Camas
People and Issues of the Northern Rockies

Summer/Fall 1998
Volume 2, Number 2
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FEATURED

WATER

An Insider's View of Washington
by Chris Arthur

Ranching and Rivers
by Sarah Heim-Jonson

Plus: poetry by Elizabeth Heron
Camas, a quarterly journal, provides a forum for non-polemical discussion of environmental issues of the Northern Rockies and celebrates the people who live and work in the region.

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Writing about water is a lot like writing about summer: so many others have already documented their sentiments that it’s difficult to deliver an original, refreshing expression. How can one improve upon William Shakespeare or Henry David Thoreau or Norman Maclean?

The seemingly indoorsy Henry James attempted nonetheless: “Summer afternoon—summer afternoon; to me those have always been the two most beautiful words in the English language.” No offense to Henry, but simple and ubiquitous words like ‘beautiful’ or, say, ‘love,’ can’t really convey a meaningful message after peppering our commercials and pop songs and even our most pedestrian daily conversations. Too often during the day do I profess my love for ice cream or Boxer puppies or one of the aforementioned pop songs, and to turn around and use the same words to describe the Blackfoot River feels false, even cheap.

But it is not the lack of words so much as it is the seemingly universal agreement linking our consciences: we all love our beautiful rivers ... we all love a beautiful summer day. Obviously, this consensus is only a mirage—we don’t collectively celebrate the same places or values or resources in precisely the same way, if at all—but there are plenty of days here in the Northern Rockies where perfection is unequivocally reached: bright sunshine, mild temperature, a cool lake or river—and where’s the news in that?

This journal attempts to strike a balance between that perfection and the sometimes contentious issues affecting our region. But how, then, to discuss these issues, to extol this landscape, in articles both unique and enlightening? And how to broaden and deepen the various debates about environmental issues surrounding our waters? Our writers happily accepted these challenges, and though their writing and researching methods vary, their results share many of the same attributes: sincerity, an open mind, and a discerning eye.

With perhaps too much of an open mind, Steven Rinella’s essay takes on the almost-intimidating mythology of much-loved waters—the gurgling creeks, the serene lakes, the raging rivers—using his own experiences to find the silver lining on every irrigation ditch or muddy bog. Not an easy task, especially with so many nearby waters for comparison, but one laudable for its judicious consideration of, metaphorically speaking, the underdog.

In “History, Economy and Landscape: A Look at Montana Ranching,” Sarah Heim-Jonson delves into the always-controversial topic of ranching near riparian areas. She finds, among many ranchers, a heartening and, in fact, unsurprising appreciation of our water resources and a prescription for future improvements on both private and public rangelands.

Finally, in “An Insider’s View,” a speech given earlier this summer, Chris Arthur, Senior Counsel on Resources to Representative Maurice Hinchey (D-NY), discusses the relationship between environmental activists and politicians. While he focuses mainly on wilderness, Arthur’s pragmatic advice is applicable to any environmental issue, for even in our increasingly cynical times, the legislative process can still yield positive—even democratic—change.

So perhaps, with the right inspiration, writing about water isn’t as difficult as I first posited. Or maybe I just got caught up in this, well, beautiful Montana summer, when articulating my appreciation for the rivers I swim in and the sunshine I bask under was less immediately necessary than the visceral experience of both. Either way, it was a perfect summer, and I hope you enjoyed it.

~ Rachel Wray
If you look closely enough, everything in nature has a story or two to tell. Many of the stories have to do with naming, like how foxglove got its name or why the dragonfly is also known as the devil’s darning needle. Other stories are composed of folklore and legend, or perhaps are simply the natural and cultural history of a plant or animal.

Camas: People and Issues of the Northern Rockies is now in its sixth year of publication. Its name is intricately tied to the name of a regional flower, the Blue Camas, and over the past year, as I have worked on the magazine, I have often considered the roots of the name, if not those of the flower, too.

My first contact with the flower occurred long before my involvement with the environmental journal. A friend and I were traveling through the Bitterroot Mountains, and we looked forward to hiking to Camas Lakes, three tiered lakes emptying one into the next like a massive fountain connected by a creek.

Searching through my hiking book, I asked, “Do you know what Camas is,” half-expecting a mumbled “I don’t know.” “I think it’s a wild flower” my friend replied, his voice thick with the conviction of a student in Rocky Mountain Flora.

And he was right.

The three hanging lakes create a snow-fed alpine wonderland overlooking the Bitterroot valley—a place where even the choosy Blue Camas flowers like to grow in the spring. But it was August, and I did not see one Camas on that first trek to the lakes bearing its name.

The Blue Camas has a storied past. Known in some circles as “the loveliest of the native American wildflowers,” Blue Camas (Camassia quamash) belongs to the Lily family. Its showy, star-shaped flowers poke their bluish heads well above the surrounding meadow flora, standing...
on stalks 8-20 inches high. At the base of these stalks, just underground, lies the edible bulb. The bulb of Blue Camas truly upstages its ostentatious flowers. Camas derives its name, in part, from the Nootka Indian word *chamas* meaning “sweet,” an apt description of the tasty bulbs. The word *camass* in the Chinook Indian language means simply “a bulb.” Camas is also known in some circles by the name *quamash*, its official species name. Camas bulbs were a major food source to native tribes of the Northern Rockies. Meriwether Lewis of Lewis and Clark fame reflects, “They now set before them a small piece of buffalo meat, some dried salmon, berries and several kinds of roots. Among these last is one which is round and much like an onion in appearance and sweet to the taste: it is called quamash and is eaten either in its natural state, or boiled into a kind of soup or made into a cake (1804-1806).”

Blooming from April to June, Camas bulbs were an extremely important early-spring source of food to native tribes in the Northern Rockies, especially the Salishan tribes, Nez Perce and Northern Shoshoni. The bulbs were roasted and eaten plain, mashed and made into loaves or cakes, or used in stew. Grizzly bears also foraged for the bulbs, when both the bears and bulbs were more plentiful. Due to its stature as a staple of native diets, deadly conflicts arose over Camas harvest rights, including the Nez Perce Indian War (1877). In addition, because Camas prefers moist, fertile soil, many Camas beds were taken over by white settlers for agricultural use. This agricultural use of Camas habitat took away a valuable resource for native Americans, resulting in severe arguments and disharmony.

One cannot help but wonder if nature responded to this desecration of habitat. Yes, as in any engaging fairy tale, there is always an evil stepsister, and Camas’s pernicious sibling is the Death Camas (*Zigadenus venenosus*). Next to Hemlock, Death Camas is the most poisonous plant in the West. Easily distinguishable from Blue Camas while in bloom, its creamy white flowers stand tall above the meadow like its benign relative. However, the flowers are white, smaller, and more clustered than Blue Camas. If one were to feast on the bulbs of Death Camas, a quick, irregular heartbeat, slow respiration and convulsions would soon ensue. There is but one redeeming feature documented in the lore of Death Camas. The flower is believed to ward off evil spirits when placed around the perimeter of camp.

*Camas: People and Issues of the Northern Rockies* has grown to fit this well-chosen name. Our journal’s goal is to “provide a forum for non-polemical discussion on environmental issues of the Northern Rockies.” The Camas flower serves as a poignant symbol for our goal here at *Camas*. The flower, part of the beauty and bounty of nature, has a past laced with debate and disagreement over proper use and preservation. It matches, all too well, the story line of so many current environmental issues. In spite of Camas’s decreased range, the flower still thrives in meadows and prairies left untouched for now by development. That it still exists at all must be looked upon with hope for the future, and perhaps hope for our journal, too.
Reflections

Silk/Light

by Elizabeth Heron

Beads of dew no bigger than the center holes of a button
where the thread goes through, strung along filaments of spider’s silk, hung
like a complex cat’s cradle between the sprigs of coyote bush
against the grey-white morning sun
so diffused through fog the sky is a single radiance of damp translucent air.
The spare outer strands thicken and jumble toward center in a pattern
too fine for the naked eye, dense as a crowded nebula, bodies of light
bound by gravity and proximity—a dendrite, exploding light in the inner space
of the body, spinning and spinning—this web. The hidden silk of caddis larvae,
spun inside scratchy cases of leaves and bark and grains of river gravel, holding those bits together
and holding with the silken stitch they’ve made to rocks under riffled water,
a silken net at the crust’s open end
to filter plankton in. These holy insect houses, essential and entrained in the woven world—
these delicate miracles, these hallelujahs!
Western customs, especially in the remote pockets of the range, are hard and fast. We never lock doors, in case some cowboy rides up, pulls his saddle, pitches hay for his lean horse, helps himself to an egg and tortilla, then saddles again, riding to mountains beyond mountains beyond mountains. It happens. Sometimes in summer, you offer a drink of water, or a cold beer. Or in winter, you take wool blankets from the shelf and say, “Throw down wherever.” And your guest will nod, looking to the sky. The mountain mahogany will poke through snowdrifts with their black stalks. Clouds will roll down from the hills, soaking into the pines, drawing the scent of dry rosin. It snows every night.

At any ranch, you can hear people talk about riding into the hills after the spring melt, finding a rider, propped against a stump, with one side of the wood charred black. One side of the body charred black. Before people freeze to death, they get hot. They may peel off their coats and pants. Then they get delirious. They may roll right into the flames, as if drawing an orange blanket of warmth over their blue skin.

I don’t doubt it. Across the Big Horn Basin, deep in another spine of mountains, the crew was riding back to our cowcamp when a storm boiled over a ridge. Hail pelted. Lighting snapped. We raced down the valley to an abandoned shack. Turned our horses loose; there’s not much else we could do. So we huddled together while the hail hammered the roof and the lightning popped and sizzled. Our teeth chattered. We fumbled with our buttons and tried to push our stiff hands into our crotches. Outside the lightning turned the tips of pines a neon blue. St. Elmo’s fire, it’s called. And it glows and hisses like a gas lamp.

“Lightning comes up through the ground,” the boss said. “Might come clean up through
You’re traveling an interstate highway, crossing a vast landscape in a western state, say Wyoming or Montana. Say Wyoming, east of Buffalo on I-90. So few cars on the road that if you spaced them evenly, they might have three or four miles of tar each to themselves.

But, of course, they’re not spaced evenly. They’re traveling in packs. One minute you’re feeling quite alone, distracted from your driving by the antelope grazing on a far hillside. Even at a distance, they’re easy to spot, their white rump patches and belly markings giving them away.

Then you’re surrounded by automobiles, a tight group traveling just car-lengths from each other. You’re back to driving, concentrating on that small bit of open space separating you from someone else’s rear bumper. Eventually the pack moves ahead of you, and you can see them miles ahead, still in a tight group.

It happens frequently enough that I sometimes wonder how those cars become gathered together. They had to be moving at differing speeds at one time; they didn’t materialize on the highway all in a clump.

Clumps are what I call those annoying packs. It isn’t an elegant word, but we’re not talking about an elegant concept.

