



M Watersheds MESSENGER

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photo ©LarryThorngren.com

Protecting Western Watersheds and Wildlife

by Jon Marvel

Western Watersheds Project's successes continue to multiply in the last several months thanks to WWP's long-term partnership with our attorneys at Advocates For The West in Boise (www.advocateswest.org) and WWP's other conservation partners and attorneys. Here are a few examples of the excellent legal work carried out by WWP staff and our attorneys in the last few months. For more complete information on all WWP legal efforts please review the recent postings and legal pages of the WWP web site: www.westernwatersheds.org

Protecting Bighorn Sheep

Early in 2008 WWP and the Center For Biological Diversity settled litigation against the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agriculture Research Service (ARS). The settlement requires the ARS to carry out a full environmental analysis of domestic sheep grazing in Clark County, Idaho on public lands and lands administered by the ARS. This is an important win for bighorn sheep, grizzly bears, wolves and pygmy rabbits that inhabit or pass through this relatively remote part of eastern Idaho just south of the Montana border. WWP anticipates paying close attention to the outcome of this analysis because of its importance to declining native wildlife like bighorn sheep.

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Western Watersheds Project: Working to protect and restore western watersheds and wildlife through education, public policy initiatives and litigation.

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In March 2008 the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) adopted a new policy of separating domestic sheep and bighorn sheep that creates what IDFG calls buffer zones between the species. WWP is of the opinion that these zones are really nothing more than free-fire areas to kill bighorn sheep that might encounter domestic sheep. As a consequence, WWP has succeeded in getting policy direction from the Regional Office of the Forest Service in Ogden, Utah that makes clear that the Forest Service has the authority to close or limit the grazing of domestic sheep on Forest Service lands if they pose an unacceptable risk to bighorn sheep.

At this writing WWP is waiting to see what the Forest Service will do in 2008 to protect bighorn sheep on the Nez Perce and Sawtooth National Forests in central and south Idaho.

Protecting Sage Grouse

In early December 2007 Western Watersheds Project won a federal court order overturning the denial of protections of the Endangered Species Act for Greater Sage Grouse, a decision affecting public lands in 11 states. After signing an agreement with the Department of Justice in January 2008 that set a reasonable timetable for a new status review for sage grouse, the Bush administration tried to back out on the stipulated agreement. That effort was thwarted in late February 2008 when Chief Judge B. Lynn Winmill of the federal court for the District of Idaho ruled from the bench and affirmed the agreement that set a deadline of May 2009 for a new sage grouse status report. Laird Lucas of Advocates For The West represents WWP in this litigation.

In January 2008 WWP and our partner, the Center For Biological Diversity (CBD), settled litigation against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that will result in a new status review under the Endangered Species Act of the need for protections for the rare Mono Basin Sage

Grouse in western Nevada and eastern California. This very rare bird is at risk from unmanaged livestock grazing. Lisa Belenky attorney for CBD's San Francisco office represents WWP and CBD in this litigation.

Protecting Pygmy Rabbits

WWP won federal court direction requiring the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to reconsider its denial of a status review for pygmy rabbits, the highly imperiled smallest member of the rabbit family endemic only to western North America. In January 2008 the FWS determined that there was sufficient information provided by WWP to warrant a full status review for the little rabbits. That status review will be taking place during the rest of 2008.

Protecting Wolves

In late February 2008 Western Watersheds Project joined with a number of other national and regional conservation groups in sending a letter to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) giving 60 days notice that the groups intend to sue the FWS to stop the delisting of the Northern Rockies population of wolves. That litigation, if needed, will be filed at the end of April 2008. If the delisting goes ahead it is likely that the three states involved (Idaho, Wyoming and Montana) may start an unprecedented program of killing wolves to reduce their populations to the absolute minimum level allowed by FWS to prevent relisting of wolves under the Endangered Species Act. WWP is represented in this potential litigation by Doug Honnold of Earthjustice's Bozeman, Montana office.

Protecting Montana Fluvial Grayling and Big Lost River Whitefish

WWP has amended prior litigation to notify the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that WWP intends to litigate the lack of protection under the Endangered Species Act of these two highly endangered native fish species. WWP is represented by Boise attorney Judi Brawer in this legal effort.

The grayling exists only in the Big Hole River of western Montana where it is threatened by dewatering of habitat because of livestock production.

The Big Lost River whitefish numbers have plummeted in recent years due to habitat alteration and dewatering of streams also for livestock production.

***Jon Marvel is executive director of WWP.
He lives in Hailey, Idaho.***

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Western Watersheds Project Annual Financial Report

In 2007 Western Watersheds Project had an excellent financial year in which total income rose to \$665,000. Readers who wish to see more detail about WWP's financial condition can access the last 14 years of WWP's Form 990 reports to the Internal Revenue service on the Web at <http://www.guidestar.org>.

For the first time in its history WWP raised over \$100,000 dollars in one month (December 2007). In addition in May 2007 WWP hired Trillium Asset Management to manage WWP's capital assets received from the sale of the Greenfire Preserve with a management focus on capital preservation and income generation.

During the course of 2007 WWP used its increased income and assets to open several new offices including the Western Idaho office in McCall headed by Debra Ellers with Dale Grooms as Data Specialist; the Central Idaho Office in Salmon headed by fisheries biologist Larry Zuckerman; the California Science Office in Reseda, headed by desert tortoise expert Dr. Michael J. Connor and the Arizona Office in Tucson headed by Greta Anderson with attorney Erik Ryberg as WWP's Arizona legal counsel.

In 2007 WWP also increased its very effective legal staff through our long-time partnership with Advocates For The West in Boise. New attorneys at Advocates For The West who will assist on WWP legal matters include Beth Richards working on Wyoming public land legal issues and Kristin Ruether, working on Oregon, Washington and Idaho legal issues. Along with Advocates For the West's other excellent attorneys Laurie Rule and Todd Tucci and especially Advocates' executive director Laird Lucas who continues to serve as WWP's legal counsel.

