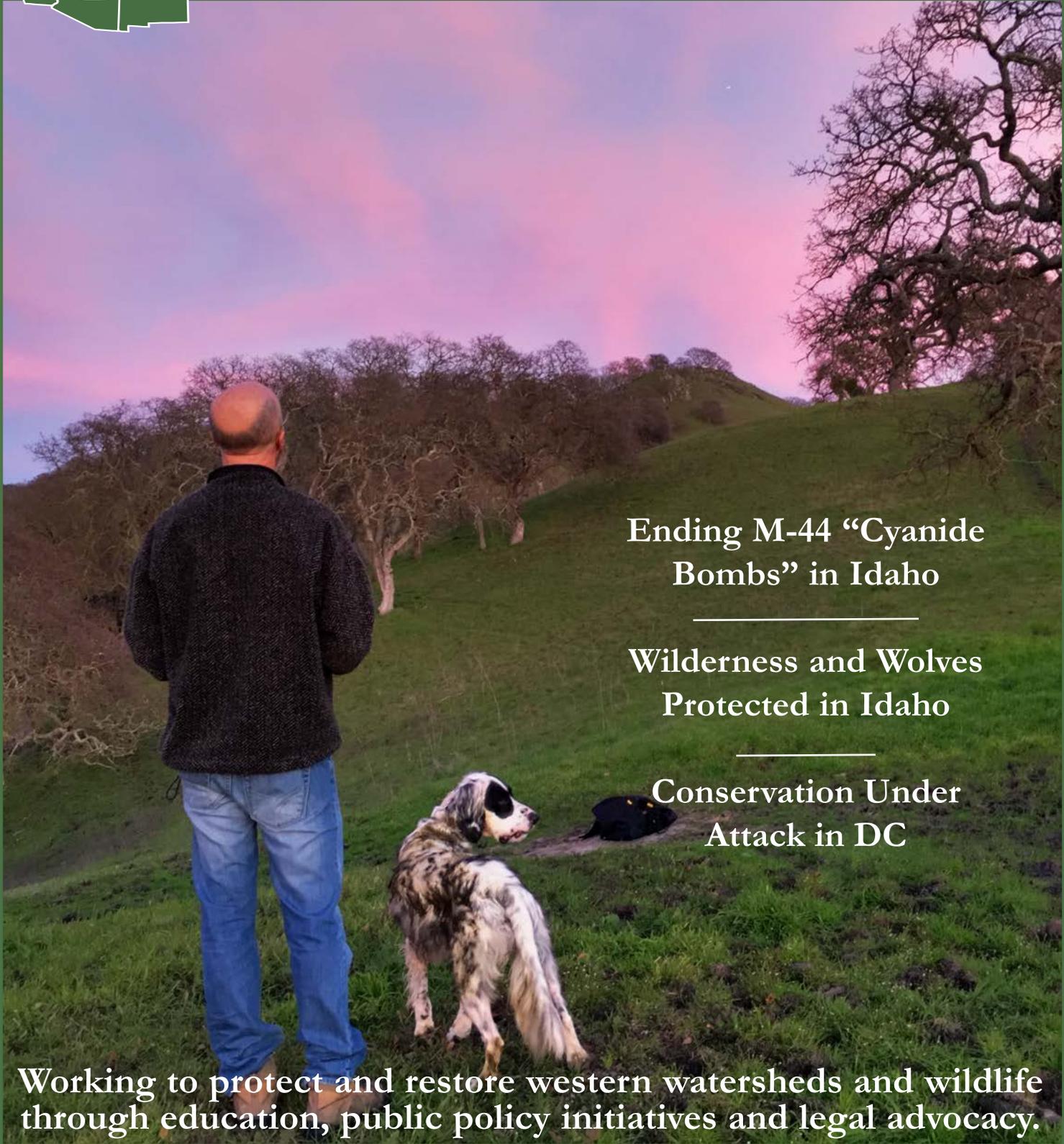




Western Watersheds Project MESSENGER

Vol. XXIV, No. 1

Spring 2017



Ending M-44 “Cyanide Bombs” in Idaho

Wilderness and Wolves Protected in Idaho

Conservation Under Attack in DC

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

www.westernwatersheds.org

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Ending M-44 “Cyanide Bombs” in Idaho

By Erik Molvar



When 14-year-old Canyon Mansfield took his dog for a walk near his house on the outskirts of Pocatello, Idaho in March, he had no idea that he

was walking into a minefield. But a federal agency misleadingly named “Wildlife Services” had set out a series of unmarked M-44 “cyanide bombs” less than a quarter mile from Canyon’s home. The wildlife-killing devices look like a sprinkler head, and when young Canyon bent down to investigate, one of them blew up in his face, spraying him with deadly sodium cyanide. The boy was hospitalized; his dog Casey got a fatal dose. It’s another tragic episode in a longer narrative of the unchecked and unsafe use of chemical weapons against wildlife at the behest of special interest industries.

