



Watersheds Messenger

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Western Watersheds Project

WWP Expands Horizons in the West

By Keith Raether

It is the worst of times and the best of times.

At a juncture when many conservation groups have battened down the hatches to weather the current administration in Washington, D.C., Western Watersheds Project has expanded its resources and redoubled its efforts.

"Complacency has no place in the conservation effort, considering the rate that species are dying and habitat is shrinking," said WWP executive director Jon Marvel.

"The worst mistake we could possibly make is to roll over and let special-interest government further marginalize the public lands that define the beauty and grandeur of the West. We cannot forget that we all own these lands equally."

WWP has long wanted to push its work farther west, and early this year the plan took form. In February we opened an office in a

crucial state - California - under the direction of conservationist Todd Shuman.

Shuman, who has worked on several California public lands projects with the Sierra Club, California Trout, Trout Unlimited and the California Mule Deer Association, now leads a three-member WWP team that includes biodiversity director Dr. Elizabeth Painter and field director Jane Baxter.

"A WWP presence in California is needed to assure that the state's valuable natural resources on public lands will survive the relentless assault of the Bush Administration," Shuman said.

Painter has conducted floristic and rare plant surveys on public lands for more than 20 years.

Baxter's conservation work dates back to 1973, when she conducted the original research that led to the purchase and preservation of Madrona Marsh, one of few remaining vernal pools in Southern California.

The opening of the California office comes on the heels of WWP's expansion into Montana and Wyoming. We now have offices and projects in Boise, Idaho; Mendon, Utah;



photos©WWP

The E.G Willis Building; new home of Western Watersheds Project

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

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A sign of the times in the American West

From page 1

Pinedale, Wyo.; Missoula and Bozeman, Mont.; and Tehachapi, Calif. Our work continues in nine western states.

While WWP was expanding in the West, it was also growing at home. Coincidental with our 10th anniversary, WWP in December moved into new headquarters in the E.G. Willis Building in downtown Hailey, Idaho.

On Feb. 28 some 100 supporters celebrated the opening of the new office with an open house that featured Wood River Valley musicians Paul Smith and Al Yates.

It was a time to share ideas, toast to successes and, most of all, welcome new staff in the main office as WWP grows within and without. After six years of dedicated effort and much success in putting WWP on firm financial ground, fund development director Judy Hall has left the organization to pursue graduate studies. She will be greatly missed.

Her replacement is Faith Wellman, who comes to WWP from Eugene, Ore., where she worked for KVAL-TV as promotions/public service director.

Wellman is joined in WWP's fundraising department by Joyce Harvey-Morgan, WWP's new grants writer. Harvey-Morgan, who makes her home in Boise, was most recently dean of extended studies at Boise State University.

The WWP expansion doesn't stop there. Bill McDorman, well-known in the Wood River Valley for his award-winning wildflower seed business, is WWP's new membership coordinator. Mandy Loving is assisting McDorman and office administrator Teri Stewart-Curtis as WWP grows in numbers, strength and responsibilities.

WWP has also added another member to its advisory board. Dr. Bruce Welch of the U.S. Forest Service's Intermountain Research Station in Utah has joined our strategic team.

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Media Bulletin

By Keith Raether

Last fall we introduced you to renegade Wyoming public lands rancher Frank Robbins. We recounted the sweet deal he cut with Department of Interior officials. The deal: nine years of alleged grazing violations effectively waived.

We also told you about Western Watersheds Project's lawsuit against the DOI after the settlement with Robbins. And, well, we let the Casper Star-Tribune in on the story too. Wyoming's largest daily newspaper put it on the front page.

Legal pressure and media exposure: an effective management tool when agency management tools are conveniently misplaced. In February the Bureau of Land Management voided its settlement with Robbins. That item made front-page news too.

Last spring, when a group of us were in Washington, D.C., to forward the voluntary federal grazing permit buyout initiative, several congressional staffs told us to come back when we had a bill.

In October 2003 the Voluntary Grazing Permit Buyout Act and the Arizona Voluntary Grazing Buyout Act were introduced in the House of Representatives, and we've been back to Washington since then. Not coincidentally, the list of co-signers on the bill keeps growing.

2003 was an appalling year for the environment under the Bush Administration but a very good year for WWP's public voice of opposition to the Bush-whacking.

The Arizona Republic, the country's 13th largest newspaper, endorsed the federal grazing buyout plan. The Sierra Club's endorsement of the buyout was carried by several outlets. We wrote the news; the Sierra Club in D.C. helped circulate it nationally.

Several newspapers in Idaho published a flawed but effective, two-part, Page One profile of WWP executive director Jon Marvel that traveled over the wire. Our efforts to protect wolves in the Sawtooth National Recreation Area continued to generate consistent news coverage, and bighorn sheep in Montana may be the next chapter in charismatic species protection and public information in 2004.

Last year our news was reported by National Public Radio, the Christian Science Monitor, Los Angeles Times, Salt Lake Tribune, San Jose Mercury News, Albuquerque Journal, Arizona Republic, Arizona Daily Star, Las Vegas Review-Journal, Las Vegas Sun, Idaho Statesman, San Diego Union Tribune, Associated Press, High Country News, Environmental News Service and other sources.

Opinion pieces appeared in the Los Angeles Times, Denver Post, Casper Star-Tribune and Headwaters News, a website given to daily environmental news stories throughout the West. Even agriculture industry publications such as Capital Press, Ag Journal and Western Stockman magazine continued to pay attention to our efforts.

**Keith Raether is public information director for WWP.
He lives in Missoula, Montana.**



Return of the Wild: Experience Greenfire Preserve!

By Debra Ellers

To showcase its restoration work, Western Watersheds Project is giving its members the opportunity to rent, at discounted rates, the stunning "big house" on the Greenfire Preserve. (See rate information.)

Spread over 432 acres along the East Fork of the Salmon River and surrounded by public land on three sides, Greenfire offers wonderful wildlife viewing. Coyotes, salmon, eagles, spotted bats, peregrine falcons, deer, elk, bears, wild horses and pronghorn antelope have all been spotted from the main house. Wolves, bighorn sheep and moose roam within a few miles of Greenfire.



Bighorn sheep along the East Fork of the Salmon

Recreational opportunities abound near the preserve. Strolling around Greenfire is enjoyable and often rewarding for birding and wildlife viewing. Numerous day hikes into the White Clouds and Boulders are within a 30-mile radius of the preserve.