The 2008 financial outlook for WWP is very good with funding that may become available to open a new WWP office in Montana and increased part-time seasonal monitoring of a number of public landscapes across the west including the Big and Little Lost River watersheds in Idaho and the entire Ruby Mountain Ranger District in northern Nevada.

Ordinary Income/Expenses 2007 (All Figures Rounded)

Income

Memberships and Contributions	\$392,000.00
Grants	\$219,000.00
Events and Earned Income	\$54,000.00
Total Income.....	\$665,000.00

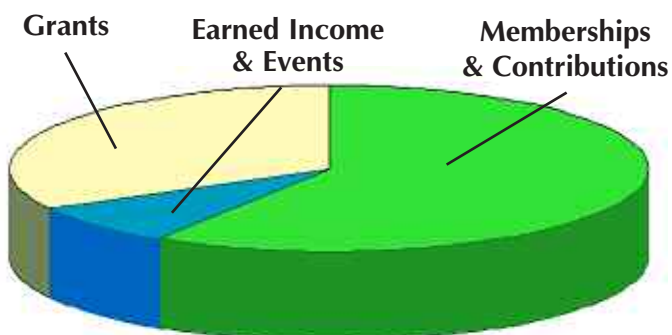
Expense

Accounting	1,600.00
Bank Charges	5,500.00
Conferences & Meetings	7,900.00
Contract Services.....	309,000.00
Equipment Rental & Maintenance.....	14,700.00
Insurance	6,400.00
Legal	88,800.00
Occupancy	15,500.00
Payroll.....	161,300.00
Payroll Expenses	13,600.00
Postage & Shipping	7,200.00
Printing and Publications	10,000.00
Professional Fees, Other	17,900.00
Supplies	8,000.00
Telephone	9,000.00
Travel	8,700.00
Website	2,900.00
Total Expense	688,000.00

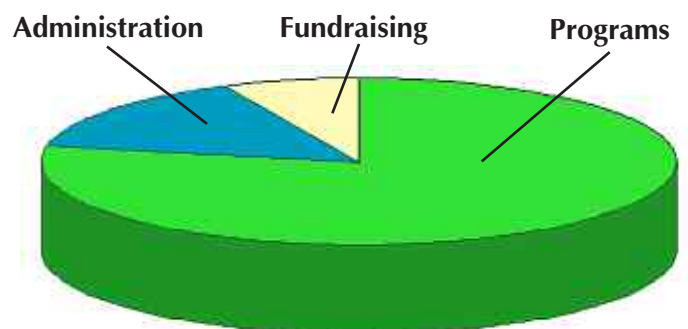
Net Ordinary Income-23,000.00

Net Income.....-23,000.00

2007 Income



2007 Expense





A Tale of Cuddy Mountain: What about Mama and Baby Bear?

by Debra Ellers

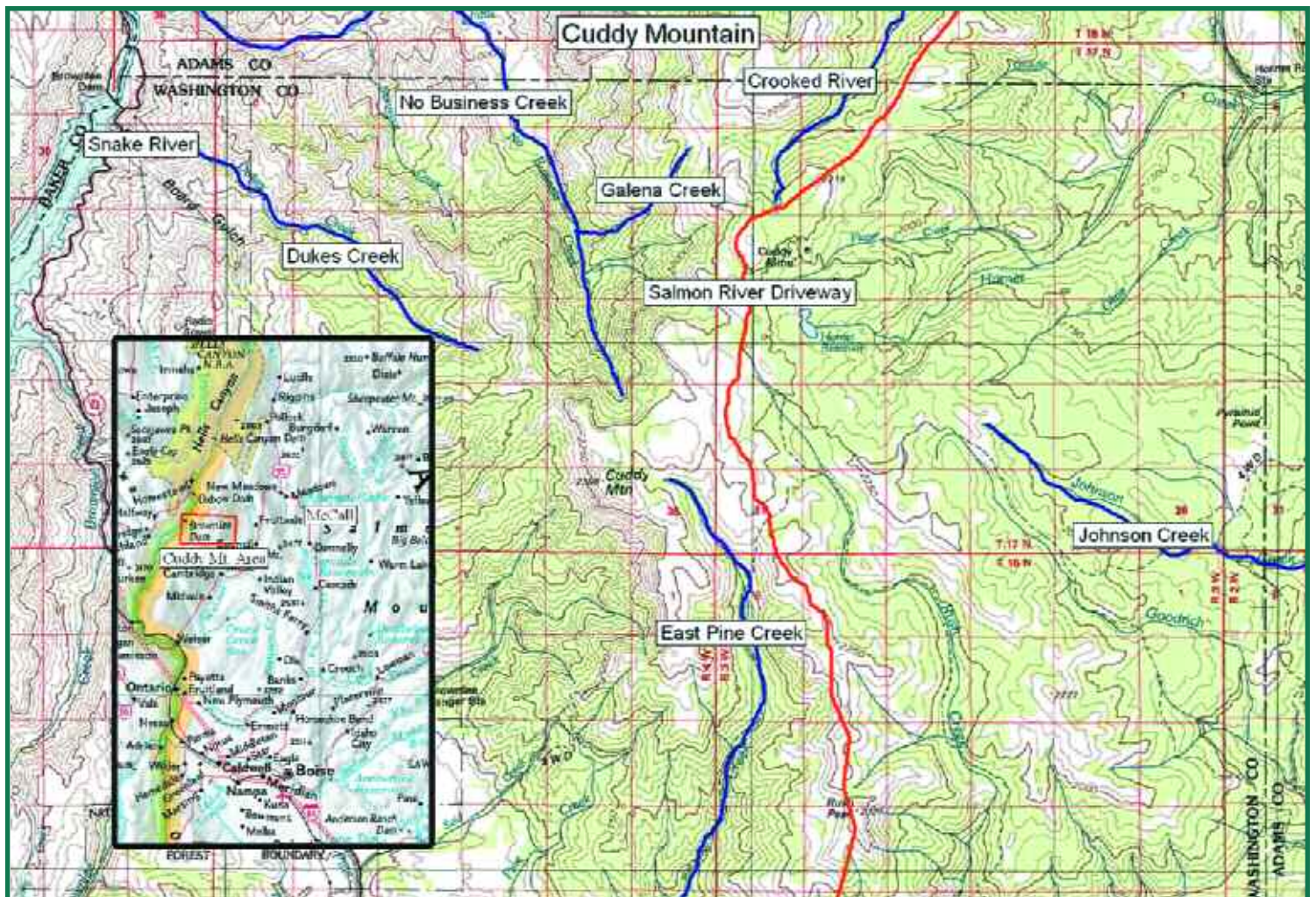
Cuddy Mountain is a large “sky island” near the Idaho/Oregon border.

