Interview Reflection
with Gloria Flora by David James Duncan

Plus: a new look at
wildlife road mortality
and wildland roads
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CORRECTIONS

The cover photo and the photo on page 38 in the Fall/Winter issue were incorrectly attributed. The photographer for those pieces is Ron Scholl. We are very sorry for the error.

An editorial snafu created a serious factual error in the article "Cove/Mallard Sales Face Dissension" in the Fall/Winter issue. Idaho Sporting Congress' suit is against the Forest Service, not Shearer Lumber Company. We apologize to both the author and the company for the mistake.

We invite submissions of article ideas, prose and artwork. The theme for the Spring 1998 issue is "Borders." Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your submission. Thanks.

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I doubt that there is an adult in America who has never encountered a road. Most of us use them regularly to travel to work or school, to run errands, to visit friends or to gain access to a remote trailhead.

Even if we ourselves don’t use them, certainly someone has done so on our behalf, delivering food to markets and grocery stores or even hauling in trees from the forest so we can maintain a steady supply of wood products, including paper. Simply by reading words on this page, you are benefitting from a road.

Many of us actually enjoy using roads, especially when on a much-needed journey away from wherever we spend most of our time. We love the freedom and movement, the air whipping our hair into new shapes. That is, if we’re driving on paved roads and moving fast.

Until I came West, I generally assumed that roads meant pavement. In Ohio, where I grew up, I didn’t encounter dirt roads. Even the barely two-lane county roads were paved. So it was with special glee that I first kicked up dust driving on a dirt road and bounced along, feeling tough.

But my love for roads, both paved and dirt, is often tinged with sadness and even grief. I think about the animals I have swerved to avoid, but sometimes hit anyway. Every day when I pull open my curtains, I notice the roads that cut a zig-zag up the mountain due west of my living room window. After a near-accident, I remember every car wreck I’ve experienced and wonder if driving is really worth it.

This issue of Camas explores the joys of road travel—though not always by car—as well as its ecological consequences. In “At the Edge of Headlights,” Ian McCluskey presents the important problem of wildlife mortality on roads and discusses several roadkill prevention projects in the Northern Rockies and beyond.

A four-part article on wildland roads, beginning on page 18, explains the Clinton Administration’s recent 18-month moratorium on roadbuilding in roadless areas. Three correspondents from the region present what this interim policy includes and excludes in their area, suggesting what a long-term roads policy ought to consider.

The “joy” part of roads emerges in the Reflections and News sections, as well as in the artwork. Often, we follow roads and trails by bike or on foot and find these experiences particularly rewarding. When David James Duncan tells us on page four to “Love Paper,” he also suggests that we must in some way love the roads that bring it to us.

Because roads are so pervasive in this country, each of us must admit complicity for their consequences. But does that mean we can never give thanks for a road? I hope not.

—Leeann Drabenstott

Greetings from the Editorial Board!
Alberton Spill Examined

I very much enjoyed Shawn Lake’s well-written piece on the MRL [Montana Rail Link] train derailment and chemical spill [Camas, Summer 1997]. Her essay illustrates how this tragedy impacted the lives of so many people and the livestock and pets they care for and depend on.

I would like to offer this correction to the editor’s note and take this opportunity to educate you and your readers about one of the misconceptions relating to the derailment.

In the early morning hours on April 11, 1996, six rail cars of hazardous materials derailed, four containing chlorine with an estimated 130,000 pounds of chlorine gas released. A tanker containing a corrosive hazardous material, potassium cresylate (spent refinery waste), spilled 17,000 gallons of waste that mixed and reacted with the chlorine gas, creating chlorinated phenols that migrated into the soil and the atmosphere. Another rail car containing sodium chlorate derailed and spilled an estimated 85 pounds of product.

This was not a chlorine spill, but a large mixed-chemical spill. This is an important distinction to the families injured in the chemical spill. Understanding what chemicals area residents were exposed to that morning is the first step in comprehending the injuries and chronic illnesses many residents and their animals are still suffering from. Proper diagnosis and treatment is essential for exposed residents to regain their health, and this can only occur if everyone involved has full knowledge of what specific chemicals they have been exposed to and poisoned by.

Lucinda Hodges,
Alberton Community Coalition for Environmental Health
When you sit down to write, no matter what it is you’ll be writing, begin by reminding yourself that a tree gave its life for what you are about to attempt. Don’t let the silicon chip or computer monitor make you forget this. Even stacked in a printer, the paper—the ex-tree—is so very dead as you begin to write: its earth-eating oxygen-producing birds-supporting squirrel-housing body has been reduced to an inert blank space of off-white. To find the life of language and lay that life down onto the paper is to redeem the sacrificed life of the tree. In order to do this, I believe we must see paper as clearly as Inuits see snow.

One’s language is perhaps the greatest living proof of what one does and does not see. Listen to how clearly the Inuits see:
apun (snow);
apingaut (first snowfall);
aput (spread-out snow);
ayak (snow on clothes);
nutagak (powder snow);
aniu (packed snow);
aniuvak (snowbank);
natigvik (snowdrift);
kimaugruk (snowdrift that blocks something);
perksertok (drifting snow);
akelrarak (newly-drifted snow);
mavsa (snowdrift overhead, about to fall);
kaiyuglak (the rippled surface of snow);
pukak (sugar-like snow);
pokaktok (salt-like snow);
misulik (sleet);
massak (snow mixed with water);
auksalak (melting snow);
aniuk (snow for melting into water);
akillukkak (soft snow);
milik (very soft snow);
mitailak (soft snow that covers an opening in an ice flow);
sillik (hard crusty snow);
kiksrukak (glazed snow in a thaw);
maaya (snow that can be broken through);
katiksunik (light snow);
katiksugnick (light snow that is deep for walking).

Paper is writer’s snow. It’s the blank white element we live upon, the element that records our every step. The receptacle of our lives and footsteps deserves an Inuit depth of respect. I lack names for the many kinds of paper I see here in my study, but looking through the drawers and shelves and manuscript boxes I find: virgin paper; still in the ream, and paper at which I stare long, unable to write a word; I find a scrap of paper upon which, in the middle of the night, I write down an urgent message from the heart, but leave the light off so as not to wake my wife, only to find in the morning that after the words, “And when a prayer fails to...” my pen ran out of ink.

I find paper at which I’m staring, when, between the words, a door opens, and inside is an imaginary Room, and inside the Room are People; I find paper on which I write what the People are doing in the Room, and paper in which the People lure me clear into the Room, addressing me now as one of their own. I find paper on which, in the midst of an intimate disclosure from an elegant Room Woman, a telephone rings (my phone, not hers), then a neighbor stops by (my neighbor, not hers), and I am so long distracted that when I return to the paper and Room Woman, I begin to spill my own thoughts, not hers, failing to notice for hours that I’ve not only cut her off in mid-disclosure, stood her up, treated her terribly, I have lost the way back to her wonderful Room.

I find paper on which I write so stupidly, aimlessly, roomlessly and unimaginatively that at the end of the day I wad it up and throw it across my study, then wad and throw a few blank sheets for good measure. I find blank sheets unwadded in shame and spoken to rather than written upon, paper I audibly promise that—during the hours and in the place foresworn to the People of the Imaginary Room—I will spill only their thoughts, not my own. I find paper at which I stare long.
unable to write a word, but keeping my promise to the Room People.

I find computer-printed pages on which I earlier wrote of the Room People, pages I begin to idly edit after the People again refuse to reappear. I find, on these computer-printed pages, a space between two letters in a single word—a space no wider than the head of an ant—yet as I am correcting an awkward phrase in that space, two tiny hands rise up out of the paper, a new Room Person climbs into sight, and this Person begins singing—to the glorious ruin of my other draft—the true and living story hidden behind everything I’ve written so far.

I find paper on which I’ve so faithfully written not what I want but what is there to be told that when I read it again, days later, its doors still open, the People in its Room still laugh/shout/hate/love, and a voice hidden in the white of the next sheet of paper whispers to me, telling whether it is akillukkak, kiksrukak or auksulak that I must watch for now....

David James Duncan is the author of The River Why, The Brothers K, River Teeth and numerous essays. He resides in Lolo, Montana, with his family.
North Country
by Carol Ann Bassett

From where I sit on a naked rock, emigre from desert dust,
I can see through leaves a flash of silver then red and blue
where a man with heels dug into stones
and thighs anchored in surf
casts his line
with a snap and a rhythm and a swirl of the strand
a single helix
no thought, no intention
just fishing.

Now in winter,
elk tracks deep in snow
rust-red urine near tufts of fur
the creek devoured by ice
the sky cold and heavy
I am estranged from those arid lands
where clarity of light is the only certainty.
If I keep moving north like a snowflake
will the rivers freeze as lines on a map?

Can these desert feet find solace in water,
beauty in ice, freedom in darkness?
Blue-black ravens embrace a pine like a gathering of monks.
I can hear them laughing
Haw Haw
as I reel against wind, the mind turned back on itself
saying stone, air, fire, spirit, light
the sun nowhere in sight.

Carol Ann Bassett, a freelance writer, lives in Missoula.
Her book, Wilderness of Light: North American Deserts,
is forthcoming from Key Porter Books this year.

Doug Johnson is a graduate student of geography and
lives in San Francisco. He was a participant in the 1996
Teller Environmental Writing Institute.
For two months, I had been on the road, moving northward from desert canyons in Arizona to June snowstorms in Yellowstone. I traveled under my own power on a bicycle, sleeping each night in hidden spots off the back roads where I spent my days. One July morning, I awoke in woods near the Clark Fork River in Montana, having turned west toward Idaho and Washington and the Pacific. Air pooled under the pines, warm and spicy, and I realized it was at last truly summer.

