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Camas
The Nature of the West

An Anniversary of Activism
The Environmental Studies Program at the University of Montana Turns Thirty

The Evolution of Revolution
by Mary Anne Peine

Please Don't Monkeywrench my PowerBook
by Jeffery Smith

Essay by Rick Bass
Interview with Howie Wolke

Poetry by Janisse Ray
BARGAIN BASEMENT PRICES

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Mating & Birth (Spring 1999)
Exotics (Summer 1999)
Teller Issue (Fall 1999)
Designated Places (Winter 2000)
An Anniversary of Activism
Spring/Summer 2000
Volume 4, Number 1

Contents

Feature

The Evolution of Revolution:
A Brief History of Environmental Activism in the Northern Rockies
Mary Anne Peine takes us on a journey of two histories: one of the environmental movement in the Northern Rockies and another of the Environmental Studies Program at the University of Montana. The program celebrates its thirtieth anniversary this year, and the paths its alumni have taken are deeply connected to the evolution of the grassroots environmental movement in the Rocky Mountain West.

Page 14

Departments

First Person
Tara Gunter, page 2

Snapshots
Jenny Flynn, page 4

Activists on Activism
Hank Fischer, page 5
Jake Kreilick, page 5
Len Broberg, page 8
Donald Snow, page 8

Perspectives
Rick Bass, page 6
Jeffery Smith, page 10

Profile
Howie Wolke as interviewed by Kyle McClure, page 18

Essay
Pete Murney, page 24

Poetry
Beth Peluso, page 23, 30

Book Reviews
Salmon Without Rivers, page 28
Taking Care, page 29

Famous Last Words
Janisse Ray, page 33
At Home with the Owls

I first heard the words “spotted owl” when I was thirteen years old. Today, the habits, needs, and politics surrounding this creature are commonly known throughout the West, perhaps throughout the country. The owl is forever entangled with tree-huggers, -sitters, and -spikers, with protests and litigation, with mill closures, and a fumbling Forest Service. The dark eyes of this endangered bird contain all that is living in coastal trees, in temperate rainforests that, once visited, haunt memory with the pungent fragrance of wet needles and bark and rhododendrons blooming. But the message I took from the wildlife biologist, who visited my 8th grade class over twelve years ago, was simple: spotted owls have a home that might be lost.

On that day, I did not know what would happen to my own home in southwestern Oregon during the ensuing years. I did not anticipate that this most famous member of the endangered species list would foster beliefs in me that were not welcome in a town where, in outlying areas, ten mills stacked logs three stories high. I learned very quickly, though, what environmental activism meant for me in that place—not rallies or petitions or picketing. It meant my 4-H leader, whose husband was a mill manager, would still teach me how to ride a horse, but that I was no longer one of her favorites. It meant that when I argued with a classmate at school about old growth forests, books were shoved off my desk. When logging trucks, stacked to carrying capacity at one or two massive trunks, paraded down the main streets and yellow ribbons flew from antennas, it meant that I should stay home.

It is said that environmentalists won that battle. To this day, I’m not sure exactly how I contributed to the fight. I never chained myself to a tree, never blocked a logging road or burned down a Forest Service building. I did believe in the owl’s fundamental right to a home in those watery forests that filled the Umpqua River basin and the surrounding valleys and hills. Though it would be many years after I left home before I would comprehend terms like “indicator species” and “ecosystem” and “habitat fragmentation,” I still understood something simple, but important, about that bird: its intrinsic right to life. That life was hidden from me, I often thought, for I understood so little about the owl. But I imagined what it might be like, envisioned myself in those forests at night, touched by cool mist just blown in from the Pacific. The fog settled in the valleys, swathed the boles of firs, and curled around gossamer fronds of bracken and maidenhair ferns. Then I might feel the sudden breath of soundless flight or hear, in some hush rough, the owl’s hesitant, dog-like bark.

Wendell Berry writes in “Life is Miracle” that “if we are to protect the world’s multitude of places and creatures, then we must know them, not just conceptually but imaginatively as well. They must be pictured in the mind and memory: they must be known with affection, ‘by heart’ ....” I cannot say that, while residing in a place where people expressed hatred for the spotted owl every day, my love and steadfast support for the bird did anything to save this species. I cannot say that it didn’t. Though other individuals and organizations practiced a more classic form of activism through litigation, protests, and civil disobedience, I wasn’t involved. My activism happened in my hometown, through involvement in our high school’s first environmental club. We started a recycling program, but Shades of Green functioned more as a support group for teenage biophilliacs than anything else. I plastered
a few environmental bumper stickers on my Volkswagen in response to the multitude of pro-logging and anti-spotted owl signs seen in the windows of businesses, homes, trucks, and mini-vans. Yet, looking back, the most important form of activism I ever practiced was to hold firm to my convictions, in spite of opposition from my peers and mentors—people I didn’t necessarily hate and sometimes cared for deeply. I wasn’t a loud voice in my town, but every day I opened the newspaper and was reminded that my unpopular allegiance with the bird was part of what was devastating my community.

Berry also writes that we exploit what we conclude to be of value, but we defend what we love. And “to defend what we love, we need a particularizing language, for we love what we particularly know.” What I know of the spotted owl is specific. It is not underlined in scientific reports or memorandums or newspaper clippings. It cannot be found in view of its white-spotted plumage, flush against a trunk, or felt as a pain in my gut at the sight of a stripped and slumping hillside. What I particularly know was how my life converged with that of the bird by virtue of place, and how, for a few years, I sought to defend the owl through a deep intimacy—a belief in the value of all life. For all the spotted owl represents today, to me it has always meant home. And home is something we never want to lose.

This issue of Camas celebrates the 30th anniversary of the University of Montana’s Environmental Studies Program. And so I find it fitting that the theme is dedicated to activism—what it means, how it fails, how it succeeds, how it has changed, and how this program in Missoula has fostered it. As you will find by reading these essays and reflections, activism is a more difficult concept to pinpoint than one might think. We asked alumni, writers, and activists of the region to contribute their thoughts on what it means to them and, of course, responses were as diverse as the individuals who wrote them. Pete Murney tells the story of his experience at last year’s World Trade Organization protest in Seattle. Mary Anne Peine provides a history of activism in the northern Rockies and describes how activists have grown and how they have changed their tactics over the past few decades. Within his essay, Jeff Smith recounts his experience in the Environmental Studies program, describes the founding of Camas, and argues that art and activism can be intrinsically linked. And Rick Bass urges readers to protect the Yaak Valley of Montana and support the Clinton roadless initiative—to insure a livable future for all of our children. All of the essays, poems, and reflections in this issue show that people will fight for or write about what they care for in various ways; they will sacrifice different parts of themselves or their lifestyles. But these writings also prove that, despite their differences, all of these people share a bond. They will learn while protecting what is important to them. And they will try to do better.

Finally, this issue marks my departure as editor. I am leaving Camas in the very capable hands of Dan Berger, an assistant editor who has been invaluable during my tenure at the helm of this little journal. Though it’s often been said, no truth is lost in saying it again: I couldn’t have done it without him. My thanks to everyone who has contributed to Camas in any way, for you were also contributing to my own well-being. I have the utmost confidence that throughout this year and the next, Camas will continue to thrive, to etch out a place for writing, for storytelling, for delving into issues that affect all inhabitants of the West—for finding a particular language for what we love.

Tara Rae Gunter

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Snapshots

Contemplating Val Kilmer’s Face

Rosebud Sioux Reservation, South Dakota, May, 1998

Last night, I watched the film Thunderheart, which is a Hollywood version of the troubles on the Pine Ridge Reservation in the 1970s, from the point of view of a part-Lakota FBI officer played by Val Kilmer. This morning, while reading the novel Underworld by Don DeLillo, I came across a minor character who comes to my part of South Dakota, to watch a movie or backdrops drawn from this place where I live. Some people now “walking sick people across swimming pools.”

They’re compelling, these casual mentions and dramatic backdrops drawn from this place where I live. Some people have no choice but to study the reflection of their lives in television, films, books. Imagine the self-referential existence of an Italian-American in New York. Usually I get only glimpses; nobody really wants to watch a movie or read a book about this corner of South Dakota, at least not if the setting is contemporary times. Who would sit through a film about how the prairie wind gets up your nose, filling your head with longing for hard drink and dinners made with mayonnaise? And yet, miraculously, Thunderheart features the South Dakota landscape, especially the lonely Badlands, as much as it stars Val Kilmer’s blunt, ambiguous face.

The Badlands look good on film, I have to say. The hills glow chalky white in the sun. The porous earth makes for interesting shadows. I’m sure the person with the camera enjoyed playing games with light. I watched, however, not for the cinematography but for familiar sights—the Rapid City Airport lobby, Bureau of Indian Affairs housing in what looked like Wanbille, and Kilmer’s character’s car. The car is now locally famous as a feature of the 1880 Town near Kadoka, a tourist attraction for those weary drivers heading west who can’t wait for Wall Drug.

For me, I explore the Badlands with pleasure. I like the clean white dust that settles around my boots. I feel crab-like, lizard-like, low to the ground seeking hidden places, the secret drips of water forming hollows in soft rock, unexpected tufts of flowers. When I ask Lakota people why they avoid it, the reason is basic: The place is inimical to human life, rife with evil spirits.

I find this simple answer very complicated to understand. Unlike in Hollywood, in Indian country there is always a tension between simple and complex explanations. I’m tempted to think of the Badlands, like Val Kilmer’s face, as a sort of canvas on which you get to paint your own story. But that wouldn’t be right. There are already stories here, just not easy stories, and not stories that compete and end like the battles in the film, with a clear moral winner. In Indian country, I’ve never seen the truth be only one thing.

Jenny Flynn was a founding editor of Camas. She graduated from EVST in 1994 and received her MFA in 1996. Jenny is now an editor at a small press in Tucson, Arizona.
Activists on Activism

Editor's note: We asked local activists to give us a few words on what activism means to them and how they first became involved. We invite you, our readers, to ponder that same question: what does it mean to you to work and fight for what you love?

Activism is an evolution. For many, it starts with the joy of having a purpose and committing one’s self to it. A person’s identity may become enmeshed in their cause, and their morals and ethics may be shaped by it. Activism can bring notoriety and stature.

The turning point in many activists’ careers comes when they look in the mirror and confront the reality that their activism may be as much about defining and feeling good about themselves as it is about advancing their cause. Some people change course when confronted with this self-realization; others simply ignore it.

But the most successful activists take a different course: they learn to measure their success not by press clippings or by accolades from friends, but by how they’ve made the world different than they found it.

We are all products of our environment. We’ve all heard this saying, but I think this adage is particularly true for Missoula and the University of Montana’s Environmental Studies program (EVST)—where I enrolled in the fall of 1985. Leapfrogging a few time zones and several bioregions, and moving west to escape the gentrified suburbs and paved strip malls of Ohio was a simple process. I knew I had to do something drastically different than selling photocopiers. I was looking for a place and a program that allowed me to utilize my whole self—body, mind and soul—and one that also offered me a chance to fight for something more than the American dream of Affluence for All.

In retrospect, my pilgrimage to Montana and my experience with the EVST program were the best things that ever happened to me—truly the keys to opening the doors of purpose and self-fulfillment. Working as a forest activist to protect our country’s wildlands and traveling to Nicaragua on a tree planting brigade seemed a lot more real than fighting on behalf of Reagan’s phony wars and bogus ideals. Being an Earth Firstler during the federal logging and road-building boom of the 1980s, when the Forest Service, the timber industry, and the Reagan Administration were all one big happy family, was akin to being a civil rights activist in the South during the 1960s. Harassment was common and expected in any rural town, and we had our share of altercations in Missoula—when Champion still operated the mill behind McCormick park, and log trucks rumbled through town on a regular basis.

Most of the easy-to-get, high-volume old growth is gone now, and more Americans than ever support an end to the federal timber sale travesty, which is a handout to industry, a rip-off to taxpayers, and an ecological crime. We are finally in a position where we can play offense, and many of our campaigns are ready to score major points. After fifteen years of unrelenting activism, it’s rewarding to start to see the fruits of our labor. Our work is by no means done, which is why it’s so important that the EVST program keep cranking out good activists.