I don’t like clumps. On my one vehicle that has working cruise control, I set the speed slightly slower than the car’s engine is comfortable at, so that when I come across a clump, I can easily accelerate through it. And when a clump overtakes me, I will sometimes flick the brake pedal, kicking off the cruise and coasting a few seconds, the faster to rid myself of unwanted company. Adios, clump.

I think people generally like clumps. When folks say they want to avoid the crowds, they really mean they want to get away from where the crowd was last year. “Where-to” articles are
McCluskey Cont.

We all looked down at our muddy boots and silver spurs. And I thought about the pictures I’d seen in small-town papers of a heap of cattle flung every-which-way near a barb-wire fence. Sometimes the snow pushed cattle into fence corners, as the storm had driven us into the cabin. Sometimes the reports explain the science of electricity. Bodies too close together make bigger targets. I didn’t know. I didn’t want to know.

Eventually, someone struck a damp match. In the flickering circle of light, we could see the gleam of tin cans. The walls had been plastered with newspapers, so someone tore a strip, twisted it like a sage branch, and held it to the match. The yellowed paper caught like a dry aspen leaf. After finding a box of split wood, we lit a fire in the rusted pot-belly stove. Finally, we had light and warmth and our sweaters steamed. We wanted to grin, but the thunder slapped against

the shack. The windows rattled. The cross-beams coughed, like the sound of breaking ribs from a swift kick.

Someone, years before, had left these supplies in the shack—obviously never to return. And as we hunched our shoulders over the stove, I could imagine this past resident packing his bedroll onto a horse, lashing down a few supplies, leaving the rest. Maybe, if he could write, he might have left a note. “Wu evur finds this grub, help yerself. Yu probly need it wurst off then me.”

In Wyoming, nature unleashes its forces whether you get out of the way or not. The rain and hail and snow and wind, I’m sure, couldn’t care less about where they cut—through a pine or through a lost visitor. So to survive, we stick together. We never lock doors. We leave extra blankets and a tin of coffee grounds on the shelf. Plenty of matches.

—a Camas alum, Ian McCluskey is now a master’s student in the University of Oregon’s Creative Non-Fiction program.

Tschida Cont.

about the easiest pieces a freelance writer can sell. People want to escape, but they’d like someone else to tell them where to escape to. Someplace that only they and the magazine’s other 1.2 million subscribers know about. Then they can pack up the car and head out to The Best Small Towns in America, The Best Mountain Biking Destinations, the Best Places to Buy Strawberry Jam...

Until recently, I lived in Missoula, Montana, a city that is on plenty “best” lists these days. People are clumping up pretty well in Western Montana. Missoula deserves most of the praise and attention. The scenery is lovely, though if you live right in town, instead of on a vast, 20-acre Bitterroot Valley ranch, you see mostly gray clouds from November to March.

And Montanans are as genuinely nice as any people I’ve met anywhere, if a little preoccupied with knowing the length of one’s tenure in their state. They’re not all gushy I-LOVE-YOU-INSTANTLY nice. The attitude is more mature, and it sort of says: If you take care of yours, I’ll take care of mine, and if you really need help, we’ll see what we can do. They’re direct, and I like that. This deal about always asking how long you’ve been there is okay, I’ve decided. It’s a direct and honest reflection of how they feel.

I’d still be part of the Missoula clump, but I found honest work in another city in another state. Exactly where isn’t important; people will be clumping up here soon enough, for the country is pretty and the people are friendly. I didn’t like saying goodbye to Montana, the people I’ve met and the trails I’ve learned. But I think I’m going to like it here. One of my new neighbors helped me unload the Ryder truck — just the heavy stuff, which I thought was pretty mature of him.

—Ron Tschida, until recently a graduate student and freelance writer in Missoula, is working as a reporter for a daily newspaper in a town west of the Mississippi.
Two Hydrogens, One Oxygen

by Steven Rinella

A pitifully simple sexual analysis technique involves a questioner asking a questionee what type of water he fancies himself to be. The answer reveals the questionee’s sexual personality. So raging waterfalls are metaphors for passionate, rough-and-tumble sex, while the choice of a quiet, pure mountain stream demonstrates a tendency toward committed lovemaking. Or a meandering creek with many different tributaries and inlets around every bend might expose a philandering fiend.

I doubt this test sheds much light on the sexual darknesses of humankind, but I do think the answers reveal a lot about our feelings toward various forms of water. I dread that a past lover would use the pond as a metaphor for my sexual personae, and that is not because I dislike ponds. Rather, it is that ponds—and sloughs and mudholes, for this matter—rarely suffer a visitor’s intrusion or get used for pleasure. Humans have highly discriminating and internalized affections for rivers and lakes, and it is such an encompassing love that all other varieties of water suffer a severe neglect of the heart.

I grew up in western Michigan, where the allure of the Great Lakes and their large tributaries consumed so much of the state’s collective conscience that a bog or a pond had to wait for a murder victim’s hapless disposal to get attention. Killers rightly suspected that no one would be mucking around in such places to uncover such tragic deeds.

I was a muskrat trapper from fifth grade on through college, and my traplines included many weedy roadside ponds. Each year, my fear that I would follow a trap wire down into the dark water and feel the long hair of a human head instead of a muskrat’s dense, silky fur grew intensely.
worse. Running traps at night became hellish, and I would scan down into the water for long periods with a flashlight before assuring myself that no one awaited my discovery.

Now, where I live in Missoula, Montana, some waters are daily staples in the news and not just because of homicide reports. They’ve become given ins in the controversial debates on use: over-crowding on the Bitterroot, residual contamination on the Clark Fork, access disputes and gold mines on the Blackfoot or habitat loss on the Rattlesnake. The citizens recognize the waters as indicators of their spiritual and physical well-being and monitor them with a firm finger to the pulse.

I sometimes feel socially driven to hang out by a stock pond just to see what happens in the life of an ignored water. I’m able to slip into a pleasant, self-absorbed numbness around the lesser-appreciated waters—a feeling I can’t quite achieve on an over-loved, coddled and trail-beaten streams and lakes. As a mud- and algae-loving child, one of my primary fantasies of early youth was to discover a secret lake. And I would have kept it secret, too, so that I alone would know what was in it and how big it was. I still have that desire for privacy, and not just the false superiority of I-was-the-only-one-here-last-Wednesday, but a privacy of exclusive knowledge that can only be found where no one else cares to look for it.

It seems to me small children have an uncanny knack for water discovery and the ability to love it without precepts. Wherever she releases them for the afternoon, my sister’s four kids quickly find a way to get wet and capture enough live specimens to fill a few quart-sized canning jars. To them, a Montana trout stream or a shallow reef at low tide have nothing on a backed-up drainage ditch. If anything, the scales of favor tip toward the ditches and ponds because they offer solitude from their parents’ infractions. If it’s a nice lake a river, mom and dad are right there nagging and hand-holding.

My parents left a home in Chicago to care for their young children on a very quiet isthmus between two lakes in Michigan now called Middle and North. I spent a majority of my childhood summer days slopping around an unnoticed back water off the east end of North lake that was home to much frog, duck and turtle life. The low area hadn’t invited development and was the only unaltered shoreline of any size on either lake. I can recognize that my memories of the place are as much a nostalgic stroll as factual narration, probably better remembered than lived.

By the time I hit high school, sounds from jet skis and whining outboards plodded through the once-silent air as fathers punctuated their dullard workweeks with a shabang. Beach ball, barbecues and weekend visitors became a theme of the lakes, like those of the far north were chiseling their utopian vision of sun and fun out of the water that they really did love endlessly. A group of residents, calling themselves the Twin Lake Committee, voted to drain the lakes enough so that their basements wouldn’t flood every spring. The pond died of thirst and is now a beach with trucked-in sand, something the locals appreciate. Now they can stroll the lake’s edge unimpeded by releases of methane gas and sandle-sucking muck.

This tale is not meant to decry the greed-sponsored destruction of wetlands that has been so terrifyingly documented. This story only shows the human biases in appreciating water and the mindframe that sorts wheat from chaff. The small town centered around the traffic of the lakes markets itself as a sort of water wonderland. It fits this image with ample sunsets, clear waters, nice sand.

In a battle of aesthetics, there are unnoticed losers and gazed-upon winners. Some waters are winning by such a wide margin that they are hurt by their attractiveness. There is a several year waiting list to float through the Grand Canyon on the Colorado River. My turn could be up next winter, and I must say the deal is sweetened by the privilege of seeing something so desired that one has to wait in line to be allowed a chance. I’m embarrassed to admit that fact helped pique my interest. Sightseers, kayakers, anglers and scuba divers are notorious for their establishments of hit lists. The nationally acclaimed water hot spots are known as well for in-
creasing crowds as they are for whatever their main, utilitarian function. For visitors, checking a local off the list can rival the thrill of the visit, and there is an element of the race to be first.

I had the misfortune to be fathered by an aging outdoorsman who loved to tell just how quiet and serene and full of fish and game—yet void of people—every famed body of water was in the time "before." He seems to have been everywhere prior to everyone else. The boundary waters between Minnesota and Canada, the Fox River in Michigan, the Green River in Colorado, the waters around Key West... My father has tried to make it crystal clear to me since I could walk: I am too late.

Henry David Thoreau maintained that a person hasn't a chance at understanding the world's depths until he can come to face-value terms with the dirt and water around his home. The lake where he lived his year of famed learning is now in need of protection from the hoards gathering in search of that same enlightenment, as if it were that exact spot on the edge of Walden Pond, not any other. Convenience and proximity, not the divine, led him to Walden.

Everyone who stuck around school long enough to read Thoreau in English class certainly picked up in science class the standard water statistics: 75 percent of earth's surface... 89 percent of human composition... et cetera. It's all over the place, a given on which we can hang our shabby structures of perception.

Lately, I've been trying to draw something as immediate and modestly similar to Walden from a set of tires behind my apartment. They're GoodYears—P235 R15s. My landowner threw them in my back yard, no doubt the leftovers from cleaning up his own home. His spare was worn, too, so there are five. They filled with water the first night in a spring storm and life followed. About seven fox squirrels live in the yard, and they drink from the tires and perch on them en route around the yard. My neighbor prophesized the tires would become "mosquito-breedin' fuckers," and he was accurate in his prediction. Quite a lot goes on inside those tires. I study them, and I try to locate that same blown-away sensation that, every summer, thousands of people—visiting from all over the nation, parking and locking their cars, dodging dog shit on the bank, skipping rocks—get just down the street when they visit the Clark Fork River.
The Insider's View: How Environmental Organizations Can Influence Washington

by Chris Arthur

This conference has been mostly about inspiration, and that’s a good thing. We need our dreams. I started out in dreaming professions myself, before I came to Washington, and it was a nice life. But I’m not here today to inspire you. Maurice Hinchey does the inspiration in our office and he does a very nice job of it. I do the ground attack. I don’t look like a wilderness advocate—maybe now you all know who the little guy in the suit is who has been walking around. And those who know me here can attest that I’m not very cheerful or uplifting. When I walked in here on Friday, one of my friends said, “Are you here to throw a bucket of cold water on us?” Well, yes I am, and I’m proud of it.