The use of M-44s is part of a broader wildlife-killing campaign that spans the West. Wildlife Services sets out M-44s, baits laced with a poison known as ‘Compound 1080,’ conducts aerial gunning of coyotes, and sets traps and snares in an effort to kill off native predators to profit the livestock industry. In addition to being dangerous, M-44s are indiscriminate killers. Records from Wildlife Services itself indicate that M-44s have unintentionally killed bald eagles, ringtails, wolves, swift foxes, badgers, and bobcats in appalling numbers. The sodium cyanide in M-44s is strong enough that on several occasions, the devices have taken down 200-pound calves. Incidents like Canyon’s poisoning are unfortunately not rare; in fact accidental poisonings of people and pets happen every year.

At Western Watersheds Project, we



Beware of M-44s such as this when recreating on public lands.

believe that healthy native ecosystems need all of their natural elements, and that targeting predators for eradication is indefensible. We also believe that public lands should be safe for the public to use and we have been working for many years to end Wildlife Services’ wildlife killing programs. Last year, we pressed the Obama Administration to reinstate Richard Nixon’s 1972 Executive Order banning the use of M-44s and Compound 1080, a goal that fell by the wayside after the November election stunned administration officials into inaction. It remains our goal to ban these poisons nationally, permanently. But the recent incident in Pocatello incident galvanized WWP efforts to fight back on behalf of wildlife and public safety, and we quickly organized a team of conservation allies and animal welfare groups to plan a rapid response.

Even as our close allies at Predator Defense organized federal legislation to ban M-44s and Compound 1080 for good, Western Watersheds Project decided

to focus our contribution on a targeted effort to ban M-44s in Idaho. We used the Administrative Procedures Act to petition Wildlife Services, a process that triggers a legal requirement for the federal agency to provide a timely written response. We also demanded that Wildlife Services remove those weapons already deployed on the landscape, and then we used the media to promote understanding and awareness of the threats posed by Wildlife Services’ killing tools. Western Watersheds Project and the additional 19 conservation signatories to the petition generated major news hits across the country illuminating the issues with deadly chemicals being deployed on the lands where many of us – and our beloved pets – recreate and enjoy.

A week later, to everyone’s surprise, Wildlife Services capitulated. In a letter to WWP, the agency said, “WS has ceased all use of M-44 devices on all land ownerships in the State of Idaho. WS has also removed all M-44 devices deployed

© BROOKS FAHY, PREDATOR DEFENSE

on all land ownerships in Idaho.” It was a decisive (but perhaps only temporary) victory. Unfortunately, the agency only promised to inform WWP 30 days in advance if it uses the devices in the future, so we have no idea how long the prohibition of M-44s in the state will last. The battle persists.

Wildlife Services is a massive waste of tax dollars in pursuit of a dangerous, inhumane, and scientifically unsound goal. Coyote and wolf predation on domestic livestock is a negligible cause of livestock deaths, and the Wildlife Services’ program is ineffective. Despite the fact that Wildlife Services kills thou-

sands of coyotes every year, there are more coyotes in America today, and their population is more widespread, than at any point in history. Coyotes are smart, adaptable, and they are one of the few wildlife species well-suited to surviving alongside human development. When the livestock industry eradicated wolves and other large native carnivores in the West, the adaptable coyote expanded its range and increased in numbers. Wildlife Services’ techniques are deeply flawed and alarmingly dangerous.

Western Watersheds Project is supporting Rep. Peter DeFazio’s bill (H.R. 1817) to criminalize the use of M-44s

and Compound 1080 nationwide. More information about how you can support this effort can be found at www.predatordefense.org. And while this is a critical component of protecting wildlife and wild places, Wildlife Services should also be either terminated, or entirely repurposed to beneficial activities, like scaring birds away from airports or battling the invasion of non-native weeds. The federal agency’s war on wildlife must end.

Erik Molvar is WWP’s Executive Director. He lives in Laramie, WY.

Earlier this spring, Western Watersheds Project held an art auction to raise money for our work. Artists and conservationists have a common desire to see wild places that inspire us protected for all to enjoy.



Everyone at Western Watersheds Project greatly appreciates the generosity of the donations made to our auction and gives a heartfelt thank you to all of our contributors.

John Beeler • Nolina Burge • Will Caldwell • Glenn Carter • Dorothea Cheney • Tina Cole • Bill Collins
Colleen Friday • Margery Friedlander • June Glasson • Jineen Griffith • E.J. Harpham • Morgan Heim
Earth Wind and Fire Gallery of Laramie • Karen Jacobsen • Greg Jahn • Joy Keown • Robert Kirkwood • Jill Lear
Linda Lillegraven • Beth Magee • Ron Marquart • Don Oman • Noppadol Paothong • Ginna Parsons Lagergren
Karen Perry • Dave Perry • Wendy & Allen Pesky • Paul Potters • Donna Pritchard • Brent Rasmussen
Carlyn Ring • Mary Roberson • Deanna Schrell • Pamela Street • Adrienne Vetter • Martin Wilke • Peter Young

A Legacy Gift: How a WWP Supporter of Modest Means Made a Big Difference

Western Watersheds Project is able to continue fighting the good fight against livestock impacts on western public lands because of the generosity of our supporters. In March of this year, WWP received a gift of \$100,000 from long-time member Roberta Parry, thanks to an end-of-life bequest this hard-working environmentalist made as part of her will.

