outdoors

High Country News

For people who care about the West

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SPECIAL ISSUE

The New Advocates

A wider range of outdoor enthusiasts and activists is finding its way into the conservation movement

Editor's note

It's your land, too

A couple of weeks after a dozen or so well-armed white men and women occupied Oregon's Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, announcing that they were there to help the locals "claim back their lands and resources" from the federal government, I began to wonder: Where were all the folks on the other side — the public-lands patriots — the people who say they cherish our country's rare birthright of a vast landscape, accessible to all Americans, no matter where they live?

So I emailed several conservation leaders, asking them whether they were going to the refuge to protest the protesters. "It might be best if everybody just lets the locals keep the pressure on these guys, or if the press pays a little less attention to them," one replied, adding, "I think they are doing much harm to their already discredited anti-public lands cause."

Perhaps the eclectic gathering at the refuge did harm that cause; the drumbeat to transfer federally managed lands to states seems to sound a little less forceful these days. But their actions, and the lack of a coordinated response from the outdoor and conservation community, raised an unsettling question: Who will nurture and lead a new generation, one that's more diverse and more urban, to defend the West's environment and lands?

The good news, as we demonstrate in this special issue, is that new people are taking up the challenge. And though they share much in common with the activists of the past, many look quite different, and have taken very different paths to the cause. I met Glenn Nelson, the Japanese American writer of our cover essay, at a conference in Jackson, Wyoming, last fall, well before the Oregon occupation, but shortly after he launched trailposse.com, a website dedicated to "diversifying by demystifying the outdoors." In the months since, *High Country News* has formed a partnership with him, co-publishing stories and essays by Nelson and other writers of color.

Nelson's own complex story of connecting to both his racial identity and the outdoors demonstrates that it's high time for a movement dominated for the past century by Anglos to reach out to and share power with a rapidly changing demographic. So, too, does his profile of Latino Outdoors, a group that, with lightning speed, has tapped into the Latino community's deep well of passion for the outdoors. I recently met one of the group's educators, Raquel Rangel, whom we profiled on hcn.org last year. She takes people from California's Central Valley to nearby state parks and relishes their growing connection to the public lands. "The greatest fulfillment comes when someone says, 'Thank you for bringing me to your park,' Rangel says. "I say, 'It's not *my* park — it's your park, too.' " That's a message the whole country needs to hear, whether it's trumpeted from an urban park in California or a remote wildlife refuge in Oregon.

–Paul Larmer, executive director/publisher

On the cover

Hikers on the Matt Davis Trail in California's Mount Tamalpais State Park in May, during a wellness walk sponsored by Latino Outdoors and California State Parks.

PAUL MYERS/GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVANCY

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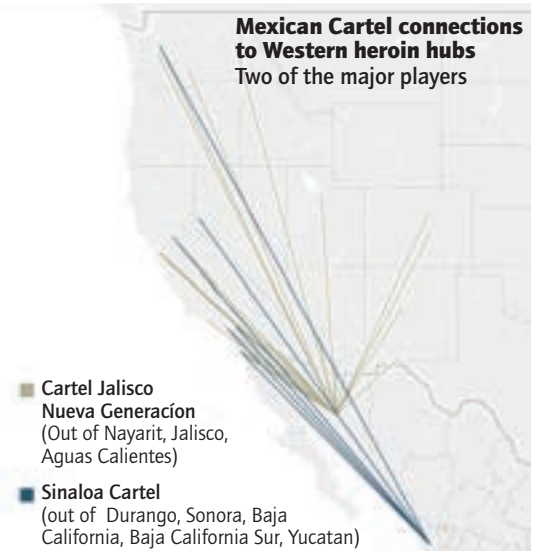

The West's heroin highways

The West's open spaces allow drugs like black-market prescription drugs, narcotics and heroin to move faster and farther than in the highly compartmentalized East. Mexican drug cartels have successfully established hubs and transport routes along Western highways. That has helped fuel high rates of opioid overdoses in Western states and allowed a wave of drugs to flow over the border. In 2014, the Drug Enforcement Agency estimated that a quarter-million pounds of heroin passed through the West. Since then, officials estimate that Mexico has increased its heroin production by 50 percent to quench the United States' growing thirst for the drug.
PAIGE BLANKENBUEHLER MORE: hcne.ws/heroinhwy

50

distance, in feet, that flames rose into the air in the Columbia River Gorge when a train carrying Bakken crude oil derailed and four rail cars exploded.

500

distance, in feet, between the train tracks and Mosier Community School, where students had to be evacuated.

On June 3, part of a Union Pacific train carrying 96 tanker cars of highly volatile Bakken crude oil derailed near Mosier, Oregon, 16 cars folding together in a great clanking din. Four exploded and smeared the sky with greasy black smoke that was visible for miles. No one was injured, and only a tiny fraction of the total amount of oil aboard spilled or vaporized. Still, the conflagration underscored the fears of oil-train opponents, who have long warned that a boom in the transport of oil by rail through the region threatens countless communities, as well as the Columbia River itself.
SARAH GILMAN MORE: hcne.ws/or-oiltrain

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Proportion of civil rights claims alleging environmental discrimination that have been dismissed by the Environmental Protection Agency. In its 23-year history of processing such claims, the office has never issued a formal finding of a Title VI violation. A group that analyzed EPA records suggests that within the agency, civil rights law has been relegated to "non-existence." Earthjustice is suing the EPA on behalf of communities in several states, including New Mexico and California, for allowing five separate complaints to languish for more than a decade. **SARAH TORY** MORE: hcne.ws/epa-fail

Send letters to editor@hcn.org or
Editor, HCN, P.O. Box 1090, Paonia, CO 81428.

WOMEN FIREFIGHTERS – NOT AS STRONG BUT MORE DELIBERATE

At least some of the hurdles faced by women in the fire service are physiological ("Trial by Fire," *HCN*, 5/30/16). The larger muscle fibers of men typically provide double the strength in the upper body and about 50 percent more in the lower body.

In wildfire, the gatekeeper is the "arduous pack test," which requires carrying a 45-pound pack over three miles of level ground in 45 minutes. By design, this test eliminates more people of smaller stature (shorter legs) and lighter weight, which includes a larger percentage of women.

Not long ago there were three tests, including a timed run and a "step test" to gauge cardiac fitness. Now we have only the one-size-fits-all pack test, and firefighting suffers as a result. As long as they don't try to "out-man" the men, women tend to employ mental processes that are more deliberative and less impulsive.

This is the perfect complement to innate male patterns of thought and action and translates into a safer and more efficient work environment, qualities that are welcome on any well-managed fire.

John Walker
Fire chief
Western Fremont Fire Protection District
Coaldale, Colorado

QUESTIONS OF PRESERVATION

The question I have yet to hear an answer to from anyone advocating for the removal of the O'Shaughnessy Dam is this: What is the plan for the Hetch Hetchy Valley after dam removal ("Under water," *HCN*, 5/30/16)? My gut tells me that the Park Service and whatever corporation is running the park's concessions would love to get their hands on it to sell T-shirts, trinkets and overpriced bland food, paving the Hetch Hetchy Valley and turning it into a veritable traffic jam. Frankly, in the months of July and August, when I'm looking for peace and quiet, I choose to visit Hetch Hetchy over Yosemite Valley. It's a worthwhile environmental/philosophical question to ponder: Which valley has really been preserved?

Ben Wickham
Bishop, California

HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS

Thanks to Nathan Martin for his May 30 essay, "It's still dangerous to be gay in Wyoming," and the related cover story, "Trial by Fire," by Krista Langlois. Truth be told, it's dangerous to be gay or female most anywhere on the planet. If racism doesn't bring us down, then homophobia and sexism might well do the trick (assuming climate change and human overpopulation don't get us first).

Eric Mills
Coordinator, Action For Animals
Oakland, California

JOE HELLER, HELLERTOON.COM

AN EARNED REBUKE

God bless *High Country News* for its fearless and productive investigative reporting, as in "Justice denied" (*HCN*, 5/16/16). Responsible investigative journalism, perhaps above all other genres, must be precise in distinguishing between claims and evidence.

But: " 'They just want your money.' What a public defender told Sue M., when asked if he could do anything to reduce her fine," doesn't reflect or even suggest that distinction. All that the otherwise skillful author had to add was "according to Sue," or the like. That's a small but vital distinction in this kind of writing. As well, the allegation may be grossly unfair to the overworked and underpaid public defender, and to Sue herself. As Jonathan Swift reminded us, zeal will indeed do us in.

Dick Shohet
Carlisle, Massachusetts

SILVERTON NEEDS A NEW VISION

Jonathan Thompson's otherwise excellent article about Silverton, Colorado's environmental and economic woes missed a key point about the town's economic problems ("The Gold King Reckoning," *HCN*, 5/02/16). All tourist economies are not created equal, and Silverton, for whatever reason, has failed to develop tourism that can sustain the town as an alternative to past mining. The Durango/Silverton antique railroad comes to town twice a day in summer and discharges a variety of people for an hour or two. Off-road vehicle enthusiasts ride their ATVs and dirt bikes up and down Main Street and on nearby BLM and national forest lands all summer long. That's mostly it. Tourism works when people come to a location and stay for more than one night. Durango, Telluride and Santa Fe have strong tourist economies because people stay in nice places and spend money on a variety of activities for many days. The off-roaders who dominate Silverton every summer are a decidedly low-budget crowd, many staying in their travel trailers and spending little money. Worse, the noise and dust from their vehicles probably repels many people who might want to enjoy the incredible mountain setting with its fascinating Victorian architecture and history. In Silverton, restaurants come and go like snowdrifts and there are few places to spend the night. The town has great resources for a tourist economy based on quiet recreation, historic preservation and wilderness, but developing such an economy will require a new vision and investment.

Tom Ribe
Santa Fe, New Mexico

High Country News

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Marshall Masayesva and Adventures for Hopi staff train in kayak maneuvering in Clear Creek, Arizona, with gear funded by a Keen grant. COURTESY MARSHALL MASAYESVA/ ADVENTURES FOR HOPI

The original outdoor badasses

One man's vision to bring outdoor recreation back to people who helped pioneer it

BY KRISTA LANGLOIS

Marshall Masayesva is lying on his side in a dandelion-sprinkled lawn, clutching his stomach and groaning as if someone's sticking a knife into it. A clean-cut, athletic 28-year-old who recently founded an outdoor education organization called Adventures for Hopi, Masayesva isn't actually hurt — he's feigning appendicitis to learn how to recognize its symptoms in the backcountry.

Masayesva and two other Adventures for Hopi guides are gearing up for summer by taking a wilderness medicine course in Durango, Colorado, a town where 5-year-olds cruise around on $400 mountain bikes and kayaking is as integral to the local culture as wine is to Napa. But Masayesva, a 2014 graduate of Durango's Fort Lewis College, says that he and other Native Americans have felt largely left out of such activities.

Though there aren't formal statistics on Native American participation in outdoor recreation, anecdotal evidence suggests it's low. When Masayesva surveyed 40 Native American students in ultra-outdoorsy Durango, for example, he discovered that 36 had never been camping. And according to Navajo river guide Nikki Cooley, fewer than 3 percent of San Juan and Colorado river guides are Native American, even though those two rivers, both regarded as sacred, flow through several reservations.

Part of the reason, Masayesva explains, is that outdoor sports are marketed to white people: You rarely see a Native American dude hanging off a boulder in a Patagonia catalog. "And there's obviously a socio-economic barrier, too," he adds. "You've gotta have this nice jacket, you've gotta have these $60 trekking poles. … It's marketed as you've gotta have money to do this."

Masayesva grew up herding sheep near the village of Bacavi, on Arizona's Hopi Reservation. He loved being outside and had no shortage of backcountry skills, but the first time he went backpacking, as a college student with an Arizona conservation corps, he was humiliated: Everyone else had fancy packs and was eating quinoa; he showed up with an old backpack stuffed with ramen noodles. But he wasn't deterred. "The Ancestral Puebloans were amazing climbers," he says. "Native Alaskans made some of the first kayaks. It's not that we can't do this."

The backpacking trip inspired Masayesva to switch his major from environmental biology to adventure education, and with the help of an Anglo mentor named Jason Hotchkiss, he started a Native American Outdoors Club. The first few outings were full of mishaps — once they were forced to rappel into a Utah canyon in the dark during a snowstorm— but everyone survived. "I didn't have the experience to be leading those trips," Masayesva says with a grin. "But I did it anyway."