Excellent fishing and mountain biking are also nearby, as are several hot springs. One of Greenfire's many great advantages is the long season for hiking, often year-round at low elevations.

My own experience illustrates the recreation, relaxation and wildlife viewing that WWP members can find at Greenfire. My husband Dale and I rented the big house at Greenfire over the recent Christmas holidays.

We sought respite from the canned Christmas carols, fake icicles and other commercial trappings of the season. We found immediate refuge at the preserve.

The East Fork of the Salmon, which flows next to the house, supplied constant, relaxing background music. In the evenings, we enjoyed watching dozens of deer come down to graze Greenfire's grasses.

At night, the Milky Way glittered in the black winter sky, far from city lights. Mornings brought out a three-coyote "vole patrol," which amused us with their pouncing and playing.



Debra Ellers hikes in Paint Pot Canyon

During the short days, we took awe-inspiring day hikes, one to a spot on Bureau of Land Management land known as the "Paint Pots." The Paint Pots were a vision of southern Utah, with slot canyons, red and yellow rocks glazed by a skiff of snow, and absolute quiet. We felt like the luckiest people on earth, standing in an undiscovered place of such beauty while masses of holiday shoppers were mobbing malls in "civilization."

The other board members and I sincerely hope that WWP members will take advantage of similar opportunities to enjoy wildlife and the outdoors at Greenfire. We encourage you to see for yourselves how the removal of livestock and the restoration of native habitat benefits not only wildlife and the arid western landscape but also the human soul.

*Debra Ellers is president of WWP's board of directors.
She lives in Boise, Idaho.*

Greenfire Rental Rates and Information <http://www.choice1.com/greenfire.htm>

WWP members: \$25 per person, per night, capped at \$150 per night. Maximum 14 persons overnight in house. Minimum stay three nights.

Non-WWP members: \$200 flat rate per night. Maximum 14 persons overnight in house. Minimum stay three nights.

Additional fees for pets (prior approval required) and persons camping (tents or self-contained vehicles) may apply. Prices, terms, availability subject to change without notice.

Big house amenities: 5 bedrooms, 3 baths, linens provided, luxurious master suite with Jacuzzi tub, extensive decks for wildlife viewing, gourmet's kitchen fully furnished with cookware, dishware and flatware, great room with stunning full-length picture windows affording mountain views.

Location: Greenfire Preserve is located near Clayton, Idaho, about 38 miles east of Stanley, Idaho, and 18 miles west of Challis, Idaho, 1 mile off Idaho State Highway 75.



**Director's Notes:
Hope For The Future,
A Vision of The West**
by Jon Marvel

The recent expansion of Western Watersheds Project with the opening of offices in Wyoming, Montana and California is truly a hopeful sign for the West.

While the new WWP offices and our new employees are but a small brushstroke in the overall picture of western public lands, they are emblematic of how all of us can change the way Americans view public lands.

By drawing public and governmental attention to the importance of our public lands for the protection and restoration of natural systems, our new offices will bring the necessary debate about the future of the West to millions of new listeners.

This debate and discussion will change the received view of the West's public lands as unwanted places left over from the rush of European settlement into a new vision of these lands as the centerpiece of a wonderful possibility—the recovery and restoration of much of western North America.

If the 270 million acres of western public lands can be devoted to the conservation of natural systems and the recovery of native wildlife and fisheries, we can help create a model of change for how people can rightfully join with the natural world.

Such a model will be created not just by the hard, grinding work of fighting old ways of thinking but more fundamentally by showing that an even older way of human understanding of close kinship with the animals, plants, air and water of this place we call home is still possible.

While WWP will continue to use the powerful tools of scientific knowledge combined with the informed legal advocacy of our attorneys, it is only by bringing a much deeper and stronger idea of the interconnectedness of the natural world to other people that we will be able to change the future of the West for the better.

Our efforts to re-create this depth of understanding is made hopeful by the qualities and character of the people who take on the work of our new offices across the sweep of our western public lands. I welcome them and honor their commitment to help paint this vision of the West.

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

**Grazing rules ruse:
Deja vu all over again**

By John Carter

“Consultation, cooperation, and communication, all in the service of conservation.”

This is the new slogan adopted by the Bureau of Land Management under the Bush Administration to justify changes to regulations that govern livestock grazing on 160 million acres of our public lands. It's another semantic twist typical of the Bush camp to justify an opposite aim: to support efforts by livestock interests to obtain ownership and control of our public-lands.

The proposed changes would eliminate most opportunities for public involvement in grazing decisions. Livestock producers would be given water rights on public lands streams and ownership in structural facilities such as fences, pipelines and water developments while grazing their livestock at 10 percent of market rates for private land.

The net result of these proposed changes would be to effectively hand over control of our public lands to livestock producers and tie the hands of the BLM. (See the proposed rule at <http://www.blm.gov>) Western Watersheds Project has submitted detailed comments and analysis opposing these proposed rule changes.

This scheme is not new. In a series of articles for Harper's magazine in the 1940s, Bernard DeVoto documented actions to eliminate funding of the Forest Service and Grazing Service, the latter of which was formed to assist public lands grazers and protect the public interest after passage of the Taylor Grazing Act.

“When [the Grazing Service] took the latter purpose seriously it was emasculated and this year has been killed by Western members of Congress, under the leadership of Senator McCarran of Nevada,” DeVoto wrote.

The Grazing Service was merged with the General Land Office to form the BLM. McCarran then succeeded in getting the agency's appropriations reduced to the point where it could not perform the functions originally assigned to the Grazing Service, effectively preserving the monopoly of stockmen over public lands.

The American National Livestock Association, National Woolgrowers Association and their allies met in Salt Lake City in 1946 to develop a strategy to take over our public lands.

One goal of the group was the conversion of National Forest and Taylor Act (BLM) lands grazing privileges that were



The Owyhees, ID
photo©Katie Fite

subject to regulation into a “vested right guaranteed them and subject to only such regulation as they may impose on themselves.”

Another goal was the distribution of all potential National Forest and Taylor Act grazing lands to individual states before dispensing them to stockmen through private sales. The common price suggested for stockmen to purchase these lands was 10 cents an acre.

In the 1980s, the Reagan Administration was successful in doing away with the collection of scientific data on the biological communities of our public lands. As an ally of stockmen, the administration knew that this data could lead to a reduction in the numbers of sheep and cattle until they were in balance with the capacity of the land and needs of its wildlife.