Roberta Parry's life was deeply intertwined with nature and environmental protection. After graduating from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, Roberta joined the Environmental Protection Agency. She became a leading professional in tackling the water quality problems caused by agricultural runoff across the nation, and a fierce advocate for environmental protection. As her career progressed, she developed especially strong views about the irresponsible use of natural resources in agriculture, extraction, and livestock grazing.

In her leisure time, Roberta was an avid and accomplished birder, identifying hundreds of species of birds in the field during her travels throughout the country.



Roberta Parry enjoying time outside with her dogs

She grew to love western landscapes and appreciate western watersheds, and closely followed the progress of wolves after they were reintroduced in the American West.

In 2015, Roberta was awarded a prestigious Norm Berg Legacy Award by the National Capital Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society in recognition of a distinguished career in protecting our nation's clean waters and for serving as an outstanding role model for young conservationists. This honor recognized Roberta's lifetime achievements as "one of the most effective voices and forces for conservation in Washington, D.C."

When it became clear that her life would be shorter than she had hoped,

Roberta made a provision in her will specifying that a portion of the sale of her home would go to support Western Watersheds Project's ongoing work to bring an end to livestock grazing abuses in the American West.

"Roberta would be quite happy knowing that she could still contribute toward a better world, a more sustainable world that has the humanity to share space and resources with its other inhabitants," said a close friend. "I hope that her spirit continues through the good that these funds enable."

Roberta Parry is a shining example of how to ensure lasting support for Western Watersheds Project and our efforts to protect and restore public lands, waters, and wildlife in the West.



Please join us at Western Watersheds Project's 2017 Board Meeting

Save the date for Saturday, June 10th. Please visit westernwatersheds.org/boardmeeting for more information on location and how to RSVP.

Bighorn Populations Imperiled by Sheep Grazing on Public Lands



By Melissa Cain

Wild bighorn sheep remain at less than 10% of estimated historic populations across the West despite decades of restoration efforts and hundreds

of translocation projects. They continue to experience disease outbreaks throughout the region, events that cause immediate all-age die-offs followed by years of low lamb survival. And yet, despite a preponderance of evidence demonstrating the devastating effects of bacterial diseases transmitted from domestic sheep to bighorn sheep, public lands management agencies continue to authorize domestic sheep grazing in bighorn habitat.

One such case can be found on the Snow Mesa allotments on the Rio Grande National Forest. A disease outbreak occurred here in the mid-1990s, killing bighorns in all four area herds, three of which continue to experience depressed lamb production even two decades later. The Forest Service acknowledges that recovery of these bighorn herds is unlikely, and that three of the four herds may die out entirely.

In 2014, the Forest Service proposed closing the Snow Mesa allotments to domestic sheep grazing to protect bighorn sheep. This proposal was supported by many conservation and sportsmen's organizations including Western Watersheds Project, Colorado Parks & Wildlife, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, the National Wildlife Federation, but Colorado Woolgrowers Association and the allotments' permittee opposed the pro-bighorn management proposal. The Forest Service acquiesced to the sheep operators, and instead pro-

posed an alternative that would reduce the amount of direct overlap between domestic sheep and bighorns, but that, nonetheless, still carries a high risk of contact between bighorn and domestic sheep: Forest Service models of contact show a high probability of new disease outbreaks occurring every 4 years.

The Forest Service acknowledges that recovery of these bighorn herds is unlikely, and that three of the four herds may die out entirely.

Instead of closure, the Forest Service proposal relies heavily on permittee diligence and compliance with Annual Operating Instructions to protect bighorns. However,

ongoing problems on the Snow Mesa allotments include trespass grazing on adjacent lands occupied by bighorns, multiple occasions where domestic sheep have been left behind when the main band has moved on, and one instance where 25 sheep were found roaming outside the allotments a month after the grazing season had ended. Further, the Forest Service is relying on both a highway and the Colorado River within the allotment to serve as barriers to bighorn movement and to keep them away from the domestic bands. Yet bighorns cross rivers, highways, fences, and other such features with ease. WWP and others have opposed this proposal, asserting that the discontinuation of sheep grazing in the area is necessary to protect bighorns. A final decision by the Forest Service is expected this summer.

The Greenhorn Mountains bighorn herd of Madison County, Montana, stand as another example of the Forest Service's ongoing prioritization of commercial grazing over native wildlife. Here, 69 bighorn sheep were reintroduced to a portion of their native range in the Gravelly/Snowcrest landscape in 2002 and 2003. No transplants have occurred since this time, and the population has struggled to expand. Several domestic sheep allotments between the reintroduced



Bighorn sheep in the Oregon Badlands Wilderness Study Area.