After graduating, Masayesva returned to the reservation to start a nonprofit to get more Hopi kids outside and to train Hopi guides to take them out. Hotchkiss says providing Native American role models who can introduce Native American kids to the daunting, white-dominated world of adventure sports fills a huge need. In fact, he was in the midst of starting something similar when his wife, who was Southern Ute, died in 2009, indefinitely grounding the project. With the exception of a Southwest Conservation Corps group called Ancestral Lands, which combines recreation with environmental service projects, there are few, if any, remaining projects in the Southwest that connect Native Americans with outdoor sports. Nikki Cooley ran a Native American River Guide Training, which certified some 50 raft guides to lead river trips through landscapes to which they have cultural ties, but that program fizzled out after she had children.

Masayesva is picking up the reins. In September 2014, he launched Adventures for Hopi. In 2015, it won a $10,000 grant from Keen footwear, which he used to buy gear and train a few guides. But the first year was a flop. He tried to entice kids with pictures of himself and other Hopi rappelling off cliffs. "And parents were like, 'You're going to do *what* with my kids?' "

This year, he promoted more approachable activities and is excited about the interest they've received. He's running outdoor summer school programs, facilitating parent-child climbing days, and leading a weeklong kayaking trip on Lake Powell. Students can participate for free in exchange for community service on the reservation. And after two years, Masayesva is finally writing himself his first paycheck, though his guides have been paid all along.

Masayesva's programs also include cultural components, biology lessons and job skills training. His goals are lofty: not to just get kids outside, but to incorporate outdoor recreation into reservation culture, sparking economic development. Adventures for Hopi is "just the seed for a much bigger vision that Marshall has," says Hotchkiss. "I'm pretty sure he's a superhero." □

> **"The Ancestral Puebloans were amazing climbers. Native Alaskans made some of the first kayaks. It's not that we can't do this."**
>
> *—Marshall Masayesva, Adventures for Hopi founder*

A new kind of outdoor group

Tapping into Latinos' passion for nature

BY GLENN NELSON

José González, second from left, takes a walk with Latino students at California's Humboldt State University.
HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY

Everyone is jammed into a yellow school bus, chattering in anticipation of a planned snowshoe outing at Snoqualmie Pass, some 40 minutes outside Seattle. Joe Camacho, an educator and one of the trip leaders, begins an orientation, holding up a pair of gaiters. The coverings are zipped together for storage in a way that, to beginning outdoor recreationists, looks like gear fitted for a giant.

"These," Camacho says, "are for keeping snow out of your pants."

Someone whispers in Camacho's ear.

"Oh, these," he amends, "are for keeping snow out of your *boots*."

There's laughter all around. The laughter continues throughout the morning and into the afternoon, as the intergenerational group cavorts in the wintry wonderland. This could be a scene from any number of introductory outdoor recreation expeditions taking place across the country every year, but there is a major difference: All the people in this bus going up and down are brown, brown, brown, and the snacks being passed around include pan dulce and Mexican candies.

84 percent of Latinos consider issues involving public lands, waters and wildlife as important as the economy, health care and education when deciding whether to support an elected public official.

This is the brave new world that José González imagined three years ago. Back then, he was looking for a movement, not trying to start one. He'd performed an internet search for "Latinos" and "outdoors," and found nothing. So González started a Facebook page that begat a blog that, in the last year, has started to look a lot more like a movement to inspire recreation, stewardship and education in the outdoors, where his community is underrepresented.

Today, Latino Outdoors has a presence in 14 states, including up and down California, the first large state in which Latinos have overtaken whites as the largest ethnic group. Like that population, Latino Outdoors is growing at light-speed; last year, its team of 42 volunteers and two fulltime employees led or collaborated on some 80 outdoor outings, coast to coast.

Buoyed by new grants and publicity, Latino Outdoors has a full plate of projects ahead: It soon will experiment with a membership program, build regional coalitions with partner organizations, nail down its own nonprofit status and take a role in the My Brother's Keeper Initiative, launched by the White House to offer job training, mentorships and educational opportunities to struggling boys and young men of color.

And so it is that the man who never intended to start an organization now has his own unofficial executive assistant, who shapes González's frenetic schedule while learning the ropes of the job.

González and Latino Outdoors are riding a great wave of self-examination in the outdoors and conservation sectors. There is a growing understanding that, without the support and leadership of the soon-to-be non-white majority in this country, the public lands — where much of the nation's outdoor recreation takes place — will be more vulnerable to privatization and development, and addressing existential issues, such as climate change, will become impossible.

The building blocks already are in place. Latinos, the largest ethnic group in the U.S., already spend more per capita on outdoor gear than any racial group, including whites, according to the Outdoor Industry Association's ConsumerVue research. They also have a deep attachment to the public lands: A 2016 poll in Western states by the Colorado College State of the Rockies Project found that 84 percent of Latinos consider issues involving public lands, waters and wildlife as important as the economy, health care and education when deciding whether to support an elected public official, and 65 percent oppose giving state governments control over federal lands.

This energy has spawned dozens of Latino-led groups and programs over the past few years. González, 34, was greatly influenced by Hugo Morales, the founder of the ground-breaking nonprofit network Radio Bilingue, often referred to as the "Latino NPR." Under a Butler Koshland fellowship, González trailed and quizzed Morales for a year, accessed his mentor's connections and honed his own ideas around reconnecting Latinos to nature. That time also led him to the people — Melissa Avery, Lesly Caballero and Eduardo Gonzalez — who would become the core of his organization. González has picked up a fundamental philosophy from these relationships: "Whatever social capital that I build, and whatever privileges I acquire, I want to be able to use to get other people where they want to go."

They'll have to go fast, just to catch a burn off González's exhaust. These days he brandishes the hashtag, #whereisjose, on social media, just so his followers can keep up with his ever-shifting locations. One minute he's shaking hands with President Barack Obama in the White House, the next he's on the road organizing new affiliates or on the trail with Interior Secretary Sally Jewell at one of the country's newest national monuments, Berryessa Snow Mountain in California, for which González and Latino Outdoors helped advocate.

On a recent warm, hazy day, González once again is kicking up a cloud of dust, this time in the Sonoran Desert, southwest of Tucson. He is behind the wheel, en route to the Kitt Peak National Observatory, telling a story he's rarely told anyone —that, during high school, he discovered that he

was an undocumented immigrant. Midtale, González says, matter-of-factly, "Looks like a checkpoint coming up."

Confused, I ask, "Checkpoint?"

"Border Patrol," González explains.

"But we're not anywhere near the border," I point out.

Claudio Rodriguez and his wife, Nelda Ruiz, are community activists in Tucson and seated in the back of the car. "The border is coming to us," Rodriguez says.

We stop, are questioned by men in uniform about our citizenship status, then waved on. I cannot easily shake what feels like a profound violation. I learn later that the Border Patrol operates fixed checkpoints within a 100-mile zone of land and coastal borders, exercising what the American Civil Liberties Union considers "extra-Constitutional powers." About two-thirds of the U.S. population resides in that zone. This fact startles me, but everyone else in the car shrugs and tells of other stops far more eventful than this. For González, the enforced separation of immigrants from this land deeply informs his work to reconnect Latino communities to the natural world.

And it mirrors his own family history. He was born José Guadalupe Adonis González Rosales in the mountain town of Amatlan de Cañas in the southwestern Mexican state of Nayarit. His grandfather made churros there. His father did migrant cannery work in the U.S., and González, his mother and siblings moved frequently between Mexico and the U.S. before permanently relocating to Turlock, California, when he was 9. González was a straight-A high school student with great expectations for college. But one day, a teacher who was helping him apply for a college-credit course asked for his Social Security number, and, much to his surprise, he learned that he didn't have one. His father had missed a deadline for submitting documentation, so González was technically in the country illegally, and had been for years.

"It put into question everything I had done," he says.

Later, when González was on the cusp of gaining his naturalized citizenship, he had, he says, "a moment of hesitation." As much as he was inclined to celebrate what he was about to gain, he also mourned what he was about to lose — the sense of belonging to the best of two different worlds and the ability to move freely between them. González filled that loss by applying what he refers to as his "ambicultural" nature to what was beginning to emerge as his calling. He became so enchanted with environmental causes at the University of California, Davis, that his M.E.Ch.A. (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlan) group dubbed him "Green Chicano," a handle he continues to use on social media. While earning his teaching certificate, he worked two summers in a California Mini-Corps program in which aspiring teachers with migrant backgrounds provide outdoor education for migrant children.

As much as González enjoyed teaching, he yearned to make a bigger impact, and the outdoor arena beckoned. After he earned a master's degree at the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and Environment, González received a grant to take a group on an outing to Point Reyes National Seashore in Northern California. The trip was not only a success, he realized, but proof of concept for Latino Outdoors. Alicia Cruz, who helped organize the outing, became that region's Latino Outdoors "ambassador," part of what now is a nationwide network of trip leaders and organizers.

González says he didn't fully grasp the traction he was gaining until a seeming failure boomeranged back as a sign of success. While putting Latino Outdoors into place, he applied for a community outreach job at Redwoods National Park, but never heard back. Months later, someone from the park did call him — not to offer a job, but to seek his advice as the founder of Latino Outdoors on how to engage local communities.

This story is not recounted by González with any obvious relish. That's not his way; he exudes a thoughtful, Zen-like quality. I ask if he gets angry, and he replies that it has happened three times in his life — once when he threw a bicycle at someone and twice at the end of relationships. He has a quiet intensity that can, at times, come across as chillingly authoritative.

"At first, I was intimidated because he was so soft-spoken," says Graciela Cabello, Latino Outdoor's national director and first paid employee. "But I've found him to be much more playful than I first interpreted."

Cabello says they are in constant pursuit of laughs, just to buffer themselves from the chaotic challenges of rapid growth. She and board president Richard Rojas Sr. are working on nonprofit status for the organization, which is forming its strategic plan with the aid of the Rivers, Trails, Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program, an arm of the National Park Service that supports community-led outdoor projects. Latino Outdoors last year helped form the Latino Conservation Alliance with Green Latinos, HECHO, Hispanic Federation, Hispanic Access Foundation and La Madre Tierra.

José González sits peacefully in the eye of the storm he's conjured. He talks frequently about how the outdoors can speak for itself and about how being outdoors helps his community stand up and be counted.

"Estamos aquí" is the message, Gonzalez says. It's a declaration Latinos are making, more and more, while stepping off yellow buses and other modes of transport onto slopes, beaches and peaks across the country: "We are here." □

A Latino Outdoors hike on Matt Davis Trail in Mount Tamalpais State Park, California.

PAUL MYERS / GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVANCY

Diversity in the outdoors, one hashtag at a time

A conversation with Teresa Baker

BY GLENN NELSON

Teresa Baker, a blogger and activist who encourages women and people of color to explore the outdoors. COURTESY PATAGONIA

During the past three years, Teresa Baker of Martinez, California, has organized some major events in the movement to promote diversity in the outdoors: The African American National Parks Event, the Buffalo Soldiers Trail Retracing, the Muir Campfire Discussion on Diversity, Relevancy and Inclusion in Outdoor Organizations, and the convening on Cultural Relevancy and Inclusion in Outdoor Organizations.

Recently featured as one of Patagonia's Women Active Activists, Baker launched her latest brainchild in May to urge women to take to the trails, solo or in groups. "Hike Like a Girl" follows Baker's usual formula: Working with partner organizations, she encourages people to engage in outdoor activities on a certain day (or days), then record and post on social media to raise awareness. HCN contributing editor Glenn Nelson recently caught up with Baker.

High Country News *How did you get started in the outdoors?*

Teresa Baker I was the only girl in a family of eight boys and was determined not to be outdone by anything my brothers did. So when they went hiking, I went hiking; when they played basketball, I played basketball. When they and the other guys in the neighborhood would talk trash about how girls weren't capable of keeping up with guys, I'd prove them wrong. That's where my love of the outdoors began. We lived directly across from a city park, so every day we were outdoors with other neighborhood kids, playing every sport imaginable, but my favorite by far was hiking.