So think of me as the picture of political Washington, the far off, fortified city that never listens and never does what you want. Think of me as the dark cloud over these proceedings. At least someone here today, who will remain nameless, who asked me here to speak at the conference, thinks there’s a good reason for inviting a dark cloud. Sunny days may make you happy, but there’s nothing like a good storm to make you hustle. These people here call me the pessimist, but actually that bucket of cold water can perk you up.

I’m not here to give you my personal views of wilderness, or to share my hopes for the future. This isn’t about me. I’ve been asked to speak on Washington’s perspective, and more specifically on the perspective of political Washington. If your view of Washington is that Washingtonians don’t care and don’t listen, let me assure you that much of official Washington has much of the same view of you. And that’s where you have a problem. Many of you may not like Washington very much, as several speakers of the last two days have made eminently clear. And most of you are probably suspicious of Washington. And with good reason—we are a suspicious lot. But you need us ... whether you like us or not. Congress makes the laws, and as people in the executive branch like to say, “Only Congress makes wilderness.” That isn’t going to change. As I said, there’s been a lot of talk over dreams this weekend, and that’s fine. But to make those dreams into reality, you need Congress. As Jim McDermott [U.S. Rep.-WA] said this morning, “You don’t need just to talk, you need to fish.”

A friend of mine in Washington says it very nicely. He says, “In some ways, it’s easier to play glorious defense against some overwhelming force and be defeated because it wasn’t your fault and you fought as hard as you could.” But I am here to say that we need to take the responsibility and take the risk and move forward, even if there are some casualties. And that’s what we try to do, we try to take that risk. Like it or not, Congress is going to continue to be important to you.

If you want to win, if you want to fish, the question is, “How can you make yourselves important to Congress?” The sad truth is, you do not influence policy just by thinking good thoughts or being good people. Contrary to popular opinion, it’s also true that you don’t influence policy by being sleazy and nasty. You influence policy by making yourselves needed. There are many ways of doing that, many ways of increasing your effectiveness and your influence. I plan to offer a few thoughts, some suggestions, from someone on the inside on what works and what doesn’t.

First, I’d like to give you a sense of what Congress thinks of environmental issues and wilderness issues. What the insiders say, after you’ve visited or called their office to plead your case, or
after you’ve had your meeting with the congressman. If you’ve done any lobbying—and most of you have, because I recognize most of your faces from lobbying me at one time or another—you probably met people who smiled pleasantly and nodded pleasantly when you made your points. We know how to smile and nod and be polite, and most Congressional staff truly like wilderness advocates. They’re a little different from most of our visitors. Most people in Congress and on the Hill like to think of themselves as environmentalists and like to be friendly with environmentalists.

But that doesn’t mean that they’ll do what you want. After all, both Jim Hansen and Orrin Hatch have said in my presence that they love wilderness. Don Young admits that he hates wilderness, but he calls himself a “true” environmentalist.

But not everyone who loves it, who loves the environment, loves it quite the way you do. Many people like clear water or clean air well enough—as Melanie [Griffin-Sierra Club] was saying, they want their child protected, they want safe drinking water. They want those things especially if it doesn’t cost too much, or if the pollution is upwind of their country club. Everyone likes Yosemite. And as Helen Chenoweth once said to me, “We all want healthy forests, don’t we?” So, some polite offices aren’t really very friendly to our cause, even though they may be nice to you. And some of those people, like Don Young, are always going to be major obstacles for us. But there’s a second problem that’s been alluded to this morning, a big one. Even in the truly friendly offices with decent LCV [League of Conservation Voters] rat-

ings. It’s a matter of priorities.

Those of you who lobby have probably noticed that the environmental LA [legislative assistant] in most offices is usually the most junior staffer in the office. There’s a reason for that. Very few people in Congress—perhaps 20 or 30—would list the environment as one of their top five legislative priorities. As Rindy [O’Brien-Wilderness Society] was saying, that top five is a very big thing in crafting messages. Even fewer, no more than ten, would put public land and wilderness questions that high on their list. That is, no more than ten of us who are on your side of the issue. The number on the other side would be a little higher than that. Why aren’t they more interested? After all, everyone here has been saying how wonderful the wilderness is. Why don’t these people in Washington know that?

The reason is simple. They care most about what the people in their home districts care about and it isn’t wilderness. It’s the economy. Or education, or health care, or taxes. It’s what affects their family every day, day in, day out, and almost by definition, wilderness is not on that list. The number of people who do care intensely about wilderness is not all that high nationally (I’m not talking about Congress). So if politicians aren’t particularly interested in public lands and wilderness, how can you influence them? Speaking in metaphors, I can tell you that sending them copies of *Sand County Almanac* isn’t going to get you very far. Neither is getting a group together to chant protest songs in their offices. There probably aren’t five members of Congress who know who Aldo Leopold is—they may think he’s an Italian film star. But
Speaking in metaphors, I can tell you that sending politicians copies of Sand County Almanac isn’t going to get you very far. There aren’t five members of Congress who know who Aldo Leopold is—they may think he’s an Italian film star.

you can learn some techniques from Aldo Leopold if you listen to him, and not just listen to the parts you want to hear. He suggested that we learn from the wilderness by listening to it. If you want to influence politics, you have to learn from politicians by listening to them. And a lot of people here don’t really want to listen too much, I’ve noticed. “Start with what they care about the most. What they care about is votes ... Some people seem to think that this shows you how corrupt and cynical politicians are, but really it’s quite the opposite. The job of the politician is to represent the interests of the voting public and to support the public good. And the public good can be defined, and often is defined, as what the voters want. I’ve heard a lot at this conference about politicians and how they think and what they do, and I’d have to say that much of what I’ve heard isn’t true. It’s about as accurate as Disney World’s jungle ride is a good depiction of wilderness. Most people in politics—your heroes and your enemies—act from what they consider the best of motives. Helen Chenoweth’s remark about healthy forests may be amusing to you, but it was truthful. We all want healthy forests. We just see that estimable goal differently. Very few politicians are motivated by campaign cash, no matter what you’ve heard and what you think, even though very few can afford to ignore it. The truth is, very few large contributors give money in the hopes of influencing a candidate. They give because they like what the member has done already, and they know what the member is likely to do in the future. Don Young doesn’t vote the way he does because he believes in what he’s doing, and because his voters believe it.

If you want corruption, look back to the glory days of wilderness in the ‘60’s and ‘70’s and before. Corporations brought sacks of money to Hill offices and called it campaign contributions. Nobody had to account for any of it in those days, and the public didn’t know about it. Those days are gone. I’m not saying I like the campaign finance system we have now—I don’t—and I can tell you, most members hate to ask for money, and hate the system. Nor am I saying that there are no more opportunities for corruption out there now, but I am saying that money doesn’t influence most members very much. Voters do influence them. The root of democracy is people. A working democracy is a government that listens to people. Like it or not, Congress really is a representative body.

Over the years I’ve seen many environmental groups who think they understand this, and who tell politicians the voters are on their side—that they will lose votes if they don’t support environmental bills. This is not a good idea. Many of you here today know a great deal about forest botany, for example—most politicians know nothing about it. You care about forest botany, they care about votes. They know votes. They know about the intricacies of polling in ways you would not dream of. They know their constituents as least as well as you know your favorite forest glade. They know how to calculate what they will lose and what they will gain from any position they take. How then to get to the point where you can give them what they want—the votes? The basic
answer is pretty simple, but getting there can be a challenge. The basic answer is that each vote is a person. You give them votes by getting people on their side. Simple, right? Maybe yes, maybe no.

Twice this year, I’ve been to environmental events where environmental leaders—national leaders—made joking remarks to the general effect that the only bad part of nature was people. They were well received. Sure, they were only kidding, I hope. I hope they were only kidding for two reasons: the first I’ve already mentioned. In a democracy, everything you want depends on what people think. And if people hear that they’re the bad part of nature, they’re not gonna support you. The second is a little more complex. What many, although not all of us, value about wilderness rests entirely on humanistic values. You’ve heard Thoreau quoted almost endlessly at this conference, on something in their heads, in something in your heads, rather than on something inherent in the land or in the trees. Our human constructs, of the meaning and the value of the wilderness, can build the bridge to reach indifferent people. They’re a good thing. But if you sneer at the human side, we not only lose them—the voters you need to influence—we lose ourselves, too.

So what do politicians know about what people think of the environment? First, they know
that while everyone likes fresh air and pretty pictures of Yosemite, most people are pretty well satisfied with things as they are, and don’t consider the environment one of their top priorities when voting.

[Second, the environment] is not a make or break issue, and if you want to have influence, it has to be a make or break issue with the voters. Third, they know who they are likely to hear from in their district about environmental issues and wilderness issues. They know how influential those people are with other people and how likely they are either to win or lose their votes based on their wilderness record. For example, if a moderate to conservative Republican hears from a hundred people on a wilderness issue—which is a lot, by the way, in a Congressional office—his interest might be piqued. If he knows they are all hard core Democrats, he won’t care. If he was elected by a wide margin, and has no opponent on the horizon, he doesn’t need to care. How many members do
need to care about wilderness supporters? Hardly any. The handful of people in Congress who really care about these issues, care because of their own personal interest in it, not because of the voters. I could not name a single person now in Congress who owes his victory because of a pro-wilderness position. I could not think of more than a few races in the past twenty years where a wilderness position has been critical to victory. Quality—clean water, that sort of thing—yes. Wilderness, no. How do you change that? And if you really want to win, you should want to know how to change that.

You change it by making more people care about wilderness. And how do you do that? First, you listen to them. Find out what they care about. Find out why they don’t care as much as you do. That’s what we do. Second, try to communicate with them. Here, I’m going to differ a little bit from some of what Doug Scott [Friends of the San Juans] told you on Friday. I’ve been on the Hill 21 years, and we’re in a different world from when we won some of those victories in the past. The people you need to reach often can’t be reached by grassroots organizing. I’m not criticizing the grassroots organizing—it’s great, it’s necessary, it’s valuable—but it’s not the only thing. Tip O’Neill did indeed say that all politics is local, but Tip, bless his heart, is gone. He was washed away by the Reagan tidal wave, because the Reagan people understood that most people get their ideas from the media, not from their neighbors.

There’s another thing that Tip O’Neill used to say about politics not as well known, that’s still true: “Politicians dance with them that brung them.” If you didn’t bring them, they won’t dance with you. Use the media, every way you can. Much of the support for parks and wilderness that we do see in Congress—shallow though it may be—has its roots in press coverage of environmental issues in a member’s district. If the press cares, members in Congress will care, I guarantee it.

