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**About the Cover:  
Elk cow with calves  
re: Winiger Ridge.  
See story starting page 5.**



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COPY EDITOR, PRODUCTION & DESIGN  
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CONTRIBUTING WRITERS  
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**Jason Baldes - High Country News**  
**Diane Bergstrom**  
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**Rachel Fritts - High Country News**  
**Sarah Gilman-High Country News**  
**Jim Plane - State Farm Insurance**  
**Taylor Dawn Stagner - High Country News**  
**Valerie Wedel**  
**A.M. Wilks**  
**Frosty Wooldridge**  
CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS/ARTIST  
**Michael Bandow**  
**A.M. Wilks**  
**Nathaniel Wilder**  
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**U.S.F.S.**  
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November



2020

### REGULAR FEATURES

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### HANDY NUMBERS

#### COUNTY SERVICES

Fire & Ambulance .....	911
Jefferson County Sheriff.....	303-277-0211
Boulder County Sheriff.....	303-441-4444
Gilpin County Sheriff .....	303-582-5500
Crescent Branch P.O.....	303-642-0119
Golden Post Office.....	303-445-8900
Golden PO Bulk Mail .....	303-278-9235
Pinecliffe Post Office.....	303-642-7358

Jeffco Animal Control.....	303-271-5070
Boulder Animal Control.....	303-441-4444

#### SCHOOLS

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Drake Middle School.....	303-982-1510
Ralston Valley Sr High.....	303-982-1078
Golden Senior High .....	303-982-4200
Nederland Elementary.....	303-258-7092
Nederland Jr & Sr High.....	303-258-3212
Gilpin County.....	303-582-3444

#### CANYON ORGANIZATIONS

Gilpin Community Center.....	303-582-1453
The Environmental Group	TEGColorado.org

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# Protect Our Community - Send Comments Now!

The public (and that means everyone - this concerns the Colorado River - the most endangered river in America) comment period has been extended to November 13, 2020 at 4:30 pm.

Send your comments to:

[grossreservoir@bouldercounty.org](mailto:grossreservoir@bouldercounty.org)  
 Written comments should be mailed to  
 P.O. Box 471, Boulder, CO 80306 and all  
comments need the Docket  
# SI-20-0003: Gross Reservoir &  
Dam Expansion on the Subject Line.

This deadline is not a hard deadline for submissions of public comment. Public comments will be accepted during the entire duration of the review process and related public hearings. Since any hearings may be virtual due to Covid-19 it is even more critical to inundate our Board of County Commissioners and Planning & Permitting Departments with any and all the concerns people have about the massive and destructive construction project Denver Water wishes to push through and now even sooner due to FERC's (Federal Energy Regulatory Committee) timeline that they get this application done in fewer months than ever before. Beware reading their application if you should - it will contain as much or more of the propaganda Denver Water has been famous for since the initial scoping meeting in 2003.

Engage your friends, neighbors and family to comment -

it may be our only hope of saving Coal Creek Canyon and the Northshore of Gross Reservoir from many years of devastation beyond your imagination: noise and air pollution, hazardous chemical exposure, road safety and

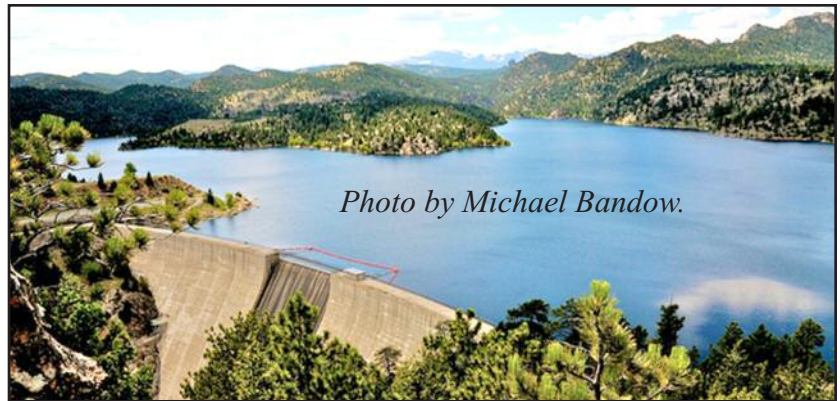


Photo by Michael Bandow.

extended travel times, sharing our two lane roads with massive trucks and long-term extended delays on all our roadways. Depletion of the Colorado River to an extent it may not recover or survive.

Feel free to use any of the information in this article in your own comments to the Commissioners and Planning Departments. If you know anyone in power or that has access to news personnel then please use your contacts to bring this issue to the attention of folks that may be able to bring State or even Federal opposition to our efforts to kill this project before it goes any further.

In opposition of Denver Water expanding Gross Dam and Reservoir here are a few of the (Continued on next page.)

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## Highlander Issues

blatant issues listed in **Boulder County's Land Use Code – 1041 Permit Application.**

**8-202 Purposes and Intent:** #4 *Conserve soil, water, forest resources, and Environmental Resources;*

Denver Water intends to produce concrete for a larger dam and this process will use many acre feet of water, disrupt soil at the dam site and along shorelines, and degrade environmental resources. The cement industry is one of the two largest producers of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), creating up to 8% of worldwide man-made emissions of this gas, of which 50% is from the chemical process and 40% from burning fuel. The CO<sub>2</sub> produced for the manufacture of structural concrete (using ~14% cement) is estimated at 410 kg/m<sup>3</sup> (~180 kg/tonne @ density of 2.3 g/cm<sup>3</sup>) (reduced to 290 kg/m<sup>3</sup> with 30% fly ash replacement of cement). The CO<sub>2</sub> emission from the concrete production is directly proportional to the cement content used in the concrete mix; 900 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> are emitted for the fabrication of every ton of cement, accounting for 88% of the emissions associated with the average concrete mix. Cement manufacture contributes greenhouse gases both directly through the production of carbon dioxide when calcium carbonate is thermally decomposed, producing lime and carbon dioxide, and also through the use of energy, particularly from the combustion of fossil fuels.

#5 *Protect the beauty of the landscape;* as noted here producing concrete, making new roads, removal of thousands of mature trees along the shorelines all will destroy the beauty of the existing landscape. #7 *Regulate projects that would otherwise cause excessive noise, water and air pollution and would degrade and threaten the existing environmental quality of the County.* This proposed project would be the largest and most damaging construction project in Boulder County history so it only goes to prove all of these issues would be adversely affected, not only during the construction, but also for decades to come. #10 *Require that municipal and industrial water projects shall emphasize the most efficient use of water, including, to the extent permissible under existing law, the recycling and reuse of water.* Certainly



cement production's massive use and waste of water is in direct conflict with this requirement. Also conservation of water in nearby metro and urban development has a long way to go to stop using Kentucky Bluegrass Sod and mature tree landscaping surrounding all new subdivisions and even commercial building development.

#13 *Ensure site selection of arterial highways and interchanges and collector highways occurs so that community traffic needs are met, desirable community patterns are not disrupted, and direct conflict with adopted local government, regional, and state master plans avoided.* ALL proposed road construction to accommodate this proposed project will disrupt and are in direct conflict with the two-lane State Highway that is the only main road in and out of this community being impacted. Other arterial roads such as Gross Dam Road, Lazy Z, Tunnel 19 and Miramonte are unimproved and mostly single lane dirt roads that residents must use daily as their only options so Denver Water's mitigation plans are not conducive to this regulation of the 1041 permit either.

#15, 16 & 17 also pose regulation conflicts from this applicant no matter what design is chosen to mitigate usage. #19 *Protect the public health, safety, welfare and the environment.* This particular regulation under **8-202 of the 1041** cannot be achieved by this applicant for reasons too numerous to list, but here are but a few: Health of




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residents in Coal Creek Canyon and upon the Northshore of the existing Reservoir are sure to suffer air and noise pollution at levels the applicant cannot control and enough to create disease related conditions to not only humans but also the wildlife we hold dear and live here to enjoy. Our very welfare is conditional upon the peace and quiet and natural environment of woodland and forest. Years of construction of the proposed levels will no doubt cause chronic health issues for the residents and also be the reason wildlife leaves to never return. Even the Final Environmental Impact Study listed long-term destruction to aquatic life in a new reservoir of the magnitude that no fish would ever live in its waters again, including stocked fish from upper South Boulder Creek. **At true risk again are the Winiger Ridge Elk Herds and their calving grounds. Boulder County has done extensive study and here is listed those findings by the county itself.**

**From Assets.bouldercounty.org** Common Name: Winiger Ridge Location (General): West of Gross Res., south of Flagstaff Rd., north of the Boulder County border, east of Magnolia Dr. Size (acres): 3,460 acres Life Zones: Lower Montane, Upper Montane. Rationale and Background: The Winiger Ridge ECA is an area, which has received significant conservation and restoration. Winiger Ridge has long been known as an important wintering area and movement corridor for elk. The area contains two important Foothill Riparian areas along South Boulder Creek (above Gross Reservoir) and Winiger Gulch, both recognized as highly bio diverse regions. The US Forest Service has been working to control unauthorized motorized recreation. Due to significant efforts by private citizens and the US Forest Service, the area between Winiger Gulch and South Boulder Creek serves as an effective core preserve. Naturalness: Roadless area in South Boulder Creek Canyon west of Gross Reservoir. Winiger Ridge is closed to motorized vehicles during winter. Quality and Uniqueness: Elk critical winter range and winter concentration area. Old-growth Ponderosa pine/Douglas fir. Important east/west large-mammal movement corridor. Restoration Potential: All efforts to limit or reverse habitat fragmentation should be pursued.

Common Name: Hawkin Gulch/Walker Ranch/Upper Eldorado Canyon Location (General): West of Eldorado Springs, south of Boulder Canyon Dr., north of the Boulder County border, east of Gross Res. Size (acres): 10,185 acres Life Zones: Lower Montane, Upper Montane.

