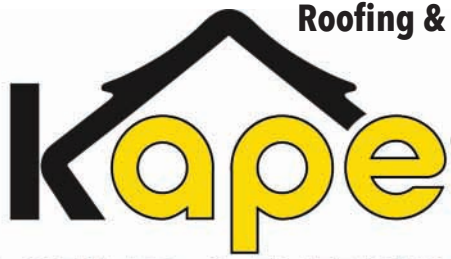


A photograph of three deer standing in a snowy forest. The deer are brown with white underparts and are looking towards the camera. The background is a dense forest of evergreen trees covered in snow.

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Wildlife Conditioned By People Feeding Them

The mule deer does on this month's cover is just three of a small herd that frequents my property in mid Coal Creek Canyon. Sometimes more come and just as often a single doe with her yearling stop by – going through what is sort of a wildlife corridor in our neighborhood. They are beautiful to watch and entertaining in their antics sometimes as they interact with each other or even with my four legged companions (horses and dog) or me. I'm pretty sure this group of deer is conditioned to not be as fearful of people as most of their species. A neighbor was feeding them for a while until that illegal action started attracting predators that put all of us in danger.

Department of Wildlife officers educated the person and the blatant feeding stopped – we all hope for good – but the damage to the little herd had already been done. They now look to people for food and are unafraid of us as they should naturally be. We all just hope everyone enjoys

seeing them up close without any harm coming to them or harm happening to people during the rut season by the big bucks that are also here.

Like most animals these deer have personalities that often show up by exhibiting a pecking order amongst themselves: one dominant doe might show aggression to the other does by running them away from droppings under a bird feeder, or making sure her yearling has first chance to nibble at willows, aspens, rosehip bushes before the other does' yearlings. Unless you observe them for a little time you might not notice these behaviors as it can be subtle and until you note differences in them: notch in one ear, or noticeable coloring on a face to distinguish them from the others it is nearly impossible to detect one from another. But once you

do it is pretty amazing to 'know' them for their predictable actions.

While riding my horse last summer I came upon a doe that refused to move off the single track trail we were using and my dog got scared so retreated to between my horse and mini horse I was ponying. This was highly unusual behavior as the doe came towards us and stomped her front feet. Even my



horse was taken aback and started to put it in reverse until I saw a small spotted fawn about 25 feet away and off the trail. Mama deer was just making sure that curly haired wolf (Continued on next page.)



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Highlander Wildlife

wasn't going after her newborn. We just stayed still and waited until the fawn moved farther away and its mama followed – allowing us to pass.

The day the cover photo and previous page photos were taken it was cold, foggy (maybe just a low lying cloud) and snowy. The frost on their coats and faces was noticeable even at a distance. But these girls come right up to my big picture window and make eye contact with us, especially curious about my cat at the window (she's usually watching the little birds) and my dog that doesn't bark at them. They don't move away if I go sit at the window with the cat and dog, but merely watch us watching them. I personally think they are begging for food (who knows what the neighbor did if they begged at his window).

Last year I had to defend my hay pole barn as I had a broken ankle when the winter hay was stacked and too many alfalfa bales were on the exterior of the stack for deer noses to poke in and help themselves. I had some construction mesh fencing that I wrapped around the exterior and it helped, but made it a pain for me to get in and get hay to throw


to my horses. A few yearlings decided to jump over the twelve-foot height and help themselves anyway so a few times I encountered the little thieves jumping out when I would go to feed my equines. The barricade of fencing did keep them from a free for all and making me guilty of illegal feeding of wildlife so the inconvenience was worth it in the end. But this year I supervised the hay stacking and all of my alfalfa is on the interior of the stacked bales of grass hay.

I'm not saying I don't relate to people wanting to feed wildlife as we do the wild birds, I just know it is against the law and the law is to protect the wild animals from being conditioned to relying upon us for food. They need to be able to eat what they naturally do and forage even in winter and snowy conditions. Sure they eat a little grass hay shake around the edges of the pole barn, but they prefer to nibble on aspens, willows, dry grasses, etc. I had a live Lodgepole tree blow over during a windy spell (which there have been too many this season in my opinion) and the deer have nearly eaten all the green pine needles off that downed tree already.

These lovely creatures are one of many of the fortunate features we mountain dwellers get to enjoy almost daily and I hope they stay here in our neighborhood so I can continue to enjoy their company. I just encourage people to let them be wild even when it seems they want to be fed, be strong and don't succumb to salt licks, bags of grain, dog food or alfalfa – they will be stronger for it too.

Since we seem to have so many mule deer here in our canyon we cannot be too careful driving our dirt roads and especially the State Highway as they cross regularly and often in groups. Another reason not to tailgate (as if anyone needs a reason) but if the driver in front of you sees a deer crossing they will stop suddenly.

By A.M. Wilks

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Saving Energy With How We Clean Clothes

By Cyndi Bray

Cutting energy waste in the home is not only good for the environment, it can also save you money. Most people wouldn't expect it but washing machines and dryers are some of the biggest energy wasters in homes. One study estimated the nation's residential laundry carbon dioxide emissions at 179 million metric tons per year. That's equal to the total annual energy use of more than 21 million homes.

While high efficiency machines use less water and electricity than other models, there is more that can be done to reduce the environmental impact of doing laundry. Especially when it comes to cumbersome items like bedsheets. The first step is to take a minute to know your machines. Most people never take the time to read the owner's manual for their washer and dryer, which could lead to missed maintenance and not fully understanding what the various cycles and settings mean. It's also important to check the care labels on garments, towels, and sheets. Many people will be surprised to learn that laundry advice passed down from parents and grandparents may conflict with manufacturer recommendations.

These tips can also help save time, energy, water, and even money when doing laundry: Give Your Dryer a Clean Slate: Make it a habit to check and empty the lint trap before each load. A full lint trap reduces efficiency and becomes a fire hazard. A clogged lint trap prevents the dryer from being able to exhaust hot air, causing it to overheat.

Try Washing on Cold: Washing on cold eliminates the need to use energy to heat the water used in the washer and it is also gentler on fabrics. Heating water uses the most energy where the washer is concerned. These days, most laundry detergents are formulated to clean in cold water, but there are also options specific for washing on cold.