Today we are subjected to BLM assessments of lands that claim streams and uplands are in properly functioning condition without a shred of scientific data to validate these claims. The damage to our lands, water and wildlife is documented by volumes of research, yet the BLM, on balance, continues to justify grazing practices that carry devastating consequences. As a defense against these pro-industry, anti-environment land managers and stockmen, quantitative monitoring data is essential.



The Reagan Administration also reorganized the BLM, decentralizing the agency’s scientific capabilities and destroying its cohesion. The administration attempted to change Department of Interior regulations to institute Cooperative Management Agreements. These agreements would have allowed stockmen to graze livestock on the public lands as they deemed appropriate.

Environmental organizations sued the BLM, challenging the proposed rule changes. In 1985, U.S. District Court Judge Raul Ramirez ruled that “. . . Permittees must be kept under a sufficiently real threat of cancellation or modification in order to adequately protect the public lands from overgrazing or other forms of mismanagement . . . it is the public policy of the United States that the Secretary and the BLM, not the ranchers, shall retain final control and decision-making authority over livestock grazing practices on the public land.”

The grazing changes proposed by the Bush Administration are intended to further compromise the authority of the BLM and hand out more power to livestock producers.

In overturning the Reagan Administration’s proposed changes to BLM rules, Ramirez also wrote: “From the mid-nineteenth century until 1934, when Congress first enacted comprehensive legislation regulating rangeland management, the key battles over the public lands were between ranchers, who sought to monopolize the range for their own uses, and homesteaders, nomadic herders and a few government



photo©Miriam Austin

A cow drinks from a trough filled with dead birds on an Idaho grazing allotment

officials, who struggled to keep the public lands open and available to all comers. The frontier attitudes of western ranchers made the western cattle industry firmly opposed to legal regulation.”

Clearly, Ramirez understood the history of stockmen’s attempts to control public lands for their own benefit. Meanwhile, back at the ranch 20 years later, the Bush Administration is pursuing the same course as the Reagan camp, with greater ferocity and wholesale disregard for the environment.

Given this scenario, with history to substantiate it, why should any reasonable American citizen be expected to go along with the new mantra in Washington, when these words are merely cover for turning back the clock to a time when stockmen ruled the land and conservation was considered a waste of forage?

With its proposed new grazing regulations, the Bush Administration wants to perpetuate the industrialization of our public lands, using failed techniques in an effort to deny the realities of excessive livestock grazing. If it succeeds, our public lands will be ravaged and our wildlife lost at an even greater rate — all “in the service of conservation.”

**John Carter is Utah director of WWP.
He lives in Mendon, Utah.**



WWP Member Meeting & Board Meeting

The annual meeting for WWP members will commence at 11 a.m. May 1 at Greenfire Preserve. The WWP board meeting will follow after a break for lunch.

Greenfire Revival IV

WWP’s Greenfire Revival IV will be held Sept. 17-19, 2004. Each year the event draws more participants and delivers more activities and entertainment. September is a spectacular time of the year to visit WWP’s Greenfire Preserve along the East Fork of the Salmon River. Mark your calendars. We look forward to seeing you there.



Report From Montana

By Glenn Hockett

Getting wired: Western Watersheds Project board secretary-treasurer Gene Bray made the trip to WWP's Bozeman office from Boise in February and devoted the better part of a week to setting up a new computer system for me. I'm now equipped with a refurbished scanner, new laser color printer, flat-screen monitor, storage system, GPS unit, digital camera, Gateway computer with CD burner, as well as a new e-mail and mapping program to learn. Thank you, Gene, for all your hard work and dedication in making the Montana office efficient and thoroughly up-to-date.

Bighorn sheep: How many viable populations of bighorn sheep are there in southwestern Montana? How much hunting opportunity was available to the public in 2003? What is a bighorn sheep worth? These are a few of the questions I posed to the Bureau of Land Management's Western Montana Resource Advisory Council when they convened a meeting Feb. 19 in Missoula. This was my first official meeting with the RAC, and I believe the opportunity was well worth the trip from Bozeman. I introduced WWP and the Gallatin Wildlife Association to this important BLM advisory board. I intend to develop a long-term working relationship with this RAC.

The Western Montana RAC is an appointed, citizen advisory board serving the Missoula, Butte and Dillon field offices of the BLM. Most of my work has focused on public lands under the supervision of the Dillon field office. The office is currently developing a Resource Management Plan, the BLM's equivalent to a U.S. Forest Service Plan.

It is the opportunity for both the BLM and the interested public to think big.

Bighorn sheep need people to think big. These magnificent animals, once numbering in the millions throughout the Rocky Mountain region (1.5 million to 2 million estimated), have declined dramatically to about 2 percent of their historic population levels (about 40,000 individuals). Remaining populations are imperiled, surviving in small fragmented herds. I will be working to restore these monarchs to the mountains of southwestern Montana. WWP Wyoming director Jonathan Ratner and I will be evaluating the challenges and opportunities to restore bighorn sheep across their historic range.

Wild bison: The last remaining wild bison herd has begun its annual migration to winter ranges surrounding Yellowstone National Park. However, instead of being allowed access to the peaceful bunchgrasses that flourish on the southern slopes and valleys of Greater Yellowstone near Gardiner, Montana,

these animals are encountered by government agents acting on behalf of the livestock industry. Hazed, harassed and eventually corralled into makeshift livestock-handling facilities constructed at the Stephens Creek capture site within Yellowstone National Park, these incredible animals have been relegated to inhumane treatment in an atmosphere of hysteria. If they test sero-positive for exposure to *Brucella abortus*, the bacteria that can cause brucellosis, their fate is a trip in a crowded stock truck to a closed-door slaughterhouse where killings are carried out. America's icon, the wild buffalo, slaughtered and hanging on a bloody meat hook, courtesy of the National Park Service and the Montana Department of Livestock.

It is important to understand that exposure to the disease is not the same as infection. In fact, many of these "sero-positive" animals may indeed be the most genetically resistant to the disease. Nor has it ever been demonstrated in the field that bison transmit brucellosis to cattle. Why, then, are we eradicating these animals in our national parks when their

winter ranges on Forest Service and state-owned Wildlife Management Areas lie just to the north in Montana?

I toured the Stephens Creek capture facility on Feb. 24 to observe this atrocity first-hand. My commitment to reverse this unnecessary and unbelievable boondoggle of native buffalo harassment, confinement, testing and slaughtering has been branded into my soul. I urge you to engage your political representatives on the wild bison management issue and hold them accountable for

their position and their decision to solve this livestock-induced nightmare within the boundaries of Yellowstone National Park.

