



# Watersheds Messenger

Vol. XIII, No. 3

Fall 2006

**Western  
Watersheds  
Project**

## **Cowboy Mentality Dominates Bison Slaughter**

by George Wuerthner

The continuing bison slaughter by the Montana Department of Livestock outside of Yellowstone National Park is a demonstration of the "cowboy" mentality the industry uses to address any problem. Instead of using its brains, it resorts to brute force. If left unchallenged, I believe the industry's harsh tactics pose a threat to free roaming wildlife everywhere.

When you review the facts, it is difficult to believe that minimizing the threat of brucellosis is really the motivating force behind the livestock industry's actions.

Reasonable options that could address their concerns about disease transmission are ignored in favor of deadly force. This can only be explained if the brucellosis issue is a Trojan Horse hiding another motive. Whether admitted, many in the livestock industry fear the expansion of wild bison outside of parks. Such an expansion of wild free roaming bison can only come at the expense of the livestock industry. The industry, realizing this threat, is attempting to construct a Berlin Wall around our parks, destroying any animals that wander from these sanctuaries.

There are several points to keep in mind. The threat of brucellosis transmission from wild free-roaming bison is grossly exaggerated. Most bison don't even have the disease.

Secondly, even if infected with brucellosis, transmission to livestock can only occur by contact with body fluids. In other words, brucellosis can be harbored in many parts of a bison's body and still not pose a threat to livestock. Thus even if a

*Please turn to Page 2*

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



*Bison roam through Northwest Wyoming.  
photo© Bruce Hayse*

## Continued from Page 1

bison tests positive for the disease, it may not pose a threat to livestock.

The only bison body fluids that pose a threat to livestock are those associated with birth or abortion. This alone means that even brucellosis infected bison wandering near cattle outside of the primary abortion or birth season don't pose a threat of infection at all. Yet this hasn't prevented agencies from killing them.

In addition, since only mature bison cows pose any threat of transmission, the killing of bison bulls makes no sense if your goal is mitigation of brucellosis transmission and only makes sense if control of bison is the ultimate goal.

Third, the brucella bacterium is extremely sensitive to things like heat, dehydration, and exposure to the environment. Even if a bison aborted a fetus it is unlikely the bacteria would remain viable (this is why the notion of wild free roaming bison not posing a threat is important). Under a laboratory situation you might be able to transmit brucellosis from bison to cattle, but that's like suggesting you could grow oranges in Montana under laboratory conditions. It's meaningless in the wild. No attempt to determine the real risks has been performed. The risk isn't zero, but it's darn close—essentially if other mitigation measures such as mandatory brucellosis vaccination for livestock and other measures were implemented.

Fourth, elk and other wildlife also carry the disease. And if brucellosis transmission were really as much a threat as the livestock agencies would have us believe, the target of control efforts should be elk, not bison.

There are far more elk in the Ecosystem than bison. Even if a lower proportion of elk carried the disease, their greater numbers and distribution poses a far greater potential threat. Yet the livestock agency ignores elk. Why? I think because ranchers do not view elk as great a competitor for forage as bison.

Fifth, snowmobile use and roads in the park has facilitated movement of bison, yet livestock agencies make no effort to restrict snowmobile use. If they were truly concerned about minimizing bison movement, they should be among the staunchest supporters of restrictions on snowmobile travel in the park. But they are silent.

Sixth, mandatory vaccination of all livestock in the region is still not required. A serious attempt to limit brucellosis transmission from wildlife should include such mandatory vaccination as a prerequisite.

Seventh, part of the problem rests with federal and state laws and regulations. For example, APHIS continues to suggest that if brucellosis is discovered among domestic animals, it will have no choice but to yank a state's brucellosis free status. Yet it does have a choice. They have the authority to restrict any quarantine to a much smaller area from a county to even a single herd. State livestock industries need not suffer merely because a single herd or a few herds contract the disease. The agencies don't readily admit this to the public because they want to create a crisis situation to justify their extreme actions.

Eighth, for a fraction of the funds currently expended on the capture and killing of bison, compensation fund could be created to assist ranchers whose livestock may contract the disease from wildlife



photos ©Buffalo Field Campaign  
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to pay for their extra expenses incurred by quarantine. Better yet, buying out of ranches in or near public lands where bison roam—such as the Church Universal Triumphant ranch near Gardiner, Montana and a few other strategically located ranches would go a long way towards removing any threat of livestock-bison contact.

When you consider all of these facts together, the current slaughter of bison is unnecessary and unjustified. It's time to question the cowboy mentality of brute force as a solution to any problem or conflict.



photo ©Buffalo Field Campaign

happened on it were trespassing. At that time, if the wildlife didn't have amusement value, they had no value at all. When I look back on those attitudes, I am appalled: How could anyone lack such basic compassion for wildlife? There I was—such a person.

