

High Country News

For people who care about the West

Monument Man

Washington insider John Podesta's 'hidden hand' has guided the environmental achievements of presidents for two decades

By Elizabeth Shogren. Page 12.



John Podesta.
CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES

On the cover
President Barack Obama and White House counselor John Podesta walk near the Washington Monument last May. Podesta is behind many second-term conservation achievements for both Obama and Bill Clinton.
PABLO MARTINEZ MONSIVAIS/AP PHOTO



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12 Legacy Maker

Washington insider John Podesta's 'hidden hand' has guided the environmental achievements of presidents for two decades
By Elizabeth Shogren

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Editor's note

Politics of the possible

Bruce Babbitt loves to tell this story: At a White House social function in the late 1990s, Babbitt, who was Bill Clinton's secretary of the Interior, finally got a brief moment alone with his boss. He used it to pass him a note that read: "TR: 230 million acres, WJC: ??". It was a shorthand way to compare Clinton's public-lands conservation record with that of Theodore Roosevelt.



Babbitt caught Clinton at a good time; it was the president's second term, and he was eager to establish his legacy, and also, if possible, to divert attention from his administration's simmering scandals. By the time Clinton left the White House, he had created or expanded 22 national monuments, covering some 6 million acres in the West. He did this by wielding the executive authority that TR himself had signed into law — the 1906 Antiquities Act.

That presidents enjoy using their executive authority should come as no surprise, especially when they're facing a Congress that reflexively opposes almost everything they do. In the past two years, Barack Obama has used his own power to keep immigrant families together, to sign a treaty with China reducing greenhouse gases, and, yes, to create a bunch of new national monuments in the West. Most of them, like Clinton's, are managed by the Bureau of Land Management. When our new Washington, D.C., correspondent, Elizabeth Shogren, examined the striking similarities between the conservation policies of the Clinton and Obama administrations, she uncovered an important common denominator: John Podesta.

Podesta, who served both presidents during their second terms, is an incredibly influential behind-the-scenes practitioner of the power game. The idea of playing "three-dimensional chess" has become a political cliché, but according to Carol Browner, Obama's former climate czar, Podesta is a genuine master of the art.

Podesta was raised on the streets of Chicago and has spent most of his life inside the Beltway, and yet his most enduring legacy is likely to be out here, in the West. (Podesta is not quite done with politics; he's currently directing Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign.) In this issue, we feature Shogren's profile of Podesta and give a brief history of the Antiquities Act. We also take a look at Clinton-era monuments in Colorado and Montana and a potential new one in California.

One lesson is clear: Bold White House proclamations don't automatically change how these pieces of public land are managed. Conflicts over grazing or energy development or archaeological preservation tend to persist, partly because the new monuments try, and fail, to please everyone involved. But as John Hart's essay on the proposed Berryessa-Snow Mountain National Monument observes, simply calling a place a national monument somehow opens our eyes to its natural wonders. And in a world increasingly dominated by human activity, that's a worthwhile legacy for anyone.

—Paul Larmer, executive director/publisher



Sandhill cranes in the Stone Lakes refuge in the northern reaches of the Delta. JUSTINE BELSON/USFWS

Drought shrinks Sacramento Delta protections

California Gov. Jerry Brown in April announced that a plan to transport Northern California water south, via twin tunnels, would be accompanied by just a third of the originally planned habitat protection. In doing so, he reignited a debate over how to allocate the water of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, which harbors one of the largest swaths of the state's remaining wetlands and is home to the federally endangered Delta smelt. The Delta also supports a \$500 million agricultural industry and supplies drinking water for two-thirds of the state. The conflict pits Central Valley farmers and southern cities against Delta farmers, cities and environmentalists. The plan for the two Delta tunnels, first put forward almost nine years ago, originally included \$8 billion dollars of state and federal funds for 100,000 acres of fish and wildlife habitat restoration and protection. Brown's new plan includes 30,000 acres of habitat to be restored or protected over five years. KATE SCHIMEL

hcne.ws/SacraDelta

Trending

Recapture Canyon verdict

A federal court has found Phil Lyman, a San Juan County commissioner, and Monte Wells, a local blogger, guilty of conspiring to operate off-road vehicles on public lands closed to motorized vehicles, and of operating vehicles on said lands. Two other defendants were found not guilty. The charges stem from a 2014 protest organized by Lyman in southeastern Utah's Recapture Canyon. JONATHAN THOMPSON

7.5 million

Number of acres stripped of vegetation between 2000 and 2012 due to oil and gas development (the equivalent of three Yellowstone National Parks).

13%

The fraction of 2013 wheat exports that 7.5 million acres could have produced.

A study recently published in the journal *Science* sought to quantify ecosystem services lost to oil and gas development. The study combined a large dataset on new wells drilled throughout the study region — the central U.S., including the Intermountain West — between 2000 and 2012 with annual satellite measurements of plant growth. Big as the above numbers seem, they're relatively small, compared to the total landmass studied. But if current trends continue for another 10 or 15 years, the loss of vegetation could be more consequential. CALLY CARSWELL

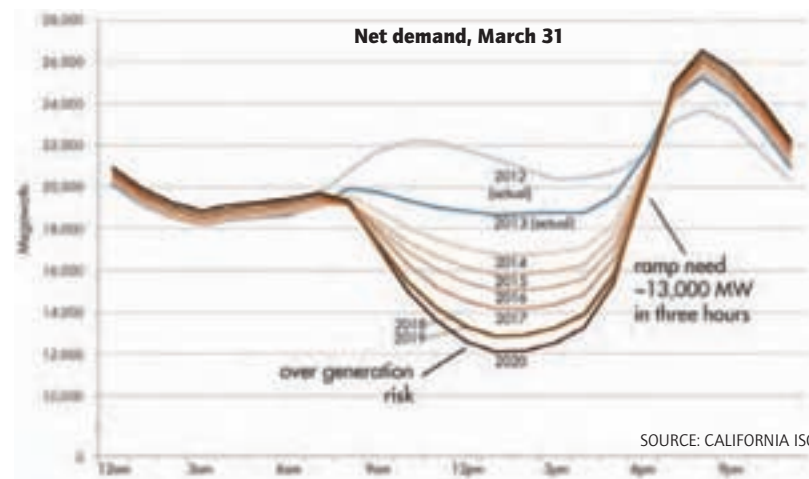
hcne.ws/OilGasImpacts

Tesla's powerplay

Elon Musk, the CEO of Tesla Motors, announced May 1 his company will soon begin mass production of the Powerwall, a hip, sleek home battery. Individually, the solar-charged battery could cut homeowners' bills. But its bigger impact would be at scale, or if its giant cousin, the Powerpack, gets used by utilities.

That would help them overcome the challenges of potential over-generation of power during the early afternoon, when demand is relatively low, and a subsequent spiking of demand, in the late afternoon and evening, which requires firing up natural gas plants. JONATHAN THOMPSON

hcne.ws/teslabattery



5

Number of chemicals the EPA has regulated in the 40 years since the Toxic Substances Control Act was passed. Number since 1990, when it lost a court case to regulate asbestos: zero. ELIZABETH SHOGRIN

hcne.ws/Udallbill

Photos

Two tribes and coal

The Lummi and Crow Nations, 1,000 miles apart, have opposite stakes in whether a coal terminal is built off the Washington coast. The Crow, who sit atop a thick coal seam in Montana, have much to gain. The Lummi, who live along Puget Sound, where the Gateway Pacific Terminal would be built, fear for their fishing grounds and ancestral sites. hcne.ws/TerminalCoal



Young football players walk down the street in Lodge Grass, a small town on the Crow Reservation in southeast Montana.

DANIEL KUKLA

You say

GARY HARMON:

"Every time I hear a conservative complain about 'private property rights,' they immediately start talking about their rights to 'public land.' As if the two were the same thing. I am part owner of the Sierra Nevada even though I live in New Mexico, just as someone from California is part owner of the Rockies. The wilderness I live next to does not belong to the county I live in, even though the county commission thinks so."

SUZI LEWIS:

"Transferring public lands would be one of the worst decisions in history."

CHARLEY WRATHER: "They are not above the law."

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WAGONS AROUND BALLONA

Articles about this precious Southern California ecosystem are always welcome, and this one delves more deeply into the complexity of Ballona than the typical “this side versus that side” article, which is refreshing (“The Wetland Wars,” *HCN*, 5/11/15). However, what is still missing from the discussion is the realization that the lack of transparency and accountability among the state agencies is the reason why this ecosystem remains neglected over 10 years after its acquisition. Good, well-intentioned people can disagree about what kind of restoration should occur. What is not acceptable is for members of the public to be deprived of the information they require to come to their own conclusions.

The Annenberg Foundation proposal, which is only briefly mentioned in this article, had a major negative impact on the restoration timeline and squandered precious time, money and credibility. It was the classic example of money and politics trumping ecological common sense. When the foundation withdrew, it rendered useless the project alternatives into which so much time and money had been invested.

Now, instead of providing more transparency, the agencies are circling the wagons. That is why the Ballona Wetlands Land Trust filed a lawsuit against the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission for its failure to disclose critical information about the restoration planning process. In response to our push for greater transparency, the public commission is on the cusp of shifting local responsibility for Ballona to its private partner, the Bay Foundation, which has adamantly resisted calls for transparency, despite being funded almost entirely by public money.

If we can establish reasonable levels of transparency and accountability, the right restoration plan will follow. Until then, it is just going to be more polarized back-and-forth.

*Walter Lamb
Ballona Wetlands Land Trust
Culver City, California*

WATER-HARVEST WARNING

It is very sad that a man of science, Brent Cluff, believes that “water harvesting could support unlimited growth.” In “Tucson’s rain-catching revolution” (*HCN*, 4/27/15), rainwater harvesting is touted as a way to conserve water. It is a step in the right direction, but only a step, and it has several negative impacts.

First, it allows us to continue



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our profligate ways when it comes to overwatering our yards and gardens. In many places, lawn irrigation is the largest use of water for individual residences, commercial and governmental entities. Rainwater harvesting supports the inefficient and unsupported “unlimited growth” mentality that gets all of us into deep trouble.

Second, if rainwater harvesting is done by enough people and entities, a large amount of water will no longer flow into rivers and streams, soak into soils or feed groundwater aquifers. This will have a significant effect, particularly in places like Arizona, where climate change is expected to create drier day-to-day and seasonal weather. When it does rain, the runoff will be blotted up by hundreds of thousands, even millions, of rainwater-harvesting systems, large and small. Rivers and streams, landscapes, aquatic and terrestrial wildlife, and groundwater levels will take the hit.

In dry areas like Arizona, it is far better to use desert plants for landscaping. After all, the residents live in a desert. Adapt to the desert. Don't fight it.

*Brandt Mannchen
Houston, Texas*

CHANGING BASELINE

Without using these exact words, editor Sarah Gilman refers to the changing baseline (“Knowledge, a wrecking ball,” *HCN*, 4/27/15). Each generation thinks that life began when its awareness began. The children of the generation before Sarah roved an empty mesa near Boulder and perhaps mourned its loss. As a young adult, I roamed the side canyons of Lake Powell and thought I was in heaven. Years later, I attended Katie Lee’s talk and slideshow about Glen Canyon, and I cried the entire time, mourning what had been taken from me before I could experience it. Is it better to not know? Is the changing baseline a blessing rather than a curse?

*Jeanmarie Haney
Cottonwood, Arizona*

BORROWED LAND

Thanks for doing an article on the Bisti Wilderness (“Strangers in a familiar land,” *HCN*, 4/13/15). It was a good one, and I like the quote, “We are all just visitors here.” An old Navajo lady, a member of a grazing committee not too far from Bisti, used to say, “We are all here on borrowed land. It is only temporarily on loan from the unborn generations, so we need to take care of it.”

*Alvin Whitehair
Hanksville, Utah*

BUNDY AND THE LAW

“Checking in on Cliven Bundy” (*HCN*, 4/27/15)? Are you kidding me? The only checking in we need with him is from his cell, when he’s finally brought to justice for making a mockery of federal law.

*Mark De Gregorio
Masonville, Colorado*

WARM NORTHWEST

“A crystal ball for the Pacific Northwest” (*HCN*, 4/27/15) gives us a good summary of what may happen to precipitation in the Pacific Northwest in coming years, but says little about what may happen to temperatures. However, the Oregon Climate Change Research Institute makes it clear: “Every global climate model used by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projects an annual temperature increase for the Pacific Northwest over the 21st century.” The amount ranges from about 3 degrees Fahrenheit, under low emissions, to about 9 degrees, under high, by 2080. Even if precipitation does not decrease, what looks like an undoubted major increase in future temperatures will have major effects on the region’s environment.

*Peter Bridges
Crested Butte, Colorado*

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Trade winds blow through the West

The Trans-Pacific Partnership could pipe in new business for the Western gas industry

BY JOSHUA ZAFFOS



Rifle, Colorado, a quintessential Western energy boomtown, has fallen on hard times. High natural gas prices spurred a drilling boom in the surrounding Piceance Basin in the early aughts. Then, in 2008, prices crashed due to an oversupply of natural gas in the North American market, and Rifle slumped into a bust from which it still hasn't recovered.

The next bonanza could be just around the corner, though, thanks to the controversial Trans-Pacific Partnership — the largest international free-trade agreement that the United States has ever negotiated. By slashing tariffs and lowering regulatory hurdles, the TPP could make it easier to sell Western natural gas to Japan, potentially igniting another boom. The agreement could also affect Western ranchers, who face both pros and cons: opportunities for bigger beef markets, but also the threat of increased competition from producers in member nations.

In the works since 2008, the TPP includes 12 countries: the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Australia, New Zealand, Chile and Peru. Those nations' economies comprise nearly 40 percent of the global gross domestic product, a bloc second in trade volume only to the European Union. That's led critics to dub the TPP "NAFTA on steroids," referring to the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement, which has been blamed for the immigration rush, the crash of American manufacturing, and the rise of industrial farming and mining in Mexico.

The nations are still hammering out the details — much of what's known has come through leaked drafts posted on WikiLeaks — but President Barack Obama has made its approval a priority.

In late April, Senate and House committees approved "fast-track" legislation for the TPP, meaning that Congress would surrender its right to amend the pact once it's negotiated and presented for approval. Both chambers of Congress are expected to vote on the bill soon, with Republicans, shockingly, behind the president. The Democrats, however, are split, with some senators insisting that tougher child-labor and trade-

practice measures and currency-manipulation rules be tied to fast-track support.

Analysts agree that energy, particularly natural gas, will be a major focus of the agreement. Japan phased out nearly all of its nuclear power after the 2011 Fukushima meltdown, replacing much of it with electricity from natural gas, nearly all of which it must import. Due to market inefficiencies and Asia's still-developing pipeline capacity, gas prices across the Pacific have been four to eight times higher than in the U.S.