Appeals and protests: I appealed, unsuccessfully, the decision by Madison District Ranger Mark Petroni in Ennis, Montana (406-682-4253) to dedicate approximately 48,000 acres of public land in the Antelope Basin-Elk Lake area near the boundary of Yellowstone National Park to stock tanks, pipelines, barbed-wire fences and domestic cattle. The denial of our appeal is being reviewed by our legal team as Petroni failed to address the significant environmental consequences of his decision. Petroni also failed to review reasonable alternatives to more domestic cows, more stock tanks, more pipelines, more barbed-wire fences and more costs on this otherwise pristine and wild landscape.

I also protested a decision by BLM Butte Field Manager Rick Hotaling to trench pipelines and construct livestock watering troughs on prime bighorn sheep habitat in the southwestern Highlands. This action is pending, and I have scheduled a meeting with BLM to discuss this and other matters related to livestock management in the area.



Buffalo injured at Stephens Creek capture site

**Glenn Hockett is Montana director of WWP
He lives in Bozeman, Montana**



Biodiversity Bulletin

By Katie Fite

Those of us who work on issues involving public lands grazing are driven by an awareness of its myriad impacts on wild lands and wildlife. With each passing grazing episode, more soils erode, more weeds move in, more beauty and biodiversity are lost.

We work to limit livestock harms as best we can through participation in agency processes, public education and litigation. Our hope is that livestock will be removed from public lands before too much more habitat is lost, and too many more weed invasions or destructive livestock projects are built. Once livestock are gone, the work on restoration, too, will be immense.

Meanwhile, threats to public lands intercede and must be dealt with if populations of sage grouse and other wildlife that we seek to protect are to persist. A new and unexpected threat to the wild lands of the sagebrush sea comes from an industry that should know better.

Wind energy is clean and can be environmentally friendly. However, two potential wind developments in Idaho, if built, will show a dark and destructive side to this industry in the interior West. These projects on Bureau of Land Management lands are located in the heart of critical sage grouse habitat and other important wildlife habitats.

BLM has authorized the placement of wind sampling towers in Browns Bench, a lovely, high-sagebrush, old-growth mountain mahogany and aspen-pocketed ridge just west of Salmon Falls Reservoir. Besides being the most important place for long-term persistence of sage grouse in the entire 1.5 million acres of Jarbidge BLM lands, there is a known density of nesting raptors in the scenic high cliffs that cap red rhyolite side canyons of this high plateau. Migratory songbirds abound.

Concerns over any wind development here are so great that even BLM's Lower Snake River District Resource Advisory Council wrote to BLM director Kathleen Clarke opposing placement of wind sampling towers, a foot in the door to future development of a massive wind farm. Yet, the wind energy company, instead of listening to an outpouring of public concern, has arrogantly and aggressively pursued an exclusive right-of-way at Browns Bench.

The energy-crazed BLM under the Bush Administration approved placement of 160-foot-tall sampling towers, ignoring its own RAC. Roads, power lines and other infrastructure here will doom sage grouse now inhabiting the area. Tall, vertical structures are anathema to sage grouse, sharp-tails and other grouse that evolved in open, treeless landscapes.

On Cotterell Mountain near Burley, placement of sampling towers occurred in a closed-door process and was approved by the BLM without any public involvement. Although the sampling is not finished, the energy company is preparing an EIS for development of a large wind farm. There are serious concerns about the impact of this project, too, on sage grouse and other wildlife.

There is no mitigation other than avoidance - don't do it! - for the impacts of wind farm development on wildlife at either of these sites.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service guidelines stress the importance of appropriate sites for wind facilities. Turbines are not to be placed in documented locations of species protected under the Endangered Species Act. (A petition to list sage grouse has been filed.) Fragmenting large blocks of continuous habitat is to be avoided.

The wind energy companies pushing these projects claim to be environmentally friendly. If that is the case, they must know Idaho has abundant alternative sites for wind energy facilities. Many areas on the margin of the Snake River Plain are sufficiently windy, fragmented with roads and development and infested with weeds. They have minimal wildlife values. Yet, instead of pursuing development in these areas, energy companies are greedily seeking sites with the most wind: high, remote ridges that are refuge for wildlife with little other habitat left.

Responsible wind energy development in the interior West must be based on the appropriate siting of wind facilities. Otherwise, we stand to lose sage grouse and sharp-tailed grouse populations, already beleaguered by livestock grazing and other factors, and untold numbers of hawks, eagles and migratory birds.

WWP and Idaho Bird Hunters have appealed the right-of-way for placement of the wind towers on Browns Bench. BLM's internal appeals court has denied our petition for stay. We can only hope that the wind energy industry polices itself, before public concern over these projects escalates and the industry makes two big mistakes.

***Katie Fite is WWP's Biodiversity Director
She lives in Boise, Idaho***



Wind energy development threatens sage grouse



Report From Wyoming

By Jonathan Ratner

The opening of the Wyoming office is already bearing fruit, and it is rewarding to see the impact Western Watersheds Project is having on public lands issues here in Wyoming.

Major progress has been made in the case of renegade rancher Frank Robbins and the Worland office of the Bureau of Land Management. WWP's legal pressure has inspired the BLM to void the settlement between the agency and Robbins, which we contended was illegal. Furthermore, Robbins has filed for non-use of his grazing allotments for the 2004 season and is in the process of selling off his cattle herd.

WWP is working with the BLM on a resolution of the remaining issues, but the latest development is a major breakthrough and a wake-up call for recalcitrant ranchers and compromising agencies.

Our Wyoming Range Allotment Complex issue is also progressing. You may recall that this perverse proposal would expand rather than reduce domestic sheep grazing on the allotment, thereby threatening to wipe out more than 25 percent of the remaining Colorado River cutthroat trout population in Wyoming and kill off the Jackson bighorn sheep herd.



photo©
Idaho Fish & Game

WWP's efforts to shine a spotlight on this project are starting to pay off. We have noted in bold for the district ranger, forest supervisor and regional forester the gamut of range laws and regulations that this proposal violates. Consequently, the authorities are much more eager to consider an allotment buyout as an alternative to the courtroom. We are working with a committed crew at Earthjustice Legal Defense Fund that is ready to take legal action with us in the event that a buyout does not occur.

We have deepened our working relationships with agency personnel who are tired of witnessing illegal and destructive activities forced on our public lands. This spring we will greatly expand this network with an "whistleblower" mailing to each and every employee of the BLM and U.S. Forest Service in Wyoming.