Thinking how many children grow up only to lose the natural compassion and empathy they have for animals, I vowed that if ever had children, I would purposefully teach them compassion and empathy for all living things. Perhaps if I couldn't teach an entire generation the importance of compassion, I could at least

teach my own children. On the ranch, our true neighbors were those that lived in our midst; the western skinks, fence lizards, racers, rattlesnakes, bull snakes, mice, pack-rats, sagebrush lizards, pheasants, jackrabbits, pronghorn antelope and sage grouse. In the city, we have a different variety, but the lessons still stand. So in keeping with my promise, when my sons were young, I would take them on walks explaining to them the value of all life and the importance of respecting it. As the years went on and my boys got older, those lessons slowed. It seemed that the general grind of daily living replaced those walks and early lessons.

Last summer following a long overnight storm, my eldest son came in from playing outside. While he was taking off his hat and coat, he casually reported that he had taken a worm that had been on the sidewalk and placed it on some high ground after covering it with leaves. He was puzzled when I hugged him tightly. Perhaps there is hope for his generation, after all.

*Erin Anchustegui is a member of WWP's Board of Directors. She teaches philosophy at Boise State University, has a Ph. D in philosophy and does research in environmental ethics relating specifically to the works of Aldo Leopold.*

*George Wuerthner, co-editor of "Welfare Ranching: The Subsidized Destruction of the American West," is a Western Watersheds Project advisory board member who lives in Richmond, Vermont.*



### Regaining Life's Value by Erin Anchustegui

Having turned green several years ago, I sometimes hesitate to reveal that ranching had been a part of my life periodically during my childhood. After my parents' divorce, I'd visit my father's ranch near Shoshone Idaho in

the summers and sometimes around Christmas. No one lived there in those days, so my father, brother, and I would travel the old highway to spend some time there. When we got to the ranch, my brother, father and I would stay in a smelly barely standing cook shack that was built by my grandfather and was used to feed the shepherds in the old days. The cook shack had all the basic homely amenities; moldy smelly beds, an old dusty bathroom, abundant mouse-droppings, and a small kitchen. Somehow all of that didn't matter when we caught toads, played in the dry sage brush, and swam in the Little Wood River. It makes me cringe to think of what we did to the poor toads that had been so much fun to catch and look at—fat, lumpy and funny looking. We'd capture twenty to thirty of them, and pile them in old milk cartons only to leave them there all night long. Children will do such things, I tell myself now, to help alleviate the cringing. But, I wonder where was our natural empathy for it was foolish for us to expect the toads to be still alive by morning.

Back then, my father, brother and I had very little regard for the wildlife on or surrounding the ranch. We had been taught to revile them. My brother would take out a rifle and shoot whatever he could for target practice. He and I had been imbued with the idea that the land was our land and any wild animals that

**Western Watersheds Project** encourages all readers to support the Buffalo Field Campaign, working 365 days a year to save our only remaining herd of wild bison!

#### **Buffalo Field Campaign**

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## Investing in a Cultural Dream

By Lia Moore

Ranchers, like many agricultural workers, are subsidized by the government. We're told it's because it helps keep the cost of food down for the consumer. Farmers pay less for water and I get cheaper veggies. Ranchers graze in national forests and I get cheaper meat.

Except I don't. I've heard various things about how mismanaged and misplaced water is on many farms, and are a big part of the reason my Columbia River is so choked up with dams. Now I find out that my beef (which I haven't eaten in years, but it's still my tax dollars and somebody eats it) doesn't even come from these ranchers. It comes from the east coast and it comes from abroad. Most of my food comes from huge corporate monocultures, be it corn or beef. So the subsidies I'm paying for are for low meat-producing ranchers to tear up public land, treat cattle poorly, and barely scrape by for a living. Jon Marvel said that we, as tax payers, are basically paying for a lifestyle. If I were going to do that I might as well support starving actors – I have way more friends that want to do that for a living.

But the truth is, when I pay for ranchers, I'm not just supporting their lifestyle. I think I'm supporting mine too. Not me as a food consumer, but me as an American, as someone with the dream of wide open spaces in the West. I'm not alone; this seems to be a collective cultural lifestyle pervasive among people of the United States. I read it in John Fayhee's *Town Shopping* and I see a glimmer of it in every environmentalist. We want to know that there is someplace green. Or brown, depending on where it is

and what the definition of healthy is for a particular landscape. We want to know that we can quit our city jobs and live out on the grasslands for the weekend, for the summer, for the rest of our lives.

Jon said that ranchers have to be sick in the head to graze and degrade our lands, but it seems hard to only blame them for this when really, we all seem to be afflicted with the same hazy delusion of space. We want to live on their lands too. I would've signed up in a heartbeat to work on the Sun Ranch like Bryce Andrews. Our culture loves the idea of waking up on the rangeland and putting in a hard days work, of soaking up the beauty of the area. Ranchers give us a living example of what we could be too, were circumstances, geography, and mortgages different. If we could both live on the wide land and get paid for it we'd all jump for it, be it ranching, writing, restoration, or anything else we love to do. It is beyond Manifest Destiny. It is the legacy of space. We believe, however irrationally and subconsciously, that we can use the land because there is always more. Because there always has been.