Wash Full, Mixed Loads: When you wash everything on cold you eliminate the need to separate towels and sheets from clothing. Fill the washing machine up with a full load to save time and again energy and money. Don't be afraid to mix your clothes in with your sheets and towels, but if you're washing a new item that is over-dyed and highly saturated with color for the first time be sure to keep it away from whites and light colors.

Keep Dryers on Low - the permanent press cycle: Even though it will take longer for clothing, towels and bedding to dry, using a low heat cycle on the dryer will still use less energy than a medium or high heat setting. Drying loads one after the other can also help by retaining the low heat in the dryer for the next load. And instead of chemical fabric softeners or dryer sheets that end up in landfills, opt for reusable wool dryer balls with a few drops of essential oils on them to add scent to laundry and reduce static.

Wearing clothes more than once, especially for certain tasks or activities can cut down on the wear from more washing on clothes and easily be done by changing your clothes when you change your chores or activities. It can also save on house cleaning by having indoor clothes next to the door when coming inside from doing dirty things outside. This way you don't drag in dirt and debris from outside and can wear your certain chore allocated clothes more than once or twice depending on how much sweat or dirt has collected on the clothes during dirty chores.

Also, setting the dryer on permanent press and taking clothes out before they are completely dry and hanging them around the house or on the shower curtain rod on clothes hangers adds humidity to your home in winter and saving the energy a longer time in the dryer will certainly cost. If you have the space you can run clotheslines inside and let your clothes dry naturally from the ambient heat in your home which will also add humidity that our dry arid environment can cause that often keeps us from fighting off colds and flu. Higher humidity can help our immune systems especially when we run our heaters so much all winter long.



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Arctic Beavers Benefit Tundra In Alaska?

By Kylie Mohr Feb. 17, 2022 High Country News

today, mostly for making fur hats. He recently asked an elder about the area’s first sightings. “They saw

A new tundra, engineered by beavers.

Once nonexistent in northwest Alaska, beavers are both benefiting from and changing a warming tundra.

Cyrus Harris hopped on a snowmobile one day in early January and zoomed up a peninsula near Kotzebue, Alaska, to break trail for his sled dogs. “The first beaver dam I’m running into is about three miles from town,” he said. “Nearby that one is another one, about five miles out is another one, and that’s just one little area.” Harris (Inupiaq) was born in 1957 and spent his childhood across Kotzebue Sound in Sisualik.

“Beavers were really just unheard of,” he said. “It’s crazy the amount of beaver coming in, they’re just raiding the whole area.” Usually felling fast growing Poplar trees.

Beavers — once seldom seen in northwest Alaska — started appearing more frequently in the ’80s and ’90s. Pastor Lance Kramer (Inupiaq) traps beavers



this thing on the tundra, and it looked like a wolverine, but it was a really long beaver,” Kramer said. “(It) had walked so far on the tundra to get up this way that it wore out the bottom of its tail.”

A beaver works in the bright night of summer in the Arctic. Photo by Seth Kantner

Now the animals — and their ponds, dams and lodges — are everywhere. Using satellite images of the Kotzebue area, scientists found that the number of beaver dams surged from two in 2002 to 98 in 2019, a 5,000% jump. And it’s not just Kotzebue: Beaver ponds doubled regionally since 2000, with 12,000 in northwestern Alaska now.

Beavers, dubbed “ecosystem engineers” because of how they flood their surroundings, are transforming the tundra.

North America’s largest rodent is moving north partly because of climate change: As the tundra grows warmer and greener, it also becomes more

inviting to beavers, which need shrubs for food, dams and lodges. Their proliferation is also linked to a population rebound: Beaver trapping, popular for centuries, has tapered off, and the animals are thriving.

Beavers were recently cited as a “new disturbance” in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s 2021 Arctic Report Card, a yearly report that tracks changes in the region. That’s because they are damming rivers and creating deeper, warmer ponds that open up new types of aquatic

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habitat. “The key question to ask, wherever you’re standing in the Arctic, is, ‘How long will it be until beavers get there?’” said Ken Tape, an ecologist studying beaver expansion at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. “Because when they get there, it’ll never be the same again.”

Harris worries that beavers swimming in the reservoir that supplies Kotzebue’s drinking water could overwhelm the community water treatment plant. Beavers (and other animals) carry the giardia parasite, which they excrete into the environment, and water contaminated with their feces can cause intestinal infections. Harris and others used to drink directly from rivers on their hunting and fishing trips, but today, they’re having second thoughts. “If our water quality gets damaged, where do we go from there?” Harris said.

Selawik, about 80 miles to the east, is a beaver hotspot, too, and some are upset that the animals are blocking hunting access by boat. “Elders said to start getting rid of the beavers, but nobody listened, and now it’s overpopulated,” said Ralph Ramoth Jr. (Inupiaq), a subsistence hunter who also works for the local airport and his town’s road, water and sewer department. Lodges up to 15 feet tall make navigating sloughs to hunt moose on the periphery challenging. “You can’t even go some places now with a boat, because it’s dammed up,” Ramoth said. Sometimes he tries to chip away at beavers’ handiwork, with little success. “If you tear up part of a dam or a beaver igloo, they’ll come right back and fix it up again,” he said. “They’re just busy beavers.”

“They’ve enhanced our land in an incredible way when they do come up.” Hunters like Ramoth regard beavers as pests, and Harris wants to see beaver population-control efforts. But others argue that the

beavers aren’t necessarily creating a better or worse tundra — just a different one. Kramer considers them a blessing for habitat diversity. “They’ve enhanced our land in an incredible way when they do come up,” Kramer said. “They make lakes and ponds and bigger sloughs, which makes for more moose, ducks, waterfowl and muskrat.”

Scientists will continue to monitor beaver activity and its possible environmental impacts. One major question remains unanswered: Are beavers accelerating climate change in the region? The pools of water that their dams create are warmer than the surrounding soil, and that could thaw permafrost and release carbon and methane greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. “Beavers are maybe a player,” said Christina Schädel, a professor who studies permafrost at Northern Arizona University. “How big, we don’t know. But it’s absolutely worth investigating.”