In the 1990s, it was a focus of old growth logging battles. Now, livestock grazing is replacing logging as the flashpoint for Cuddy Mountain.

Rising steeply from an elevation of 1800 feet at the Snake River, Cuddy Mountain’s escarpment reaches over 7800 feet. These dramatic elevation changes provide a great diversity of plant communities, from grasslands to open meadows to conifer forests. Recognizing the diversity and significance of the vegetation on Cuddy Mountain, the Forest Service has established three Research Natural Areas (RNAs) in the vicinity—Cuddy Mountain RNA, Emery Creek RNA and Lost Basin RNA, which feature plants such as bluebunch wheatgrass, serviceberry, mountain big sagebrush and old growth ponderosa pines.

This diverse vegetation and topography provide four season forage and cover for wildlife. Bighorn sheep, elk, black bear, and flammulated owls are just a sampling of the wildlife making their homes on Cuddy Mountain. The northwestern part of the mountain contains the Crooked River drainage, which is habitat for native redband trout and threatened bull trout. The scenery is breathtaking from many points, especially the dramatic overlook down No Business Creek to Hells Canyon and beyond, to the Wallowa Mountains in Oregon. The views and wildlife could provide ample opportunity for recreation-based businesses, such as nature tours or hunting outfitters.

However, much of Cuddy Mountain receives extensive use by domestic livestock, lowering its attractiveness for either recreation or wildlife. Six major cattle allotments exist around Cuddy Mountain on the Payette National Forest—Heath/Dukes, Wildhorse/Crooked River, East Pine/Rush Creek, Mill Creek, North Hornet Creek and Johnson Creek, which permit approximately 2200 cow/calf pairs to graze on public lands from late spring/early summer through mid-fall, essentially the entire snow-free season.



“Sky islands” are mountains in ranges isolated by valleys in which other ecosystems are located. As a result, the mountain ecosystems are isolated from each other, and species can develop in parallel, as on island groups such as the Galápagos Islands.

The Salmon River Driveway, over which bands of domestic sheep have for decades been trailed to or from other areas within the Payette National Forest, traverses high across Cuddy Mountain. The bighorn sheep in the vicinity are at risk of disease transmission from domestic sheep as they trail and graze along the Driveway. One of WWP’s notable successes in 2007 was the closure of this Driveway to domestic sheep trailing to protect bighorns. Future protection for Cuddy Mountain area bighorns is uncertain as the State of Idaho proceeds with its politically-motivated “sheep-free zones plan” detailed elsewhere in this newsletter.



***Mother Bear with Cubs
photo©Dale Grooms***

As part of the Western Idaho office’s monitoring in 2007, we visited Cuddy Mountain twice: once in mid-June, before livestock turn-out, and again at the end of July, when domestic livestock were out in force. In June, in a single day, we observed lush meadows with wildflowers, a 4-point mule deer in velvet, several elk and notably, a mama black bear with her cub.

The next day, as we walked down a steep ridge on the western flank of Cuddy Mountain scoping for bighorn sheep, we heard a strange yipping sound. For a moment, we puzzled over the source; then suddenly realized it was one of the most feared sounds in the wild: Baby Bear calling for Mama Bear because of some unknown and unwanted creatures getting too close! Fortunately, we retreated—RAPIDLY—up the steep ridge with no further interactions with the bear family.


The scene a month and a half later was not so pleasant. Fresh cowpies littered the previously lush meadows. Along East Pine Creek and Galena Creek,

cattle had eaten stream-side forage below the 4” minimum stubble height called for by Forest Service standards. The cattle had also trampled and hung out extensively in these previously-clear running streams, which now ran foul and dirty.

As I stood near Galena Creek, just a short distance from where we had seen both Mama and Baby Bear and later heard Baby Bear so memorably, I wondered how they had fared with having to drink this filthy water during the hot days of summer. I thought about the toll livestock grazing was taking on the wild creatures and native plants of Cuddy Mountain, and vowed to do what I could to end abusive grazing activities in this special place.

Tools that the Western Idaho office is using to protect Cuddy Mountain include meeting with responsible Forest officials to discuss modification in grazing practices for the upcoming season, providing comments on Forest allotments set for NEPA review, which includes the Heath/Dukes and North Hornet Creek Allotments, and continued monitoring of sensitive areas, particularly riparian zones and RNAs. With improvement in management practices, Cuddy Mountain can provide a place where Mama and Baby Bear and their descendants will thrive for generations to come.

***Debra Ellers is WWP’s Western Idaho Director.
She lives near McCall, Idaho.***



The Western Idaho Office is planning a field trip to Cuddy Mountain on August 15-17, 2008 for monitoring, wildlife watching and exploring. Interested WWP members are invited to join us on this car-camping outing to experience Cuddy Mountain.

Access to Cuddy Mountain is via a rough, rocky four wheel drive road. A high-clearance four wheel drive vehicle with 2-speed transfer case is required. A shuttle can be arranged for members who wish to participate, but do not have an appropriate vehicle.

For more information or to sign up for this field trip, please contact Debra at(208) 634-9946 or e-mail debra@westernwatersheds.org.