If Ohio State is a football factory (I played ball at a Division 3 powerhouse, Wittenberg University, in Springfield, OH), then EVST is an activist factory—having produced scores of environmental advocates who are sticking up for our planet and its many life forms. It is an amazing program, one that has certainly evolved over the past 30 years from the days of the venerable Clancy Gordon, but it has never lost its key element—an advocacy approach driven from a campaign perspective but never devoid of problem solving. As such, it is unique, visionary and, in large part, has not been subject to the conservative leanings, corporate influences, and political trappings of environmental programs in other schools. The EVST program is why Missoula, Montana has such a high concentration of environmental groups and activists, and one can say, without drawing too long a bow, that it has helped to make both the community of Missoula and the surrounding wildlands stronger and better appreciated.

Hank Fischer has been the Northern Rockies representative for Defenders of Wildlife since 1977. He received his graduate degree from EVST in 1976.

Jake Kreilick is Campaign Coordinator for the National Forest Protection Alliance and a founding member, as well as a board member, of the Native Forest Network. He graduated from the Environmental Studies Program in 1990.
Take care of the Yaak’s last roadless areas, take care of each other. Take care of the big trees, take care of our Noah’s Ark of endangered species—particularly in Montana, and particularly on the Kootenai, where so many of our wonders, though still present, are down to but single- or double-digit populations. Take care of good stories, take care of your bodies. As Barry Lopez has said, take care of children.

If I could do or say anything to tell you how to assuage the fury and grief you will almost always feel when hiking your wounded hills and forests, in an ever-diminishing wilderness, I would say it. I would tell you how to put these things completely out of your mind, so that your time in the woods would in no way be tinged as it too often is now with these sadnesses. Stories, music, paintings, art, can take the weak strands in us and braid them into some semblance of strength, but they still cannot erase or obscure the present truth of diminishment, nor our fears of a compromised future.

If I could say anything that would dull the joy or awe or wonder you feel—sometimes in bursts of rapture though other times for long, languorous stretches of days and weeks, if not seasons, in the woods, and in the wilderness—I would never say those words, but would keep them under lock-and-key, or beneath piles of boulders, to stop such an awful truth from emerging. No such truth exists, fortunately, though certainly the old vices of inattention, silence, and inactivity are capable of leading to this same place of loss—as if such words did exist somewhere, and had been uttered to us.

For a long time, I used to think all the fuss about the permanent protection of our last roadless areas (which contain less than one percent of our nation’s timber supply) was ridiculous. I thought it was pathetic that as activists we must invest so much time and energy over so tiny an issue. But then I considered what the world would be like to live in, were even that one percent unprotected: if we cannot commit even that tiny amount to be held beyond the reach of our bulldozers, if we can no longer protect the land of dreams. And now I realize that, however much energy and effort we have put into this modest need, it has not been nearly enough. What we are arguing for, clamoring for, is not just a solution to the question of what kind of world we and the next generations will inhabit, but whether there is room in the future for the largeness and wildness and calmness and dangerousness of spirit that stirs within us when we encounter such unclaimed, untouched places.

I sometimes envy the radicals among us who can burn so furiously. Often, when I get into the backcountry, I am ashamed of and lament my own tendencies toward moderation and the way that, again and again, I want to lean toward peace, rather than war. Beleaguered by the battle, I sometimes put out of mind how small one percent really is, and how vital.

In such realization, such shame of moderation, I remember again what is important to me as a human: that I would not care if the entire rest of the world decided it didn’t need that last one percent. I would
still work as hard, or harder, for however long it took, with as much energy and strength as can be found. It might not be the most important issue in the world, but it is the story of my home, and seems, to me, to speak directly to any, to all, of the other issues of tolerance and intolerance.

If you enter into collaboration or “consensus” meetings, remember that your duty to the rest of the group is not to come to agreement, but to be honest in your needs and to represent them accurately. To agree to a thing your heart does not agree with is not consensus or collaboration, it means only that you have been browbeaten by a larger force; and I would think that to admit that would be as bad as losing the forest itself. Nonetheless, strive to know personally your opposition, and, though they will try to avoid this, seek to make your opposition know you—the specifics of you, rather than rumors and abstractions. Abstraction is the fuel of hate; specificity, and the knowledge inherent in it—knowledge of a neighbor’s likes and dislikes, fears and loves, strengths and flaws—is the language of success and the language of solution.

Because of my moderation, I feel I have to work extra hard. I have to put in extra effort, to cover up for a willingness in me, even a tendency, to see both sides—even as I recognize with increasing horror how thin and small and fragile in the world are these last small wild places.

Many of these places are reduced now to landscapes across which a man or a woman, much less a wild thing like a bear or raven, lynx or lion, might travel in a single day. Don’t some dreams prosper better amidst great space or in the presence of great expanses of time? Why must we continue to be so dead-set on making the world get smaller?

Work harder, play harder, rest more, read more poetry. Spend more time with children, spend more time alone, spend more time with friends. Give up the wasteful margins of your life, and the wasteful toxins of appearance, excessive preparation, appointment, and chatter. Don’t return every fax or phone call, and you might barely be able to find the extra time necessary to do all these extra, necessary things. Take care of the children.

Rick Bass began writing during lunch breaks on his job as a petroleum geologist. His early writings evolved into The Deer Pasture (1985). Later came Oil Notes (1989), The Ninemile Wolves (1995), The Lost Grizzlies (1995), and other widely read books. His latest works are a novel, Where the Sea Used to Be (1998), and The Brown Dog of the Yaak (1999). Besides his fiction and nonfiction, Rick churns out a torrent of editorials and letters to congressmen in an attempt to preserve wild places. He lives in northwestern Montana’s Yaak Valley with his wife, Elizabeth, and their two daughters.
Activists on Activism

Six years ago I came to the Environmental Studies Program as a green newcomer to academia. I have been privileged to grow professionally and personally in an atmosphere of energy and enthusiasm. In the company of such fine people, students, faculty, staff and alumni, cultivating a passion for the environment seems natural. Coupling this passion with technical expertise in law, science, and policy continues to challenge and excite me. Looking back can be a good way to focus the view into the future. Watching our alumni and students act as environmental leaders throughout the state, region, nation, and the world is immensely satisfying and reinforcing. If they can be so effective, we must be doing good work within the Program.

Personally, activism provides a visceral thrill. The contest of ideas in the public arena, the personal dynamics of persuasion, and the technical arts of crafting a successful argument and delivering it effectively offer opportunities to test myself. Despite the frustrating setbacks, the numerous meetings, and seemingly endless proliferation of proposals to support or oppose, the rewards can be great.

To Outlive the Bastards
by Donald Snow

Botanist Clancy Gordon, one of the founders of the University of Montana Environmental Studies Program, sometimes took a tough-love approach to his students. I was in his office one day in 1978, and I saw this: A recent graduate of the program, the Master’s certificate still quivering in his hand, bounded in to tell Clancy the great news. The student had just been hired as a fisheries biologist for the Forest Service. A Real Job! He couldn’t wait to thank his old prof for the hard work that had gone into his professional training. Clancy gave him “the look,” that basset-hound face he could put on, then sighed a weary congratulations. “Frankly, I had better things in mind for you,” was what I remember him saying. The student shuffled away, fallen crest in tow.

Clancy didn’t want his best students to bury themselves in bureaucracies. He wanted ‘em to go forth and raise hell. I was not one of his best students, but I took him up on his charge. Somehow it came easy for me. Maybe it’s genetic. My mother’s father, a Finnish immigrant, raised some hell in his day. He was thrown in jail more than once for union organizing in the Utah coal mines. Bad enough the son-of-a-bitch could barely speak English—now here he was trying to get other Finn miners to join the United Mine Workers of America. I didn’t go the union-organizing route; instead, I’ve worked for environmental organizations ever since my second year of college, and I’m now 48 so I’ve made something of a career of it.

Along the way, I’ve picked up on a telling paradox, and it’s part of what I want to write about here: In the world’s first successful modern democracy, politics for many seems somehow un-American. There’s a lot of discussion about the swell of anti-government sentiment now overtopping the country, but I think the feeling runs deeper than that. What we really don’t like is politics, and not just because Vietnam, Watergate, Monicagate and the laugh riot known as the U.S. Congress have turned us cynical. There’s something suspicious about the whole nasty affair, something that perhaps cuts to the roots of our personal identity.

We think of ourselves as independent, individualistic, rugged, plain spoken; and here is this business of politics: collectivist, pluralistic, interdependent, artful-tongued. We seem to like political organizations even less than politics itself, and we are increasingly loath to identify ourselves with any prominent causes. One simple finding on this fact: American women overwhelmingly agree with nearly all of the political agenda of the mainstream feminist coalition, but a similarly robust majority refuse to call themselves “feminists.” We don’t want the union label. Maybe we don’t want any label, and that’s why most of us stay away from politics in droves.
But of course, that’s the prescription for tyranny. If we hate politics now, ignore it and see how much better we like it a generation from now.

Social-change non-profits do most of the heavy lifting for the people’s politics. They are the edge that cuts against plain tendencies toward injustice, tyranny, the predation of the strong against the weak, the collusion of government and profiteers. John Gardner, former president of Common Cause and the author of a marvelous, wise book, On Leadership, has repeatedly made the claim that the leading political ideas of modern society have emerged not from the universities or the political parties, not from government agencies or elected officials, but from the “third sector” of social-change non-profits. Those small, seemingly insignificant organizations may be the Titans of political thought, as well as action, in the U.S.

Does that mean that everyone who wishes to advocate on behalf of the environment ought to seek work in an environmental non-governmental organization? Are you less of an advocate if you don’t become a paid activist? Not by my lights.

Ten years ago, I directed a national study of leadership in the U.S. environmental movement. The central question of the study was a simple one: To what extent and how do environmental groups deliberately foster leadership within their ranks? We asked current non-governmental organization leaders—staff members and volunteers—why they had entered into the work of environmental activism. The great majority told us they had received inspiration from two kinds of sources: mentors and books. As children, they had been taken out and lovingly introduced to the natural world by a parent, relative, or teacher; nearly all of them had read at least one environmental book that had changed their lives, given them the spark of commitment.

The message is clear: It takes many hands, many different kinds of talent and skill, to keep a movement alive. In the environmental movement, there has always been room for teachers and parents, writers and artists. If they are the inspirations, then their work is no less significant than the work of the person on the front lines.

It’s hard for me to imagine the modern environmental movement without a Rachel Carson, a David Quammen, a Terry Tempest Williams, a Wendell Berry. It’s hard to imagine it without those teachers in public schools and those naturalists who staff various nature centers and preserves, and even—sorry, Clancy—those Park Service “bureaucrats” who mark trails and control crowds, and help people look and listen and learn in Nature. Activism has to have many faces, has to include joy and delight, beauty and art and the artful lie of great writing. And activists, no matter how grim their work makes them in an era of diminishing public interest in politics, have to get out as much as possible into the world they are trying to save. If we can do that—romp and revel and work close to the bone—then maybe Abbey was right: maybe we will “outlive the bastards.”

Don Snow is the executive director of the Northern Lights Institute and associate editor of the Northern Lights journal. He graduated from the Environmental Studies Program (EVST) in 1991 and now is an adjunct professor in EVST and the School of Forestry. He recently co-edited The Book of the Tongass, published by Milkweed Editions in 1999.

Photo by Dan Berger
The '90s are going to make the '60s look like the '50s. A decade ago, this slogan was pretty common in activist circles. I wanted to believe it. I was long past ready for it. For an unrepentant radical, the '80s had been frustrating and maddening, and when '60s-style activism wasn't yet resurrected by the second year of the '90s, when I arrived in Missoula, I was impatient. But as long as there was a link to Ronald Reagan in the White House, the '80s weren't going to go away. So in November of my first fall in Missoula, when George Bush lost to Bill Clinton, the 1990s finally began. Now, I thought, is our season.