Kylie Mohr is an editorial intern for High Country News writing from Montana.

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Update-Lion of Lyons ~ Color Issue ~ Gross Dam

Letter to the Editor,

Contributing writer Diane Bergstrom wrote an article (last summer) on Navy Veteran Ralph Ford and his career of bringing affordable food to urban and rural food deserts. Ralph lost his Lyons food stand to hotel developers, which has not stopped him from his mission of feeding people. After the article ran, he received some donations through a GoFundMe campaign, and then his story was picked up by Denver 7, who did a piece on him and asked for donations through their Denver 7 Gives fund. He's not giving up at a time when food prices are rising rapidly and which also cuts into his meager profits.

Google the clip from July 26, 2021, www.denverchannel.com. "Just trying to feed people good stuff at a fair price," he is quoted, "I think everybody just needs to be treated with a little love." While he has raised funds for a basic trailer, he still needs funds to operate and expand his mobile produce store. You can contribute to his GoFundMe account at

<https://gofund.me/5ace22c8>. Thank you, Ralph, for your continued service, from the Navy to local farmers to feeding Coloradoans struggling to feed themselves and their families! **From Diane**

Recently Ralph wrote this to the contributing writer, "Hi Diane, Thanks for keeping me in mind on my journey. I got a trailer in October and have been working on it since then. The trailer is almost complete. I have been working on safety issues. That will be done this week. I will have the state patrol inspection and then ready to roll. It's been



quite a bit of work. I can't wait to get this unit operational. I am very excited to serve. I'm still working out the bugs. I'll let you know when it's fully operational so that you can come check it out. I'm forever grateful for how you helped me get to this point. If it weren't for your (Highlander Monthly article, "The Lion of Lyons," July 2021, pg. 24-26), none of this story would have happened. Thank you." **Ralph Ford**

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Dear Readers,

I'm not sure if everyone noticed the Highlander Monthly has gone full color. Our long-time printer closed, so shopping for a new printer made color possible finally. Please excuse our 'under construction' issues as it is still a work in progress. Let me take this time to remind readers we distribute hard copies to ALL OF COAL CREEK CANYON every month, in addition to Golden Gate Canyon and north of Golden rural routes while alternating Black Hawk rural routes. The usual distribution to businesses: Boulder, Golden, Arvada, Central City & Nederland when possible as businesses are reopening and more folks are out and about.

Don't be fooled by the lack of information about Denver Water to expand Gross Reservoir and its Dam in this publication. By covering and opposing this environmental catastrophe since 2003 we at the Highlander are gearing up for the onslaught of actions by Denver Water to obliterate and destroy our canyon way of life. Rest assured we will cover and inform you of every misstep Denver Water makes in its problematic effort to enlarge and remake the existing Gross Dam and Reservoir in our Canyon.

We know the destruction and ongoing construction will make our canyon a less desirable place to live or even work from home, but we also know our canyon is resilient and has warded off many efforts to make it a 'work zone' – to extract minerals or simply aggregate. We have sacrificed much: a railroad going through much of our canyon – tunnels, crossings, etc. and the existing reservoir with its ongoing maintenance and water conveyances. Enough already, with Denver Airport sending much of its westbound flights right over our heads it is not fair to also push unneeded water storage with increased Reservoir and Dam size into our neighborhoods.

Simply due to our low population numbers corporations like Denver Water and DIA think we don't count and therefore count on us not voicing any concerns when they want to use our canyon as a 'not viable' entity whenever it is easy to do so.

Speak out to your Congressional Representatives and Senators – only a Google search away to find out who they are and voice your concerns to make Coal Creek Canyon a place to be reckoned with instead of a small population... the part where three counties converge.

Editor

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A Vision For More Sustainable Farmlands

By Theo Whitcomb Feb. 15, 2022 High Country News

Central California can't continue to farm at its current industrial scale. As land is fallowed, what could take its place?

From above, California's San Joaquin Valley spills out of the Sierra Nevada in a checkerboard of earth-toned farmland. It's some of the most valuable land in the world; every year, the agribusiness industry here produces billions of dollars' worth of milk, vegetables and nuts. But the scale, and the industrial intensity, of agriculture require an enormous amount of groundwater to be pulled out of aquifers deep belowground — more than the industry can afford to pump, according to hydrologic modeling.

According to projections from the Public Policy Institute of California, between 535,000 and 750,000 acres — around 15% of the valley's irrigated farmland — will need to be taken out of irrigated

production in order to meet the requirements of the state's Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. Removing irrigated land from production — following the land — could have disastrous and

unequal effects on the area's inhabitants: Small farmers are less equipped to weather the impacts, and thousands of low-wage farmworkers will be put out of work. Dusty, idle land is also dangerous: It hosts pests and weeds and spreads valley fever, a fungal disease that can seriously impact high-risk individuals. But taking that much farmland out of production and considering alternative uses for it means completely

transforming the landscape — something California is starting to incentivize with a new program headed by the California Department of Conservation.

Ideas for what to do with fallowed land remain largely conceptual, but advocates are busy putting together a vision of what is possible. Some of these uses give local government agencies across the West a prototype for a different kind of future for the

region's farmland — treating the transition as an opportunity to address public health, equity and access.

Turn it into a park

"We'd really like to see land be retired around communities where there's massive overpumping," said Nataly Escobedo Garcia, a policy coordinator at the advocacy nonprofit Leadership Council for Justice and Accountability. In its place, Garcia advocates for what she calls a "buffer zone," or a park. The idea is to create a dedicated ecological reserve — a sort of living donut around rural communities —



The Kern Water Bank in southwest Bakersfield, California, has 20,000 acres of groundwater recharge basins. Kern County Water Agency

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designed to promote biodiversity and protect small towns from groundwater depletion and exposure to pesticides.

In many small towns in the San Joaquin Valley, wells are the primary source of water. But decades of overpumping near them has dropped the water table so low that the wells often fail. Garcia says a new land-repurposing program could provide much-needed green-space, a safer alternative to the pesticide-laden crop fields that often abut rural towns, and, importantly, help protect vulnerable communities' water supplies. "We want water systems to be safe, so we'd love to see land go out of production around disadvantaged towns in order to protect their drinking water for years to come," she said.