©PAUL RUPRECHT

Western Watersheds Project 2016 Annual Financial Report

Greenhorn herd and the closest extant bighorn herd, located in the Madison Range, prevent dispersal and genetic exchange among the bighorn populations. Inbreeding resulting from such isolation in the wild herds results in reduced fitness, reduced recruitment, and increased susceptibility to disease.

Prior to the reintroduction, the Forest Service, the BLM, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and the allotment permittees signed a closed-door agreement guaranteeing that the future presence of bighorn sheep would not preclude the use of the allotments for domestic sheep grazing. Following protests from Western Watersheds Project, Gallatin Wildlife Association, and others, the Forest Service was ordered to prepare an analysis of the effects of the agreements on bighorn sheep, and, in this analysis, the Forest Service concluded that the plan did not adversely impact bighorns. Their analysis did not utilize science-based modeling or any other quantitative assessment to assess the likelihood of bighorn contact with domestics on the allotments, and did not consider the genetic isolation resulting from the bighorns' limited range. Western Watersheds Project has demanded the Forest Service analyze the potential effects of inbreeding in the Greenhorn population and assess the likelihood of disease transmission through replicable, scientific methods in an updated EIS. We have also demanded the agreement be withdrawn.

These cases, and many others, demonstrate the critical work of conservationists advocating for wildlife security on public lands. Until the agencies cease prioritizing commercial uses over native species, advocates working to protect wildlife must fight to ensure such actions do not drive species toward extirpation or extinction.

Melissa Cain is WWP's Bighorn Habitat Protection Campaign Coordinator. She lives in Ketchum, ID.

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INCOME

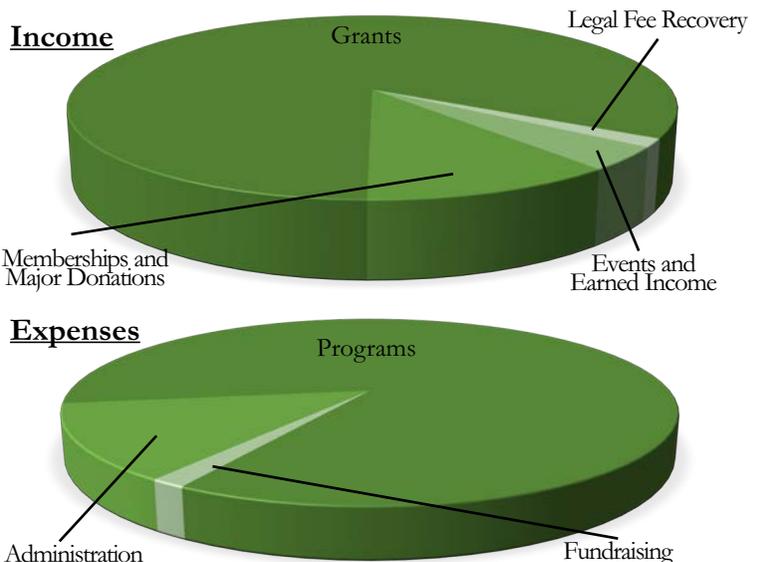
Memberships and Major Donors.....	81,800
Grants.....	597,100
Events and Earned Income.....	29,100
Legal Fee Recovery.....	10,500
Total Income.....	\$718,500

EXPENSES

Accounting.....	3,200
Donation Processing.....	2,000
Conferences and Meetings.....	4,800
Contract Services.....	49,000
Equipment Rental and Maintenance.....	4,200
Insurance.....	47,400
Legal.....	25,700
Occupancy.....	24,300
Payroll.....	431,200
Payroll Expenses.....	47,800
Postage and Shipping.....	4,000
Printing and Publications.....	76,300
Grazing Leases.....	400
Supplies.....	4,000
Telephone.....	7,000
Travel.....	41,400
Website.....	1,400
Total Expenses.....	\$774,100

Funding Shortfall..... \$55,600

*All figures rounded.



Western Watersheds Project Staff and



Deputy Director Greta Anderson protesting anti-wolf legislation at Senator Flake's office in Tucson, AZ.



WWP Executive Director Erik Molvar at the March for Science and Environment



WWP Attorney Paul Ruprecht protesting the slaughter of the Profanity Peak Wolf pack in Olympia, Washington



Energy Campaign Coordinator Kelly Fuller on a 78-degree day

Board Taking Part in Activist Events



PHOTO COURTESY TASTE OF SCIENCE DC

and delivering a speech at an event afterward in Washington, DC.



WWP Senior Attorney Kristin Ruether at the March for Science in Boise, ID.



8-mile protest along the path of a proposed transmission line.



Board Member Karen Perry, her husband Hank (right), and a friend at the March for Science in Berkeley, CA.