We are preparing for a busy spring and summer of research and data collection to provide a strong foundation for our fall and winter legal strategy. Before June 1 we need to raise \$12,500 to pay for summer interns, equipment, supplies, lab fees and other costs.

**Jonathan Ratner is Wyoming director of WWP.
He lives in Pinedale, Wyoming.**



Report from Utah

By John Carter

In late February, we completed detailed analysis and comments on proposed changes to the regulations governing livestock grazing on Bureau of Land Management lands. The proposed changes directly affect nearly 200 million acres of public lands.

The draft environmental impact statement produced by the BLM to justify these changes lacks scientific credibility. To counter this smokescreen, we supplied a detailed review of science applicable to the issues and submitted hundreds of pages of documents to ensure that the BLM has the best available science for its final decision.

Efforts continue toward a settlement of our lawsuit on 1.5 million acres of BLM land in northern Utah. Positive results have already occurred; our suit has prompted the BLM to prepare a revised land use plan for Rich County. With pygmy rabbits, sage grouse, pronghorn, Bonneville cutthroat trout and other wildlife at stake, we are negotiating to ensure that the best available science is also used in this planning effort, and that current conditions of the land are used to determine livestock management.

We continue to focus on national forest management in the Bear River Range of Idaho and Utah. This mountain range is the only high-elevation forested corridor connecting the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and northern Rockies to the southern Rockies. It is an important migration corridor to maintain species viability and genetic diversity. The Bear River Range is heavily damaged and altered by logging, livestock grazing and fire suppression. In the past year, wolves have been migrating into Utah from Idaho, and this range provides an important route for their re-establishment in Utah. The area remains under assault by U.S. Forest Service projects.

One such project, the Bear Hodges Timber Sale, has logged mature and old-growth fir and spruce trees on 2,000 acres. Two years ago we defeated the project because the Forest Service had not done the required monitoring of its Management Indicator Species of birds and mammals to show their population viability was being protected. Rather than perform this monitoring, the agency in their newly revised Forest Plan for the Wasatch-Cache National Forest simply removed the Management Indicator Species.

In the same area, the Forest Service proposed to renew livestock grazing in the North Rich Allotment covering 27,000 acres across the top of the Bear River Range. The EIS indicated loss of plant communities, soil erosion and various other problems. Based on our own monitoring and the agency's data, we determined that its proposal would result in the consumption of all available forage on the allotment.

We have embarked on a mapping project and capacity analysis (in collaboration with the Wild Utah Project) using historical Forest Service data to show that the allotment is unsuitable for grazing.

**John Carter is Utah director of WWP.
He lives in Mendon, Utah.**



Report from Greenfire

By Stew Churchwell

It seems like a kind of oxymoron to describe uneventful days as the time of one's life. Nevertheless, this is the case at Greenfire, where the commonplace is extraordinary.

I don't take anything here for granted. I'm fortunate to spend every day in a place with qualities that many people wrap whole vacations around. A herd of 100 elk, 40 deer and five wild horses wintered in the fields of the preserve. That alone is enough to excite any wildlife lover. It makes each day at work an adventure for me, and prying me away from the spotting scope is sometimes difficult.

Aside from the ho-hum days of spectacular scenery and abundant wildlife, it never fails that each season at Greenfire presents at least one special treat ... a cherry center hidden inside that "ain't nature grand" creamy chocolate coating. This winter was no exception.

I wish I could say that I saw the cats. But alas, that has not happened -- yet. Nevertheless, this winter's cherry center was two cougars that walked down the road to the old homestead, continued right into my yard and came within four feet of my bedroom window. This all took place at night while I was asleep. But in the morning, two inches of fresh snow held the unquestionable evidence.

One mountain lion on the preserve would be thrilling enough, but the thought of a mated pair and the potential for a litter of kittens in the canyon across the river is spine-tingling -- a once-in-a-lifetime wildlife viewing event.

As I write, two bald eagles are cavorting over the river in full view from my office window. The eagles aren't as elusive as the lions; perhaps this is a mated pair that will produce young for visitors to watch this spring.

On the restoration front, three projects are moving forward as spring nears. Grant money was secured this winter for an island stabilization project. The goal is to save an island in the East Fork that is rapidly washing away due to many years of heavy livestock grazing. There is a definite downside to the sediment the island is contributing to East Fork spawning beds, but this is not nearly as critical as the small side-channel that the island creates. The side-channel provides rare and important rearing habitat for salmon and steelhead in the East Fork. We will complete the island project before the spring runoff occurs.

Western Watersheds Project was also able to secure funds from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to establish 14 test plots. Using different soil and vegetation preparation techniques, these plots will be seeded and monitored within the spring planting



photo©Idaho Fish & Game

time frame. The test will show us which methods work best in this location. We will have the plots established and planted by early summer, and we hope to secure funds to repeat the tests in a fall planting.

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game will be funding another habitat improvement project this spring. The agency will provide plants and a power auger for a project that will establish trees and shrubs on the preserve. The work is an extension of last year's Wilderness Volunteer Project.

WWP board president Debra Ellers and WWP member Dale Grooms have once again assembled a group of Wilderness Volunteers to provide the labor for planting, and we fully expect this year's mission to be every bit as successful as last year's project was. The Wilderness Volunteers are scheduled to be at Greenfire May 9 through May 15.

The busy season is quickly approaching. Days will be longer, and there will be much work to get done. But the rewards will be abundant and increasingly apparent - more tangible than even a cougar's paw prints in the freshly fallen snow.

Stew Churchwell is central Idaho director and Greenfire Preserve manager for WWP. He lives at the preserve near Clayton, Idaho.



photo© Idaho Fish & Game

Cougars bring wildlife viewing to a new level at Greenfire



Report From California

By Todd Shuman

Beth Painter, Jane Baxter and I bit off quite a bit when we started the California office, but for good reason. We have a tradition to uphold. Western Watersheds Project has never been shy about taking on many issues simultaneously - thorny ones especially - in furthering the conservation cause. Beth Painter, Jane Baxter are of the same mind. We intend to apply WWP's progressive principles and approach in a state where great impacts can be achieved.



Western Watersheds: working to protect California Wilderness for future generations

And let's face it: The opening of an office in California couldn't have come at a more important time. A WWP presence in this state is absolutely essential if California's valuable natural resources on public lands are to survive the relentless assault of the Bush Administration.