¡Que vivan los lobos! by Greta Anderson

The Mexican gray wolf has had a tough time in the southwest. By 1970, it was extirpated from the U.S. during a systematic “predator control” campaign carried out at the behest of the livestock industry. Now, it seems like history might be repeating itself.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service listed the Mexican gray wolf under the Endangered Species Act in 1976 and eventually set about recovering the species through captive breeding. In 1998, the agency began reintroducing wolves in portions of their former range in Arizona and New Mexico. The program set a goal of 102 wolves in the wild by 2006, including 18 breeding pairs. However, as of January 2008, only 52 wolves remain and only three of those are breeding pairs, a decline from the previous year and part of an ongoing trend of failed restoration.

This last year’s decline in the wolf numbers reflects a serious threat to maintaining viable wolf populations on the southwestern landscape. Each wolf is important genetically to the diversity and health of the subspecies, and the loss of a single individual or pack represents a serious loss for the long-term health of the entire population. Given this significance, it is important to look at one major reason for the population decline: the demands of the public lands’ livestock industry.

In the Mexican gray wolf recovery area, if a wolf preys upon three cows in any given calendar year, it will be permanently removed from the wild. Since there are plenty of opportunities for wolves to learn what raw

beef tastes like from carcasses left out year-long on backcountry allotments, wolves learn the benefit of poor animal husbandry and exploit untended livestock. It’s natural behavior.

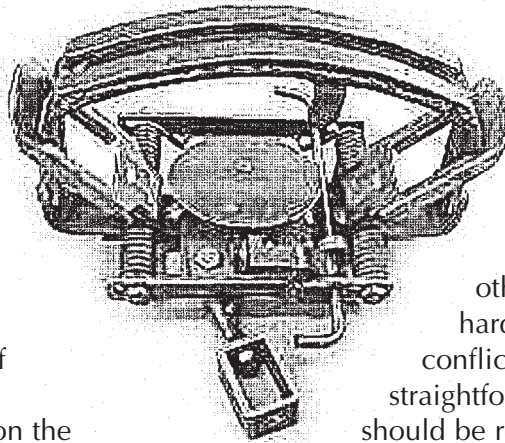
What is unnatural is the level of fear and antagonism this adaptive behavior has earned from the livestock industry. Though well-compensated for livestock losses, public lands permittees continue to assert that wolves are bad for business. Meanwhile, neither the ranchers nor the land management agencies will agree to render carcasses unpalatable and deprive wolves of these learning opportunities. The permittees refuse to modify their management to accommodate wolves, and instead expect wolves to be removed from the wilderness. In 2007, 19 wolves were removed for livestock depredations and another three are suspiciously “missing.” The “predator control” campaign appears to be back in effect. This is not how recovery programs are supposed to work.

Western Watersheds Project and other conservation groups are working hard to change the perception of the conflicted recovery program to a simple, straightforward paradigm: Mexican gray wolves should be restored to their southwest habitat and provided full protections under the Endangered Species Act. Public lands management should prioritize wildlife recovery and multiple uses should be permitted only where those uses don’t conflict with ecosystem integrity. Wolves will be wolves, and our lives are enriched because of it.

For more information on WWP’s work on the Mexican gray wolf, check out:

<http://www.westernwatersheds.org/species/mexicanwolf.shtml/>

Greta Anderson is WWP’s Arizona Director. She lives in Tucson.



*Mexican Wolf
photo©USFWS*



**Bighorns in Peril:
WWP fights for the Cassia**
by Miles Johnson

South of Twin Falls on the Idaho-Nevada line, the South Hills rise abruptly from the Snake River plain. This expanse of ridges and canyons is mostly federal land, managed by the Sawtooth National Forest as the Cassia Division of the Minidoka Ranger District.

The gem of the Cassia Division—and the last refuge of Bighorn Sheep in the South Hills—is Big Cottonwood Wildlife Management Area.

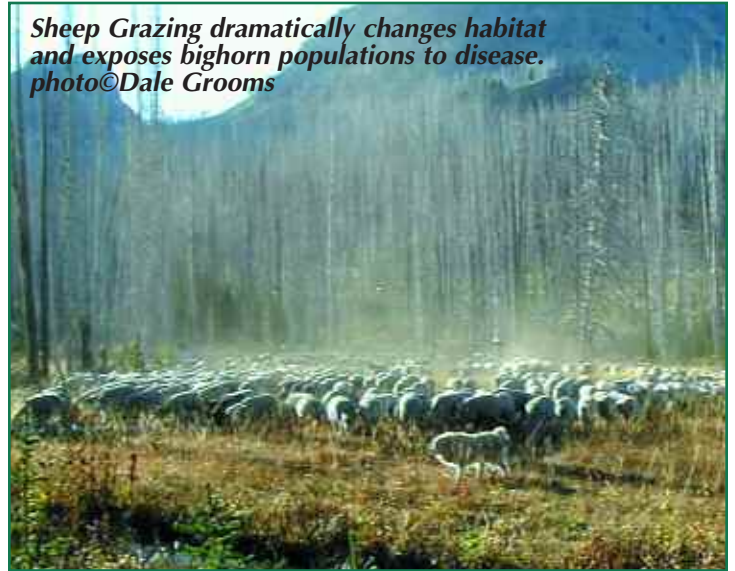
Big Cottonwood Creek canyon is a rarity among National Forest lands: a cottonwood riparian forest without a road along the river, and un-grazed by livestock since 1993. On a recent hike up the canyon, I saw strong willow and cottonwood regeneration along the stream, along with numerous beaver dams providing cover for native Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout. Bald eagles perched in the mature cottonwoods, and a pair of Golden eagles circled above the rim-rock. Wild turkey and mule deer strolled through the creek bottom at dusk. Undoubtedly, though, the highpoint of my trip to Big Cottonwood Creek was seeing eleven Bighorns grazing and sunning themselves high on the eastern slope of the canyon.

Indigenous rock art and pioneer sightings of Bighorn in the Cassia Division establish that this rugged terrain was home to wild sheep for centuries before the last Bighorns died out in the early 1900's. In 1986, IDFG and the Sawtooth National Forest acknowledged this area's potential as Bighorn habitat by transplanting fourteen Bighorns into Big Cottonwood Creek basin in the Cassia Division. Reintroduction efforts continued until 1993, and a total of 74 Bighorns were released into the Big Cottonwood Creek and East Fork Dry Creek basins over those eight years.