Welcome Kevin Mueller and Kelly Fuller

WWP hired Kevin Mueller as our new California Director in February. With family roots in Northern California, Kevin comes to us from the Intermountain West with 20 years of leading National Forest advocacy under his belt. From 2013 to 2016 he was WildEarth Guardians' Utah-Southern



Rockies Conservation Manager where he curbed logging and oil and gas developments across many intermountain and southwest national forests, particularly in Colorado. Kevin joined Guardians in 2013 via a merger with Utah Environmental Congress (UEC) in 2013. Kevin directed UEC's state-wide inventory of roadless areas on National Forests in Utah from 1999-2004. With 80,000 geo-referenced photo-points Kevin led the crafting of UEC's statewide National Forest Wilderness Proposal. From 2004 through 2013 Kevin served variously as UEC's Executive Director and Program Director, where he ran a state-wide Forest Monitoring Program that set many standards for public lands advocacy throughout the west. Kevin has a BA from Hobart College in western New York's Finger Lakes region, where he developed an individual major in island biogeography and the American environmental movement.

Kevin and his girlfriend Colyn love to explore our great remote public lands with their dogs Casey and Mali. Kevin's lifelong passions include swimming, hiking, and exploring the natural history of our western forests.

Kevin has a long history of fighting to protect western public lands and we're thrilled he's on our team. Welcome Kevin!

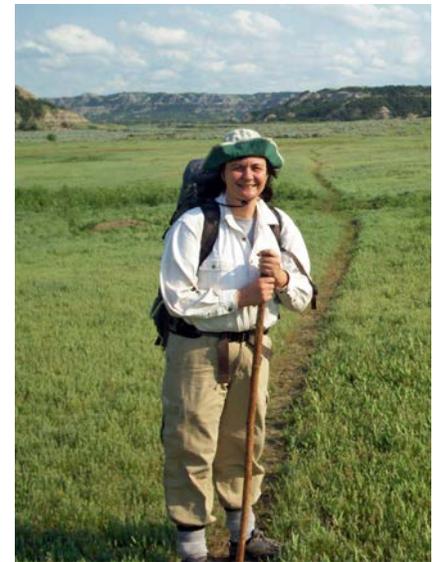


Kevin and Colyn with their dogs.



Kelly Fuller came onboard as WWP's Energy Campaign Coordinator in February. This is a new position that works on opposing impacts to sage-grouse and other sensitive species caused by energy development. Kelly was most recently the Executive Director of Gila Watershed Partnership, a

rural watershed group that partners with government agencies and local communities to care for three rivers in southeastern Arizona. She has a history of working on energy campaigns in about two dozen states and Washington D.C. (American Bird Conservancy, Plains Justice, The Protect Our Communities Foundation, and two Sierra Club chapters). Highlights include coalition work with rural residents who opposed coal projects and the Keystone and Keystone XL pipelines, organizing a national campaign to make wind energy bird safe, and leading a 78-mile walk through the California desert to protect public lands from a destructive transmission line project.



Kelly hiking through Theodore Roosevelt National Park

Kelly has direct experience with federal and state regulatory processes related to energy (transmission, natural gas, wind, solar, endangered species, rulemakings) and she has facilitated coalitions that worked to improve our laws on climate change and energy efficiency.

For leisure, she spends as much time outdoors as possible, and posts fabulous nature photos at

<https://twitter.com/birdskyriver>. She currently lives in Safford, Arizona. Kelly says, "I grew up hiking and camping with my family throughout the western U.S. I do this work so that future generations will get to experience nature as I did."

She's got a wealth of experience with issues that are at the heart of many public lands battles in the west, and we're so glad to have her on our team. Welcome Kelly!

WWP Hearts Lahontan Cutthroat Trout!



By Paul Ruprecht

The Lahontan cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii benshawii*) is a remarkable fish. The only salmonid native to the basins of former Lake Lahontan,

which covered northwest Nevada during the Pleistocene, it is adapted to a diverse desert range.

As Lake Lahontan receded, fish populations were cut off from each other and several unique varieties of Lahontan cutthroat trout evolved. In the western Lahontan basin, the fish adapted to tolerate the high alkalinity of terminal lakes in the Walker, Truckee, and Carson watersheds. These lake dwellers can grow large. In Pyramid Lake, Lahontan cutthroat trout once

grew to 60 pounds feeding on native cui-ui sucker! This giant race went extinct in the 1930s following commercial overfishing and pollution from logging mills along the

Truckee River. Miraculously, however, a small population—long ago transplanted to a remote stream on Pilot Peak along the Utah border—was rediscovered in the 1990s. The original strain has now been reintroduced to Pyramid Lake.

Meanwhile, in the Humboldt and Quinn River watersheds in the eastern Lahontan basin, the fish are mostly stream-dwelling and may grow to only 10 inches. Taxonomist Robert Behnke considered these trout to be a distinct subspecies of cutthroat altogether, *Oncorhynchus clarkii humboldtensis*.



Lahontan Cutthroat Trout

© FISHERY/PHOTOGRAPHY.COM, PAT CLAYTON

Wherever they are found, these native cutthroat trout are a special part of the natural history of the Great Basin. They are also beautiful fish: copper and olive bodies, rosy gill plates, and large black spots.