In that heady and optimistic autumn, I felt as if I'd come home. I'd begun to know the circle of people around the Environmental Studies (EVST) Program who were devoted to writing and literature, people who had the same obsession about words, sentences, essays, and books, and who combined that obsession with a passion for preserving the environment, for being outdoors.

And that was the autumn when we launched Camas. ("We" includes Kurt Menning, Christian Sarver, Jenny Flynn, Kir Talmage, John Dillon, Ed Blankman, Jim Barilla, and myself.) Perhaps you have never seen any of those early issues. In those days, Camas might have seemed to some like an artsy-fartsy collection of photographs, personal essays, short stories, and poems—as a venture that was purely art-for-art's sake and did nothing to promote or provoke activism. And we knew that some people around EVST did see the magazine that way. But in our eyes, it was an activist publication, and in a number of ways. Above all, we wanted to influence people not with information or rhetoric, but with stories and images. We wanted to publish a magazine so deeply informed by the ecological perspective that it fairly breathed love and passion and acceptance.

It was, and is, an awkward fit, activism and art. So we had some trouble finding a place in EVST as well as in Missoula's community of writers. We didn't seem to belong squarely in either camp. Despite the fact that several of us held undergraduate degrees in literature or writing, we felt pretty marginalized around the English Department, where most of us enrolled in advanced writing courses. I'd studied enough literature and had been involved with enough activism to know the standard-issue line about art and politics: They don't mix. One of them inevitably gets compromised, the highbrows say, and usually it's the art. "If you want to send a message, use Western Union." So we were rarely able to persuade the excellent writers around the MFA Program to submit their work to Camas; they evidently thought we were too partisan to be respected in the literary circles they aimed for.

And while there was enough interest around EVST in writing and literature to make Camas possible, it would be three or four years yet before there was a well-defined environmental writing focus. The magazine was spawned and nurtured in the activist environment of the program, and we all shared some of the activist background and inclinations of most EVSTers. But we knew that among those EVST faculty members and fellow students more devoted to traditional notions of activism and the hard sciences, there was some concern that those of us more inclined to ethics and literature and environmental history—the "soft stuff"—were going to undermine the program, uproot it entirely from its scientific and activist history and legacy.

Before coming to Missoula, I'd been involved with Earth First! in western North Carolina. Back then, it seemed to me that to become a better activist, I needed to understand things in a more concrete way than the intuitive, love-all-creatures stance I'd always had. So I enrolled in EVST, not to become a writer or editor, but to better ground myself in conservation biology and other earth sciences. At least, when I wrote my application to the program, those were my stated intentions. It seemed the most useful thing a person with my principles could do.

I was by no means typical—my Camas colleagues were better at the sciences that me. And I'd forgotten...
that my own nature has always been incompatible with anything resembling “useful.” In my first term in EVST, I nearly flunked a required course on how activists should use science; in my second I did flunk an undergraduate-level course in Animal Behavior. Not only did I not seem to possess the left-brain intelligence for these courses, but by then I was also devoting nearly all my time to writing and reading, history and philosophy, and Camas.

I do believe that in the humanities courses I took, I did learn about other ways a writer might become an activist. During that first term in Missoula, as I was flunking “Applied Science,” I also sat in on William Kittredge’s workshop in nonfiction writing. Even when their intent was explicitly political, Bill wanted our essays to tell stories.

I didn’t get it initially. The first essay I submitted was a polemic about the condition of the environment in the Southern Appalachians. I’d written newsletters and dozens of press releases for Earth First!, and you could tell. The essay identified the region’s environmental troubles, and it lingered over the symptoms—the ridgelines of dead trees, the dwindling of reptile and amphibian life, the streams that were void of any life whatsoever. To that I added statistics, doom-and-gloom style prophecies, and criticism of the government and other nonbelievers who ignored all these signs. It was a list bound together by nothing more than anger and advocacy. I thought that was enough.

“It’s really fucking boring,” Kittredge pronounced. “It’s cold and dry and preachy. There’s not a single scene in it.”

A what? A scene? I had no idea how or why you would want scenes—people walking and talking and so on—in an essay that was in some fashion, on some level, arguing a position. In a short story, yes, you would want scenes. But in an essay? In the sort of nature writing I’d taken as my own model, the writer issued a polemic, or presented him- or herself as a modern version of Emerson’s all-seeing, all-identifying eyeball, perpetually ready for epiphany and praise, often making certain we understood and appreciated his/her own brand of righteousness and political correctness.

Then I began to read the books and essays Kittredge had written. In scene after scene, they moved effortlessly from the personal to the ecological. He did not allow his essays to become “us” versus “them” narratives. He told his own story and usually implicated himself along with whatever forces were making a mess of things. Shortly, I found my way to other nature writers who were inclined to fold personal stories into a larger one: Terry Tempest Williams, Gretel Ehrlich, Charles Bowden, and others.

These writers often included themselves as part of the problem, and they lamented not so much the misconduct of “them” as they lamented the selfishness that marks us all—no matter what our politics might be. This selfishness and arrogance is so deeply embedded in human nature that one might never be entirely free of it. It means that none of us are innocent in the despoiling of our planet.

Being rather misanthropic myself, I tended to agree wholeheartedly with that. And, the work of these writers was often beautifully crafted (which is not always true of nature writing) and emotionally moving. Their writing could be painful and self-lacerating in a way earlier nature writing rarely is. It wasn’t always easy to read, but neither is

This style of writing—putting the personal so nakedly and vulnerably into the ecological—seemed new and full of possibility. For weeks, months, I felt as if I had been lifted off the ground, and I know I was not alone.

I trace my own interest in environmentalism back to my childhood in the late 1960s and early 1970s, back to hearing artists like Neil Young and John Denver and Marvin...
Gaye and Jackson Browne and Joni Mitchell on the radio. The area where I grew up, the Appalachian foothills of southern Ohio, changed a great deal during my youth. Chemical and heavy metal plants, taking advantage of the easy transportation afforded by the Ohio River, had moved into the region in the late '50s. A decade later, the river was so polluted that nobody fished in it. The plants burned local, high-sulfur coal, and at night the skies took on an eerie orange cast from all the airborne pollutants. By the mid-1970s, in the town of Wheeling, West Virginia—some thirty miles from my home—the EPA reported what remain to this day the highest levels of acidic rainfall ever recorded. I knew that I didn’t like what was going on, but I had no means of naming my feelings. The words and music of these artists articulated convictions and principles I agreed with—convictions and principles I would have been hard-pressed to name or discover in that predominantly working-class area, where nobody celebrated the new “Earth Day” and where uttering the words “EPA” or “Clean Air Act” would get your mouth washed out with soap.

Since that time, I’ve lost track of how often my activism has been inspired by a book, a song or a poem. But I’d never known how common that path was until I was in Missoula, and our first issue of Camas had been published. Around EVST, we were hearing whispers and rumors that our little venture was being questioned. So I did some informal polling. I asked several people around the program—including activists and hard-core scientists—to trace for me the awakening of their commitment to environmentalism. Some of them, as you might expect, were called into the fold by getting involved with an issue close to home or by a relationship they felt with a particular place or animal.

The great majority, though, had come to environmentalism via the arts. They told me that they had been so influenced by a book or an essay or a photograph or song or album, or some combination of these, that they’d ultimately decided to devote their lives to the environment. I couldn’t begin to argue that Camas was as influential as R.E.M. or Joni Mitchell or Annie Dillard or Barry Lopez; but now, I had plenty to counter the suggestion that Art Does Nothing.

As it turned out, we never did need to bring out the results of my poll, and we never had to defend Camas. Overall, the EVST Program gave us a warm and very appreciative response. By most any measure, we were successful for a new magazine. Of our first issue, Kittredge said, “This is exactly the magazine the world needs right now,” which of course delighted us. With the publication of every issue of Camas, we held an open-mic gathering at the late, lamented Freddy’s Feed and Read bookstore. We called it “Writing Wild,” a night of literature and music devoted to the environment. At each of those readings, the audience overflowed into the upstairs of Freddy’s. Many of those who came to these gatherings were more interested in activism and hard science than in literature, so we felt at least a little justified.

We had high hopes for Camas, and some of them may have seemed at least somewhat activist. We decided to publish only unknown writers, no big names, to give the work we were reading in workshops the audience it deserved. In publishing, where brand names are as important as they are in any other American industry, this was a fairly radical position, and certainly not a wise one, financially speaking. As it is now, western Montana was torn with debate over environmental issues, and we wanted to help establish some sort of dialogue in the region. So we published personal work, which discussed local places and concerns. We also made the magazine available outside of Missoula, in convenience stores and grocery marts and village diners where different folks might see it. Our most controversial decision was to make Camas free, so that our message might have a chance to reach beyond the usual choir, who, we reckoned, would pay for Camas anyhow.

Mostly, we thought that this sort of publication—one rooted in stories and images and love—might attract to environmentalism those who were put off by rhetoric and politics.

Camas, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2000), Art. 1
great, if unspoken, love for the creation, or at least for a particular place. Through the writer’s eyes you saw that place in all weathers; you saw the people and other animals it shaped; you wanted it to be saved. Gretel Ehrlich gives this advice to her writing classes: be carnal, be passionate, and be precise. Nearly always, naming what we love is a political act, and that is what these stories—these scenes—do; they name our loves. They show our loves, and in great, vivid detail. By doing so, they make us want to save what we love, or help save what someone else loves. What could be more political?

We all know that the 1990s turned out to be nothing like the ’60s. In their heedless indulgence, they were more like the Roaring ’20s. The decade’s long stock market boom (continuing now into the new millennium), and the giddy optimism it has launched, makes naysaying no-growth types like myself and some other environmentalists sound an awful lot like Chicken Little. And our 1992 optimism that the environment would be a priority for the Clinton-Gore administration has turned out to be utterly unfounded.

In those eight years, Camas has changed some too. There is a price stamp on the cover now, and the magazine long ago opened up its pages to environmental reporting. EVST has created an informal track for the nurture and education of those who would be environmental writers, and there is even a little stipend available for Camas editors, which was unheard of in my days with the journal.

I have no dispute with any of these changes; subsequent staffers thought the magazine and its audience would be better served by them, and Camas has lasted. Back then, we wanted Camas to so conjoin art and activism as to make that old argument about their long-rumored incompatibility entirely moot. I see now that this was an enormously ambitious aim, perhaps too subtle, and certainly unrealistic.

But I am forever grateful that we were fortunate enough to have found a place, there in Rankin Hall, home of EVST, where we could dream such big dreams and try to put them into print, and a circle of friends, fellow

students, and faculty who were endlessly supportive. It was awkward at times, trying to fit activism and science and art all together, but somehow it worked. I’m gratified to know that it has gone on working, that Camas has survived all these years and that the program now welcomes an ever-increasing number of writers and other humanist-types. And I’m sure that in time there will be a substantial shelf of influential books published by EVST students, dropouts, and grads.

So even with the booming stock market, I still think there’s cause for hope. For all those other changes, Camas continues to publish poems and photos and personal narratives—images and stories very much like the ones we ran in those first issues. After all, we are still bound to imagination, artists and activists alike. We are still bound to imagination, that holy of holies; and we are bound by stories, the stories we tell about the places we love, the stories we need to help us organize the past, understand the present, and orient ourselves into the future. As long as we have stories to tell we can re-imagine and reinvent ourselves, and as long as we can do that there’s some chance yet that we might save the places we love.

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Jeffery Smith’s first book, Where the Roots Reach for Water: A Personal & Natural History of Melancholia, received the 2000 PEN/Martha Albrand “Art of the Memoir” Award, and was also included on Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat’s list of the “Fifty Best Spiritual Books of 1999.” His essay, “Plainchant for the Panther,” appears in the anthology Shadow Cat: Encountering the American Mountain Lion, and another, “Shapeshifting,” appears in the anthology Head/Waters. His work has also appeared in High Country News, The Oxford American, The Ohio Review, Gramophone, and on the New York Philharmonic’s website. He is now writing two books: Albums, a nonfiction narrative about the 1970s, and It Rises from the Land, a narrative and natural history of traditional Appalachian music.