It would also give people somewhere to go, added Garcia, pointing out that many rural towns are miles away from the nearest park. David Shabazian, the director of the Department of Conservation, which is administering a program to pay farmers to transition their land, said that early guidelines specifically point out the importance of addressing inequity. Building parks, he said, could tick many boxes.

Flood it

One promising alternative to water intensive farmland involves simply constructing giant ponds — called groundwater recharge basins — strategically designed to capture and store floodwater underground. These are some of the most likely land-repurposing projects, said Ann Hayden, a policy expert at the Environmental Defense Fund, mainly because they would benefit people, the ecosystem and the broader agricultural industry. Birds and pollinators can always use the habitat, and storing water underground helps chronic depletion of groundwater, which, in turn, helps communities dependent on wells depleted by overpumping. The San Joaquin Valley is a giant floodplain; before 19th century developers drained the marshes and diverted tributaries for agriculture, it was home to the largest lake in the West. Recharge basins absorb floodwater, create wetland habitat and address the impact of decades of

(Continued on next page.)

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groundwater mining, according to California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment, a report intended to guide government policy on adaptation. The assessment also predicts longer droughts, but when wet years do come, the rainfall will be more intense, and recharge basins can play a vital role in storing the water underground.

Farm it

(Yes, you read that right.) Aidee Guzman grew up in the San Joaquin Valley and now studies soil health as an agroecologist. She sees land repurposing as an opportunity, not to take farmland out of production, but rather to invest in a different type of farming. Guzman's research focuses on small-scale farms run by Southeast Asian refugees in the San Joaquin Valley. Her findings suggest that their techniques, which involve planting a diverse set of crops, have a wide array of ecosystem benefits. Not only do they increase the number of mycorrhizal fungi, which help distribute nutrients and decrease the need for fertilizer, the plants and fungi also improve water retention and carbon sequestration in the soil. The farming is often less water-intensive, too.



"They are not doing this on healthy, prime farmland," said Guzman. "They are farming on formerly industrially managed land. We have an enormous opportunity to farm this land differently, to rethink how this landscape can be designed." Whatever ends up happening will be up to local

governments and the communities they represent, said Shabazian. An effective land-transition process cannot not be prescriptive, he added: Rural communities, landowners and governments will decide what is best.

LaCha Her walks in a greenhouse planted with water spinach. Her's 26-acre farm in West Fresno is one of many small-scale farms run by Southeast Asian farmers in the San Joaquin Valley.
Tomas Ovalle/High Country News

Theo Whitcomb is an editorial intern at High Country News.



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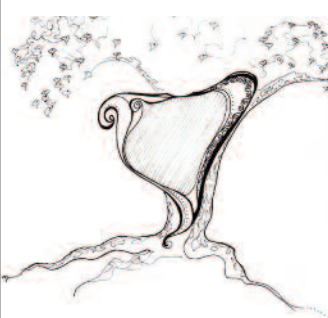
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Animals & Their Companions



Page 15 - Top left: *Cat from Diane*. Page 16 - Top left: *Pup from DogBlog*. Right: *Lovey cat from Yeldells*.
Page 16 left - *Baby Donkey*. Page 17 - Left *Friesian horse by Christa Merk*. Right: *Mala from Tracy*.
This page top left - *Tlt mini*. Top right - *Cute cats*. Bottom left - *Missinell Queen*. Right - *Horse grapevine*.

Times To Review Your Insurance

From Jim Plane – State Farm Insurance

Insurance protects you, your family, your home, your car and your property from the unexpected. But, it can only do its job if the coverage is up to date. Review your insurance coverage to ensure it is there when you need it. There are key times during the year to review your home, renters and auto insurance. This is also a good time to examine your need for products such as life insurance or umbrella insurance.

Review insurance policies when:

1. When your current insurance policies are about to expire - If your home, auto, life, or health insurance policies are about to expire, make time to meet or talk with your agent. As your needs change, so should your coverage. Your agent can help you review what you want to protect and what you may need.
2. If your family status changes - Planning a wedding, expecting a baby or adopting a child? You'll want to protect your growing family with adequate life and disability income insurance. Losing a family member through death or divorce also should prompt a policy review. Remember to review and change the beneficiary designations on your existing policies, as needed.
3. Once your children have matured to driving age. When you have a new teen driver, adequate auto insurance is a must. Your agent can review options with you. Whether your child is leaving for college, or has recently graduated, it's time to consider renters insurance. Personal property and liability protection are typically provided under renters

- insurance. Discuss with an agent the amount of coverage needed to protect your child's new home.
4. If you move or remodel your house - When you make upgrades, the replacement cost of your house will likely increase. If you move and downsize your home, you may be over-insured. If you move into a larger home, you may be under-insured. In all three instances, you want to review your home insurance coverage to insure you're sufficiently protected.
5. When you're starting a business - Whether you're renting office space or opening a home-based business, include a thorough insurance review in your start-up plans. Depending on your operation's size, you may have to consider property and liability insurance as well as commercial vehicle insurance. If you have employees, you may also need workers' compensation coverage and a healthcare plan. If you're working from home, review your homeowners plan to see that your business and equipment are fully covered.
6. When your employment status changes - In today's rapidly changing healthcare environment, protecting your family's health can be a challenge. Here are three examples: Your current healthcare plan is up for renewal. You've started a new job. You've been downsized and need brand-new coverage.

In each instance, it's important to take the time to compare plan features against your family's current or anticipated needs. Also, consider disability insurance to help protect against disabling illnesses and accidents.

7. Once you've decided to retire - In prepping to retire, make sure you know how your employer

(Continued on next page.)

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handles health insurance coverage once you're Medicare eligible. For out-of-pocket costs not covered by Medicare, supplemental coverage may help. These are just a few times when you'll want to review your insurance policy.

Five ways to help your retirement savings go further.

If you suspect you haven't saved enough, it's time for strategic retirement planning. Today, Americans are living longer than ever, and that means longer retirements than previous generations. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the average person spends 20 years in retirement — others say 30 years or longer.

Many financial advisors suggest you'll need 70-80% of your annual pre-retirement income to maintain your standard of living.