Rationale and Background: This ECA acts to conserve critical resources in the south-central part of the County. This area contains a multitude of significant plants, plant communities, and wildlife and provides an important mountain to prairie link. Walker Ranch is at the center of the Hawkin Gulch/Walker Ranch/Upper Eldorado Canyon ECA and occurs within an area, which initially acquired as Boulder County Open Space. It provides important winter range for elk. The western portion of this ECA, centered on Twin Sisters, is a critical migration corridor for elk and other large mammals; this site became an important habitat connector due to the creation of Gross Reservoir in the 1950s, which is an effective barrier to east-west movement of animals in this part of the county. The canyons and gulches between Flagstaff Drive, Boulder Canyon and Magnolia Road, including Hawkin, Keystone, and Calhoun Gulches, are wild and rugged areas. Upper Eldorado Canyon is another wild and rugged region. Ownership is mixed between Eldorado Canyon State Park and Boulder County Open Space. Running through this area is South Boulder Creek. It is one of the few roadless foothill creeks in the county, the others being Fourmile Canyon Creek and the North St. Vrain Creek. All of the others, including Boulder Creek, Fourmile Creek (the Fourmile Creek that heads to Sunset), Lefthand Creek, James Creek, and South St. Vrain Creek, are impacted by adjacent roads. Naturalness: Several roadless areas in Hawkin Gulch, south half of Walker Ranch, South Draw, Johnson Gulch, Keystone Gulch and Twin Sisters Peak. Quality and Uniqueness: Elk critical winter range and winter concentration area. Old-growth ponderosa pine/Douglas fir. Area is considered good habitat for Mountain Lion and Black Bear due to foothills

*(Continued on next page.)*

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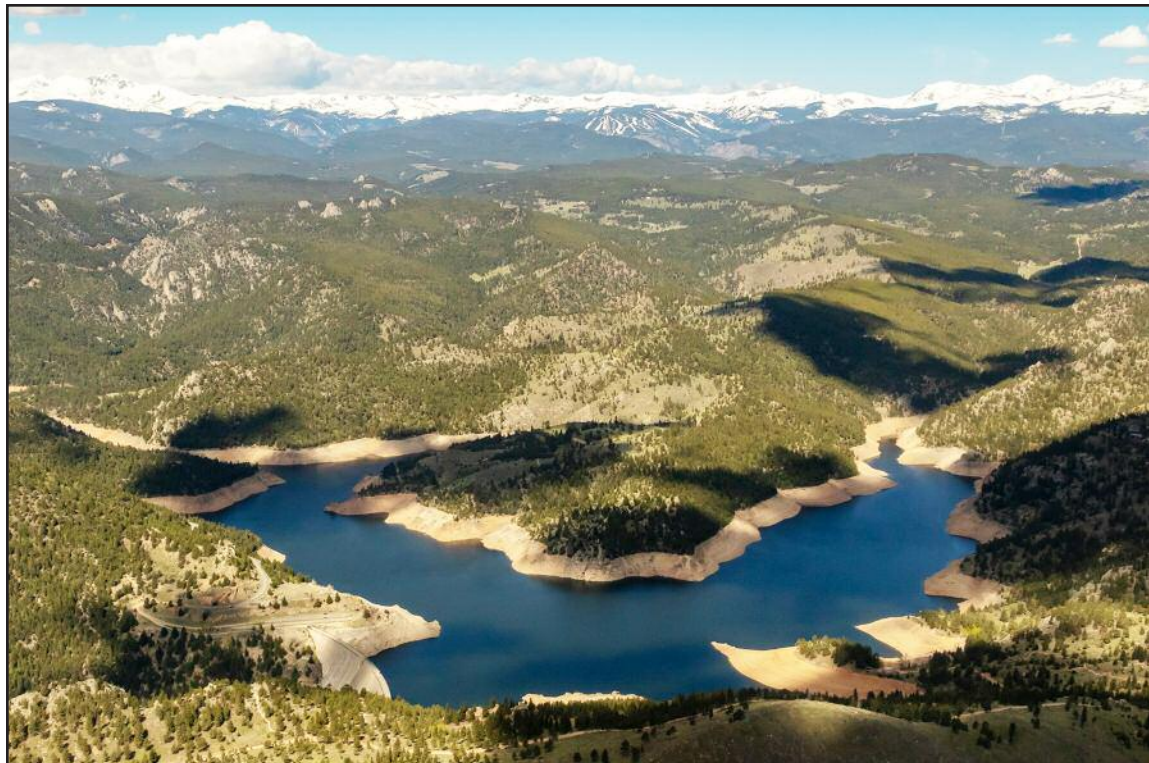
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## Highlander Issues

habitat, size and high degree of naturalness. Important east/west and north/south large-mammal movement corridor. Restoration Potential: All efforts to limit or reverse habitat fragmentation should be pursued.

Common Name: Magnolia Location (General): East of Nederland, bounded on the north by Boulder Canyon, west of Winiger Ridge and Gross Res. Size (acres): 7,126 acres Life Zones: Lower Montane, Upper Montane. Rationale and Background: The Magnolia ECA is an area, which has received significant conservation and restoration by Boulder County Parks and Open Space, the USFS, and others. It is relatively unfragmented by roads and development. Additionally, this area has long been known as an important movement corridor for elk. This area is also included in the planning area for the Magnolia Environmental Preservation Plan, which seeks to protect the “unique rural qualities, unfragmented habitats, wildlife, scenic and recreational resources” of the Magnolia area. Naturalness: Relatively



undeveloped and unfragmented area east of Barker Res. Much of the area is public land (Boulder County Parks and Open Space, USFS, State of Colorado). Quality and Uniqueness: High quality plant sites and plant diversity. Old-growth Ponderosa pine/Douglas fir. Important east/west large-mammal movement corridor. Restoration Potential: All efforts to limit or reverse habitat fragmentation should be pursued.

**8-206 of the 1041 states:** *Review or approval of a project by a federal or state agency does not obviate, and will not substitute for, the need to obtain a permit for that project*

*under these regulations. I.E. The FERC and Army Corps Records of Decision to permit Denver Water’s expansion plans are not to override Boulder County’s Commissioners representing county residents and interests to protect our county. Neither of those permits have the necessary guidelines to prevent the destruction of our Environment surrounding the existing Dam and Reservoir.*

**8-210 Definitions – B, 2 c.** *Will not cause significant adverse environmental impacts on the unincorporated County; and d. Will not overburden the infrastructure of the unincorporated County in areas surrounding the proposed service area.* THIS particular regulation of the 1041 addresses again the massive road construction that Denver Water

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proposes to do to allow their proposed project to be possible. Since this bedroom community has only the one paved State Highway in and out of their homes this is an impossible mitigation by the applicant and any suggestions otherwise are untrue and risk the safety and continued unhindered movements of the existing population.

**8-401 Specific Water and Sewage Treatment Activities Requiring Permits; H. Systems, extensions, or projects partly or entirely on land which is designated in accordance with the Boulder County Comprehensive Plan as any of one of the following: (which applies to) critical wildlife habitat. Winiger Ridge Elk calving grounds.**

**8-507 D.2.d** A detailed inventory of total commitments already made for current water in terms of taps or other appropriate measurements. THIS application requirement has always been a point of contention between Denver Water and their opposition, not to mention Denver Water recipients and their Denver customers i.e. their own bylaws and water numbers. Initially Denver Water had sights on a Two Folks Dam in southern Colorado and once that project was rejected and killed by the E.P.A. many years ago the water board set its sights on expanding existing Gross Reservoir. Over the course of many scoping meetings, public hearings and botched IGA's the utility is now using a heretofore and untrue reason – storage stability for

growing populations in the Denver Metro and surrounding suburbs they sell water to.

**They have never been able to prove a need for the mere 8% an expanded Gross Reservoir might provide to the entire Denver Water system.** Real conservation, reuse and recycling of water would allow their existing water system the stability and growth potential they say the expansion of Gross Reservoir might to support growing populations moving to their metropolitan area, not Boulder County.

Too much time and effort has been spent or is warranted to stop this destructive massive proposed project and now that FERC's permit to amend the hydroelectric has put strict timelines on Denver Water's efforts to push this application process through, it is apparent not all the regulations including public comments can be done to satisfy the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's time standards. In letters between FERC and Denver Water it is most concerning that FERC does have grave issues with who the applicant (Denver Water) will hire for any Dam Construction. The only possible outcome is for Denver Water to be denied Boulder County's 1041 permit and to go on their way by doing the environmentally responsible things they should already be doing –

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*By A.M. Wilks*

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# Be Alert, Be Informed, Be Ready

Article by Diane Bergstrom

This isn't the article I was going to write. But the intended topic was tabled as I spent my intended writing time watching CalWood fire lines lace over the foothills seven miles due west of me, coughing on acrid smoke, texting friends in pre-evacuation and evacuation areas, convincing police to let me up a canyon to check on the evacuation of an 87 year old woman living alone (her family was packing her up), and checking several Facebook community groups I'm a member of while trying to match any posted requests and resources between them, i.e. a woman in Ft. Collins was standing by with a truck and trailer to move any animals from evacuation zones. I am awed by how these small communities kept each other informed, and responded to each other's questions and requests for help, right down to tracking a pair of loose donkeys that were caught and kept until the owners could be contacted. Smokin'Dave's BBQ & Brew in Lyons was offering free BBQ sandwiches to all firefighters. It is times like these when we can see the best in others and ourselves.

By the time you read this, all fire statistics, road closures, and evacuation areas will have changed, really by the time I finish writing this article, the stats will have changed. High winds, sustained drought conditions, and abundant dry fuels have accelerated all fires. As of October 19th, the Cameron Peak fire, the largest in Colorado history, spread over 200,000 acres and was 62% contained. Over 1,500 personnel are working on that fire. Firefighters from as Far East as Pennsylvania and as far west as Washington are arriving to help Colorado fire teams. The CalWood fire, the largest fire in Boulder County history, was over 8,788 acres, with 5% containment. Fires have started up Lefthand Canyon, and Ward, Gold Hill and Jamestown have been evacuated. So far. Smoke is still rising from hotspots on the front ridges along Hwy 36 north of Boulder. All fire causes are under investigation. There have been no lightning strikes, so any weather related causes have been ruled out. As fog, drizzle and cooler temperatures arrived on the

19th; a heavy air assault was conducted on the CalWood fire and to the north in the closed Glen Haven area on the Cameron Peak fire. Slurry bombers and helicopters are crisscrossing airspace. (FYI, don't let your animals near the slurry which is toxic to them.) The Glen Haven Volunteer Fire Dept. issued a statement, "Conditions are right. We're going to kick it in the teeth."