To that end, Beth, Jane and I have just completed a 42-page appeal of the Giant Sequoia National Monument Management Plan FEIS and Record of Decision. We hope that our collective experience in range science and management will produce a compelling appeal.

I am finalizing an extensive FOIA that I will submit shortly to the regional Forest Service office concerning willow flycatchers, as well as meadow assessment and meadow monitoring issues. We have already started work on an appeal of the regional U.S. Forest Service decision to amend California national forest plans, a change that would

incorporate less-protective standards and guidelines for livestock grazing.

Field director Jane Baxter is preparing an upcoming Sequoia National Forest NEPA review of approximately 10 grazing allotments. Her WWP efforts are a great fit with her work for Range Watch, which has been featured on the McNeil Lehrer News Hour and in the PBS special "Sierra In Peril."

Biodiversity director Elizabeth Painter, a co-founder of the Sierra Nevada Alliance and a board director from 1993 to 1999, is developing a distinctly WWP response to current management approaches toward invasive exotic grasses on federal public lands here.

Collaboratively, we are also starting a region-wide monitoring project concerning the willow flycatcher and grazing-related NEPA reviews on Forest Service lands.

Our agenda is large. But so is California, and the state can ill-afford to maintain the status quo on public lands issues. While we are sympathetic with public lands ranchers who face economic difficulties due to conflicts with threatened native plants and wildlife, we will not hesitate to challenge the ranching lobby and its agency allies whenever their operations and plans wreak havoc on California's endangered natural heritage. I hope we'll be able to work with broad-minded public lands ranchers in the state to push forward the voluntary grazing permit buyout bills recently introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives.

If California intends to preserve its image as the Golden State, especially where public lands are concerned, we must effect a sea change with concerted, collaborative and decisive conservation action. Beth, Jane and I promise that WWP will be there to lead the way.

**Todd Shuman is California director of WWP.
He lives in Tehachapi, California.**



WWP Settles Idaho Land Board Lawsuit

After a year and a half of negotiations, WWP has settled its lawsuit against the Idaho Land Board over the 700-acre Sam Noble Springs grazing lease in the headwaters of Rock Creek in Owyhee County, Idaho. This site is the largest known hibernaculum in Idaho for Columbia Spotted Frogs, a species at risk across its limited western habitat.

Under the settlement, the Land Board and Idaho Department of Lands will lease the primary frog habitat (about 130 acres) to the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and exclude livestock from that area. Disagreements over the provision of water for livestock from the spring complex have been settled in a way that will protect lacustrine habitat, which has been severely degraded by cattle impacts.

Many thanks are due to WWP's biodiversity director Katie Fite and WWP attorney Laird Lucas for work on this issue. Special thanks go to WWP board member Gene Bray who has devoted years to preserving this important center of biodiversity in southwestern Idaho.



Plants and Grazing

By George Wuerthner

Part of the discussion at a recent Sierra Club Grazing Committee meeting that I attended centered on a pivotal question: Do plants "need" grazing?

Some people, notably holistic range management promoter Allan Savory, argue that plants require grazing to survive, lest they become "overmature" or "decadent." This kind of assertion provides a justification for livestock production, but it is not uniformly accepted by ecologists.

The effect of grazing on plants is somewhat like the effect of sunlight on people. Even small amounts of sunlight hurt the skin of all people. As a consequence, we all develop mechanisms that help us "tolerate" the sun. The usual defense against exposure is skin pigmentation. However, one must be careful not to conclude that such an adaptation means we "need" to expose ourselves routinely to the sun. Except for a very small need of vitamin D, which limited exposure to sunlight will supply, most of us are better off avoiding the sun, thereby decreasing our risk of skin cancer.

In a similar way, different grassland ecosystems have different degrees of susceptibility to herbivory. Grasses on the Great Plains, where herbivory pressure, historically, was greater, have developed more tolerance to grazing, just as people in the tropics have developed mechanisms to tolerate the strong tropical sunlight. Plants in the Great Basin or other areas where there were fewer herbivores are less tolerant.

Most plants have developed various mechanisms that allow them to tolerate or avoid herbivory pressure to some degree. Cactus have thorns to discourage browsing. Plants like sagebrush have chemical terpenes that make them unpalatable to many, but not all, species. Some grasses have awns to discourage grazing. Others have underground runners so they can spread in spite of grazing pressure.

What all of these adaptations suggest is that herbivory comes at a cost to the plant. Plants have developed all kinds of ways of dealing with that cost, but the adaptation is still a cost rather than a benefit.

When a grass plant is grazed, it sends a signal to the rest of the plant: Mayday! Mayday! I lost my photosynthetic material. A plant that loses its leaves cannot survive long since leaves produce the food that the plant requires.

What does the plant do? It translocates nutrients from other parts to sustain new growth of leaves. But the process does not happen without a cost. When nutrients are taken from roots, the root system suffers and may even die in a prolonged drought. When nutrients are taken from seed development, fewer seeds are produced. These are real costs to the plant. The fact that some plants can tolerate herbivory pressure does not mean they should be grazed.

Many of the studies purporting to support the notion that grasslands need or benefit from livestock or other large herbivory pressure are narrowly defined and reflect economic not ecological interests. The measurement commonly employed in range studies is "above-ground biomass." When a plant is cropped, it produces new shoots so that it can continue to photosynthesize. This leads to greater amounts of above-ground biomass since new young shoots tend to grow at a faster rate than old shoots.

This is what happens in a forest when it is logged. A young tree grows faster than an old, or "decadent," tree. "Overmature" forests do not produce wood as fast as young, "healthy" growing forests. If you are a logger, this is an important economic consideration. If you are an ecologist, it is a consideration best avoided for the health of species that depend on old-growth forests.

New shoots that develop after a plant is cropped are higher in nitrogen and other nutrients. If you are a rancher, new growth is better than "decadent, overmature" grasses because it supplies more of what cattle need to grow. But again, the new growth comes at a cost, especially if the plant is grazed more than once in a season. The overall biomass of a plant - root system included -- is often reduced when there is significant herbivory pressure. But because below-ground biomass is difficult to measure, most studies are content to document above-ground biomass, thereby presenting a biased perspective on the "benefits" of herbivory.

I remain unconvinced that grasslands - even on the Great Plains - require large herbivory pressure to remain viable. Many relict, ungrazed grassland sites I've visited - from the tops of buttes, sides of cliffs, highway and railroad right-of-ways, where native grasslands exist without significant herbivory pressure from cattle or bison - indicate quite clearly to me that Great Plains grasslands do not require herbivory pressure to thrive. I invite livestock producers and agency range managers to visit these sites and see for themselves.