Perhaps the ranchers' idea of space is no different from ours as we concrete our cities and look west, paying our taxes to help our dreams of more space stay alive. Maybe my desire to come in here and "fix" this place still stems from that, now that we've discovered that our ranch dreams have started to burst. Does this excuse the grazing problems at hand? Absolutely not. But we are victims – or perhaps, more appropriately consumers – of our culture, and are so no more or less than those that live here. Those that ranch here. I helped perpetuate the dream. And I still want to. Part of me wants to live out in Montana, even though I know full well that moving there will degrade it, just as it happened to Aspen, Jackson, and the next small town discovered that has a nice view, good hiking, or fantastic skiing.

*A new paradigm needed: Like these buildings, ranching in the west is dying.*





*Jon Marvel speaks to Lia's class  
photo ©Semester in the West*

We still want the romantic West, it lives in our hearts as we read Gretel Ehrlich, Terry Tempest Williams, and Ellen Meloy. We still want it at any length. Only now we've shifted the dream, now that we see ranching won't work for us any longer. We put our eggs in the wrong basket last time around. I can't fully blame the basket. So how do I tell this basket of ranchers that we've changed our minds and therefore they must change to fit my pleasure? Is it my dream versus theirs? Do I get to take the higher ground because I'm playing the Lorax and speaking for the trees (or sagebrush, as it were)? Because I woke up first from the dream, because I already ruined my land past restoration and they haven't yet?

The idea of public land makes it trickier. Who is the public? Who should be? I've never been to Nevada before in my life and now I, as a taxpayer, apparently should have the authority to tell these people what they can and cannot do? Me, with all the resources and votes from the more populated coasts? Me, who let the rancher carry my romantic vision of open space? Me, who was not here, on the land, helping out or noticing the problem earlier, when this mess might have been more gradually altered in a slightly more amicable and collaborative way?

We can't ignore unsustainable practices like grazing and call it permissible just because it's a victim of our cultural machine, no more than forgive mechanized meat industries for simply being a product of capital. There is blame somehow, but also compassion, and the need to see the problems within ourselves as well. We still haven't woken up yet. There is no more land. There will be no more land. This is it.

*Lia Moore is from Portland, Oregon and is a sociology student at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington. She is spending the fall semester as one of the students in Professor Phil Brick's Semester in the West program. The Westies met WWP's executive director, Jon Marvel and Board president Kelley Weston in Elko County, Nevada in late September 2006 when Lia's essay was written.  
Article ©Lia Moore*



# Semester in the West

Whitman College's Semester in the West is an environmental studies semester in the field, exploring ecological, social, and aesthetic dimensions of the American West. It is a program designed for liberal arts students who want to get out into the field to meet the people who are shaping this beautiful and diverse region. It is a program for students who can think across traditional, disciplinary boundaries and who welcome adventure.

There are no specific major requirements for SITW, although it is oriented towards the Environmental Studies curriculum. SITW has had many environmental studies majors, but also students majoring in studio art, politics, economics, biology, and included others who were undecided. However, all students must be full-time students of Whitman

The NPR program *Day to Day* featured a story about the Whitman College Semester in the West program and Jon Marvel's two-day visit with them in Elko County, Nevada in late September 2006. You can access the broadcast at the NPR web site here:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6443120>

For more information on Semesters in the West, visit [www.semesterinthewest.org](http://www.semesterinthewest.org) online or email Program Director Phil Brick at [brick@whitman.edu](mailto:brick@whitman.edu).





## WWP News From The Frontlines

By Jon Marvel

Western Watersheds Project's legal and public lands administrative efforts, in concert with our attorneys at Advocates For The West in Boise (<http://www.advocateswest.org>),

continues to bring benefits to the west.

On September 25, 2006 Chief Judge B. Lynn Winmill issued a second injunction barring the implementation of the remainder of the Bureau of Land Management's proposed changes to public land grazing regulations affecting over 160,000,000 acres in eleven western states. Readers will recall that Judge Winmill first issued a partial injunction against these Bush administration's grazing regulations on August 11, 2006 as requested by WWP.

This enormous victory is especially notable for what the Court said in its decision:

In his Order (page 10) Judge Winmill states: *"This analysis shows that WWP has a strong likelihood of success on the merits concerning its challenge to the new regulations concerning the FRH (Fundamentals of Rangeland Health) and the ownership of range improvements. WWP has also shown a possibility of irreparable harm."*

Judge Winmill went on to say on to say on Page 11 of the Order: *"The Court also finds that the balance of the hardships tips decidedly toward WWP. The BLM advances no reason to immediately place these new regulations into effect. Given the lengthy course of BLM's development of these new regulations, there appears to be no urgent need for them. Finally, WWP is acting in the public interest."*

***Destruction is what remains, after "chaining."***  
photo ©Katie Fite



***A healthy pinyon forest provides habitat and forage for many species.***  
photo ©Katie Fite

WWP expects to prevail in this case, thereby blocking the BLM's efforts to undermine public involvement in the management of public lands and return rancher control to the west. Our able attorneys in this critically important litigation are Laird Lucas, Todd Tucci and Laurie Rule. Thanks to them all.