From a sunny crag above the river, I watched a string of Burlington Northern freight cars snaking by, rolling over the joints in the rails with a steady ka-chunk ka-chunk, ka-chunk ka-chunk, while insects buzzed over flat, green water. Other than occasional trucks carrying fuel from Thompson Falls, the road was still. I examined scat on the rocks around me and scanned tall snags for osprey nests. This was how I had come to know roads, as strips of human busyness in otherwise quiet places where weather and creatures that lived there came and went all day long. Following rivers and crossing ranges, riding alongside fields and through forests, I was passing through, but I was also soaking in.

Wendell Berry likens river systems to a net of water cast over the continent, drawn constantly back to the sea. Roads, too, form such a net—one that connects to almost every doorstep. This net was leading me to the sea as well. Who would get there first, I wondered, me or the water sliding through the slow stretch below? On this first day of summer, I—like the river—felt in no particular hurry at all.
At the Edge of Headlights

by Ian McCluskey

H eather Marstall parks the pickup at the end of a driveway and stammers, “Damn, that’s a big one!” Behind the house, grass rises up the slope of Mount Sentinel. Below us, the ground cuts down a bank of willows. She points. About 100 feet below the driveway, the wind has peeled a blanket of snow off a lump of grey fur. But it doesn’t look like a deer to me, only a heap of hair, like a dirty futon mattress with the stuffing crumbling.

As we slide closer, I realize that the deer has been decapitated. “I see a lot of this,” she explains. “I bet that was a nice five-point buck.” Then she turns and looks back to the garage. “I bet his head will be on a wall pretty soon.”

She shows me a knot on the deer’s front leg, like a whorl in a pine. “He got hit, he stumbled down this bank, then he died.” The hair is soft to my touch—the color of cinnamon at the tips, but shining silver next to the skin. When we drag the body, our boots slip on the yellow bunchgrass combed down by snow. We pause, catch our breath, then tug. He’s heavier than I expected, much heavier than a wet mattress. We heave again, and skid the carcass to the pickup.

Marstall chops her hatchet into a leg, only nicking it. It is too cold for blood and the frozen muscle tears off in crumbs. She hacks until the bone snaps. Then she hooks her finger and draws back the lips. The skin is too cold, so she cuts about an inch, spreading the inside of the lip open. It is feathered with smooth, white knobs like the underside of a starfish. Running her finger over the line of back teeth, Marstall observes, “Just a baby.”

It’s rather macabre work, she admits. In a way, you could call her a roadkill undertaker. “I dragged a friend along with me once,” she says, while she tows the carcass towards the truck. “But we found six that day.” She hooks a cable around the deer’s neck, winches it into the bed, then adds, “he never came out again, the wimp.”

When we find another deer, she forces a metal bar into its mouth, then twists, popping the jaw like a knuckle. Then she hooks her finger and draws back the lips. The skin is too cold, so she cuts about an inch, spreading the inside of the lip open. It is feathered with smooth, white knobs like the underside of a starfish. Running her finger over the line of back teeth, Marstall observes, “Just a baby.”

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When I ask how she feels about her work, she sighs. Last spring she discovered a black bear. She found the skidmarks first, then paw tracks in the melting snow. She scrambled up a hill. Under a tree, she noticed blood where the bear had rested before climbing again. She
found the bear tangled in a barbed-wire fence. “I got angry,” she says, biting her lower lip. “I thought: how can people be so irresponsible to cause this animal to suffer?” She pauses. “Now all I see is a dead animal; I try not to get too emotional.”

But there’s reason to worry. Swerving to avoid animals is the second greatest cause of single-car accidents in the United States. Over the last five years, collisions between deer and automobiles have increased by 62 percent, putting the current level at 500,000 cars damaged and over one hundred people killed annually.

“Just in the urban area of Missoula, we find a couple hundred deer along the roads,” reports John Firebaugh, a regional game specialist for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. On Highway 93, from Missoula to Hamilton, he estimates that at least 1,000 animals are killed every year.

“That’s probably an underestimate,” suggests Greg Powell, an insurance agent in Missoula. “There isn’t a week we don’t process a claim for hitting a deer, elk, or even a mountain lion.” Sometimes the cars are partially damaged, and Powell says, “you got to think that animal probably went a’ways before dying.”

But even if fairly accurate, that sum translates to two or three deer killed each day throughout the year, just in one 47-mile stretch. “It adds up,” admits Firebaugh. The simple cost to motorists alone is sobering. In 1995, 41,500 deer were killed on state roads in Pennsylvania. At an average bill of $2,000 per collision, that calculates to $83 million in damages. You bet it adds up.

As we descend from the base of Mount Sentinel, I’m not thinking about numbers. Through the window, strips of willows follow streams and patches of cured bunchgrass poke through snow drifts. Houses seem to draw together, until we are passing rows of condominiums. The grey rooftops of Missoula stretch below in a grid of streets and blocks.

From 1904 to 1995, rural paved roads increased from 153,662 miles to over 1.5 million miles. Yet from the beginning of the century, deer populations have also waxed from fewer than one million to a current 18 million. “We’ve got such an over-population problem of deer,” states Marstall, “that
roadkill actually helps thin the herds, increasing their overall fitness.”

Not all roads, for that matter, produce roadkill. After plotting her sites on a map, Marstall has observed areas of high concentrations. “At some locations, I’ve had to go back almost every other day and pull off deer not more than 15 feet away from where I’ve pulled several others.” Harvey Locke, founder of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, explains that wildlife deaths occur most frequently on roads where north/south and east/west valleys intersect, such as the Bow River Valley in Alberta.

“I find most of the dead deer on the perimeter of town,” says Marstall. In her home state of Virginia, she notes that tracts of parklands shelter deer, but in Montana, houses and highways block the access to rivers. Wildlife will cross roads, often along a narrow stretch, to reach water. In canyons, a road may transect their only path of migration. Plus, traditional winter feeding grounds, like the Hamilton Valley, have now been converted to hay fields and pastures. Deer and elk, naturally, go to the food. Last year, the snow piled so deep in the Blackfoot Valley that several hundred deer concentrated along the shoulder of the highway.

The size of a road can make a difference. As one reporter for Audubon speculated, major highways “...seem less lethal to small mammals than smaller roads—possibly because an open run across multiple lanes intimidates the creature.” The central cement barricade might also impede an animal—or perhaps simply the level of traffic noise.

“Sometimes I drive down a road at night, watching for deer, and won’t see a single one,” says Marstall. “Then the next morning I’ve gotten calls for four or five killed that night...and I wonder: now why didn’t I see any?”

Back in the Fish, Wildlife and Parks office in Missoula, I study the map Marstall has dotted with red flags. Each pin represents a roadkill, and they stretch along the outbound roads like spokes on a wheel. Marstall sighs. “That’s just what I’ve done this last semester,” she says. “That’s just the beginning.”

To remedy the problem of roadkill, Firebaugh suggests that drivers slow down at night and stay alert for animals. Marstall chuckles. “How many deer-crossing signs do I pass, and do I slow down?” I nod, remembering times that I’ve hurled down back roads, peering through a snow-streaked windshield, and noticed a black deer bounding across a yellow, bent and bullet-speckled sign.

We’ve all seen the eyes of deer flash gold at the edge of headlights, yet cautionary signs and roadkill education have had little success. The Florida Department of Transportation reported: “Wildlife speed zones have not been effective;
motorists slow down initially, but speed up again after a short distance.” Lower general speed signs have also not helped much. Florida DOT tried using signs with flashers, as well as deer reflectors; however, no studies have documented their effectiveness. They have also turned to larger, more landscape-intrusive projects, such as a 40-mile stretch of fence. They’ve built bridges over waterways to encourage animal crossing—in effect, attempting to reverse habitat fragmentation. They built three bear crossings near Orlando and even installed video cameras to monitor if any animals used them.

Perhaps the largest effort to minimize roadkill has occurred in the Rockies. In Banff National Park, Alberta, the Canadian government constructed a 2.4-meter-high, ungulate-proof fence along both sides of the eastern-most section of highway. The fence stretches 26 km and took five years to complete. Underpasses and bridges were erected in 12 locations. After two years, the elk learned to use them. By collaring elk, managers recorded a 94 percent reduction in roadkill.

In 1993, the Banff-Bow study, a two-year independent investigation, was initiated to develop a management plan for the park. The final plan makes it very clear that Banff National Park is, “first and foremost, a place for nature,” calling for measures to reduce wildlife mortality by allowing animals to move safely across the Trans-Canada highway. Since moose, wolves, and grizzly bears had been hesitant to use the highway underpasses, the park built arches to see if wildlife prefer to travel over, rather than under, the road.

In addition, officials will also restrict traffic from evening to morning, when wildlife wander to water and are less visible, as well as during the period of March 1 to June 25, when animals travel with their young. Some minor highways and popular camp areas will also be closed.

Banff Park, Canada’s first national natural reserve is akin to Yellowstone. Each year the grizzlies, wolves, and cougars make room for more than four million recreational visitors. Under the new directives, it seems that tourists will now have to yield to the animals. Perhaps such a large-scale effort is the best solution for roadkill. But the extent of the construction project will bring a high price tag: each new overpass will cost an estimated $2.2 million.

We deliver the deer to the Missoula rendering plant—a small block building with green, metal sides. Beside a door gaping like an open mouth, a heap of cattle and horses lay frozen, hooves jutting to the grey sky. From subterranean pipes, white smoke brews. As Marstall dumps the deer, I peek into the doorway, then teeter back. Inside, the floor drops into a steel-walled pit, where a huge auger—like an enormous drill-bit—twists into the dark and into a hole I
cannot see, but can smell.

Rows of oil barrels spill animal parts. Pieces of hides—now frozen and crumpled—fill several barrels, while another section holds hooves and horns. In the summer of 1996, the *Earth Island Journal* claimed that roadkill may end up in pet food. They’ll grind up the deer, Marstall informs, and yes, it will become pet food. “Lots of people want to feed their dogs and cats,” she says as she peels off her leather gloves. Then she steps quickly back to the truck. “You kinda numb yourself.”