1. Decide how you want your retirement to look. Whether you're planning to travel extensively or kick back by a lake, your income will need to support your lifestyle. Once you decide how you'd

prefer to spend your retirement days, you can map out a strategy that could help get you there.

2. Assess your finances. Take a realistic look at your current financial status. Look at how much you've saved, your debt, the amount of life insurance you have, and what you have available in emergency funds. Talk with a financial professional.

3. Increase savings. It's never too early — or too late — to add to your savings. If you've got plenty of time before retirement, save as much as you can to take advantage of interest compounding. If retirement is near, look into catch-up contributions, which can help improve your financial picture. Even small gains matter: increasing your retirement contribution by one to 2% each year adds up over time. Evaluate your savings progress with our retirement calculator.

4. Knock out debt. Those in the financial industry recommend keeping debt level manageable: no more than 35% of your income. Getting rid of high-interest debt such as credit card balances is always a good idea. And before you retire, you'll want to eliminate as much debt as possible so that you aren't servicing it with your savings. Consider paying off your home before you stop working, too.

5. Review and revise your plan every year. Review with a financial professional every year to see if you're still on track. It's also a good idea to review your insurance coverage periodically, and any time your life changes, such as when you marry or have a baby. As you near retirement, you might decide to shift some of your savings to income-producing investments, such as annuities. Or, to keep your nest egg intact, your plan may be to continue working a few years more into retirement.



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Are GMO Foods Safe For Us?

Dear EarthTalk: Are genetically modified organisms (GMOs) really so bad for us and the environment, and given their prevalence in our food supply already, how can I avoid them?

—Dianne Mercurio, Richmond, VA

Unless you only buy foods that are certified organic or marked as “GMO-free,” odds are that a great deal of the food you eat contains genetically modified organisms (GMOs). But are you risking your health and damaging the environment by eating GMOs? Not according to Monsanto, the agricultural biotechnology company that is a leading producer of GM seed. Monsanto contends that GMOs are safe to eat and that seeds with GM traits have been tested more than any other crops in the history of agriculture—with no credible evidence of harm to humans or animals.

The company also points to studies that have positively assessed the safety of GMOs, including the 2010 European Commission report summarizing the results of 50 research projects addressing the safety of GMOs for the environment as well as for animal and human health. In announcing the report, the Commission stated that “there is, as of today, no scientific evidence associating GMOs with higher risks for the environment or for food and feed safety than conventional plants.”

But Are GMO Foods Safe?

Since the U.S. does not require food producers to label products containing genetically-modified organisms, the non-profit Non-GMO Project has taken matters into its own hands and released its own certification label for the industry.

Of course, not everyone agrees. According to the non-profit Non-GMO Project, genetically modified crops and food items can contaminate conventional crops and foods through cross-pollination and/or contamination. Also, since many GM crops are designed to be immune to herbicides and pesticides, farmers have increased their use of various weed and bug killing chemicals to keep competition for their cash crops at bay. The resulting overuse of these chemicals has led to a rapid evolution of “super weeds” and “super bugs” that can quickly take over unmaintained or wild lands.

Given the prevalence of GMOs in our food supply already, the non-profit **Just Label It** believes

labeling everything that contains GMOs would be a start so at least consumers can choose on their own what they put in their bodies. Some 64 countries around the world—including China, Japan, Australia, Brazil, Russia and 28 nations in the European Union—currently require labeling on foods created with GMOs. **Just Label It** is one of many activist voices calling on the United States to follow suit. The group has created an online petition so everyday Americans can let the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) know that they have the right to know what’s in their food, especially when it comes to GMOs.

But until we have federal rules in place requiring labeling, concerned consumers will have to take matters into their own hands when it comes to ferreting out the GMO content of what they eat. Luckily the Non-GMO Project is helping make it easier by offering verified products the opportunity to display its “Non-GMO” symbol on their labels.

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Lease Land To Protect It

By Shawn Regan & Bryan Leonard Jan. 25, 2022 HCN

‘Use it or lose it’ rules can bias public-land management in favor of extraction.

In 2020, the state of Wyoming held an oil and gas lease auction for state lands near the remote Wind River Range to raise revenue for public schools. A local conservation group, the Wyoming Outdoor Council, opposed the sale because several parcels were located in a vital wildlife migration corridor — the path of the longest mule deer migration route ever recorded. So the group did something it had never done before: It bid on several leases — not to drill, but to conserve the parcels for wildlife.

In much of the rural West, environmental groups have a reputation for suing to stop natural resource development. But some, like the Wyoming group, are attempting a new strategy: purchasing what they want to protect. The approach, sometimes called conservation leasing, could bolster “30 by 30,” the Biden administration’s ambitious conservation plan to conserve 30% of the nation’s lands and waters by 2030, without ending the leasing revenue that state governments have long derived from resource extraction. **The only problem: It’s often illegal.**

The Wyoming group was the high bidder on one parcel. The state, however, promptly rejected its bid because the group did not intend to drill for oil. On

both federal and state land in the Western U.S., that rule generally applies: Leaseholders must intend to drill, log, graze or otherwise develop public land; if they don’t, their leases can be canceled.

When environmental activist Terry Tempest Williams bought federal energy leases in southern Utah in 2016 in an effort to keep fossil fuels in the ground, the Bureau of Land Management later voided her leases, citing the “diligent development requirements” of the 1920 Mineral Leasing Act. Conservation groups have also paid ranchers to relinquish their federal grazing permits to reduce wildlife-livestock conflicts, only to have the federal government reopen the bought-out allotments to other ranchers who will use them for grazing.

These century-old “use it or lose it” requirements were designed to deter speculation and encourage white settlement. But today, they can bias resource management in favor of extraction. In a recent article in the journal *Science*, we argue that these policies should be reformed in light of modern challenges and new demands. Use it or lose it rules — defined in ways that exclude conservation as a valid use — prevent environmental interests from participating in the leasing process that determines how much of the West is managed. This leaves them with few options other than litigation to deter unwanted development.