In 1978, my mother made me join the Girls Club, which I fought tooth and nail. I didn't want to be around a bunch of girls who would probably not embrace my love of the outdoors. I was only partially right. In the summer of 1979, we went to Yosemite National Park for my first official camping trip. That was it for me; I fell in love with Yosemite and have remained so to this very day.

HCN *What inspired you to start the African American National Park Event?*

> "If we don't start creating welcoming environments in the outdoors for people of color, in 20 years when the majority demographic in this country is black and brown faces, no one will be around to care about these open spaces."

TB On one of my Yosemite visits in 2012, I started to take notice of how many African-Americans I encountered. At the end of my second day in the park, I had not seen one other African-American. I started to research people of color in our national parks — not just visitation, but in the makeup of the National Park Service. The lack of diversity was surprising because I had never really paid much attention to it. The next year, I created an event to encourage African-American communities across the country to get outdoors in a national park site during the month of June. The larger concern is that if we don't start creating welcoming environments in the outdoors for people of color, in 20 years when the majority demographic in this country is black and brown faces, no one will be around to care about these open spaces. That's the urgency of this issue.

HCN *How did you come up with Hike Like a Girl?*

TB I wrote about solo hiking as a woman in my blog, *African American Explorations*. Women from across the country reached out to me about the article, expressing their desire to do solo hikes. They just needed a push to get beyond their fears. So I put together this campaign to inspire women to get out on the trails for their first solo hike, or to hike with friends and family. There is power in numbers and the psychological effect knowing that other women across the country also are hiking in support of one another is huge. For me, hiking solo is where it's at. There are no lengthy conversations to take your concentration off the road ahead, so you notice every little detail and every little sound. It's magical. It's a connection that you miss when you're hiking in a crowd.

HCN *What's your assessment of where we are in this work?*

TB I think we are making strides in our efforts to engage communities of color in outdoor spaces. It will take our collective efforts to continue the progress we have started. The National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the various outdoor organizations and community organizations will need to make this a priority. Mainstream outdoor retailers really need to step up — we need to start seeing faces of color in their advertisements and in their stores. It's important to not only hear from retailers that diversity is important, but we need to see it in the work they do to demonstrate it. Once we begin to see black and brown faces regularly atop billboards for athletic clothing and equipment, that will send the message that every face matters, every voice matters, and we can finally put to rest the falsehood that people of color are not relevant forces in the outdoors. □

Warriors for the wild

Stacy Bare sees a role for veterans in conservation

BY BRIAN MOCKENHAUPT

Stacy Bare came home from Iraq in 2007 with a traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress, unsure of where he fit into the world, and unmoored without the military. Liquor and cocaine seemed the best means of coping, and he often thought of suicide, until a fellow Army vet took him rock climbing in Colorado. On a vast slab of sandstone, legs trembling and heart pounding, Bare found the relief that had eluded him. "I'd be dead or in jail without climbing," he says. "The outdoors gave me my life back."

Bare, who is 37 and stands 6-foot-7, cuts an impressive figure; with his shaved head and unruly beard, he has since become perhaps the most prominent voice for taking veterans outside, to hang out and heal. He co-founded Veteran Expeditions, which runs climbing, rafting, fly-fishing and mountain-biking trips, and he now directs the Sierra Club's outdoor recreation programs. And his focus has broadened to include environmental stewardship. He sees conservation as an ideal fit for veterans, a continuation of their oath to protect and defend the country. "Country is both the concept of our nation as well as the physical country," he says. "Tell me what I fought for, if it wasn't public lands, clean air and clean water?"

His thinking began to change a few years ago when he took several veterans and their families hiking in the mountains in southern New Mexico. Many hadn't spent much time deep in nature, and they reveled in the experience. The area, which President Barack Obama would designate as the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument in 2014, wasn't yet protected. How would people have these moments, Bare wondered, if the open spaces that made them possible disappeared? "The only way this works is if we have public land," Bare says. He enjoys challenging politicians who don't support conservation or who decry federal land ownership: "You sent me to war, and now you're trying to take away that which has healed me? How was I supposed to get better if it wasn't for public lands?"

Bare traces his lineage for this advocacy to what he calls the first veteran outing, when naturalist John Muir took President Theodore Roosevelt, a veteran of the Spanish-American War, on a three-day trip into Yosemite National Park in 1903. That outing brought greater federal protection of the area and deepened Roosevelt's commitment to conservation.

The connection between soldiers and the land they defend is deeply rooted. During the Revolutionary and Civil wars, they often fought for the very ground on which their houses stood. (Bare has an ancestor who fought with the Marquis de Lafayette in the Revolutionary War and was paid for his service with a piece of land near Pennsylvania's Allegheny River.) But war veterans have also played key roles in conservation. David Brower, who led the Sierra Club from 1952 to 1969 and later founded Friends of the Earth, fought in Italy in World War II with the Army's 10th Mountain Division. He and Martin Litton, a glider pilot in World War II, helped stop the Bureau of Reclamation from building two dams on the Colorado River that would have flooded parts of the Grand Canyon. Paul Petzoldt, another 10th Mountain veteran, founded the National Outdoor Leadership School in 1965, and Tom Bell, who flew raids over Germany as a B-24 bombardier and nearly lost an eye to anti-aircraft shrapnel, started *High Country News* in 1970s.

In these lives, and in the work of veteran conservationists today, Bare charts a clear through-line of service to country. "Land stewardship is a patriotic value," he says. "That's the kind of deep, steady patriotism that this country needs. Not the flashy, fiery outbursts.

"The ideals we've espoused in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution haven't always met up with the ideals we've lived," he adds, "but in our public lands there is a physical embodiment of those ideals."

Bare knows this view of conservation can be slow to catch on with veterans who may not have camped or hiked since their days in uniform. A few weeks ago, Bare took a veteran on a Sierra Club outing in the forests of central Pennsylvania. The man had not left Philadelphia since he returned from Vietnam. "If I tell that guy, right away, 'Hey, man, you fought for Yellowstone,' he's going to say, 'I fought to survive, and I've been home since 1972 fighting to survive.' "

By the end of the weekend, though, the man had drawn his own conclusions regarding the power of the outdoors. "Had I known that was there," he told Bare as they left the forest, "had I had a buddy who took me out there a little bit earlier, my life would have been different." □

Stacy Bare, an Iraq War veteran who has found solace and relief from PTSD through outdoor adventure and conservation, on an outing in the Beartooth Mountains to look at the impacts of climate change on whitebark pines.
RICK MEADE

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Monument Valley, Arizona, left: This is one of the last picnic tables in Monument Valley. The rest were demolished so that a hotel overlooking the valley could be built. White Sands National Monument, New Mexico: The picnic tables there are iconic, straight out of the '60s, and the landscape is like no place else on earth. RYANN FORD

THE LAST STOP: VANISHING REST STOPS OF THE AMERICAN ROADSIDE, By Ryann Ford
173 pages, hardcover, $45. Powerhouse Books, 2016

Rest areas offer travelers much more than toilets and picnic tables, says photographer Ryann Ford. Along desolate stretches of highway, they've provided relief, hospitality and nostalgia for well over half a century. But they're disappearing, replaced by monstrous commercial travel centers and fast-food chains. Ford's new book, *The Last Stop*, which she funded through an online crowdfunding campaign and completed after many road trips with her mother, is filled with photos of the roadside relics still scattered across the U.S. — from tepees in Texas to rickety benches in the Salt Flats and sun-bleached shelters in the Nevada desert. As historian Joanna Dowling writes in the introduction, "The roadside has been a place of connection, a place of pause, where the experience of the landscape becomes more important than moving beyond it."
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A skipped issue, and a farewell to Bill Mitchell

Paonia, Colorado, home of *High Country News*, has been in the middle of a heat wave, with temperatures lurking around 90 degrees for far too long. We're looking forward to skipping an issue, per our usual schedule, and will see you again in July!

Despite the heat, **Claire Goodis-Baker** and **Lynell Kyser** of Denver stopped by the office (where, fortunately, it was much cooler). The pair, with their cute pups Maya and Tigger in tow, scoped out *HCN*'s local stomping grounds before coming by to say hello. Claire and Lynell, both retiring soon, are considering settling in the area. Thanks for coming by!

This month, we're saying farewell with a heavy heart to a longtime friend and former board member: **Bill Mitchell**, who passed away May 25. Bill served as *HCN* board president from 2004 to 2006, and, as Executive Director **Paul Larmer** recalls, "always brought his curious mind, his decency and his sense of humor to the meetings. I always felt more capable and calm having Bill by my side."

Bill was an organizer, who in the mid-1980s helped start the Military Production Network, a group dedicated to closing and cleaning up the nation's nuclear weapons facilities. Colleague **Bob Schaeffer** recalls Bill's "fidelity to the principles of democracy," as he pulled together activists around the country. Though he was the organization's strategic leader and chief fundraiser, "the microphone was in the hands of the leaders and activists who were from the communities where the nuclear weapons plants were located," Schaeffer says. "Bill Mitchell never put himself out front."

Current board member **Bob Fulkerson**, who directs the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, says Bill "was responsible for getting our first big grant in 1986 to work on nuclear weapons and waste, and it's likely our fight against Yucca Mountain would have turned out differently but for his garnering national support for our work."

Through the 1990s and early 2000s, Bill was a program officer for the Seattle-based Brainerd Foundation, where he helped numerous grassroots conservation groups, especially those fighting and coping with mining pollution. He also had his eye on the health of the environmental community itself. Fulkerson says Bill was "the first white man I ever heard talk about the imperative of addressing race and racism in progressive organizing. He demonstrated how white men with privilege can grow, can listen, can move from aspirational to true allies."

We will miss you, Bill.

Former *HCN* board member Bill Mitchell. PAUL LARMER

A few corrections: Our May 30 "Cats along the border story" stated that a loophole allows ranchers in Mexico to kill jaguars that prey on livestock. In fact, it has been a federal offense to kill a jaguar in Mexico since 1987. Nevertheless, enforcement and prosecutions are rare, and several cats are lost each year to ranchers who suspect them of killing cattle. In the same issue, in our story "Under Water," San Francisco County residents, not Bay Area residents, have voted against draining Hetch Hetchy. The proposal has not yet gone to a statewide vote. And from that issue's Dear Friends, we mistakenly located the conservation organization Pronatura Noroeste as being in New Mexico. It is in Mexico. Our apologies.

—Paige Blankenbuehler, for the staff

Author Glenn Nelson, in a selfie taken on Mount Rainier.
ALL PHOTOS COURTESY GLENN NELSON

What If I'm Not White?

A multiracial sports writer pivots into the world of the outdoors

FEATURE ESSAY BY GLENN NELSON

During my previous life as a sportswriter, an NBA player once made me wait for an arranged interview while he horsed around with ball boys in front of his locker. After a long spell of this, he grew bored and finally turned to me.

"I don't talk to no f---ing white boys," the player said.

"What if I'm not white?" I replied.

"Then what are you?" he asked.

"Japanese," I answered.

"I don't talk to no f---ing Japs neither," he said.

I wouldn't have admitted it to that player, but there is a part of me that *is* white. But I rejected most of it long ago. Except for the place my father fills, my whiteness has been replaced by the rest of me: The son of a Japanese immigrant, the father of two daughters more multiracial than I am, the husband of a daughter of South American immigrants, the uncle of a Korean adoptee. I'm also a journalist who has received death threats — among them: "If you love Japan so much, we're happy to send you back in a pine box." That's because in the 1990s I supported a Muslim basketball player who refused to stand for the national anthem because of the way his people, and mine, were oppressed in this country.

I'm also male and a baby boomer. I have a white name. When I tell people I have a Japanese parent, you'd be surprised by how many ask me which one.

Being multiracial has given me a chameleonic nature, making it mostly easy to move between races. Still, sometimes I feel like I'm perpetually stuck between here and there, my in-betweenness both my paradox and my identity. Sometimes people don't know what to make of me, or in what language to address me; occasionally, they think they know me because I look a bit like everybody. Sometimes I get let in on unpleasant secrets, as when I inquired at city hall in the coal-mining town of Benham, Kentucky, about the childhood neighborhood of its most prominent citizen, Bernie Bickerstaff, an African-American NBA coach. "You're looking for N-----town," I was told with staggering nonchalance.