Sadly, Lahontan cutthroat trout have disappeared from most of their range. In the Humboldt River watershed, only around 8% of their original habitat is occupied, largely in remote reaches of higher elevation tributaries. Isolated

According to the Fish and Wildlife Service, livestock grazing occurs in 95% of habitat for “conservation populations” of Lahontan cutthroat trout in the Humboldt watershed.

populations are susceptible to genetic loss as well as natural and human-caused habitat disturbance. In 1970, the species was listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) due to habitat loss and other threats like competition and hybridization with non-native fish species.

Most of the now-occupied Lahontan cutthroat streams flow through public lands, and the management agencies permit a number of activities that degrade riparian habitat. In some locations, gold mines have severe impacts. And in most areas, livestock grazing takes its toll. According to the Fish and Wildlife Service, livestock grazing occurs in 95% of habitat for “conservation populations” of Lahontan cutthroat trout in the Humboldt watershed. The majority of

this habitat is in poor or fair condition.

Optimal stream habitat for cutthroat trout includes clear, cold water, gravel bottom, and abundant cover (like deeper pools, undercut banks, and woody debris). Robust streamside vegetation is critical for shade, cover, and bank stability. Grazing reduces vegetation and livestock break down streambanks. This results in wider, shallower streams with warmer, more turbid water.

On the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest in northeast Nevada, the impacts of livestock grazing are evident on streams like Wildcat and Draw Creeks, which flow out of the Jarbidge Wilderness. But in neighboring Marys River where grazing has occurred infrequently in the last several decades, riparian conditions have greatly improved.

Land management agencies are required to protect Lahontan cutthroat trout under the ESA. Part of their duty requires consulting with the Fish and Wildlife Service to prevent negative impacts from land uses like grazing. In some areas, the agencies have not done this, and in many areas their studies are now decades old and outdated.

Lahontan cutthroat trout deserve high quality habitat on our public land. Western Watersheds Project will continue to push federal land managers to provide it for them!

Paul Ruprecht is WWP’s Staff Attorney. He lives in Portland, OR.

Wilderness and Wolves Protected in Idaho!



By Kristin Ruether

This headline from last winter was as unbelievable as it was infuriating: “Idaho Fish and Game Accidentally Collars Four Wolves.” How exactly does a wolf get accidentally collared anyway?

This far-fetched story sprang from the latest in a long chain of ill-advised actions to scapegoat wolves at the behest of the livestock or outfitter industries. This time, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) claimed it needed to study elk mortality in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness, managed by the U.S. Forest Service, to determine if wolves were having an undue effect on elk populations. The agency claimed it needed extensive back-country helicopter access into the wilderness to collar elk, and further air access to check on the cause of elk mortality when the collars showed an elk had died. But somehow—whoops!—the field crew ended up collaring wolves too. That was troubling because IDFG could then use the wolves’ location data in support of its misguided plans to exterminate the majority of wolves and inflate elk numbers in this region.

Earthjustice ably represented Wilderness Watch, Friends of the Clearwater, and WWP in swiftly filing suit to challenge the Forest Service’s approval.

A year later, we have positive news to report: The District of Idaho federal court recently ruled that the Forest

This unusual remedy was necessary to prevent the agencies from benefitting from the illegal actions—including killing those collared wolves and their packs.



While the Frank Church Wilderness is closed to motorized use by the public, the Idaho Fish and Game sullies wilderness values with their vigilante intrusions.

Service violated the law in approving those helicopter landings. The court found that the decision violated the Wilderness Act, which limits such flights except as necessary to meet minimum requirements for wilderness administration. The Forest Service had unlawfully and artificially sliced the project into a 1-year proposal, even though the record was clear that the IDFG’s goal was to conduct its helicopter intrusions for 10 years. The court also found that the Forest Service should have prepared a full Environmental Impact Statement due to various factors including its occurrence within wilderness.

As a remedy, the court enjoined the IDFG from using any collected data in further proposals to the Forest Service, and further ordered the destruction of

the data from the collars. This unusual remedy was necessary to prevent the agencies from benefitting from the illegal actions—including killing those collared wolves and their packs.

Both the Forest Service and IDFG have asked the court to reconsider its decision. We will remain vigilant, but in the meantime are gratified to have obtained some measure of justice for the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness and for wolves.

Many thanks to Earthjustice, our co-plaintiffs Wilderness Watch and Friends of the Clearwater, and the WWP members who drafted standing statements about how such helicopter intrusions would degrade their enjoyment of the wilderness, including Board Member Kelley Weston, Idaho Director Ken Cole, founder Jon Marvel, Dave Hayes, and Brett Haverstick.

Kristin Ruether is WWP’s Senior Attorney. She lives in Boise, ID.

Conservation Under Attack in DC

By Josh Osher



The political roller coaster that we have all been riding for the past year is showing no signs of slowing down any time soon.

Regulatory rollbacks, attacks on our bedrock environmental laws, and outright land grabs are just a few items in the extreme anti-environmental agenda that pervades the Republican-controlled Congress and White House. Western Watersheds Project will continue to fight for wildlife and healthy, well-managed public lands using all of the tools at our disposal. This includes regular engagement with our elected officials in Congress, our allies in the conservation community, and the public, to advocate for our lands, our wildlife and the democratic institutions that guarantee our rights to defend the legacy entitled to our grandchildren. Here's a sample of what we're working on right now:



Josh in Nancy Pelosi's office.