But more than Fluffy and Fido enjoy roadkill. You’ve heard the jokes, no doubt: “Roadkill Cafe, from your grill to ours,” or “You kill it, we grill it.” Actually, in Illinois, 60 percent of annual roadkill deer are eaten by people, according to *U.S. News and World Report*. The biography of world-champion rodeo rider Chris Ledoux, a Wyoming resident, tells of him hitting a deer on the way to a rodeo. It fed his family for weeks.

“This is by no means a ‘waste’ plant,” says Marstall. Everything gets converted: the hooves become glue and dog chewies; the hides get tanned and sewn into purses. About once a month, Marstall delivers a freshly killed deer to the Craighead Institute which feeds two eagles with the meat. The eagles are used for educational programs.

“We are taught the moral: waste not, want not. Perhaps all the uses we can find for roadkill deer help justify their deaths. But I am thinking of earlier, when Marstall and I found a deer sprawled in black weeds. Its body was arched, as if frozen as it leaped, turning, upside down. The head tilted almost to the spine, the ears pointed back. Both hind legs extended straight, with the front legs folded under the body. The eyes had collapsed. With shards of plastic and broken beer bottles glittering around its body, like flakes of gold leaf in a Russian Icon, I could not help but see an artistic gesture of a deer’s flight, as if the mat of dried weeds and brown snow were a canvas—or the clouds that stretched into the mountains.

But then Marstall grabbed a front and back leg, jerked the carcass from the ice of its blood, then twisted her broad shoulders. As she turned to hurl the deer into the truck, she thrust her knee, like bucking a bale of hay. “I’m blunt,” she said, wiping her hands. “But this is what happens when you don’t have enough predators and too many people.”

Finished for the day, we drive back to the office, along a road that bends with the Bitterroot River. Where the river twists, a few patches of sunlight shine silver and grey. And we are quiet, watching the rows of houses pass. Smoke scatters from chimneys. The forest crouches at the edge of the light that spills from kitchen windows. “I’m sorry no one has started this before,” says Marstall. “I’d like to know how the situation changes as the population around Missoula continues to expand.” And expand it will.

Between 1990 and 1996, Missoula’s population increased by 10,000 people. While Marstall’s work has been a first step in identifying the extent of roadkill around the edges of Missoula, a real solution to address the causes remains to be seen.

As we continue through town, I consider the advice from a Flannery O’Connor story: “Drive carefully. The life you save may be your own.” But common sense may be too little, too late. As our backyards bump into mountains, as roads reach like fingers into the forest, the boundaries between cities and wildlands become more obscured. Too many cars, too many deer. The lines between life and death cross and cross again. And if we can strike a truce, it will only be temporary.

At the intersections, cars sputter and steam. While the clouds darken to the tint of dirty water, headlights click on. And as Marstall drives, I stare into the dark fields, peering into the headlights as they roll, thinking about a pair of eyes flashing gold.

Ian McCluskey is a graduate student at the University of Montana. He drives a big Ford truck and pays close attention to deer signs.
Although it’s too early to say for certain, a federal judge’s ruling calling the Yellowstone and central Idaho wolf reintroduction illegal probably will not affect a similar effort to reintroduce grizzly bears in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. Tom France of the National Wildlife Federation said Judge William Downes’ ruling “is very specific to wolf biology. I don’t see the case having applicability to the Selway-Bitterroot [grizzly bear] reintroduction.”

Downes ruled on Dec. 12 that the wolf reintroduction illegally reduced protection under the Endangered Species Act for Canadian and Montana wolves in the recovery area. Downes ordered that the reintroduced wolves and their offspring be removed but he stayed his own order pending an expected appeal.

The reintroduced wolves were designated an “experimental, nonessential population.” Ranchers catching wolves preying on livestock can legally kill the wolves, and people who find wolves on private property can attempt to drive them off. Such action would not be allowed if the animals were fully protected as endangered species.

The proposed grizzly reintroduction also uses the “experimental, nonessential” designation. However, the grizzly bear recovery coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Chris Servheen, is also confident that Downes’ ruling will have no affect on the grizzlies. “There’s a big difference between wolves and grizzly bears,” Servheen said. “Wolves were known to be in the area, both in the Yellowstone and in the Bitterroot, and wolves disperse over a wide area. “That was the basis of Judge Downes’ ruling—that the wolves were already in the area. We don’t have any evidence of grizzly bears in the Bitterroot in the past 50 years,” Servheen said, adding that grizzly bears do not disperse like wolves. “Despite the fact that we’ve had radio collars on over 550 bears, we’ve not seen any of these disperse between any of our ecosystems.”

Meanwhile, both Defenders of Wildlife and the National Wildlife Federation have appealed Downes’ wolf ruling to the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver. Tom France said the National Wildlife Federation is formulating its argument and expects to file a brief in early March. He’s confident the ruling will be overturned. “We think the judge was wrong in his interpretation of the law,” France said. The appeals probably will not be heard until late summer or early fall, according to France.
A Road Could Run Through It

Representative Robert Smith (R-OR) and Senator Gordon Smith (R-OR) have introduced companion bills that would declassify a portion of the Hells Canyon Wilderness Area (HCWA) to allow motorized access into the current Wilderness. The three-paragraph bill was presented as a “non-controversial,” “minor” boundary adjustment. However, this bill is opposed by a broad array of public and private interests.

Located within the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area (HCNRA), the land at stake lies along the western rim of the spectacular Hells Canyon of the Wild and Scenic Middle Snake River, which serves as the border between northeastern Oregon and west central Idaho. In 1975, Congress designated the HCWA within the HCNRA as a “rim-to-rim wilderness.” The western boundary, or rim, of the Wilderness Area rests on the divide between the Snake and Imnaha Rivers.

Proponents of this bill, such as the Baker County, Ore., Chamber of Commerce, cite additional scenic viewing opportunities as the main reason for increasing vehicular access to the rim. The bill’s opponents include the Hells Canyon Preservation Council, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Oregon Hunters Association, the Nez Perce Tribe and numerous outfitters and ranchers. They point out that 38 miles of the 50-mile western rim are already accessible to motorized vehicles and include developed overlooks and camping facilities.

If passed, the bill would allow the construction of a road to replace an existing trail through seven of twelve miles of the rim. At several points along the contested section, the rim is so narrow that the only ground wide enough for a road lies to the east—inside the Wilderness Area.

However, as Ric Bailey of the Hells Preservation Council has indicated, this section of the rim contains critical wildlife habitat and has exceptional wilderness, primitive recreation and archaeological values that would be negatively impacted by the increased human activity associated with roads.
Snowmobiles in the Great Burn?

by John Adams

Comprising 300,000 acres just west of Missoula, Montana, the Great Burn is one of the largest unprotected roadless areas in the Northern Rockies. Still visibly scarred in places by the fires of 1910, the Great Burn holds lush pockets of old-growth forests in riparian areas and is home to mountain goats, fisher, wolverines, elk and black bear. In addition to this valuable habitat, the Great Burn is the northern anchor of the Salmon-Selway ecosystem.

Currently, Lolo National Forest officials are revising their travel plan for the Bitterroot Crest and determining whether they will permit snowmobiling in the Great Burn. In its original Forest Plan, the Lolo National Forest wrote that it would manage the Great Burn as if it were wilderness. Despite this assertion, the Lolo has permitted snowmobiling, an activity prohibited in wilderness areas. The U.S. Forest Service has recommended that the Montana side of the Great Burn be designated wilderness—a recommendation made since completing the RARE I (Roadless Area Review and Evaluation) in 1972.

When Lolo first prepared its travel plan, which defines recreational and motorized access to the forest, snowmobile use was infrequent enough to be essentially ignored, and few if any restrictions on machine use were enacted. As improved technology and booming participation increased snowmobile use along the Bitterroot Crest, snowmobilers eventually expanded into new areas like the Great Burn—an expansion virtually ignored by the Lolo officials.

Their approach to off-road vehicles (ORVs) is typical of the Forest Service in the Northern Rockies. Travel plans for national forests in Montana, when they were last revised in the late 1980s, generally considered ORV use so minimal that it had no impact. Accordingly, ORV use was rarely regulated. Today, 58 percent of national forest trails in Montana permit some type of motorized use, even though non-motorized use accounts for 90 percent of forest-visitor days in Montana.

Bigger, faster machines and more riders have pushed ORV proponents farther into areas that saw little or no machine use ten years ago. Travel plans have become manifestly incapable of maintaining a fair balance between motorized and non-motorized use—and of protecting public lands from resource damage. In Montana, Forest Service policy currently permits motorized use in many roadless areas, even in congressionally designated wilderness study areas and land that the Forest Service itself recommends for protection.

Although motorized use does not legally preclude wilderness designation, it builds a vocal constituency opposed to designation: traditionally, Congress has not designated wilderness in known motorized areas.

A draft decision is expected by summer.
Bicycling Between The Borders

by Rick Thompson

On a map, the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route (GDMBR) looks like America has an EKG gone awry. The 2,500-mile trail runs from the Canadian border near Glacier National Park to the Mexican border at Indian Wells, New Mexico, snaking and roller-coastering its way across the geological spine of America at least 26 times.

The route was first imagined in 1989 by Adventure Cycling, a not-for-profit bicycle advocacy group headquartered in Missoula, Mont. Staff members worked with the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, state bureaucracies and private landowners to establish the world’s longest route for touring mountain bikers.

Completed in May of 1997, the GDMBR cuts through forests in Montana and Idaho, the vast Great Divide Basin in Wyoming, mountain resorts in Colorado and the rolling desert hills of New Mexico.