On Friday October 20, 2006 Western Watersheds Project was rewarded in federal District Court in Reno, Nevada when Judge Larry R. Hicks granted WWP's Motion and Ordered the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to immediately stop any activities associated with a massive chaining and burning project in Elko County on and near Spruce Mountain located about halfway between Wells and Ely. The Judge's Order was issued one day after a hearing was held at the federal courtroom in Reno.

The Spruce Mountain project proposed the chaining and burning of thousands of acres of native Pinyon-Juniper forests, including many old growth trees 200 to 400 years old, in order to increase forage for cattle. The BLM was also proposing to install a 90 mile water pipeline costing many hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Judge Hicks apparently was impressed with photographs provided to the Court by WWP's Biodiversity Director, Katie Fite, that showed the ancient trees that the BLM was proposing to chain and burn. You can see these photos at WWP's web site at this URL:

[http://www.westernwatersheds.org/news\\_media/newsmedia.html](http://www.westernwatersheds.org/news_media/newsmedia.html)

WWP is very ably represented in the Spruce Mountain BLM litigation by attorney Judi Brawer of Boise. Thanks Judi !

Finally, litigation filed in September on behalf of WWP by Advocates for the West attorney Laurie Rule against the Sawtooth and Boise National Forests in regard to three grazing decisions on four allotments affecting over 250,000 acres of public lands has resulted in the Forest Service withdrawing all three decisions in order to avoid WWP's compelling case.

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

# Trout Creek Recovery Set Back By Cattle Trespass

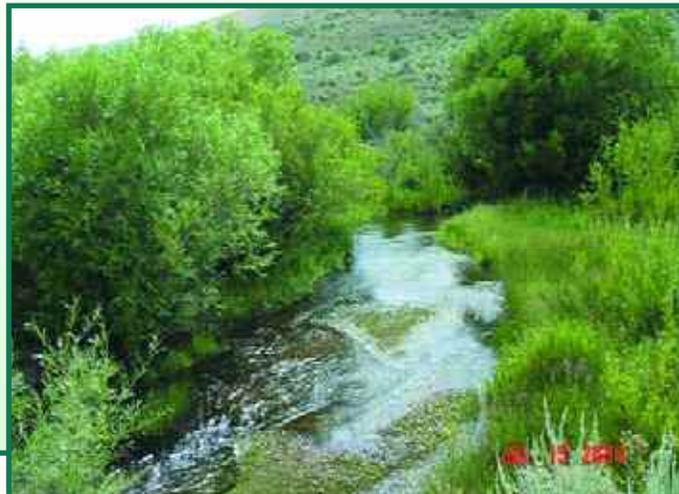
*Trout Creek rises in the South Hills of the Sawtooth National Forest and flows south into Nevada where it joins Goose Creek which flows on to the east into Utah and then back to the north into Idaho . The headwaters of Trout Creek provide habitat for one of the few remnant populations of native Yellowstone cutthroat trout in southern Idaho.*

*Trout Creek has been the center of management controversy over cattle grazing for many years. In the late 1980s the local Forest Service District Ranger, Don Oman, was threatened with having his throat cut by an Oakley, Idaho rancher. That story made the front page of the New York Times and a reproach from then President George H.W. Bush.*

*Since those days, under the direction of Don Oman, Trout Creek on the Sawtooth National Forest was partially fenced off from cattle use and recovery of the riparian area started. By July 2004 when the top photo of this essay were taken, riparian recovery was obvious to any visitor to Trout Creek.*

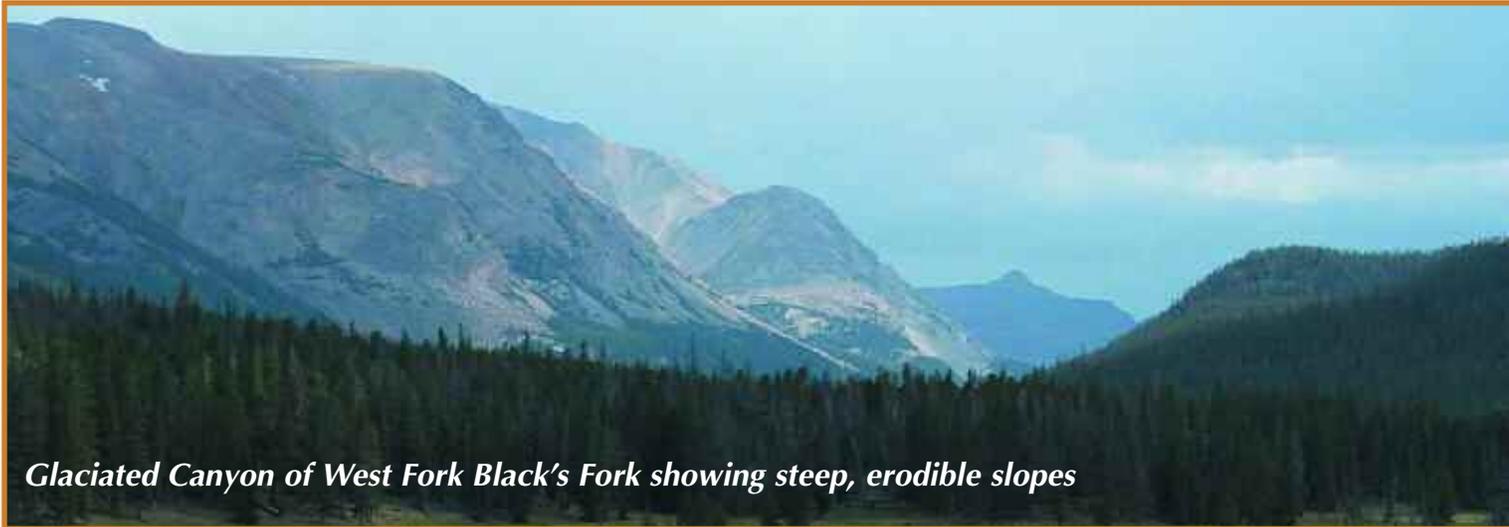
*Unfortunately, in the summer of 2006 hundreds of cattle belonging to an Oakley, Idaho rancher camped out for weeks inside the Trout Creek enclosure and created a wasteland setting back riparian recovery by a decade at least. The photos showing this extreme level of negative impacts by cattle were taken on September 27, 2006.*