Initially, the reintroduction program met with success: adult mortality was low and lamb production and recruitment were strong. Radio-collared Bighorns migrated throughout the western half of the South Hills, colonizing superb habitat that had not seen wild sheep since the turn of the century. Unfortunately, Bighorns in Big Cottonwood are surrounded by domestic sheep: a few miles to the west are numerous sheep allotments on the National Forest; to the east are BLM sheep allotments and farm flocks of domestics. The free-roaming nature of Bighorns often brought them into areas used by domestic sheep, and the two species were observed intermingling on Forest Service allotments and private lands early on in the reintroduction effort.

Giving the proximity and contact of wild and domestic sheep in the South Hills, it is not surprising that Bighorns ran into trouble. In 1989 roughly half of the Cassia Division Bighorns died and lamb mortality

was extremely high in following years—likely due to an outbreak *Pasturella* Spp. pneumonia, a devastating disease passed from domestic to wild sheep. The Cassia Division Bighorn population has dwindled steadily over the past two decades. The IDFG estimates that only twelve to fourteen Bighorns now cling to survival in habitat that should support a thriving herd.



Sheep Grazing dramatically changes habitat and exposes bighorn populations to disease.
photo©Dale Grooms

Since this time last year, legal victories by Advocates for the West for Western Watersheds Project and campaigning by WWP members and staff have elevated the priority of Bighorn Sheep conservation, as well as the blood pressure of several powerful Idaho sheep ranchers and politicians. At the prompting of many influential sheep growers Governor Otter directed the IDFG and the Idaho Department of Agriculture to create sheep exclusion zones around all public lands domestic sheep allotments in Idaho. These “death zones” will be drawn up without public input and represent areas where Bighorns are hazed, removed or shot for crossing an imaginary dead-line. Unfortunately for the surviving Cassia Bighorns, even a small exclusion zone around all the domestic sheep allotments on Forest Service and BLM land in the South Hills would blot out every available inch of Bighorn habitat.

From the snowy serenity of Big Cottonwood Creek canyon, it is difficult to imagine the social and political turmoil surrounding Idaho's Bighorn Sheep, and even harder to contemplate the violence that could be visited upon the Cassia Bighorns as a result of the Governor's misguided plan. Bighorns have been driven from the South Hills once before. Our knowledge of Bighorn Sheep biology and our appreciation of the aesthetic and economic contributions of this iconic western species has progressed so much over the last century; let us learn from our past mistakes rather than repeat them. WWP supports the interests of the vast majority of Idahoans who value and enjoy wild Bighorn Sheep.

*Miles Johnson is a WWP 2008 Winter Intern
A Graduate of Whitman College, he lives in Oregon*

Why Are Bighorn Sheep Dying?

Historically, bighorn sheep played a central role in Native American cultures providing a chief source of food, clothing and tradable tools. One example of bighorn's contribution to tribal artisanship are the beautiful bows crafted out of horn that were traded along regional trading routes between indigenous peoples.

Once thought to number in the millions in North America, bighorn sheep now struggle to maintain viable populations. While pockets of native bighorn persist in areas of the West, efforts to reintroduce bighorn or supplement pre-existing populations have been stymied by the heavily subsidized presence of domestic sheep grazing on western public land.

Bighorn die-offs originally occurred as settlers moved west bringing domestic sheep with them. As domestic sheep intermingle with bighorn in wild sheep habitat, diseases including lung diseases like pasteurilla spread from immune domestics to wild bighorns. Massive die-offs following domestic sheep settlement almost wiped out wild sheep across the West and disease is considered the principle reason for bighorn decline. Bighorn numbers dwindle from historic levels as domestic sheep continue to graze on public lands, spreading disease and causing continued bighorn die-offs.

Another obstacle to bighorns is inadequate and inaccessible habitat. During efforts at reintroducing bighorn sheep, wildlife biologists assess suitable habitat where bighorn have a reasonable likelihood of maintaining viable numbers. Much public land in the West has been deemed unsuitable for bighorn re-establishment, not because bighorns did not historically thrive in these areas, but because of competition from domestic sheep and cattle. Wildlife managers have been forced to rule out bighorn reintroduction on significant stretches of habitat in order to perpetuate the senseless subsidized production of livestock on public lands. Livestock grazing precludes restoring bighorns that once roamed free.





All Photos ©LarryThorngren.com
WWP would like to thank photographer Larry Thorngren for the use
of his images. www.larrythorngren.com

The True Cost of Brucellosis

By Robert Hoskins

During a recent call-in program on Montana's Yellowstone Public Radio, I posed the following question to Montana Senator John Tester:

"It has been shown that in Wyoming, loss of brucellosis-free status between 2004 and 2006 only cost livestock producers one percent of total production costs. Given that brucellosis clearly is not a serious economic threat to Western livestock producers, why do you continue to support the extravagantly wasteful Interagency Bison Management Plan?"

Senator Tester's answer clearly danced to a tune he didn't know well. We got the same awkward dance from retired Billings Gazette agricultural reporter Jim Gransbery, who appeared on the show with Senator Tester.

Both Senator Tester and Mr. Gransbery waxed indignant as they stumbled over my question; in stiff stentorian tones they each responded, "Oh, I'm sure that's too low a cost. No one has told me that brucellosis isn't serious." Of course, they had no contrary facts to back up their certainty.

Their certainty is misplaced. It wasn't I who came up with the one percent estimate. It was the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), the federal agency that gives brucellosis-free status with one hand and takes with the other.

In its Federal Register Notice (15 September 2006, p. 54404) that restored brucellosis-free status to Wyoming, APHIS admitted that "the [testing] expenses forgone as a result of this reclassification in status will not be significant for cattle owners in Wyoming....The savings from the forgone testing will be very small, estimated to be about 1 percent of the value of the animals sold."