Ted Turner once hired me to write his autobiography and flew me to his ranch in Montana. There, I stood in the middle of the continent's largest bison herd as it wandered through what was essentially Turner's front yard. Turner screamed at me to run for the house: "Those f---ers will kill you!" But what I remember most was what he told Jane Fonda, whom he'd recently started dating. Although I was at the opposite end of Turner's ranch house, I could hear him, in full Mouth of the South mode, tell her on the phone, "I have Glenn Nelson over here. You'd love him; he's eth-*neek*."

I'VE ALWAYS IDENTIFIED AS JAPANESE OR ASIAN-AMERICAN. For most of my life, I thought I did so because of my mother. And when Samurai movies or sushi or even reliable, fuel-efficient cars became vogue in the U.S., it was cool to be Japanese. But the gritty core of my identity was forged long before that, when my parents, Chiyoko Abe and Scott Nelson, started courting in Niigata, in snow country on the northern part of the Japanese main island of Honshu. My father was stationed there with the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War.

When my parents decided to marry, my father had to secure

Sometimes I imagine Teddy Roosevelt and John Muir at the top of Glacier Point in Yosemite National Park, discussing the preservation of wild places, but never imagining someone like me at any of them.

permission from the Air Force. That meant my mother had to undergo a background check. There also were medical exams and meetings with a chaplain. The process became even more protracted when my father wrote his mother to reveal his plans to marry a Japanese woman. Alarmed — this was the '50s, remember — she telegraphed my father's commanding officer. That's how my father came to be re-assigned to Sado Island for seven months, to "think things over." Sado is so remote that, throughout Japanese history, it was a place to which the enemies of ruling clans were exiled. My father emerged from his own exile still resolute. This year, my parents celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary.

Early in those 60 years, people called my mother a "dirty Jap" in public. More than once I tried to scrub the "dirty" color out of my own skin. I remember the underlying hostility with which the other women in my father's life treated my mother. She endured it, per cultural prescription, and eventually forgave my grandmother and aunt, both of whom have since passed. I never came to grips with that. If you're Asian, you have a dichotomous outlook that maybe only your Catholic and Jewish friends recognize: The guilt you feel about doing something wrong, but the shame you feel when it is you who have been wronged. It's often hard to distinguish the two. So I've come to understand that, even as I have embraced being Japanese, I have deliberately rejected being white because of the guilt over what my white family did to my Japanese mother, and the shame I still feel over watching it happen.

SOMETIMES I IMAGINE TEDDY ROOSEVELT AND JOHN MUIR at the top of Glacier Point in Yosemite National Park, discussing the preservation of wild places, but never imagining someone like me at any of them. I imagine a different Roosevelt signing Executive Order 9066, sending people like me to wild places for the preservation of a national identity — an identity that, well past World War II, dealt people of Japanese descent out of the equation. I imagine another president signing another law that excludes the Chinese in my daughters.

I also imagine, in two or so decades, belonging to a nonwhite majority whose ancestors were hanged from trees, forced to labor in fields, or, if not slaughtered outright, forcibly relocated from the best wild lands to the worst. I imagine that nonwhite majority deciding that it doesn't give a frack about fracking, a crap about climate change, or even rubbing two sticks together to spark an environmental revolution. I imagine "the planet" appearing as an alien construct, the white man's conceit, and not ours to save.

Then I imagine my children and my children's children — those multiracial, multicultural generations — not understanding why we allowed it all to just burn, baby, burn.

And so I imagine changing the picture, before it's too late.

If I rewind to my youth, the picture improves in some ways. I think of early mornings fishing with my mom and dad, days on trails and shores, and nights in sleeping bags under stars. My father was my scoutmaster at Troop 14 in Seattle. That is where I met one of my oldest friends, Gordon McHenry, Jr., who is African-American and now the head of a prominent anti-poverty organization. Our fathers liked to walk and take pictures, and I now follow in their footsteps. My brother, Mike, also was a Boy Scout, as was Gordon's brother, Eric. And there were other black, Asian and Native kids in Troop 14. Being a person of color in the outdoors seemed perfectly normal.

College was where I first began to understand that people like us were outliers. At Seattle University, Gordon and I practically dragged our classmates of color outside. We endured the nervous tension in car rides to what our friends called "the woods," whether or not trees were present. Someone inevitably joked about being lynched. David Black, who actually is black, would hum the theme from *Deliverance*, which instantly registered as the racist national anthem. This outlook was alien to me — the fear and loathing expressed by brothers from another planet.

Glenn Nelson, far right, and with his mother and siblings, Mike and baby Linda, top. He later became a sportswriter, and while writing a magazine piece for *The Seattle Times* in the mid-'80s, got to shoot hoops with All-Star center for the Seattle SuperSonics Jack Sikma, above.

But I came to understand that the planet where race is such a persistent touchstone is my planet, too. I did my graduate work in American government at Columbia University, where I studied under Charles V. Hamilton, co-author of the seminal 1967 book *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*. I frequently went to Harlem, to do research at the *Amsterdam News* offices and election archives. And I stayed connected to one of my life's passions — basketball. Some would say I double-majored in hoops because I spent so much time in the gym with cats from Harlem like my buddy, Jesus (who, when I asked his last name, told me, "The Messiah"). I went to Madison Square Garden to watch an all-black NBA team that was pretty overtly referred

Glenn Nelson, right, with Gordon McHenry Jr., who is now the head of a prominent anti-poverty organization, during their days in Boy Scout Troop 14 in Seattle, where being a person of color in the outdoors seemed perfectly normal.

to as the "N-----bockers." On a student's budget, I bought upper-level tickets, with plans to move closer to the court as the arena's crowd inevitably thinned. In the upper reaches, drugs were hawked like sodas and hot dogs. A dealer once thrust a joint in my face and claimed, "I got the shit that killed Bruce Lee" — an attention-grabbing declaration to someone who hails from Seattle, where Lee is buried.

Then I got an offer to work for *The Seattle Times*, a newspaper I once delivered to finance tickets for the SuperSonics. It was a no-brainer; my high-school yearbook contains entries like, "Looking forward to reading your Sonic stories in the *Seattle Times*." And, as much as my Columbia classmates gave me the Bronx cheer for "selling out," my study of race in America actually accelerated in the sports arena.

In sports, it rarely mattered that I wasn't white. At times, it was a virtue. Then considered too black and a "drug league," the NBA served my interests by opening up to the media and reshaping itself as the purview of captivating individuals. In the back of team buses, I talked to Dale Ellis, Xavier McDaniel and Nate McMillan about growing up in the South, or Sam Perkins and Kevin Williams about life in East Coast inner cities. Sometimes discussions of black conservative politics took place in the front of the bus, over the *Wall Street Journal*, with people like the late Maurice Lucas, with his *Enforcer* persona and teddy bear personality. I once toured East Oakland's ironically named gang- and drug-infested High Street with one of its favorite sons, Gary Payton, then barely an NBA rookie. A few years later, we toured Payton's multimillion-dollar home in the tony hills above Oakland, replete with a bowling alley and Asian-styled spa with a retractable roof.

"Glenn knows what time it is," Payton once told a journalist competitor of mine, a reference to my "being down" with athletes of color and their culture.

I also knew the time in South Korea, one of the only places I've visited, besides Japan, where my ancestry was instantly recognized. I'd fretted about that when I covered the Summer Olympics there, given the strained historical relationship between the two countries. So I brought gifts and a cool pair of sunglasses, both of which delighted the young soldiers who, in plain clothes, secured the Olympic Village.

"You are our favorite journalist, even if you are a Japanese," one of them told me, cheerfully.

"But if we ever find a Korean girl in your room," he added ominously, "we will not hesitate to shoot you."

MY GLOBETROTTING ABATED when, in the late 1990s, I left newspapering for a thing called the internet. The web was liberating. I was a words guy at *The Seattle Times*, but soon began using audio, video and, most of all, photography to expand my storytelling repertoire. Developing *HoopGurlz,* a national website dedicated to empowering young women through basketball, I believed that women relate to sports more visually than men do, so I began carrying cameras in addition to pads and pens.

I left ESPN, to which I sold *HoopGurlz* in 2008, with a nagging feeling that my success as a photographer was due more to my basketball acumen than skill: I knew *where* to point the camera. A friend, Paul Bannick, who is an owl expert, turned me on to wildlife photography. Soon I was regularly hiking and photographing, mostly in national parks. When my knee got repaired, I had to temporarily forego dragging big lenses into the field, so I took smaller ones and got hooked on landscape photography. This revived my love for the outdoors, which had been sparingly nurtured by birding forays and outings with my wife, Florangela, and my daughters, Sassia and Mika.

Two years ago, I read a story in *The New York Times* about the lack of diversity in National Park Service visitation. "You're always talking about that!" said my wife, whom I married in Tofino, just outside Pacific Rim National Park in British Columbia. She suggested I write an op-ed piece about it for the *Times*. It was a good idea, but I reminded her that those pieces always end with a biographical line regarding current projects — and I didn't have one yet. Researching the op-ed, I found that diversity was a major problem not just for national parks, but for the whole outdoors sector, which was overwhelmingly white and aging out as the nation's demographics changed. The issue dovetailed neatly with my growing concern for the state of the

This whirlwind period of my life has reinforced the idea that I don't have to be white to be green.

planet I was leaving my girls. I started *The Trail Posse* to document and encourage diversity and inclusiveness in the outdoors.

My piece, "Why are our parks so white?" published by *The New York Times* last summer, was a booster rocket for *The Trail Posse*. Thousands of comments, both pro and (some very nasty) con, were posted on every web platform of the *Times*, as well as on other social-media channels. My inbox overflowed, and it hasn't stopped since.

My life changed dramatically. I've had to surmount other barriers — psychological ones. I am afraid of heights, but a little over a year ago, I drove myself for the first time ever to Paradise in Mount Rainier National Park, elevation 5,400 feet, something I would never have done even as a passenger a year earlier. Recently I drove and hiked all over Rocky Mountain National Park, though I was glad that Trail Ridge Road, at 12,183 feet, still was closed. Last fall, I overcame another fear: public speaking. I presented before an almost all-white banquet crowd at the National Wilderness Workshop in Missoula, Montana, and did another talk for a large nonprofit called Forterra at Town Hall in Seattle. A few months ago, I partnered with *High Country News*, which has few writers of color, to bolster its efforts to more regularly cover race, diversity and inclusion in the outdoors.

I've discovered that I'm not alone. I've met dozens of people who are focused in some way on the connection between diversity in the outdoors and the mounting environmental crisis. This nascent movement inspired us to create the Next 100 Coalition. It's composed of diverse leaders from civil rights, environmental justice, conservation and community organizations that have called on the Obama administration to take tangible steps toward creating an inclusive system of national parks and other public lands that reflects, honors and engages all Americans.

This whirlwind period of my life has reinforced the idea that I don't have to be white to be green. Race and the outdoors are tethered concepts for most of my generation; the Civil Rights Act and the Wilderness Act both were signed in 1964. It's difficult to comprehend how we ended up in a place so disconnected.

Glenn Nelson and daughter Sassia, top, on Cadillac Mountain in Maine's Acadia National Park. Above, Florangela Davila with Santana, in Washington's Olympic National Park.

I'VE MET WHITE SENIORS on trails who've patted me on the head for "doing a good job of assimilating," in essence thanking me and other nonwhites not for joining their ranks, but for becoming invisible. "Inclusion isn't about assimilation," according to my friend Carolyn Finney, author of *Black Faces, White Places*. In the natural world, we call it checking our identities at the trailhead. That means we get questioned for hiking in groups, something white people apparently find intimidating, though many of us do it to feel safer around them. It means having trouble getting a permit for a big-enough camping spot because our outdoors party, especially if we're Latino, might comprise all of our *familia*, including our *abuelos* and other extended members. It means getting shushed for socializing on the trail, something I've never heard anyone do to, say, a chatty group of white female hikers. Shoot, inclusion isn't even about inclusion, which is by definition adding something different to an otherwise sameness. It's about embracing — and recognizing — who already belongs.