*Western Watersheds Project is seeking accountability for both the Forest Service Minidoka Ranger District and the rancher so that this level of abuse never happens again in the Trout Creek watershed.*



*Photos(from top):*

- 1) Trout Creek in Recovery: 7/2004*
- 2) Trout Creek hammered by cattle: 9/2006*
- 3) Dying Cow adjacent to Trout Creek: 9/2006*
- 4) Cattle trashing Trout Creek: 9/2006*



*Glaciated Canyon of West Fork Black's Fork showing steep, erodible slopes*

*The West Fork Black's Fork is a 15,000 acre watershed that is grazed by thousands of sheep. Thousands more sheep are added each year. In 1998, a draft Environmental Assessment was issued authorizing these sheep to graze and trail through the area, even though previous work by the Forest Service indicated that this area would be easily damaged.*

*In the grazed watersheds we have found loose, eroding soil, depleted plant communities, lakes rapidly filling with sediment, loss of ground stabilizing vegetation in their watersheds and streams with trampled banks with an accompanying loss of habitat.*

*Poison, traps and snares placed for predators pose a threat to dogs and wildlife, a practice allowed even though it leaves dozens of sheep abandoned or unattended after each grazing season.*

*In September, 2006, the Forest Service released its decision to continue grazing sheep in the West Fork Black's Fork. Century-old logging activities and avalanches were blamed by the Forest Service for current degradations, while the sheep that use the area were excused from any causative relationships. Observations in ungrazed watersheds show that the claims are unethical attempts by the Forest Service to maintain the status quo.*

*Our analysis of the capability of the West Fork Black's Fork using the Forest Service's own criteria and data shows that the area would be viable for sheep grazing. Rather than comply with facts discovered by using their own criteria, the Forest Service redefined rules that have been in place for over 40 years, claiming over 3,000 acres were able to be grazed. Ignored were habitat needs for lynx, goshawk, bighorn sheep, deer and elk.*

*Sheep grazing the watershed each summer consumes forage equivalent to over 300,000 deer days. This massive removal by sheep is depleting the food base for wildlife to a massive degree. This was not addressed by the Forest Service.*

*WWP has filed a report and an appeal of this decision. You can view our report and photos at:  
Report: <http://www.box.net/public/3jz6achvif> • Maps: <http://www.box.net/public/og30tye>  
Photos: <http://www.box.net/public/ai96idzfog>*