Camas Spring/Summer 2000
The Evolution of Revolution:
A Brief History of Environmental Activism in the Northern Rockies

by Mary Anne Peine

On July 12, 1994, I found myself standing in the same Tennessee courtroom where, 69 years earlier, a judge declared the teaching of evolution in public schools illegal in the infamous “Scopes Monkey Trial.” I was chained at the ankle to a woman much shorter than I and we had a hard time synchronizing our footsteps as we made our way to the long bench in front of the judge. Two by two, reminiscent of some bizarre cross between Noah’s ark and a three-legged race, we 58 activists eased into our seats and heard the charges against us—criminal trespassing, a misdemeanor.

The day before, we had blockaded the entrance to Watts Bar, the last nuclear power plant under construction in the United States. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) had been attempting to put Watts Bar on line for over 22 years, at the staggering price of over seven billion dollars. The delays had been caused by a steady stream of major safety problems and, by the time of our protest, Watts Bar was the target of more whistleblower complaints than any other nuclear plant in the nation. Construction at the plant was finally nearing completion, and the TVA had scheduled the first nuclear fuel to be loaded later that fall.

Enter Earth First!. During the week prior to the protest, radical environmental activists from across the nation had converged in Tennessee’s Cherokee National Forest for Earth First!’s annual Round River Rendezvous. The Rendezvous is traditionally followed by a protest involving civil disobedience, and we had chosen Watts Bar as our target. At 4:30 a.m. on the morning of the action, we unloaded materials from a pick-up truck, and in just 15 minutes we created a human barricade that blocked the only access road into the power plant. For several hours, activists, police, and TVA law enforcement officers milled about in a state of nervous anticipation, accompanied by a constant stream of chanting. Then the word came down to begin arresting activists, and chaos erupted. Police told the protesters to stand on the opposite side of the road or risk arrest. The activists complied, but the police then proceeded to charge into the crowd and grab as many people as they could, as if they were trying to catch their limit of environmentalists. It was during this free-for-all that I was snatched up and hauled away.

The nine individuals making up the actual blockade were among the last to be arrested, and we all spent a night in jail. The next day we were arraigned, the judge set a court date, and within 48 hours of our arrest, most of us had made bail and gone home.

Looking back on the experience six years later, I realize we were a ragged, disheveled-looking crowd, a complete anomaly to the east Tennessee news media and the local sheriff. Yet, at the time, I felt as if I was walking on some higher plane, part of a noble group of activists willing to sacrifice personal freedom for the greater good. But while I was exhilarated, I was also terrified: a 20-year-old small town girl from Sevierville, Tennessee, the valedictorian, the kid with the full ride to college, the nice one, was never supposed to end up in jail with a bunch of smelly hippies. My hometown paper duly noted this, describing me as “quiet, willowy” and “speaking in well-modulated tones,” not at all one of the “wide-eyed, frothing creatures, given to outlandish modes of speech and dress” traditionally associated with radical environmentalists.

Many people—friends, relatives, professors—were supportive of my activism and proud of my convictions. After all, the protest had made a difference. Prior to our action, few residents of our region were aware of the mere existence of Watts Bar, not to mention its troubled history and the threat it posed to public health and safety. The action made front-page headlines across the state for several days and finally brought Watts Bar into the public eye. As I told my hometown paper, “When everyone is glued to the TV set watching the O.J. Simpson trial, it takes more than a few newsletters and slide shows to get their attention.”

But although we had raised the issue, the general public was largely opposed to our tactics. There was a dark side to all of the publicity we had generated, and I could see it in the eyes of some old friends who now approached me guardedly. “Why couldn’t you just work within the system?”

Camas Spring/Summer 2000
they demanded. “What were you trying to prove?”

These are the sorts of questions that nip at the heels of most activists. Taking on the humble task of transforming society requires you to think creatively and strategically, to work within the system when possible and outside it when necessary, and to constantly ask yourself whether or not what you are doing is making a real difference. Since those days in the Rhea County jail, I have come to see activism as complex and multi-dimensional—a spectrum with recycling at one end and prison at the other—and I am still trying to figure out where on that spectrum I belong.

**Rocky Mountain Roots**

I came to Missoula, Montana in 1998 and, somewhat unwittingly, stepped into one of the most important centers of environmental activism in the nation: the Environmental Studies (EVST) Program at the University of Montana. For the past three decades, the interdisciplinary program has been committed to providing graduate students with the skills, resources, and training necessary for careers in the world-changing business. While many EVST graduates are now working as paid (albeit poorly) activists, others have become agency bureaucrats, filmmakers, scientists, authors, educators, and state gubernatorial candidates.

The presence of the EVST Program, in combination with some of the most pristine public lands left in the nation, has turned Missoula into a hub of environmental activism. I have spent the last year and a half here, both as an EVST student and, more recently, working as the executive director of The Ecology Center, a local environmental organization. But it was not until this spring, when I talked at length with several of the leading activists in the northern Rockies, that I began to understand the influence activism in this region has had on the environmental movement as a whole. All of the people I spoke with were part of a wave of environmental activism that swept over the region during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Their story is one worth telling because it offers lessons for activists everywhere. There are a few dramatic moments—FBI raids, grand juries, lock downs—but the real gems are the lessons that have been learned about influencing society and protecting our environment.

According to Tom Roy, the current director of EVST, the environmental movement was much more subdued when he arrived in Montana in 1969 than it has been in recent years. Tom is an energetic, practical reformer whose ribald sense of humor belies his serious, lifelong commitment to social issues. He put the current state of the movement into perspective by reminding me that when he first came to the region, most of the environmental laws that we take for granted today (such as the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act) had yet to be written. And there was only one paid environmentalist in the state, a staffer for the Montana Wildlife Federation.

The number of environmental organizations in Montana gradually increased during the '70s, but most organizations were small, insular, and closely paralleled the government agencies. In the late 1980s, when the activists who are leaders today first arrived in the Missoula area, they found many of the doors in the non-profit world closed to them. By then, most of the established organizations in the region suffered from an institutional paralysis Roy calls “founders syndrome,” which is common throughout the non-profit world. Leading activists become entrenched and wedded to the same strategies they have been using for years, and they don’t know how to incorporate the enthusiasm and idealism of newcomers. And so, one might expect in such a situation, these young activists took matters into their own hands.

Jake Kreilick was one of those fresh faces. He came to EVST without much of an activist background, compelled mainly by a strong desire to get out of the Midwestern suburbs and head west. Kreilick is not only a rugby player and river-runner, but also one of the most well-known and well-traveled grassroots organizers in the nation. Kreilick says that when he stepped into activist circles in the region during the late 1980s, the influence of Montana Earth First! was evident in the radical, aggressive nature of environmental activism. Many of the older activists (who were of the “gun-toting, beer-swilling redneck” variety, according to one activist) were phasing out, and in 1987 the newcomers took the reins and transformed Montana Earth First! into Wild Rockies Earth First!. This new incarnation of Earth First! adhered to ecological rather than political boundaries (hence the name change), and charged ahead at full throttle into a number of Northern Rockies-based campaigns.

Their efforts were largely consumed by repeated attempts to pass a Montana state wilderness bill in the late '80s and early '90s. The Wilderness Act of 1964 had designated a number of specific areas as wilderness, several of which were in Montana. Since 1964, most additional wilderness had been designated by Congress on a state-by-state basis. Only two states, Montana and Idaho, have failed to this day to pass state-wide wilderness bills. It was mainly on this issue where the clashes between the established conservation groups and the younger EVST-based activists took place. There are about six million acres of potential wilderness in Montana, and the bills that were being pushed in Congress would have protected between one and two million of these acres. While this may have suited some of the more traditional organizations, it wasn’t enough for Wild Rockies Earth First! Much of the energy...
during the late 1980s went into what Kreilick called “killing bad wilderness bills,” which often put these younger activists in direct conflict with other conservationists in the state.

Direct Action

Additional tension was created by a heavy emphasis on direct action and in-your-face approaches to the issues, which generated a tremendous amount of attention. Most of the activists I now know as clean cut then sported long, scrappy hair and wild beards, reminiscent of the “wide-eyed, frothing creatures” mentioned by the reporter from my hometown newspaper. Some of their actions were lighthearted and almost whimsical. EVST students celebrated Earth Day by walking barefoot up to the “M” on a hillside overlooking campus and reading the Ten Commandments of Ecology, which were written by EVST founder Clancy Gordon. But these activists were also experimenting with serious civil disobedience strategies. They pioneered the direct action technique known as the “tree sit,” in which activists occupy flimsy treetop platforms in areas threatened by logging. And the Earth First! Journal was published in Missoula from 1990 until 1993, further highlighting the area as a hub of aggressive environmental action.

This focus on direct action led to an increasing amount of friction on campus, which came to a head in 1989. Tensions between EVST and the School of Forestry constantly flared. Every year the forestry school would put on a “Boondocker’s Day” that would feature such Paul Bunyan-type contests as ax throwing. Bill Haskins, who entered EVST the year after Funsch and Kreilick, told me about EVST’s response. In 1989, EVST students threw their own parody of this contest on the University of Montana campus, including such events as letter writing, banner hanging, and tree spiking. According to Haskins, this was a few days before the legislature was going to vote on appropriating money for the university. “The FBI showed up and they were running around with their video cameras, forestry students were screaming at us, and the whole thing turned into a three ring circus.”

Tracy Stone-Manning describes these tense years (and the presence of the FBI) from the perspective of one who found herself in the eye of the storm. She is now the executive director of the Clark Fork Coalition, an organization that focuses on water quality throughout the basin of the Clark Fork, the largest river in the northern Rockies. In 1987, Stone-Manning was working as an intern for the National Wildlife Federation in Washington, D.C., and became friends with fellow intern and EVST student Jake Kreilick. He convinced her to take a closer look at EVST and, a year later, she traveled to Missoula. Just before she left for Montana she got a call from Kreilick, who told her there was “something she needed to know.”

She interrupted, “Jake, are you going to be in jail when I get there?”

“It’s a possibility,” he answered. “I just wanted you to know I might not be able to pick you up at the airport.”

Sure enough, when she arrived in Missoula two strange faces were there to greet her and Jake was, in fact, in jail, having been arrested as part of a tree sit. Stone-Manning went ahead with her visit anyway, and was struck by the “incredible energy in the department.” EVST students had arranged a lecture by Earth First! founder Dave Foreman, and the department was buzzing with activity. But what impressed her most was the department’s reaction to Kreilick’s arrest—the director, Tom Roy, paid Kreilick’s bail. That clear commitment to activism and to the students clinched it for Stone-Manning. She didn’t apply anywhere else.

After her arrival in Missoula, she became involved in a number of issues in the northern Rockies, utilizing her public relations background as a spokesperson for Earth First! And then one day in 1989 everything changed. In a letter postmarked Missoula, the papers reported, an anonymous activist informed authorities that the trees in an Idaho timber sale had been spiked. Tracy Stone-Manning had mailed that letter.

Tree spiking is a highly controversial, direct action tactic that involves hammering numerous heavy nails into trees that are slated to be cut. It often stops timber sales because, once trees have been filled with nails, cutting them endangers both loggers and sawmill operators. Stone-Manning told me that the actual tree spiker (ironically named Spiker) was a loner, not well known within the activist community—part of what she described as the “fringe, angry” component of the movement that ultimately turned many people away. While working with Earth First! as a spokesperson, she had become distantly acquainted with Spiker.
This acquaintance transformed Stone-Manning’s life on the day Spiker handed her a letter, asking her to mail it for him. As she began reading, the consequences of its contents slowly dawned on her. It informed the Forest Service that the Idaho trees had been spiked and therefore should not be logged. She was petrified. Paralyzed by indecision, she carried the letter with her for a day or two, considering her options. She could throw it away, but then no one would know the sale was spiked and a logger might be injured when cutting began. She could mail the original letter and hope the FBI wouldn’t find her fingerprints, which were all over it. Or she could retype the letter, being careful to keep it free of fingerprints, and mail the clean copy. Confused, upset, and feeling horribly compromised, she decided to retype and mail a fingerprint-free version of the letter, although in retrospect, she told me, “mailing it from Missoula might not have been the best idea.”