If you consult only one site, consult this trusted one: <https://www.INCIWEB.nwcg.gov>. Look up by a fire name or by adding "/incident" after "go" with an assigned incident number. Boulder County is <https://www.INCIWEB.nwcg.gov/incident/7245> and the site for the Cameron Peak fire is <https://www.INCIWEB.nwcg.gov/incident/6964>.

For Boulder County evacuations and pre-evacuation planning see map at: <http://boco.org/OEMinfomap>. For evacuation and road closure information visit <https://www.boulderoem.com/emergency-status/> or on Twitter @BoulderOEM or Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/BoulderOEM/>. Today a new Facebook page was developed under "CalWood & Lefthand Canyon Fires." Search under that title. For maps, consult: <https://www.bouldercounty.maps.arcgis.com>. For closures of the districts of the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests that are in place for public safety and to support firefighting efforts, see <https://www.fs.usda.gov/alerts/rap/alerts-notices/?aid=62734> for details.

For Northern Central Colorado emergency alerts (sign up) and evacuation zones map, go to: [www.nocoalert.org](http://www.nocoalert.org). Also text the word LCEVAC to 888777 to receive text message alerts about evacuations, road closures, and other important updates. Join Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CameronPeakFire>. Smoke updates: <https://fires.airfire.org/outlooks/NorthCentralColorado>.

Rocky Mountain National Park restrictions and closures <https://www.nps.gov/romo/learn/fire-information-and-regulations.htm>. Resources in English and Spanish can be found at: <https://www.estesvalleyfire.org/cameron-peak-fire-resources>.

While speaking with Michelle Kelly, Public Information Officer for the Cameron Peak fire, I asked her what we need to know going forward. She explained there wouldn't be a good recovery until we have a significant precipitation event over a long time in order to extinguish the fires. The heavy fuels and downed trees that hold heat, especially in the interior of the Cameron fire area, continue to make the

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fire “stand up.”

In addition to the challenge of the Front Range’s hot and dry year, the constant high winds dry out any moisture and high humidity in a matter of days. She explained a tree stump could be cool for days, with warmth building up inside that flames up again when the sun dries and heats it up. Snow can also act as an insulator. The fire can travel within tree roots and come up in exposed areas.

(It’s important to remember that “contained” does not mean extinguished. I asked her to explain containment further.) She said the containment lines set along the perimeter must have a strong level of certainty that the fire won’t stand back up and get outside that line. They need to see no potential for the fire to come back out. She stated the infrared flight data, which can be released prematurely to the public, isn’t always 100% accurate until it has been processed, or what they call “ground truthing.”

She gave the example of a running car at a stop sign can show up as a hotspot. Burned grass doesn’t hold heat so those areas will not show up as valid burned spots. The experts have to verify what is and isn’t valid information. They have Resource Advisors who are familiar with local flora and fauna to guide the forest teams. Once the fire behavior allows, she explained, the various Burn Area Emergency Response teams will go in to evaluate the landscape erosion, do suppression repair, rehabilitate the lines, and work with forest and environmental goals so that plants and animals come back. She ended with this advice. Keep in mind all the heat and lack of precipitation records we have broken this year and do your part to minimize fire danger. Conduct fire mitigation around your property, removing any fuels that would feed a fire. Have an emergency plan in place; if you wait until an emergency happens, it’s too late.

Sign up for public alerts and follow all directions for public safety. Keep in mind this fall is hotter and drier than usual and they don’t see significant changes in the future. Some of these fires have laid down for a while then they

got back up and kept moving. Conditions have lined up several times for fire expansion. Be diligent in awareness.

Some final insights: wildfire areas are NO drone areas. There are TFRs or temporary flight restrictions in fire areas, with a warning of “if you fly, we can’t.” If any drone is spotted, all fire suppression and spotting aircraft are grounded until any drone has cleared the area. Consult <http://knowbeforeyoufly.org>. If you need to prepare for evacuation, please take care of yourself, your animals, check in with your neighbors, and especially the vulnerable people in your area. Some areas have had power temporarily cut and therefore residents do not have the timeliest information. Keep them informed if you can. Yesterday I spontaneously ended up escorting a horse trailer and driver down Sunshine canyon road. They could only go 15 mph despite frantic pre-evacuees moving too fast down the canyon road. I followed behind the trailer at a good distance with my flashers on to slow and warn drivers behind us. Editor Anita told me about a bumper sticker on her friend’s trailer, “Do not be what you see. (A horse’s ass.)” That about sums up taking extra care behind horse trailers! Thanks go out to Candy and Jim, former residents of Pinewood Springs who started rain dances for us from Oregon on the 18th.

Though I am an avid supporter of science, I believe Candy helped encourage moisture on the 19th. As Matt, and his honey Katrina who owns the Jacklegger Merc in Ward, cut firebreaks around property, Matt had first hand accounts and high praise for the Indian Peaks Volunteer Fire Dept.

We all have high praise and gratitude for the firefighters, smoke jumpers, pilots, Incident Management Teams, and all other fire personnel for their dedication, knowledge and relentless efforts to save all lives, habitats, and our patch of the planet. Thank you and may everyone be safe.

**Editor’s Note:** If you know someone in the line of a fire be sure to call them and offer a place to stay, even if it is only a parking spot for them and their camper, it could give them much needed peace of mind.

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Thank you to Larry Mudd for suggesting this important information for rural and mountain residents. I just signed up for multiple years with a Senior discount, check out their website for yourself or call the number here to find out more and safeguard yourself from possible massive expenses should you ever need to be transported by flight to save your life.

*By A.M. Wilks*



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# The Island Swallowed By Nowhere

By Sarah Gilman Oct. 14, 2020 High Country News

*This article was originally published by Hakai Magazine and is republished here with permission.*

St. Matthew Island is said to be the most remote place in Alaska. Marooned in the Bering Sea halfway to Siberia, it is well over 300 kilometers and a 24-hour ship ride from the nearest human settlements. It looks fittingly forbidding, the way it emerges from its drape of fog like the dark spread of a wing. Curved, treeless mountains crowd its sliver of land, plunging in sudden cliffs where they meet the surf. To St. Matthew's north lies the smaller, more precipitous island of Hall. A castle of stone called Pinnacle stands guard off St. Matthew's southern flank. To set foot on this scatter of land surrounded by endless ocean is to feel yourself swallowed by the nowhere at the center of a drowned compass rose.

My head swims a little as I peer into a shallow pit on St. Matthew's northwestern tip. It's late July in 2019, and the air buzzes with the chitters of the island's endemic singing voles. Wildflowers and cotton grass constellate the tundra that has grown over the depression at my feet, but around 400 years ago, it was a house, dug partway into the earth to keep out the elements. It's the oldest human sign on the island, the only prehistoric house ever found here. A lichen-crusting whale jawbone points downhill toward the sea, the rose's due-north needle.

Compared with more sheltered bays and beaches on the island's eastern side, it would have been a relatively harsh place to settle. Storms regularly slam this coast with the full force of the open ocean. As many as 300 polar bears used to summer here, before Russians and Americans hunted them out in the late 1800s. Evidence suggests that the pit house's occupants likely didn't use it for more than a season, according to Dennis Griffin, an archaeologist who's worked on the archipelago since 2002. Excavations of the site have turned up enough to suggest that people of the Thule culture—precursors to the Inuit and Yup'ik who now inhabit Alaska's northwestern coasts—built it. But

Griffin has found no sign of a hearth, and only a thin layer of artifacts.

The Unangan, or Aleut, people from the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands to the south tell a story of the son of a chief who discovered the then uninhabited Pribilofs after he was blown off course. He overwintered there, and then returned home by kayak the following spring. The Yup'ik from St. Lawrence Island to the north have a similar story, about hunters who found themselves on a strange island, where they waited for the opportunity to walk home over the sea ice. Griffin believes something similar may have befallen the people who dug this house, and they sheltered here while waiting for their chance to leave. Maybe they made it, he will tell me later. Or maybe they didn't: "A polar bear could have gotten them." None remained long.

In North America, many people think of wilderness as a place mostly untouched by humans; the United States defines it this way in law. This idea is a construct of the recent colonial past. Before European invasion, Indigenous peoples lived in, hunted in, and managed most of the continent's wild lands. St. Matthew's archipelago, designated as official wilderness in 1970, and as part of the Alaska Maritime National *(Continued on next page.)*

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## Highlander Nature

Wildlife Refuge in 1980, would have had much to offer them, too: freshwater lakes teeming with fish, many of the same plants that mainland cultures ate, ample seabirds and marine mammals to hunt. And yet, because St. Matthew is so far-flung, the solitary pit house suggests that even Alaska's expert seafaring Indigenous peoples may never have been more than accidental visitors

here. Others who've followed have arrived with the help of significant infrastructure or institutions. None remained long. I came to these islands aboard a ship called the Tig'lax' [TEKH-lah] to tag along with scientists studying the seabirds that nest on the archipelago's cliffs. But I also wanted to see what it felt like to be in a place that so thoroughly rejects human presence.

On this, the last full day of our expedition, as the scientists rush to collect data and pack up camps on the other side of the island, the pit house seems a better vantage than most to reflect. I lower myself into the depression, scanning the sea, the bands of sunlight flickering across the tundra on this unusually clear day. I imagine watching for winter's sea ice, waiting for it to come. I imagine watching



*An aerial view of the northwestern corner of St. Matthew Island. The small grouping of uninhabited islands is over 300 kilometers across the Bering Sea from the mainland, making it the most remote location in Alaska.*

*Photo by Nathaniel Wilder*

for polar bears, hoping they will not. You never know, a retired refuge biologist had said to me before I boarded the Ti'lax'. "I would keep my eyes out. If you see something big and white out there, look at it twice."