## **Utah's West Fork Black's Fork Evidence of the Forest Service's**



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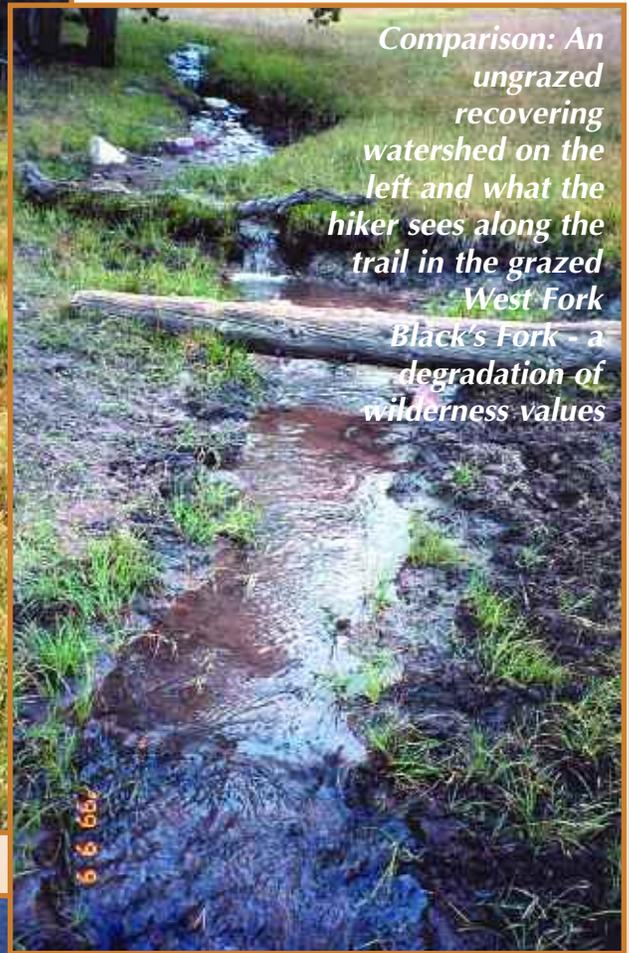
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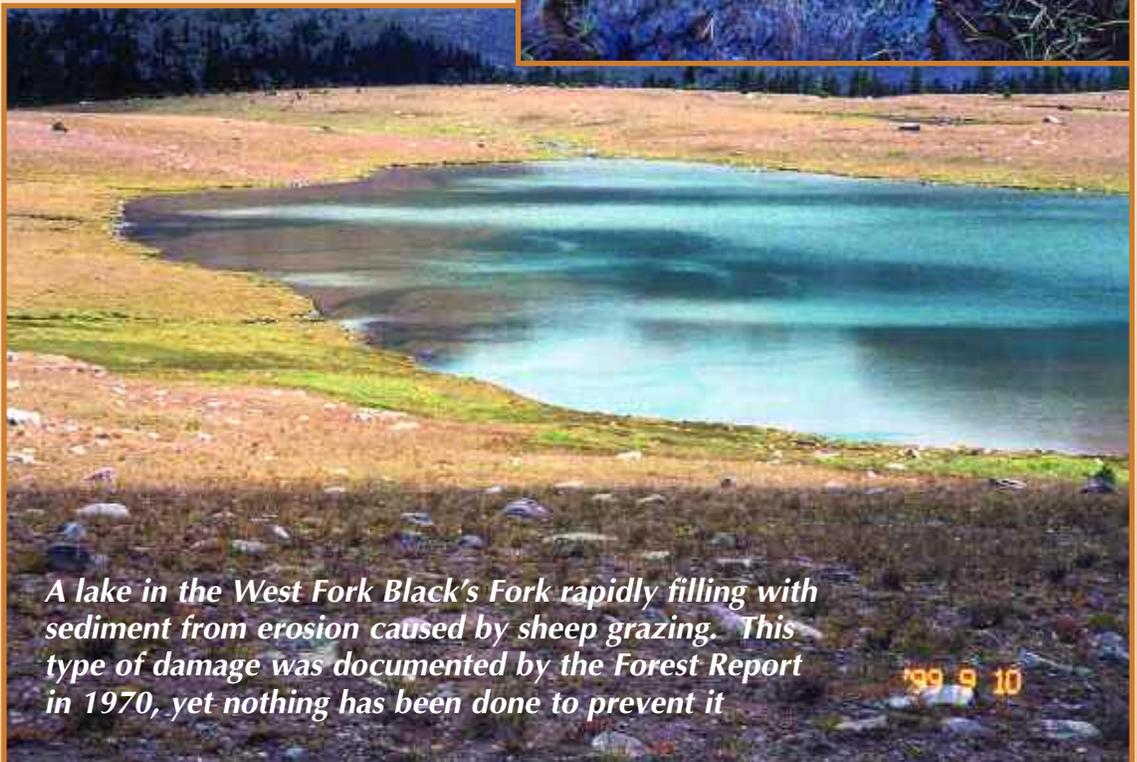
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online:  
[e2rk](#)



*Comparison: An ungrazed recovering watershed on the left and what the hiker sees along the trail in the grazed West Fork Black's Fork - a degradation of wilderness values*



*A lake in the West Fork Black's Fork rapidly filling with sediment from erosion caused by sheep grazing. This type of damage was documented by the Forest Report in 1970, yet nothing has been done to prevent it*

# **Fork: ervice's ongoing duplicity.**



## A Summer with Western Watersheds Project

By Erin Wetherley

The first day of my internship, I walked into the Boise WWP office with little idea of what to expect. I had no real experience with public lands issues, nor had I ever taken part in any type of advocacy. I grew up in Idaho, but I never wandered too far off the beaten path. I had seen cows on the side of the road, and had spent hours picking cheatgrass seeds out of my shoes, but I had no real knowledge of the issues I would face.

I knew I was in for some excitement when half the WWP email list advised me to start drinking coffee to keep up with my boss, Katie Fite. At the office, I read proposals for fencing projects, water developments, horse removals, and permit renewals. I spent hours trying to interpret agency maps that would have received D-minuses in any fourth grade geography class. I wrote comments and protests and letters. I made multiple copies of articles and documents— a tedious chore, but at least I wasn't the BLM intern who would have to read through them.