But it was too late—the FBI now had its sights set on Missoula as the hub of Northwest eco-terrorism. Dan Funsch, who lived in a house with many of the high profile Earth Firsters at the time, said it was not uncommon to see an FBI van parked across the street. And not only did they watch the house, they raided it, confiscated resident’s possessions, and tapped the phone. Finally, the Forest Service called six people to appear before a grand jury: five EVST students, including Stone-Manning, Tim Bechtold, Bill Haskins, and Jake Kreilick, and then-EVST director Ron Erickson.

The FBI was convinced that not only had the tree spiking been perpetrated by one of the high-profile EVST activists, but that the department was protecting the perpetrator. According to Stone-Manning, once the agency hatched this EVST conspiracy theory, it was determined to prove it was right. It wasn’t until many months later that the tree spiker was finally linked to the crime. He had been arrested on domestic violence charges, and his terrified former partner told the police about the tree spiking incident in an attempt to keep him in jail. Stone-Manning was called in again for another round of hearings, and this time she told authorities everything she knew.

Stone-Manning told me that she was astounded by the support the activists received from the Missoula community throughout this entire saga, support that she feels was galvanized when Ron Erickson, a respected professor and community leader, was called before the grand jury. She felt extraordinarily lucky to be living in such a progressive place, a sentiment echoed by many of the others with whom I spoke. But the whole episode turned her away from direct action, and toward the non-profit sector.

New Tactics

Tracey Stone-Manning was not the only Missoula activist to change her tune. As Tim Bechtold offers, “Jail—one you’ve been there, you’ve been there, and there’s not a lot you can do there.” Bechtold is a founder of The Ecology Center, a Missoula-based organization that offers technical resources to the conservation community and works to increase citizen participation in public land management. The founding of The Ecology Center in 1988 was part of an increasing professionalism that was taking place among the EVST activists, a transition that included a gradual shift away from direct action. The late ‘80s and early ‘90s saw the formation of a number of grassroots environmental organizations that blended an aggressive approach to the issues with an increasing sophistication. Besides the Ecology Center, these new groups included Alliance for the Wild Rockies (a grassroots organization that takes a bioregional approach to protecting the northern Rockies) and Native Forest Network (which focuses on preserving native forest ecosystems around the world).

According to Bechtold, much of the movement’s increasing effectiveness was directly related to an improved understanding of environmental laws. When he first began working on environmental issues in the region, activists were so unfamiliar with the processes that govern resource extraction on the national forests that “by the time we figured out the trees were down it was all over, and we didn’t know what hit us.” Activists began to study and understand these processes and soon, by merely insisting that the Forest Service comply with existing environmental laws, they were stopping timber sales. And they weren’t through yet.

They had a vision for the region, one that they articulated in the form of the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act (NREPA). Activists used Geographic Information Systems (GIS), a computer mapping technology that had been brought to the Ecology Center by Bill Haskins, to create a conservation-biology based proposal for protection of all the potential wilderness in the northern Rockies. With Mike Bader, a former student in the University of Montana’s Wilderness and Civilization program, at the helm, the newly-formed Alliance for the Wild Rockies took NREPA to the House of Representatives, where it has been reintroduced in every session since 1992.

The increasing professionalism of the movement was reflected not only in the work of organizations, but in the paths of individual activists. For example, Jennifer Ferenstein, an EVST graduate, quickly climbed through the continued on page 31
Howie Wolke has spent the past twenty-five years as a wildlands conservationist. In 1980, he, along with Dave Foreman and Mike Roselle, founded Earth First!, a radical environmental group well known for its dramatic and extreme methods of defending the ecological integrity of the earth.

Wolke has written two books, Wilderness on the Rocks (1991), and The Big Outside (1992), which he co-wrote with Dave Foreman.

In 1990, Wolke quit Earth First! after becoming dissatisfied with the group’s changing focus. “People wanted to talk about tree-spiking and bombing, not ecosystems,” he said in the March/April 2000 issue of Sierra magazine. He and his family moved near Darby, Montana. There, he and his wife, Marilyn Olsen, run a wilderness guiding business, Big Wild Adventures, and a nonprofit advocacy organization, Big Wild Advocates. Wolke is presently working on building public support for the U.S. Forest Service’s Roadless Area Initiative, which has the potential to protect up to 50 million acres of Forest Service land as roadless.

KM: What does the word “activism” mean to you?

HW: It’s a very general term. It simply refers to somebody who’s active in the socio-political process ... either trying to make the world a better place or a worse place, depending on where you’re coming from. I don’t refer to myself as an activist, simply because it’s so general. If I do use the term “activist” I have to pref- ace it with the kind of activist I am. My favorite way of describing myself is plagiarized right out of Ed Abbey. Ed referred to himself as a “wild preservative.” I have never been able to come up with something more original or better than that.

But, on a slightly more serious note, I primarily refer to myself as a wildlands conservationist. And I use that term rather than the more common word “environmentalist” because it narrows things down a little bit more. Environmentalists are concerned with everything from toxic wastes in urban landfills to setting aside wilderness, everything from air pollution, ozone depletion, green house warming to endangered species, and pesticides, herbicides, and genetically altered foods. All those are within the realm of environmentalism, all great causes, all important things that need to be addressed. And, of course, I’m leaving out probably the most important of them all, which is global overpopulation. But my area of emphasis has been on public wildlands, wildlands in general, wildlife habi- tat, native biological diversity, and above all, trying to protect areas as wilderness, trying to protect our remaining dwindling domain of roadless wild lands.

KM: Who are the activists that have influenced you and your work?

HW: People I have gained tremendous inspiration from, that’s a long list. But I’ve got to start with, in a sense, the big three. John Muir, Bob Marshall, and Aldo Leopold—John, Bob, and Aldo. There are a lot of other people too. The conservation/environmental movement has been lucky to have some extremely inspiring, visionary people: Ed Abbey, who I was also lucky enough to be friends with for the last ten years of his life. His writing inspired me many years before I ever met him. I think he, at least in more modern...
times, has probably inspired more people to care about and get involved with the fight for wilderness than anybody I can think of. Marjorie Stoneham Douglas, carrying on that fight for the Everglades, has been a big influence on me and to a lot of people, particularly in her commitment and the amount of fight she had left in her at a very ripe old age. Rachel Carson, of course, changed the face of the environmental movement as a whole in the United States. Bringing it a bit more down to this region, to western Montana, I get a lot of inspiration from people like Stuart Brandborg who have a long history as fighters for wildlands. There are probably more.

KM: How have you seen the environmental movement, specifically activism, change over the past thirty years?

HW: When I first got involved with the conservation movement, after I got out of college, and I was living in Wyoming, most of the power in the movement was centralized in a handful of Washington D.C.- and San Francisco-based organizations: the Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society, Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation, and Friends of the Earth. What I have seen change is that the proportions of power and the effects of those organizations has dropped off to some extent, and grassroots groups have risen. Ten, fifteen, and twenty years ago, there weren't groups like the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, the Center for Biological Diversity, on and on and on down the list. And I think that's been a really big change in the conservation movement.

Interestingly enough, when Dave Foreman, Mike Roselle, and I founded Earth First! in 1980, one of our goals was to change the face of the conservation movement. But we really didn’t foresee the number of new groups that resulted. What we hoped to do was to expand the political spectrum and expand the spectrum of what was discussed by advocating wilderness for all roadless areas and wilderness recovery areas. These things were considered radical in 1980, but they are not considered radical anymore. By expanding the spectrum of the debate, we wanted to create a political situation that allowed the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society to take much stronger positions, to become much stronger advocates for wilderness, wildlands, and native biological diversity. And I think that has gradually happened. But I think what we didn’t foresee was that partly as a result of the early Earth First!, there was a strong reaction to the extremist anti-environmental policies of the Reagan years. A lot of new groups formed that got way ahead of the Washington D.C.- and San Francisco-based establishments in the level of advocacy, in their commitments to grassroots development and organization, their sophistication, and in the utilization of much better arguments and techniques for creating a strong pro-wilderness organization.

The other thing that’s important to realize is that perceptions evolve. If there is one thing we’ve learned from the last twenty or thirty years, it’s that it’s up to conservationists to determine where public perceptions are going and how much they are going to evolve. I touched on a couple of primary examples. When we formed Earth First!, the central focus was a platform that we put together. The three elements of that platform were that, first, conservationists should advocate legal wilderness designation for every single public land roadless area that qualifies. Second, we put together a map and a list of every major native eco-region in the United States. Actually the map was already put together. It was the Bailey Kuchler Map, “Eco-regions of the United States,” which the Forest Service distributed with its Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE) II final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in 1979. It basically mapped out the major ecosystems of the U.S. And we put together a list of multi-million-acre ecological preserves which require wildland recovery programs putting people to work tearing out roads, restoring native vegetation, and reintroducing native wildlife. The third aspect of that original platform was removal of dams that were particularly destructive, starting obviously with Glen Canyon. Of course, we were labeled crazy radicals, with no credibility.

The public perception and the news media’s perception was that we were “out there” and the Sierra Club and Wilderness Society were at least mainstream enough to be a part of the club. Funny how perceptions change. It’s twenty years later and now the federal government is holding public hearings on the removal of dams on the Snake River. There is a national organization based in Utah called the Glen Canyon Institute. Its primary mission is to foster the removal of Glen Canyon Dam. Not through George Hayduke on a houseboat, but through the legal means of the government finally admitting that this is a turkey that never should have been built, and let’s breach it. In virtually every conservation group that I work with nowadays, it’s a given that if it’s roadless, then it should be protected. These aren’t radical ideas anymore. These are now part of the mainstream.

And the only reason they are part of the mainstream is because some people took it upon themselves to expand the spectrum of the debate and to create the idea, to plant the idea in people’s heads. And if it’s a good idea and you keep repeating it, it’ll take hold. That’s how ideas evolve. There’s always been a history in the conservation movement
of people who define politics as the art of accomplishing the possible. In fact, a lot of Washington, D.C. lobbyists who spend their entire lives within the Beltway would argue that politics is the art of the possible. I would argue that politics is the art of changing what’s possible. And I think we have a long history in this country of that being the case.

**KM:** What would the ideal environmental movement be composed of?

**HW:** Well, it would be composed of 90 percent of the population. The average citizen would make a political effort to protect the environment a small and regular part of their lives, like taking out the garbage. It wouldn’t be a movement consisting of a small portion of the population, it would be institutionalized and carried out by the vast majority of the people in the country.

**KM:** Do you see that starting to happen?

**HW:** It’s got a long way to go, obviously. But more people today are aware that there is an environmental crisis than were aware of it ten years ago. It’s kind of the age-old problem. The worse the crisis becomes, the more obvious it becomes, and the more people become aware of it. Finally, enough people become aware of it that something is done about it, but by then it may be too late. That’s the quandary we are in and it’s what we have to avoid. That’s why it’s so important to elevate the status of environmental issues.

I hate to drag it down into anything as mundane and ordinary and predictable as presidential politics, but for the first time in my life, the environment is being thrown out there as an issue in a presidential campaign. For the first time in my life, a presidential candidate has recognized wilderness and roadless areas as an issue. I hope we can build on that and use that as a springboard for continuing to educate the public and continuing to bring more people into the fracas. That’s really the bottom line. The whole conservation war, the whole conservation issue, the whole environmental issue. We are not going to win them behind closed doors in smoke-filled rooms in Washington, D.C. We’re not going to win them in the courts. We win battles that way. But those victories are only temporary unless you have the people behind you. Developing grassroots understanding, educating the public, educating them in a way that gives people some ownership to the ideas that they develop, rather than a talking head just being up there preaching to them, that’s the real key.