Not allowing environmentalists to bid means less competition and lower prices for industry bidders, creating an implicit subsidy for extractive users. Drilling rights have recently been sold to energy companies in critical migration corridors and prime sage grouse habitat for as little as \$2 per acre. Last year, most of the tracts sold in a controversial lease auction in Alaska’s Arctic National Wildlife Refuge went for just \$25 per acre. (Successful bidders pay annual rental payments and royalties on production from their leases, but at rates that generate low financial returns for taxpayers compared to states and other nations, according to the Government Accountability

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Not allowing environmentalists to bid means less competition and lower prices for industry bidders, creating an implicit subsidy for extractive users. Environmental groups would likely pay far more to protect ecologically important areas. On private lands, conservation organizations and local land trusts regularly pay to conserve open space by buying land outright or purchasing conservation easements, often at amounts that far exceed public-land lease revenue. And in the few areas of public land where similar transactions are allowed — either under region-specific legislation authorized by Congress or in states that permit conservation leasing on state-owned lands — environmental groups have often proven willing to acquire resource rights for conservation purposes.

These old laws need to be updated to recognize conservation as a legitimate “use” of natural resource rights. Fortunately, there is precedent for such a reform. Many Western states now allow water rights to be sold or leased for environmental uses, enabling groups like Trout Unlimited and the Audubon Society to pay farmers and other water right holders to leave water in streams to support fish and wildlife habitat.

The Biden administration could advance similar reforms for public grazing permits and energy leases. Its long-awaited review of the federal oil and gas leasing program, released last fall, recommends raising rental fees and royalty payments but offers little guidance on how to resolve conflicting demands over new or existing leases. Conservation leasing would incorporate environmental values directly into the program without



A mule deer stands near a drilling rig in Wyoming's Wind River Mountains. In 2020, the Wyoming Outdoor Council bid on several oil and gas leases in the area to conserve a mule deer migration corridor. Robert D. Flaherty

undermining lease revenue, and it could encourage voluntary buyouts on the hundreds of millions of acres that are already leased for resource extraction. Of course, this approach brings its own challenges: Annual lease rates need to be adjusted to account for lost royalties, and the concerns of resource-dependent communities have to be acknowledged and addressed. But conservation leasing represents a pragmatic alternative to litigation by honoring existing resource rights and seeking honest bargains that reflect the value of other foregone land uses. Conservation has value, and sometimes there is more

money to be gained from conserving landscapes than from developing them. It's time for our laws and policies to recognize that.

Shawn Regan is the vice president of research at the Property and Environment Research Center (PERC) in Bozeman, Montana. Bryan Leonard is an assistant professor of environmental and natural resource economics at Arizona State University and a senior research fellow at PERC. They are co-authors of the recent article “Allow ‘nonuse rights’ to conserve natural resources” published in the journal Science.

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Is Coal-Free Really Possible in the U.S.?

Dear EarthTalk: Are we really heading for a coal-free power future in the U.S. or is this just an environmental pipe dream?

—Jack Summa, Boston, MA

Far from just an environmental pipe dream, the coal industry in the U.S. and around the world is in the midst of a major downswing. In 2011, coal dropped below 40% of total U.S. energy generation for the first time since the late 1970s, while in 2015 coal accounted for only 33%. And given the influx of cheap natural gas and the ascendance of renewable energy sources—not to mention recent coal mine safety lapses with tragic consequences—coal might not be able to mount a comeback.

“Technological advances have made natural gas, wind and solar—and efficiency—increasingly competitive,” reports John Brinkley in *Sierra Magazine*. “The once-robust overseas demand for coal is disappearing.”

Brinkley adds that a decade of sustained public advocacy for clean air and clean energy has left coal out in the dark. The Obama administration’s landmark Clean Power Plan that forces big coal fired power plants to clean up their acts dramatically or shut down has been one major factor in coal’s slide, while the Paris climate accord has sped up the process even more by taking a huge bite out of potential U.S. coal exports.

Over just the last five years, fully one-third of U.S. coal plants, some 232 different facilities, have been closed or scheduled for imminent retirement. Plans for another 184 new coal-fired plants have been shuttered—activists claim credit but the development of new technologies that make harvesting natural gas that much cheaper may have more to do with coal’s death knell. For the first time in 200 years, no new coal plants are on the drawing board in the U.S.

According to the Energy Information Administration (EIA), which collects data and reports on energy statistics for the federal government, some 13,000 megawatts of coal power went offline in 2015 as a result of coal plant retirements, while wind energy added 8,600 megawatts and solar tacked on another 7,300 megawatts. The Sierra Club’s Beyond Coal

campaign reports that coal’s downswing is just beginning, with another 50,000 megawatts of coal power predicted to go offline by 2030.

And the trend isn’t stopping at the border. “Many countries that used to be reliable customers for U.S. coal just aren’t into it anymore, partly because of last year’s successful UN climate change conference in Paris,” reports Brinkley. Even before the Paris agreement, China, the world’s largest producer and consumer of coal, had been scaling back production and imports drastically in efforts to clean up urban air pollution and reduce its carbon footprint. In 2015, China cut imports of U.S. coal some 86.5% from 1.7 million tons to only 229,000.

Of course, coal is still big business in the U.S. and beyond, and it isn’t going away overnight. But how long it can stick around as a viable contender for Americans’ energy dollars is anybody’s guess. “The trajectory for the coal industry is clear, but the timeline is not,” sums up Brinkley.

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Yellowstone Bison Management Plan?

In developing a range of alternatives for people to consider, evaluate and disclose an alternative for: Managing wild buffalo like wild elk on public lands in Montana, i.e., subsistence hunting of sustainable populations.

Making an expanse of habitat available for each genetically distinct subpopulation or buffalo herd to adapt and thrive over the long-term.

Designating refuges to provide security from overhunting and permit dispersal across public lands.

In developing the alternative, please review BFC's proposal detailing the four corners of a respectful wildlife management plan:

Managing Wild Buffalo Like Wild Elk in Montana Proposal

In recognizing buffalo as a wild species and honoring their freedom to roam public lands, evaluate and disclose the benefits and costs of managing wild buffalo like wild elk in Montana, including:

No trapping or capturing for slaughter.

No commercial privatization or domestication via quarantine.

No "hazing" unless there is an imminent threat to safety, e.g., buffalo on a blind-curve highway.