The real fun was the field work. Many days saw Katie and me trucking along back roads with her two dogs (read: double trouble). When Katie's car died one day, we drove across the back hills of Leadore, ID, in a rented minivan with six inches of clearance. I did my best to keep up with Katie on hikes, but I usually found myself bringing up the rear. As I huffed and puffed at 9,000 feet above sea level, I saw some of America's most beautiful country. I was even lucky enough to spot a few sage grouse. But more often than not, I saw landscapes where years of abuse and mismanagement

had taken a terrible toll. Golden hills from horizon to horizon may look beautiful until one realizes that the only living thing within miles is cheatgrass.

I learned a lot by observing interaction between science and government policy. The science was easy to grasp— herding heavy, water-guzzling, vegetation-munching animals through a fragile ecosystem has predictable effects. Most fascinating to me was watching science brushed aside to implement damaging policy, a feat which required constant creativity. From the Forest Service, I learned that there is little need to worry about erosion when cutting a road deep into a hillside— a steep bank of exposed soil is “stable.” The BLM informed me that gophers, not grazers, are to blame for spreading cheatgrass away from roadsides. And sheep ranchers really don't want to run sheep over steep, erodible valley walls, but those darn wolves keep chasing them up there. For every piece of irrefutable evidence pointing to abuse, there was always a colorful, hand-to-heart excuse.

Despite my adventures outdoors, the highlight of my internship was in a courtroom, where I watched WWP challenge the BLM's new grazing regulations. I admired the way lawyers from Advocates for the West cleverly used science to support their argument, instead of treating it as an embarrassing technicality. The success of the hearing was an encouraging end to a summer spent witnessing depressing behavior from people who know better. I came out of the internship grateful for organizations like Western Watersheds Project, which protect our most treasured natural resources.

And I'll never look at gophers the same way again.

*Erin Wetherley, of Boise, is a junior Environmental Studies major at Brown University in Providence, RI.*



*Erin Wetherley at the headwaters of Beaver Creek in the Sawtooth National Recreation Area - sheep grazing and trampling in fragile high elevations of the Sawtooth Mountain has stripped the slopes of protective cover, resulting in large-scale soil erosion and gullying. - photo© Katie Fite*



## Supporting Our Wyoming Efforts

by Jonathan Ratner

Our Wyoming Fall Fund Drive was a major success. To date we have raised nearly \$35,000 to support our work here in Wyoming for the rest of this year and into 2007. Our participation in Old Bill's Fun Run for Charities exceeded our expectations, doubling our total from 2005. This resounding support will allow us to greatly expand our water quality monitoring and other research projects in Teton County, Wyoming. In addition, because of this large increase in support through Old Bill's Fun Run this year, we are going to expand into Teton County, Idaho and take on a number of areas on the Caribou-Targhee National Forest in 2007. We are finding, in particular, that our water quality monitoring is 'resonating' with the Forest Service, the Department of Environmental Quality as well as Conservation Districts so we look forward to expanding our work with this. It seems that the prospect of a citizens group collecting water quality data under a state-approved Sampling and Analysis Plan (SAP) has many agency folks very concerned that they may have to start dealing with the factors contributing to the polluted waters we are finding nearly everywhere across the state.

Old Bill's Fun Run was such a success due to the support of great folks like the Sperling Foundation, the Earth Friends Wildlife Foundation, Dr. Bruce Hayse,

Mary and Clee Sealing, Emily and T. R. Shelby, Kathe Henry, Viesia and Jerry Kirk, Roxanne and Tom Factor and many others.

Special thanks go to Rick Flory and Lee Robert of the Earth Friends Wildlife Foundation who not only provide major financial support for our activities here in Wyoming, but provide leadership to strive harder, reach higher and make use of new principles to achieve our



funding goals. Our partnership with them has been very rewarding. We look forward to getting more and more accomplished under their inspiration.

A special thanks also goes to Gil Ordway who provided major support for our state-wide efforts. It is the dedicated support from great people like Gil and others that allows us to do the important work that we do, allows us to be the voice of the people who care about our public lands and the creatures who depend on these precious public lands.

*Jonathan Ratner is Wyoming director of WWP.  
He lives near Dubois, Wyoming.*

**Old Bill's Fun Run generated nearly \$19,000.00 for WWP.**  
photo ©  
Community Foundation of Jackson Hole





## Cow pies in Paradise: Observations From a Stream Monitor

By Ashley Wells

Driving up over Trail Creek Summit each Tuesday and Thursday, from the Sawtooth to the Challis

National Forest, I never quite knew what I would find. As the seasons changed from summer to fall I would experience warm, sunny weather with the golden leaves changing as fall set in, or snow covered hills on an icy morning. My experiences varied just as much as the weather did and each day was different.

Growing up in Idaho, I enjoyed attending the annual summer rodeos and embraced the idealistic view of the Western cowboy. I accepted ranching as a natural part of western culture and heritage and never really put much thought into it. Even after my first day as a Western Watersheds field monitor, I soon realized that I was naive about the cattle business and the destruction of public lands.