We find corroboration for APHIS' one percent estimate in the Final Bison and Elk Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the National elk Refuge and Grand Teton National Park (2007). On page 187 of the FEIS, we read:

"Although difficult to assess, the brucellosis outbreaks [in Wyoming] do not appear to have had a

major adverse impact on market prices for Wyoming cattle. Prices for Wyoming cattle fell sharply in January 2004, but that decline has been widely attributed to the 2003 discovery of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in a dairy cow in Washington State. Since January 2004, Wyoming cattle prices have shown a general upward trend, notwithstanding the several brucellosis discoveries in the state in 2004. Prices for the first nine months of 2005 were well above those of 2003, a time when Wyoming's brucellosis status was class free."

The FEIS concludes that costs of losing brucellosis free status in Wyoming amounted to approximately one percent of total production costs—mostly the costs of testing—which the FEIS estimates to have been around \$1.2 to \$1.7 million per year statewide.

The FEIS does not inform the reader, however, that the 2005 Wyoming Legislature appropriated \$1.6 million to help cover the costs of brucellosis testing while Wyoming producers were "burdened" with Class A status.

Thus, much of the cost of losing brucellosis-free status was externalized from livestock producers to the Wyoming taxpayer. This puts the actual costs to producers down to near zero, especially when you consider that cattle prices actually rose during the two years Wyoming "suffered" under Class A status.

Further, according to a Wyoming Department of Agriculture Class A Status Brucellosis Fact Sheet, "cattle moving from a farm or ranch of origin directly to a slaughter plant or directly to an approved livestock auction market to be sold and moved directly to slaughter, do not have to be tested," which meant no testing costs for slaughter cattle.

In short, the livestock industry has been lying when it claims brucellosis is a serious economic threat. Indeed, losing brucellosis-free status had about as much impact on the economic health of Wyoming's livestock industry as a bout with the common cold. The same would be true in Montana. (Compare that to the likely costs of an outbreak of BSE in cattle or chronic wasting disease in elk).

So what is the true cost of brucellosis?

We know the purpose of Wyoming's ghetto-like elk feedgrounds and Montana's deadly bison circus is not disease control, but control of wild, free-ranging elk and bison. Brucellosis management is the modern range war, and the war-prize is grass, control of land, and control of wildlife.

Our land. Our wildlife.

And it is the citizen-taxpayer who is innocently paying for the livestock industry's rapacious, mendacious, and brutal range war on elk and bison, on the public interest and the public purse, and on truth itself.

That is the true cost of brucellosis.

Robert Hoskins is a naturalist, conservationist, and hunter from Crowheart, Wyoming.



In Wyoming, elk were loaded into a trailer live, to be shipped to a slaughter facility in Idaho.

*Photo by Mark Gocke
Wyoming Game & Fish Department.*



Remembering my First Time

by Simone Lupson-Cook

Two weeks ago my dad and I headed off to Colorado to visit friends in Boulder. On the way we stopped at Yellowstone. I've always wanted to go to Yellowstone in the winter and we were not disappointed.

There were very few people in the park and immediately upon arriving we spotted three bighorn sheep above us on some cliffs. It was about freezing when we got there but wasn't snowing yet. We saw some absolutely huge elk herds as well as the usual herds of bison (a couple were very close). As we neared the Lamar Valley we noticed a couple cars stopped with scopes out. We pulled over and got out and in the sage brush a few hundred feet out was an enormous grizzly bear with a bison in front of him! The bison did not appear to be injured and the grizzly made no attempt towards him. A nice couple let us use their scope and we got some great looks at the bear. A little bit later the lady yelled that there was a wolf in front of the bear! A gray wolf the same color as the sage was slinking back and forth in front of the bear. We watched the two predators for at least a half hour and the bear did not have a kill so we were not sure what the wolf was trying to accomplish. They eventually disappeared into the woods with the wolf still following the bear.

We thought of course we had seen it all but wanted to get to the Lamar Valley. On the way we spotted a herd of about 500 elk down in a different valley. Incredible. It was getting late in the afternoon and we had to get going so once we reached the Lamar Valley my dad said he was going to turn around. We found a spot to turn around and I jumped out to take a picture. As I stood there I heard a lone wolf howl...or at least I

thought I did. I gestured for my dad to get out of the car. Of course a few cars went by and we couldn't hear anything. Then everything was silent again and we just waited. It happened again except two wolves were howling this time and they were closer. I scanned the sage and the woods. It was totally silent again.

Then all of a sudden I noticed something. A lone black wolf was standing between two trees on the hill and was looking directly towards us! We waited and a second black wolf appeared. They both began running towards each other but we lost them behind the trees. I figured this would be the end of our wolf experience. However, just then I noticed some magpies and a couple ravens flying up and landing again in the sage near the river....hmmmm...corvids are always a good sign. I got on the bumper of the car and saw one of the most amazing things I have ever seen: a pack of 11 wolves in a tight circle with their heads to the ground with every single tail wagging. They had just made a kill! I jumped on top of the car and could see even better although I could not tell what they were eating. I was so excited (and cold) that I couldn't even hold my binoculars up.

After about 15 minutes the pack broke up a bit. A white wolf was covered in blood and a black wolf and white wolf brought a leg up on the hill to gnaw on. Judging from the size of the leg I would guess it was a deer. A couple of the wolves drank from the river and then rejoined the pack. It was absolutely incredible!! Only one family stopped to see what we were looking at but by then the wolves were spread out. It was starting to get late so my dad and I turned back and headed out of Yellowstone even though I could have stayed and watched the wolves until it was dark.