The “Endangered” Species Act – One of the primary goals of certain members of Congress and the Administration is the dismantling of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for the benefit of extractive industries such as oil and gas development and livestock ranching. In order to attack one of the most effective, efficient and popular conservation laws, the ESA's detractors resort to deception and misinformation about its successes in saving 98 percent of all listed species from extinction. Western Watersheds Project will continue to provide the facts about the ESA's positive record and its importance to the preservation of our nation's biodiversity.

Poisons Anyone? – Western Watersheds Project has been deeply engaged in the efforts to rein in and ultimately eliminate the so-called Wildlife Services agency. WWP, along with our conservation allies, is supporting a bill (HR 1817) by Rep. Peter DeFazio to ban the use of M-44s nationwide. Your support of this legislation is vital to its ultimate success. (See “Ending M-44 ‘Cyanide Bombs’ in Idaho” page 3.)

The Golden Saddle – Western Watersheds Project and our partners have been working to eliminate public lands ranching in some of the most sensitive wildlife habitats by offering to buy out ranchers' grazing permits so that these lands are permanently protected from livestock. Passing legislation in Congress is the key to expanding the availability of this win/win solution. The Rural Economic Vitalization Act (REVA), a bill championed by Representatives Adam Smith and Raul Grijalva, is a great first step toward this goal, and Western Watersheds Project continues to promote this legislative effort on the Hill and beyond.

Keeping the “Public” in Public Lands – In addition to the high profile attempt to take over federal public lands

(e.g. Bundys, Koch Brothers, etc.), a more insidious tactic is being deployed by corporate powers that want to seize control of our public lands. Legislative attacks on public participation, science-based decision making, and judicial review are all the rage right now in the Republican caucus. At the behest of their corporate funders, they are finding sneakier and sneakier ways to allow industry and states to bypass federal laws meant to safeguard the environment and shut the public out, using riders on unrelated legislation and misleadingly titled bills that confuse the media and the public. Western Watersheds Project works to bring light to these efforts and help our allies in Congress fight back.

Organize, Educate, Resist! – In D.C. and in congressional districts across the country, Americans have been taking to the streets and town hall meeting rooms to weigh in on public policy. Western Watersheds Project has been sharing opportunities for local activism on social media and our staff and members have been engaging in public protest against anti-science, anti-environmental efforts in their home states. This increases Western Watersheds Project's visibility in our communities and adds another voice to the choruses demanding positive changes.

As you can see, there is no shortage of work to do in protecting our wildlife, our wild places and, truthfully, the very foundations of our democracy. WWP will be steadfast in our efforts but we also need your support and participation. Democracy requires action. Defend our public lands against corporate raiders. Watch for WWP action alerts and be a voice for the voiceless. Continue to contact and engage with your elected officials. Hold them accountable and vote!

Josh Osher is WWP's Montana Director and Policy Director. He lives in Hamilton, Montana.

Sheep Allotments Closed in Idaho

Bighorn protection gaining Momentum Across the West

By Ken Cole



The Salmon River flows through a deep canyon across central Idaho and its rugged landscape holds a native population of bighorn sheep that Native American hunters have hunted for thousands of years. In the late nineteenth century, domestic sheep were brought to the area and by 1915, there were 175,000 domestic sheep grazing on the Payette National Forest, including what is now the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness, and on the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Cottonwood Field Office. These Old World domestic sheep carried pathogens that cause deadly pneumonia in the New World native bighorn sheep that resulted in devastating losses to bighorn sheep throughout the west.

Domestic sheep grazing on the Cottonwood Field Office and Payette National Forest threatened the health of the native bighorn in the Salmon River Canyon through potential contact from stray domestics. Western Watersheds Project, other groups, and the Nez Perce Tribe began to get involved in the land management plans. The groups asked that the BLM and U.S. Forest Service analyze the risks involved with the permitted domestic sheep grazing. Thus began a years-long fight that involved many court battles and rounds of contentious meetings and comments.

BLM was forced to temporarily stop domestic sheep grazing on the Partridge allotment in 2009 because of an injunction that Western Watersheds Project obtained. BLM then closed grazing on the Marshall



Sage Grouse

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Mountain Allotment, and the permittees voluntarily quit grazing on the Hard Creek and Big Creek Allotments for a total of 19,000 acres protected while the BLM analyzed the risk of contact. Simultaneously, Payette National Forest analyzed the risk of contact between bighorn and domestic sheep and, in 2010, decided to permanently close domestic sheep grazing on 68,718 acres, or 70% of the National Forest.

Finally, in January 2017, the BLM finished its analysis and issued its decision to close 18,966 acres of domestic sheep grazing allotments! Just one small, low-risk allotment remains, and twenty-one terms and conditions would need to be met to allow turn-out on the remaining 439 acres. This is a major win for the Salmon River bighorn!