After graduating in June from the University of Denver, I was determined to get a job where I could apply my degree in Environmental Science. I signed on with the Western Watersheds Project in August 2006, and began doing field-monitoring work shortly thereafter. My assignment was to locate and monitor the streams and tributaries feeding into the Big Lost River, and to follow up on work that Nate Green did for WWP five years ago.



*Somewhat improving section of the East Fork of the Big Lost River in September 2006.  
photo ©WWP*

As a field monitor, I researched and collected data on 12 streams, took over 600 photographs, and catalogued all of my data into field notebooks. I used a G.P.S. device to find the watersheds and then locate the exact 11 points along the stream. The points were taken every tenth of a mile for one mile going upstream. At each waypoint I would note my coordinates, take photographs of the stream and report on the current condition of the stream. With this data, it would be possible to note the change, either an improvement or degradation, of the quality and condition of the watershed over a 5-year period.

The most shocking watershed I surveyed was the Lower Riparian Zone on the East Fork of The Big Lost River. This gorgeous area is known for its fly-fishing and incredible vantage point of the Pioneer Mountains. Designating the riparian zone is a sign that reads,



*Cattle crossing of the East Fork of the Big Lost River Dumps sediment into the stream, September 2006.  
photo ©WWP*

“Riparian Management... This 1200 acre riparian pasture...was made in 1986. Cattle graze intensely for short periods of time as they enter and leave Copper Basin”.

By definition, a riparian zone is the interface between a flowing body of water and land. Riparian zones are important, from an ecological standpoint, because they play an important role in soil conservation, the biodiversity of an area, and on the aquatic ecosystem itself. The sign, unfortunately, is an oxymoron and the intense cattle grazing on this area poses a very big problem for the riparian zone.

The most notable feature of the Lower Riparian Zone was the intense stench that emanated from the entire riparian area. The foul odor of cow excrement was notably concentrated. It is obvious that this area is in poor condition: the entire area was littered with fresh cow pies, the stream banks were severely trampled and eroded, and the surrounding vegetation had been over grazed. The collapsed banks, trampled cow paths, and fresh cow excrement make the Lower Riparian Zone an incredibly unsightly area.

The United States Department of Agriculture is charged with regulating and monitoring public lands and designates specific time allotments and areas where the cattle can and cannot graze. The U.S.D.A. publishes annual operating instructions for ranchers to follow that specifically identify when and where the cattle should be. This year, the cattle were only supposed to be on the Lower Riparian Zone for 5 days from October 1st until October 5th. When I monitored the stream on October 10th, the cattle were still using the riparian zone. I was surprised and saddened to observe that these guidelines are not only loosely followed, and apparently not enforced.

This experience has definitely opened my eyes to the impact of cattle grazing in the West, and I experienced first hand the damage that can occur with over grazing. There is definitely a range of conditions of the streams, and not all of them were as damaged as the Lower Riparian Zone on the East Fork of The Big Lost. Some streams look almost natural, and others are nearly beyond repair. Working with the WWP has been a rewarding experience. I very much enjoyed monitoring the streams and in the process I learned a great deal about the use and misuse of public lands.

*Ashley Wells is a 2006 graduate of the University of Denver in environmental science. A native of the Wood River Valley in central Idaho she is about to embark on a work and travel trip to Ecuador.*



## *Wedding at Greenfire*



Western Watersheds Project's Greenfire House and Preserve have become a popular place for family reunions and events. In August 2006 Kyla Bach and Mike Kauffman were married at the Greenfire Preserve House joined by an admiring group of family and friends.

On behalf all the WWP Board and Staff WWP extends our wish for their continued happiness to Kyla and Mike!

*Kyla and Mike's friends and family at their Greenfire wedding*





photos ©WWP

## Western Watersheds Project Welcomes Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Members Back To Their Historic Fishing Grounds

WWP welcomes members of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of Fort Hall to carry out their historic and culturally significant fishing practices on the East Fork of the Salmon River on the Greenfire Preserve. These photos are of members of the Tribe engaged in their traditional fishing techniques at Greenfire.



Early trappers and settlers reported the presence of Shoshone-Bannock people at the headwaters of the Salmon River and their techniques for harvesting fish in the Stanley Basin; "they subsist upon the flesh of elk, deer and bighorns and upon salmon.." In the early 1830s, the lower reaches of the Snake and its adjoining tributaries, the Boise, Payette, and Weiser to the east and the Owyhee, Malheur and Burnt to the west continued to be highly productive fisheries for the Shoshone-Bannock people. Historic descriptions indicate substantial yields, sophisticated techniques for harvesting fish and large scale efforts to preserve and store the catches for trade and for subsistence in off-seasons.

For more information on the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe, visit [www.shoshonebannocktribes.com](http://www.shoshonebannocktribes.com) online.

### 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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**^ The "cowboy way" is destroying some of the most majestic animals in the west. Worse, it's ingraining this philosophy in the young. (Story, Page 1) photo ©U.S.F.W.S.**