No exclusionary management zones or boundary lines preventing natural migrations to range and habitat.

No vaccinating.

No permanent tagging, marking, or inserting microchips to identify individuals.

No population control experiments, e.g., fertility or birth-control agents.

Actions common to all alternatives, and for each alternative, evaluate and disclose:

Managing cattle in Designated Surveillance Areas in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming as concurrent management actions.

Costs and cost effectiveness of managing cattle in the States as concurrent management actions.

How managing cattle, buffalo and elk biology, the biological role of predators and scavengers, and environmental conditions prevent disease risk and transfer.

A fact-based quantitative risk management assessment for wild buffalo, elk, and cattle at local scales.

In managing wild elk in Designated Surveillance Areas in Montana, evaluate managing wild buffalo similarly by:

Limiting actions to adjust buffalo distribution away from cattle ranches at local scales.

Limiting actions to adjust buffalo distribution when a localized risk is greatest to cattle ranches.

Actions common to all alternatives, and for each alternative:

Adapt a long-term minimum viable population size for each genetically distinct population or herd for Yellowstone buffalo. Conservation biologists recommend a census of 2,000–3,000 for each herd to "avoid inbreeding depression and maintain genetic variation." (*Hedrick 2009*). "Both the evolutionary and demographic constraints on populations require sizes to be at least 5000 adult individuals. . . minimum viable population size in many circumstances will be larger still." (*Trall et al. 2010*).



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Incorporate a safety-net halting lethal management actions if buffalo in the Northern or Central herds or both are below the conservation biology threshold.

Incorporate a conservation biology action plan for increasing genetic diversity and protecting the integrity of each herd, and the Yellowstone buffalo population. Actions common to all alternatives, and for each alternative, evaluate and disclose:

Projected impacts of rapid climate change on buffalo and the ecosystem buffalo depend upon for survival. Include adaptability of buffalo (body mass or size, heat stress or thermoregulation, fitness, life history traits such as age of maturity, reproduction, and growth), availability and quality of forage, and access to water, across meaningful time scales, i.e., over the next century or longer.

Actions common to all alternatives, and for each alternative, evaluate and disclose how Yellowstone National Park will use the best available science for: Protecting the long-term viability and evolutionary potential of Yellowstone buffalo.

Protecting genetically distinct subpopulations or herds of buffalo in the wild.

Retaining migratory behavior for each genetically distinct subpopulation or herd and the Yellowstone buffalo population.

Making future “adaptive management” decisions. For each alternative, evaluate and disclose:

Impacts to genetically distinct subpopulations or herds, and the Yellowstone buffalo population.

How management actions alter, adversely effect, or artificially select against wild traits and genetic diversity.

How management actions alter, adversely effect, or artificially select against natural selection, natural disease resistance and immunity.

Actions common to all alternatives, and for each

alternative, identify and evaluate:

Measures for protecting and restoring migration corridors and connectivity to habitat for wild buffalo.

Cattle grazing allotments suitable for closure, buy-out, or permanent retirement.

Acquiring habitat to reduce local conflicts with cattle ranchers.

Acquiring habitat to restore migration corridors and connectivity to habitat for wild buffalo.

Actions common to all alternatives, and for each alternative, evaluate and disclose:

Ecological sustainability, the capacity of wild buffalo in providing for biological diversity, resilience of native species, and healthy grasslands in



the Yellowstone ecosystem. Opportunities for developing wildlife safe passages and measures for increasing awareness of, and safety for, buffalo crossing highways in the region. Actions common to all alternatives, and for each alternative, evaluate and disclose: Costs and cost effectiveness, and address accountability. The public should not have to guess where and how much public funds are being spent or what it costs for managing wild buffalo.

Commit to annually disclosing total costs, and what, if any, outcomes were achieved or not, and why.

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Plugging Abandoned Oil/Gas Wells Cost Billions

By Nick Bowlin Jan. 19, 2022 High Country News

In January, the Department of the Interior stated what many have suspected: there are far more orphaned oil and gas wells in the U.S. than previously estimated. In a memo, the agency wrote that more than 130,000 documented wells exist across the country that lack a responsible company on the hook to pay for cleanup – the remnant of more than 150 years of extracting oil and natural gas. This figure, based on data provided by the states, is two-and-a-half times the agency’s 2019 estimate, which put the figure at 56,000.

This ballooning estimate comes in response to Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that President Biden signed in November, which includes \$4.7 billion to plug and reclaim abandoned and orphaned wells. This is a historically large figure, but the injection of cash pales in comparison to the full cleanup cost for the new abandoned well figure. Plugging wells is a time-consuming and expensive process. Using estimates from a 2021 Government Accountability Office report, the cost of plugging all 130,000 abandoned wells could range from \$2.6 billion to more nearly \$19 billion. According to industry experts and the plugging cost estimates used by oil state regulators, the expected cost is very

likely to fall on the upper end of that spectrum. And it’s likely that this larger figure represents only a fraction of the problem: The Environmental Protection Agency stated in an April 2021 report that there could be as many as 3.4 million abandoned wells nationally.

In a memo announcing the recent plugging program, the agency noted that “millions of Americans live within a mile of the tens of thousands of abandoned mines and oil and gas wells.” Interior Department Secretary Deb Haaland has emphasized the environmental justice aspects of this push to plug abandoned wells. In addition to their public health effects, abandoned wells are well-documented sources of methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

“These legacy pollution clean-up efforts will advance the Department’s goals of environmental justice by helping historically marginalized communities address the devastating and long-lasting effects of legacy pollution,” the memo stated.

The recent infrastructure spending package includes \$250 million for wells on public land, which are overwhelmingly concentrated in the West, and an additional \$150 million for tribal governments. Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming alone account for 65% of all public land oil and gas

leases, according to Bureau of Land Management data. Compared to many oil states, the BLM has a far less stringent system of required financial assurances from oil and gas companies to ensure cleanup in case the well becomes orphaned. The agency recently held an online forum, led by BLM Director Tracy Stone-Manning and Deputy Director Nada Culver, to roll out the new well plugging program. The program featured testimony from industry experts, environmental groups, state oil and gas officials, and more. Several speakers urged the agency to increase the bonding requirements. Sara Kendall, the program director at the Western Organization of Resource Councils,



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described the federal minimum bond requirements as “decades out of date” and blamed the system for “the problems and the delays in getting ... inactive wells plugged and reclaimed.”