The overseas market, in other words, is thirsting for cheap and abundant U.S. natural gas. But before it can get there, it must be supercooled and turned into liquefied natural gas, or LNG, in special terminals, then loaded onto refrigerated tankers for shipping. The only existing U.S. Western LNG export terminal is a relatively small facility in Kenai, Alaska. Construction of new facilities involves billions of investment dollars and the regulatory approval of both the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the Department of Energy.

Currently, there are only seven terminals in the country operating or fully approved, though there are 54 applications for building new LNG production facilities and export terminals. A company called Oregon LNG proposes to build a terminal in Astoria, Oregon, near the mouth of the Columbia River, which would ship up to 9.6 million tons of LNG annually — enough to supply hundreds of thousands of American-sized homes a year. And Calgary-based Veresen Inc. is also seeking approval for its planned Jordan Cove export terminal in Coos Bay, Oregon, and expects to ship 6 million tons a year.

Environmentalists, along with many locals, oppose both projects. The two terminals are awaiting a Federal Energy Regulatory Commission permit, but have already received approval from the Energy Department, which determines whether export to countries lacking free-trade pacts are in "the public interest." If the TPP is approved, however, future projects exporting to the Asia Pacific will no longer need Energy Department permits. Under the agreement, "every LNG facility would be de facto approved (by the Energy Department)," says Jake Schmidt, director of

the Natural Resources Defense Council's International Program.

The two terminals would likely receive gas through the Northwest Pipeline, a 4,000-mile network of lines that crosses six Western states and reaches into Canada. That system plugs into the under-utilized Ruby Pipeline, a 680-mile delivery route stretching from western Wyoming to southern Oregon, and the Rockies Express Pipeline, a north-south system that goes from Wyoming into New Mexico. That should mean an uptick in business for gas drillers and communities along the way, especially in western Colorado's Piceance Basin, the San Juan Basin on the Colorado-New Mexico border, and the Uinta Basin on the Colorado-Utah border. A 2014 report by Mercator Energy, a Colorado gas broker, notes: "The predictability of Piceance Basin reserves and abundant ... pipeline export capacity should be very attractive to any foreign country or foreign consumer of LNG." Wyoming, with 20,000 planned new oil and gas wells, has spent the last two years studying how to further increase LNG production and storage and its pipeline capacity and connections.

Increased trade with Japan could also benefit ranchers, says David Salmonsens, senior director of congressional relations for the American Farm Bureau. Producers now face steep tariffs on meats and dairy in Japan and Asia, but reports from negotiation talks indicate Japan would chop its current 38.5 percent tariff on beef to just 9 percent.

But some Western ranchers are worried because the trade deal would also increase U.S. beef imports. "The United States keeps mounting a horrendous deficit in the trade of live cattle, beef, and processed meats," says Bill Bullard, CEO of R-CALF, a Billings, Montana-based independent-rancher advocacy group. Plus, Bullard says, global trade deals typically weaken domestic food-safety rules.

With so many details still unknown, some ranchers as well as environmentalists who have come to loathe NAFTA see the TPP as a scary extension of "free trade." But for Western energy producers in the Piceance and other drilling hotspots, the deal looks like it's coming down the pipe just in time. □

An artist's conception of the proposed Jordan Cove liquid natural gas terminal in Oregon. The project already has an Energy Department permit, but future terminals may be automatically approved if the Trans-Pacific Partnership goes through.

JORDAN COVE LNG

By slashing tariffs and lowering regulatory hurdles, the Trans-Pacific Partnership could make it easier to sell Western natural gas to Japan, potentially igniting another boom.

Joshua Zaffos (@jzaffos) writes in Fort Collins, Colorado.

Water for later

On New Mexico's Gila River, a contentious diversion decision

BY SARAH TORY

The Middle Fork of the Gila River in New Mexico winds west toward Arizona.
JOE BURGESS/FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION



Late last year, New Mexico's Interstate Stream Commission voted to proceed with planning for a large diversion and storage project on the upper section of the Gila River, something that will, depending on whom you ask, either save a drought-prone region or destroy one of the Southwest's few remaining wild rivers.

For a decade, people have been fighting over how to spend money from the 2004 Arizona Water Settlements Act, which gave New Mexico \$66 million in federal funding to help improve the water supply in the state's southwestern corner. The commission considered 15 different proposals, some conservation-oriented and others with considerably larger ambitions. Ultimately, it decided in favor of a large-

scale proposal to develop 14,000 acre-feet of water from the last remaining stretch of the wild Gila, garnering an extra \$34 million in federal funds in the process.

As part of their role, the commission also approved funding for a few conservation projects, but the big-ticket item was the diversion, with the 4.5 billion gallons of water per year that proponents hope it could supply. And though it's not that much compared to, say, the 110,000 acre-feet diverted from the San Juan River for northern New Mexico's use, its impact could be tremendous: The Gila is not a big river. In its upper reaches, it tumbles through box canyons high in the Gila Wilderness, Aldo Leopold's old stomping grounds, before it paints a ribbon of green across the arid Cliff-Gila Valley.

The diversion matters because the Gila's ecosystem is so intimately shaped by its floods, from light trickles to heavy deluges. They all play critical roles along the river, spreading nutrients across the floodplain and recharging groundwater reserves. They water cottonwoods for the endangered southern willow flycatcher and provide habitat for the threatened Gila trout, as well as for the endangered loach minnow and spikedace. Diverting water would permanently alter the Gila's flows, diminishing the seasonal floods along with the ecosystem that has evolved to rely on them.

So the commission's decision to build the diversion angered many environmentalists, who see it as the product of an outmoded way of thinking. "There are folks saying you have to grab this water," said Adrian Oglesby, director of the University of New Mexico's Utton Transboundary Resources Center and a former attorney for the commission, "because if you don't grab it now, you're never going to get it. No matter the cost, and even if we don't know what we're building yet."

The decision raises questions around one of the West's oldest and most intractable issues, and whether new conservation ideas might have an impact on water management. The answer, at least here, appears to be no. Given the Southwest's pervasive drought, old instincts rise to the surface: Get as much water as you can, from wherever you can, and worry about the consequences later.

Anthony Gutierrez, the chairman of the commission's Gila River subcom-

mittee, is a leading diversion proponent. During deliberations late last year, he said the fear of losing the water trumped all other concerns.

"Just look at Phoenix and Tucson," he said. "Those cities are screwed if they don't find water somewhere." For him, approving the diversion was like buying drought insurance for New Mexico. The most important thing was for the state to secure the right to develop the water, even if all the details aren't fully worked out. "We can figure out how to get it later on."

But major questions remain: How much water would a diversion actually yield, for example, and would anyone here be able to afford it? According to Norm Gaume, who served as director of the Interstate Stream Commission from 1997 to 2002 and has since become its loudest critic, the water would cost \$8,000 per acre-foot. That means that a typical household in Deming would see its water bill rise from about \$14 per month to more than \$170. Meanwhile, environmental groups and scientists worry about the impacts on the river's fragile ecosystem. "The project will provide little to no water and will harm the wildlife of the Gila River," Allyson Siwik, director of the Gila Conservation Coalition, said.

The commission argues that a diversion will actually improve the river's ecology, by allowing the release of water from storage into the river during dry spells. Plus, supporters say, it will provide more water for drought-stressed farmers. Craig Roepke, the commission's deputy director and an avid river runner, says critics are missing the big picture. "If I had nothing else to consider, personally, other than nature, I probably wouldn't divert any water from the Gila," he said. "But you have to consider other interests as well."

Gaume remains unimpressed by the commission's arguments. In his mid-60s, Gaume has watery blue eyes, a white goatee and the exasperated air of a man who has run out of patience. "Even if you assume best-case scenario, it barely works," he said. "Don't people deserve to know this?"

Before he left the commission, Gaume had dismissed similar diversion proposals as unrealistic. Three previous attempts to build a dam on the Gila had failed: The costs, both financial and environmental, far outweighed any benefits. Diverting water from the river and storing it in side canyons would be no different, Gaume said. "It's common sense that there's no

Sarah Tory (@tory_sarah) is an HCN fellow.



Former Interstate Stream Commission director Norm Gaume speaks out against proposals that call for the diversion of a portion of the Gila River during a rally outside a commission meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico, last November. SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN/ AP PHOTO

place to store it, and it's going to be super-expensive, even without the calculation of yield."

The commission's preferred plan would start with an intake structure at the top of the upper Gila Box Canyon less than a mile from the wilderness boundary. Water would be diverted through a screen-like infiltration device into a tunnel, then into a series of pipelines that would convey the water to four reservoir sites in side canyons. But Gaume says those canyons are made of a kind of rock, known as Gila conglomerate, that is very prone to seepage — and they might not hold any water.

The commission has not publicly disclosed the amount of water a diversion would yield, but at a May meeting, Roepke acknowledged that getting the full 14,000 acre-feet of water entirely off the Gila would not be possible without causing "severe environmental problems." If New Mexico is going to enjoy the full allotment, he said, another water development project in another part of the Gila Basin will likely be needed.

An earlier report by the commission's own consultants echoed concerns that the diversion would not yield enough water to make the project worthwhile. The expected seepage and evaporation losses "could equal or exceed the planned minimum annual diversion yield of 10,000 acre-feet,

which would result in no available usable water from the project," the report said. "In our opinion, several project components were not adequately addressed in the (preliminary engineering report), and it is currently unknown if these components represent fatal flaws."

The commission's consultants have suggested coping with the seepage by draping the canyons in a layer of clay and a plastic liner. But, as Gaume noted, there's no clay in the area. It would have to be trucked in — 26 million cubic feet of it, the equivalent of 100,000 dump-truck loads — at enormous cost.

The whole process has left many New Mexicans wondering what the commission was thinking when it approved a project that appears to be so flawed. "It's like religion," Gaume said. "People aren't rational about water development."

Last April, the commission allowed Gaume to present his concerns at a public meeting in Tucumcari, a remote town in eastern New Mexico. Few people attended and no media were present. Afterwards, no details of Gaume's criticisms appeared in the minutes — including his questions about the actual cost of the project and a realistic estimate of the amount of water it would gain for the state.

Building and operating the kind of project the commission has in mind would cost somewhere around \$1 billion, Gaume and other experts estimate, far more than federal funding would cover. The commission proposed issuing bonds to pay for it, but critics say that the current financing plan relies on unrealistically low cost projections.

Now, the commission has until the end of this year to draft a more concrete plan for a diversion so the Bureau of Reclamation will sign off on the project. If the commission succeeds, the next step will be the federal environmental review process, which could last another four years.

Altogether, the commission has spent \$5 million studying the diversion proposals and anticipates spending millions more, in the hopes of bolstering what critics believe was a predetermined conclusion: that developing more water from the Gila is not only possible, but advisable. The problems are manageable, supporters say, and besides, any technical and environmental concerns are missing the point. In a drying region, the chance to grab new water — no matter what the cost — is too precious to pass up.

"Who knows what it's going to be like in 50 or 100 years?" Gutierrez said. "I think that we want to try to eliminate that risk." □

THE LATEST

Backstory

Former Las Vegas water boss Patricia Mulroy made numerous deals to keep water flowing from Lake Mead to her city and installed two water intakes deep in the reservoir. During her quarter-century tenure, **the nation's once-largest reservoir plummeted drastically, but never hit 1,075 feet, the level that triggers mandatory water-delivery cutbacks** for Arizona and Nevada ("Unite and Conquer," HCN, 3/2/15).

Followup

In early May, Lake Mead hit a record low — 1,078 feet.

Drought in the Colorado River Basin has reduced the reservoir to 140 feet below what it was 15 years ago. A third intake, scheduled to go online this summer, will reach even deeper into the shrinking supply. **Water cutbacks won't start unless Mead is lower than 1,075 feet in January, though, and the Bureau of Reclamation predicts that lake depth could rise or even drop further by then,** depending on precipitation and water releases from upstream Lake Powell.

ELIZABETH SHOGREN

Low water at Lake Mead.



CHRIS RICHARDS/CC FLICKR



Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument.
GOOGLE STREET VIEW

THE LATEST

Backstory

Millions of acres of public land along the Arizona-Mexico border have been damaged by the U.S. Border Patrol's activities, including Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument and Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge, home to the rare Sonoran pronghorn, desert bighorn and desert tortoise. **In the post-9/11 security buildup, environmental laws were shoved aside to give agents unfettered access to public land, including fragile desert ecosystems** ("Border out of Control," *HCN*, 6/9/14).

Followup

Now, **Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., wants to further increase Border Patrol access to borderlands in his state and parts of California.** On May 7, a Senate committee passed the **"Arizona Borderland Protection and Preservation Act," which would give security agents "immediate" permission to patrol and deploy equipment on 10 million acres of public lands,** including national parks and monuments, within 100 miles of the Mexican border. Critics call the bill unnecessary, given the existing waiver of most environmental protections along the border.

SARAH TORY

Canis Sanfranciscans

Janet Kessler tracks urban coyotes

BY LEATH TONINO

It's a typical late-summer afternoon in San Francisco, chilly and damp, the sky a low ceiling of cloud. I'm sitting at the edge of a golf course fairway with Janet Kessler — waiting, watching, listening. The soft *thwock* of a well-struck ball sounds from behind a screen of Monterey cypress at our back. A red-tailed hawk alights on a nearby branch. "It's funny," Kessler says, scanning the expanse of cropped grass before us. "People are always asking me how to see a coyote in the city. I tell them the coyotes are right here, right in front of you. You just have to look."

And so we look.

Thwock.

An amateur naturalist, self-taught urban wildlife photographer and long-time resident of San Francisco, Kessler, 65, has spent the better part of the last decade tracking, studying, documenting, and generally enjoying the heck out of her favorite neighbor, *Canis latrans*. She spends a minimum of three hours a day, usually at dawn or dusk, checking up on individual animals and family packs. By her estimate, several dozen coyotes live in the overgrown chinks in the metropolis' concrete armor: "McLaren, Lake Merced, Golden Gate — they're in all the parks." This golf course, sandwiched between a neighborhood known for its Chinese restaurants and a cliff band that drops steeply to the Pacific, is one of her go-to sites.

She points to a tee box on a slight rise to our left. "Goggles usually comes out around 6 or 7 p.m., though I've seen him as early as 4 p.m. He's the coyote I've known the longest, almost eight years. He looks a little like he's hanging on his bones now. He walks stiff. But hey, we all get old, right?"

Thwock.

Two border collies approach with a young guy in tow. "Have you seen the coyote?" Kessler asks.

"All the time," the guy says. "It yells at us." He plays a video on his phone of a coyote standing beside a log, framed by shrubs, barking. The border collies turn their heads, intrigued.

"Oh, yeah, that's Goggles all right," Kessler says. "I recognize my coyotes by facial structure and expressions, not by their fur. It's the same with humans. We hardly ever forget a face."