Adventure Cycling spent the last 20 years mapping over 22,000 miles of North America’s back roads for long-distance bicyclists, but when mountain bike touring became increasingly popular in the 1980s, the group decided to head for the hills. Although about ten percent of the Great Divide route is on paved roads, the rest is single-track, dirt roads and ATV trails, many of which can turn from friendly dusty paths to foot-thick, gumbo-like mud in heavy rain.

Of course, a downpour is just a minor example of Ma Nature’s mountain temperament. Dust-filled headwinds, rock slides and lightning storms should also be expected along the trail.

Fortunately, there are lesser “inconveniences” on the GDMBR, including cattle drives, cacti needles and one-car towns with nary a bike shop in sight. However, the trail rewards with cold mountain streams, tranquil forests and unforgettable landscapes.

If you’re looking for a rewarding adventure through the Rockies to challenge both mind and body—especially the legs and lungs—or if you would like to join the GDMBR inaugural group ride this summer, contact Adventure Cycling at (406) 721-8719. Six maps, each covering 500-mile sections of the trail, will be available for purchase in March.

Photo by Shelly Burnham

Camas — Deep Winter 1998

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Interim Policy Elicits Questions

Though many of us regularly use paved roads to get to our jobs or to drive to a recreation spot, we often forget about another system of roads that laces through the country—wildland roads. Recently, the Clinton Administration established an interim roads policy to protect roadless areas in the U.S., as a precursor to a long-term roads policy. This article begins with an explanation by Bethanie Walder, Director of Wildlands Center for Preventing Roads, of what that interim policy both includes and excludes. Three correspondents from the Northern Rockies region then discuss the wildland roads issues in their areas and suggest how the interim and future policy may or may not affect those areas. —LD

According to U.S. Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck, “Of all the things that we do on national forests, road building leaves the most lasting imprint on the landscape.” On the national forests, roadless areas are often considered the key to wildland protection and recovery. Dombeck has also stated that, “We have ample new scientific evidence of the immense social and environmental values provided by roadless areas.”

For the past two years, Congress has nearly passed proposals to cut federal funding for road construction on national forest lands. The Porter/Kennedy Amendment in the House and the Bryan Amendment in the Senate both challenged federal roadbuilding subsidies to the timber industry gained through direct appropriations and purchaser road credits. The Porter/Kennedy passed in a much watered-down version and the Bryan failed on a tie. The debate was intense.

To preclude a similar Congressional debate over road funding in 1998, the Clinton Administration, together with the Forest Service, announced on January 22, 1998 an interim policy for roadless area protection. This policy halts all road construction in roadless areas, though it does not stop resource extraction. It will last for 18 months while a long-term roads policy is developed.

The interim policy places a moratorium on all new road construction in inventoried roadless areas 5,000 acres or more as well as smaller areas adjacent to designated Wilderness. The policy applies to about 130 of the nation’s 156 national forests. The remaining forests are exempted because they have recently undergone revisions to their forest plan or because they are managed under the Northwest Forest Plan for spotted owls. Some of the forests exempted include the Tongass
National Forest in Alaska and many of the forests on the Pacific Coast, from Washington to Northern California.

The policy offers a moratorium only on roadbuilding in roadless areas. It does not exclude any resource extraction, such as logging or mining. Since these activities can continue to occur with helicopters, the policy offers very limited protection to roadless areas. The policy does not preclude the development of motorized recreational trails, as they are not considered roads under current Forest Service definitions. It provides limited protection for a limited number of roadless areas, with those in the Northern Rockies among the prime beneficiaries as they are some of the largest and most remote.

But roadless areas are only one piece in an increasingly complex puzzle of wildland protection and recovery. While efforts to protect roadless areas may be laudable, they are only the first step toward full protection of wildland ecosystems. Many more would be necessary, the first of which would include restoring ecological function and integrity to already degraded areas. A more holistic policy would exclude all types of road construction, including temporary roads, roads for ORVs/motorized recreation and user-created roads; exclude all resource extraction; be based on biological criteria rather than acreage; include inventoried as well as uninventoried roadless lands; and not exclude roadless areas in certain regions or forests.

While the interim Forest Service policy meets none of the above components in their entirety, it partially includes some. For instance, the policy does halt temporary as well as permanent road construction in roadless areas.

The Forest Service can use the following process to create an ecologically-based roads policy: The process would include the following steps: 1. Complete a comprehensive, ground-based inventory of all roads that exist on forest land; 2. Create comprehensive road density standards for wildlife habitat, with specific standards for road-sensitive species; 3. Prioritize the most ecologically significant roaded lands for protection and restoration; and 4. Prioritize ecosystem restoration through road removal and revegetation.

To protect wildland ecosystems, it is critical to prevent roads and the commercially extractive activities associated with them. To restore ecosystems, it may be necessary to remove roads. A policy that embodies these principles would be the first step toward protecting national forest lands, but not the final answer.

—Bethanie Walder
ne area that will be given some protection for the 18 months of the directive is the Kettle Range. The Kettle Range is on the Colville National Forest in northeast Washington, which is between the Kettle and Columbia rivers. The Kettles extend north into British Columbia, where they are called the Columbia Mountains. Elevation ranges from 1,600 feet at the Columbia River to over 7,500 feet. The lower elevations are a high desert, and forest cover begins at 2,000 feet. Precipitation varies from 8 to 35 inches per year. The Kettle Range is noted for its gentle, rolling terrain.

Plant and animal species are similar to the Central Rockies, as are the weather patterns. Grizzly bears, wolves and woodland caribou are not long gone, and may indeed still be present. Among the animals in the Kettles are mule deer, fisher, wolverine, moose, elk, black bear and river otters. Lynx are also present; in the mid-1970s, 56 were trapped there. Bird life includes bald eagles, osprey, loons and goshawk.

There has been no permanent protection status granted for any roadless area in the Kettle Range. The region was passed over in the 1984 Washington Wilderness bill by U.S. Representative Tom Foley (D-WA). Since then, 4,000 acres of roadless areas in the Kettle Range have been lost to logging and roads.

While there are many large roadless areas in the Kettles that will be protected by the interim policy, there are also many areas under 5,000 acres in size that will not be. These areas are often separated from official roadless areas by just one road.

Additionally, there is a problem in defining what constitutes a roadless area. The Forest Service, conservationists and the law are often at odds on this. One recent example is the Eagle Rock timber sale in the uninventoried 13 Mile Basin Roadless Area. This sale was taken to court, and if it could have been proven that it was a roadless area over 5,000 acres in size, it would have been dropped.

However, the judge ruled that it was substantially developed and the sale proceeded. The judge came to this conclusion based on evidence of 50-year-old stumps from trees that had been horse logged. While hiking the area, conservationists found only a few of these stumps. There are no existing roads in 13 Mile Basin. Three new miles of road will be built, and 260 acres will be logged in this area which contains old growth ponderosa pine, larch and Douglas fir. One unit in the sale includes trees over 21 inches in diameter.

One timber sale that will be affected by the directive is Deadman Creek. This was to have entered the Twin Sisters (18,675 acres) and Hoodoo roadless areas. In the Deadman Creek area, the Kettle Falls Ranger District was proposing to cut 20 million board feet, build 28 miles of new roads and reconstruct many roads.

The directive should prevent the building of eight miles of
road into Twin Sisters and Hoodoo. However, the area adjacent will be heavily logged and roaded. Two sales adjacent to the Profanity Peak roadless area, Alec and Sandtim, will probably not be affected. These sales have been brought before the 9th Circuit Court, and a decision is pending. Alec is a 110-acre roadless area of alpine fir and larch, while Sandtim contains old growth ponderosa pine. Neither sale is protected by the directive because they are too small.

So while the directive does provide protection in inventoried roadless areas over 5,000 acres in the Kettles, the amount of logging and roads right next to some of these areas will be severe. Small roadless areas near inventoried roadless areas will be sold. Areas that are not considered inventoried roadless areas by the Forest Service, such as 13 Mile Basin will not be protected. While the directive will delay some major battles for 18 months, valuable wildlife habitat and wild areas in the Kettles will continue to be lost.
On national forests in the Northern Rockies, more than 50,000 miles of roads now crisscross and fragment what once seemed like unbroken forest and wildland. For many animals, such as elk and grizzly bear, roads pose hazards such as legal hunting, illegal poaching and lost habitat. Noise and exhaust from motorized use on roads and trails can cause animals to abandon nests or dens and add stress to individuals struggling to find enough food during lean months. Forest roads also disturb ground, providing and a means for rapid dispersal of noxious weeds.

For all of Yellowstone National Park’s borderland outside Montana, some two hundred miles in Idaho and Wyoming, there are but two paved roads that pierce its perimeter. To the casual visitor, perhaps tethered to asphalt in a shimmering Winnebago, this represents some of America’s most precious wild country. The hinterlands of the world’s first national park still harbor grizzly bear, elk, bison, wolves, bighorn sheep, geothermal wonders and thousands upon thousands of acres of protected natural beauty.

It all sounds too good to be true, and sadly, that may well be the case. Although conditions within the park warrant plenty of concern with a recently decimated bison herd, a burgeoning population of “experimental, non-essential” wolves court-ordered for removal and a National Park Service unable to close even a single stretch of road to study the impacts of winter snowmobile use, conditions outside the protected confines of Yellowstone can be truly alarming.

Abutting Yellowstone National Park to the southwest are the Targhee National Forest, in Idaho, and the Bridger-Teton National Forest, in Wyoming. From the air, the Targhee-Yellowstone border leaps forth in particularly vivid contrast, with a barren edge of clearcut forest stretching for dozens of miles from the Continental Divide southward. Amidst the clearcuts, long tendrils of road circumscribe the landscape.