ONCE, THESE ISLANDS were mountains, waypoints on the subcontinent of Beringia that joined North America and Asia. Then the ocean swallowed the land around the peaks, hid them away in thick summer fogs, made them lonely. With no people resident long enough to keep their

history, they became the sort of place where "discovery" could be perennial.

Lieutenant Ivan Synd of the Russian navy, oblivious to the pit house, believed he was first to find the largest island, in 1766. He named it for the Christian apostle Matthew. Captain James Cook believed he discovered it in 1778, and called it Gore. The whalers who came upon the archipelago later called it, simply, "the Bear Islands."

Around the winter of 1809–1810, a party of Russians and Unangans decamped here to hunt bears for fur. Depending on what source you consult, many of the Russians died of scurvy, while the Unangans survived, or some or most of the party perished when the sea mammals they relied on moved beyond the range of their hunts, or all



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were so tormented by polar bears that they had to leave. Indeed, when naturalist Henry Elliott visited the islands in 1874, he found them swarming with bruins. "Judge our astonishment at finding hundreds of large polar bears ... lazily sleeping in grassy hollows, or digging up grass and other roots, browsing like hogs," Elliott wrote, though he seemed to find them less terrifying than interesting and tasty. After his party killed some, he noted that the steaks were of "excellent quality." The fog was endless; the weather, a banshee; the isolation, extreme.

Even after the bears were gone, the archipelago remained a difficult place for people. The fog was endless; the weather, a banshee; the isolation, extreme. In 1916, the Arctic power schooner Great Bear ran afoul of the mists and wrecked on Pinnacle. The crew used whaleboats to move about 20 tonnes of supplies to St. Matthew to set up a camp and wait for help.

A man named N. H. Bokum managed to build a sort of transmitter from odds and ends, and climbed each night to a clifftop to tap out SOS calls. But he gave up after concluding that the soggy air interfered with its operation. Growing restless as the weeks passed, men brandished knives over the ham when the cook tried to ration it. Had they not been rescued after 18 days, Great Bear owner John Borden later said, this desperation would have been "the first taste of what the winter would have brought."

U.S. servicemen stationed on St. Matthew during the Second World War got a more thorough sampling of the island's winter extremes. In 1943, the U.S. Coast Guard established a long-range navigation (Loran) site on the southwestern coast of the island, part of a network that helped fighter planes and warships orient on the Pacific with the help of regular pulses of radio waves. Snow at the Loran station drifted up to around eight meters deep, and "blizzards of hurricane velocity" lasted an average of ten days. Sea ice surrounded the island for about seven months of the year. When a plane dropped the mail several kilometers away during the coldest time of year, the men had to form three crews and rotate in shifts just to retrieve it, dragging a toboggan of survival supplies as they went. The other seasons weren't much more hospitable. One day,

five servicemen vanished on a boat errand, despite calm seas. Mostly, the island raged with wind and rain, turning the tundra to a "sea of mud." It took more than 600 bags of cement just to set foundations for the station's Quonset huts.

The coast guard, worried how the men would fare in such conditions if they were cut off from resupply, introduced a herd of 29 reindeer to St. Matthew as a food stock in 1944. But the war ended, and the men left. The reindeer population, without predators, exploded. By 1963, there were 6,000. By 1964, nearly all were gone. Winter had taken them.

THESE DAYS, the Loran station is little more than a towering pole anchored by metal cables to a bluff above the beach, surrounded by a wide fan of debris. On the fifth day of our week-long expedition, several of us walk the sagging remains of an old road to the site. Near the pole that still stands, a second has fallen, a third, a fourth. I find the square concrete pillars of the Quonset huts' foundations. A toilet lies alone on a rise, bowl facing inland. I pause next to a biometrician named Aaron Christ, as he shoots photos of a pile of rusting barrels that shriek with the scent of diesel. "We're great at building wondrous things," he says after a moment. "We're terrible at tearing them down and cleaning them up."

And yet, the tundra seems to be *(Continued on next page.)*

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## Highlander Nature

slowly reclaiming most of it. Monkshood and dwarf willow grow thick and spongy over the road. Moss and lichen finger over broken metal and jagged plywood, pulling them down.

At other sites of brief occupation, it's the same. The earth consumes the beams of fallen cabins that seasonal fox trappers erected, likely before the Great Depression. The sea has swept away a hut that visiting scientists built near a beach in the 1950s. When the coast guard rescued the Great Bear crew in 1916, they left everything behind. Griffin, the archaeologist, found little but scattered coal when he visited the site of the camp in 2018. Fishers and servicemen may have looted some, but what was too trashed for salvage — perhaps the gramophone, the cameras, the bottles of champagne — seems to have washed away or swum down into the soil. The last of the straggling reindeer, a lone, lame female, disappeared in the 1980s. For a long time, reindeer skulls salted the island. Now, most are gone. The few I see are buried to their antler tips, as if submerged in rising green water.

Life here grows back, grows over, forgets. Not invincibly resilient, but determined and sure. On Hall Island, I see a songbird nesting in a cache of ancient batteries. And red foxes, having replaced most of St. Matthew's native Arctic foxes after crossing on sea ice, have dug dens beneath the Loran building sites and several pieces of debris. The voles sing and sing.

The island is theirs. The island is its own.

THE NEXT MORNING DAWNS dusky, light and clouds stained sepia by smoke blown from wildfires burning in distant forests. I spot something big and white as I walk across St. Matthew's flat southern lobe and freeze, squinting. The white begins to move. To sprint, really. Not

a bear, as the retired biologist had hinted, but two swans on foot. Three cygnets trundle in their wake. As they turn toward me, I spot a flash of orange porpoising through the grass behind them: a red fox.

The cygnets seem unaware of their pursuer, but their pursuer is aware of me. It veers from the chase to settle a couple of meters away — scraggly, gold eyed, and mottled as the lichen on the cliffs. It drops to its side and rubs luxuriantly against a rock for a few minutes, then springs away in a possessed zigzag, leaving me giggling. After it's gone, I kneel to sniff the rock. It smells like dirt. I rub my own hair against it, just to say "hey."

As I continue on, I notice that objects in the distance often appear to be one thing, then resolve into another. Ribs of driftwood turn out to be whale bones. A putrid walrus carcass turns out to be the wave-pummeled rootball of a tree. Unlikely artifacts without stories — a ladder, a metal pontoon — occasionally jag from the ground, deposited far inland, I guess, by storms. When I close my eyes, I have the vague feeling that waves roll through my body. "Dock rock," someone will call this later: the sensation, after you have spent time on a ship, of the sea carried with you onto land, of land assuming the phantom motion of water beneath your feet.

It occurs to me that to truly arrive on St. Matthew, you have to lose your bearings enough to feel the line between the two blur. Disoriented, I can sense the landscape as fluid, a shapeshifter as sure as the rootball and whale bones — something that remakes itself from mountains to islands, that scatters and swallows signs left by those who pass across.

I consider the island's eroding edges. Some cliffs in old photos have fallen away or buckled into sea stacks. I look

at the few shafts of sun out on the clear water, sepia light touching dark mats of kelp on the Bering's floor. Whole worlds submerged or pulverized to cobble, sand, and silt, down there. A calving of land into sea, the redistribution of earth into unknowable futures. A good place to remember that we are each so brief. That we never stand on solid ground.

THE WIND WHIPS strands of hair out of my hood and into my eyes as I press my palms into the floor of the pit house. It feels firm enough, for now. That it's still visible after a few centuries reassures me — a small anchor against the dragging currents of this place. Eventually, though, I get cold and clamber out. I need to return to my camp near where the Tig'lax' waits at anchor; we'll be setting course

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south back over the Bering toward other islands and airports in the morning. But first, I aim overland for a high, gray whaleback of ridge a few kilometers away that I have admired from the ship since our arrival.

The sunlight that striped the hills this morning has faded. An afternoon fog descends as I meander over electric green grass, then climb, hand over hand, up a ribbon of steep talus. I top out into nothingness. One of the biologists had told me, when we first discussed my wandering alone, that the fog closes in without warning; that, when this happened, I would want a GPS to help me find my way back. Mine is malfunctioning, so I go by feel, keeping the steep drop of the ridge's face on my left, surprised by flats and peaks I don't remember seeing from below. I begin to wonder if I have accidentally gone down the ridge's gently sloping backside instead of walking its top. The fog thickens until I can see only a meter or two ahead. Thickens again, until I, too, vanish — erased as completely as the dark tracery of path I left through the grass below soon will be.

Then, abruptly, the fog breaks and the way down the mountain comes clear. Relieved, I weave back through the hills and, on the crest of the last, see the Ti'lax' in the placid bay below. The ship blows its foghorn in a long salute as I lift my hand to the sky.

*A red fox comes in for closer inspection of human visitors on the south side of St. Matthew Island. The island grouping only gets visitors (researchers and tourists) every few years so wildlife has little to fear.*

*Photo by Nathaniel Wilder*

*Sarah Gilman is a freelance writer and illustrator, and Hakai Magazine contributing editor, based in*



*north-central Washington state.*

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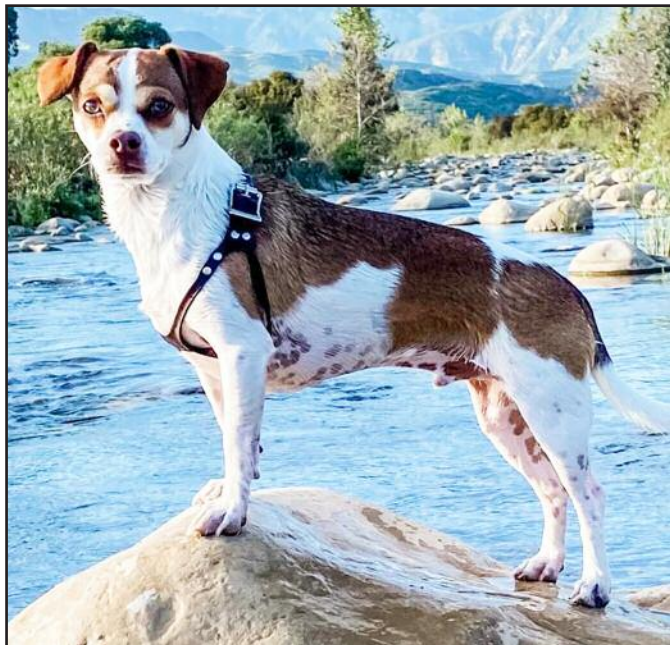


This page top left: *Riley* Right: *Celebrating Teddy's 1st.*

Next page Top Left: *Posey.*

Bottom Right: *Grey Mantle from Rob Hulford.*

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# Black Ice ~ Winter Car Care

From Jim Plane – State Farm Insurance

How can you protect yourself from this hidden winter hazard? Thousands of injuries and fatalities occur every year from accidents on snowy or icy roads, according to the Federal Highway Administration. Many drivers are unaware of a common culprit in many of these crashes - black ice. So what is black ice? It is a transparent glaze that forms without bubbles, allowing it to easily blend into the surface of the roads.