Third, you need to communicate through other channels as well. Most important, you need to broaden your base. Start talking to people who you’re not used to talking to, as Melanie said just a few minutes ago. Start talking to people who own Winnebagos and eat at Bennigans. They’re the danger, by the way. The extractive industries are still a problem, but they’re fading. I’m at the leading edge of the baby boomers. People my age are getting to the point where they can’t get around quite so much anymore. They like these off-road vehicles. They have money. They’re gonna use it. Start talking to them now. When I say start talking, I don’t just mean talking to them on the street. Use your computers, use your glossy brochures, use the Internet, use any tool you can think of. Start talking their language. Don’t condescend to them.

Maurice Hinchey’s message on wilderness is that all of these lands that we’re talking about all belong to all the American people, no matter what state they live in. It’s an important message. Congress has been more and more willing to accept the notion that the people who live in a county or state should decide what happens to federal lands there. In most places, that doesn’t help us. But when we say that all Ameri-
Start talking to people who own Winnebagos and eat at Bennigans. I’m at the leading edge of the baby boomers. People my age like these off-road vehicles. They have money. They’re gonna use it. Start talking to them now.

cans own this land, and all Americans have a role in deciding, we don’t just mean campers and backpackers. We don’t just mean Edward Abbey and David Brower. We can’t. Because a lot of other people vote. We mean people who live in Levitown and vacation on the Jersey shore. We mean people whose favorite park is not Yosemite. It’s Six Flags. We mean people who look like me. People who like nature well enough, but who are never going to get very far from a motorized vehicle for the rest of their lives. We mean people in inner cities and people in southern suburbs and people in small towns in the rust belt. They all own the lands, and we need them on our side, as many of them as we can get.

A few of our speakers said earlier in the conference that the past support for wilderness comes from people who have had a wilderness experience. Wrong. Our best, most solid political support comes from urban Democrats, mostly from the northeast, most of whose voters will never set foot in a wilderness area in their lives. I could go on at great length why we get that support, but I won’t. I’ll just say that’s where we get it. One of our strongest editorial supporters in the entire country vacations at high-tone beach resorts—wouldn’t know wilderness if he tripped over it. People support wilderness if they believe in the idea, for whatever reason. Don’t ignore people because they are not like you. Some of you will say, “But we do have most of the people on our side, the people are with us!” Not exactly.

A few years ago, one of the speakers at this conference sat in my office urging us to hold out for broader, stronger legislation on a lands issue than the House seemed likely to consider. In a few years, the person said, the tide will have moved much further in our direction—don’t settle for anything less now. I admired the enthusiasm, but not the forecasting ability. Five years later, we have Don Young and Frank McCowsky running the Public Lands Committees. I’m old enough to remember people saying exactly the same thing about Alaska in 1980: “That no good Mo Udall was too damn quick to compromise!” A few months later we had Jim Watt at Interior. We got into those situations because there weren’t enough people willing to make your issues our issues—not just lands, but environmental issues generally—the make or break issues that decided how they would cast their votes.

Next suggestion—one you’ve all heard so often this week, you’re sick to death of it. Join hands with each other, instead of arguing over the details. In Washington, many environmental groups do appear, to the uninitiated, to present a united front. And it works very well. We do our best in Congress when we do the same. We have more disagreements on our side than you may think. But the more time we spend on our internal difficulties, the less chance we have of winning. Reach out to others and draw them in. The more people you have—and more specifically, as Mike Bader [Alliance for the Wild Rockies] said yesterday, the more diverse your supporters—and we’re not a very diverse-looking crowd here today, are we?—the more politicians will need you. The more they will start caring about your issues—not just because
of their personal quirks, and their private nostalgia
for nature, but because they need you. If they can
see you as a small, narrow group of elitist hikers, or
granola types, they can ignore you.

Sixth: don’t treat politicians like dirt. Every­
one of that handful of legislators who really care,
who really works on these issues, has been attacked
over and over for not doing enough, or not backing
the right bill, or whatever. I’ve seen some of them
get so sick of it that they drop out. You may not like
all politicians, but at least be nice. Learn to work
with them. Other people do. Make them like you,
and make them need you. They did need you back
in the ‘70’s. That’s why we won as much as we did
back then, for all the talk of the great old days. It
was that simple. There’s no simple formula to get
back to that situation quickly—although I endorse
all the suggestions made here this morning. Bringing
back shag carpet and disco might bring back a boom
in environmental legislation too, but I wouldn’t count
on it. We’re in a different world now, and you have
to find new ways of changing it. Don’t listen only to
me on this—I’m on my way out, there’s a new gen­
eration coming in and you’re going to have a lot of
new methods—keep looking for them, whatever
works. You can do it. Clearly, you all care intensely
about wilderness. If you care enough, you can do
some things you don’t like to do to bring about some
change. Things like rethinking your message, ex­
amining the image you project, talking to other
people in their language, consorting with the enemy,
building coalitions, and above all, listening.

That’s one Washingtonian’s perspective on how
to accomplish things, how to fish instead of talk. How
to get what you want. There’s a small network of
us in the back halls of Congress and the corridors of
the agencies. A network, greatly helped, I might
add, by some of the people in the national organiza­
tions here who some of you are a bit skeptical of.
Everyday, we do the kind of things I’m asking you
to do. We talk to the other side, we go to recep­
tions, we read the papers, we wear suits and ties;
we don’t go out in the woods, we cut deals, we do
lunch, we sweet talk, we scheme, we plot. I have
to just cut in a second and differ with Melanie on
one point—we didn’t win on the Smith-Forest bill
[pro-timber bill] because the people were with us.
We didn’t hear from the people on the Smith-For­
est bill! My office got four calls on the Smith-For­
est bill. We won because one member’s ego was
bruised, and he got mad and took 20 votes over to
our side and called us at seven o’clock the night
before the vote and said, “I’m bringing you twenty
extra votes.” That’s why we won. And that’s what
we worked on, because we were all on the phone
for a couple days trying to bring him over.

We don’t do these things because we’re sell­
outs; we do it because we care. You need to swal­
low hard and start doing things that you don’t like to
do, and stop sounding like the town scolds (that’s
my job). We need to reach a point in Congress
where people will be environmental heroes and en­
vironmental bulldogs, not because they care, not
because they know what an ecosystem is, not be­
because they love the land, not because they love the
trees—but because the voters demand it. Because
they need to support the causes you support. That’s
where we were 20 years ago. You can, and you
must, bring us back to that point.

Chris Arthur, the Senior Counsel on Resources to Repre­
sentative Maurice Hinchey (D-NY), gave this speech on
Text transcribed by Ron Scholl. Reprinted with permis­
sion.
In southeastern Arizona, on an almost vertical bank of the San Pedro River, a mid-70s Oldsmobile perches at a precarious angle along the riverbank. The gutted, pale yellow sedan lies not ten feet from the bottom of the riverbed. Scattered around the property, various other metallic fragments slowly decay in the arid climate, and the Oldsmobile appears to be just one more piece of trash disposed of in the rural desert.

But the car is not trash, not a forgotten souvenir from a famously ugly decade. Instead, the car’s purpose is to stabilize the riverbanks and prevent further erosion. The car’s owner, a rancher, explains that before the 100 year flood in 1993, a string of old, junked cars lined the riverbanks. But the 1993 event washed every car away, along with a large amount of property, and the rusted remains bobbed down the San Pedro and the Gila Rivers until they were eventually deposited, destined only to sink and rust.

For a short while, the vertical used car lot was a passable example of rip-rap. Rip-rap is any hard material added to a stream or shoreline bank that attempts to control erosion. Junked cars are probably the crudest and least stable form of rip-rap, but their use is not unusual.

Closer to home along the banks of the Bitterroot River, homeowners have commonly used old automobiles for bank stabilization. According to Ron Pierce, of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, there are about 200 junked cars now lining the banks of the Bitterroot near Stevensville. An amendment to the Montana Constitution, effective April 13, 1995, prohibits junked vehicles as bank reinforcement.

According to the National Streambed Land Preservation Act of 1975, an irrigator must apply to the supervisors of a local conservation district for a “310 Permit” before altering a stream channel to divert water. All alterations, however slight, are subject to the permit process. Penalties include misdemeanor charges with a fine no greater than $250.00, or 30 days in jail.

The drawbacks of using junked cars for bank stabilization are clear, with instability and toxicity being the most obvious. However, even more apparently benign forms of rip-rap also threaten water quality, fisheries and the overall health of riparian environments. Pierce states that many bank stabilization efforts are heavily engineered projects that do not always give proper consideration to habitat protection and restoration. In larger streams and rivers, rock, broken concrete, and mixtures of materials such as rocks, dirt and branches are commonly dumped or placed along banks. In smaller
streams, particularly those that are seasonally dry or nearly dry, streambed gravel is often bulldozed against the banks to prevent erosion. The problem with these forms of bank stabilization is serious.

Heavily engineered stabilization efforts, as well as the cruder attempts of rip-rap, drastically alter the river's natural condition, impacting the vital functions of the river and stream banks. Riverbanks provide breeding grounds for fish, birds and amphibians. Stream-banks fortified by rip-rap also reduce available rearing habitat for some fish, such as salmon and trout, that prefer non-altered areas. Rip-rap also creates hiding places from which predators can prey upon passing juvenile fish.

Large-scale projects that dump tons of rock and revetment onto the banks often change the structure of riverbanks permanently, making habitat restoration after flooding difficult. By hardening the banks, these projects intensify downstream flows, causing wind waves and water level draw-down as well as secondary waves, thereby increasing bank erosion below the revetment. This can create the need for more bank stabilization projects downstream as well as further destruction of sensitive riparian habitats.

The impacts of rip-rap projects and dikes on the Yellowstone River has recently become the center of a conflict between the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the US Army Corps of Engineers. This has come on the heels of two years of record flooding, which has led to a number of major bank stabilization projects in the Livingston area. The USFWS recently issued a warning that the Yellowstone River is being damaged by the rip-rap and dike projects authorized by the Corps.

According to the USFWS, the agency has sent 37 letters to the Corps during the past 2-1/2 years expressing its concerns about the impacts of bank stabilization projects on the fish and wildlife of the Yellowstone. In some cases, USFWS has requested that specific bank stabilization projects not be authorized. In all of these cases, however, the USFWS reports that it has received no reply from the Corps. Yellowstone River trout populations are now at their lowest level in over 20 years, and the USFWS is calling for an immediate halt to non-emergency rip-rapping and diking on the Yellowstone River.

While attempting to control flooding and erosion, rip-rap projects may cause unknown cumulative impacts on riparian habitats. Rather than rock or cement structures, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks promotes natural habitat restoration with native plants and shrubs to stabilize river banks. Such habitat restoration is necessary where banks have been destroyed by flooding and hard grazing. Grazing in riparian areas can lead to excessive erosion, and ultimately the destabilization of the root systems of willows, alders, and cottonwood trees. In these cases, bank stabilization using native plants is an essential step toward improving habitats and water quality.
Bison Plan Finds Little Public Support

by Pete Mumey

In early June, a coalition of government agencies released the long-awaited draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), which outlines the future management of the Yellowstone National Park bison herd. The National Park Service, National Forest Service, Animal Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS) and the state of Montana jointly issued the DEIS. The DEIS presents seven alternatives for the management of the last wild, free-roaming bison herd in the country.