If a group of people get together to discuss a problem, work out possible solutions, and feel like they have some ownership in what’s going on, they’re going to be a lot more dedicated and a lot more effective than a just group of people watching a talking head pontificate. That’s another thing I’ve learned over the years. You can’t change people’s minds or alter their perspective simply by trying to pound something into their heads. On one level, you can. If you are talking about media work and letting people know redundantly, over and over again why roadless areas are valuable, yes you have to do that. But in order to get people get really active and working you have to develop your message and put out your proposals in a way that makes people feel that they have some ownership in the process and some ownership in how it gets done. And I think we are moving in that direction.

**KM:** You use words like “war,” “fracas,” “battle.” Do you see a role for compromise at all in the future of the environmental movement?

**HW:** I think that we need to achieve a balance between wilderness preservation and the industrial world. Let’s look at the United States for example, let’s have a balance. Let’s have fifty percent of the United States as big wilderness reserves and fifty percent for various aspects of civilization. Well, how do we get there? Right now, two and a half percent of the United States is protected as designated wilderness. Maybe a total of nine percent of the land area is still in a roadless, undeveloped condition. Yes, I am for balance and compromise, but I think we passed that point of balance and compromise 50, 70, 90 years ago. Perhaps even longer ago than that. I don’t think that there is any more room at this point in time for compromising away our wildlands.

You can continually cut a piece of pie into smaller pieces. But after you cut it in half a few times, there is not much of a pie left. How many more times do you compromise and cut the pie in half? If you want to talk about that strictly from the point of view of conservation biology, conservation biologists will tell you that we’ve already chomped down so much of the pie that what’s left is not even enough to maintain the basic processes that create terrestrial evolution in large vertebrates. I’m paraphrasing Dr. Michael Soule on that. Conservation biologists will tell you that we’ve already chomped down too much of the pie to maintain viable populations of large carnivores in most every terrestrial habitat left on earth,
with just a few exceptions. I am not willing to compromise away another square inch.

KM: What needs to happen in order for the environmental movement to become more effective?

HW: The movement needs to do a better job at reaching out and convincing the average thinking citizen. There are a lot of people out there who don’t think much about anything except what’s on TV tonight. But we need to do a better job connecting with thinking citizens in order to upgrade where the environment sits in their list of priorities. Survey after survey shows that the American public does believe in environmental protection and is willing to forego some economic opportunity, if necessary, to achieve it. But that doesn’t mean that the environment is at the top of their priority list. We have to elevate it. Another thing we have to do is a better job of educating people in the news media, because the news media does shape public opinion. Taxes, abortion, all of the things that get the most media play are much more in the forefront of the public’s mind. I think a lot of that has to do with what they pick up and read in the newspaper every day. What they see on the six o’clock news every evening really does shape what they think is important.

The other thing the environmental movement has neglected is the population question. I think that you can make a very strong argument, particularly in the United States, that in the next few decades, we can start moving toward that 50 percent wilderness habitat goal I was talking about without giving up the reasonable comforts of life, without giving up very much of our affluent lifestyle, without having to use corn cobs instead of toilet paper, and so on. But let’s be honest. There’s going to be a point, if our population keeps growing, where the pressure will force us to open up protected areas and to be in there gleaning and scraping and sucking out every last remaining stick of timber, every last drop of oil, every surviving blade of grass for cattle and sheep.

We have a responsibility to set an example for the rest of the world. The environmental movement needs to start incorporating the population issue into its message. I don’t want any grassroots or national groups to drop their agendas, but we have to start incorporating the need for population stabilization and reduction into the message, and we have to educate the people. We have to educate ourselves. And we have to educate our leaders, the media, and the American public, because everything is a holding action, unless we do something about population.

KM: Could you talk a little about the proposed Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act (NREPA)?

HW: It’s probably the most visionary piece of environmental legislation that’s ever been considered by the United States Congress, with the possible exception of the Wilderness Act. The reason it’s such a great piece of legislation is that it looks at the regional landscape as a whole, and rises above the parochial politics of “this state and that state.” It recognizes the land as an ecological unit without the artificial boundaries that people impose on the land. You have this region with some relatively intact wildland ecosystems, in particular the greater Salmon-Selway, the greater Yellowstone ecosystem, the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem, which is sometimes called the Glacier-Bob Marshall. And the smaller sub-ecosystems like the Hells Canyon, and the Cabinet-Yaak (Selkirk) ecosystems. NREPA recognizes these as largely intact wildland regions, and it also recognizes what’s actually out there on the landscape and what’s actually feasible to accomplish in terms of linking these ecosystems with corridors that wide-ranging species can use to occasionally migrate between these various ecosystems.

And, of course, that’s so important because what conservation biologists have been telling us is simply that small isolated populations are inevitably going to face a downward spiral toward extinction for a variety of reasons, including inbreeding and related genetic factors, like genetic drift, and natural cataclysms such as disease. So, having bigger populations is essential. And with large, wide ranging carnivores, the only way to have populations of adequate size is to link some of these ecosystems so that there is some interchange and you have one meta-population, consisting of subpopulations, all linked together.

The other thing about NREPA is that it has a pilot system of wildland recovery areas, which would actually put people to work, would actually be a jobs program, restoring damaged wildlands, taking out roads, replanting native vegetation, and restoring the wild characteristics of a landscape. And it’s a labor-intensive job. For example, as NREPA
is currently written, there are just under a million acres of wildland recovery areas, and it’s been calculated by Michael Garrity, an economist at the University of Utah, that that alone would create 2,000 good-paying outdoor jobs for quite a period of time. And again, that’s just a pilot system. A more comprehensive system to restore a much larger section of the damaged landscape could create literally ten times that many jobs.

KM: Could you talk a little about what you are up to these days with Big Wild Advocates?

HW: Since I talked a little about my Earth First! history, I also want it understood that I quit Earth First! in 1990, and I haven’t been involved with Earth First! for a decade now. My wife, Marilyn Olsen, and I have our own nonprofit called Big Wild Advocates. Primarily what I do when I am wearing my Big Wild Advocates hat is a lot of writing and the production of educational materials. I try to plug into things in the wildlands conservation movement, regionally and sometimes beyond the region, where I see an empty niche. I try to pick and choose the issues and the battles, to get back to the war analogy, where I think I can do some good and add something that wouldn’t ordinarily get added to the mix. And so that’s kind of what Big Wild Advocates is all about.

Lately, the roadless area initiative has consumed all of my conservation efforts. That’s the way it should be. Because, more than anything, my primary focus for my whole adult life has been trying to protect national forest roadless areas. And all of the sudden, finally, we have a chance to get some measure of protection. It still remains to be seen how much. But we have a chance to get some measure of protection for at least the vast majority of these roadless wildlands, and I think that the conservation movement needs to do everything in its power to succeed in this. We need help. We need people to get behind this and to write letters to the editors of local newspapers and call the news director at KUFM radio station and say, “Hey, I want five minutes to say my piece.” And we need people to be calling the Missoulian and all the other regional newspapers, and say, “Let’s get on this roadless area issue.” I’ve been working on developing strategies for creating a lot of public support for full protection of roadless areas.

KM: The roadless area initiative is an administrative classification by the Forest Service. Does that concern you?

HW: Yes. It’s not legal wilderness designation. It’s not anywhere near as strong or permanent as legal wilderness designation. But, the administration has no power to legally designate an area wilderness. That can only be done by an act of Congress under the Wilderness Act of 1964. Ideally, Congress would designate every remaining roadless area as a wilderness area, but a Democratic Congress wouldn’t even do that, let alone the Republican Congress that we have. So, given that reality, the next best thing is for the governing administration to take administrative steps to give these areas as much protection as it can.

But, let’s not kid ourselves. This is not a done deal yet. And if they do succeed in giving 50 million acres of roadless wildlands at least protection from the bulldozer and the chain saw, I can guarantee you that, should George W. Shrub get elected President, he will make an effort to reverse the policy. Now, on the other hand, they are going through the National Environmental Policy Act process, creating an environmental impact statement with public involvement, and therefore, Shrub would have to go through the same process to undo it. And if they look through the public comment record and find that it’s four to one in favor of protection, and then they start realizing what a nasty buzzsaw they are going to be walking into if they try to undo it, that might give them pause.

In addition, you can expect the standard reactionary people like Helen Chenoweth-Hage, Larry Craig, and Don Young to be attaching riders to unrelated appropriations bills or other kinds of bills going through Congress to try to undo the thing. So, no, this is not the same and it’s definitely nowhere near as safe as legal wilderness designation. But it’s a big step in the right direction. And again, for the first time that I can remember, roadless areas are being made a big, visible issue by people at the highest levels of government. I think we are going to come out ahead in one way or another.

Kyle McClure is a graduate student in the Environmental Studies Department. He likes geology and says he has gotten over his childhood fear of earthquakes.
Sonoran Wind

haikus by Beth Peluso

Sharp Saguaro thorns
hot rocks and cactus wren chirrs—
water to my heart.

Raven perches on
the runaway truck ramp sign
wipes his beak and waits.

Saguaro arms curve
up, down—a century long dispute
one word each decade.
The air is filled with the dull thud of explosions as patches of tear gas waft down 5th Street past the Christmas lights of Westlake Mall. An armored personnel carrier slowly cruises up the street carrying about a dozen riot police with tear gas guns aimed at the sparse crowds. As we watch them drive away, a man standing next to me says, "So, is this Seattle or Bosnia?"

I have just heard that the Mayor declared a 7:00 p.m. downtown curfew. Seattle is in a "state of civil emergency," caused by the anti-World Trade Organization (WTO) protests that have been occupying the streets since before dawn. Not many of the tens of thousands of protesters who flooded the streets earlier in the day are still downtown, but at 6th and Pine I do find a few hundred people facing a police line. The riot police are decked out in their "Darth Vader" outfits: black body armor, black helmets with tinted face plates, gas masks, and a full complement of "non-lethal crowd control weapons," including tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets, and concussion grenades. After a few minutes of milling about the crowd, I hear someone give the now familiar warning "they're masking up, get ready."

I turn and start walking back down 6th when the fusillade begins. Concussion grenades explode in the air with deafening blasts, and tear gas canisters fly into the crowd as we retreat. With all the noise and smoke, it’s difficult to suppress a panic reaction. Just in front of me, a group of teenagers starts to run. Suddenly, there’s a pile-up of bodies on the sidewalk. Other kids in the group shout “slow down, walk, don’t run,” and help pull everyone to their feet. A man hurries by yelling, "Does anyone need water?" I motion him over, holding out the fringe of my tee shirt. He douses it, and I cover up my mouth and nose as best I can. Tomorrow, I swear to myself, I’ll remember to bring a bandana.

The fury dies down after a few minutes, and at the end of the block, the tear gas is hardly noticeable. I overhear someone say that the National Guard is being called in tomorrow to help the police "restore order." My first reaction is to laugh and mutter to myself “all for little old us?"

The crowd is no different than at any of the dozens of other protests I’ve participated in. No one has any weapons, not even a rock, and given the circumstances, we are remarkably calm. It’s a bit difficult to see us as threatening the civil order of the city. Yet, despite a massive show of force by the police, the protest has succeeded better than any of us could have hoped.

If there was a "Battle in Seattle," as the media dubbed the protests, it was a battle of political ideas and of conflicting world views—not a street battle, as it has too often been portrayed. The mayor and the...
police ultimately gained control of the streets by declaring a state of emergency, calling in the National Guard, and cordonning off most of downtown as a “protest free zone” for the rest of the week. By shutting down the opening ceremonies of the Third Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization on the morning of November 30, 1999, anti-WTO protesters had already guaranteed unprecedented media exposure for the usually secretive and obscure trade talks. The overreactions by the police would keep the protests on the front page even longer. At the end of the week, after hundreds of arrests and the collapse of the WTO negotiations, the supposedly unstoppable force of economic globalization had received its first major setback since the end of the Cold War.