In 1994, a Bozeman, Montana-based conservation organization, Predator Project, created the Roads Scholar Project in an effort to document the roaded condition of the landscape. In particular, Roads Scholar set out to determine road densities in grizzly bear habitat and to assess the effectiveness of road closures in selected bear management units (BMUs). Roads Scholar Project studied three BMUs in the Targhee and Bridger-Teton National Forests and found 84 miles of “ghost roads,” which are roads that have not been included in agency road inventories. Compounding the problem, of 101 road closure points checked during the study, only 22 effectively excluded motorized access.
Most roads on Targhee and Bridger-Teton National Forest lands were built to access timber sales. In Bridger-Teton, most cutting areas and the roads leading to them are 15 to 35 years old. Grazing and hunting activity, along with sporadic timber sales, are the main uses on Bridger-Teton roads. But increasingly, Wyoming towns such as Jackson and Pinedale are turning to wilderness-based economies of outfitting and backcountry recreation. Logging roads provide access for some, but many forest users now favor roadless conditions that provide better views, backpacking, hunting and fishing.

The Targhee National Forest officials are in the final stages of revising Targhee’s Forest Plan, which establishes forest policy for at least the next ten years. The new plan would reduce the number of open system roads by 12 percent and open nonsystem roads by 64 percent, as well as restrict summer off-road vehicle use on 79 percent of the Forest’s land (cross country motorized use restrictions are currently almost non-existent). While these may be positive steps, Targhee National Forest has thus far failed to incorporate plans to obliterate the roads it closes.

With existing closure effectiveness on Targhee’s BMUs hovering around 50 percent, according to Roads Scholar Project inventories, it remains something of an open question just how much secure habitat the new Targhee Forest Plan would establish. Tom Skeele, Predator Project’s Executive Director points out, “Our information shows that the Forest Service is making decisions based on inaccurate information. Until the agency incorporates studies like the Roads Scholar Project inventories into its road management program, habitat degradation is going to continue.”

Important discussions continue to take place in Washington, D.C. concerning the protection of remaining roadless lands and current Forest Service policy that gives a crisp financial incentive for building new roads. Meanwhile, the national forest lands surrounding Yellowstone Park and elsewhere still suffer from steady deterioration of habitat secure from motorized intrusion. Most national forest lands already have roads and therefore will not win consideration as a part of a new roadless policy the Clinton Administration may put forth. In order to better protect the roaded bulk of the 191 million acres of national forest in the U.S., policy-makers and the public will at some point need to turn their attention to what conditions exist on and around the roads.

On the cut-over lands or roaded lands of Targhee and Bridger-Teton National Forests, comprehensive road obliteration and habitat restoration programs will prove essential. Failing this, Yellowstone National Park, even without its share of troubles, will increasingly sit island-like in a sea of industrial activity and managerial neglect.
The Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area (WSA) in Montana’s Gallatin Range, at 151,000 acres, is the largest unprotected roadless area in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. While the southern portion of the range enjoys protection as part of Yellowstone Park, much of the range has no formal protection and may never receive such protection. But until Congress makes a final decision about the WSA, even the interim roads policy won’t offer much protection for the Gallatin Range as a whole.

The Gallatin Range is an immense area of high, rolling ridges, alpine flower gardens, craggy ten thousand foot peaks and cold tarns. Forests of lodgepole pine, Douglas fir, aspen, subalpine fir and whitebark pine are interspersed with remote, wet meadows. This is critical habitat for grizzly bears and all wilderness-dependent species in Greater Yellowstone, including bighorn sheep, mountain goat, wolverine, wolf, and cougar. It is also headwaters of world-class rivers such as the Gallatin, Madison and Gardiner. Just north of Yellowstone is the unique Gallatin Petrified Forest, the world’s most extensive fossil forest, where stumps of million-year-old trees are still anchored in the ridgetops.

There are already many roads in the range. The northern foothills and western drainages of the Gallatin Range have suffered extensive roadbuilding and logging since the turn of the century. Hyalite Canyon alone has had over 100 million board feet of timber extracted, and there are over 90 miles of inventoried road in just this one drainage. Only one major drainage, South Cottonwood, remains roadless in the northern and western portions of the range. Since this drainage is within the WSA, it receives protection through the interim policy.

Increasing Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) and snowmobile use is damaging the fragile alpine soils and trails and disrupting wildlife populations in the Gallatin Range. Despite the Wilderness Study Area status of the roadless area, which requires maintenance of the wilderness character of the backcountry, the Forest Service has widened and upgraded hiking trails to accommodate four-wheel ORVs. Four-wheel ORVs turn hiking trails into de-facto roads which, although not wide enough to carry actual auto traffic, face an ever-growing onslaught from what are essentially miniature, one-man jeeps. Since the Forest Service does not consider these roads, they are not included in the interim policy.

However, because of public pressure, the Forest Service has closed two key trails in the Gallatins to four-wheel ORVs for a year to study the effects of these machines. Motorcycle use continues to increase, largely due to the recent upgrading of the Gallatin Crest trail, a spectacular route winding along the top of ridges and peaks at nine to ten thousand feet.
Though the controversial Hyalite timber sale in Hyalite Canyon is currently shut down under court order, many other timber sales are looming. The Gallatin National Forest estimates 14,560 acres of suitable timber within the Wilderness Study Area. If the WSA does not receive wilderness designation, logging could occur—even without new roads.

The Gallatin Land Exchange is a congressionally-mandated effort to acquire extensive private lands within the Gallatin Range. Lack of federal funds for land acquisition means that other public resources, such as trees, are being offered to the principle landowner, Big Sky Lumber (BSL) of Portland, Ore.. Up to 50 million board feet of timber sales associated with the land swap could occur over the next five years, with sales and associated roadbuilding proposed in nearly every drainage on the north and west end of the range. Meanwhile, ongoing logging on private lands by BSL is further degrading dwindling forests. If there are any roadless area timber sales proposed as part of the exchange package, it's possible that they could be curtailed by the roads policy. But we have yet to see the final package.

Early in 1998, BSL announced that they are no longer interested in public timber as part of the land exchange package, as the prospect of massive timber sales on the Gallatin National Forest had aroused intensive opposition from regional conservationists. However, BSL’s demands and public position shift frequently, and contents of the final land exchange package remain to be seen.

According to the Montana Wilderness Association (MWA), there are even more roadless acres in the Gallatins that were left out of the WSA. Calling for Wilderness designation for 202,000 acres in the Gallatin Range, MWA’s proposal shows that over 50,000 roadless acres were not considered. The Native Forest Network has collected hundreds of petition signatures for protection of the entire WSA as designated wilderness. Citizens and conservation groups are appealing to Big Sky Lumber, Congress and the Forest Service to keep the timber sales out of the Gallatin Land Exchange.

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Gloria Flora Talks Tough about Integrity and Commitment

by Leeann Drabenstott

Gloria Flora, Supervisor of the Lewis and Clark National Forest, decided last fall against allowing new oil and gas leases in the Lewis and Clark portion of the Rocky Mountain Front. This decision, considered atypical of the Forest Service, raised Flora into the national limelight. In this in-depth interview with Camas, she explains her motivations for the decision and also discusses candid thoughts on her experiences in the Forest Service and as a resident of the Northern Rockies. —LD

Camas: I'd like to get an idea of how you came to the Forest Service and to the West. What's your story?

Flora: How I came to the West: I was born and raised in western Pennsylvania, and I saw the Rockies Mountains for the first time when I was, I think, about 16 years old, and I knew instantly that I had been born in the wrong place and definitely needed to get into a mountain environment.

The Alleghenies just didn't cut it for you, huh?

Uh, no. (laughter) They were nice, but little and rolling in comparison. When I finished my education—my formal university education—in Pennsylvania, at Penn State University (I got a BS in Landscape Architecture), I was working at a firm and they offered to put me on full-time once I graduated. I turned that down and said, "Oh no, I'm going West." I ended up on the Pacific Coast for a very short time, but had put in applications for the Park Service and Forest Service because my interests really lie in much larger landscapes than in planting flowers in someone's yard or urban developments.

So in rather short order, I was very fortunate to get a job offer from the Forest Service in northern California as a landscape architect trainee. I stayed there for almost three years when some downsizing encouraged me to move on, and that's when I moved to Libby, Montana. That got me connected to the Northern Rockies, so all of my subsequent positions have been bouncing around in kind of a big circle around the Northern Rockies.

What are the major steps along that way from being a trainee in landscape architecture to becoming the supervisor of a national forest? What are some of the major milestones you had to reach?

I actually took a fairly traditional path. I started about twenty years ago and I went from a trainee to a journey level landscape architect, and then eventually a program manager for visual resource management. That's what I was doing as a landscape architect: I was focusing on how to design activities so they had the least amount of contrast with the natural environment.

From there I moved out into a district to try to diversify. I felt fairly constrained by the career potential in landscape architecture, and I was also getting tired of making recommendations that weren't getting listened to. I decided I needed to set my sights elsewhere.

When I first got into the Forest Service, if you were not a forester and if you were not male, preferably white, you didn't become a district ranger, let alone a forest supervisor. It's only been in my career span with the Forest Service that women have begun moving into positions of leadership...

So from the supervisor's office I moved out to district—I was still on the Kootenai National Forest—then I had the chance to go up into the region as a resource specialist for visual resource management, which in my opinion is an underutilized tool in the Forest Service's toolkit.

When I first became a district ranger, I was assigned to the Whitefish Ranger District. I worked there for about three years, and then I moved over to the Lolo, and then I moved to the Clearwater, and then I was there two years as a district ranger. And then I decided it was time for another career move. I was still interested in visual resource management, and I was also interested in managing in the private sector. So I moved back to the Forest Service, and I've been in management ever since.

Camas — Deep Winter 1998
Forest in northwest Montana. At the district level, I took over kind of a multiple resource responsibility, and then from there I definitely set my sights on district ranger. In '86 I became District Ranger on the Selway district in northcentral Idaho. After being District Ranger, it was fairly obvious that where I was really heading was forest supervisor.