*Simone Lupson-Cook resides in Seattle, Washington
She is a Graduate of Evergreen College*



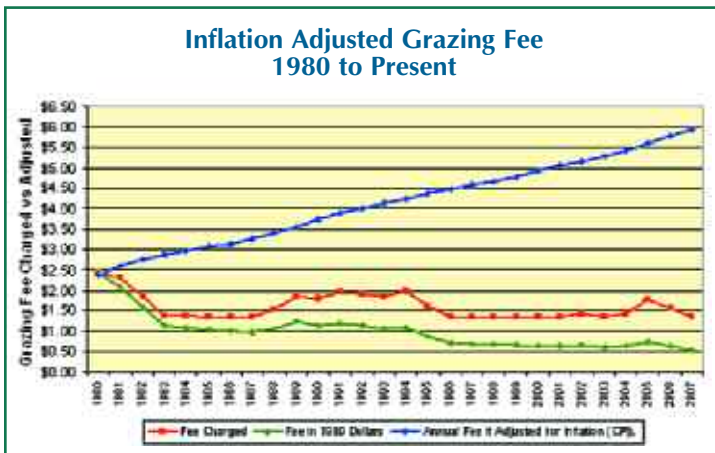
Photo © USFWS.

Chump Change for Super-sized Cows

by Greta Anderson and John Carter

Those of us who care about public lands' ranching tend to think about the ecological costs of livestock on the landscape: ruined streams, trampled and compacted soils, and degraded vegetation communities. Many of us care deeply about the impacts of cows on wildlife habitats and worry about the permanent damage that this powerful special interest group inflicts on our publicly-owned forests, deserts, and grasslands.

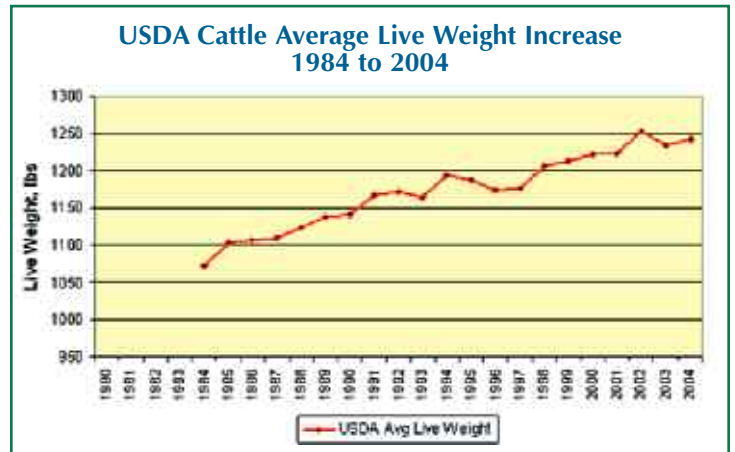
Thinking about these things in terms of the economics is just as frustrating. From grazing fees to fat cows, the balance is constantly tipping towards the side of the cowboys.



In 2008, the cost to graze a cow and her calf on public lands in the West will be just \$1.35 per pair, per month, an amount of forage known as an "AUM." This year's fee per AUM is as low as it can go under the Public Rangelands Improvement Act (PRIA) and the Executive Order which extended its authority in 1994. It is well-known that the fee doesn't even come close to covering the costs associated with the federal grazing program and even the government's own estimates see red. However, the fee is set by a convoluted and unfair formula, and the agencies seem to be determined to give away "forage" to livestock producers in spite of the funding shortfall. Western Watersheds Project has already joined other conservation groups in asking for a revision in the formula itself, so far with no response from the agencies.

This year, we figured out exactly how little the fee costs. Since the AUM was based on a 1000 lb. cow, looking at the average cattle weight showed a significant discrepancy. Unlike cows of yesteryear when

the AUM was determined, today's cows weigh a whopping 1242 lbs, an increase of 23 percent. Calves are not counted and their forage consumption is significant. When both cow and calf are accounted for, the forage consumption value used by the Forest Service and BLM understates the actual current amount by over 40%. This means that carrying capacities based on traditional AUM calculations are insufficient to estimate the amount of forage each contemporary cow-calf pair is consuming. It also means that public lands ranchers are not paying for the full amount of vegetation that their fat cows (and sheep!) are eating.



We're taking this discrepancy and fiscal irresponsibility forward to land managers across the West, challenging them to adjust their stocking rates to reflect the bigger livestock being put out on public lands. So far, every forest supervisor in 13 western states has received a detailed report advising them of the carrying capacity adjustments that need to be done.

It isn't just the AUM whose value is out of balance with the times. The value of a dollar has decreased with inflation, the same inflation that affects everyone's wallets. The \$1.35 fee of 2008 is worth about \$0.54 compared with 1980. Just to keep up with inflation, the fee today would have to be \$5.94. Public lands ranching may be the only business in the country whose basic operating costs have gone down. And we're not even counting the endless subsidies, grants, and programs designed to prop up this dying industry.

For those of us who care about the ecological effects, the fiscal value is just insult added to injury. But since most Americans know and care more about good economic sense, we're hoping that we can expose more of the inequities in the federal lands program and really get people interested in the value of their public lands.





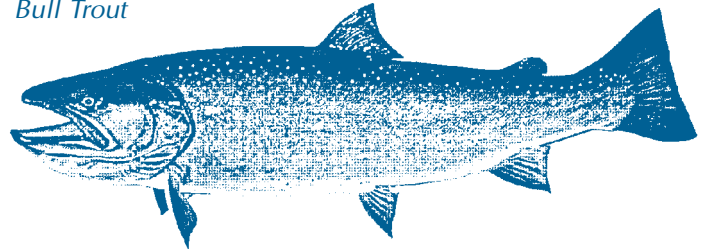
Notes from the Salmon Underground
by Larry Zuckerman

Greetings from Salmon, Idaho - Western Watersheds Project's newest outpost. I am the proud, new Central Idaho Director. Central Idaho is the heart of the Western Watersheds Project and is prominent in its earliest legal victories against the Forest Service and BLM. Local legend has it that the mighty WWP with its hordes of environmental attorneys even got a Federal judge to shut down the Salmon-Challis NF for almost three months – it actually was the Pacific Rivers Council and The Wilderness Society, and it did not last that long. In 1994, they prevailed against the FS for failing to consult properly for ongoing Federal actions under the Endangered Species Act and failing to analyze adverse effects, including grazing, on listed salmon and steelhead. Seems like things don't really change in Central Idaho; the issues remain the same, only the faces change every once in awhile.