Growing up, we chided each other to "act your race," and, ever so slowly, we're giving ourselves permission to do just that. It's been a struggle. One of the more traumatizing incidents of my youth was going back to Japan for the first time with my mother when I was 16. I was allowed to return to the U.S. only if I first renounced my Japanese citizenship, to which I was entitled because I was born on a U.S. Air Force base in Tokyo. How do you renounce part of yourself? It's like cutting off a body part. Yet people of color have been asked to perform cultural amputation for centuries. I was taught, largely by white educators, that being American was celebrating differences — which feels in retrospect like celebrating shades of (male) whiteness, from St. Patrick to Columbus and all the presidents who have their day. Pride — in country, flag and the majority culture, whatever that is — is encouraged, unless it's associated with ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender. If we have to keep checking all of that at the trailheads, there won't be space for restrooms, drinking fountains or parking.

Because the outdoors remains a largely white domain, it is up to white America to invite communities of color in, to enlist us as allies. And it needs to happen across the governmental, nonprofit and business ecosystem if we are to have a chance at retaining our public lands and creating a sustainable planet.

To come for us, white America cannot roll out the same tactics it frequently has deployed against us. It cannot continue

We have to break the cycle of what I call Summer Camp Syndrome, where we come together, have a "good talk," feel connected and pledge unending devotion, then go home and allow the sentiment to fade into inaction.

Once strictly a words guy, Glenn Nelson has added photography to his repertoire, first shooting sports, then moving on to wildlife and landscapes, especially in national parks, including this photograph of Yosemite Falls and its reflection.

to portray race as purely black and white. It cannot adopt us, as if we were mascots, and, in best "checkboxist" fashion, isolate, tokenize and ultimately co-opt us. We're to be activated, not neutralized. People of color need to be at the table, in workforces and budget-line items, to have real power. A group of white people can no more decide on its own how best to attract and convert people who are not like them than older people can for Millennials, or men for women, or straights for LGBTQ. And we have to break the cycle of what I call Summer Camp Syndrome, where we come together, have a "good talk," feel connected and pledge unending devotion, then go home and allow the sentiment to fade into inaction.

WHEN DISHEARTENED, I find inspiration from my immigrant mother and immigrant mother-in-law. As naturalized citizens, they see public lands differently, much like new members of a club with "ownership of iconic landscapes" among the benefits. My mother-in-law, Ligia, literally wants to cart off parts of "her parks" — a rock, leaf or *tronquito* (branch) — and still gets disappointed when I stop her because it's against the law. The mothers help me believe that lost passion for the outdoors is reignitable in those much longer rooted in this country.

As new stewards, we have new outlooks, often unchained to custom and convention. Last fall, I spoke at the National Wilderness Workshop, whose organizers explained that "wilderness" is a higher, more complicated designation than, say, national parks, where I'd done most of my work. Because the mostly beginner-level audience I am seeking does not need additional complexity, I challenged myself to plot an elementary course from urban dwelling to wilderness. My own home provided a starting point.

My wife, Florangela, is a Latina from Los Angeles, whose mother is from Colombia and father from Peru. She long has loved the sea, but I have encouraged her growing enchantment with forests, mountains, rivers and lakes. When we bought our first house, I hung a bird feeder from our balcony. We soon had regulars, primarily northern flickers. We delighted in them, even named them. We took classes to learn how to create native habitat, as well as identify other species. We bought a pair of binoculars and ventured into local parks, then into state and national parks and wildlife refuges. I bought a spotting scope to entice my youngest daughter, Mika, who has special needs that preclude the use of other optics. We took her older sister, Sassia, to Canada to look at snowy owls.

When we left that first house, Florangela wept, distressed about the fate of "Flicky" and its family. But we've attracted northern flickers and many other birds to every place we've moved. Now, her mother has a vast network of feeders in the backyard of her house.

All of that unfolded from a simple act: Stepping outside our home and looking into the sky, seeing creatures and patterns that now cannot be unseen, the life connecting us thousands of miles away to places, even wilderness, and people who share our outlook and maybe even look like us.

It's not a cure for this ailing world. It may not even be a saving grace. But it's something — something that makes me believe it doesn't matter if I'm not white. I still count, and I will have my say. □

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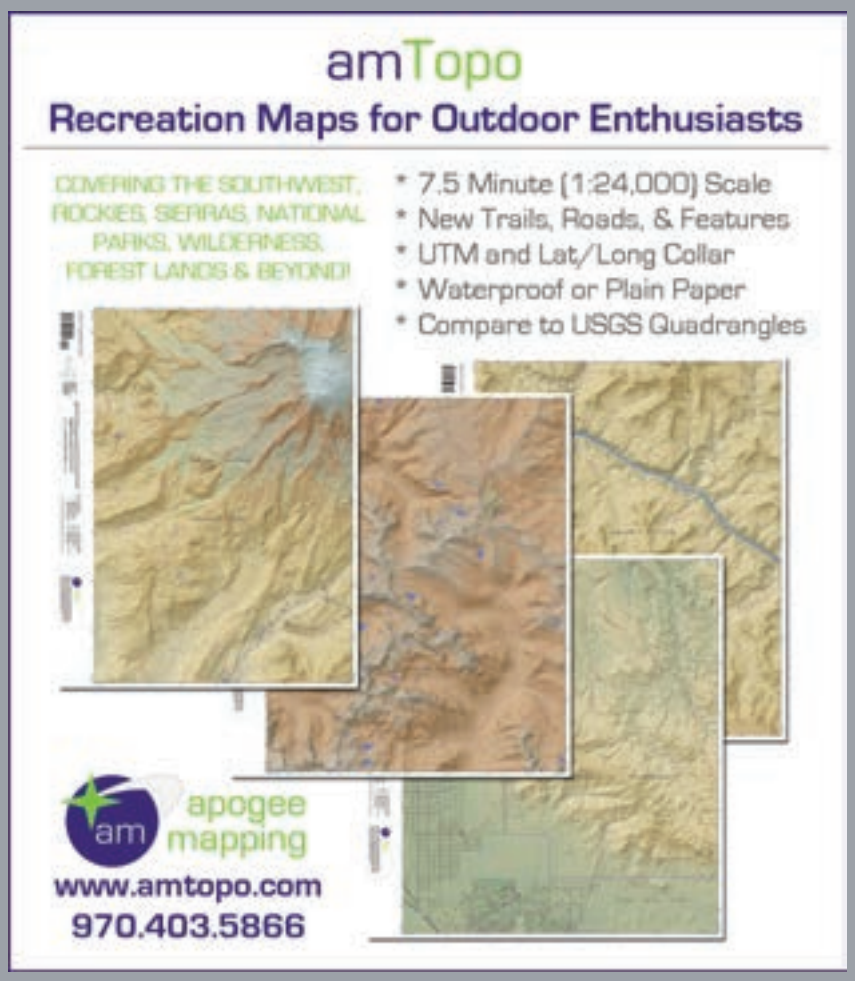

Changing our relationship to the outdoors

The West has long been a mecca for hikers, kayakers and campers. Getting recreationists to help preserve the landscapes they love isn't always easy, though. Now, some Western activists are using outdoor sports as a stepping-stone toward conservation. Here, *High Country News* contributors Paige Blankenbuehler and Joshua Zaffos caught up with a few of these advocates, who are using outdoor recreation to tap into deeper missions, such as bolstering science, addressing climate change and bringing new generations into the wilderness.

Christine Fanning

Away from screens and onto the trail

During a ski trip with her family a decade ago, avid kayaker and surfer Christine Fanning witnessed a moment that made her acutely aware of the growing schism between people and the outdoors. Fanning brought her niece to a beginner's lesson with a large group. As they practiced, one young boy fell down sobbing, ski poles flailing. "His mother started yelling at the ski instructor," she says. "She couldn't understand why her son wasn't good at skiing. I remember her saying to the instructor, 'You're doing something wrong. He's great at video-game skiing!' "

That moment inspired Fanning to address a modern condition that many describe as nature-deficit disorder. Today, children are spending less time in the outdoors and more time in front of screens, and many are developing behavioral problems as a result. "Across the country, there are millions of permanently protected acres that provide an incredible opportunity for outdoor recreation," Fanning says. "But if there is not political will going forward, we could lose that. We need future stewards and environmental leaders."

SUU PHOTO SERVICES

In 2014, Fanning, who has a background in philanthropy, created Outdoor Nation, a nonprofit that aims to get more millennials engaged in outdoor activities. Fanning, who is the executive director, and her three-person team are partnering with several Western colleges that organize outdoor adventure programs and multi-day experiences. In 2015, Outdoor Nation hosted its second annual summit, which, perhaps ironically, was documented via social media. More than 56 colleges registered, and, in the end, more than 10,000 inspired young adults participated in outdoor activities and shared their experience on Instagram. This year's campus challenge begins in September. P.B.

Students at Southern Utah University, hiking above The Subway in Utah's Zion National Park, won the Outdoors Nation Challenge last year, getting SUU named the Most Outdoorsy School in the Nation.

Dae Dahlquist

Young but outspoken for the climate's future

The Pacific Northwest has an unlikely new champion for climate change awareness — an 11-year-old boy in White Salmon, Washington. Dae Dahlquist is not your typical kid, though. When he was 4, he remembers his mom, Brynn Dahlquist, listening to NPR. He was struck by the solemn, urgent tone of the voices. When "I asked my mom what was wrong," Dae says, she told him they were talking about climate change. "I just said: 'Well, why don't we stop it?' " he recalls. "I was interested in trying to help."

Dae began modestly, by begging his mom to drive him and his friends out to river cleanups in Portland so they could help. By the time he was 6, he and a group of nearly a dozen children cleaned up riverbanks regularly to "get out in nature and help." In 2013, when he was 9, Dae started his own nonprofit organization called Gen-Earth (short for Generation Earth), aimed at getting kids engaged in hiking, camping and talking about climate change.

At meetings, group members often watch YouTube videos and discuss what they might do about climate change. Then, they all take to the trail. Dae says his strongest tool has been recreation, because activities like swimming, hiking and camping can get kids excited about protecting the environment. "It takes an activity to motivate people to care about something like climate change," Dae says.

Dae has been a youthful powerhouse at climate rallies throughout Washington and Oregon, where he partners with organizations like Climate Solutions and Power Past Coal. In 2015, the first time he spoke in public, he stood in front of more than 200 people in Seattle at a hearing about running coal trains through two dozen Northwest cities and ports. "I realized very soon into doing those hearings that the magnitude of human-induced climate change was a lot bigger than just me," Dae says. "There were so many people."

What does the future hold? Dae hopes to attend a university on the East Coast and eventually become a diplomat. "I like to travel, I like to speak, and I know I want to make a difference in policy," he says. P.B.

DAMIAN MULINIX/GREENPEACE

Eleven-year-old Dae Dahlquist speaks at a rally at Washington state's Department of Ecology during a public hearing on a proposed coal export terminal in Longview, Washington.

Abby Barrow and Jenna Walenga

Adventures with a bigger purpose

In Bozeman, Montana, an organization has been blurring the line between recreation and science for half a decade. Adventurers and Scientists for Conservation transforms outdoor enthusiasts into citizen scientists, teaching them how to take samples and build data around the places they love.

Since its start in 2011, the organization has grown into an international hub for a host of projects geared toward solving "pressing environmental challenges," such as climate change and mass extinction. Currently, around 800 volunteers contribute data to various projects each year.

In 2013, Abby Barrow, a marine biologist, and Jenna Walenga, an ASC project manager and sailor from Seattle, created the organization's microplastics program, which tests water samples for bits of broken-down pollutants. "The smaller the piece of plastic, the more available it is as food to animals," Barrow says, but they can't digest it. The group has collected nearly 2,000 aqueous analyses from 680 outdoor enthusiasts from around the world, including sailors crossing the Pacific, skiers in Italy, and a group of women kayakers from an organization called EXXpedition, who took samples as they paddled the Atlantic Ocean. The project is still in its early stages, but its goal is to create a comprehensive dataset that can be used to help develop policies to better control plastic production.

Barrow and Walenga say that enlisting outdoor recreationists has given the project access to waterways across the globe that one team of scientists alone could never have tested. "Despite all of the bleak and terrible things we've done to the natural world, this work gives me hope for the future," Walenga says. "There is a lot of potential to solve these issues." P.B.

LOUISE JOHNS/ADVENTURERS AND SCIENTISTS FOR CONSERVATION

Citizen scientist Claire Hood, whose day job is at Gallatin Microplastics, chops through the ice to get a sample from the Gallatin River near Black Butte, Montana.