While the Seattle protests appeared to spring out of nowhere, a wide array of activists and groups have been organizing against unfair trade regulations and the impacts of “corporate globalization” for years. And while the alternative press paid attention, the mass media continued to report economic globalization as inevitable, entirely beneficial, and lacking any significant opposition.

Seattle changed this perception for good, and it also dramatically illustrated the growing power and influence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in global politics. NGOs focused on trade and development issues were especially prominent in Seattle and included the International Forum on Globalization, Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch, Global Exchange, the 50 Years (of the World Bank) is Enough Network, People Centered Development Forum, and the Third World Network. Small farm and alternative agriculture advocates were represented by national organizations such as the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and the Campaign to Save Rural America, and by smaller groups such as the Billings, Montana-based Northern Plains Resource Council. Environmental organizations ranged from mass-membership groups such as the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, and Defenders of Wildlife, to grassroots groups such as the Indigenous Environmental Network, Rainforest Action Network, and the Native Forest Network. Completing this unprecedented, historic alliance were a plethora of trade unions including heavyweights such as the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and the United Steelworkers of America (USW).

Like most of the estimated 40,000 protesters, I came to Seattle as an individual rather than as part of any group. I may have also been typical in that, just a few months before the protests, I knew little about the WTO. I quickly learned that the WTO is an easy organization to oppose. Its secrecy, lack of democratic process, and consistent bias in favor of corporate rights represent perfectly what is wrong with the current process of economic globalization.

The WTO is charged with enforcing international trade rules and agreements, including the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), among its 134 member nations. On behalf of local business interests, WTO member nations can challenge laws and regulations of other members as violations of WTO rules. WTO tribunals then have the power to limit what non-tariff laws and trade policies member countries can implement or maintain. These “non-tariff barriers to trade” include food safety laws, product standards, environmental regulations, investment policy, and other domestic laws that impact trade. So far, every single environmental or public health law challenged before the WTO has been ruled illegal by the WTO. This has resulted in the weakening of the

In Seattle, we proved that the new threats presented by globalization also present new opportunities for political organizing and alliances—centered not on divisions between left and right, but between populists and corporatists.
U.S. Endangered Species Act and Clean Air Act, as well as food safety standards in the European Union and Japan.

Most protesters in Seattle saw the WTO not as an aberration, but as an integral aspect of “corporate globalization” and neo-liberal economics. Using the rhetoric of “free trade,” neo-liberal economic policies have instead implemented a system of corporate-managed exchange. Opening national borders to unrestricted trade puts developing economies and small producers at the impossible disadvantage of having to compete “freely” with established trans-national corporations. When poor nations are not allowed to provide internal markets for their own industries and agriculture, they are often forced to depend on exporting natural resources and providing cheap labor for international corporations. The cheaper cost of doing business in countries with minimal or nonexistent labor and environmental protections then leads to a “race to the bottom” among nations who do have environmental and labor laws. Such competition between national borders ultimately benefits the biggest global corporations at the expense of locally produced goods, small and subsistence agriculture, indigenous cultures, and biological diversity.

In Seattle, we proved that the new threats presented by globalization also present new opportunities for political organizing and alliances—centered not on divisions between left and right, but between populists and corporatists. What interests me most about these new alliances is their potential to go beyond the limits of single-issue and special-interest group politics. The partnership in Seattle between labor and environmentalists was perhaps just the most obvious example of this political tendency. Any efforts to move past the tired “jobs versus the environment” rhetoric is welcome, though it’s too early now to tell if this coalition will extend past the WTO protests.

As the WTO meetings grew nearer, the momentum for the protest seemed to take on a life of its own. Soon I began to think that the plans for a mass non-violent action to shut down the WTO on the opening day of the WTO ministerial could really become a major event. And I knew that many of my Seattle friends were involved in the Direct Action Network that was planning the action. As the media attention and momentum for the action grew, I finally decided that there was no way anyone was going to hold a “carnival against capital” in my old hometown without me.

I arrived in Seattle the night before the Day of Action and was up before dawn the next day to catch the beginning of the march downtown. Art and Revolution had been busy for weeks creating the striking array of giant puppets, costumes, and banners that gave the march an almost carnival feel. Monarch butterflies, sea turtles, and other endangered species were plentiful, as were ominous looking bureaucrats and bankers, some of them on stilts. Other installations were more abstract, like the giant puppet head that led the march or the eye in the pyramid (from the dollar bill) on wheels. This entire menagerie and several thousand of us in not-so-exotic rain gear set out for the Paramount Theater, the site of the WTO opening ceremonies. We slowly followed a circuitous route downtown, and as we progressed, small affinity groups split off from the main march to begin their planned civil disobedience actions.

My first glimpse of what these groups were doing came as we reached a major intersection a block from the Paramount. A ten-foot tall tripod was erected, and a protester crawled up to suspend himself above our heads. The shopping carts transporting the giant puppet leading the march were then opened up to reveal a cache of chains, lockboxes, and “sleeping dragons” (pipes that fit over linked arms to make it more difficult to separate them). A group of protesters quickly sat down, linked arms in a circle around the tripod and locked themselves together.

Such actions were repeated all over downtown, and by the time we reached the Paramount at about 9:00 a.m., the area around the theater and the

Camas Spring/Summer 2000
Convention Center was completely closed to traffic. The police seemed somewhat prepared for this, as they had already advised most downtown businesses to stay closed, and they quickly diverted traffic around the protest core. What they didn’t seem as prepared for was the combination of decentralized action, lockdown tactics, and the sheer number of people willing to blockade the WTO. Outside the Paramount, the police were expecting a violent riot, not civil disobedience. One of my favorite moments of the day was watching a line of officers, with their night sticks held rigidly across their chests, looking grimly at a mob of costumed protesters dancing in the streets to Bob Marley and Aretha Franklin.

At 10:00 a.m., when the WTO opening ceremony was to begin, hundreds of demonstrators sat with linked arms in front of the Paramount. It was at about this time that I left downtown to rendezvous with friends at the big union rally at the Seattle Center. I had just missed the first police attacks, though I’d see similar actions later that afternoon when I returned downtown. Police began firing tear gas, rubber bullets, and pepper spray at point blank range into groups of protesters sitting in the street—including some groups of protesters locked together waiting to be arrested.

Late that afternoon, I saw groups, who had been locked down in intersections for seven or eight hours, discussing whether to continue holding their intersection until 5:00 or move closer to where the action had shifted. It was by far the strangest police response to a civil disobedience action I’ve ever seen. The police didn’t bother to arrest protesters blockading streets but instead tried to disperse them with tear gas. Not even the few dozen “black bloc” activists, whose window smashing and spray-painting spree became the most over-reported event of the day, were targeted for arrest. Out of the 610 arrests the police made during the protests, only 60 came during the most intense action on the first day.

Both the police attacks and the property destruction escalated late in the afternoon, about the time I returned downtown. The blockade at the Paramount had succeeded in canceling the WTO’s opening ceremonies. The police managed to get some delegates into the afternoon session scheduled at the convention center, but only controlled a two-block-wide and four- or five-block-long strip of central downtown. Thousands of protesters surrounded this area, and at the front of each police line was a line of protesters linking arms with their backs to the officers. Despite the police violence, the mood of most the crowd remained peaceful, determined, and almost celebratory. We were winning, and we knew it.

Throughout the afternoon I constantly bumped into friends that I hadn’t seen for months or years. This lent an even stranger atmosphere to the day, as I watched the streets I knew so well become the stage of a global political drama. It was sort of like a family reunion with tear gas. Whoever I met, we’d invariably grin and say something like, “Isn’t this incredible?”

I’m sure I’m not alone in feeling that the Seattle WTO protest was both a significant turning point in the fight against corporate globalization, and a reaffirmation of years of activism. Protests, by their nature, rarely succeed in meeting any immediate political goal, which frequently leads to high levels of burnout and cynicism among activists. Seattle showed that creative, decentralized, non-hierarchical protests are capable of winning real political victories on the streets, in the media, and even in global trade talks. Long after the tear gas and broken windows have been forgotten, this may be the most important legacy of the “battle in Seattle.”

Pete Murney is a graduate student in the Environmental Studies Program. His thesis is about the environmental movement and social action theory. In his spare time, Pete likes to grow vegetables in his garden and take care of cats.
Salmon Without Rivers: 
A History of the Pacific Salmon Crisis

by Jim Lichatowich
Island Press, 1999

reviewed by Ethan Hasenstein

I first experienced wild Pacific salmon in Alaska. My canoe slid over pods of 50-pound kings holding in deep pools and emerald-shadowed channels. Cleaning one, I'd smell its spine and breathe deep the salt, tumbling water, and raw vigor and abundance of northern rivers.

But drive on Interstate 84 down the gorge of the Columbia River in Oregon, view the sere concrete of McNary, John Day, and Bonneville Dams and the clean lines of the federal fish hatcheries, and you'll witness a far different story. It is the one that Jim Lichatowich has told in Salmon Without Rivers. In the book, the author draws on three decades of experience as a fisheries biologist in Oregon and Washington.

Lichatowich produces a comprehensive history of the salmon’s decline in the Pacific Northwest. For the reader who believes the construction of the major hydroelectric dams on the Columbia brought on the salmon’s crisis, Lichatowich painstakingly recounts a much broader history—a history that essentially began in 1849 with the discovery of gold at Sutter’s Mill on California’s Sacramento River. In fact, there is very little mention of the massive dams until quite late in the book. Lichatowich makes it clear that salmon populations were spiraling toward the abyss of extinction, even before construction of Grand Coulee Dam in 1939 completely closed the upper Columbia basin to the spawning runs. By the time Grand Coulee was built, Lichatowich writes, salmon populations were already decimated by over-harvest, and their habitats had been turned inside out by mining, cattle and sheep grazing, and log drives. The dams are but a new chapter in the salmon’s struggle to survive.

While Salmon Without Rivers is very much a history of habitat destruction and its incremental, cumulative effects upon salmon, Lichatowich also takes on the issue of hatcheries and the extreme price such biologic manipulation has exacted from native species. He traces the evolution of hatchery fish culture in the Northwest—trapping spawning salmon, mining their eggs, and propagating them for release to supply the commercial marine fishing industry—and examines an idolatrous faith in the ability of science to manage the reproduction of salmon better than the salmon themselves. The goal of hatcheries was to “eliminate the need of rivers to produce salmon ... [We believed] we could have salmon without healthy rivers.”

In the aggregate, policies to artificially propagate salmon in the Pacific Northwest have been a gross economic and ecological failure. According to Lichatowich, the century-old hatchery culture within fisheries agencies has been only recently dislodged. The author believes a new paradigm for salmon management and, indeed, how we inhabit the region itself, is now essential. It is this proposition which makes this such a provocative book: “We live in the same ecosystems as the salmon, so we cannot stand apart, manipulate, control, and simplify those ecosystems without at some fundamental level diminishing ourselves.”

This is an informative, heavy read. While not penned with an overabundance of grace, the author is truly at his best when he is most passionate about the salmon, its life history, and evolutionary resilience. Lichatowich’s deep affinity for the species he has devoted his life to shines through the occasionally dry and rocky prose.

Salmon Without Rivers is a painful history, but it is infused with reverence and hope. If anything, the author leads the reader to the realization that it is truly a miracle of the species’ evolutionary toughness and utter endurance that any shred of wild salmon stocks in Oregon, Washington, and California have survived as remnants to this day. These are heartening thoughts for those of us who passionately love the Pacific Northwest, its wild salmon, and the rivers they depend on.

“I am convinced that the first step in building a culture capable of coexisting with the salmon,” writes Lichatowich in the final pages, “is the cultivation of attentiveness—encouraging people to listen to the world they live in.”
Taking Care: Thoughts on Storytelling and Belief

by William Kittredge
Milkweed Editions, 1999

reviewed by Ann Whitesides

Part of the Credo series by Milkweed Editions, Taking Care: Thoughts on Storytelling and Belief is a reworking of William Kittredge’s personal philosophy and outlook on our relationship to the natural world. Written in the same confessional tone his readers have come to know and love, he mingles his current thinking with bits and pieces of previous works and lets his reader know exactly where he still agrees with himself. This book describes a personal journey—a history of one man’s experience working and loving the land. It also provides a statement about belief and a look at the stories we tell ourselves in order to continue living in the paradigm that we are taught is right.