George Wuerthner is a Western Watersheds Project advisory board member who lives in Richmond, Vermont.

Sawtooth Mountains, Idaho
photo©Rick Hobson





Western Watersheds Board Member Profile

Name: Louise Wagenknecht
WWP affiliation: Board member
Residence: Leadore, Idaho
Family: Husband Bob, mother Barbara, assorted imaginary friends.
Occupation: Writer and recovering sheep farmer

Other conservation affiliations: None. WWP is the only one you'll ever need!

Memorable conservation experience: Watching the incredible recovery of the riparian corridor on the East Fork of the Salmon River at WWP's Greenfire Preserve; seeing the wildlife living there in peace; the great sense of accomplishment helping to rebuild the roadside fence at Greenfire last fall. Looking forward to going at it again in April.

Other interests: Hand-spinning and knitting; bird-watching; movies; reading; wannabe policy wonk and unreconstructed political junkie.

Favorite places in the West: The Klamath Mountains of far northern California, where I was raised: ancient, mysterious, full of relict plant species, now home to a returned population of Roosevelt elk (largest deer in the world), and once and future habitat for gray wolves. A steep forested country, unfriendly to ATVs, where logging roads disappear beneath brush in a few years and where range cattle are few.

Western Oklahoma, where the souls of bison linger in ancient wallows. Fences, cattle, wheat, oil and gas wells, but also a world of botany and birds: buffalo grass, blue grama, little bluestem, sand bluestem, shinnery oak, sumac, poison ivy climbing up ancient cottonwoods, bobwhite quail, wild turkey, roadrunners, scissor-tailed flycatchers, cuckoos, cardinals. White-tailed deer in milo fields, rabbits, opossums, raccoons, bobcats, coyotes, foxes. Cottonmouth snakes in the roads and box turtles in my garden. Tracks of a cougar in a coulee on an abandoned homestead. Pipestone outcrops where descendants of Cheyenne warriors still come to find material for ceremonial pipes. Whole counties emptying out, losing people since 1930.

Yellowstone, that plateau of geologic wonders where elk cows calve beside parking lots while 20 tourists stand around taking pictures, where the meadows show the difference between the way domestic cattle graze and the way bison and elk graze. And now the wolves, feeding the grizzlies, keeping the elk on the move so that willows are returning to the riverbanks.

Finally, the mountains and rivers and sagebrush seas of central Idaho, where the aridity cured my bronchitis. Mountains so massive they create their own weather; sage grouse and antelope and horned larks, the surprise of a moose in the willows. A job as a range specialist and the knowledge, finally, that when it comes to cattle on public lands, agencies won't enforce the rules and ranchers won't follow them. Learning that we have traded an energy surplus (free rivers carrying wild salmon) for an energy sink (pouring out the



photo©Idaho Fish & Game

rivers for alfalfa to be fed to cows). This will not last; the only question is how long the salmon can wait.

Books recently read: *The Fellowship of the Ring*, by J.R.R. Tolkien (reading the trilogy for about the 20th time; it never gets old); *Finding Caruso* by Kim Barnes (a terrific first novel from a northern Idaho native); *The Great Transformation* by Karl Polanyi (one of the great works of political economy of the 20th century, analyzing the origin and deficiencies of the market system; highly relevant in an era of globalization.)

Quote to live by: from a bumper sticker I saw in Portland, Oregon: "Live Long and Die Out."

Three Wishes for the Planet: First: a human population stabilized at a much lower level, this to be achieved without mass starvation or disease. Second: 60 million bison roaming from Yellowstone to North Dakota to Oklahoma, with their complement of wolves, antelope, sage grouse and prairie hens. Third: all dams blocking fish migration removed, and the rivers of the Northern Hemisphere dark with migrating salmonids.



Join WWP for 2004 Wilderness Hikes

Western Watersheds Project biodiversity director Katie Fite is going hiking this spring and summer, and invites WWP members and others to come along.

The informal hikes are designed for recreation and instruction, to enjoy nature in its wild state and understand it in its mismanaged state.

Hikers must provide their own gear, meals and transportation.

April 25: Sheep Creek Rating:moderate-rugged

Celebrate Earth Day with a spring day hike into a scenic Wilderness Study Area in Sheep Creek country of the Owyhee-Bruneau Canyonlands. This area, grazed by billionaire public lands rancher J.R. Simplot, is threatened by "release" from WSA management under the Owyhee Initiative. Its release would open the door for new Simplot livestock projects in the heart of some of Idaho's most important sage grouse habitat. This will be a day hike, with the option to car-camp that evening.

May 29-31: Pole Creek Breaks Rating:rugged

Explore the labyrinthine, juniper-cloaked canyons of the Pole Creek Breaks, shared between Idaho and Oregon, in the Owyhee Canyonlands. The area is marked by ancient junipers and intricate, unmapped side canyons. Under the Owyhee Initiative, several little-known WSAs here are threatened with release to livestock development. This will be a three-day backpack trip, with opportunities to view lush canyon areas



photo©Katie Fite

Scene along the Jarbidge hike

brimming with chokecherries, willows and roses because they are inaccessible to livestock.

June 25-27: East Fork Jarbidge Riverrugged

An overnight backpack trip along a lush, ungrazed river in the Jarbidge Wilderness. This area, unlike many wilderness lands where status-quo grazing is allowed, has been livestock-free for many years. Mountain mahogany trees, cottonwoods and ungrazed blue-bunch wheatgrass abound in orange rhyolite canyons.

Car-camp the first night and begin hike the following morning. Group size limited.

If you're interested in joining Katie for the hikes, contact her at (208)385-7588 or katie@westernwatersheds.org.



WWP Appeals SNRA Decision

In November Western Watersheds Project and the Boulder-White Clouds Council filed an appeal of a U.S. Forest Service decision that supports continued grazing on the Sawtooth National Recreation Area in the East Fork of the Salmon River Valley. The appeal affects the Upper and Lower East Fork cattle allotments.

The Forest Service's decision, issued Sept. 30 by Sawtooth National Recreation Area Ranger Debora Cooper shortly before her departure for Alaska, will allow livestock grazing to resume at higher levels than those of the past three years once certain resource conditions are met.

The decision also clears the way for 15 miles of fencing at the 9000-foot level, at a cost to taxpayers of at least \$150,000, in order to keep cattle out of sensitive high elevation areas.