I then spent a few years on the Selway, and then I moved to Jackson, Wyoming...; I was there about 5 years, but again, finally the freeze was lifted—we had a very long freeze on filling line officer positions—and I put my hat in the ring. Of course, staying in close proximity of the Rockies, particularly to the Northern Rockies, was my objective, so Lewis and Clark was like—Woo!—back to Region One and back to Montana, and yee haw! It was a very wonderful move for me.

I'm wondering if, as you are talking about the increase in number of women in positions in leadership in the Forest Service during your career, you feel that the attitude toward women on the part of colleagues and the public has changed accordingly? Or is there still some resistance?

I would say it has changed accordingly, but one step behind. I know that the women that really broke the barriers—and I kind of view them as the first generation—really hit the wall hard. They really had some challenges and faced a lot of internal suspicion and concern. It was change and we were an organization that was essentially modeled after the Russian military, and so it wasn't an organization that had a lot of room in its mind and its attitude to accept change. To have women in charge was very radical. Women were always in the Forest Service, but they were behind the scenes. They were the spouses of the District Ranger, the lookout, the secretary who was really the office manager and administrator and took care of everything while the guys were out in the woods having a good time.

And so, women were always a very integral part of the Forest Service, but to be elevated to a position where they could be supervisors? It was hard for many people because they saw it as losing tradition. Not so much that they were all misogynists or couldn't wait until we were all...
dead—it wasn’t that at all in my opinion. I felt I was kind of in the second wave; I think I was the 35th woman to assume the district ranger position. So I wasn’t brand new, but considering that we have hundreds and hundreds of ranger districts, I am still a minority and sometimes a surprise to people—many times the first female supervisor anyone ever had.

I had my fair share of discrimination—nothing terrible, you know. Attitudes. Yet I found that, particularly with the employees that I had an opportunity to work with one-on-one on a daily basis, that those attitudes, concerns and resentments faded away very quickly. I have had people get right in my face—new employees—and say, “The only reason you got this job is because of affirmative action. You’re not qualified; we’re all going to go down the tubes because you’re leading us.” I think they were expressing some very real fears based on their own perceptions, but every one of those folks, after working with me—and I’m sure working with other women—had their minds changed and said, “Well, hey, you’ve got the skills, you’ve got the qualifications, we enjoy your leadership.”

But then there was also the element that I was a landscape architect. I came in the seventies with the “-ologists,” on the wave after the National Forest Management Act. Particularly landscape architecture was kind of a shaky, gooey thought for them—if it isn’t really science-based, it’s really scary. And I was also very young, and I was female. So why people copped an attitude, I couldn’t pin it solely on gender.

Well, what major decisions and choices do we make in our lives that are not deeply and intrinsically connected to our emotions?

And if you think that time—or lack of it—affects how you do your job.

I try to spend a fair amount of time in the field. Obviously in winter, because of restricted access and road conditions, I don’t get out nearly as much. I’d much rather spend all of my time out in the field.

But you know, my job is really one of networking, communicating and discussing, rather than just sitting here fooling around with paper. I’m not in the office very often. I’m travelling a lot to Helena, to Missoula, around to the forests, to my district offices. So it’s a rare occasion when I’m in the office for a whole week.

And you’ve been here for just a few years?

Yes, I came here in July of ’95.

Wow—what a busy two years! I’m interested to know about something else, though. There’s a lot of talk these days about “connection to place,” and I’m wondering what you think contributes to a person’s connection to place.

Sure. “Sense of place” is actually the phrase we’re starting to use to describe that phenomenon of people’s connection to the landscape. My training as a landscape architect and my early experiences in the Forest Service really led me to a keen interest in the relationship of people to their landscapes. I say “landscapes” plural because we have different landscapes in our life. We have our home landscape—the area where we grew up or were raised. And then we have our fantasy landscapes, to where we think about...
escaping. I think landscapes speak to us symbolically as well...

So when you talk about sense of place, or when I talk about it, the things I think about are the symbolic meaning of the landscape, what it conjures up in our memory, how it makes us feel. I think values are a real pivotal element in how we relate to a landscape.

It’s very easy for me to envision a person who was born on a farm or a ranch in eastern Montana just standing out there and sticking their hands in the dirt and just being overcome with a feeling of love for the land and a connectedness. To some people it might be like, “Oh my god, it’s a wheat field. It goes on for miles; it’s boring; it’s nothing.” But to the person that’s been there and seen it through the seasons and seen how the vegetation changes and how the animals interact with the vegetation, and the memory of working the soil...You know, all that builds up and really makes people identify with a place.

And it doesn’t even have to be a place that you’ve lived on or in a place that you’ve seen. That’s where it gets really interesting and where it really connects with national forests, because national forests belong to the American people.

That’s when we get more into the human dimension. It covers all the wide range of needs that we have. There’s been quite a bit of research about that, but not the research that the Forest Service has typically focused on. We do have social scientists, and we do think of those kinds of things, but it’s been fairly recently that we’ve felt comfortable with talking about such things. It seems so esoteric, like “Oh, it’s just emotional.”

Well, actually, I just did buy tires and I was very emotionally attached to soft, rubber tires because they really grip. They’re great. So get deep tread, soft rubber—they’re perfect (laughter).

Well, I could see how that could work for me! Fear of driving, deeply treaded tires...

Well, actually, I just did buy tires and I was very emotionally attached to soft, rubber tires because they really grip. They’re great. So get deep tread, soft rubber—they’re perfect (laughter).

So what else influenced such a major decision? From where did some of that courage or that umph to finally make that move emerge?

I knew it was probably one of the biggest decisions I would have the honor of making. I viewed it as a tremendous responsibility to do the right thing. That was really critical for me—to do the right thing. I noticed how I was answering questions when I was speaking with groups—whether they were groups from the oil...
industry, or students, or writers, or whatever. And when people asked me a question, it was very difficult to answer.

I realized that to make a decision like no new leases on the Rocky Mountain Front, you look to the owners of this land, 80 percent of whom responded to this DEIS, which is completely consistent with what people have been saying to me on the street and at every meeting for the past 20 years. The consistency is there. They don’t want any leasing. I certainly weighed that. That’s not a typical decision; we usually compromise.

Obviously, I thought about the personal side of it: “What will my employees think? My god, they’ve labored for years trying to make something happen and following the law and stuff, and will they feel like ‘It’s a waste. Why did we bother?’” That isn’t at all the case, but of course it crossed my mind.

I thought about what my peers—other Forest Supervisors—would think, and how that would affect things they were doing or working on. I considered: I could get labeled, this may lessen my ability to make other meaningful decisions because of these stereotypes. I could be sent off to Ekalaka—not that I have anything against Ekalaka, but that’s what we always say in the Forest Service because it is so remote. I’m a fairly new Forest Supervisor and I really wasn’t looking to truncating my career, but at the same time, I played out the worst-case scenario: what happens if I make a decision like the preferred alternative?

I realized that the worst-case scenario would be waking up every day wondering if you were a sell-out. If you just didn’t have the guts to listen to the people. To be a real, genuine person, to be real to my values and true to my job as a steward of public lands, there was only one choice—and that was the choice I made.

Your decision suggests to me that you envision a future for the Northern Rockies that is not dependent on extractive industry. Would you say that’s true? If so, what would it look like for towns like Choteau and Augusta?

I’m not predicting or suggesting that no extractive activity is the rule and is exactly what should happen on the Front. My decision is not a long-term decision in the grand scale of things. I
just felt that at this point in time, there wasn’t overwhelming evidence that we needed to conduct development activities like oil and gas leasing on the Front.

However, that’s not to say that I believe the whole thing ought to be wilderness. Actually, no. I think that we’ve got the Bob Marshall Wilderness complex that really preserves a critical and key ecosystem. But you also need front country—that’s the name I call it—and by that I mean lands that are perhaps undeveloped but provide a different range of opportunities, have a different kind of accessibility, have different options open to them, rather than an either/or where you have lands that are fully open for development or wilderness. You need that in-between land also.

**DO YOU THINK YOUR DECISION WILL CREATE WAVES THAT WILL AFFECT FUTURE DECISIONS IN ADJACENT NATIONAL FORESTS? DO YOU SEE A MOVEMENT IN THE WHOLE AREA, OTHER THAN IN JUST THE LEWIS AND CLARK?**

Most of the Front is the Lewis and Clark Forest, but if you look out at the larger landscape—including the real Northern Rockies (we call this area the Northern Rockies, and actually if you look at them, they’re not north at all—it goes up way north from here)—I think when you look at things in a much larger context, will this decision influence other land managers? Yeah, it may.

The response has been so positive and so many people have written to me saying “You’ve renewed my faith in the Forest Service. I’m so excited about this. This is so important.” That kind of reinforcement is not lost on people; it’s certainly not lost on me. I’m not saying that the nature of the decision will suddenly create a wave of everyone going, “No development!” I don’t think that. What I hope for is that the influence that stems from this is one of being true to the process, trying to avoid political intervention, engaging the public and responding, recognizing in very real and tangible ways that these people we’re talking to own this land.

Well, they’re part owners—there’s 250 million owners out there—but the owners who want to talk about it are speaking for quite a few people. It’s very important that you listen to them. You’re not going to die if you listen to the public if it seems to be counter to conventional wisdom.

**BUT YET, IT SEEMS THAT’S A PRETTY NEW STEP FOR THE FOREST SERVICE, ISN’T IT? TO BEGIN TO REALLY LISTEN? DO YOU THINK THERE’S BEEN A SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN YOUR TIME IN THE FOREST SERVICE?**

Absolutely, but it’s been slow. We’ve had NEPA since 1969. It took us eight to ten years to figure out what to do with it and how to deal with it. Yeah, we were way into public information, and thought that was a real advance—that we at least told people what we were doing. So it’s been a very slow evolution, and it’s been difficult because we had been rewarded for years for doing the kind of job we had been doing as the Forest Service. And we were producing. We were a can-do agency, and there was nothing you could do to hold us back. Point us in a direction and infuse us with some dollars, and we would produce.