Previously I was senior fishery biologist for the National Marine Fisheries Service in Salmon, working on endangered and threatened anadromous salmonids — Snake River sockeye salmon, spring/summer Chinook salmon, and steelhead — and their designated critical habitat. People ask me after serving as an aquatic ecologist for more than 30 years, how could I give up my comfortable position at the Federal trough and take a chance with a bunch of rabble rousers and modern-day hippies that are trying to overthrow the government, with even worse, the help of an army of eager lawyers. Probably the two most common questions posed to me are: 1) Do you really work for "what's-his-name"? 2) What is "what's-his-name" really like? Seems like the lore surrounding Executive Director Jon Marvel is much more akin to the fame and fable of Paul Bunyan and his giant blue ox, Babe, than the head of a very successful and effective public interest environmental group. Salmon residents from all walks of life just want to know, so they inquire...but they seem reluctant to utter Jon's name, like they were in that movie "Beetlejuice" or if they say the dreaded name of the leader of the dreaded environmentalists, they might end up where the sun never shines... or even worse a life member of WWP!

What will you see from the Salmon outpost? More of the kind of work that helped put WWP on the map as the most effective nonprofit in the West. Among the WWP talented and enthusiastic team members and, the often victorious and tenacious Advocates for the West attorneys, we will be legally revisiting the poorly tended grazing allotments and abusive irrigation diversions on the Salmon-Challis NF, Sawtooth NF, and the Salmon, Challis, Upper Snake River Field Offices of the BLM.

Bull Trout



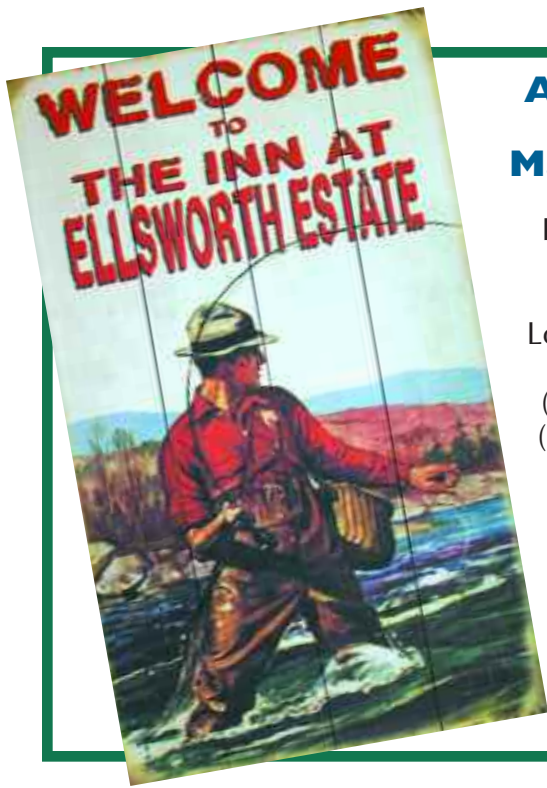
I will help protect the declining populations and degraded critical habitat of several aquatic species. Included are: bull trout throughout the Upper Salmon River Basin, Big Lost mountain whitefish from their natal waters in the Big Lost River Basin, an endemic freshwater "mussel," the Pahsimeroi pearlshell, which none of the Federal agencies seem to know anything about. This lack of knowledge is more infuriating since cattle degrade the stream habitat and the mussel populations are dwindling. We will even reach across the border into Montana, where the last population of river-dwelling, wild grayling in the Lower 48 resides. Fluvial Montana grayling have found their refuge in the embattled Big Hole River of Montana (just over the hill from Lemhi County). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service does NOT believe fluvial Montana grayling deserve protection under ESA from poor grazing practices, unscreened diversions, angling pressures, and depleted stream flows. All of a sudden, it's okay with the Bush Administration Federal regulators empowered with the Public Trust, if all that remains of a species is in Alaska and Canada – we all know better than that, don't we?

I am proud to serve as the new WWP Central Idaho Director and hope that my years of experience with the ESA, Clean Water Act, NEPA and with rare and protected aquatic biota serves the storied organization and its members well. Oh yes, the job is great!

Larry Zuckerman is Central Idaho Director for WWP. He lives in Salmon, Idaho

Central Idaho's Sawtooth Mountains at Sunrise
photo©Rick Hobson





**All Members Are Invited To The WWP Annual
Members and Board Meeting
May 3, 2008 Hailey, Idaho at 11:00 A.M. M.D.T.**

Please join us to learn the latest news about WWP and our plans for the next year!

Location: Due to Remodeling at the Greenfire Preserve, the Annual Meeting Will Be Held At The Inn At Ellsworth Estate (www.ellsworthestate.com) at 702 South 3rd Avenue, Hailey, Idaho (located one and half blocks north of State Highway 75 just north of the Hailey Airport and Across the Street From The Hailey Fire Department)

Lunch will be provided by WWP. The Board and Member Meetings will be Over Around 4:30 P.M.

**Please RSVP to the WWP Hailey Office: 208-788-2290
email: wwp@westernwatersheds.org**

WWP extends special thanks to the following supporters, each of whom contributed \$100 or more to our efforts since the last newsletter. This generous assistance helps to preserve and restore habitat for many species.

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To join WWP's Online Messenger, send an email to wwp@westernwatersheds.org with the word subscribe in the subject line.

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WWP Blog Now Online

For a look at a more irreverent and personal take on public lands watershed and wildlife issues by a few dedicated WWP authors, WWP invites readers to check out the new WWP Blog: <http://wwpblog.com>. Comments are always welcome or join in as an authorized author by contacting WWP: wwp@westernwatersheds.org.



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^ Bighorn Sheep are Losing Habitat in the West even as They Fall Prey to Diseases Borne by Livestock. WWP Seeks to Reverse this Trend. photo ©LarryThorngren.Com