Black ice is most likely to form when there is a sudden temperature drop, such as in the early morning and evening hours. Common problem areas are bridges, overpasses, and shaded areas of the road. These areas have much colder surfaces that rapidly freeze when air moisture makes contact - especially if they're near lakes or rivers.

### How to prepare for winter driving

Use these tips to prepare your vehicle for driving on black ice or unexpected icy conditions:

**Winter Tires.** Switch out your standard tires to winter tires once the temperatures start to drop. If your vehicle is regularly exposed to driving in snowy and icy conditions, the grip and handling provided by these weather-specific tires will be better than all-season tires.

**Slow Down.** When conditions exist for an increased possibility of black ice, exhibit caution by driving slower than the posted speed limit and extending your braking distance. This could give you more time to react calmly if you're caught on black ice.

### Learn possible warning signs of black ice

When favorable conditions are present, be on high alert. Black ice looks a lot like wet blacktop. Other indicators include: Absence of water spray on a seemingly wet road - Cars suddenly swerving or skidding - Brake lights ahead. Cars or tire tracks in the ditch - Shiny surfaces next to a dull black.

### Ways to react when you encounter black ice

If you're caught driving on black ice, use these tips to maneuver past the problem area:

Do nothing. Avoid making sudden moves or turning the wheel. Smoothly lift your foot off the accelerator and glide across the ice in a straight line until you find traction.

**Shift.** If possible, slowly shift to a lower gear for added control.

**Brake wisely.** If you begin to skid, firmly press on your brakes to activate the anti-lock brake system (ABS). Or, if you don't have ABS, pump the brakes gently.

**Avoid spinout.** If your front end is sliding, steer in the opposite direction of the skid; if the back end is sliding, steer in the same direction.

Look toward where you want to go. If you look where you think you might crash, then you might inadvertently veer the car in that direction.

### Important Winter Car Care Tips

Keep your car running smoothly in the winter months. From low tire pressure to frozen fuel lines to road salt damage, winter can take its toll on your vehicle. Here are five car care tips to prevent long-term damage:

**Check tire pressure weekly.** Driving on underinflated tires can cause them to wear down prematurely and lose traction on icy or slippery surfaces. Your tires lose a pound of pressure with every 10-degree drop in temperature.

**Keep your fuel tank half full.** During winter weather, it's a good idea to keep at least half a tank of fuel in the vehicle in the event of an emergency or if you get stuck in the snow and need to wait for rescue. For longer road trips, plan stops for gas in advance.

**Add a protective layer.** A coat of polymer wax can create a barrier against road salt, grime, snow, sleet and more. Couple that with high-pressure car washes after winter storms to rinse away buildup in hard-to-reach areas such as wheels, wheel wells and underbody.

**Protect your windshield wipers.** If you park outdoors, leave the wipers in the raised position to prevent them from freezing to the windshield. Never use your wiper blades to remove ice, snow or frost from the windshield; use an ice scraper instead.

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# Green, Gold, Silver

By Valerie Wedel

Green, gold, silver,  
Dance in circles,  
Green, gold, silver -  
All are one.

Wreathed in smoke,  
The land burns,  
Green, gold silver,  
Still are one.

One are many,  
Many are one -  
Together alive!  
Green, gold, silver.



Their special shape means that in the massive, gale force winds that sometimes tear through our mountains, green leaves of summer survive. Aspen leaves dance and sway and remain on their branches all throughout summer. Also in part due to the shape of the petioles and leaves, the branches of Aspen remain securely on their tree trunks.

Many of us learn in school that green leaves are photosynthetic – they convert sunlight into food and energy for plants, and indirectly, also for animals and people.

Something special and unusual, the bark of Aspen trees is also photosynthetic. This means in our short, high-altitude mountain

Aspen trees in green, gold and silver grace our northern mountains in autumn. Their leaves dance and sing all summer, deep and rich green, circling round about silver trunks. The voice of these leaves is different, the way they dance on their branches, unique. As the days shorten into autumn, Aspen leaves change from glossy deep green to brilliant gold. Does your heart lift each fall, when you see shining gold leaves dancing on silver branches?

Here in the western mountains of North America, it is the Quaking Aspen that is native. Known to scientists as *Populus Tremulous*, these trees love cool summers and cold winters. They grow throughout the North and West of our Northern hemisphere, usually at higher altitudes where conifers also thrive. Other varieties of Aspen live on other continents also, including Eurasia, Asia, and parts of Europe.

Our Colorado mountain Aspen are very special. The leaves are relatively flat and have a very aerodynamic petiole, which is the little stem connecting each leaf to its branch. This contributes to their unique dance and voice.

growing season, the trees use their green leaves to help them grow. As the leaves turn (Continued on next page.)



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## Highlander Nature

gold in autumn and begin to fall, Aspen trees can continue growth by taking sunlight in through their bark!

One may also be aware that deciduous tree leaves contain stomata – special pores that open and close to take in food and exchange gasses. Aspen bark does this also. There are lenticels scattered along the bark of Aspen trunks, which can exchange gasses similar to the way stomata on leaves do.

Those of us in the “hills” of Colorado have all admired golden lakes flowing along hillsides and ridges in fall. Aspen trees are frequently seen clustered in groups. A favorite fall sight here is a grove of Aspen seen from a little distance, surrounded perhaps by conifers and blue sky, along a mountain side. The trees can reach heights from 49 – 98 feet tall, helping us see them clearly among the conifers.

Aspen roots are deep and very long lived. A very special and unusual feature of Aspens is a single tree is one with an entire grove... they have one root system, and an entire grove is all one being. Sometimes a grove of Aspens is called a colony. New root sprouts grow from the existing root system. In other words, that lovely lake of gold on the mountain side which may stretch for acres is one, large, living organism!



Equally amazing, Aspen roots can live for thousands of years underground. Every century or so as the living trees above ground die back, the living roots send up new sprouts. You read that right – thousands of years. There is a grove, or colony, nicknamed Pando, in Utah. Pando’s root system has been estimated to be 80,000 years old.

As this article goes to press, and for the entire summer and early fall seasons of 2020, our land is burning. Three months of flame... From the Pacific Ocean to the Front Range of Colorado, fueled by extreme heat, high winds, drought, and perhaps also beetle killed trees, massive conifer forests are going up in smoke.

The fires will go out. Our land will cool. And when the land cools, and the fires have gone, sunlight will awaken the Aspen. From their deep roots they will grow again. Each tree will be unique and beautiful, and will also be one with its entire grove.

*Further Fun Reading:*

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aspen\\_Green,\\_Gold,\\_Silver](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aspen_Green,_Gold,_Silver)

**Editor’s Note:** Fewer reds this year, maybe due to drought but a few stands changed to red or orange too.

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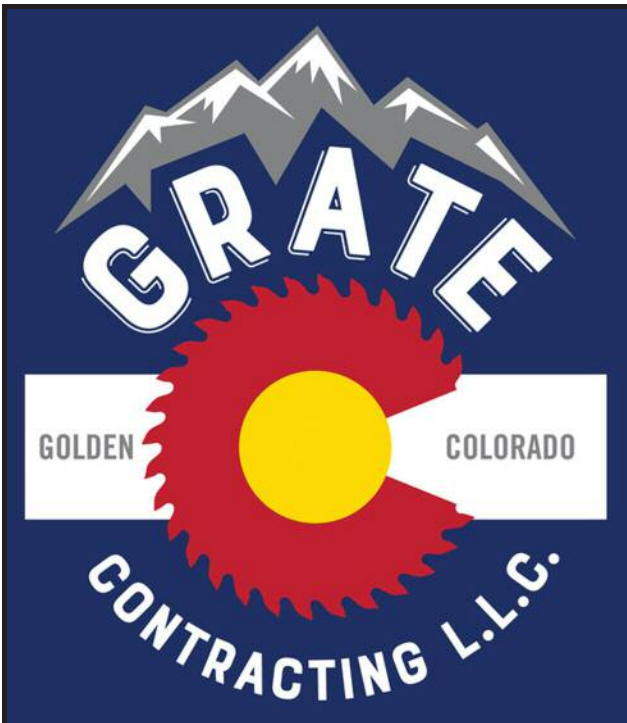


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# A Need To See Buffalo

By Jason Baldes Oct. 5, 2020 High Country News

Buffalo do not exist on the landscape the same way other wild animals do. They affect the environment, as well as human beings, in an important and unique manner. Before we can protect them for future generations, we need to understand their history.

Buffalo and Native Americans are deeply intertwined. We both survive on the remnants of once-vast territories. Buffalo live in parks, refuges and private ranches, while Native Americans were forced onto reservations to control and subjugate the tribes.

We Eastern Shoshone call ourselves “Gweechoon Deka,” or buffalo eaters, and we have deep cultural connections to the animal. Buffalo used to dominate grassland and prairie ecosystems across the Western U.S., with an estimated 30 to 60 million animals roaming free. These great herds had positive ecological impacts on the land they grazed, not only on its soil, water and plant life, but on a variety of other animals, even insects. All these creatures lived in synergy, benefiting their habitat.