Some people take on their dog's appearance and mannerisms after enough years together — a pit bull of a man jog-

ging his pit bull, a poodle in the lap of a prim, curly-haired old lady. Similarly, Kessler is thin, quick and hyper-attentive. She dresses in various shades of muted green to better blend with her surroundings: mossy jeans, fern-colored fleece, olive ball cap with a coyote standing just above the brim. A brown-gray ponytail hangs to the small of her back, resembling — as the name suggests — a tail.

There is a surefire way to identify Kessler as human, though, and that's the massive camera in its case, slung across her chest like a beefy camo-patterned infant. "I don't have an encounter every time I come out, but if I do, I'll easily get 600 photos," she says. "My camera is my notebook. It records time, place, weather, behavior, everything." Her images have been published in Bay Area magazines and shown at local museums and galleries, but they are first and foremost per-

sonal research tools. Recently, she's been using them in conjunction with Google Maps to better understand what she calls "trekking" patterns — how the coyotes navigate the city.

Kessler's obsession can be traced back to a seemingly random incident: In 2006, she cut her finger on a can of black beans and had to quit practicing the pedal harp for two hours each day, as was her habit at the time. One afternoon during her recovery, while walking her dog on Twin Peaks, a semi-wild ridge at the heart of the city, she happened upon a hunting coyote. Entranced by its behavior, she returned the next morning with her camera. Soon she had self-published a little album, *Myca of Twin Peaks*, and was feeling an entwined sense of wonder and responsibility — an obligation to share her newfound appreciation of the city's lesser-known denizens.

Occasionally, coyotes in urban and suburban settings have attacked dogs and even people, but Kessler says that such antagonistic interactions are avoidable. She's adamantly opposed to trapping and killing programs, and helped found a volunteer group — Coyote Coexistence — to educate the public about how to live alongside the species. (Rule number one:



Leath Tonino writes in San Francisco and edits poetry for the *Afghan Women's Writing Project*.

Keep your dog leashed.) “In every community, there’s one group that wants to kill them, one that wants to save them,” she says. *Coyotes As Neighbors* — the title of the 30-minute slideshow she produced for coyotecoeexistence.com — is an apt summary of her hopeful vision.

Thwock.

And now here comes one of those neighbors: Goggles.

Kessler is on her feet in an instant, camera out, shutter clicking maniacally. Goggles, so named because his eyes are “a little puffy,” strikes me as more robust and handsome than previously described. Trotting along the far side of the fairway, he stops and ponders the ground. His head tilts. “Pay close attention,” Kessler whispers. “You might witness a pounce any second now; gophers and voles, that’s what he wants.” But the pounce never comes. For 15 minutes, we trail Goggles at a respectful distance of 50 feet. Then he turns, looks directly at us — *click, click, click* — and disappears into heavy brush.

The afternoon dimming into evening, we wander the back nine, poking about in thickets, enjoying the exploration. Kessler recounts story after story as we stroll.



TERRAY SYLVESTER

Once, she observed snoozing siblings for 13 hours. (They stirred occasionally to harmonize with howling ambulance sirens.) Another time, determined to travel through the night with a particularly welcoming coyote, she told her husband not to worry if she wasn’t back before sunrise. (The coyote ditched her earlier than expected.) She’s seen just about everything in the field, from coyotes that have been hit by cars to one that understood traffic signals and would wait patiently for the light to change before dashing across the street.

Eventually, inevitably, I raise the obvious question: Why? Why would a woman with a master’s in art history and no formal biological training dedicate the prime of her retirement to the pursuit of an animal that many folks consider a pest, and that others say has no business living anywhere near a city?

“You get to know them,” Kessler offers. “Their world opens up, the details of their days. It’s a soap opera: ‘Wow, am I going to see that youngster again? Is his sister going to be around? Is Dad going to be aggressive with him?’ There’s always a cliffhanger.” Though she’s collected scat samples for a UC Davis professor studying coyote DNA, consulted with groups in Texas and Georgia that are trying to establish coexistence management plans, and is writing a book based on her coyote observations, it’s this multigenerational family saga that keeps her coming back, this melodrama playing out across the years in her own backyard. “It’s like with the pedal harp,” she says. “You get lost in the music. It absorbs you. You become part of it and nothing else exists.”

Returning to the fairway, we’re surprised by the sight of Goggles, hunting, exactly where we first spotted him. This time, he treats us to a number of acrobatic

pounces, all unsuccessful. Kessler says that she usually heads home when she can no longer see to shoot — *click, click, click* — and both of us chuckle. If that were true, we’d have been out of here a half-hour ago.

Minutes later, it’s full-on night, and Goggles is all but gone; I can just make him out curled up in a ball, five feet from a paved cart path. Kessler and I sit in silence, squinting into the dark, not quite ready to leave. “We could call it quits,” she says. “Or, if you’d like, we could play with my night-vision goggles.” She pulls what looks like a regular pair of binoculars from her backpack and hands them to me. In a flash, it’s daylight again, a weird pale key-lime sort of daylight. The fairway is a ghostly wash, with Goggles a coyote-shaped splotch of ink. The perspective is magical, as if I’ve been sucked through a portal and granted access to a secret San Francisco.

“Here come some people,” Kessler says, excited and tense. “Keep your eye on him. See what he does.” I pan right, and five teenage girls stroll into view. They follow the cart path, heading directly toward Goggles, totally oblivious. He raises his head, just barely, and my chest tightens.

Four, three, two steps away. The girls are closing in, chitchatting, near enough to feel a coyote’s wild breath on their ankles if only they were to remove their socks. Goggles flicks his ears and puts his chin back down on the ground. He knows they don’t know he’s there. He knows that this is his turf, his zone. He knows there’s no issue, no problem, no need to react.

The girls pass by, none the wiser, and I pull off the goggles. Everything goes murky — for a moment, I’m blind. “The only thing we’re missing now is a howl,” says a voice beside me. “Then we’d have the perfect outing.” □

Uncommon Westerner

Name Janet Kessler

Hometown San Francisco, California

Vocation Urban coyote observer. Retired “jack of various trades” (art gallery manager, magazine editor, legal assistant)

She says “People think habituation is a dirty word, like if coyotes aren’t scared of us they’ll get too close and cause problems. That’s silly. All species share a world. We all get used to one another and live side-by-side.”

Favorite things about coyotes Their intelligence, curiosity and fun-loving attitude. Their rivalries and affections. Their unique personalities.

Websites Maintains both a blog, coyoteyipps.com, and a photo archive, urbanwildness.com, celebrating the wildlife of her home city and arguing for its protection.

WEB EXTRA See more of Kessler’s coyote photos at www.hcn.org.

A coyote enjoys the sunlight in San Francisco, left.

JANET KESSLER

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Less than a week into his 2,668-mile journey on the Pacific Crest Trail, Casey Gannon pauses to watch the sunset over the mountains of Southern California's Anza-Borrego Desert. COLIN ARISMAN

ONLY THE ESSENTIAL: A HIKE FROM MEXICO TO CANADA ON THE PACIFIC CREST TRAIL

Colin Arisman
40 minutes, DVD: \$10.
www.onlytheessential.com, 2014.

In 2013, filmmaker Colin Arisman set out from Campo, California, just north of the Mexican border, to hike the Pacific Crest Trail with a friend. Motivated by a desire to reconnect with the natural world, the two spent five months on the trail, taking on the nicknames "Miracle Zen" and "Wabash" and documenting their daily progress. The resulting film, *Only the Essential*, vividly displays the dramatic vistas, perturbed rattlesnakes and slippery stream crossings they encounter. But much of the screen time is devoted to the two friends' primary activity: just putting one foot in front of the other. *Only the Essential*, which takes its name from a quote by Henry David Thoreau, celebrates the act of boiling down life to its sparse necessities and exploring the joy that minimalism can give.

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The local-federal tug-of-war

On Saturday, June 6, *High Country News* will convene a panel of experts in our hometown of Paonia, Colorado. We'll explore — through the lens of two hot local issues, oil and gas development and the listing of the Gunnison sage grouse — the limits of collaboration and confrontation between the federal agencies that manage a large chunk of our lands and the communities and industries that depend on them. Please join us at the Paradise Theatre, 215 Grand Ave., at 7 p.m. The event will be followed by an ice cream social at which you can meet and bend the ears of *HCN* staff and board members.

VOTE IN HCN'S 'BATTLE OF THE LANDS'

In the spirit of sparking a good ol' verbal wrestling match — while celebrating the West's extraordinary places — *HCN* invites you to vote in "Battle of the Lands," a bracket-style tournament to crown our readers' favorite recreation spots. Whether you're a rafter or a powerboater, fly-fisherman or mountain biker, backpacker or motorhead, we want your help in winnowing 32 beloved parcels down to a single champion. The fun begins May 28 — please vote at hcn.org/events/public-lands/vote.

We're also running an essay contest: Tell us why your favorite public-land hangout rocks! See hcn.org/events/public-lands/essay.

A SPRING FLOOD OF VISITORS

March and April brought more folks to our headquarters, including one virtual visitor. A while back, we asked visitors who had yet to see their names in this column to contact us. We got a note from some late-summer guests: "We (**Amy Ewing** and **Kerry Wood**) came by at the

end of August 2014. Amy is a consulting hydrologist at Daniel B. Stephens & Associates Inc., in Albuquerque, and Kerry works for the U.S. Forest Service as the trails and wilderness program manager on the Sandia Ranger District in Tijeras, New Mexico." Thanks, and sorry we missed noting your visit!

Laine Dobson moved here in March from Greeley, Colorado, and is building a house with his wife and kids. Laine works in software, printers and document management solutions for a company on the Front Range. He's also a watercolor painter. He discovered us the old-fashioned way: by strolling down Grand Avenue and checking out local businesses.

From Bellingham, Washington, came **Gary Ingram**, a longtime subscriber who was in town for technical sales and design training at Solar Energy International. He says the instructors are excellent, and his fellow students come from all over — Florida, California, even India. Before returning to Washington, he plans to summit Pikes Peak, a 14,114-foot mountain on Colorado's Front Range.

Evelyn Hess traveled to the North Fork Valley from Eugene, Oregon, taking the train to Flagstaff and driving up here. She's interviewing people about coal and environmental advocacy for a book, and came to see *HCN's* archives, which stretch back to our founding in 1970. Evelyn's first two books, *To the Woods* and *Building a Better Nest*, were about her time spent living in a tent and a trailer on a plot of land southwest of Eugene. It took her and her husband nearly 15 years to finally build a house on it. "We're very slow at projects," she laughed. We know the feeling!

—Jodi Peterson for the staff



Gary Ingram visits *High Country News* while taking solar energy classes in Paonia, Colorado.

ALYSSA PINKERTON

Legacy Maker

Washington insider John Podesta's 'hidden hand' has guided the environmental achievements of presidents for two decades

Monumental changes?

As the Obama administration winds down, a look at the state of the national monument system

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Illustration of John Podesta by Joe McKendry.

That winter's day, as she headed to the White House, Gina McCarthy undoubtedly steeled herself for a confrontation. It was 2014, and McCarthy, the head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, was about to make her case for blocking the controversial Pebble gold mine planned for Alaska's Bristol Bay watershed, home to one of the world's most prolific salmon fisheries. But she knew that the lawyers, economists and political advisors assembled in the Roosevelt Room would make Swiss cheese out of her plan. The decision would inflame the Republican Congress, they'd say, hamper economic growth and likely provoke a lawsuit from industry. Then they'd send her on her way without an answer.

But McCarthy also knew there would be a new player in the room. Longtime Democratic operative John Podesta, Bill Clinton's former chief of staff, had just returned to the White House as counselor to Barack Obama. And Podesta had a reputation for bold conservation policy.

Shortly before the meeting, in fact, Podesta pulled aside Mike Boots, the acting head of the White House's Council on Environmental Quality. He said: "Maybe it's time for me to show people it's going to be different," Boots recalled.

And 10 minutes into the conversation, Podesta broke in. He said that he and the president endorsed McCarthy's plan, and then laid out exactly how the announcement would roll out. McCarthy left the room, dumbfounded and elated. "Was that the Roosevelt Room that I was just in?" she asked, according to a White House staffer, who asked to remain anonymous. "I've only ever been handed my ass in that room."

The Pebble Mine decision was just the start of a yearlong presidential sprint to advance conservation and climate change goals. Podesta has been there

every step of the way. Think of him as the Good Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*, telling Obama's Dorothy that she always had the power to do what she wanted; she simply had to tap her heels together three times.

As the 66-year-old Podesta embarks on yet another adventure — this time as Hillary Clinton's campaign manager for the 2016 election — he can list some remarkable achievements: He directly had a hand in six of 16 national monuments Obama has created or expanded so far by executive order, including New Mexico's Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks, Colorado's Browns Canyon, Southern California's San Gabriel Mountains, and the country's largest marine reserve, the Pacific Remote Islands National Monument; and steered a landmark climate deal with China to control greenhouse gas, as well as the first proposal to regulate climate emissions from U.S. coal-fired power plants.

Add in his record under Bill Clinton — the sweeping 2001 "Roadless Rule" protecting 58 million acres administered by the U.S. Forest Service, and the 19 national monuments and conservation areas, many in the West, that Clinton declared in his second term in office — and Podesta can claim a green legacy that even Teddy Roosevelt would be proud of.

"Nobody in the 21st century in U.S. government has had the influence that he has had on public lands and climate change," says Douglas Brinkley, a Rice University professor of history.

Podesta rarely gets public credit, but those who do — from the presidents he has served to Cabinet members and agency heads — are quick to acknowledge his contributions.

Says Bruce Babbitt, Clinton's Interior secretary, "The hidden hand of John Podesta is involved in every environmental advancement accomplished in the Clinton and Obama administrations."