The Young Walkers

A new start in the wilderness

Near Flagstaff, Arizona, on a warm summer night, about 20 young adults step aboard a bus just before dusk, on their way to a campsite in the middle of Coconino National Forest in northern Arizona. It doesn't take them long to set up a group camp with a crackling fire, as youth leaders go from one teen to another, providing gentle reassurance and cozy wool blankets. The teens, some from broken families or with histories of substance abuse, have come to this wilderness to heal.

The Mesa, Arizona-based Anasazi Foundation seeks to provide a primitive outdoor experience for troubled kids with the goal of encouraging their mental and physical rehabilitation. Each year, more than 200 young people enroll in the 30-day retreats, held in the Coconino or nearby Tonto national forests. "It's just us and nature," says co-founder Ezekiel Sanchez. "Nature is very impartial. If it rains, it rains on everybody."

The group is led by mentors called the Young Walkers, who are trained in sociology and Native American traditions. All they ask the teens to do is walk — whether just taking a single step or hiking for several miles. "This program teaches them that whether they are in the middle of a desert or in a city street, they can walk forward at any time," says Sanchez.

Instead of taking a militaristic approach, the Young Walkers move at the pace of the individual. "We get out to the wilderness, but if they don't want to walk, we will stay with them until they decide they want to," he says. Those methods, says Michael Gass, a wilderness therapy researcher, set the organization apart from others with controversial boot camp-style programs. "(The Anasazi Foundation) is certainly one of the leaders in the field of primitive skills adventure therapy programs," he says.

The program, Sanchez says, sparks a lifelong conservation ethic in many young people who have never had an outdoor experience. Teens learn how to be self-sufficient, cooking their own meals and setting up their camps. "It gives them confidence," he says. "There's a sense of 'If I can do *this*, I can do anything." **P.B.**

ANASAZI FOUNDATION

Ezekiel Sanchez, co-founder of the Anasazi Foundation, which is geared toward getting troubled kids into the wild. COURTESY OF MICHAEL MERCHANT, THE ANASAZI FOUNDATION

Una voz in the wilderness

Center gets Latino children — and parents — outside

Rafael Salgado grew up in Michoacán, Mexico, bird hunting with his dad and brothers. When he was 12, Salgado shot a duck with a mysterious band on its leg. His brother translated the English wording on the tag, which explained that it was placed by a Canadian researcher, and then helped Salgado exchange letters with the scientist. "So, there are people who actually go to school for this?" Salgado asked his brother. The experience inspired him to study science in college, a story he often shares with youth.

Salgado is the executive director of the Cal-Wood Education Center, a 1,200-acre nonprofit outdoor learning space nestled in the mountains above Jamestown, Colorado, west of Boulder. Established in 1981, Cal-Wood offers overnight camps and other programs to help kids, including minorities and low-income and urban youth, get comfortable in the mountains. "You'd be surprised how many kids — kids who were born (in Colorado) — have never been up here," says Salgado. In 2015, the center served 3,775 children, including more than 1,300 low-income students.

During three-day programs that include hiking, camping and science fieldwork, students go from scared, in some cases, to not wanting to leave. In order to keep that spark lit, Salgado and staff have extended their services to parents and adults who sometimes lack information about outdoor recreation or a connection with nature.

In Boulder County, for instance, 80 percent of Latino families originally came from Mexico, where there are few public recreation areas. "(They) may not understand what public lands are, and they don't have a lot of information about how to use them," Salgado says.

CAL-WOOD

Two years ago, Cal-Wood began bringing Latino families from across metro Denver for a two-night camping experience. "It's a short program, but it's very impactful," Salgado says, "because they get to actually camp, and to learn how to fish, do archery, or mountain bike." While families pay what they can, donations help cover program costs, including gear and a bilingual activity staff. In the first two years, 378 people participated in the Latino Family Camp, and there are plans to serve 450 this year.

"I really believe the experiences that we are giving these kids are an opportunity for them to think about what else is out there," Salgado says. "I tell kids, you know, that duck really helped me to make a decision in my life, and I hope you can find your own duck, too … something that will motivate you." J.Z. □

Elementary school students during a learning day at Cal-Wood Education Center's environmental education program above Jamestown, Colorado.
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Putting art in environmental advocacy

An Oregon group hopes to turn culture-makers into public-lands defenders by bringing them into the backcountry

BY SARAH GILMAN

***Dollar Lake 2011*, top right, created from charcoal ink from burnt trees, maps out a fire footprint for the project *Burn Perimeters (Fire Maps)*. Lower right, *Against Forgetting*, made from a wax rubbing of tree rings and a fingerprint.** GARY WISEMAN; NINA MONTENEGRO

Hard rain has driven the small crew down from their camp at an alpine lake to a roadside national forest picnic area. The spot's pleasant, even under a late-May storm: Oregon's Clackamas and Collawash rivers meet here, and conifers and the fluorescent whorls of horsetails overhang the clear green water. Amy Harwood — all in black with an Army-drab beanie and a long braid over one shoulder — crouches by a metal fire pit, knifing kindling from a wedge of wood. Four others, all artists, stand around her. Despite sweaters and jackets, everyone looks chilled.

"Are there rippling muscles in there yet?" asks Harwood's partner, Ryan Pierce, pointing at my notebook. The flames falter in the wet ash. Harwood blows them back to life as Pierce narrates my hypothetical story: " 'It seemed like fire sprouted from their fingers … or from their rippling muscles,' " he says gravely. " 'Julie made a bird call and we were suddenly surrounded by finches.' "

It makes for an unusual staff meeting, but then this is an unusual group. Signal Fire, which Pierce and Harwood co-founded, runs public-lands-based backcountry trips and residencies for artists and art students. And Julie Perini, Wendy Given and Kerri Rosenstein are alums and volunteer guides.

The couple seeks to address gaps in their respective fields: Harwood, a longtime staffer at Bark, a Portland-based environmental nonprofit, and a former staffer for the Center for Biological Diversity, feels that conservation groups lack the right tools to foster broad cultural change. And Pierce is frustrated by the urban art world's detachment from the wild places he loves.

Signal Fire, they hope, will infuse the environmental movement with new energy and inspire artists to defend public lands. "I think the population we're dealing with has a special power. No matter how loud I yell, no matter how good my mass email is, I can't amplify the way they can," says Harwood. "Making a painting or producing a play or making a record — it's hard to claim that it's going to change people. But we know that it does."

Harwood came to Portland, Oregon, for the ocean but stayed for the forest. When she arrived for college from Portland, Maine, in 1998, she didn't know Oregon's largest city was inland. Backpacking wasn't her bag; she grew up sailing and island-hopping. Still, something clicked after an activist invited her to a tree-sit to stop a timber sale. "I really loved the logistics of it," she says. "There were a lot of Friday nights where I was skiing supplies in. It felt like what I was supposed to do."

In 2008, Harwood won a prize from the local weekly for her environmental advocacy. Pierce, who had just finished his MFA, had long talked about creating a field program for artists: He discovered the self-reliance necessary for becoming one on a semester-long college backpacking course in the Southwest. "Amy was probably like, 'Let's actually start this,'" Pierce recalls. "And I was like, 'I don't know how to start a thing.' "

So the pair used Harwood's prize money to buy a '63 Suburban and remodel a trailer. They towed it up a logging road and left artists for weeklong independent stays on Mount Hood. Then, Signal Fire morphed into backcountry stints with groups of artists in a wall tent. But the first backpacking trips to Oregon wilderness areas in the Wallowa Mountains and along Opal Creek in 2010 and 2011 were what cemented the identity of the organization, which became a full-fledged nonprofit in 2013. "It was just watching people respond to the interruption of their life that way," Harwood says. "A bunch had never backpacked, and the physical challenge of it really pushed their creativity."

The artists aren't required to create anything, though many do: Nude self portraits, an elephant snare, glamour shots of rotting stumps, movies of tap dancing in rock outcroppings. Some find the experience transformative. Grace Chen, then a California College of the Arts student from Singapore, landed a spot on Signal Fire's first "Wide Open Studios" in 2013, exploring various California wildlands on a five week accredited course. "I had no idea that there was so much space in the world that human beings didn't live on," she recalls. Fascinated by the puzzle-piece patterns of ponderosa bark, she made rubbings that she developed into a series of calligraphy-like characters. The trip galvanized her activism, inspiring her to tackle poverty, race and food systems. "Understanding the historical and political context that shaped these landscapes I was living among, I realized that the status quo doesn't have to be this way," she says. "It's this way because of peoples' choices, and we can make different choices."

These days, Signal Fire runs seven to 10 trips per year, mostly in the West, ranging from a couple hundred dollars to $3,500 for the college course. So far, more than 300 people have participated. Pierce and Harwood share the directorship part-time with Ka'ila Farrell-Smith, a Klamath Modoc visual artist. Each season is arranged around a theme — "the triumphant yet troubled" history of wilderness, for example — and features readings and speakers from environmental and social justice groups designed to help participants think critically about where they are. This year's theme is "Unwalking the West," with excursions roughly tracing — in reverse — the routes of explorers like Lewis and Clark. Participants will talk about Indigenous sovereignty and the dark, fraught backstory of the public lands.

"It's a slow process, trying to bring things like that into Signal Fire," says Farrell-Smith, who will co-lead a trip to the Klamath region on the Oregon-California border. There, they'll meet with Indigenous artist Natalie Ball and discuss the loss of the Klamath Tribes' reservation. "It's one thing to talk about Native issues and autonomy within a group of other Native people," Farrell-Smith says. "But it's vital for everyone in this country to know whose land they're on and to pay respect to those people and those ancestors."

Recruiting diverse artists has been the organization's greatest challenge. After last year's participants ended up being mostly white, Signal Fire redoubled outreach efforts through community and cultural centers, groups focused on getting people of color outside, activist networks, and public universities. It worked: This season, over half the participants were eligible for six scholarships reserved for non-whites.

It's difficult to tell how much the experience influences artists' actual work, since many already deal with environmental themes. But several say that joining an artistic community with similar interests is reaffirming. And the outdoor experience can open new doors. For Portland-based Kurtis Hough, it inspired backpacking trips to Utah and Arizona that helped him complete a trilogy of abstract geological films involving death, rebirth, and long-term environmental change. It also fosters collaborations: After meeting artist Nina Montenegro, Hough deployed his drone camera to help document part of her "Against Forgetting" project: Circles of sawdust representing the circumference of old-growth trees, poured in places where they might have stood. One was in a Portland Superfund site, another in a bricked-over public park.

The group is intentionally not hardcore, like the National Outdoor Leadership School. Once, in New Mexico's Gila Wilderness, NOLS students stumbled haggard and hungry into a Signal Fire camp, Harwood says. "We backpacked in just as far as they did. But we were sitting around, talking about critical art theory and eating chocolate. And we were like, 'Do you want some chocolate?' And they were like, 'Really?' All wild-eyed."

Instead, Signal Fire's message is empowerment through accessibility — underscoring the idea that these lands are available to everyone. "One thing I love about Signal Fire is that it takes (people) like me who don't go alone into the wild, and they handhold you, get you introduced to it and used to it," says Portland-based artist Vanessa Renwick, a repeat alum who also serves on the board. "You learn to bear-hang your food and shovel your shit. You get more than your toes wet. You get your ass wet out there."

Last year, Signal Fire started the Tinderbox Residency, which places an artist with a grassroots environmental group. Gary Wiseman embedded with Bark in the first, and soon found himself deeply engaged in efforts to change public attitudes about forest fires. He followed Forest Watch coordinator Michael Krochta to burns and collected charcoal from trees, then laboriously transformed it into ink and painted Rorschach-esque renderings of each fire's footprint. He now teaches classes on wild-crafting the ink, because "the process is a tool to help people understand what a fire-adapted ecosystem is and combat some of the language that vilifies fire."

"It kind of exemplified the work we do in this place-based, artistic way," Krochta adds. And it changed the way he thought about organizing. Instead of just submitting the usual National Environmental Policy Act comments on a proposal for a fuel-thinning timber sale, he also put up a topo map where forest lovers could write or draw their connections to the place to show why it merits protection. "Hoo hoo hello owls," one wrote, and "years of winter tracking hikes." Even some Forest Service employees at an info session participated. "It was really amazing and powerful," Wiseman says.