Initial public hearings were held just a month later for the public to voice its support or concerns. On July 27, only one of the approximately 30 people at a Helena hearing spoke favorably about the government’s preferred alternative. Two days later, in Gardiner, Mont., a second hearing was held, yet not one of the 46 people commenting fully supported the preferred plan. Bison advocates criticized the plan for killing too many bison for leaving the park, while ranchers and others in the beef industry said that the plan doesn’t go far enough toward eliminating brucellosis in the bison herd. Rather than supporting any alternative in the EIS, most bison advocates support either the Citizen’s Plan or Plan B, which different wildlife groups have put forward.

At the Gardiner hearing, a few ranchers and members of the livestock industry supported alternative 5 or 6 in the EIS, which take more aggressive measures to eradicate brucellosis in the bison herd. Others involved in the livestock industry pointed to overpopulation of bison and elk as the real underlying problem in the area without voicing support for any particular management plan. Ultimately, the various critics of the current plan agree on only one thing: the bison management policies in place over the past decade are simply unacceptable.

Since 1994, Montana Department of Livestock and Park Service personnel have shot-or shipped to slaughter—approximately 1,900 bison that have wandered out of the park. Bison killings have occurred on both public and private lands outside the park boundaries. The slaughter peaked during the severely harsh winter of 1996-97 when these agencies killed almost 1,100 bison—almost one-third of the Yellowstone herd—attempting to migrate to lower elevations in search of food. The reason given for the slaughter of the bison is that some of the animals carry brucellosis, a disease many ranchers and livestock officials fear might spread to the roughly 1,800 cattle in the area, 800 of which graze on public National Forest Service lands in the summer.

This slaughter policy began in 1985, when APHIS declared Montana “brucellosis free” and ordered that no bison be allowed out of the park and into Montana territory. The current Interim Management Plan implemented in 1996 has maintained this policy.

Brucellosis (brucellosis abortus) is a bacterial disease that spreads within cattle herds through the milk of cows and from the consumption of fetal materials after calving. Called “undulant fever” in humans, brucellosis causes a variety of serious health problems. Properly cooking meat and pasteurizing milk kills the bacteria. Standardized pasteurization of milk products in the United States has almost eradicated the disease.

No one involved in this controversy disputes that brucellosis entering cattle herds in the area would have a severe adverse impact on local ranchers, and that the loss of the state’s brucellosis-free status would have a similar affect on the entire cattle industry in Montana. Both livestock interests and wildlife advocates debate just how great the risk of brucellosis spreading from wildlife to cattle is, and how feasible it is to eradicate brucellosis within wildlife in the Greater Yellowstone Area. One of the top objectives of all alternatives in the DEIS is to “commit to the eventual elimination of brucellosis in bison and other wildlife.” This objective, however, may be inconsistent with the most comprehensive government
study of this issue, which the DEIS does not refer to directly.

Commissioned by the Department of Interior, the National Academy of Sciences released a report entitled “Brucellosis in the Greater Yellowstone Area” (February 1998). The report concludes “the total eradication of brucellosis, as a goal, is more a statement of principle than a workable program at present. Neither sufficient information nor technical capability is available to implement a brucellosis eradication program in the Greater Yellowstone Area. The best that will be possible in the near future will be the reduction of transmission of brucellosis abortus from wildlife to cattle.” The report also states “the risk of bison or elk transmitting brucellosis to cattle is small, but not zero,” and vaccinating cattle in the area “would make the risk extremely low under current conditions.” Most ranchers in the area already vaccinate their cattle for brucellosis, though Montana does not require this vaccination.

The disease entered the bison herd around the turn of the century, when wildlife managers introduced bison from private ranchers into the herd. A report by the Greater Yellowstone Interagency Brucellosis Committee found that “transmission from bison to cattle is almost certainly confined to contamination by a birth event by adult females.” To spread the disease, cattle would have to consume fetal afterbirth material from an actively infected bison. This would likely have to happen soon after calving by bison, since brucellosis dies quickly when exposed to sunlight. Less than 3% of the cultures taken from the bison slaughtered in the winter of 1996-97 showed signs of active infection. Blood tests carried out on live bison only indicate exposure to the disease, not if it is present in any actively contagious form.

Despite this, all DEIS alternatives that involve the capture and testing of bison call for all bison testing positive for exposure to brucellosis to be killed. This policy could result in killing off bison that may have developed immunity to the disease. Bison advocates also point out that even the complete eradication of brucellosis within the bison herd will not eliminate the risk of brucellosis transmission in the area. Elk and other wildlife in the Greater Yellowstone Area also carry brucellosis. Over 30,000 elk inhabit the park, and they regularly migrate across park boundaries. Studies have shown the incidence of brucellosis in elk equal to that in bison, and the means of transmission to cattle would be the same from either animal. Michael Finley, Superintendent of Yellowstone National Park, says, “All of Yellowstone’s large ungulates, including elk, moose, pronghorn, deer, bighorn sheep and bison routinely cross the [park] boundaries on seasonal migrations. All except the bison are enthusiastically welcomed on surrounding lands.”

Bison advocates criticize the DEIS for maintaining the state Department of Livestock’s jurisdiction over bison in Montana. Both the Citizen’s Plan and Plan B ask that jurisdiction over bison return to the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and the plans also call for consistency in wildlife management for bison and other wildlife that carry brucellosis. In the winter, both plans would allow more bison greater access to public lands outside the park than the preferred DEIS alternative. Ranchers only run their cows onto these public lands in the late spring and summer.

Ranchers and livestock industry officials claim that making public lands available to bison is merely expanding the park boundaries and thereby delaying consideration of the underlying problem, the overpopulation and overgrazing of bison and other ungulates within the park. Though few ranchers are backing the government’s preferred plan, alternative 7 does manage bison for a specific population range of 1700-2500 animals. Several ranchers supported alternative 5, which, though it does not manages specifically for population size, does take far more aggressive steps towards controlling brucellosis and the migration of bison. This plan completely restricts bison to the park boundaries. The plan also calls for the construction of eight capture and quarantine facilities within the park boundaries. In these facilities all bison within the park would be tested for brucellosis,
and those testing positive would be killed.

Two Gardiner residents, speaking at the second hearing, noted that large bison migrations out of the park have been the exception over the past decade, rather than the norm. Large migrations occurred during the unusually severe winters of 1996-97 and 1988-89. These speakers contend bison need access to public lands outside the park largely in these exceptional situations, and that this is not the same as expanding the boundaries of the park.

Bison advocates also urge that “low risk” bison, as defined by APHIS, not be slaughtered. Low risk bison are calves and bulls that cannot spread brucellosis. The killing of bulls and calves and the shooting of bison without first testing for brucellosis in past slaughters has generated much controversy.

Native Americans have been among the most vocal critics of these policies, and they consider the slaughter of park bison both wasteful and disrespectful of their traditions and relationship with bison. Tribes who work with the Intertribal Bison Cooperative (ITBC) have repeatedly offered solutions to shooting-on-sight, including paying the costs of shipping bison that were rounded up outside the park—and test negative for brucellosis—to tribal quarantine facilities. The ITBC would then ship bison determined to be free of brucellosis to tribes in the ITBC. Forty tribes in the ITBC are establishing bison herds on their reservations.

A key component of the Citizen’s Plan includes the creation of a health certification facility on the Fort Belknap Reservation, in eastern Mont., where bison would be quarantined and relocated to tribal lands. This plan allows for removal of bison at the request of private landowners as well as long term, non-lethal population control. The 17 groups sponsoring the Citizen’s Plan include the ITBC, the National Wildlife Federation, the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, the American Buffalo Foundation, and the Wildlife Federations of Mont., Wyo., and Idaho. The Ecology Center in Missoula, Mont., supports a different citizen’s alternative called Plan B. This plan differs from the Citizen’s Plan in that there would be no roundup and quarantine of bison. Plan B calls for mandatory vaccination of all cattle in the area and vaccinating bison with dart guns, once a safe and effective vaccine for bison is available as the means of controlling brucellosis.

Public comment may be sent on the draft EIS until October 16, 1998.

SEND COMMENTS TO:
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PLAN B:
The Ecology Center
801 Sherwood
Missoula, MT 59802
(406) 728-5733
http://www.wildrockies.org/PlanB
Bob Marshall once said that “wilderness is disappearing like a snowbank in the August sun.” This was the prevailing sentiment at the first National Wilderness Conference (NWC), held May 29-31, 1998, in Seattle, Wash. The conference, sponsored by the Northwest Wilderness and Parks Conference and the Wilderness Society, brought together visitors and delegates from 100 environmental organizations, all hoping to define an agenda for wilderness protection in the 21st century. The three day event included lectures, workshops, and field trips throughout Seattle.

This first National Wilderness Conference was touted as a step toward a rejuvenated national movement to protect wilderness that is more inclusive of human interests, replete with workshops ranging from media skills, economics, organizing, and science, punctuated with ‘pep’ talks given by some wilderness heavyweights.

Many speakers pleaded for the conference not to be a single or isolated event. Politics, both external and internal to the environmental movement, and political economy were dominant themes at the conference. Eco-elder David Brower, the former President of the Sierra Club and founder of Friends of the Earth and the Earth Island Institute, lambasted the current Clinton administration for creating “more environmental damage in four years” than the Reagan and Bush administrations in toto because of the ratification of NAFTA and GATT. “It was Mr. Clinton’s idea that wilderness, human rights, and equity should not get in the way of world trade,” Brower asserted, before turning his criticism upon the general world economy. “The things we are fighting for are not going to make it if the present corporate lack of conscience, if the present investor lack of conscience, about what happens to the Earth prevails.”

Stewart Brandborg, former executive director of the Wilderness Society and currently an officer for the Montana-based Friends of the Bitterroot and Wilderness Watch, echoed Brower’s political and economic concerns. “We find the West standing against itself, “he said. Citing lack of support for wilderness and the environment in the House and Senate on congressional energy and environmental committees, Brandborg claimed, “These people are bought and paid for by the extractive industries in this corrupt political system of ours.”

Brent Blackwelder, president of Friends of the Earth (FOE), warned that a fundamental threat to wilderness has evolved from economic globalization. “[T]he results have been poisonous for wilderness, because ... now capitol can move any place on the planet for quick plunder.” He characterized the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), which has yet to be ratified, as the “takings issue internationalized, globalized, by the Clinton Administration.” Under the MAI, Blackwelder asserted, a company can sue a nation for prohibiting its product, or throwing up a trade barrier, and would allow any foreign corporation to have the same rights as local companies.