The story within these pages is completely engaging. At times, however, the narrative line is broken to identify pieces of writing from other works. These breaks can disrupt the reader’s participation in the synthesis of Kittredge’s current thoughts. Nonetheless, what draws this book together is the heartfelt compassion he expresses for his story and the story of the West. Kittredge’s candid approach to questions of spirituality and mortality distinguishes Taking Care from his other books and essays.

Kittredge’s experience as a rancher and farmer in eastern Oregon is the motivating force behind his concern for nature. It is a story of estrangement from a place, which occurred while he was brought into close contact with the landscape. In the end, what his family had considered moral, just, right, and “God’s work,” destroyed the ecology of the valley he once loved to call home. With the marsh gone, birds no longer came to visit. And the badgers, hand-poisoned with strychnine soaked carrots, weren’t there burrowing in the hillsides. The cow shit was even “chemically contaminated.”

For William Kittredge, freedom came by committing himself to work as a writer. When he told his father what he wished to do, after years of running the ranch, he found encouragement rather than the disdain he expected. His dad said, “I’ve done things I hated all my life. I sure as hell wouldn’t recommend that.” Kittredge has been working over the stories of those times ever since. He has embraced the West and made not only a home for himself in Montana but helped create an intellectual climate in which thought and art concerning western issues, beliefs, politics, and livelihood are thoroughly examined and recognized as their own story.

Kittredge believes in stories. He believes that they frame our lives and are the tools we use to motivate our actions and place ourselves in society and on this earth. Not willing to just give a story to the reader, Kittredge wants his audience to know why it is important. He wants them to be able to use that information in life, as he has, to come to greater understanding. “We need to inhabit stories that will encourage us toward acts of the imagination, which in turn will drive us to the arts of empathy, for each other and the world. We need a story about compassion and caretaking that is so compelling that people will act it out as they work and vote.” That story, once found and shared, he says, will have the power to change our social institutions. And the “urgent” need to find such a story is our most important task as a community.

This is the crux of activism for William Kittredge. Willing to work and rework what he has learned in order to find such stories, he seeks a place in which humanity can live, and live comfortably, satisfied with the paradise in nature that has always been provided for us. He sets out a list of beliefs in the book beginning with “Everything is part of everything” and ending with “And compassion. We have no choice but to forgive ourselves.” For Kittredge, this empathy is the point from which we may be able to take responsibility, and question “how good we can be.” It is our chance to inhabit the “electric process of what is actual.” An honest and inspiring look into one man’s experience in the world, written as an account of the lessons he would take and share, Taking Care ends with the words “Momemto vivere.”
Montana Spring

haikus by Beth Peluso

One hill in sunlight
Snow clouds snagged on distant peaks
Redwing blackbird sings.

Sad, how spring frost melts:
pale, blade-fine calligraphy
into dull, round dew.

One bough blossoms white.
The rest of the cherry tree
still ponders winter.
ranks of the Sierra Club to gain a seat on its national board of directors, and she has, thus far, completed two years of her first three-year term. She is just one of the many activists that have emerged from the “fertile ground” of EVST, as she describes it, to become regional and national leaders.

In some form or another, Ferenstein and all of the other activists I spoke with are still hard at work. But they have learned a tremendous amount during their years as activists, and many of them are asking the same tough questions I asked myself after my arrest at Watts Bar. Are we still making a difference? Have all the letters, rallies, arrests, and long hours ultimately made the world a better place?

Difficult Questions

Perhaps the person who has been the most persistent in questioning the effectiveness of the movement is Bryony Schwan, director of Women’s Voice’s for the Earth (WVE). Originally from Zimbabwe, Schwan moved to the Bitterroot Valley, just south of Missoula, thirteen years ago. Outraged by clearcuts in the neighboring national forest, she became involved with several conservation organizations that focused on wilderness and forest issues. As she continued working in the regional conservation community, Schwan became increasingly uneasy with something that women in the movement have been dealing with for years—they were vastly outnumbered, especially in leadership positions. With the help of a small grant from EVST, she held a women’s environmental conference in Missoula that led to the formation of WVE in 1994.

Six years later, she sees improvements, but doesn’t feel the conservation community has done enough to bring in those groups it has traditionally ignored—women and minorities. “We’re big promoters of biological diversity, but we’re horribly lacking in diversity within our own ranks,” she laments. And she believes it is the single most important factor stopping us from bringing about fundamental change. “You aren’t going to protect wildlands in perpetuity,” she says, “until you deal with social issues, such as poverty and consumption. You’re just going to be putting out brush fires.”

Schwan is not alone in her concerns about the marginalization of the environmental movement. Many of the activists I spoke with worry that while we have made tremendous progress utilizing such tools as litigation, direct action, and legislation, we have not been as successful in reaching out to all people and creating true social change. Dan Funsch believes we’ve been chipping away at the problems, but, pointing to a fleet of sport utility vehicles passing through downtown Missoula, says “we’re still losing and nothing we’ve done has ever changed that.” He feels that even though psychology and spirituality are what lead people to become activists, the environmental movement is ignoring those issues. Instead, activists are recycling old tactics that are losing their impact, leading him to conclude that the conservation community in the northern Rockies has “lost its edge.” As he puts it, “People see hippies hanging from trees and they change the channel.” He sees the movement stagnating, rather than moving forward and creating the sort of social transformation that would forever banish the gas-guzzling sport utility vehicles.

One of the reasons environmental issues have failed to permeate the mainstream, in Bethanie Walder’s opinion, is because activists themselves are often cliquish and out of touch, putting the movement beyond the reach of average individuals. Walder is the director of Wildlands Center for Preventing Roads, an organization that, as its name implies, focuses on the ecological impact of roads. As an EVST student she helped to organize Native Forest Network’s second International Temperate Forest Conference, which was held in Missoula and attracted hundreds of activists from around the world. While the conference was a tremendous success, Walder remembers scanning a room full of conference attendees, many of them young punks and hippies, and thinking, “If this is the face of the environmental community, we aren’t going to win.” She realized “we have to create an outlet for people who don’t have sticks in their noses to get involved.” This lead to her involvement with WVE, and her ongoing commitment to move beyond what she terms the “I’m more radical than you” infighting and move towards creating profound social change.

The challenges the movement faces are not limited to bringing in a broader range of individuals. In Tracy Stone-Manning’s opinion, the movement needs to adjust its focus in order to create a real cultural shift. If we are truly intent on infusing an environmental ethic into all levels of society, we must begin “learning how we can live well in this place.” He sees the movement has done itself a disservice by ignoring those issues. Instead, activists are recycling old tactics that are losing their impact, leading him to conclude that the conservation community in the northern Rockies has “lost its edge.” As he puts it, “People see hippies hanging from trees and they change the channel.” He sees the movement stagnating, rather than moving forward and creating the sort of social transformation that would forever banish the gas-guzzling sport utility vehicles.
versus the environment—has emerged, and the movement is still battling that negative image. She sees the boom and bust cycles of extractive industries as the real threat to the people of the northern Rockies. By talking about how we can restore ravaged communities and create a sustainable future for the northern Rockies, Stone-Manning believes we can begin healing the wounds of the past.

Moving Forward

But that is not to suggest that there is no place for conflict. In Tim Bechtold’s opinion, the aggressive strategies of activists in the region have made a tremendous difference. In the 1980s, activists in the northern Rockies wrote their own agenda and “created an atmosphere where anything goes.” He continues, “We tended to be more brash and demanding than activists in other parts of the country had been. We were acting from a position of strength.” Now, he tells me, victories that would have seemed outlandish ten or fifteen years ago are within the realm of possibility, such as protecting roadless areas or bringing down Milltown Dam, which holds back the Clark Fork River just east of Missoula. Bechtold emphasizes that the movement shouldn’t shy away from conflict. As he puts it, “Sooner or later you’ve got to stand up for what you believe in or you’re going to get shoved around.”

Just as Bechtold sees many potential victories finally within reach, Kreilick sees a major cultural shift on the horizon. After working for years for the Native Forest Network, Kreilick is now on staff with the National Forest Protection Alliance, which focuses on ending commercial logging on the national forests. He feels that we need to fundamentally alter how we interact with the land and with other cultures, and it is big campaigns, such as the effort to end commercial logging on national forests, that are critical to that shift. As he sees it, “we’re finally in a position to win” on a number of the issues he has been working on for years. And he would like to think the activist community in the northern Rockies had a large hand in that.

Kreilick is right. Activists in the northern Rockies have made a tremendous contribution to the national environmental movement, and EVST has been at the heart of activism in the region. I can say this with some authority, as I now realize that the activists I grew up with were borrowing some of their strategies from the Rockies and applying them to the problems of the Appalachians. But these tactics are not always enough. Not only is Watts Bar up and running, but it has also become the first civilian reactor in the country to produce materials that are used in the manufacture of nuclear weapons.

Does this mean that my two days in jail were pointless, that the world would be no different had 58 activists spent July 11-12, 1994, eating bon-bons and drinking mint juleps? I don’t think so. After my discussions with activists in the northern Rockies, I remain convinced that there is an important place for direct action within our movement and that civil disobedience is a sign of a healthy democracy. But I am also beginning to understand that we have too often viewed it as an end in itself, which it is not.

Without addressing the social issues that are at the root of environmental problems, such as the wasteful consumption of resources, we will continue to find that while we may stop one timber sale, two more will pop up in its place, be they in the Appalachians or the Andes. Within EVST, the focus has shifted away from activism to some degree, and the majority of students are now concentrating their studies in writing, education, and science, rather than advocacy and policy. While this dismays those of us who believe strongly in the importance of activism, perhaps these newcomers are the messengers that will breach the cultural divide still separating the environmental movement from the mainstream.

Those of us working as professional activists often become absorbed in the one little part we are pushing down the assembly line. Whether we are filing lawsuits, appealing timber sales, making posters, organizing rallies, creating maps, writing grants, or analyzing policy, it is easy to become so immersed in our tasks that we forget to step back and measure our successes and failures. But this stepping back is essential to moving forward. While we stopped Watts Bar for a few hours, we couldn’t stop it forever. As the activists in the northern Rockies have taught me, it is not until a true cultural shift takes place, until conservation has permeated all levels of society, until a healthy environment is as basic a human right as free speech, that such a revolution will become truly possible. Creating that change is our challenge.

Mary Anne Peine is the executive director of The Ecology Center. When not at work as an activist she sings in a band called Stillhouse Nixon and is known to frequent EVST potlucks.
Beyond Negotiation
by Janisse Ray

You want peace.
Peace does not care.
Make a garden in its name,
fill your days with that which peace craves—
fresh flowers on the desk, a long walk—
how do you know a fox will den
underneath the brush pile?
In making it you have little idea
what the fox desires in a den.
Today when you wake, having dreamed,
you can not recall one feature on the face of anguish.
Nothing mars the vessel of day.
Oh, to extend toward tomorrow.
But peace is a wild animal of a mind for an old oak’s hollow roots
far from road-noise.
We are led to believe in our own authority.
We are led to believe in the wrongness of suffering.
We are led to believe in prayer.
No.
You must wait quietly,
your sad torment camouflaged by leaves,
until the fox comes trotting from the forest.

Janisse Ray dedicates the publication of this poem to the last roadless areas and to her “belief that our spirits, no less than our physical functioning bodies, need wild places.” She is a 1997 graduate of the University of Montana’s MFA and EVST programs. Her first book, Ecology of a Cracker Childhood, was published in 1999 by Milkweed Editions. Janisse’s work has also appeared in Wild Earth, Orion, Florida Naturalist, and Georgia Wildlife. She lives in Georgia with her son, Silas.