About 23,500 acres specified for permanent closure in the draft environmental impact statement would only be temporarily closed.

WWP also contends that the decision fails to assess the issue of "substantial impairment" of wolves by livestock on eight other allotments within the SNRA.

Despite the presence of wolves in the area, some 4,470 sheep and 2,500 cattle are allowed to graze on 28 Forest Service allotments in the SNRA.

WWP and the Boulder-White Clouds Council also maintain that the Forest Service's decision fails to give priority under the Organic Act to the remnant Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep on the Lower East Fork Allotment.

The White Cloud Bighorn Sheep herd may have as few as 37 individual members, a figure that reflects an 80 percent decline in population in the past 10 years, according to the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

WWP's Jon Marvel noted that the majority of the public's input on the draft environmental study was essentially ignored. Of 219 written comments, 130 supported the termination of livestock grazing through a four-year phase-out, and 65 recommended curtailed grazing. Only 17 supported ranching.

The appeal has been reviewed by Intermountain Region Forester Jack Troyer and remanded for further action.



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WWP Petitions to List Sage Grouse

In December Western Watersheds Project and 19 other conservation groups submitted a petition to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list the Greater Sage Grouse as “threatened” or “endangered” under the Endangered Species Act.

The species has suffered declines up to 80 percent over the past 20 years due to habitat loss. Today, the total sage grouse population is estimated at 8 percent of historic numbers.

Sage grouse dependence on vast areas of healthy sagebrush habitat makes them proverbial “canaries in a coal mine.” Wherever sage grouse struggle to survive, the landscape has suffered serious ecological damage.

The species’ historic range conforms to the distribution of sagebrush on the prairie sagebrush steppe (the “Sagebrush Sea”) covering parts of 16 western states and three Canadian provinces. Since 1900, however, the distribution of sage grouse has been greatly reduced. Sage grouse no longer occur in Arizona, British Columbia, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico and Oklahoma.

Remaining sage grouse populations suffer from habitat degradation caused by unsustainable livestock grazing and other causes. New threats such as increased energy development on the Rocky Mountain Front, persistent drought and the West Nile virus found in sage grouse in Montana and Wyoming threaten to reduce populations even more.

“The Bush Administration has prioritized resource extraction over conservation on public lands, which has increased the pressure on sage grouse populations now contending with West Nile disease, drought and all the hardships associated with degraded habitat,” said Mark Salvo, Grasslands and Deserts Advocate for American Lands Alliance.

Grants and Thanks

The board of directors of the Good Works Institute recently approved an extremely generous three-year funding commitment to Western Watersheds Project and our legal team, Advocates For The West. Funding commenced in January.

We owe great thanks to our legal counsel, Laird Lucas, who drew up the grant proposal, and his tireless team at Advocates. We are also deeply grateful to the Good Works Institute for its continued endorsement of our work through its generous funding. Thank you all.

Special thanks also go out to the Lazar Foundation for its \$5,000 contribution to support the work of WWP biodiversity director Katie Fite and to the Sperling Foundation for support of WWP’s California and Montana offices.

WWP extends special thanks to the following WWP supporters, each of whom contributed \$100 or more to our efforts since the last newsletter.

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WWP is honored to announce that Dr. Bruce Welch of the Forest Service's Intermountain Research Station in Utah has joined the WWP Advisory Board.

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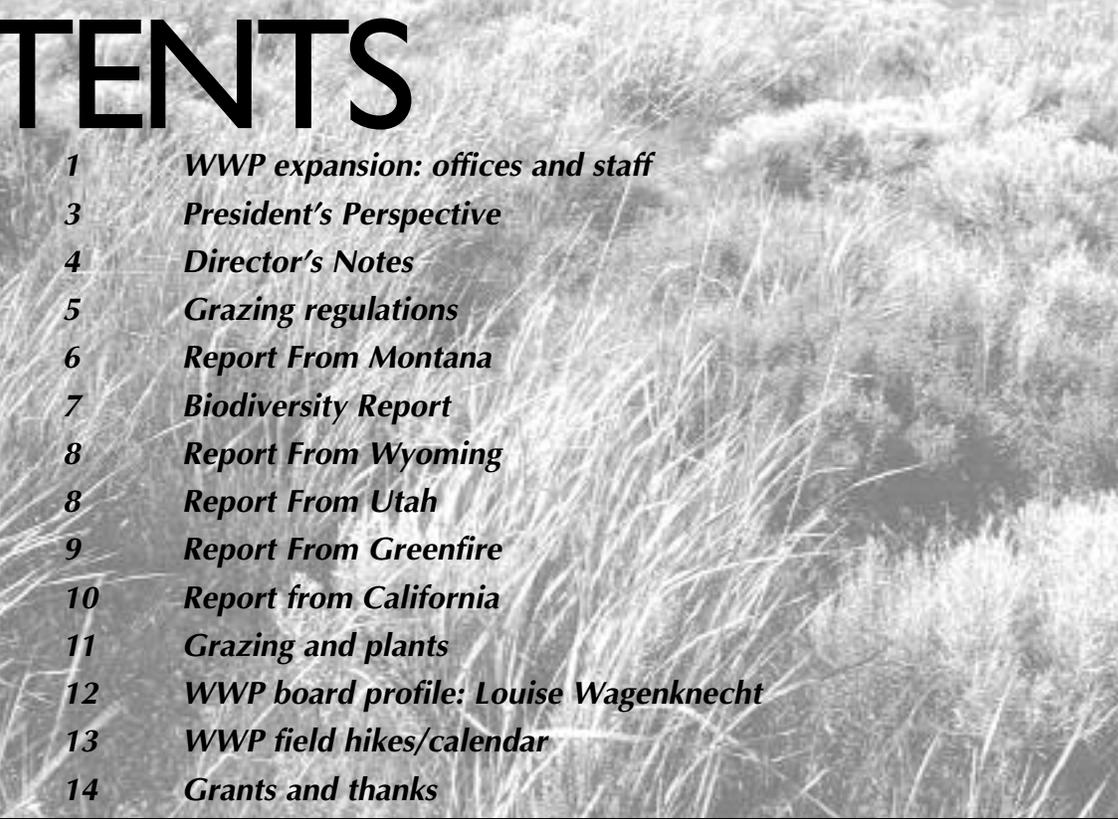
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^ Western Watersheds Project grows: With new headquarters in Hailey, Idaho, and a new office in California, WWP is poised to tackle crucial public lands issues throughout the West. (story, P. 1)