Buffalo are considered a keystone species, critical to the environment, meaning that without their presence the

ecosystem is dramatically different. In places where buffalo have been restored, their unique characteristics and behavior promote an increase in biodiversity. When buffalo wallow, they create ephemeral pools and micro-depressions in the landscape that serve as a water source for other animals. Their dust-bathing behavior encourages seed dispersal. Certain species of birds line their nests with buffalo hair, keeping their eggs at the appropriate temperature for incubation.

Sadly, when railroads cut through the Great Plains in the 19th century, buffalo were killed in large numbers for sport and in order to subjugate the Native peoples that relied on the animal. Today, buffalo remain a vital piece to the well-being not only of Indigenous communities like my own, but also of the land itself. That’s why we’re working to bring them back to their rightful place on the landscape.

But before we can make real progress in buffalo restoration and conservation, we need a paradigm shift in how we collectively “see” buffalo. Today, the animals are generally confined by fences or prescribed boundaries. The people who travel to see them are probably unaware that most are privately managed and not considered “wild.”

We have forgotten how to see buffalo in their habitat, the way we see pronghorn, moose, elk and other wildlife species. This is largely because of land-use policies, politics and the influence of the agriculture industry on how public lands are managed.

For Native Americans, the restoration of buffalo is as much about healing people and reviving our culture as it is about healing the land.

The policies’ negative repercussions affected how buffalo and Indigenous peoples relate. Federal policies diminished tribal rights and ownership of lands in order to open the Western U.S. so that “surplus” tribal lands could be sold to white settlers. The buffalo economy, life’s commissary for Native peoples, was wiped out as a result, and Native peoples could no longer hunt and harvest buffalo or use the



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animal for traditional and cultural purposes. Instead, agriculture was promoted, and large tracts of land in the West were made available for cattle businesses, many of which are still operating today.

The federal government often manages public land for industry, prioritizing mineral extraction and cattle grazing rather than ecological integrity or restoration. Many who oppose buffalo restoration fear that the animals will transmit disease to cattle. States are required to certify livestock as disease-free, and ranchers worry that this could economically impact their bottom line. But there has never been a documented case of buffalo transferring brucellosis to cattle. There is, however, evidence that elk have transmitted the disease, and yet we still see elk living freely on the landscape. We want elk to continue to thrive in the West. We simply believe buffalo deserve the opportunity to do the same.

We need to partner with tribal nations to create additional buffalo herds on their lands. Tribal quarantine programs demonstrate that genetically pure, disease-free buffalo can roam safely, and that healthy animals can be supplied to those who want to establish their own herds. For Native Americans, the restoration of buffalo is as much about healing people and reviving our culture as it is about healing the land.

The Department of the Interior recently announced the Bison Conservation Initiative, a new cooperative effort that will enact conservation strategies for the wild American bison over the next ten years. This initiative affirms a commitment to the shared stewardship of wild bison in cooperation with states, tribes, nonprofits and other stakeholders. It also commits to establishing and maintaining large, wide-ranging bison herds on large landscapes, where their role as ecosystem engineers can shape healthy and diverse ecological communities.

This is a big step in the right direction. With continued commitment from government entities, expanded capacity for quarantine facilities, and, above all, a paradigm shift in how we see bison, we may truly be able to restore and treat these animals as true Western wildlife.

*Jason Baldes is the tribal buffalo coordinator for the National Wildlife Federation and an Eastern Shoshone tribal member.*

**Editor's Note:** The Highlander has been supporting the nonprofit proponent of wild bison in Yellowstone for at least 20 years: i.e. BuffaloFieldCampaign.org and it has to be said - all efforts to allow bison to roam free would be best served if more folks worked together instead of small competing groups that butt heads with each other to mostly try and achieve the same end goal.



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# Update: BuffaloFieldCampaign.org

## What Our FOIA Lawsuit Victory Revealed

The Secretary of the Interior Ordered Yellowstone National Park to Manage Buffalo Like Cattle on a Ranch

Under court order, Yellowstone National Park recently released records to BFC the park had fought to withhold from the public on how the park manages buffalo under their protection. The park's release of records stems from a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit decided earlier this summer by U.S. District Court Judge Donald Molloy who sided with BFC and ordered Yellowstone National Park Superintendent Cam Sholly's office to make them public. The newly released records can be found on BFC's Freedom of Information Act web page. Attorneys Daniel Snyder of the Law Offices of Charles M. Tebbutt, P.C., and Tim Bechtold of the Bechtold Law Firm, successfully argued the case on BFC's behalf.

Much was revealed in the release of these documents the park sought to keep from public eyes. An unpublished manuscript higher ups in the park appear not to have wanted to see the light of day, blew the whistle on the "myths and misperceptions" perpetuated by the livestock industry to gain control over buffalo as a betrayal of the common good, and the public and tribal trust. Another briefing memo recounted how: "Yellowstone's Superintendent was informed that the Secretary of the Interior wanted . . . Yellowstone bison managed more actively like cattle on a ranch, and . . . the Bureau of Land Management to conduct an assessment of the number of



bison the park could support using the animal unit month (AUM) concept . . . used to manage forage use by grazing livestock." Former Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke's marching orders to turn Yellowstone National Park into a domesticated buffalo ranch may shock some, but it is a blunt comment on the pervasive use of livestock management practices, and livestock control of wildlife management, threatening the country's remnant population of indigenous American buffalo. No wonder Yellowstone National Park fought to keep his statement from the public, and quashed publication of the scientist's manuscript.

Managing buffalo roaming Yellowstone National Park like cattle on a ranch describes policy put in place with the State of Montana decades ago. The business of government trapping buffalo for slaughter and quarantine, harassing buffalo from National Forest habitat, deploying fencing and vaccination schemes, enclosing their range, stopping migrations, has been in place for a quarter of a century. Tens of millions of dollars have been appropriated from your purse to keep the lucrative business of managing wild buffalo like cattle in place.

*Photo by Stephany Seay, Buffalo Field Campaign*

What will the future be? Must we pay the \$1.35 a month livestock allotment fee for a wild female buffalo and her calf to roam National Forest habitat? Will Yellowstone National Park set up a stand to sell "pure-bred" buffalo heads, hides, and meat to make the ranch more profitable?

Will American buffalo be reduced to a human conditioned domestic animal behind electrified fences? Will the Montana Dept. of Livestock round up or shoot the ones who got away? Will buffalo be allowed to naturally migrate and adapt as a wildlife species? Managing for domestication of a revered wildlife species endangers the ancient migratory knowledge embodied in the native American buffalo roaming Yellowstone. This is why Buffalo Field Campaign was founded and why we remain steadfast in the home of the buffalo. We must multiply our number into a persistent, unbending force for the right for buffalo to live as a wildlife species on the land of their birth right. We, the people, must gather our forces and re-double our efforts. Thank you!

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# Wolverines Denied Protections

By Rachel Fritts High Country News Oct. 16, 2020

*This story was originally published by the Guardian as part of their two-year series, This Land is Your Land, examining the threats facing America's public lands, with support from the Society of Environmental Journalists, and is republished by permission.*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has denied protection to wolverines under the Endangered Species Act, frustrating conservation groups who argue the species faces an existential threat from the climate crisis.

According to the ruling announced on October 8, the Fish and Wildlife Service considers wolverine populations in the lower 48 states to be stable and threats against wolverines to be less significant than they previously thought. The agency is consequently withdrawing a proposal to federally protect the species.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has denied Endangered Species Act protections to wolverines. The decision is based on a comprehensive species assessment completed in 2018, which calls climate change “the most significant stressor” of wolverines in the lower 48 states but argues enough snow will persist in the upper elevations of the wolverine’s range to accommodate the animal.

“If wolverines need snow, we think that there’s going to be enough snow out there for them,” said Jodi Bush, the Montana project leader of the Fish and Wildlife Service. The Fish and Wildlife Service is also withdrawing the proposed listing in light of new research suggesting the U.S. wolverine population is not genetically distinct from the population in Canada, rendering them ineligible for

protection. Officials with the Fish and Wildlife Service cited a recent example of wolverines returning to the Cascades as evidence that wolverines are moving back and forth between the U.S. and Canada.

“My primary concern is that USFWS’s decision was not based on good science,” said Jeff Copeland, a wolverine expert and director at The Wolverine Foundation. “Either it represents a gross misinterpretation of the science or a purposeful misrepresentation of the science in order to produce a preconceived result.”

Wolverines are members of a diverse group of mammals collectively known as mustelids, which includes weasels, badgers and otters. They are the largest land-based member of the family, famous for their elusive nature, love of snow and ability to punch above their weight. Three feet long and 15 to 50 lb., wolverines are compact animals resembling small bears with bushy tails, large skulls and powerful jaws capable of crunching through frozen meat and bone.

These traits, along with their snowshoe-like feet and dense coat of fur, make them highly adapted to snowy arctic and sub-arctic environments. Snow seems to be particularly important to mother wolverines, who consistently choose the deepest snow available to make their dens in snow tunnels or under snow-covered rocks or logs between February and April.

For these reasons, conservationists believe the climate crisis poses a unique threat to wolverines. “This is an animal with extremely specific habitat requirements. It lives in a very narrow environmental niche that can be easily impacted by climate change,” said Copeland. “There is no reason to believe that it is (Continued on next page.)

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## Highlander Wildlife

adaptable to other climate situations.”

The species nearly disappeared from the lower 48 states in the 1900s, succumbing to fur trapping, predator poisoning and lack of prey due to sheep farming, but has since returned to much of its historic range. An estimated 300 individuals now live in pockets of high elevation wilderness in Washington, Montana, Idaho and Wyoming, with over 90% of their potential habitat on federal lands and wilderness areas. Each individual occupies a vast territory ranging from 100 to 500 square miles and has “an almost insatiable need to be on the move,” Copeland said.

U.S. conservation groups have long fought for this snow-loving species’ protection under the Endangered Species Act, first petitioning for designation in 1994. Since 1995, the Fish and Wildlife Service has twice denied wolverines protection because conservation groups could not provide “empirical data” on how wolverines’ range had changed over time because of humans. In 2013, however, the Fish and Wildlife Service proposed a rule to federally protect wolverines in the lower 48 states following new evidence that the species faced the threat of extinction.