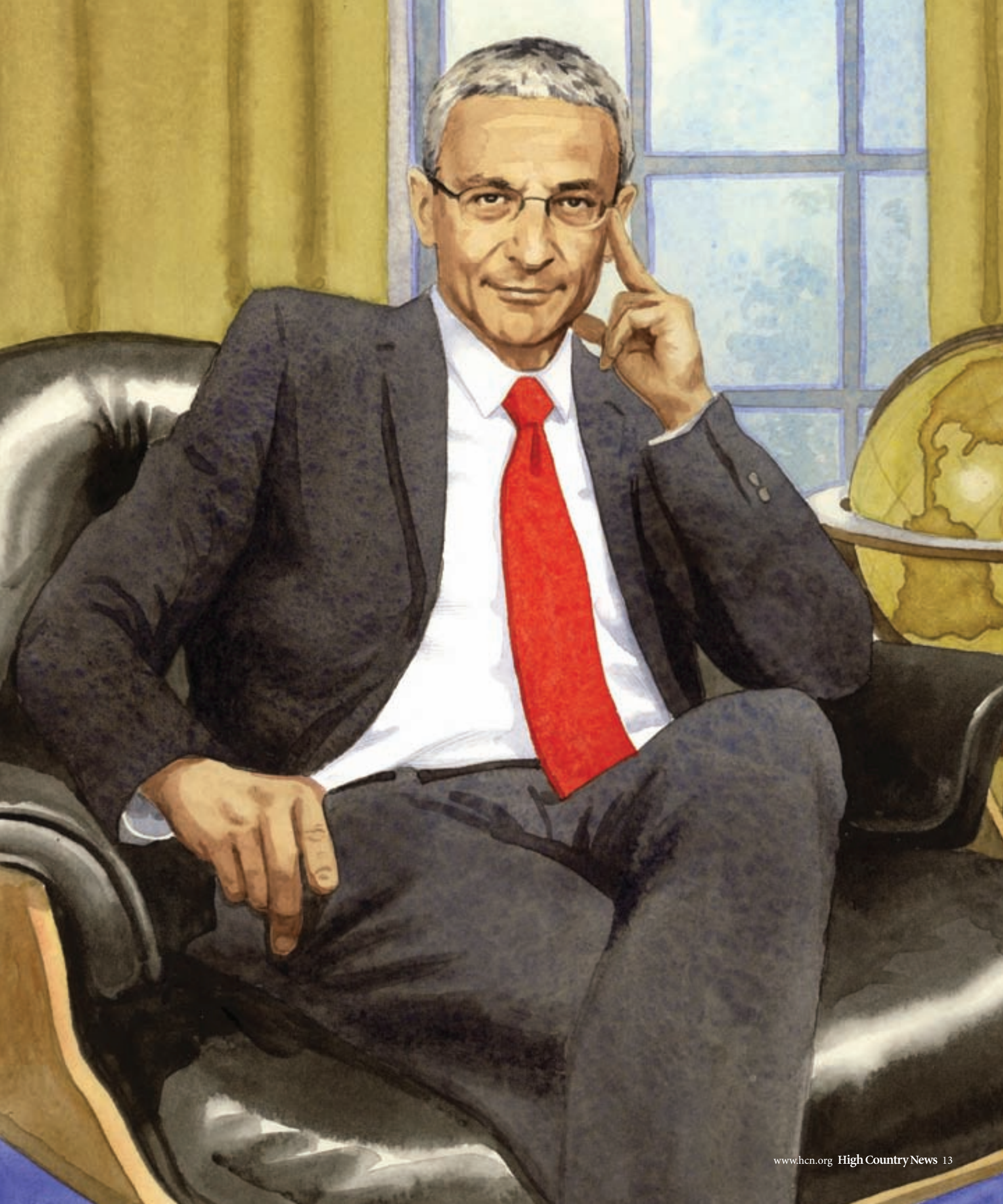
AND YET, JOHN PODESTA RARELY talks about how an inside Washington guy like him became an environmental crusader. His office at the Center for American Progress, the think tank he created in 2003, is small, and the pictures on the walls aren't the serious images you'd expect — photos of him standing with a president on the edge of some majestic canyon somewhere. Rather, they show him engaged in various antics at the White House — riding in the cherry-picker of a hybrid-electric utility truck over the West Wing, for example, or floating over the White House lawn in a helium balloon.

"I was standing in the Oval Office with Clinton and I could see them testing the balloon, and I said, 'Mr. President, I've got to make sure this thing is going right,'" Podesta says, laughing. "Of course, the president wanted to do it, too, and the Secret Service said, 'No way are we letting you go up in a balloon above the White House.'"

Podesta has a quirky sense of humor and is famously fascinated by science fiction — especially UFOs. One of his last tweets before leaving the White House this year was: "Biggest failure: Once again not securing the #disclosure of the UFO files." Even people who've worked with him for years aren't sure how serious he is about this particular obsession. "He wants it that way," says Ana Unruh Cohen of the Center for American Progress, a longtime colleague.

The roots of Podesta's passion for the environment are equally murky to many who have worked with him. Why does he care so much about this issue?

"It's not from my upbringing," he replies with a smile. "I spent most of my time standing on street corners." Podesta's parents both worked in factories when he was growing up in Chicago.



More seriously, he adds, “I have two grandchildren, hopefully more. It comes a little bit from, I’m kind of a Pope Francis Catholic: I’m someone who just cares about the future.”

Podesta says he fell in love with wild places during college-break visits to the Colorado Rocky Mountains in the 1960s. Now he and his wife of 36 years, Mary, a retired lawyer, own a vacation house in Truckee, California.

“My wife and I took up cross-country skiing as geezers, and I’m a fanatic snowshoer,” says Podesta. He has the ultra-lean frame of a long-distance runner, his clothes floating around him as if they’re still on a hanger.

Podesta’s political philosophy was shaped by his time at Knox College, a small liberal arts school in Galesburg, Illinois, where he joined Vietnam War protests and civil rights demonstrations. His first major political experience involved working on

IT’S NOT SURPRISING that Podesta answers by quoting someone else; after all, he’s spent much of his career talking about what his bosses believe. But while words might elude him, actions don’t. His effectiveness as a White House insider, honed during the Clinton years, is unrivaled. Not surprisingly, he’s attracted critics. Some allege conflicts of interest with wealthy donors or accuse him of overusing executive powers. Others say that his policies are not green enough.

His colleagues defend his motives and point to his accomplishments, crediting his uncanny political skill. “In politics, some people are out there playing checkers. Some people are playing chess. And he’s playing three-dimensional chess,” says Carol Browner, who headed Clinton’s Environmental Protection Agency and was the White House “climate czar” during Obama’s first term.

Browner vividly remembers how the playing field shifted when Podesta became Clinton’s chief of staff in 1998. Over the Fourth of July in 2000, Browner says, she went camping with her family. A park ranger came to their campsite. “He says, ‘We’re looking for Carol Browner. There are these people (on the phone — this is before cellphones were standard gear). They say it’s the White House.’”

It was Podesta, who had called to warn her: Congress had launched a stealth attack on her agency’s upcoming rule to regulate the amount of pollution in the nation’s waterways, known as the Total Maximum Daily Load. At the last minute, an unidentified legislator inserted a measure into an emergency spending bill to prevent the EPA from spending any money on the new rule.

Browner replied: “You have to veto this. This is outrageous.” Podesta said the president *had* to sign the spending bill — it funded crucial disaster relief — so they had to find another way. And so, while the president used his 10-day cushion to delay signing, EPA staffers worked around the clock to finish the new rule, months ahead of schedule. In the end, the rider had no impact because the rule was already in place.

Other Cabinet members benefitted from Podesta’s knowledge and influence. And Podesta learned as well. Interior Secretary Babbitt worked with him to create a series of new national monuments, mostly on underappreciated Bureau of Land Management holdings in the West. Wielding the 1906 Antiquities Act to get around Congress, Clinton first designated the 1.9 million-acre Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in southern Utah months before the 1996 election. The move provoked loud protests from locals and their elected officials, who denounced it as a federal land grab and complained they were never consulted.

That experience taught Babbitt to use the Antiquities Act more carefully. “Everybody from the administration is still quite proud of having designated Escalante,” Podesta says. But “Secretary Babbitt came away from that saying,

we shouldn’t spring this on people. We should spend more time, listen more thoughtfully.”

Podesta never forgot. In early 2014, when a group of Western senators, frustrated by the lack of progress in preserving public lands, invited Podesta to Capitol Hill, he first asked if they had public support for their proposal. New Mexico Sen. Martin Heinrich cited a broad coalition of local residents, who had spent decades trying to get Congress to protect a rough-and-tumble chunk of mountains, canyons and grasslands outside Las Cruces as a wilderness area. Would the president consider creating a national monument there now?

Some Cabinet members hesitated, unwilling to promote new monuments that were guaranteed to anger the powerful Republicans who controlled the federal budget.

“The secretaries knew they were in for it with their congressional overseers,” says Podesta, “and I think they weren’t certain about whether the president would back them up. I tried to reassure them that indeed he would.”

Within a few months, President Obama had designated the half-million-acre Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument. Sen. Heinrich gives Podesta credit for getting “the wheels turning within the White House” to make it happen. “He personally gets these issues and he understands the West and he understands the importance of lands issues,” Heinrich says.

Podesta also understands how public lands can be leveraged to benefit his boss and political party. Toward the end of the Clinton administration, he supported Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck’s proposal to permanently protect the remaining roadless areas on national forests from logging, mining, drilling and other development. He saw it as another piece of Clinton’s environmental legacy. Dombeck, who had previously had little influence in the White House, suddenly found himself attending meetings in the West Wing, with Clinton himself popping in to check on progress.

Podesta was deeply interested in the details, Dombeck recalls, and drove the decision to add forest lands excluded from the original proposal, including the Tongass in Alaska, the Black Hills in western South Dakota and northeastern Wyoming, and the Pacific Northwest forests where the northern spotted owl lives. The plan topped out at 58.5 million acres, more than a quarter of all the national forest lands. Podesta maneuvered the proposal through a gantlet of other agencies and the White House Office of Management and Budget in the weeks before George W. Bush moved into the White House. It was signed just a week before Clinton left office.

“We’d have never gotten it done without him,” says Dombeck.

How does Podesta get such controversial conservation initiatives past the finish line? “It’s just good management,” he



John Podesta shows his lighter side as he gets strapped into a helium balloon and floats up by the National Monument.

“Of course, the president wanted to do it, too,” he says of Bill Clinton. (The Secret Service nixed that idea.)

COURTESY WILLIAM J. CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY

the doomed 1972 presidential campaign of liberal Democrat George McGovern. In 1976, he earned a law degree from Georgetown University. It wasn’t until 1990 that his passion for the environment really caught fire, though, when he worked on that year’s Earth Day celebration.

Podesta and his brother, lobbyist Tony Podesta, organized a Washington, D.C., event from the basement of a townhouse on Capitol Hill. It drew hundreds of thousands of people to the National Mall, including celebrities like Tom Cruise, John Denver and Olivia Newton-John.

“It was a life-transforming experience,” recalls Tony Podesta.

An “Earth Day 1990” poster adorned John Podesta’s various offices at the White House, yet Podesta has trouble articulating what drives his own environmentalism. “You ask me, ‘What’s my commitment?’” he says. “It’s kind of like when wandering around in the Rocky Mountains — you never forget it. You become connected to it. Wallace Stegner described it as the geography of hope.”

says. “If you want to get something done, you pay attention to it.”

Colleagues say Podesta’s generally an affable and supportive manager. But as the point man for the many scandals that plagued the Clinton White House, he got a reputation for having an evil twin known as “Skippy,” who could be harsh and unusually direct. “I’ve had some Skippy sightings, (but) not in a while,” says David Hayes, who was deputy secretary of the Interior Department for both Clinton and Obama. By 2007, when Daniel Weiss joined the Center for American Progress, he says Skippy “was more legend than fact.” That’s not to say Podesta’s not still very exacting. “He’s very committed to his friends,” Carol Browner says. But “it doesn’t mean he’s not a hard-ass sometimes. He calls it as he sees it.”

WHEN THE REPUBLICANS TOOK OVER the White House in 2001, Podesta and some colleagues decided to create a progressive think tank that would be tough enough to compete with those on the political right. They called it the Center for American Progress, and it grew into a revolving-door powerhouse that harnessed the intellectual and political capital of the academic, NGO, philanthropic and government communities, often shuttling people in and out of key positions in all these realms. In 2012, the group had a budget of more than \$39 million, according to its IRS 990, and today, it boasts a staff of 314 policy wonks, professors and writers.

“Democrats and progressives did not have an institution dedicated to thinking up policies and finding a way to move them into the public sphere,” says Ana Unruh Cohen, who joined the think tank in 2004 as its first director of environmental policy. “We called it a think-and-do tank. We didn’t want to write just one more report that would be sitting on the shelf.”

Perhaps the center’s most urgent environmental goal was developing climate policies and building political and public support for them. The entire environmental movement had watched as Al Gore, heeding his advisors, retreated from his fierce concern about climate change during his unsuccessful presidential bid in 2000. The think tank believed that, with more groundwork, climate policy could become a winning political issue.

Part of the groundwork included working with Republicans and business leaders. In 2005, Podesta teamed up with think tanks in Great Britain and Australia to create the International Climate Change Task Force. He believed the major economies could work together to combat runaway climate change. Maine Republican Sen. Olympia Snowe, who has since retired from the Senate, led the task force with a British member of parliament, and by the end of 2007, President George W. Bush had adopted a similar, though watered-down, approach, launching a voluntary effort by major economies to slow and stop the growth of greenhouse gases. He also asked Congress to tighten fuel

economy standards for cars.

Podesta’s Center for American Progress lobbied Congress to do the same, commissioning a poll that showed public support for boosting fuel economy. Daniel Weiss, who worked for the center at the time, says the poll helped persuade House Democrats to vote for the 2007 Energy Independence and Security Act, which required automakers to raise fuel economy standards to 35 miles per gallon by the model year 2020. President Bush signed the bill into law.

As the 2008 election approached, Podesta continued to think and act like the chief of staff of a Democratic White House in waiting. With Todd Stern, his think-tank colleague, he released a clean energy blueprint for the next administration. Although Podesta supported Hillary Clinton in the primaries, Obama embraced clean energy as a centerpiece of his campaign, and long before it was clear whether he would win, he asked Podesta to lead his transition team. Despite a multitude of competing priorities — including selecting a Cabinet and White House staff — Podesta continued to press conservation measures. In TV appearances, he urged the cancellation of 77 oil and gas leases near Canyonlands and Arches national parks in Utah, an idea Interior Secretary Ken Salazar eventually implemented. He also readied an economic recovery bill that invested \$90 billion in renewable energy and energy efficiency, including programs like “cash for clunkers,” which paid people to trade in old gas-guzzlers. Many of the initiatives came straight from the Center for American Progress.

Podesta returned to his think tank, but many of his allies remained in the administration. Stern became a special envoy for climate change at the State Department. Former senior fellow Denis McDonough rose through the White House inner circle to become chief of staff in 2013. Jennifer Palmieri went from president of the center’s political arm to assistant to the president and White House communications director. She’s now communications director for Hillary Clinton’s 2016 campaign. Christina Goldfuss moved from public-lands director at the Center for American Progress to deputy director of the National Park Service. Today, she’s acting chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality. The list goes on.

The think tank’s revolving door positioned Podesta and his allies to promote action on climate change early in the Obama administration. Ana Unruh Cohen left the center and re-joined the staff of Rep. Ed Markey, D-Mass., where she helped draft sweeping legislation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Democratic majority in both chambers offered a rare window in which to push for the bill, which included a market-based strategy for reducing carbon dioxide emissions, known as cap and trade.