It was very different to suddenly start listening to people who didn’t have a forestry background. Then we got into the era of when we started to lose lawsuits, and it was like: *Well, the public told us they were absolutely going to have a fit if we did this. We did it anyhow, they had a fit, they took us to court, and they won.*

So we started to listen a little more, but I don’t think that until you really just commit to the fact that the American people own this land and we’re the stewards—they depend on us for advice, guidance, interpretation of natural processes, thinking in long terms temporally, thinking in big terms spatially—that people are really willing to rely on us.

Actually, I think the majority of people are very willing to rely on us to make those kinds of
decisions. But, we made enough mistakes and crossed enough people in terms of blowing them off that we know we have to change. We have to adapt....

But it’s been fairly recent—this whole concept of the human part of ecosystem management. In 1992, when we were sort of launching the boat, if you will, for ecosystem management on the heels of our new perspectives effort, we had six basic principles. And there wasn’t one that dealt with people and their relationship to the landscape. I was fortunate enough to get involved with a very small group of people who said, “This isn’t going to cut it. We really need to have some addition.”

So we developed a little diagram with the interlocking circles of the physical/biological/human dimensions. We started talking about the human dimension, and we wrote the seventh principle and it was incorporated into Forest Service vision. It wasn’t like it was original thought or anything, but we were attempting to elevate and put on the same plane the human concerns. That doesn’t mean that only preservationist kind of thoughts equate with the human dimension. The human dimension includes dimensions that we’ve talked about a lot over time, you know—the social effects of the decision, and the economic effects.

Bringing the human dimension up onto an equal playing field with the biological and physical suddenly—absolutely—requires you to communicate, to collaborate, to be responsive, to develop integrated decisions. And usually we can find a point on the continuum where people are accepting. It might be grudging consent, but we come close. If we can just get grudging consent from our biggest detractors, then we’re really doing something. We’re getting somewhere.

I’m wondering about the budget process for the Forest Service. To what extent does politics come into play and affect your role—and others—in trying to fund your work?

Politics does play a big role in it, but I’m not weeping and moaning about it because it’s difficult to think of decisions that are made that are not politically motivated. I think it’s unrealistic to think that politics are not going to play a role, but that can be balanced by an active, interested public.

We often elect people that don’t really exactly represent what we’d like to see. It’s incumbent on people not just to show up at the voting booths, but keep showing up and keep speaking out, keep making their voices heard. People can counterbalance the political influence. There’s not a politician around who will just blast forward mindlessly if they’re getting peppered with comments and concerns. So, yeah, budget is influenced a lot by politics.

It’s also influenced by our past history—how we traditionally did things. The elaborate tracking systems, the elaborate ways of reporting. I think people in the past have been control freaks and have invented these horrendous reporting systems that attempt to prevent us from spending money in any other way than what they exactly see fit.

Most of us feel we’d be much better off if someone just said, “Okay, you have this much money and we want you to produce these things and provide these services—go for it.” That would be a heck of a lot easier than having the money come down in tightly defined little channels, and then we report back up in tightly defined little channels. Ecosystems don’t work that way; budgets for ecosystems don’t work that way.

I’m concerned about the divisiveness in communities. What do you think is at the heart of divisiveness in a community, like when you see the public interacting in polarized camps?

Values, very definitely. Lifestyle choices—real basic stuff. When you have intelligent, lawmaking people who are on two different sides of an issue sit down and talk to each other, they can be very civil and they can find areas of agreement, and even in many cases come to workable solutions.
You asked me earlier about the effects on communities along the Front, like Augusta. You have in the context in oil and gas leasing some people in Augusta who think, “Oh, shit! I could have made a killing. Just think if they started drilling a well and they needed...pencils! And I’ve got pencils. Hell, I could sell a billion pencils.” You have that kind of thought, but what’s not in that thinking is who you’re selling a billion pencils to.

If you sell a billion pencils to the 2,000 people who are living in trailer parks, causing your schools to overflow, your taxes to go up, and your sewers to max out—who fight with you over your water rights, and are digging up the land that you play on to build another subdivision—when you unroll the whole scenario, some people that have expressed the choice for not developing do so because they don’t want to see change in their community. They sacrificed a lot to move to that community or to stay in that community. If people want to go through that kind of change, that’s great, but there are other of people that don’t.

So it could be resistance to change or a desire for change....Although it’s family ties, too. You know, “We never did like your family, ‘cause your Uncle Joe punched my Uncle Larry in 1951...”(laughter).

So, what do you regret most in your career?

(sigh)...That’s a stumper...I regret the pain that I’ve seen individuals have to suffer—I mean Forest Service employees—because of hatred, because of the winds of change. Somebody gets caught in the gears when things are changing—the career they envisioned for themselves doesn’t unfold, their capabilities can’t be used. Or else, they felt they had to move to places and it took a horrible toll on their family.

I think the Forest Service has made tremendous strides forward for positive change for the better, like more women in leadership. But what does that mean? That means that a lot of men that had career aspirations and were told “If you do this, do this, do this, you’re guaranteed,” well, the rules changed halfway through. This was extremely painful for people, and I hate to see people suffer like that. That’s what I regret. I wish we could have made the changes that we have made with much less pain.

This is a lighter question. Who would you consider one of your Western heroes?

Lewis and Clark. It’s kind of obvious, but—

—Actually, I was wondering if you thought about or read anything of Lewis and Clark as you were thinking about the decision for the Rocky Mountain Front.

Oh, yeah, definitely. The Rocky Mountain Front has, with the exception of free-roaming bison, every animal species that was present when Lewis and Clark were here. The grizzly bears, in some parts of the Front, are Plains grizzly bears. We don’t have plains grizzlies anywhere else! This is wild! This is exciting! That means we’re doing something right....

Lewis and Clark? Yeah, you bet! That’s a perfect example of how important these landscapes are to our heritage. This is what it was. This is what they saw when they walked out. God, could you imagine thinking that they were going to just go up and over a hill and blithely glide down the Columbia? Get out to one of the
tops of those peaks and look out—look at that! Holy shit! Could you imagine what went through their minds when they got to the top and thought, “We just went through a hellatious experience, and as far as the eye can see, we’ve got a hellatious experience”?

There’s a string of people I hate to pick out for fear of not showing sufficient respect for people I might forget, but I think about early rangers, early homesteaders. The courage of early pioneers. Certainly I have great respect for the American Indians who inhabited this part of the world. This is rough country. You have to be ingenious and tough and really understand how to live on the landscape because the Rocky Mountains are not cordial.

...And then, writers who are so talented, like Ivan Doig—his sweeping way of describing landscapes that brought the landscape alive for so many people who will never see it...

**When you received comments from the public about the Front, did people refer to writers from the West? How much does that writing end up weaseling its way into the political process?**

That’s really hard to quantify. Some people specifically mentioned reading about works by a particular person, or just generically. Or by photographers that capture the majesty of the landscape, like Rick Graetz in *Montana Magazine*. People mention that, but I think that sometimes people don’t even know why they say things or why they have feelings.

It could be because of something they saw or read. Sometimes they know, but don’t want to say, “Well, I read this poem,” because they think, “They’ll think I’m a dork, so I better talk about endangered species.” One thing that came up repeatedly was the legacy to children and grandchildren. That was a very recurring theme.

**Do you have children or family that have moved into the area for whom you feel you are preserving the area?**

Um, kinda sorta. I have a stepson and my...we call her our foster daughter, but legally she’s not—she’s a friend of my son’s who moved in with us when we lived in Idaho. So she’s one of ours, and recently they got married. I became a grandmother in December.

But you know, it’s funny. I wasn’t really thinking about my grandson necessarily when I was making the decision. I was so caught up in the whole thing...Somebody asked me that one time and I said, “Oh, yeah—him, too!” I was thinking about it in broader terms. But certainly, my kids were very supportive, and I’d certainly be talking around the dinner table—they had since moved to Helena—about issues and concerns. It was very meaningful for me to have them say, “Thank you. This is cool. I like this, this is meaningful to me, this is important to my generation.”

**What advice would you give to a young, passionate environmentalist?**

Stay clear, but recognize the influences. Sometimes we don’t think broadly enough about really what makes things tick. I think that any environmentalist, to make a difference for the rest of this century and into the next, has to think about the human dimension.

I think environmentalists tend to key into the landscape and get so passionate about the landscape, that they write people out of the equation. People are a very important part of the equation, and they need to have meaning in their life.

In many cases in the United States, that means having a job. We have to recognize that we can have jobs and we can preserve elements of the environment that we feel are essential. It means some really radical changes in the kind of jobs we have and how we use resources...

We’re operating on a linear system of using our resources: we shove it in one end, we fool with it to produce something, we have a bunch of crap that is a by-product of production and have the consumer who uses it and chucks it in a landfill. That’s a dead-end. And then we have the problem of pollution and the problem of land-
fills. What are we gonna do with all this waste?

Nothing functions on a linear system and survives, and we have been operating on a linear system because we have this tremendous wealth at our disposal: if we can’t get it here, we’re going to go to Central America and get it.... We have got to modify the way that we conduct our lives, modify how we consume. We have to start taxing—because money talks—pollution, waste. It’s real simple—tax bad, reward good. We haven’t quite figured that out yet. We tax good, reward bad: You want to move your corporation off-shore, you want to move it to Mexico or to Indonesia, you want to produce shoes and pay workers about 25 cents a day to produce them? Here—we’ll give you a tax break. Here you go. Plus, we’ll beat the shit out of this other country to make sure they don’t charge any outrageous export taxes. We’ll make everything so convenient for you to earn money by exporting U.S. jobs.

Why are we doing that? That is stupid. Why do we reward companies or give them breaks when they are polluting, when they are destroying communities? You know, toxic communities—Love Canal! That’s outrageous! That’s a sin! It’s a crime against humans; it’s a crime against nature! It’s weird and twisted. Why do we let it happen?