Brandborg and others also cited a list of threats to designated wilderness, including agency mismanagement, overuse, ATV and snowmobile use, mountain biking, grazing, outfitter camps, illegal stocking of exotic fish and mining. “Any designated wilderness or wild and scenic river gets stomped flat by [the] anachronistic 1872 Mining Law,” said Dave Willis of the Soda Mountain Wilderness Council. In the case of mining, the Wilderness Act allows ‘reasonable access,’ construed by agencies as allowing roads, so miners can “perform their God-given right to grovel in the gravel for gold,” Willis continued. “Miners can drive in their motor vehicles, rip up the land with their bulldozers, and if they can prove they have an economically-valid claim, they can buy that public land for two-fifty to five dollars an acre.”
George Nickas of Wilderness Watch, headquartered in Missoula, noted the creeping threat of the “incrementalism” of exceptions to the prohibition against mechanization in wilderness. In the 1960’s, the Forest Service made fewer than ten exceptions nationwide. In 1994, in Region 1 alone, 99 exceptions were made. Nickas said the biggest management threat is “indifferent, or even hostile wilderness managers that work in the agencies. The second biggest threat to wilderness is an apathetic public.”

Panelists also pondered the future of the wilderness system going into the 21st century. Noting the drawbacks of piecemeal legislative approaches, Mike Bader of the Alliance for the Wild Rockies called for passage of the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act, first introduced in Congress in 1994: “We need to get away from the idea of wilderness as isolated gems, but as part of a healthy, functioning landscape.”

Bill Meadows, president of the Wilderness Society bemoaned that “[We are] still losing too many wild places, and not just the public land. Call them woodlots or open space. What they have in common is their wild natural character and their importance to our well being.” Meadows called for an additional 200 million acres to be fully protected on top of the 103 million acres currently designated wilderness.

Finding solutions to protecting more wilderness generated the most passionate appeals, and the criticism became self-reflective within the conservation community. While some speakers touted the NWC as a community conference, Flip Hagood took issue with that notion. The only African-American speaker at the conference, Hagood is vice president for regional operations of the Student Conservation Association. Referring to demographic changes on the horizon, Hagood warned, “There’s a train a-comin’, and it’s got different passengers on it.” He said green votes must come from new constituencies, and he cited the need to create bridges and partnerships with the next generation of people to help in the environmental movement. Alluding to “the way this room looks,” Hagood chided, “It’s kind of ironic how in our community, we embrace the concept of biodiversity—get it?” He said more women, people of color, and youth “should have been here hearing this message today. I ask everyone of you to change the structure of your organization. Look at your boards, your membership. Be inclusive.”

Melanie Griffin of the Sierra Club concurred: “[A] democratic Congress is not the solution. The solution is fundamentally changing the political landscape. We have got to create such a demand for wildlands protection that the Democrats and Republicans are falling all over each other to pass our wilderness bill.” Since even members of environmental groups voted on average only 50% of the time, it was obvious to the speakers that some improvement in public attitude needs to be affected.

But amidst the debate over how to educate the public and advance environmental constituencies, a few speakers called upon the wilderness and environmental movement to cease infighting and unify. “We’ve picked up that line,” David Brower said, “At the sign of the enemy, circle the wagons and fire within.” In his conference-closing speech, Denis Hayes, Founder of Earth Day and President of the Bullitt Foundation, claimed that unlike many issues, wilderness was an issue of basic principle. “Wilderness is different. You cannot compromise and have a ‘sort of’ wilderness. Once a wilderness is lost, it’s lost forever.” Hayes pointed to how Earth Day 1970 joined urban, pollution-oriented interests with nature and wilderness interests. For Earth Day 2000, Hayes announced the launching of Project Apollo, a call for global conversion to solar energy. He outlined the biggest threats to human beings and the environment: current energy production and its attendant pollution, steep population growth, and conspicuous consumption. Part of the agenda of Earth Day 2000 is to preserve wilderness and wild things.
History, Economy and Landscape: A Look at Montana Ranching

by Sarah Heim-Jonson

High on a hillside, on the edge of a lush stream around a bend, a herd of cattle drinks peacefully from a metal tank, seemingly ignoring the water flowing nearby. Given both options—still and running water—the cows make their choice, but one wonders what the cows are thinking on that hillside and why they dismiss the cool, refreshing stream.

Surprisingly, cattle will choose a tank of water over a stream about 50 percent of the time. Water tanks are but one example of recent techniques developed—under the buzz title “sustainable ranching”—that attempt to conserve and protect rangelands, specifically riparian and pasture areas, from the detrimental effects of overgrazing.

Ask a rancher about sustainable ranching and you will probably get a chuckle, followed by a pause, followed by the question, “What exactly do you want to know about, hmmm?” The truth is that there is no set definition of “sustainable ranching,” and one rancher’s definition is very likely different from his neighbor’s. Instead, it is wiser to ask a rancher about basic ranch operations and land management, which could then provide a forum for the rancher to dive into a discussion of range rotations, cowboys, water allotments, fencing and other specific techniques being used on ranches throughout the West.

After years of hard use, ranchers discovered that range lands were not responding well to cattle herds, leading to, among other problems, loss of forage and reduced water quality. In an enlightened movement, ranchers began implementing new methods for land management, methods that more often than not focused on water quality. The result: developments that focus on the preservation of stream banks, waterways, riparian vegetation and pasture forage but that also continue cattle production on traditionally-grazed lands.

Concern over the worsening condition of riparian areas began over 20 years ago and was a hotly-contested issue for years by various contingencies. Ranchers were wary of outsiders telling them what to do. County extension agents wanted to address the issues of riparian degeneration, but were not sure of the best method to use. Some environmentalists denounced livestock production across the board.

In describing the early meetings and conversations among the various players involved, Jeff Mosely, a range extension specialist from Bozeman, Mont., draws an analogy to a heavy weight prize fight contest. To begin with, he explains, ranchers and non-ranchers took opposing sides and spent a lot of time, money and effort battling one another. Over time, all parties involved realized that no one had made any progress, but everyone had suffered from the existing animosity. Over the past five years, a sense of respect has developed among opposing interests as well as a growing recognition that both sides are intertwined and must work together. Indeed, not all meetings run smoothly, but the disagreements these days stem from personality clashes, not from contempt or distrust.

Furthermore, Mosely argues that it is a compliment to the ranching community that anyone is concerned about the riparian areas at all. He alludes to the poor shape of upland areas at the turn of the century after seasons of overuse. Herds of cattle were typically left on upland areas in summer months while ranchers hayed other sections of the ranch. This method, while convenient for haying ranchers, ruined the uplands so that, from a range standpoint, it did not matter what the riparian areas looked like. Poor upland areas equal poor forage, which in turn lead to poor cattle production—and no income. Ranchers successfully rallied together and restored the uplands,
but the probability of further areas in need of help remains.

In Montana, county extension agents, aligned with the state’s universities, work with ranchers and non-ranchers in order to develop sound land management practices for cattle production and other land issues such as noxious weed control. County extension work concentrates on “using the land without abusing it.”

Jerry Marks, County Extension Agent of Missoula County, Mont., describes his office philosophy as “Jeffersonian”: it attempts to set up public programs to promote problem solving and informed decision making. Another county extension agent describes his role as a mediator working primarily with individual producers and agency representatives, from the US Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to other state and county agencies. Extension offices are a remarkable resource for the public, offering state-wide workshops and seminars on land-use issues, research plots and classes taught by trained professionals on a variety of public-interest issues, including riparian restoration and rangeland management.

Although forage production is a key element in livestock production, riparian restoration receives more public attention. Why are riparian areas so important and why should ranchers—and the public—worry about restoring them?

On a small scale, riparian areas, along streams, rivers and creeks, are of prime importance to water quality and quantity, fish habitat and overall stream function. Riparian vegetation along streambanks slows flood waters, storing water which could flood farther downstream. Stored water is released gradually over time, lengthening the time of seasonal water supply and bolstering groundwater supply. In addition, the vegetation bordering streams and rivers decreases erosion, using root systems to bind soil, thereby stabilizing the entire bank. As water moves along the channel, vegetation interferes with its passage along the bank, slowing the water down and reducing the amount of soil and lighter debris lost to the water. As well, riparian plants and grasses provide a shade canopy for the streambank, creating a unique climate along the water.

This unique biome is a critical habitat for wildlife species for breeding and foraging. Likewise, shade canopies provide cooler, more comfortable travel corridors for species who tend to avoid hotter, more exposed areas above the riparian zone. Water creatures and fish also depend on the streambanks for food. The aquatic food chain begins in the riparian zone with organic detritus and terrestrial insects. Without the riparian zone, fish and other aquatic creatures would die from lack of nutrients. Besides wildlife, however, the riparian zone offers domestic livestock and humans a place of shade, water and relaxation, as well as forage for livestock. In fact, vegetation along the water may be good to eat long after upland forage has cured.

Why then, if cattle benefit so well from riparian areas, are we concerned with getting them up and away from waterways? Lamentably, the impacts of a herd can be enormous due to their weight, heavy foraging and hoofed feet. Livestock are attracted to riparian areas for food, water and shelter from the sun. Who can blame them for wanting to enjoy a cool drink in the...
shade? Unfortunately, a herd of cattle will trample down the soil of streambanks, making the bank increasingly unstable, leading to accelerated erosion. Too much cattle browsing reduces the vegetation’s ability to rebound and regenerate. Defecation along waterways is easily swept into the current, along with churned-up soil, released nutrients and discarded vegetation, negatively affecting fish habitat and water quality downstream. Clearly, the concern over riparian areas stems from the human need for water consumption in addition to the foraging and watering needs of cattle.

Although many ranchers interviewed for this article expressed a genuine sense of responsibility for upholding land standards, they are also under pressure from the Clean Water Act, which sets goals and standards for water quality. However a rancher chooses to manage grazing—by modifying timing, frequency, or intensity—he is held responsible for the effects his cattle have on the water quality.

In Idaho, Best Management Practices (BMPs) are one approach to addressing the negative impacts of livestock grazing and various land-use activities on water quality. Before a BMP is officially approved, methods of controlling non-point source water pollution or polluted runoff must be addressed. A step in the right direction, BMPs apply to specific areas rather than trying to govern water quality issues across the board.

Although county extension agencies and public land officials are involved with ranching issues, the most important players are certainly the ranchers themselves. There is a great sense of history to the world of ranching. In fact, many ranches have been handed down through generations of one family. Even ranchers who have recently purchased their own land, or who manage a corporate ranch, have long histories of working with land and animals, and those histories typically provide them a deep sense of belonging to and appreciation for the land.

Ranching is a dicey career because there are always uncertainties in weather, hay production, water availability and a score of other factors. Add to the mix the reliance on public lands and it seems as though ranching could be a lose-lose proposition. Public grass- or range-lands are in great demand these days by ranchers, hunters, birders, recreationists and preservationists. As tax payers, everyone has some ownership of the public lands, but from a ranching standpoint, it seems only sensible to lease lands out for grazing rather than protect them for hikers or birders. Ranchers pay taxes and for grazing permits, yet the cost of leasing public land is often a fraction of what it would cost to lease private land a major point of contention.