> **"I had no idea that there was so much space in the world that human beings didn't live on."**
>
> *—Grace Chen, California College of the Arts student from Singapore*

Harwood says everyone gets something different from the residencies and trips. Outside Tinderbox, the public-lands engagement part is subtle: She might spend an evening talking about the ins and outs of getting involved in land-use decisions, or building a relationship with and defending a special place. "That's the takeaway I want people to have: That they're welcome to be part of those conversations," she says. "And I try to remember to just shut up and let the land speak for itself. You don't have to say: 'This is an old-growth tree and it's worth protecting.' You just walk somebody to an old-growth tree." □

After several days carrying 80-pound packs, Steve House and Vince Anderson summit and ski in the remote Purcell Wilderness of British Columbia in the film *Jumbo Wild*. Adventure films like this are including more advocacy messages. CHRISTIAN PONDELLA/ COURTESY PATAGONIA

Bridging the gap between adventure and conservation — through film

BY KRISTA LANGLOIS

Jumbo Glacier, or Qat'muk, is the wild heart of southeast British Columbia's Purcell Mountains. It's also the site of a decades-old fight over a proposed ski resort, and that fight is the subject of Nick Waggoner's new film, *Jumbo Wild*. But though *Jumbo Wild* has no shortage of wilderness advocates criticizing development, it may be as captivating for adrenaline junkies as for environmental advocates — and it may represent the future of the outdoor film industry.

> "If you're going to travel someplace, (you should) begin to take responsibility for helping protect it."
>
> *—Kristine McDivitt Tompkins, founder of Conservacion Patagonica*

Waggoner, a 2008 graduate of Colorado College, got his start in a genre jokingly dubbed "ski porn" — gorgeous videos of skiers dropping off cliffs, surfing slow-motion through glittery powder and slicing down mountainsides. Much like surf, climbing and kayaking porn, its cousins, ski porn is a visual feast, and it's what some of the biggest outdoor film festivals, like Telluride Mountainfilm, were built around.

But in an age when anyone with a GoPro can record their epic adventures, audiences are losing interest, says David Holbrooke, Mountainfilm's festival director. To get featured in a competitive festival, you need something more. Something with meaning. "Can you tell a story?" Holbrooke asks. "That's the most challenging part. We want people who can tell real stories."

Waggoner was one of the first filmmakers to incorporate storytelling into outdoor sports cinematography; in 2013, *Outside* magazine called his approach "exceedingly rare." Today, it's standard fare. From Telluride to Banff, festival-goers are realizing that adventure is more compelling when there's something on the line besides an athlete's sponsorship money. Other recent festival favorites include *Almost Sunrise*, which follows two Iraqi War veterans as they walk across America, and *Unbranded*, in which four college graduates ride wild mustangs from Mexico to Canada. The former raises awareness of mental health and suicide among U.S. military veterans, while the latter tackles wild horses and public-land connectivity.

Conservationists like Kristine McDivitt Tompkins, founder of the nonprofit Conservacion Patagonica, hope that merging advocacy and adventure on the big screen will help bridge the divide between outdoor athletes and the places they play. "If you're going to travel someplace, (you should) begin to take responsibility for helping protect it," Tompkins says. "You can't sit back any more and imagine that someone else is going to fight for the places everyone takes for granted."

Film may be the most effective medium for turning recreationists into conservationists. The clothing company Patagonia, which helped fund both *Jumbo Wild* and last year's *DamNation*, which documents the impacts of dams on rivers, sees outdoor films as integral to its mission to advance environmental causes. Nonprofit advocacy groups are increasingly aware of this, too. "There's a recognition, especially in the environmental world, that throwing around facts and figures doesn't hold water anymore," says Hanson Hosein, a media expert at the University of Washington. "People have to be hit in the gut."

Case in point: When American Rivers wanted to raise awareness about the river it deemed "most endangered" in 2013, it partnered with filmmaker Pete McBride to create the three-minute film *I Am Red* — a first-person story of the Colorado River told from the river's perspective. The following year, the nonprofit fell back on an old standard: To spread the word about the perils facing the San Joaquin River, it produced a film that showed a guy standing in front of the waterway, talking about diversions and imploring people to write their Senator. To date, *I Am Red* has gotten nearly 158,000 more views on YouTube. Amy Kober, American Rivers' communication director, says the extra views led to a noticeable increase in the number of people who signed petitions, joined American Rivers or wrote to Congress.

Yet the line between advocacy and entertainment is delicate, says Holbrooke — if you try too hard, audiences will balk. That's where *Jumbo Wild* gets it right. After Waggoner spends time interviewing wildlife biologists, developers, tribal leaders and other stakeholders, he shows outdoor film audiences exactly why they should care about protecting the mountain. It's the moment when *Jumbo Wild* spans genres, when it leaps from documentary footage to pro athletes carving big lines, and convinces skiers that even North America's deepest, wildest backcountry won't remain unspoiled unless someone fights for it. Without the backstory of what's at stake on Jumbo, these scenes would be nothing more than powder porn. But when you know why they matter, they become the film's most emotionally powerful moments. □

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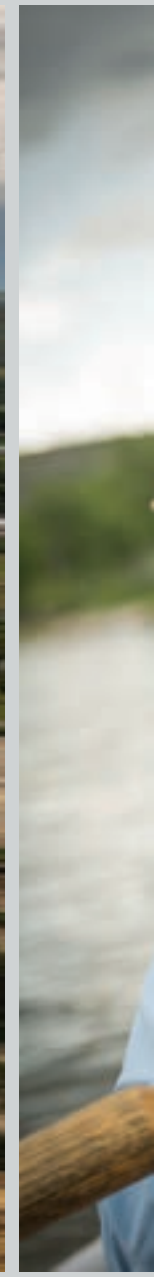

A Grand Plan to Save the

Can Mike Penfold's river trail protect one of the West's most iconic waterways?

FEATURE BY BEN GOLDFARB

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIK PETERSEN

On a rose-tinted summer evening near Billings, Montana, a football-shaped dory drifts down the Yellowstone River, its flat bottom skimming wakeless over the roiling surface. Mike Penfold, a former Bureau of Land Management state director, mans the oars with the vigor of an Olympic rower. Dale Anderson, a bearded ex-teacher, perches in the bucket seat. The river tightens into a narrow canyon, hemmed by sandstone cliffs that glow in the fading light. Two hundred and nine years earlier, Captain William Clark's Corps of Discovery drifted past this very spot during its homeward trek from the Pacific.

"You wonder what was going on in Clark's brain when he saw *that*," Penfold, 78, says, nodding at the radiant cliffs. A cowboy hat shades his broad, florid face, and his T-shirt bears the slogan #KeepItPublic. "Today, the Yellowstone seems quiet and easy," he adds, pirouetting the dory away from a groping log. "But there are times when this river is damn-well dangerous."

Farther downstream, the Yellowstone's mood swings are scrawled across the landscape. Tangled root wads burst from naked clay banks, and gravel bars jut into the current. The wheat and beet farmers whose properties abut the river don't appreciate its capriciousness; they've piled the banks with concrete blocks, warped nests of rebar and rusted-out pickup trucks to thwart erosion. But floods and ice jams regularly tear apart the riprap and send junk whirling downriver. Every year, volunteers extract some 7,000 pounds of detritus. Anderson, who swears he once saw an ex-wife's Buick in the rubble, watches the riprap slide by, arms folded. "Man, that's ugly," he mutters.

Penfold — "the dean of the Yellowstone," a former colleague calls him — also grumbles about the trash. Much of the meddling, he surmises, was conducted without a permit. In central Montana, environmental enforcement can be lax, and a full 84 percent of the Yellowstone's surroundings are privately owned, substantially more than the state as a whole. But Penfold, a career federal servant who worships Montana's famously progressive stream-access laws, believes the Yellowstone's corridor is also home to thousands of acres of heretofore

The Yellowstone River rounds a bend near Billings, Montana, facing page, flowing around an island owned by the city of Billings and the Department of Natural Resources. It's ideal for part of the island park trail system Mike Penfold, left, is proposing.

e Yellowstone

unrecognized public land, in the form of unclaimed islands and banks. Identifying the rightful public ownership of these parcels is central to his longstanding dream: the creation of the Montana Recreation Waterway, aquatic cousin to the Appalachian or Pacific Crest trails, a river trail running most of the 670-mile course of the Yellowstone.

He believes that to experience a river is to love it, and that to love it is to fight for its protection. The Yellowstone — its waters overdrawn by irrigators, polluted by oil spills, constrained by riprap — could use some love. "What would you need to make a river trail happen?" Penfold asks as we cruise through the canyon. "You need places to camp. You need places to pull out. You need public land."

THE YELLOWSTONE IS A CURIOUS RIVER, at once iconic and neglected — neither contaminated like the Duwamish, nor altered beyond recognition like the Colorado, nor beloved by rafters like the Salmon. Though its headwaters rise just outside America's first national park, it's a utilitarian waterway, whose flows nourish sugar beets, wheat and alfalfa. Its upper reaches in the Paradise Valley are stalked by trout and well-heeled fly fishermen; by the time it reaches its confluence with the Missouri, it's inhabited by blue-collar fish like sauger and bass, and trafficked by the jet boats of Bakken oil workers. It is the blue thread that ties Montana's mountainous west to its agricultural east, its grizzly bear meadows to its beet fields.

Much recent Yellowstone media coverage has focused on two catastrophic oil pipeline ruptures, in 2011 and 2015, which together hemorrhaged over 100,000 gallons. But the spills were merely the latest episodes in a history of maltreatment. Agricultural withdrawals have reduced the river's flows, riprap stifles the buildup of floodplains and other hydraulic processes, and runoff from farms and cities degrades water quality. Invasive plants, particularly Russian olive, choke the banks. While the Yellowstone is technically the country's longest free-flowing river, its irrigation diversions impede fish, especially the endangered pallid sturgeon.

Decades of abuse came to a head after 1996, when a hundred-year flood tore through the basin, devouring crops, bridges and houses. Landowners like Jerry O'Hair, a ruddy-cheeked rancher and farmer, vowed to protect themselves against future torrents. O'Hair spent thousands of dollars armoring his section of the river and restoring a trout stream on his land. "We must've bought all the chicken wire in western Montana," he recalls. The next year, yet another hundred-year flood undid his work. "These giant root wads I'd put in just went bobbing away like corks."

Riprap had almost certainly exacerbated the floods by converting sections of the river into giant sluices. Yet many farmers believed the solution was still more riprap. The number of armoring permits granted by the Army Corps doubled. Environmental groups sued, insisting that the agency evaluate the cumulative impacts of all its permits. A judge sided with the environmentalists, but by then, says Susan Gilbertz, a cultural geographer at Montana State University Billings, "Sections of this river were screwed up about as badly as they could get."

The Yellowstone's mood swings are scrawled across the landscape. Tangled root wads burst from naked clay banks, and gravel bars jut into the current.

PENFOLD FOLLOWED THE ARMORING CONTROVERSY with interest. He'd served as Montana's BLM director from 1980 to 1985, administering the agency's coal-leasing program. Later, he worked as its national assistant director for land and renewable resources under both George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. But his formative years came in the 1970s, when Penfold, a Colorado native, moved with his wife and four daughters to Roanoke, Virginia, to work for the U.S. Forest Service. More than 300 miles of the Appalachian Trail traversed his hardscrabble corner of the state, and he noticed that towns closer to the trail seemed cleaner and wealthier. Hikers served as walking shots of economic adrenaline, injecting tourist dollars into Virginia's hills. The local trail club watchdogged the Forest Service, lambasting it when it planned clear-cuts near the path. Penfold joined the club on hikes and incorporated its concerns into forest planning. "The Forest Service needed to be dragged up by the scruff of the neck," he recalls.

Though Penfold retired to Billings in 1995, leisure didn't suit him, and he hurled himself into public land conservation and access issues. In 2007, for instance, he organized a coalition of conservationists, ATVers and horsemen in an attempt to devise travel-management plans in the Pryor Mountains, a remote crease of peaks, canyons and mesas near the Wyoming border. "Everyone was pissed," recalls Dale Anderson, who was involved in the negotiations. "Mike was one of the cooler heads I've been around."