Of course, these monumental decisions have caused quite a stir among

the woolgrowers, but they've also set a precedent across the west. Currently, the U.S. Forest Service is analyzing the risk of contact on all national forests in Utah, Nevada, western Wyoming, and southern Idaho using a computer modeling tool developed for the Payette Decision. The BLM issued guidance to use the tool on BLM lands as well. Western Watersheds Project has obtained the Risk of Contact Tool and we are able to calculate our own numbers to keep the agencies honest.

Our new Bighorn Habitat Protection Campaign is aiming to spread this process to areas throughout the range of bighorn sheep, win livestock closures on problematic and high-risk allotments, and to ensure a secure future for this iconic species.

Ken Cole is WWP's Idaho Director. He lives in Boise, ID.

15,000 Acre Federal Fracking Plan Endangers Sage Grouse in Utah



By Kelly Fuller

Every spring, wildlife lovers across the west rise before dawn and gather on great open expanses of sagebrush. They know that after the sun rises, they will

enjoy one of nature's vivid spectacles: the mating display of the male greater sage-grouse.

Male sage-grouse sport a fan of striped tail feathers and a fluffy white mantle with two gold-colored air sacs, like a double-yolked egg. The dancing birds lift

and drop the top half of their bodies dramatically, as if they had hydraulic suspensions under their feathers. Sometimes you can hear the strutting sage-grouse before you see them. The inflating air sacs sound like old-fashioned percolator coffee pots, and the noise carries a long way across the quiet steppe. This spring-time dance party has been going on for thousands of years. But over the last five decades, the sage-grouse population has declined by more than 60% due to habitat loss and fragmentation. Grazing, farming, mining, urban sprawl, and energy development are just a few of the factors driving the

decline.

One group of sage-grouse is especially in trouble. In the Sheeprock Mountains area of central Utah, greater sage-grouse numbers are dropping fast: They have decreased by nearly 40% in the last four years.

In February 2017, it looked like the vulnerable Sheeprocks sage-grouse had finally caught a break. The U.S. Bureau

Instead of restricting oil and gas development, the BLM announced it would auction off fracking and drilling rights to 14,943 acres of Sheeprocks sage-grouse habitat, including special priority habitat that has been identified as critical to the birds' survival.

of Land Management (BLM) declared that a "hard trigger" had been tripped, meaning the population declines were sufficiently dire to increase stronger and more protective management guidelines. This meant that stronger actions to help sage-grouse became mandatory, including habitat restoration and minimizing impacts from development.

But less than two months later, the BLM flip-flopped. Instead of restricting oil and gas development, the BLM announced it would auction off fracking and drilling rights to 14,943 acres of Sheeprocks sage-grouse habitat, including special priority habitat that has been

identified as critical to the birds' survival.

Oil and gas development is bad news for sage-grouse not just because it fragments and destroys their habitat. Sage-grouse have been known to abandon their nesting grounds when tall structures that can provide perches for their predators are built. These include the drilling rigs and power lines that service oil and gas fields.

TucIf this auction takes place in September 2017 as planned, greater sage-grouse will not be the only wildlife that suffer. Eagles, mule deer, elk, and many other

species will also experience habitat loss in the area.

There is an obvious solution. Rather than auction off oil and gas development rights in the Sheeprocks, the BLM should do what it said it would do: improve the habitat so it can support more sage-grouse.

Western Watersheds Project has organized a coalition of conservation groups to fight this lease sale. Contact Kelly Fuller at kfuller@westernwatersheds.org for more information and to learn how to join this effort.

Kelly Fuller is WWP's Energy Campaign Coordinator. She lives in Thatcher, AZ.



The Oquirrh, Onaqui, and Cedar Mountain ranges in west-central Utah.

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Every day the public lands, streams and wildlife throughout the West benefit because of the work done by Western Watersheds Project. The agency management plans we challenge, the allotments we monitor, and the lawsuits we file all help to protect and restore our western public lands.

- **Any size donation is greatly appreciated and makes a difference!** Everything WWP does to influence the restoration of western public lands is based on a vision that western North America may be one of the only places on earth where enough of the native landscape and wildlife still exists to make possible the restoration of a wild natural world.
- **Make a gift of appreciated stock.** Talk to your accountant or financial planner about the potential tax benefits of making this type of donation.
- **A gift through careful estate planning can make a lasting difference for WWP.** A bequest, an arrangement made in a donor's will, is a simple and uncomplicated approach to planned giving. Other methods to facilitate a planned giving donation include: charitable remainder trust, charitable lead trust and gift annuity. It may be wise to talk to your accountant or financial planner to fully understand the potential tax benefits of different giving options.
- **Help others learn about WWP!** Recently, WWP supporters hosted events in Pocatello, Idaho and Berkeley, California to help us spread the word about our important work. You can host an event too and WWP will help. We'll supply informational materials, send out email/printed invitations combining your guest list with local WWP supporters, and even have a WWP representative attend a "meet & greet" which can be customized to your area of interest or concern.



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