During her tenure as Interior secretary, Haaland has emphasized the job-creation potential of a large-scale effort to deal with abandoned wells. She has backed a proposal included in the White House’s Build Back Better spending bill that would create 250,000 jobs plugging oil and gas wells. That bill is currently stalled in the U.S. Senate. Job creation came up often during the public forum.

“We shouldn’t have to choose between good jobs and a clean environment; we can and must have both,” said Jason Walsh, the director of the Blue-Green Alliance, a coalition of environmental groups and labor unions. “And well remediation and reclamation is kind of a perfect embodiment of that principle.” So far, 26 states have stated that they intend to apply for these grants. On this list are the



Workers from Ranger Energy Services are pictured during plugging and abandonment operations at an Extraction Oil & Gas well in Lafayette, Colorado. A proposal included in the White House’s Build Back Better spending bill would create 250,000 jobs plugging abandoned oil and gas wells. Andy Colwell

West’s leading oil and gas states, including: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming. Of these states, California (5,151), New Mexico (3,375) and Wyoming (1,350) had the highest number of reported orphaned wells, according to the most recent state reports from the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission. Extra grant funding is available to states that “improve their plugging standards” or increase the financial assurances that oil and gas companies put forward to prevent wells from becoming

abandoned. In January the Interior Department made public a cross-agency agreement that includes the BLM, the Energy and Agriculture departments, the EPA, the IOGCC and tribal governments. The agreement details how funding decisions will be made and states that annual reports on well plugging will be submitted to Congress. The funds will begin to be allocated to states at the end of February, according to the Interior Department.

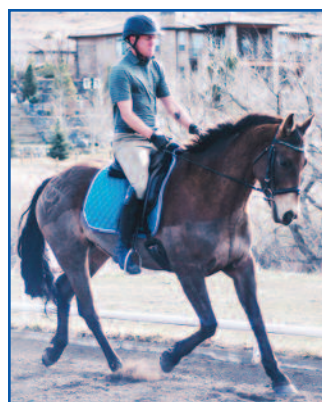
Nick Bowlin is a correspondent at High Country News.

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Power Update

March
2022

Democracy at the Cooperative

United Power members have the unique opportunity to have a say in the future of their electric cooperative. Each year our members' votes in the director election determine who will represent them on the co-op's Board of Directors. As an electric utility, your participation in the annual election is critical to helping the co-op better serve its members.

Every Vote Matters Equally

United Power is a not-for-profit cooperative owned and controlled by the members it serves. When you become a member, you automatically receive the benefits all other members share, including the right to vote for board representation. As a member, your vote carries equal weight as any other member's vote, regardless of what kind of account they have or how large it is. This is a cooperative principle known as "democratic member control." Director candidates must also live within United Power's service territory, so you know you'll be voting for someone who understands your community's needs.

Voting in the Election

The cooperative mails director ballots in March and encourages all members to cast votes in the election. This year, members may also participate in the director election electronically through their

online account. Although directors live in a specific geographic district, they represent all members and are therefore elected on an "at-large" basis. This means members may cast a vote for a director in each district and not just their own. Directors serve in geographic districts to ensure adequate accessibility for members and to provide a representative cross-section of United Power's member base in their leadership role.

To learn more about a director candidate, consider attending one of our Meet the Candidate events. Candidate statements are also available online at www.unitedpower.com/annual-meeting.

2022 Director Election

The director candidates for the 2022 Director Election have been announced. Three positions on the cooperative's board are up for election, one in the East, South and West Districts.

The director candidates are Steven "Steve" Douglas, Naptali A. Lucks and Elizabeth "Beth" A. Martin in the East District; Keith Alquist in the South District; and Ursula J. Morgan in the West District.

Information about the 2022 Annual Meeting & Director Election and how to vote your ballot is available online at www.unitedpower.com.



Hybrid Annual Meeting & Director Election

Wednesday, April 13, 2022

The 2022 Annual Meeting will be held as a **hybrid** event. Members may participate online or attend in-person.

VIRTUAL MEETING:

www.unitedpower.com/annual-meeting

IN-PERSON MEETING:

Riverdale Regional Park & Fairgrounds
9755 Henderson Road, Brighton 80601

Event Schedule:

4:30 p.m. | Registration, Dinner & Entertainment

6:30 p.m. | Meeting, Election Results, Prizes

United Power is monitoring COVID-19 restrictions, and in the event conditions do not permit an in-person event, the virtual format will still be available. More information is available at www.unitedpower.com/annual-meeting.

Candidate Forums



United Power will host the following Meet the Candidate Forums where members can learn more about each of the candidates vying to serve on the Board of Directors. The following events are free to members. Light refreshments will be served. RSVPs are not required.

TUESDAY, MARCH 22, 2022 | 7:30 a.m.

Coal Creek Canyon Community Center
3158 Highway 72
Golden, CO 80403

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 30, 2022 | 7:30 a.m.

Fort Lupton Recreation Center, Multipurpose 3
203 S. Harrison Avenue
Fort Lupton, CO 80621

MONDAY, MARCH 28, 2022 | 6:30 p.m.

Riverdale Regional Park, Waymire Dome
9755 Henderson Road
Brighton, CO 80601

Hybrid Event: Livestream at www.unitedpower.com

THURSDAY, MARCH 31, 2022 | 6:30 p.m.

United Power Carbon Valley Service Center
9586 E I-25 Frontage Road
Longmont, CO 80504

**Dates and locations may be subject to change or cancellation.*



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3 BD/ 2 BA 1,627 sq.ft. **\$475,000**



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1.74 Acres

11965 Vonnie Claire

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SOLD!

213 Rudi Lane

Oversized 2 Car Garage + Shop
2 BD/ 2 BA 1.15 Acres **\$470,000**



SOLD!

968 Divide View

Outstanding Views - 1.95 Acres
2 BD/ 3 BA 2,400 sq.ft. **\$715,000**



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