The climate bill passed the House in 2009, but Senate Republicans used the recession to successfully paint the bill as



STEPHEN JAFFE/AFR/GETTY IMAGES



JIM BOURG/POOL/AP PHOTO



MICHAEL O'CONNELL/FEDERAL NEWS RADIO

John Podesta with Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, top, and President Bill Clinton at a Cabinet meeting at the White House in 2000; center, with Secretary of State John Kerry in Beijing, China, in 2013, at a meeting that included discussions on global energy and environment; bottom, with Interior Secretary Sally Jewell last year.

a jobs killer, and even some Democrats helped kill it. It was a major defeat for Obama and Podesta, and, for a while, Obama retreated on the environment.

BUT THERE'S NOTHING LIKE a second term facing a Congress fully in the hands of the opposing party to change a president's perspective.

"With an obstructionist Congress, you ... need to think about, 'How do I use all the authority of the bully pulpit, public-private partnerships, executive authority,

"These are people who have huge audiences every morning, who are trusted, who could talk about changes."

Successful events like this helped embolden Obama, but failed to impress everyone in the environmental community. The administration's initial reluctance to aggressively regulate hydraulic fracturing and greenhouse gas emissions from the natural gas industry angered on-the-ground activists. At a White House conference table in March 2014, a reporter's question about environmentalists' call for

a ban on exports of natural gas provoked a sharp response. Opposing all fossil fuels, Podesta snapped, is a "completely impractical way of moving towards a clean energy future."

Liberal pundits and mainstream journalists have occasionally questioned Podesta about his think tank's financial and policy ties to its energy, defense and pharmaceutical company funders. But his most aggressive critics are on the right. Following Podesta's return

to the White House, right-wing bloggers and reporters honed in on one of the center's board members and major donors, Hansjörg Wyss, a billionaire businessman who, for two decades, has financed efforts to conserve public lands. Podesta's financial White House disclosure showed he collected \$87,000 in 2013, for consulting for the HJW Foundation, a Wyss philanthropy. The conservative *Daily Caller* website accused Podesta of violating White House ethics rules for taking funds from Wyss and then pushing Obama's proposal to expand the area off-limits to oil and gas drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge — a priority for the Wyss Foundation.

Nothing ever came of the accusations. A spokesperson for Podesta said: "While Mr. Wyss and Mr. Podesta share a passion for conserving America's most precious landscapes, his consulting work involved a separate philanthropy focused on social justice issues. He observed all applicable rules, and there was no conflict."

Together, HJW and Wyss Foundation donated more than \$5 million to the Center for American Progress between 2011 and 2013, according to a spokesman for the Wyss Foundation. The foundations merged in 2014. (*High Country News* has received donations from the Wyss Foundation, including funding for news coverage from Washington, D.C.)

Tony Podesta brushes off the criti-

MONUMENTAL CHANGES?

Still quiet at Canyons of the Ancients

When local people first heard that President Bill Clinton wanted to designate a new 164,000-acre national monument in the red-rock desert of southwestern Colorado, many saw the new "Canyons of the Ancients" as a change for the worse.

"We thought, 'They're going to start taking away our rights,'" says Rodney Carriker, who runs horse-packing trips on the public lands involved.

At the time, the Bureau of Land Management gave access to pretty much everyone: 95 percent of the land was leased for grazing and 80 percent for drilling oil and gas, as well as for deposits of carbon dioxide, which is injected into oil deposits to enhance their recovery; mountain bikers explored it largely unrestricted; and archaeologists raced against pothunters for the artifacts scattered across the rugged landscape.

Carriker and his neighbors believed a new monument would mean new restrictions, and they brought their fears to community meetings and the local newspaper opinion pages. Montezuma and Dolores county commissioners filed formal protests, joined by various user groups.

"The folks who were against it were

cism. "He agrees with those views, is an effective advocate, and they (philanthropic donors) fund his research on issues they care about," he says. "That's how the nonprofit sector works; that's how think tanks work." Then, referring to another, more famous pair of brothers, the fossil fuel industry billionaires who fund GOP campaigns, he adds: "Did you expect the Koch brothers would fund John to stop drilling" in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge?

PODESTA'S MOST IMPORTANT contribution during his year in the White House may have been his role in negotiating a climate agreement between the United States and China — the world's two greatest emitters of greenhouse gases. Drawing on long-term relationships with Chinese leaders and experts, Podesta entered negotiations with a well-conceived plan. One key to getting China to agree to a robust pledge, he says, was showing that the U.S. was taking serious action on its own: The EPA's proposal to cut greenhouse gas emissions from coal-fired power plants, along with policies to reduce climate pollution from cars and expand solar and wind power, demonstrated that "we were doing a lot," he says.

Podesta hopes the deal will lead to a new international climate agreement,

Please see *Legacy Maker*, page 19



John Podesta poses with Center for American Progress President Neera Tanden, center, and Hillary Clinton at a CAP event in 2013.

YURI GRIPAS/REUTERS

regulatory authority to try to make the country a better place?" Podesta says.

Although not officially part of the White House, Podesta was never far away, visiting 139 times between 2009 and the end of 2013, according to the White House visitor log. Podesta wasn't always a cheerleader; he urged the White House to do more on income inequality, clean energy and climate, and he joined Babbitt in criticizing the Obama administration for drilling more public land than it had protected.

With Podesta's input from the sidelines, Obama began using the Antiquities Act to designate monuments. The president issued executive orders to get agencies to consider climate change impacts and announced regulations to curb greenhouse gases. After he announced his Climate Action Plan, Obama brought Podesta back formally as a senior advisor to implement it, "both in substance and communication," Boots says.

Podesta immediately saw a chance to make a splash with the National Climate Assessment, due out in May 2014. He knew a data-filled 827-page climate report would make most people's eyes glaze over, so he found a way to jazz it up by championing a colleague's idea to bring meteorologists to the White House lawn, and persuaded the president to do one-on-one interviews with national and local TV weather forecasters, says Boots.

really passionate, even to the point of, at times, being a little threatening,” recalls archaeologist Mark Varien, who has worked in the area for 36 years. But Clinton, undeterred, designated the new monument in 2000.

Today, 15 years after that designation, and five years after the BLM implemented a new management plan, much of that anger has died down. “(People) anticipated the most wicked things happening, and they haven’t,” says John Sutcliffe, a winemaker who lives across the road from the popular Sand Canyon trailhead.

Little has changed on the ground. “We manage grazing the same, we manage oil and gas the same, and we manage recreation the same,” says monument manager Marietta Eaton. “We use the same regulations and laws that the rest of the BLM uses. It’s still a multiple-use area; we just have conservation now in addition.”

The conservation overlay in the 2010 management plan has led to a few changes: The BLM has reduced the number of grazing permits by about one-fifth, and imposed stricter environmental and cultural oversight of new drilling proposals.

Eaton says the agency has added a second enforcement officer and pursued a handful of conservation-oriented projects. These include restoring habitat for reptiles, removing non-designated roads, and cutting junipers around archaeological sites to reduce the risk of wildfire.

But with a budget that has remained basically flat at \$1.2 million per year, the agency is still working on the cheap. The

visitor’s center, for instance, is housed at the Anasazi Heritage Center, in a building deeded to BLM by the Bureau of Reclamation, and is staffed by volunteers. (The monument recruits about 200 annually.) People who live near Sand Canyon complain about cars from the tiny trailhead parking lot spilling onto the highway, but Eaton says traffic overall has grown very little, staying between 30,000 and 35,000 visitors per year. She doesn’t know exactly how much visitation has increased, though, because the agency does not have the infrastructure, like monitored entrances, to formally track visitation.

Eaton says the monument is not that popular a destination. “People come to see Mesa Verde National Park,” she says. “Then, if they’ve heard about Canyons of the Ancients, they might check out Lowry Pueblo or Painted Hand.”

The modest increase in visitation and attention brought by the monument designation may actually be helping protect the area’s valuable archaeological treasures. Varien says the monument sees less large-scale looting than in the past, likely because looters fear greater scrutiny. “Of course, visitors are guilty of a little bit of what I call ‘loving it to death,’” he says. “But I don’t believe in management by secrecy. People need to learn from (these resources).”

On a recent spring day, a walk down the narrow path that leads to Painted Hand Pueblo on the north end of the monument is surprisingly quiet. Lizards dart from rock to rock, crossing lumpy



ERIC MIRAGLIA/CC FLICKR

soil darkened by the fungi, bacteria and tiny mosses and liverworts that form its living crust. Ahead, the ground falls off into a shallow canyon, where, unmarked by signs, a circular stone tower rises, surrounded by rubble and bits of pottery.

A family of seven appears on the far rim, and two boys and a girl scale down a ladder of boulders, followed by a man with a younger boy who chatters enthusiastically about the Ancestral Puebloan people who lived here 800 years ago. The Francis family came from Riverton, Utah, to visit Mesa Verde National Park on their spring break, and today, on their way back to Utah, they’re making a brief stop at Painted Hand. Now they vanish over the lip of the canyon. Soon, there’s just the fading sound of a car engine and wheels rolling away down an unseen gravel road.

KINDRA MCQUILLAN

Painted Hand Pueblo in Canyon of the Ancients National Monument in southwest Colorado was designated by President Bill Clinton in 2000.

TIMELINE

Antiquities Act: A power tool for presidents

President Theodore Roosevelt signed the Antiquities Act into law in 1906, primarily to halt the ransacking of archaeological sites in the American Southwest. This Progressive Era act grants any president the unilateral power to protect “historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest,” by proclaiming “the smallest area (of federal lands) compatible with proper care and management” as national monuments. Many presidents have interpreted the law liberally

and used it to protect large landscapes, periodically provoking local backlashes and legal challenges. Traditionally, monuments are managed by the National Park Service, although many of those created since the 1990s are overseen by the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service and other federal agencies. Today, there are more than 110 national monuments. The majority were established by presidential proclamation, though Congress also has the power to create them. MARSHALL SWEARINGEN



SEPT. 24, 1906
President Theodore Roosevelt proclaims the first national monument, 1,194-acre Devils Tower in Wyoming.

1908 After more than two decades of congressional gridlock and local backlash over protecting the Grand Canyon as a national park, Roosevelt makes it a national monument. At 800,000 acres, it sets a new precedent for using the Antiquities Act on a landscape scale. In 1919, Congress declares it a national park.



1915 Under pressure from logging interests and the Forest Service, President Woodrow Wilson reduces the size of Mount Olympus National Monument by nearly half. (It was designated by Roosevelt about 48 hours before he left office – the first “lame duck” monument.) In 1938, Congress makes it a national park.

1932 Encouraged by the National Park Service, President Herbert Hoover tacks on a 273,000-acre national monument to Grand Canyon National Park. Local ranchers denounce this as an abuse of executive power. With the Depression diverting the country’s attention, Hoover proclaims four other large, lame-duck monuments: White Sands, Death Valley, Saguaro and Black Canyon of the Gunnison.

ANSEL ADAMS/NARA



CUMULATIVE ACREAGE (IN MILLIONS) ADDED OR SUBTRACTED FROM NATIONAL MONUMENT SYSTEM BY PRESIDENTIAL PROCLAMATION

30

20

10

8

6

4

2

0

YEAR, STARTING IN 1906

PRESIDENT AND NUMBER OF PROCLAMATIONS THAT ESTABLISH, ENLARGE, OR DIMINISH NATIONAL MONUMENTS ■ REPUBLICAN ■ DEMOCRAT

Controversy grazes Missouri Breaks

On a blustery April morning in north-central Montana, a dozen volunteers, including me, scramble from three jet boats onto a grassy bank. Five guys from the Bureau of Land Management just gunned us 20 miles up the Missouri River, through a remote canyon of sandstone cliffs and sagebrush bluffs. Now we grab shovels and buckets and get to work, planting cottonwoods.

The cottonwoods on this stretch of the river “have one foot in the grave and one foot on a banana peel,” explains Chad Krause, a young BLM hydrologist. Most are over 100 years old, and there are very few younger trees to replace them. Several possible culprits have been cited — upstream dams have reduced seed-propagating floods; winter ice flows are scouring the banks; and grazing cattle are chomping the young trees. But the impacts are clear: The BLM has warned that in a few decades, river floaters might have to start packing their own shade with them, because there won’t be enough trees left to cool their campsites.

This 149-mile stretch of river, plus 585 square miles of adjacent BLM land where the northern plains crumble into a fractal-like network of coulees and canyons, is the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. And that 2001 monument designation, I’m told, is the reason the cottonwoods are now being planted.

President Clinton’s proclamation, in a few pages of sweeping prose, describes the “objects” this monument is to protect: plentiful bighorn sheep and other wildlife, traces of history left by numerous Native tribes and the Lewis and Clark expedition, riverside cottonwood ecosystems and more. The proclamation also laid out the terms of protection, including withdrawal of all monument lands from future oil and gas leasing and a new travel plan to manage motorized traffic.

But — in a nod to local input — it permitted continued grazing and hunting.

The BLM’s management plan, released in 2008, made so few changes that it even garnered the support of the Missouri River Stewards, a local group of ranchers who had opposed the monument designation. But it drew opposition from the Friends of the Missouri Breaks Monument — the nonprofit group organizing the cottonwood planting — and other conservation groups, who argued that the plan was too lax on roads and airstrips. As a result of their lawsuit, settled in 2013, the BLM is moving ahead with plans to close about 200 miles of backcountry routes.

But tensions remain. Even though the proclamation allows grazing, the Western Watersheds Project, an aggressive grazing reform group, argues that the BLM actually has authority to restrict it in order to protect monument “objects,” like the threatened cottonwoods. That group’s lawsuit is ongoing.

Glenn Monahan, who has guided this stretch of river for 20 years, has amassed evidence that livestock are primarily responsible for the decline of the cottonwoods and other vegetation. He also thinks livestock have caused a drop in the number of river visitors, from roughly 5,000 in 2009 to 3,000 in 2014. He’s counted as many as 1,360 cattle along a 46-mile stretch of river popular with floaters, and he and his guides carry shovels for scraping cow patties from campsites. Although the BLM says it plans to erect fences around some campsites, Monahan thinks the agency should go much further, removing cattle from the river entirely. “This is now a national monument,” he says, “and we need to start asking, ‘What is the highest use of this land?’”