But the following year, the Fish and Wildlife Service backtracked, withdrawing the proposal. Since then, it has delayed making a firm decision on whether wolverines deserve federal protection. The move is the culmination of years of pressure from conservation groups, which led to nine organizations filing a lawsuit against the agency in March. These groups, argue that the Fish and Wildlife Service is ignoring the best science available

on how climate change will affect wolverines, as a Montana judge found in 2016. Conservation organizations expressed their frustration at the latest withdrawal, announcing recently that they would soon begin the process of filing a lawsuit in response. “It’s a continued pattern of wanting to stick their heads in the sand about climate change and not do anything about the impacts that greenhouse gas emissions will have on species,” said Brad Smith, the north Idaho director of the Idaho Conservation League. According to Smith, federally listing wolverines as threatened under the Endangered Species Act would ensure a more consistent approach to conservation: the Fish and Wildlife Service would have to draft a recovery plan that applies across the species’ entire U.S. range and designates certain areas as critical wolverine habitat. According to Bush, however, the fight to protect wolverines – led by the Western States Wolverine Conservation Project – will continue at the state level. Copeland fears that necessary attention to the plight of wolverines could be slipping away. A 2019 study found that wolverines avoid areas of off-road winter recreation such as backcountry skiing and snowmobiling. As temperatures warm and snowpack decreases, wolverine habitat and backcountry recreation areas could increasingly overlap.

*Rachel Fritts is a science writer and environmental journalist who writes about wildlife, natural resource use, climate change and earth sciences.*



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# Sage Advice

By Taylor Dawn Stagner Oct. 1, 2020 High Country News  
*The ecological and ethical problems of 'smudging.'*

Chances are you know the scent of white sage as well as you know patchouli. The sweet aroma of its dusty, pale green leaves permeates New Age spirituality shops across the Western U.S. The burning of California white sage, especially, has become an accepted form of cultural appropriation. Today, shops that carry sage, whether in mountain tourist towns or on Etsy, rarely consider its Indigenous origins or the current-day implications of its use.

California white sage, or *Salvia apiana*, is a perennial desert shrub that grows several feet high. During April, the plant's flowers, which range in color from white to pale lavender, attract bees, giving it the nickname "bee sage." Indigenous cultures have collected, dried and burned the plant for centuries, using its smoke as medicine and in ceremonies. The scent is unique, an earthy, sweet aroma that curls in rising circles during smudging, clinging to clothes and hair for hours after burning.

It's a beautiful plant with many uses. And that's part of the problem: It's become so popular that it has been commodified to the point of erasure, robbed of its

Indigenous roots and cultural importance.

Historically, white sage has had many uses. The Kumeyaay and Cahuilla used it to treat fever, and its leaves were eaten or smoked in sweathouse ceremonies. The



White sage marketed as "sustainably grown" for sale in a Denver, CO, metaphysical store. Luna Anna Archey/HCN

smoke was used for fumigation, and the plant crushed to use as a deodorant and to mask the tell-tale odor of hunters. The Chumash also ate the plant, preparing it in various ways.

California white sage still grows (Continued next page.)

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abundantly in Southern California, although over-harvesting has kept it from growing in the tall, thick bushes it once did. Indigenous peoples continue a tradition of handling it in environmentally sustainable ways by harvesting only what is needed for ceremony.

There is very little data about where and how the plant is being harvested today for commercial purposes. Without rigorous research into the supply chain that takes a bundle of sage from California to an Etsy shopping cart, consumers simply cannot know if their sage was gathered and sold in a culturally ethical or environmentally responsible way.

United Plant Savers, a nonprofit that advocates for the preservation of medicinal plants, has put California white sage on its list of threatened species. Director Susan Leopold said the lack of understanding about sage's sustainability and cultural importance — coupled with its seeming ubiquity — has led people to acquire and use it irresponsibly.

“There are no commercial permits for selling white sage. You can get written permission from private landowners,” Leopold said. “And you can get permits for personal wild-crafting. But also, there’s very unspecific guidelines that sellers exploit.” “It doesn’t matter if the company is Native or non-Native; it is against protocol to sell medicines.” Well-intentioned vendors and patrons alike might believe they are buying sage directly from a private grower, not realizing that it was harvested without permission from public lands, possibly causing significant damage to the landscape.

The Gabrielino-Tongva, a state-recognized tribe in Southern California, have a relationship with white sage that goes back 7,000 years, ever since the tribe has been in the Los Angeles Basin. To the Tongva, sage is not a commodity, but a member of the family. This creates a relationship between medicine and person that is more complex than commerce can account for, a kinship beyond dollars and cents. “I have a firm stance in regards to medicinal plants that they are not to be sold: period,” said Weshoyot Alvitre, a Tongva illustrator who advocates for her ancestral land. Growing up, Alvitre was taught that selling such medicine was wrong. “It doesn’t matter if the company is Native or non-Native; it is against protocol to sell medicines.”

The white sage industry either ignores — or capitalizes on — the plant’s importance to the Indigenous population, she said, and it can be found in “withcraft” and “Native spirituality” kits on Amazon, or purchased for “cleansing rituals” at a local New Age shop. Like dreamcatchers, sage has been degraded for consumption, she said. Unfortunately, it’s not easy to find ethically, responsibly — and legally — sourced white sage.

Buzzwords like “responsibly sourced” mean nothing if you don’t know your source or their practices, she said.

The plant itself may not be endangered, but its habitat is threatened by encroaching development. In early August, intense wildfires destroyed miles of white sage habitat. Global warming impacts the plant in other ways, too, as rising sea levels erode its coastal habitat. Unauthorized, unregulated harvesting of the plant for commercial purposes accelerates the problem.

Meanwhile, even those non-Native store owners who realize that there are gaps in their sourcing appear unmotivated to change their practices. Herbs and Arts, for example, a Denver metaphysical shop, claims that its vendor ethically sources the sage it sells. That vendor is Full Moon Farm in Arizona, which supplies 350 stores across the country. The farm's owner, Wendy Hillyer, is not Indigenous. She started the company, she said, because white sage "creates a feeling of sacredness in everyday life, and I wanted to share that with everyone." Hillyer acknowledged that she could have purchased sage from Indigenous suppliers, but thought it was too expensive.

The fact that California white sage is not listed as endangered gives people the sense that it's OK to harvest it lavishly and sell it for a profit. The regulations on harvesting are confusing and rarely enforced. Under California law, white sage cannot simply be gathered from the side of the road. In some parts of the state, there are fines for harvesting without proper permitting. It's legal to take for personal use with written permission from the

property owner. But who owns the property? Few shops accurately document where and how their sage was collected. In California, it could be the Forest Service, the state Fish and Wildlife Department or the Bureau of Land Management. The Etiwanda Preserve in San Bernardino County, for example, is home to complex underground waterways that help the plant flourish, an irresistible attraction for poachers.


Bret Williamson, owner of the Colorado wholesaler Crystal Peddler, has been selling sage for 30 years. His sage is gathered by wild-crafters from Bureau of Land Management land, he said. And though he knows you need a permit to wild-craft on BLM land for personal use, he admits he's never actually seen a permit, or even asked for or received permission to gather. Despite this, Williamson said he believes the sage he sells has been ethically collected. "I know enough people out there," he said.


Deborah Small and her co-author, Rose Ramirez, who is Chumash and Yaqui, said the only solution is to make sure that the "responsibly sourced" label actually means something.

The two women have spoken about California white sage across the state, trying to warn people about poaching and explain how to responsibly harvest and use the plant. But people would rather just learn how to smudge, and they seem to have no interest in the ethical and sustainability issues surrounding the plant.

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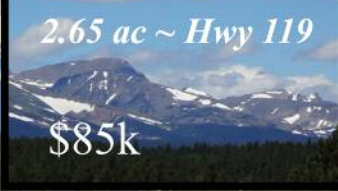
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Finally, as the starship Captain Jean-Luc Picard in Star Trek told Commander Data, “Set a course for the Zebulon sector...engage.”

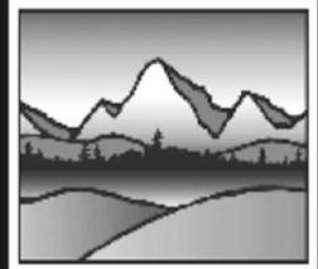
Everything falls into place as you work your mind toward success. You engage your entire being into the process of triumph through these practices.

Do you see a new pattern for your life emerging? While many enthusiastic people create energetic lives for themselves, many other quiet individuals also create fulfilling and happy lives at their levels of engagement.

None possess a patent on what it means to live a spectacular life. That's why someone who loves to sculpt, play chess, paint or macramé may enjoy just as passionate a life as a mountain climber. Something in our own mind turns each of us on to our own passions.

On my bicycle trip through South America, at Iguassu Falls in Argentina, (*photo next page*) my friends and I stepped beside one of the grandest waterfalls in the world. It's not the tallest, but it proves to be one of the most spectacular. Around the roar of the falls, we watched toucan birds and brilliantly colored butterflies. Near the falls, we watched 10,000 black and yellow butterflies dancing on pink flowers. Can you imagine the color contrast and movement as the butterflies pollinated the flowers?