Well, it’s because we’re so locked into this linear way of thinking about the way that we use resources, and that has got to change. If we taxed the crap out of people for throwing things away, do you think we would throw as much stuff away? No. No way—we wouldn’t.

We know there is a limit to fossil fuels. We know it. And do you think we will slow down for a minute? Not unless someone raises the price at the gas pump to $4.50 a gallon. Then we’ll slow down—for a while, until we get used to seeing $4.50, and then we’ll just pay $4.50 and off we’ll go on our merry way...

It’s great to be impassioned about landscapes—I absolutely love natural resources and it’s part of my being—but you get myopic if you don’t look at the big picture.

**Whew! So what’s your motto?**

Well, I have mottos for all walks of life.

**Let’s go more with your personal life. What is a motto that keeps you fueled day-to-day?**

I’d rather not share that. I’m a real spiritual person. I try to be, let’s say. That’s where I get my strength. When I talk about the big picture in my personal life, I look at the really big picture. I look at infinity, so that’s what fuels me.... We as humans, I believe, are here for a reason. We have a purpose and we have a responsibility to other human beings and to the landscape. The Creator gave us something really special, and He gave us the ability to do the right thing. And that’s really what we need to shoot for: to think what is our responsibility to our neighbors and to the landscape that supports us. It’s all connected. There is no difference between being nice to your neighbor and the landscape.

**Is there a phrase that you find yourself repeating at meetings with people you work with—a phrase you might consider a motto?**

Yeah, with employees I tell them that I only care about a couple of things: honesty, integrity and ethical behavior. I tell them, “That’s what you’ll be evaluated on, that’s what I care about. That’s all I need to tell you to do your job correctly. If you can be honest, fair and ethical, and show integrity....” If we could all just rise up to that challenge, then I don’t think there are insurmountable obstacles. That’s what I’ve been telling my employees for a while and no one’s argued with me yet.

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The Sky, the Stars, the Wilderness

by Rick Bass
Houghton Mifflin, 1997

Reviewed by Erin Ebersberger

Rick Bass makes his home in the Yaak Valley of northwest Montana, where he spends much of his life outside. Especially in this new collection of novellas, his writing reflects time well spent on the land.

In this book, Bass shows the mystery and magic of the natural world by spending time on the details. The daytime hiding places of luna moths, the habits of broad-billed hummingbirds and the presence of fireflies are a few of the intricacies he examines. Bass seems in tune with the wise, old grandfather of the title story who believes adamantly that the natural history of Texas is “being sacrificed on the altar of generalization.” Yet, in this book Bass makes nature much more than a brightly painted backdrop. He succeeds in bringing the stories of nature in to our consciousness and solidifying his characters’ and readers’ connection to the land.

The first novella, “The Myths of Bears,” is a twisted love story between a mind-crazed man named Trapper, and his wife, Judith. Judith crashes through their cabin window one night while Trapper is having one of his “fits.” Once she has escaped, Trapper pursues her like an animal through the forest for many months. In this story, Bass illuminates the interplay between predator and prey. Trapper is a predator. He is experienced and well-trained at trapping animals. Judith is his prey and thrives on the thrill of being chased. She seems to almost want to be caught, so she can escape again. Bass’ descriptions and metaphors here convey the fascinating and raw truth of their dysfunctional, habitual relationship. Both Trapper and Judith are tied to the land—permanently connected to the forest, the mountains and each other.

The next story, “Where the Sea Used to Be,” is the tale of an oil geologist named Wallis, who is more aroused by the possibility of finding oil than by his pretty, young girlfriend. Yet it’s not the money that excites Wallis, but rather a knowledge and sense of the dark, ancient substance buried under layers of crust in the southern Appalachians. This is the most human-centered of the three stories; Bass focuses more on the interactions between the characters than on their relationship to the land. This story pales next to the other two because it lacks the element that sparks Bass’ finest writing—the outdoors.

In the third and title story, “The Sky, The Stars, The Wilderness,” Bass takes on a female voice, that of Anne, who is revisiting her memories of growing up on the Prade Ranch in Texas. Her mother died on the ranch when Anne was a child, and mother is “planted” in the center of their land near the huge oak tree. Anne’s connection to the land is synonymous with her connection to her mother. This story is filled with descriptions of what it’s like to get outside to feel and live with the land, as Anne strives to feel and live with her mother. Anne and the rest of her family know their land intimately; they live their lives by the return of the golden-cheeked warblers and the sound of the Nueces river.

Bass’ descriptions throughout the book are undeniably beautiful, but at times border on the excessively romantic. In these stories, he leaves out much of the harshness that goes with living close to the land. But then, this is fiction and much of Bass’ non-fiction confronts the sad realities of land that lacks responsible stewards.

In these novellas, Bass weaves the mysteries of nature with the lives of the characters, making the two almost indistinguishable. This book reminds us to get out of the house and feel the world around us, the world to which we are so inextricably linked.

Camas — Deep Winter 1998
Once labeled the most critically endangered mammal in North America, the black-footed ferret has only recently been pulled back from the brink of extinction. Tim Clark, a conservation biologist and wildlife policy analyst at the Yale University School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, has considerable first-hand experience researching wild ferrets and participating in the ferret recovery program throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and this book grew out of those experiences.

In the first couple of chapters in his book, Clark relates how the black-footed ferret (North America’s only native ferret species) went from being a common species ranging over 12 Great Plains and Rocky Mountain states, two Canadian provinces and Mexico as late as 1920, to probable extinction in 1974. The story goes like this:

Black-footed ferrets are obligatory predators on prairie dogs, meaning they prey almost exclusively on prairie dogs and use their burrows for shelter and nesting. Because ranchers believed that prairie dogs competed with cattle for forage, large-scale rodent control programs were conducted and funded by state and federal governments. In 1964, it was thought that only one population of black-footed ferrets existed in the wild. This small population of less than 100 individuals in South Dakota was studied intensively until 1974 when the last remaining wild ferret population died out.

Searches for additional populations proved fruitless, so it seemed that the black-footed ferret had followed the passenger pigeon and the Carolina parakeet into the oblivion of extinction. However, a chance discovery of a ferret population on a cattle ranch in Meeteetse, Wyoming, in 1981 provided conservationists with an unexpected “second chance” to save the ferret. Ferret biologists, including the author, studied the small population intensively over the next four years. Ferret sightings increased each year until 1985, when ferret numbers plummeted because the prairie dog colony had been struck with sylvatic plague. Six ferrets were then taken into captivity but eventually died because they were housed together. By 1986, the last 18 wild ferrets were taken into captivity to begin a breeding program. It was believed that no ferrets persisted in the wild.

Though this is an interesting and uncommon story, it is not the focus of Clark’s writing. What follows in the next 12 chapters is a detailed and careful analysis of the black-footed ferret recovery process from the time the Meeteetse population was discovered in 1981 until captive-reared ferrets were released into the wild in the 1990s.

Although the black-footed ferret recovery effort is often cited as an Endangered Species Act (ESA) success story, the author has chosen the ferret as a case study for an examination of why restoration efforts often fail. Clark’s critique of the recovery effort relies heavily on the author’s own experiences and on the accounts of countless state, federal, university and independent biologists, technicians, conservationists and wildlife managers. This is not a case of reckless, self-serving finger pointing, but rather a sincere attempt at evaluation and improvement.

Clark identifies two critical failures of the program that appear to have brought the species to the brink of extinction—the near extinction of the wild ferrets and the loss of the first six captive ferrets. His analysis of these two crises does not focus on the individuals responsible for the decision making. In fact, the names of individuals are rarely referred to in this account. Instead, Clark uses the organization as the unit of analysis. While the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Ser-
vice is charged with implementing the ESA, the ferret recovery effort was dominated by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department and involved a number of other state, federal, tribal and non-governmental organizations.

Clark’s analysis of the different roles these agencies and organizations played in the ferret case is strengthened by his use of organizational theory. Traditionally not integral to conservation biology or wildlife policy, organizational theory is a highly specialized and academic discipline concerned with the structure, operation and function of organizations. Here, Clark is mainly interested in the enormous body of literature regarding bureaucracies.

Although dry and scholarly at times, Clark’s critique is persuasive and strong. His application of organizational theory effectively substantiates his assertion that it is not the individuals or the laws that are flawed, but the agencies charged with implementing them.

*Averting Extinction* calls for nothing less than a complete restructuring of the agencies responsible for ensuring the survival of endangered species. It is a bold and creative take on a very controversial and important subject. Anyone concerned with the future of the ESA as it goes through the process of reauthorization should find this book timely and informative, if it is at times academic.
What I Would Tell at Confession

After I killed the snake and drove on, something told me, Look left.

I was thinking about the deer near Paradise I didn’t kill but came upon, bunched in the shadowed shirring of the highway, hobbled like a collapsed table and how a young man turned back to help ease her from the road. Likely she’s fat from spring, he said, as I cupped her white, heavy belly, white and heavy as the moon, still warm, workable as clay or dough.

All the mark she carried was a scarlet trickle, at the head.

I hear they die same time, he said, meaning to comfort.

After he rode on I kept pressing, to stir the fawn from sleep. It was not ready for this world. Which can’t be said for the snake, who lay among warming rocks of the grade, every scale open to the red-rising sun. I had bent, squeezed from the doe’s nipples pearl beads of colostrum, more glue than nectar, and drank.

Now, to my left, below in a flat meadow redolent with tufted hair-grass, with long-plumed avens, cranesbill, through which a small creek chortled across its stones— in the creek, in fact, a moose paused its creekside grazing of cress and bluebells to look at me.

Her coat was rich chestnut, shining like steeped mahogany, so she appeared to have just risen from the center of the earth, and was cooling. Nothing stood between her and fire. At the throat her bell rang and rang.

The way she gazed at me held not one flicker of blame.

—Janisse Ray

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