This is why the 120-odd landowners within the monument still largely resent



Friends of the Missouri Breaks volunteer Shannon Walden limbs cottonwood cuttings and then plants them in seven-foot-deep holes along the river, where dams and grazing have diminished the populations of new young trees. FRIENDS OF MISSOURI BREAKS

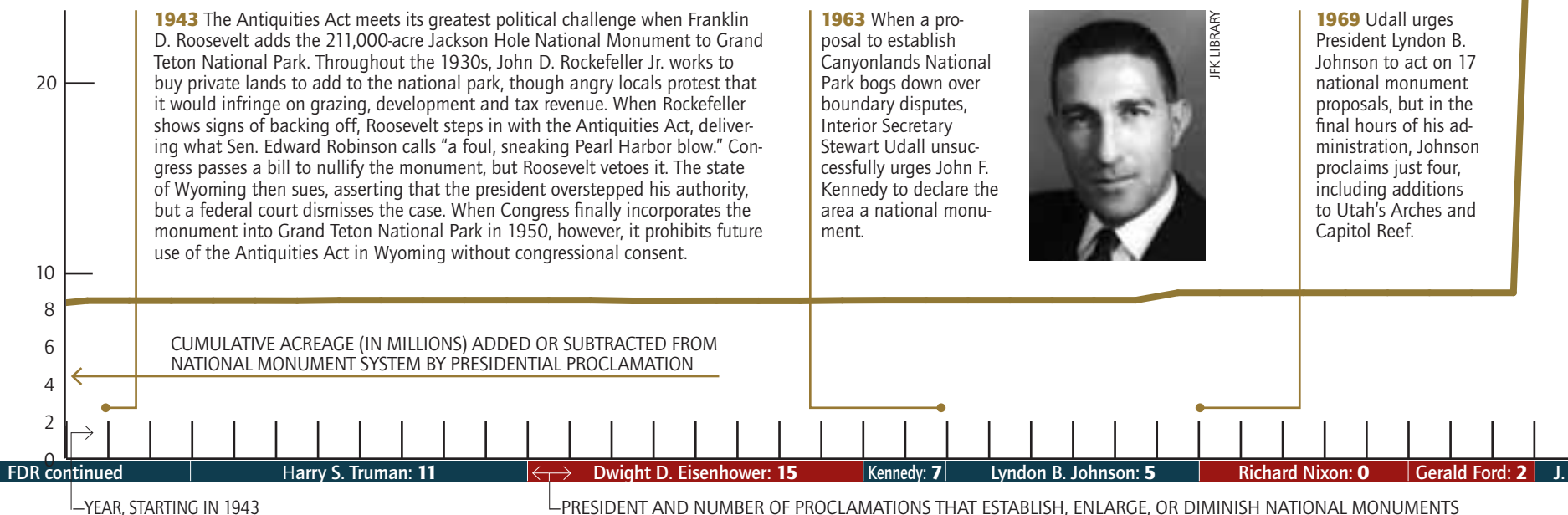
the monument — not for what it’s done, but for what it might do. Ron Poertner, a leader of the Missouri River Stewards, sees the Western Watersheds Project lawsuit as an ominous sign of things to come: increased public attention and scrutiny over local grazing practices. “We’re always waiting for the other shoe to drop,” he says.

Hugo Tureck, who has a ranch on the edge of the Breaks and helped found the Friends in 2001, told me that he sees the monument staying pretty much the way it is, maybe with slightly stricter grazing in the future. But one thing has changed: “(This area) now has a stage presence that it never had before,” he says. “That’s what a national monument means.”

Back on the grassy bank, we place each slender cottonwood cutting in a hole along with a watering pipe, tamp in a slurry of dirt, river water and rooting hormone, and erect a ring of wire fence to keep out cows. Dark clouds build over the white cliffs, spit rain and then clear to blue sky. I ask Rick Pokorny, who was born and raised in the Breaks, why he’s here. “To plant trees, because they need to be planted,” he says.

MARSHALL SWEARINGEN

continued from previous page



Legacy Maker, continued from page 16

and a political shift in Congress. “I think it had the ancillary effect of taking off the table the argument that we shouldn’t do anything because the Chinese aren’t doing anything, when the Chinese are in fact doing quite a lot to transform their energy system,” he says.

That’s not to say that Podesta expects Republican climate skeptics to concede defeat. In fact, he seems to hope climate change will be a central issue in the 2016 election, which could pit a Republican climate denier against Hillary Clinton, with Podesta in her corner. Many of his tweets since he officially became Clinton’s

campaign chairman have pressed the issue: He praises California’s aggressive new climate goals, warns of alarming new science on melting Antarctic ice, posts a video of President Obama losing his normal cool at climate deniers during a skit at the White House Correspondents Dinner, and shares a photo showing a polar bear cub stretching to nuzzle its mother in Alaska, where the animals are threatened by melting sea ice.

One tweet hints at how Podesta sees the battle possibly shaping up. He links to a *Guardian* story that quotes GOP candidate Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas comparing people who believe in global

warming to “the flat-Earthers,” even as a recent poll shows that 60 percent of Republicans believe the government should limit greenhouse gases. “If the majority of Rs support climate action,” he wonders, “when will their leaders accept the science?”

Back in his office, Podesta can’t hide his eagerness for the fight ahead: “Politics is about friction. When people agree more than they disagree, it doesn’t rise to the top. This time it could be massive.” □

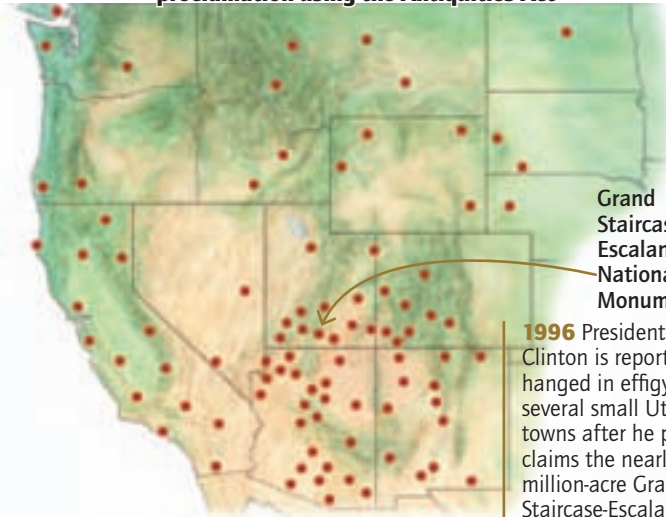


Elizabeth Shogren, formerly of the *Los Angeles Times* and National Public Radio, covers Washington for *High Country News*.



1978 In what will become known as one of the greatest single acts of conservation, President Jimmy Carter designates 56 million acres of new monuments in Alaska. This pushes Congress to resolve long-standing public lands issues in 1980, with the passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, which redesignates several of the monuments as national parks, including Denali, Kenai Fjords and Kobuk Valley, but requires congressional approval for any new major monuments in Alaska. Cantwell area residents gather in Denali to fire off guns, build campfires and engage in other now-prohibited acts — an episode called the Great Denali Trespass.

Monuments created through presidential proclamation using the Antiquities Act



Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument

1996 President Bill Clinton is reportedly hanged in effigy in several small Utah towns after he proclaims the nearly 2 million-acre Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument — the largest created since Carter’s Alaska monuments and the first managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Local counties sue, but a federal court upholds the national monument. Encouraged by Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and John Podesta, Clinton goes on to create 18 more monuments in his second term, most managed by the BLM.



REAGAN



BUSH

1981-1993 Neither Presidents Ronald Reagan nor George H.W. Bush use the Antiquities Act.

The Upper Salmon River, one of the most remote parts of Kobuk Valley National Park, which Carter first designed as a national monument in 1978.

EDUCATION SPECIALIST/WESTERN ARCTIC NATIONAL PARKLANDS

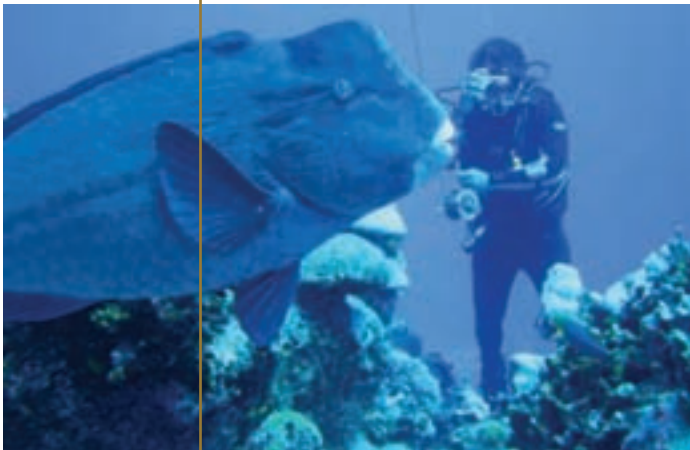
CUMULATIVE ACREAGE (IN MILLIONS) ADDED OR SUBTRACTED FROM NATIONAL MONUMENT SYSTEM BY PRESIDENTIAL PROCLAMATION

2006-2009

President George W. Bush establishes more than 300,000 square miles of national monuments in the Pacific, administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. (Marine monuments not included in graph to preserve scale.)

A NOAA diver photographs a large bumphead parrotfish at Wake Atoll in the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument.

MATTHEW DUNLAP/
NOAA

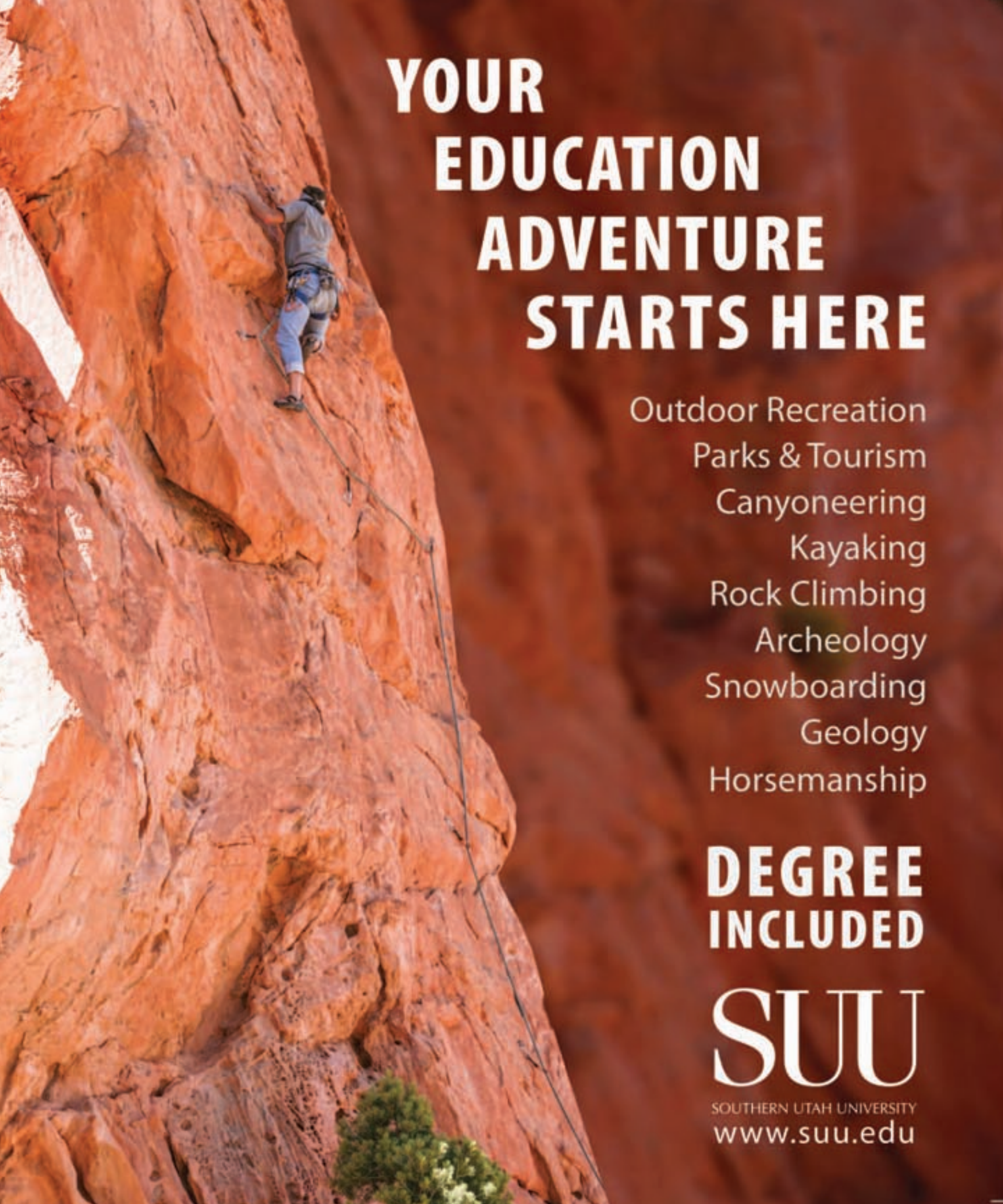


2011-PRESENT

President Obama uses the Antiquities Act 16 times, protecting more than 1.1 million acres and enlarging by six-fold the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument established by George W. Bush — thereby creating the largest marine reserve in the world.



SOURCES: THE ANTIQUITIES ACT: A CENTURY OF AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY, HISTORIC PRESERVATION, AND NATURE CONSERVATION, EDS. HARMON, D., MCMANAMON, F.P., AND PITCAITHLEY, D.T. - RIGHTNER (1989); NATIONAL MONUMENTS TO NATIONAL PARKS: THE USE OF THE ANTIQUITIES ACT OF 1906; NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. FOREST SERVICE, BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT, NOAA, US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

A person is seen from behind, climbing a steep, reddish-orange rock face. They are wearing a light-colored shirt, blue pants, and a backpack. A rope is attached to their harness and extends down the cliff. The rock face is textured with various cracks and crevices. The background is a blurred view of the same rock formation.