Opponents complain that grazing should not be permitted on public lands due to the negative effects it can have on land. It is a touchy subject which is rapidly becoming political. Despite the rancher perspective that grazing is a worthy and compatible use for public lands, many environmentalists believe that grazing should be greatly restricted if not prohibited on public lands. They contend that grazed land is unequivocally detrimental for wildlife species. For example, the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge is heavily grazed to the detriment of sharp-tailed grouse habitat, key for nesting and foraging, originally found in areas like the refuge. Likewise, residual grass obscurity coverage is low from over-
grazing—dangerously low, in fact—for deer and elk populations.

What happens, then, if use on public lands is restricted in order to protect the land from grazing and to preserve wildlife? Unfortunately, it seems that private land would suffer from trying to make up the difference in loss of land. While one might say it is the rancher's livelihood, let him use his own land, it is also true that in fixing a situation in one area, one may exacerbate a problem in another. (It seems important to realize that private land might be found in the more sensitive valley bottoms, riparian areas where migratory birds stop on their way south in the winter. Wildlife does not discern between public and private land so that in the fight to preserve public land, wildlife might still suffer.)

When approached about grazing practices on public versus private land, ranchers wholeheartedly proclaim that their sense of stewardship is equal for both areas despite the fact that they own one and lease the other.

One rancher, Ray Marxer of Matador Cattle Company in Dillon, Mont., detailed his perspective on grazing permits. To begin with, permits are set up to be renewed every ten years, which gives livestock producers a sense of long-term commitment. This alone, he believes, avoids the short-term tenant philosophy whereby there is no sense of responsibility for the land. With a ten-year lease, however, a rancher will treat the land as though it were his own, with a true sense of ownership. The Matador Cattle Company uses one USFS allotment, some BLM land, state-deeded land and private land. Another rancher matter-of-factly told me that most ranchers are dependent on public land so it is in their best interest to take care of it.

Bob Lee, an independent family rancher in Judith Gap, Mont., and winner of the National Environmental Stewardship Award in 1996, informed me that two-thirds of the rangelands in Montana are privately owned. His family operation utilizes a state lease and forest permit, a small fraction of his land use in contrast to his own land totaling 13,500 acres. Despite the small size of public land used, Lee reports great improvements on his leased land including increased vegetation and water developments so that the public land will be in better shape at the end of his use than it was originally. Although there are undoubtedly improvements being made by a number of ranchers, some non-ranchers still have concern about land misuse since not all ranchers are as respectable as Lee and Marxer.

What, then, is the answer to the dilemma of cattle and land use, public or private? It is unrealistic to suggest an end to all cattle production in the name of land protection. Yet where is the balance between use and responsibility? Perhaps the most productive way to address the issue is through the methods being used to regulate cattle usage of pastures and riparian areas. Some of the most significant improvements have been due to water allotments and rotational grazing practices.

One of the most effective ways to keep cattle away from riparian areas is to create water tanks, or stockwater, at several points, roughly a mile apart, throughout a pasture. Bob Lee explains that cows...
What, then, is the answer to the dilemma of cattle and land use, public or private? It is unrealistic to suggest an end to all cattle production in the name of land protection. Yet where is the balance between use and responsibility?

prefer the tanks because they offer clean water as opposed to the often muddier water of the stream. He compared the stream choice to drinking water downstream from where several children have been playing: that if one cow is drinking from a stream, an entire herd is not far away.

Stockwater originates on the uplands from a groundwater source which is then gravitationally pulled downhill into large water tanks. The tanks reduce the need for extensive fencing which is another method used to regulate cattle along riparian areas. Fences effectively keep livestock away from streambeds, but they can create other problems. For example, cows may pace alongside a fence in search of access to the nearby water, creating a “cow path,” trampling vegetation and leading to accelerated erosion once it rains. Selective fencing in combination with stockwater proves to be a practical method to prevent overuse of riparian areas.

Ranchers must concentrate on forage production in addition to riparian restoration in order to feed their cattle and develop a healthy herd. There are a number of ways to move cattle around a ranch, but the overall purpose is to keep cattle from overusing one particular area. If given the chance, cows will laze around one area so long as there is food and water. In rotational grazing, a rancher moves his cattle frequently during the growing season, allowing certain pastures to rest, sometimes all season long.

On large, commercial ranches, seasonal workers are hired as stockmen to move the herd from one pasture to another, sometimes moving 80 miles over the growing season. Small, family ranchers will work with the herd themselves, rotating the livestock throughout the summer over a number of pastures. Either way, cattle is being moved constantly throughout the growing season.

The benefits of rotating cattle through pastures are numerous. First, there is overall improved ground cover. In some areas, cattle use one pasture long enough to graze, but leave before the cover is decimated. In the next pasture, cattle will trample budding seeds into the ground, aiding in distribution and eventual forage growth. Rotation means reduced erosion over large areas and increased growth time for plants which leads to a greater diversity of plant types over time. Improved ground cover and transitional livestock herds around ensures more habitat to be used by wildlife. At the Matador Cattle Company, in the 1970s, only 56 elk were seen on the Sage Creek allotment while 400 elk presently live there year-round and 1100 more winter on the allotment.

Finally, a rotational grazing schedule allows ranchers to harvest forage on unused pastures in order to prepare for the winter season so that in some cases, the cattle never eat hay, only natural forage from their summer pastures.

Clearly life has improved for cattle and wildlife on rangelands. Ranchers are benefitting from recent improvements in land management with thriving herds and healthy lands. The question still remains: how to balance public land use with private interests? Should recreationists accept that public lands will be harvested by cattle? Or, should hikers pay an additional user fee and be assured a non-grazed area for use?

It is arguable that changes in range management are too new to arrive at a definitive answer. Rather, as ranchers become more knowledgeable about
their land improvements (what works and what does not), it should be their responsibility to educate the public about land management improvements in order to avoid arguments from uninformed non-ranchers. In fact, some ranchers, through groups such as the Grazing Land Conservation Initiative and the Governor’s Rangeland Resource Executive Committee, are inviting public involvement in land management improvements through a number of statewide workshops and range tours.

Likewise, it is imperative for non-ranchers to seek out the facts about grazing permits and livestock use on public lands before denouncing the livestock profession altogether. Considering recent improvements on ranches in the West, the once unsustainable middle ground between cattle growers and non-ranchers seems feasible. Ranching is an integral aspect of the economy and history of much of the West—and it cannot be ignored. But it can’t hurt ranching to look closely at its own history, for as rancher Bob Lee says, “It’s hard to know where you’re going if you don’t know where you’ve been.”

Rancher Bob Lee and his wife, Kathy.
Photo by Sarah Heim-Jonson.
Joe McDowell: Friend to the Blackfoot River

by Rachel Wray

About his legacy, Joe McDowell is candid: “I’d like to be remembered for my work on the Blackfoot,” the octogenarian says bluntly, looking me in the eye. Then he shakes his shock of white hair and looks past my shoulder, as if even contemplating future generation’s regard for his good deeds were unthinkable.

We’re sitting at his dining room table in his home on the North Fork of the Blackfoot River ‘on the river’ being almost literal: if I jumped from his deck, I could clear the bank and land in water. It is this immediate inspiration in his backyard that has influenced the last four decades of McDowell’s activism—a majority of it focused on preserving the open spaces along the Blackfoot—and it is this activism that has brought me to his home today.

We tour his house, which he built himself, and chitchat about his early life. Almost imperceptibly, the interview has started, and though I’m not yet drawing from my list of questions, McDowell is ultimately providing the answers. I wanted to ask him what pivotal experience encouraged his environmental bent. He speaks about his birth in Deer Lodge, Montana, in 1912, and his appreciation for the western Montana landscape in general and Powell County in particular. Slowly, with various tangents about school and poverty and a multitude of part-time jobs, his environmental ethic emerges: he is an active conservationist simply because this is his home, and he knows of no other way to treat it.

For years, however, McDowell lived far from the Treasure State. After graduating with a law degree from the University of Montana—where tuition was a staggering $100—he moved to Washington, D.C., working for the Justice Department for 19 years. Then came a private practice as partner in a law firm, and finally his own business in New York City. All the while, he said, “I couldn’t wait to come back.” And when he retired at age 58, he did just that.

Retirement, however, applied only to his career, not to work, and McDowell quickly found himself busy with philanthropic pursuits. For several years, McDowell had been on the Montana Foundation committee, which raised money for the University of Montana. Before long, he was securing funds that would help support the Lubrecht Forest, and it was through that project that he found himself acquainted with Arnie Bolle, dean of the Forestry School, Hank Goetz, manager of Lubrecht Forest, and Land Lindbergh, a local rancher.

Along with McDowell and others, these three men would find themselves entrenched in the debate over public use of the 132-mile river, for even at that early date, in the mid-60s, the number of recreationists and visitors was rapidly increasing. But the high traffic was just one problem, what Goetz characterizes as a day-to-day problem, and the larger issue remained the long-term protection of the river’s ecological and scenic integrity.

Enter McDowell. While working back east, he had witnessed the implementation of federal “scenic easements” in the Smokey Mountains, and he was acquainted with California’s version, which was designed to prevent development. Montana, however, had no such law ... yet.

The Nature Conservancy’s Western Regional Representative, Huey Johnson, contributed ideas for this badly-need, long-term protection, and he, along with lawyer Robert (Bob) Knight worked with McDowell on crafting and passing legislation. Unfortunately, for all their good intentions, Montana state politics proved to be a considerable hurdle. “This used to be a Democratic state,” McDowell fondly remembers before turning a serious gaze toward me:
"I hope you’re a Democrat."

At that time, though, the legislature was suspicious of any sort of law that would affect property owners, and reception to the proposed bill was cool. "There were some [legislators] just flat opposed to it," Lindbergh remembers. Still, in 1973, the three aforementioned men as well as private landowners made their first run at the legislature, and the bill eventually passed in the House. Railroad and other corporate interests, however, successfully blocked its passage in the Senate, and the contingency had no choice but to regroup, rewrite, and try again.

Lindbergh calls this a "frustrating" time, but all the while, he notes, McDowell never gave up. Goetz concurs. "Joe's one of the grandfathers behind the conservation easement legislation," he says, adding that McDowell's role was instrumental in passing the legislation. "Joe was not a bit put out by having to deal with these folks," Lindbergh agrees, referring both to the opposition's lobbyists and the politicians. "He was really the leader, particularly politically."

That leadership finally yielded results, and in 1975, the "Montana Open-Space Land and Voluntary Conservation Easement Act" was adopted. "We needed a tool to help us protect long-term," Lindbergh assesses, and this Act was it. The legislation provided that landowners retained their property rights, the right to sell or lease the land, and even the right to farm, ranch and selectively log. In exchange, on land adjacent to the river, landowners wouldn't clear-cut timber or, most importantly, subdivide their property.