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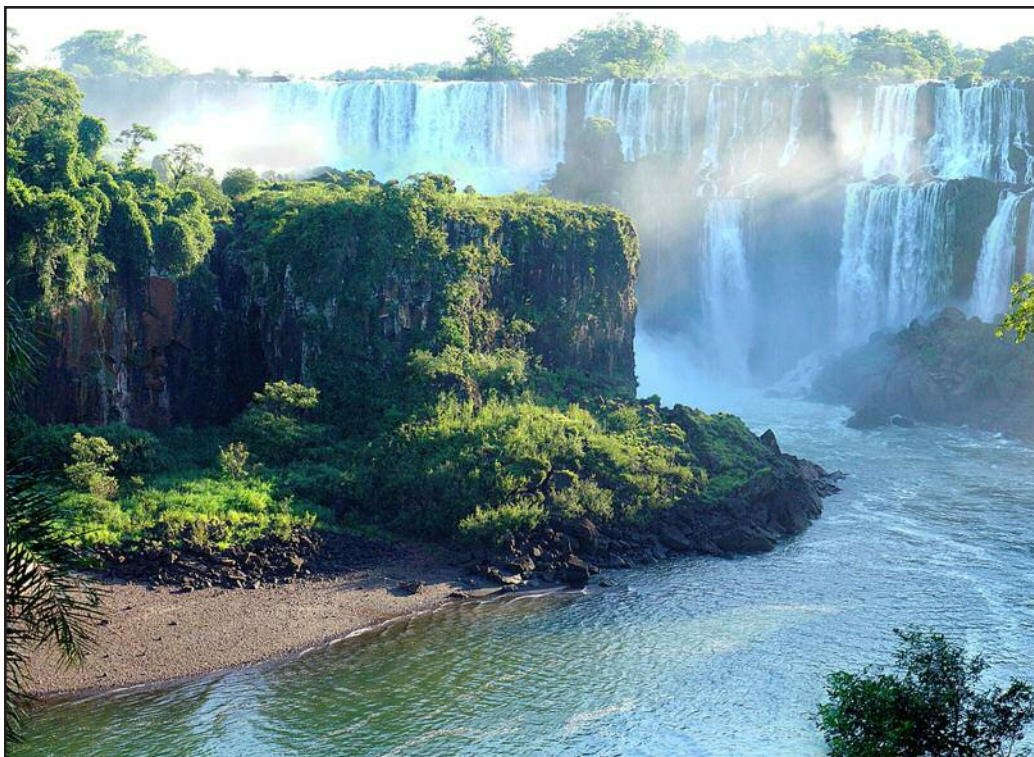
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### **Wondervu Consulting Services**

**303-642-0433** or visit us at [www.wondervu-consulting.com](http://www.wondervu-consulting.com)  
**Michele Barone - [mbarone@wondervu-consulting.com](mailto:mbarone@wondervu-consulting.com)**



## Highlander Opinion



with the butterflies. We sat on the grass watching him play while the butterflies danced to his music. Maybe his music danced to the butterflies. His passion translated into an amazing experience for him and for us.

Sure, I get high riding my bicycle, skiing down a bump run, canoeing, rafting and climbing mountains. This guy got high playing his harp with butterflies dancing to the music. By the look on his face, I swear he climbed to the top of his own Mount Everest in the musical realm. He lived brilliantly. By engaging your creative talents, your passions and your actions—you may play your own “music” to fit your “edge”

What made that experience more incredible? A man, sitting at a seven-foot-tall harp, played his music to “flow”

in this world.

Website: [www.howtolivealifeofadventure.com](http://www.howtolivealifeofadventure.com)

## Angels With Paws Cat Rescue & Adoption Center



A  
Non-Profit  
Volunteer  
Organization

YOU CAN  
MAKE A  
DIFFERENCE!

2540 Youngfield St.  
Lakewood

[angelswithpaws.net](http://angelswithpaws.net)

[info@angelswithpaws.net](mailto:info@angelswithpaws.net)

Usually open  
1pm to 6pm  
Call  
303.274.2264

Closed Mondays

Volunteer!  
Make a Donation!

Tune into KGNU Community Radio at

88.5 FM & 1390 AM  
Boulder / Denver

93.7 FM  
Nederland



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voices, music from  
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programming heard  
no where else!

KGNU, independent community radio, broadcasts hard hitting news and public affairs and an eclectic mix of music including world, hip-hop, folk, reggae, and bluegrass. KGNU gives volunteers the opportunity to take the media into their own hands, providing training, equipment and access to the airwaves.

88.5 FM & 1390 AM  
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Only on KGNU Community Radio | [www.kgnu.org](http://www.kgnu.org) | 303-449-4885

# Highlander Ad Index & Business Telephone Numbers

## ADVERTISING

Graphics Galore 303.642.0362  
 Highlander Monthly 303.642.0362

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# Power Update

November  
2020

## Winter Weather May Cause Outages

Parts of United Power's service territory experienced its first snow of the season in early September. With winter weather arriving, we want to make sure our members understand the potential for outages due to strong winds, heavy snow and ice. Tree limbs become a hazard during heavy snow because they can break and fall into lines. Heavy snow may also cause damage to cross arms and other electrical equipment along United Power's lines.

To help our members in the mountains, United Power's line crews are on alert around-the-clock. We utilize the most sophisticated tracking technology in our 24-hour dispatch center to monitor outages along our lines. You can also help when it comes to restoring power. Sometimes we may not know the extent of an outage or may not know about an isolated outage at the end of a line affecting only one or two homes. A simple call from our members gives us a clearer understanding of the extent of the outage.

Do not assume United Power is aware of your outage. If you (and/or your neighbor) lose power for an extended period of time, usually more than a few minutes, please call United Power's Outage Line at 303-637-1350 or report your outage through your online account or the United Power mobile app. If the outage is widespread, your call will be answered by our Automated Outage Reporting System.

When reporting an outage, please provide any details you may have. If you heard a loud bang or your neighbors still have power, let us know. This will help us determine any unknown problems on our system.

## Members Award Grant to Pastor's Pantry

United Power members recognized Pastor's Pantry in Coal Creek Canyon during the third and final round of Member Choice Grant nominations over the past couple months. Pastor's Pantry is one of two nonprofits to receive a \$1,000 grant during this round of nominations. Organizations receiving grants operate within the cooperative's service territory and serve its members. The other recipient was the Colorado Therapeutic Riding Center.

Member Choice Grants were introduced earlier this year as a way for members to nominate nonprofit organizations to receive support from the cooperative. The grants allow United Power to provide support for causes and organizations members truly care about.

Pastor's Pantry, which operates out of Whispering Pines Church, was founded in 2001 as a resource for anyone in need in Coal Creek Canyon. It provides both food and essential items, such as toiletries and paper products.

Pastor's Pantry is open every Thursday from 3:00 - 5:00 p.m. or by appointment for emergency needs, and accepts individual donations via a donation box outside the church, 73 Gross Dam Road.

Earlier this year, Operation Round-Up also extended a \$3,000 grant to Pastor's Pantry to restock diminishing shelves as a result of the current pandemic.

### Winter Weather Outages



Report Using Your  
Online Account  
or  
Call 303-637-1350

**UNITED POWER**  
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



## Unclaimed Capital Credits

### We May Have Money For You

United Power is attempting to issue unclaimed capital credit refunds to members.

### How Can I Find Out If I Am Due a Refund?

To find out if you are due a refund, visit [www.unitedpower.com](http://www.unitedpower.com), click on 'My Cooperative' and look for the 'Capital Credits' page to view the entire list of unclaimed capital credit accounts.

### How Do I Claim My Refund?

If you find your name on the list of unclaimed capital credits on our website, download and complete the **Patronage Capital Refund Request form** and return it to United Power or call our Capital Credit information hot line at 303-637-1200, leave a message with your name and mailing address and we will mail you a Patronage Capital Refund Request form.

**UNITED POWER**  
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

Member Services: 303-637-1300

Coal Creek Office: 303-642-7921

[www.unitedpower.com](http://www.unitedpower.com)

# Thanksgiving Feast - Community Invited

Thursday, November 26, 11:30am - 2:30pm

CCCIA Hall - 31528 Hwy 72



**Under Contract**

**7 car garage**

**134 Kegley Road**

Best Views in Colorado

4 BD/ 3 BA 4,051 sq.ft. **\$1,350,000**



**6 Car Garage**

**Coal Creek Canyon**

Gorgeous Updated Log Home - 1.82 Acres

4 BD/ 4 BA 3,817 sq.ft. **\$1,100,000**



**Under Contract**

**4 car garage**

**687 Copperdale Lane**

Privacy abounds amongst the Aspens

3 BD/ 2 BA 1,920 sq.ft. **\$429,000**



**Under Contract**

**181 Hummingbird Lane**

Nicely Updated - Theater Room 1.29 Ac.

3 BD/ 2 BA 2,129 sq.ft.. **\$474,000**



**Under Contract**

**Orange Orchard**

**4303 30th Street, Boulder**

Wonderful Park Like Setting .40 Ac.

4 BD/ 3 BA 2,842 sq.ft. **\$990,000**



**New Listing**

**1.5 Acres**

**Coal Creek Canyon**

Fabulous Luxury Home, Views

4 BD/ 4 BA 4,697 sq.ft. **\$950,000**



**New Price**

**Pinecliffe Subdivision**

**3497 Coal Creek Canyon #18**

Adorable Summer Cabin

3 BD/ 1 BA 1,184 sq.ft. **\$249,000**



**SOLD!**

**11470 Ranch Elsie Road**

Horse Property! 3.8 Acres

2 BD/ 1 BA 1,948 sq.ft. **\$455,000**



**SOLD!**

**198 Range Road**

Solar Powered & Secluded "Treehouse"

2 BD/ 2 BA 1,652 sq.ft. 2.7 Ac **\$569,900**



**New Listing**

**34226 Gap Road**

Amazing Mtn Home, Backs to Conservation

Land 4 BD/ 2 BA 2,750 sq.ft. 1.14 Acre



**Under Contract**

**Vacant Land**

**1257 / 1316 Chute Road**

Secluded 5+ acres, Divide, City,

and Gross Dam Views **\$139,000**



**SOLD!**

**11440 Inspiration Road**

Amazing Views at Road's End

3 BD/2 BA 2,341 sq.ft. 1.5 Ac. **\$540,000**



**SOLD!**

**31992 Coal Creek Canyon Drive**

Horse property- Walkout Guest Ste. - 4 Ac

3 BD/ 3 BA + Den 2,907 sq.ft. **\$689,900**



**SOLD!**

**Coal Creek Canyon**

Custom Log Home - 4.2 Acres

3 BD/ 4 BA 3,300 sq.ft. **\$900,000**



**SOLD!**

**85 Valley View Drive**

Breathtaking Divide & Lake Views

4 BD/ 4 BA 3623 sq.ft. 1+Ac. **\$775,000**



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