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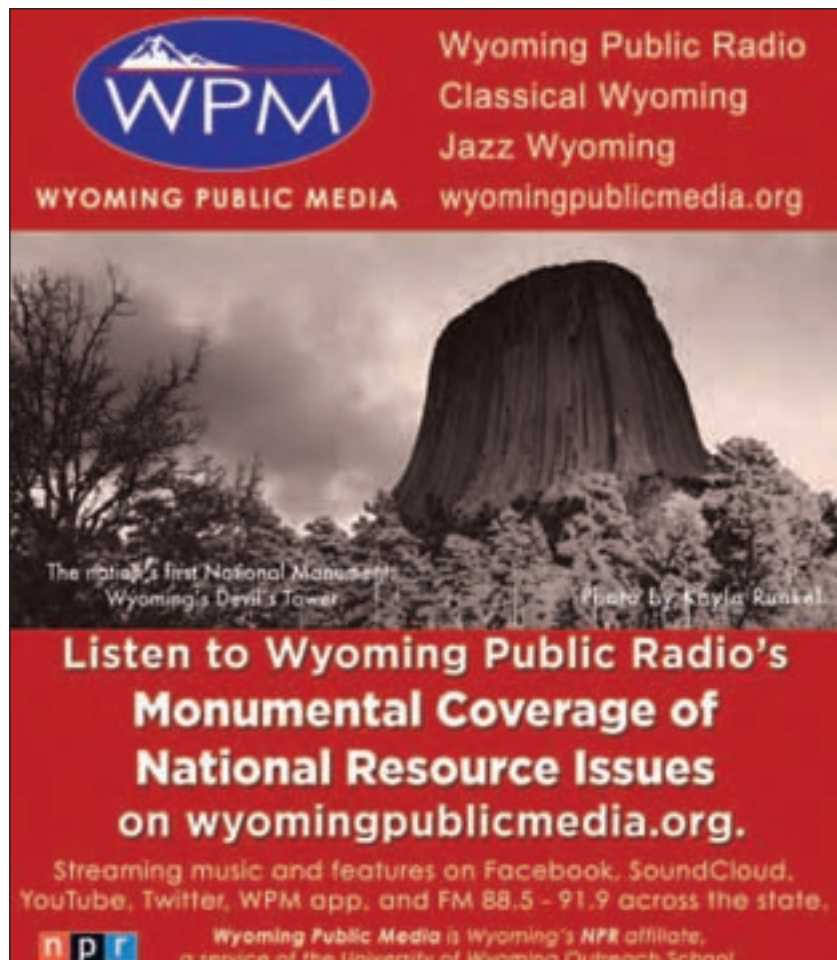
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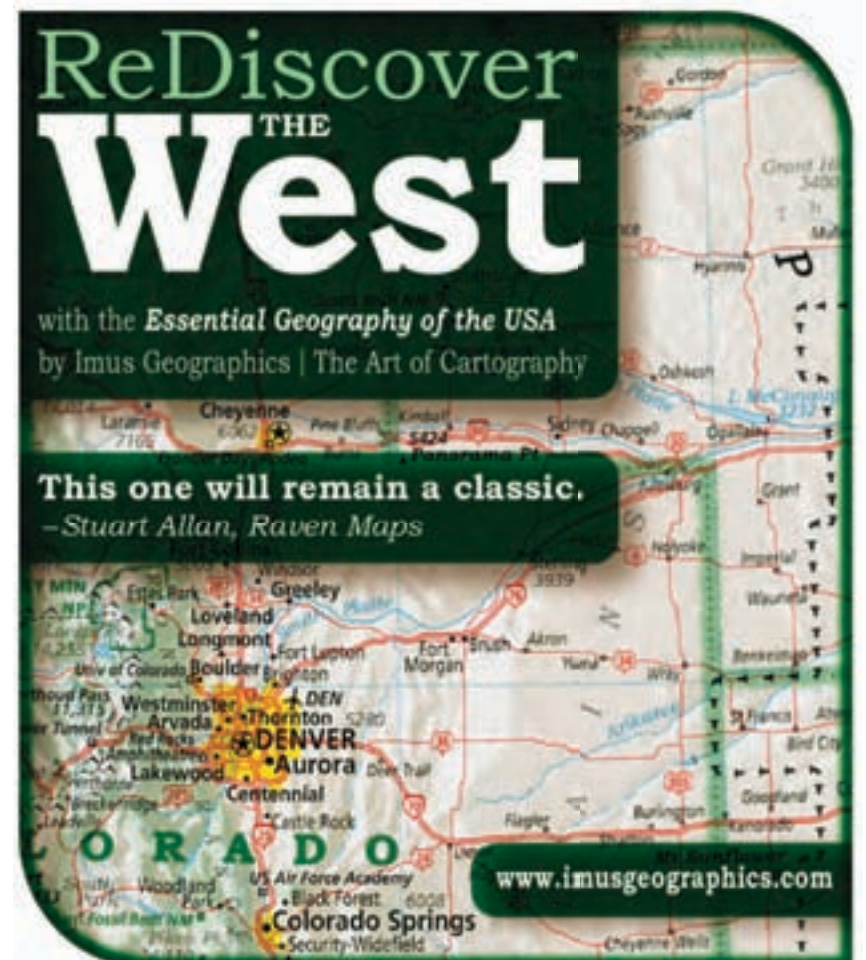
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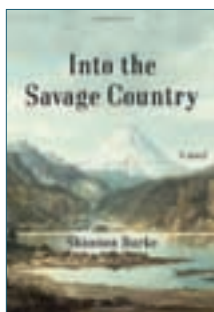


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A trapper's tale



Into the Savage Country

Shannon Burke

272 pages, hardcover:

\$24.95.

Pantheon, 2015.

The classic Western frontier story is an archetype of the hero's journey: A young man, off to seek his fortune in the West, enters the wilderness to prove himself and emerges both stronger and wiser. *Into the Savage Country* follows this pattern, but charismatic characters, good humor, lively language and nail-biting scenes make Shannon Burke's novel feel as fresh and thrilling as the first time this kind of story was told.

In 1826, 22-year-old William Wyeth is a hunter selling furs in St. Louis. He and the eventual love of his life, Alene Chevalier, meet cute, frontier fashion, when he hires her to brain-tan some hides. Wyeth isn't the only one sweet on Alene — so is Henry Layton, a hot-headed braggart who “could buy you a drink and do a good deed, but he could not do it without others knowing he'd done it.”

William embarks on a fur-trapping expedition, because, he says, “I was fated to test my mettle in the West. If I'd not make a fortune ... I'd live my life up to the hilt and satisfy that inner craving and have something to talk about in my dotage.”

He learns from seasoned trappers, including historical figures like legendary mountain men Jedediah Smith and Jim Bridger. William observes of Bridger,

“Though he was as ignorant of book learning as the day he was born, he possessed all the accomplishments needed west of the Mississippi.”

When William re-encounters Alene and Henry at a U.S. Army fort, Henry invites him to join a Smith-led expedition to Wyoming's Wind River Range, where wild animals still abound, offering “the last, best chance of a big take.”

Burke vividly conveys the complex interactions between French and American trappers, the Crow, the Blackfoot and British soldiers. Burke's characters constantly evolve and surprise. Blackfoot warrior Red Elk, for example, at first appears despicable but emerges as a dignified man of canny intelligence.



Even Henry reveals endearing qualities.

Into The Savage Country rings with the conviction that a Western story is supposed to be fun above all, and that it need not sacrifice historical accuracy and complexity in order to entertain the reader.

BY JENNY SHANK

HCN's Annual Issue on

Outdoor Recreation

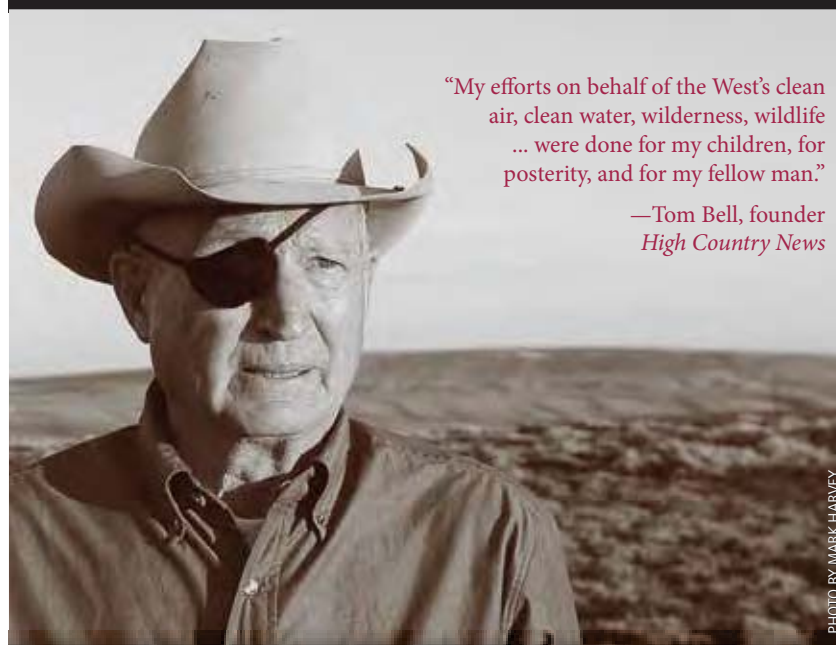
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Interior of a trapper's lodge.
WILLIAM MACY/NPS

Survival = Anger x Imagination

"Unless you're into meth or having sex with people you're related to, you'll find shit's pretty boring here" in Idaho Springs, 16-year-old Margaritte matter-of-factly tells a newcomer, as she introduces the boy to the downtrodden Rocky Mountain town just west of Denver. Margaritte is the protagonist of *Crazy Horse's Girlfriend*, the debut novel by Colorado native Erika Wurth, a poet who teaches creative writing at Western Illinois University.

Funny, tough, realistic and heart-breakingly foolish, Margaritte is a high school drug dealer on the fast track to teenaged motherhood and welfare; her dad, a white man, is drunk and abusive, while her Indian mother ceaselessly forgives and enables him.

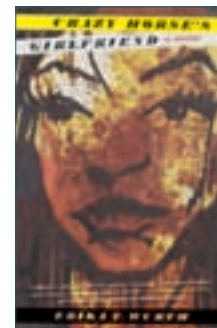
Like the author, Margaritte is Apache/Chickasaw/Cherokee; her best friend is her adopted cousin, Jake. "He's Nez Perce, Arapahoe, Cheyenne, and black. And big. ..." Margaritte talks tough and acts superior to the other impoverished residents of her town. "I knew where that kind of thinking led. To a doublewide trailer and miles and miles of cheap macaroni and cheese, ten for a dollar." However, her knowledge fails to inform her behavior; again and again, she makes the wrong choices.

For nearly 300 pages, Margaritte speeds toward impending doom, pausing along the way for multiple pit stops at the emergency room, a detour to an abortion clinic, various alcohol- and drug-fueled forays, and a flight with her mother and younger twin sisters to a hotel, followed by their drunk, gun-toting father.

Yet, Margaritte's kindness and compassion prevail. Even after her alcoholic father literally drives the family into a ditch during a thunderstorm, she thinks, "Sometimes my sadness for him overwhelmed my resentment, and that was even worse." She and the new boy fall in love. His family, wealthy and white, buys him expensive outdoor gear, but he's never slept outside. Margaritte takes him camping on Mount Evans. Sitting beside the campfire, she finds bliss. "I felt so content, so beautiful parts of me felt like they were dying off, exploding."

As Margaritte careens into and out of disaster, her strong fingers grip the reader's heart from the very first sentence, never letting go. She skids close to the edge of unredeemable stereotype, then screeches decisively to a halt, exploding into brilliant humanity. Exhilarated and terrified, readers of *Crazy Horse's Girlfriend* will be grateful for the ride.

BY ANNIE DAWID



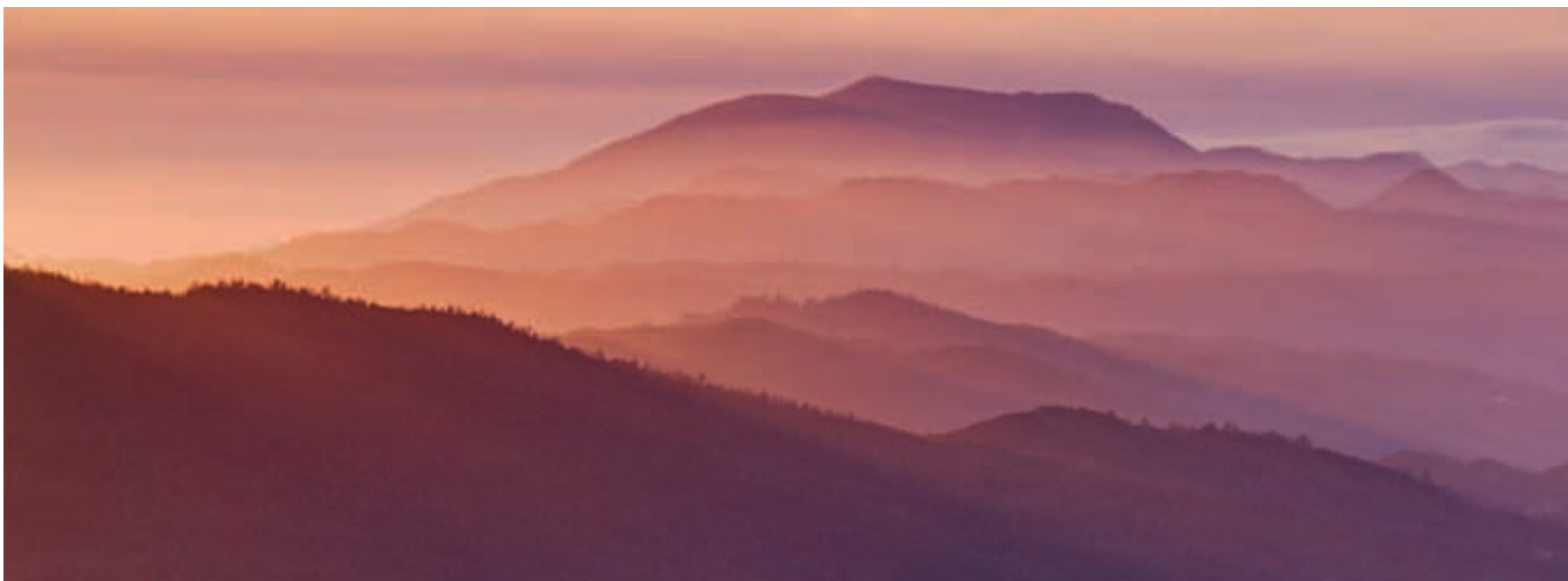
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Making a monument from scratch

I've always had a weakness for the underappreciated, overlooked corners of the public domain. Now, one of my favorite Cinderella places is on the cusp of becoming a national monument. I've been pondering: Does it deserve this?

Four decades ago, I became aware of some scraps of land on the dry inland edge of the Coast Ranges, just a couple of hours north of my home near San Francisco. Administered by the Ukiah office of the Bureau of Land Management, they had no special name. Their uniting feature was something called Blue Ridge, a ghostly hogback some 3,000 feet high and 70 miles long, overlooking California's rich Central Valley and the state capital of Sacramento. Two big creeks, Putah and Cache, cut east through this rampart to join the Sacramento River. Their upper watersheds, hidden behind that ridge, were pretty primitive, an enticing blankness on California's busy map.

My first attempt to penetrate the blankness, around 1978, earned me some scratches. Starting near the notch cut by Cache Creek, I bushwhacked to the top of Blue Ridge, a trek feasible only because a brushfire had just thinned out the usually dense and thorny chaparral. The scorched plateau I finally reached challenged traditional notions of "scenery," but I don't think I've ever been in a place that felt more wild. Local undulations hid the farmlands to the east, but not the great rank of Sierra-Cascade peaks beyond. In the other direction, Cache Creek vanished upstream among roadless hills.

I was standing on a little island of BLM land, from which I could see more such islands north, south and west. Several blocks were inaccessible behind ranch gates, public property the public could not reach. I thought how nice it would be to hike those places, but the idea that these leftover bits of ground could ever be part of something called a national monument never crossed my mind.