Because flexibility helped easements more palatable to both landowners and lawmakers, the law allowed easements to be granted for either 15-year terms or in perpetuity. The conservation easement law also allowed landowners to deduct the value of their donation on their tax returns as a charitable contribution, a tenet designed not only to help the small rancher—many of whom were and still are pressured to subdivide—but also to incite corporate landowners to donate land, too. The inability to subdivide meant the land's development value could no longer be taxed, although landowners are still assessed on agricultural or forestry rights. Still, the tax break for donation makes up for other taxing. Long-time rancher Lindbergh explains, "It's a good tool for estate planning, and not just by the wealthy, out-of-staters, but also by the third and fourth generation ranchers. Otherwise, they just couldn't pay the taxes." McDowell puts it another way. "It's a great
partnership between public and private landowners." Plus, he wryly adds, "It doesn’t cost the state a goddamn penny."

Before long, individual landowners were putting conservation easements on their river front land, with many of the donors working on the previously mentioned problems of anglers, hunters and other recreationists using private land. The Recreation Management Plan, developed by the state, various agencies, Goetz and the local landowners, attempted to alleviate this problem by designating certain access points to the river. These access points were on private land, but landowners were willing to concede public use if state agencies were willing to manage, and in some cases police, the access points and the public’s use. The Blackfoot Recreation Corridor is the subsequent result, and its success has been the model for river managers across the country. Still, the foundation for the recreation corridor, the obviously more visible component, remains the conservation easements. Goetz explains, "People today just see the recreation aspects. They don’t realize the thing that back that up."

This, then, is Joe McDowell’s legacy, and his request to be remembered for his development of conservation easements is both humble and reasonable. Humility, however, is something he consistently displays. Goetz notes that for years, when McDowell was younger and able to provide more financial support to the department, the Forestry School had McDowell Day, when forestry students would visit and work around his property, thinning trees and cleaning up before enjoying a picnic with their benefactor. "Didn’t he mention it?" Goetz asks. No, he didn’t.

Lindbergh echoes Goetz’s sentiment. Recently, two books detailing the recreational and conservation corridor were released, and Lindbergh laments the lack of wholly accurate research. "I felt very badly when these things came out," he sighs. "Neither one gave [Joe] the kind of credit that he justly deserved." But then he perks up, and he talks about his good friend. "He’s a very unique guy," and then, with more than a tinge of understatement, he adds, "Joe’s well-known for his buffalo steaks and his old fashioneds, but he did some other things, too."

Even if McDowell is unwilling to laud his own achievements, his legacy grows. Witness the thousands of people who visit the Blackfoot each year, swimming, fishing, boating... Better yet, witness the generous landowners who continue to use conservation easements as a tool to protect and preserve their property. In the Ovando Valley recently, 8.75 miles of river frontage along the Blackfoot was placed in a perpetual conservation easement by several landowners, which—when added to other easements placed along the river frontage land over the past two decades as well as the 26 miles of protected land in the Recreation Corridor—means McDowell has had some impact indeed.
Eating one’s way through the recipes in Greg Patent’s New Cooking from the Old West provides the rare opportunity to study Western cultural geography and history with knife and fork in hand. Rather than accepting the West’s ungainly cliché of beef, beans and gravy, Patent has used methods similar to the environmental historian William Cronon to create a story of western cuisine based on diverse characters converging in a diverse landscape.

In the cookbook’s introduction, Patent claims that the gift of time is responsible for the unique cuisines of France, Italy and China, which have had hundreds or thousands of years to evolve. Considering the relative newness of settlement in the American West, he believes we are at a beginning point, developing an innovative culture of food that is just now being appreciated.

The bond that ties the cultural players together is the array of indigenous and agricultural items found in the West, and Patent’s recipes-logically organized under headings like breads or deserts or seafood-have a running theme that includes these distinctly western items with myriad interpretations.

The chapter on meat includes both recipes for wild game and the tamer fleshes, like beef and pork. The pages devoted to wild game should not be mistaken for yet another “hunter’s cookbook.” Instead, these recipes challenge the hunter, or the hunter’s beneficiary, to make the difficult jump beyond the fry-and-serve game cookery that is responsible for the remnant’s of last decades’ kills that are still sitting in many freezers. Hunters who follow the “I killed it, guess I have to eat it” logic will enjoy experimenting with Patent’s ideas, just as many Mexicans, Asians and Europeans did while trying the make the West’s abundant big game herds fit into old-world kitchen precepts. There are several recipes and guidelines for duck, buffalo, pheasant, elk and venison, most with enticing ethnic twists.

European immigrants were delighted to find fungi growing throughout much of the West, and they learned to use those new species of mushrooms along with some more familiar to their homelands. The Appetizer chapter is loaded with mushroom concoctions, information, and some historical notes on mushroom hunting and use.

The fish and seafood portion of the book is enhanced by the inclusion of tastes from the Pacific Northwest. Herbed baked halibut, sturgeon with morel mushrooms and cognac, smoked salmon, trout scallops, and Dungeness crab quiche are some of the offerings, and they demonstrate nicely the theme of ethnic variations on native items. I was especially pleased and surprised to see some whitefish recipes and a nifty parable headlined “A Whitefish Story.”

Whitefish are sometimes called chokers—a joke taken from the term ‘smokers,’ as in fish suitable for smoking—because anglers commonly practice choke and release on them, letting the spiraling corpses wash downstream. Angler logic goes that whitefish eat the more lucrative trout spawn— as if the native whitefish should give up an introduced food source because some nitwit took a Monday morning off for some flyfishing. I might post Patent’s whitefish fillet roulades with watercress sauce at all public river accesses—possibly inducing some to re-think their wasteful ways.

Wild berries are frequently called upon in the dessert section, with the West’s very own huckleberry making several appearances. Huckleberry pie, ice cream, and shake recipes should encourage gatherers to let a few berries actually make it home instead of being devoured during the walk downhill to the car.

Patent’s vegetable section relies heavily on...
those plants hardy enough to thrive in the unpredictable mountain summers. And he praises the hard winter wheat that he says is essential for making excellent yeast breads. He also credits the Hmong, who moved to the Missoula, Montana, area from Southeast Asia after the Vietnam War, with growing delicious, organic vegetables such as carrots and broccoli, giving Farmer’s Market patrons an early-summer treat.

Too often, people live up to the proverb “you are what you eat”—that is, they are as squeamish as their palates and unwilling or unable to sample more than ubiquitous coffee shop fare or processed meals. New Cooking from the Old West, however, offers a subtle sleight of hand: Patent deals with esoteric foodstuffs so matter-of-factly, so honestly, that he may even trick some of the most cowardly consumers into a little friendly experimentation with culinary diversity.

Patent, himself, embodies that diversity. An award-winning cook who has lived in Shanghai, San Francisco, and Naples, he leads the move to define Western gourmet. In his book, he has taken his broad experiences, as well as the experiences of many others, to the pantry of the American West with some intriguing and educational results. Bon appétit.

VENISON CHILI WITH SINGAPORE HOT SAUCE ~ SIX SERVINGS

2-1/2 lbs. venison stew meat, trimmed and cut into 3/4-inch cubes
2 Tbsp. corn oil
1 c. chopped red bell pepper
1/2 c. chopped, seeded poblano chiles
2 c. chopped sweet yellow onions
6 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 tsp. sweet paprika
1 tsp. ground coriander
1-1/2 tsp. ground cumin
1 Tbsp. chile powder
1 tsp. fennel seed
1/2 tsp. salt
1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
1 can (14 1/2- to 16-ounce) peeled crushed tomatoes with juices
12 ounces dark beer
1/4 to 1/2 c. Yeo’s Hot Chili Sauce

Pat the venison dry with paper towels.

Heat the oil in a 12-inch wide, 3-inch deep saute pan over medium-high heat. Add the venison and brown on all sides, about 5 minutes.

Add the red and green bell peppers, poblano chiles, onions and garlic. Stir well, cover and cook 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Add the paprika, coriander, cumin, chile powder, fennel, salt and pepper and cook 1 minute, stirring occasionally. Add the tomatoes and juices, beer and hot sauce (use 1/2 cup if you like spicy chili).

Bring the mixture to a simmer and cover the pan. Reduce heat to low and cook slowly until the meat is very tender and the sauce is slightly thickened, 1 1/2 to 2 hours. If the sauce seems too thin, cook, uncovered, 10 to 15 minutes more. Serve hot.
This is for you to know.

My road is a dusty spine—
Pines, maples, birches, tenting it from August.
Can’t you know how I will hold your hand on that road?

Twenty years I can give you:
Skinned knees from forgotten bike wrecks
(my blood is in that road),
miles of solitary lazy ambles,
Juniper bushes against mossy stone walls of grown-in
pastures,
where I hid, outraged, on a million ten-minute runaways
(injustice comes and goes quickly for children).

We’ll walk halfway up the gravel
to the small room I was born in.
Left leg first, umbilical cord tight around my neck.
Nearly the room I died in.
This body would be buried among oaks behind the
pasture.

We can sit beneath a head-shaped chunk of granite
behind the yard (alternately
pirate ship, space shuttle, stagecoach)
I ran to with wicked six-year-old laughter
after stealing a ginger-ale.

I’ll show you the white pine, five feet around, Max
died under.
Speak quietly of the way the snow was pink—
He was bleeding from the inside; he was my first dog.
He was embarrassed by his pain, so walk on
down the hollow: we’ll see black metal and ashes,
which once was an A-frame where I lived for two
summers,
in my eighteenth and nineteenth years.
I built a porch to watch bats and call barrel owls.
You’ll see the spring I dug out for drinking water.
That water was brown and salty and delicious.
It burned down last summer. I was walking home to bed.

I will give you small tart apples, daffodils,
hard pears, and sweet furry peaches
sun-warmed on the branch
wild mint my small hands picked for my mother’s iced tea.

I’ll show you a rock that was a mountain.
My sister was four, and always wanted
pretend picnics there.
I sometimes played along.
Spooning mud with gusto,
and exclaiming at the deliciousness
of her grass-clipping mashed potatoes.

At the bottom of the driveway,
at the base of the long-grass field,
My small apartment: just two rooms (one deep paisley
couch,
a 1951 jukebox, a stained glass window,
a writing desk made from a door).
The room I sleep in now is the room I was born in.
Below that, an always-cool garage.
Full of greasy wrenches, used oil, crusty cans of paint.
My black dog will be lying there; he’s old now, he pants
and limps when he wakes up.
He snaps at yellowjackets and they sting his tongue.

When I was eight I built a shabby birdfeeder.
I gave it to my father. He still has it.
When I was seventeen,
I rebuilt my truck. 1961 International.
Last year, I put a refrigerator in the garage,
so my friends and I could sit, evenings,
drink cold Shlitz, watch moths at the light,
play the radio low.

We can go back down the hollow, to where the
raspberries grow.
Eat them as we walk past, and into the woods.
In ten minutes, we’ll be at the swimming pond.
Where my whole family used to skinny-dip,
and sometimes
my parents would have dances on the banks.
We can swim there, and catch tadpoles.

We’ll go up to my folk’s house,
the kitchen where I waltz with mother,
and the woodstove that has always dried my mittens.
Can’t you know how I will hold your hand, there?
This history trembling in my fingers?

Benjamin John Ahlgren
October 1977 - May 1998