Around the same time, the Public Land/Water Access Association was winning its own legal battle, for recreational

By law, islands that formed prior to Montana's statehood in 1889 are federal land, while islands that sprang up later belong to the state — even if they eventually attach to the bank.

river access at a disputed Yellowstone crossing called Bundy Bridge (no relation to the notorious Nevadan). Although a local rancher claimed the land, the group used historical records to prove public ownership; today, the bridge hosts a popular fishing access site. That success got Penfold wondering: Just how much unrecognized public land lined the Yellowstone? After all, the river was constantly re-contouring itself, creating and annihilating islands and bars. By law, islands that formed prior to Montana's statehood in 1889 are federal land, while islands that sprang up later belong to the state — even if they eventually attach to the bank. Some of those erstwhile islands, Penfold believed, had been appropriated by landowners, or ignored altogether. He wanted to reclaim them for the people.

In 2009, Penfold, now volunteering for a group called Our Montana, hired a fluvial geomorphologist to study 15 miles of the river's historic twists and turns. He also pored over tax records and folios of old aerial photos, identifying stretches of bank that may have originated as islands. In the end, he identified 10 separate tracts of unrecognized public land along the Yellowstone between Billings and nearby Laurel. If a single 15-mile section enfolded that much land, who knew how many public parcels lined the river's course?

Penfold submitted his report to the state in 2010. Then he waited. And waited. The state made polite noises about evaluating the issue, but the process moved slowly. "The response was always, 'We don't have time,' " Penfold says. "It was disappointing."

Finally, in 2014, his work bore fruit. Among Penfold's islands was a piece of land dubbed Clarks Crossing, a cobble-strewn stretch of bank where William Clark ordered Sgt. Nathaniel Pryor to lead two dozen horses across the Yellowstone. Thieves soon nabbed the animals, but the sergeant, undaunted, stretched buffalo hides over wooden frames to create makeshift canoes, paddling downriver to deliver the bad news to Clark two weeks later. Inglorious though the episode may have been, the historical connection helped spur Montana to officially recognize the island. The state later leased the 115-acre Clarks Crossing, without the apostrophe, to the city of Billings for use as a public park.

Still, the floodgates of public-land designation won't open anytime soon. "(Riparian ownership) analyses are quite costly in both staff time and contracted resources," Monte Mason, minerals management bureau chief for the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, told me via email. Penfold's work, Mason wrote, "is useful to help refine a list of possibilities," and has led the agency to engage in "a broad review of landforms in the central-eastern stretch of the Yellowstone River." But Penfold's reports, he added, "do not provide the level of expert analysis" necessary to prove title. Wrote Mason: "We have cautioned Mr. Penfold regarding making public assertions of state ownership and access to landforms where legal title has not been adjudicated."

THREE DAYS AFTER OUR DORY RIDE, Penfold and I embark in a green battleship of a canoe on a 19-mile float below Intake Diversion Dam, a line of boulders that shunts irrigation water into nearby fields and disrupts migratory sturgeon. We're joined by a ragtag armada drawn from Penfold's bottomless pool of friends and friends' friends, from retired wheat farmers to plant pathologists to a small-town mayor who doubles as his village's minister and triples as the owner of its liquor store.

Among the paddlers is Doug Smith, an immense, gray-braided member of the Montana State Parks and Recreation Board, a citizen council that helps steer the state park system. Soon after joining the board, he lobbied for the creation of three new parks — including a 40-mile stretch of the Yellowstone that would "get your foot in the door for a whole river park," he tells me when we beach our canoes for lunch. Though Smith and Penfold had only met this morning, they'd independently concocted similar visions. When Smith presented his river park to the board, however, it was dead on arrival. "The park system is way underfunded, and there's a huge backlog of deferred maintenance," he says. "I don't get much traction with these ideas."

Indeed, Montana's state parks are fiscally ailing. Between 2009 and 2013, revenue from hunting and fishing licenses declined by 8 percent, forcing the state's Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks to cut staff and close laboratories. In 2014, Montana's budget for its 55 public parks was $7.5 million,

The Yellowstone River is constantly re-contouring itself, creating and annihilating islands and sandbars, far left. Riprap made of concrete blocks, warped nests of rebar and rusted-out pickup trucks lines the riverbank in places, but floods and ice jams can send it floating downriver. Below, detail of the shoreline, where anything goes.

paltry compared to nearby states like Idaho, which had a $16 million budget for just 30 parks. Montana scarcely has enough money to manage its existing parks, let alone a sprawling, logistically complex river with myriad access points.

If the state can't come through, though, the feds could. The National Recreation Trails program, administered by the U.S. Department of the Interior, includes numerous water trails, among them a network of 55 campsites in Washington's Puget Sound. But in eastern Montana, where anti-government fever runs high, a federal river trail surely would incite resentment.

"To many people, any attempt to raise the profile of this river seems to come from on high and will involve more regulations," Susan Gilbertz cautions. In 2014, Interior dissolved its two-year-old National Blueways System, an initiative designed to recognize aquatic conservation efforts, after some landowners and Republican congressmen expressed largely unfounded fears that it would lead to land seizures.

Skeptical landowners may take comfort in the fact that, if history is any guide, the Montana Recreation Waterway would serve as a state-long stimulus package. The Appalachian Trail, the legendary path that first inspired Penfold, generates nearly $30 million annually for local communities. Even small trails, like the 34-mile Virginia Creeper Trail, are worth millions. And rivers are liquid assets, in every sense: A 2005 study, for instance, found that fishing and boating on the Upper Snake creates $46 million annually. "We've got 3.5 million people coming by our door every year on their way to Yellowstone Park," Penfold says as our canoe scrapes a shallow bar. "The potential here is absolutely immense."

Moreover, conservation is already coming. In 2015, the Yellowstone River Conservation District Council, the organization that formed in the wake of the mid-'90s floods, released a long-awaited draft of its Cumulative Effects Analysis, a hefty document that chronicles the Yellowstone's plight and offers an array of recommendations for ameliorating damage. The suggestions include removing blockages that cut off side channels, taking out old riprap and berms, and compensating farmers who let their land sink back into the river.

"Many of the biggest changes to the river's morphology are also subtle — we have to address things that are not obvious to the eye," says Don Youngbauer, the council's chairman. Penfold's project, Youngbauer adds, could nudge restoration along by growing the river's constituency. "I'd love to see that. You can't protect what you can't touch."

Around 10 miles below the dam, the river widens and slows, and civilization disappears behind a wall of cottonwoods. The other canoes slip around a bend, leaving our boat alone with a small group of mergansers, the females' rust-colored crests ruffled by the wind. We sit in silence, listening to the faint hiss of silty water sliding against the hull. For the first time since our voyage began, it's possible to imagine the river as Clark might have experienced it. The channel guides us along the right flank of a massive island, and Penfold adds it to his mental map as we drift past. "What a nice piece of land," he says, like a jeweler admiring a 12-carat diamond.

The Montana Recreation Waterway is, to be sure, a pie-in-the-sky scheme. It faces resistant landowners, cash-strapped agencies and uncertain land tenure. (Because recreational river boating is prohibited within Yellowstone National Park's waters, the trail would have to begin in Gardiner, Montana, rather than at the headwaters.) Still, Penfold is making incremental progress. He's recruited students and professors at Rocky Mountain College to help map more islands, launched a new website touting Yellowstone conservation, and gradually filled his Rolodex with supporters. Yet even the designation of humble Clarks Crossing, a single link in a 670-mile-long chain, took years of work.

No one understands the sluggish pace of bureaucracy better than a former BLM director, and Penfold realizes that he may not live to see his plan to fruition. Still, he also knows that most great ideas in the annals of public lands protection began as flights of fancy. As we cruise downriver, I wonder aloud who would be foolhardy enough to travel his hypothetical river trail, braving diversion dams and loose logs and irate farmers along the way. Penfold, crouched in the canoe's rear, flashes a mischievous grin. "It's a river that could be very challenging to a lot of people," he says, dipping a paddle. "You need someone with a little adventure in their spirit." □

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HEARD AROUND THE WEST | BY BETSY MARSTON

IDAHO

What do guns and sewing machines have in common? Not all that much, you'd think, but in Grangeville, Idaho, population 3,100, they've been paired for an unusual shopping opportunity. Think of it as a BOGO — buy one, get one free — though the freebie in this case has the power to blow your head off. If you purchase a sewing machine of a selected brand at Jody Hoogland's Home Grown Quilt shop this month, you get a muzzleloader thrown in for free. "That's right," says the *Idaho County Free Press*, "this benefits both the men and the women, making this the perfect time to make everyone happy and satisfied, ready for sewing season as well as hunting season." We don't know what doodads make an Epic or Sapphire brand sewing machine deluxe, but B&B Bargain boasts that its stainless steel/black muzzleloader comes equipped with fiber-optic sights.

UTAH

You have to admire the leopard who not only escaped from his cage at a Salt Lake City zoo, but then started tweeting about his experiences: "Former tenant@HogleZoo. Out exploring the city and all it has to offer." Yet the wonderfully spotted 4-year-old Amur leopard didn't wander very far from the Hogle Zoo; he simply jumped eight feet up to a beam just a couple of feet away and lay there, supine, watching the humans fuss. A zoo visitor spotted him, and handlers restored the leopard to its enclosure. An hour later, human visitors were again free to roam. The leopard continued to communicate, however, assuring visitors that his "escape was totally not a ploy to trap people in the gift shop for an hour."

THE WEST

Let's hope it's just a flurry of bad behavior and not a lasting trend, but reports of vandalism in public places are mounting. In Utah, at Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, a sandstone wall of Zebra Slot Canyon was defaced by "Kenny and Aryn," a couple who incised their names and the date inside the shape of a heart. Kenny and Aryn are not unique in their desire to leave their mark outdoors; last year, reports the *Salt Lake Tribune*, monument patrols had to restore 1,234 square feet of rock that had been chiseled by visitors.

IDAHO **ATV ingenuity.** ROB MASON

And in Grand Canyon recently, a visitor at the South Rim saw a couple spray-painting graffiti on rocks, tagging "Evans 16" before rangers could nab them. An anonymous tip line, 888-653-0009, is the place to call with any leads.

Those annoying Canadians have still not returned to Yellowstone National Park to face charges of tampering with an iconic hot spring by deliberately leaving the boardwalk and dipping their hands in the water. The *Guardian* reports that the four men, who post online as High on Life Sunday Fundayz, have a history of flaunting their sabotage of public places. Wearing "animal-pattern onesies," for instance, they posted videos of themselves this spring on wakeboards as an RV dragged them across the wet Bonneville Salt Flat. Louise Noeth of Save the Salt, an advocacy group for the region's racing community, said she was astonished "to see video of these knuckleheads, and I think the damage is pretty bad. It broke my heart. It creates ruts and mud that can take decades to heal, if ever." The men have also posted videos of themselves ignoring an agency ban to swing on a rope from Corona Arch in Utah, and they have allegedly entered prohibited areas at Machu Picchu in Peru and climbed atop monoliths at the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin. The men have a slew of followers, though one critic, Bryce Dodson of Mammoth Lakes, California, says he got so angry at the Yellowstone and Bonneville insults that he created the Facebook page, "Stop High on Life." Meanwhile, the U.S. attorney's office in Cheyenne, Wyoming, has issued arrest warrants for the men, who sport distinctive names: Hamish McNab Campbell Cross, Charles Ryker Gamble, Alexey Andriyovych Lyakh and Justis Cooper Price-Brown.

WYOMING

Occasionally, a moment of thoughtlessness can end in tragedy. Colin Scott, 23, recently strayed off a boardwalk at Yellowstone National Park, and once on the fragile crust he slipped and disappeared into a hot pool. Only his flip-flops could be retrieved by rangers. A different kind of tragedy resulted when a man and his son picked up a newborn bison and put it in the back of their SUV. They were "demanding to speak with a ranger," said a visitor who saw the incident. "They were seriously worried that the calf was freezing and dying." After wildlife officials restored the calf to its herd, reports The Associated Press, the animal found itself firmly rejected. Ultimately, it had to be put down because it "continually approached people and cars along the roadway."

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

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

"There is no charge for using the sky as one giant dumping ground. But take bald tires and old stoves to a landfill, and you will be assessed a dumping fee."

Allen Best, in his essay, "Let's tax what makes the whole world sick," from Writers on the Range, hcn.org/wotr