THE PUTAH-CACHE BIOREGION

The monument plan is the latest step in a quarter-century quest for identity that began in the university town of Davis, in the shadow of Blue Ridge. Inspired by visiting poet Gary Snyder and the contemporary push for "bioregional" identity, academics

proclaimed a kind of new homeland: the Putah-Cache Bioregion. The bioregion became the subject of courses and a tour guide, and the press it received enticed many more people to explore it.

The bioregion's key contribution, however, may have been to focus scientific research. Gathering new information and reassessing old, the Davis scientists became boosters of their backyard. To geologist Eldridge Moores, for example, this is perhaps the world's best exhibit for the type of tectonic junction called subduction. Less than 10 million years ago, along this line, an oceanic plate was diving under the North American continent, a process recorded in today's rocks. "You can walk from stuff that was on the upper plate onto the lower plate," says Moores.

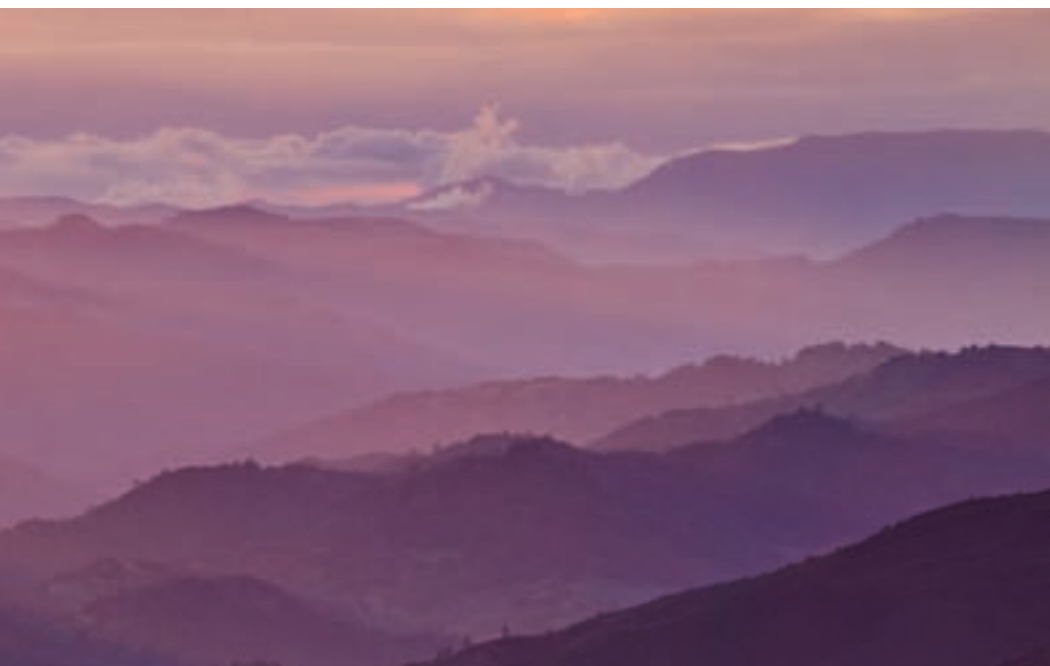
One signature of subduction is an abundance of serpentine, material ripped from the mantle of the earth and here exposed to the sky. Soils derived from this rock, low in potassium and calcium and full of iron and magnesium, are tough on plants. But evolution has filled this niche with hardy specialists like the dwarf McNab and Sargents cypress; the largest genetically pure forest of Sargents cypress occupies a mountaintop west of Lake Berryessa, the misnamed "Cedar" Roughs. Serpentine is a haven for rare plants and for native ones holding out against the tide of exotics. "This region is smack-dab in the middle of a global biodiversity hot spot," says botanist Catherine Koehler. Wouldn't that apply to most of California? No, says Koehler firmly. "This is distinct. It is a hot spot within the hot spot."

Maybe these hills were not so ordinary after all.

THE BERRYESSA-BLUE RIDGE NATURAL AREA

Up in the headwaters, a mining company man was coming to the same conclusion. About the time of my first hike, the gold-mining giant Homestake had moved into the area, buying up some 15,000 acres of ranchland speckled with leaky old mercury claims. Burned by public relations disasters elsewhere, Homestake hired biologist Ray Krauss and gave him rare authority as its environmental manager. Krauss, like the Davis professors, was smitten by the living treasures in his patch of auriferous hills. Knowing that the gold would play out in a few years, Krauss wanted these enduring assets in good hands: In 1993, Homestake donated 7,000 acres to the University of California-Davis as a natural reserve.

Saving this "postage stamp" was well and good, but Krauss sought greater recognition for the entire region. Working with the bioregionalists and a local rancher, George Gamble, he launched what vintners would call an appellation: the Blue Ridge-Berryessa Natural Area. "We were able to give a kind of branding to an area that most people had never heard of," he says.



The view from atop
Blue Ridge.

IVAN SOHRAKOFF

In 1997, Krauss invited the Bureau of Land Management, the state Department of Fish and Wildlife, various land trusts, the university crowd and key private landowners to sit down together in a Blue Ridge-Berryessa Natural Area Partnership. Though it lacked formal decision-making powers, the partnership had awesome connections, and these inspired a wave of land acquisitions. “We did 60,000 acres before we were through,” says Krauss. To the north, a large BLM purchase opened access to the wild Cache Creek canyon. To the south, the hidden valley of Elicura Creek, a Putah tributary where the Homestake pits had been, passed into the hands of several public agencies.

By the early 2000s, public and semi-public holdings had coalesced into an all but continuous band, further buffered by several big ranchland conservation easements. What next? The Partnership envisioned a novel joint-management scheme, and conservative landowners, normally leery of all things governmental, were at least willing to discuss it. But another, more traditional path would be taken.

TULEYOME

Robert Thayer, one of the bioregion authors and a Partnership participant, had his own favorite title for the region, based on a Native American village name whose resonance enchanted him — *Tuleyome: The deep home place*.

In 2002, veteran conservationists Bob Schneider and Andrew Fulks bestowed this Lake Miwok name on a new regional advocacy organization. Though Tuleyome-the-group endorsed the partnership’s theme of public-private cooperation, it zeroed in on the landscape’s most manageable aspect, the federal properties. Its first campaign secured wilderness designation for Cache Creek and the Cedar Roughts in 2006, protecting some 34,000 acres.

BERRYESSA-SNOW MOUNTAIN NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

By 2008, Tuleyome had moved on to a larger vision and another brand. It asked Congress to create a 350,000-acre Berryessa-Snow Mountain National Conservation Area. Besides BLM land, this would include the shores of Lake Berryessa, a big federal reservoir on Putah Creek controlled by the Bureau of Reclamation; and, jumping a fence to the north, it would take in a portion of neighboring Mendocino National Forest.

The expansion reflected the doctrine of conservation biology and the threat of climate change. “Bioregions,” these days, are somewhat out of fashion; “corridors” — bands of protected habitat linking south to north and low ground to high — are in. With its southern tip brushing the metropolitan San Francisco Bay Area and its northern blending into the Pacific Northwest

forests, the inner California Coast Range is just such a corridor, what Davis ecologist Chad Roberts calls “a hundred-mile-long geographic ramp” for species forced to relocate in a warming world. The national conservation area would embrace the government lands along this ramp, from 300 feet near Lake Berryessa to 7,056 feet on the top of Snow Mountain, the first big hump in Mendocino National Forest.

No land would be shifted between agencies. Though overseen by a joint advisory council, each would keep on managing its own acres. Established activities — logging, grazing, and off-highway vehicle use among others — would continue. Just what, then, would designation bring? Essentially, money. The combined area would have a better crack at the dwindling national funds for land acquisition and ecological restoration. The title would also push the agencies to work together on issues like control of exotic starthistle and rampant marijuana plantations. And it would lure more tourists. The relabeled area would show up on ordinary highway maps, a block of welcoming green proclaiming: “Something special here.”

To achieve support, advocates trimmed the plan as they went along. When some local governments said no, they dropped lands in those counties; to accommodate proposed wind turbines, they pulled the boundary back from the breezy crest of a key ridge; and they laid on reassuring language thickly — no application to private lands, acquisition from willing sellers only, endorsement of historic uses. Finally, the Lake Berryessa shoreline was omitted.

Still, not everyone was mollified. The California Cattlemen’s Association, for instance, feared that any special designation would “open us up to a lot more pressure” toward reduction of grazing. And when California’s Rep. Mike Thompson and Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer introduced bills in 2012, they encountered something not negotiable — the generic Republican suspicion of anything that smacked of government expansion or increased control. The bills never even reached the floor.

THE NATIONAL MONUMENT

Which brings us to the present day and to the latest entry in this identity parade: Berryessa-Snow Mountain National Monument, which President Obama may, at any moment, declare.

National monuments used to have a pretty exalted status. Parks in all but name, they differed largely in being created not by act of Congress but by presidential decree, under the Antiquities Act of 1906. Tending to size and jaw-dropping spectacle, they were subject to restrictive management. Even those who love it most had trouble seeing this stretch of California as that kind of monument.

But in 1996, when Bill Clinton created the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in southern Utah, he changed the model, allowing the land to be managed under vaguer rules and left in the hands of the BLM. Since then, the classification has shed much of its rigor. Some new monuments are park-like, but others are multiple-use areas — as this one would be. The switch from “national conservation area” to “national monument” is no longer all that much of a leap.

This spring, I got to know the debatable region afresh, taking recently-built trails to places once off-limits. I walked among budding blue oaks and flourishing native grasses and wildflowers far beyond my limited capacity to name. And I revisited my old campsite on Blue Ridge, greener now and blossoming, if still on the prickly side.

This place will never be a Grand Canyon or a Grand Teton — to name two parks that got their start as national monuments. Its values are subtler and come largely from location. In a bustling neighborhood of cities and intensive agriculture, this is a precious void, a reservoir of habitats, a breathing space for millions of people. Whatever we call it, this country needs and merits our loving attention — more building of trails, more purchase of key parcels, more healing of old scars, more pulling of bad weeds. Money needs to fall on it like rain.

The Berryessa-Snow Mountain National Monument?
Bringing it on. □

John Hart writes on public lands, resource policy and farmland protection. Titles include San Francisco Bay: Portrait of an Estuary and Storm Over Mono: The Mono Lake Battle and the California Water Future, plus several guides to wilderness travel. He is based in San Rafael, California.



HEARD AROUND THE WEST | BY BETSY MARSTON

MONTANA

It seems counterintuitive, but triathlete Brent Ruby, who directs the Department of Health and Human Performance at the University of Montana, wondered if eating a Big Mac might be just as healthy as scarfing down PowerBars after strenuous exercise. The makers of sports supplements tend to exaggerate their effectiveness, he said, touting their clear “natural” superiority to something as obviously odious as a double cheeseburger with an extra serving of fries. But is their advertising backed up by the facts — or are fitness freaks spending lots of money without reason? Ruby devised an experiment, reports the *Billings Gazette*, involving 11 active men who cycled for 90 minutes and were tested before and after consuming either the sports supplement or fast food from McDonald’s, which precisely measures its servings and was conveniently located just across the street. The result: Muscle recovery and exercise performance “were not different when comparing products created specifically for sport recovery and traditional fast food.” Ruby concluded that rebounding physically after workouts doesn’t have to be complicated. The body’s requirements are pretty simple, he said: “You asked me to work. I’ve done my job. Put some stuff back in the tank, dude.”

CALIFORNIA

Indignation doesn’t begin to describe the reaction of Californians who found out — thanks to the Coachella-based *Desert Sun* — that the Nestlé Corp. has been drawing water from wells that tap into a canyon’s springs without the permission of the San Bernardino National Forest. In fact, the permit for water withdrawal expired 27 years ago. The *Sun* also discovered that the Forest Service wasn’t tracking how much water was being taken. Reaction to the story was swift: Protesters blocked the entrance to Nestlé’s bottling plant in Sacramento, and a petition demanding that the corporation stop profiting from state water gained more than 135,000 signatures. “While California is facing record drought conditions, it is unconscionable that Nestlé would continue to bottle the state’s



NEVADA Souvenirs? CAROLYN ROSNER

precious water, export it and sell it for profit,” the petition declares. Actually, what Nestlé has been doing is apparently the norm: The *Sun* reported that no state agency tracks how much water is used by the 108 private bottling plants in California, of which Nestlé operates five. But thirsty Californians may set their minds at ease; the San Bernardino National Forest supervisor says that the Nestlé matter “has gone to the top of the pile in terms of a program of work for our folks to work on.”

IDAHO

It might seem romantic, but spray-painting your prom invitation in giant pink-and-blue graffiti on federal land is a dumb idea. The Black Cliffs near Boise is a popular rock-climbing area on Bureau of Land Management land near Boise and is also culturally significant to Native American tribes. It’s not that easy to access, but once there, the sprayer — in all caps — geo-texted: “DESTINY, PROM?” Here’s hoping that Destiny replied, “No, you vandalizing creep.” If identified, he could face up to six months in jail and/or a fine of up to \$1,000.

UTAH

That infamous “penalized” bull above a restaurant in Hurricane, Utah, is once again intact, proudly displaying an appendage that more accurately resembles a giant party hat. Owner Stephen Ward said he decided to restore the copper whopper because his customers liked it. Besides, he didn’t want to take any bull from the local government.

COLORADO

Sometimes there is a happy ending. After someone unwisely dumped a bowl full of goldfish into a 12-acre lake in Boulder a few years ago, the inevitable occurred: A handful of fishies morphed into some 4,000 goldfish. This alarmed Colorado wildlife officials, who feared they were taking over the ecosystem. One suggestion was to shock the fish, then scoop them up and feed them to hungry raptors at a rehabilitation facility; another was to drain the lake to kill all the fish, reports the *Boulder Daily Camera*. But a fortuitous fix occurred when passerby pelicans — birds usually found at the seashore — dropped down and scooped up almost every single goldfish. “Isn’t it fantastic?” said Fish and Wildlife spokeswoman Jennifer Churchill. “It has totally happened naturally.”

NEVADA

Somewhere near Area 51, in remote south-central Nevada, there’s a brothel that claims to be the nation’s “only themed” bawdy house, reports the *Sacramento Bee*. The “Alien Cathouse” is its official moniker, and its employees call themselves “Cosmic Kittens.” This legal enterprise in the middle of the desert is so weirdly entertaining that Savannah Sunshine, its madam, boasts that some visitors drop in just to tour. They might be missing something by not participating: “Decency prevents me from listing the services,” says reporter Sam McManis, “but let’s just say that some of these Cosmic Kittens are amphibious and most can do unusual things with pudding.”

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



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“Politicians will have to consider a difficult balance: water supplies for cities versus water for rural industries, including ones that may not be able to survive in a drying region.”

Tom Ribe, in his essay, “Are cows drinking the West dry?” from *Writers on the Range*, www.hcn.org/wotr