GRASSROOTS

the rise of the radical center

by
Courtney White

Grassroots

The Rise of the Radical Center

and

The Next West

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To
my fellow radical centrists,
practical dreamers all

Contents

Preface

Talk about déjà vu all over again.

In the American West during the mid-1990s, the daily news featured political gridlock, anti-government anger, Us vs. Them factionalism, political assaults on environmental regulations, local demands to turn over federal land to the states, 'patriotic' armed militia groups, corporate attempts to commercialize our national parks, ineffectual government oversight, courtroom brawls between urban activists and rural residents over endangered species, and a bunch of finger-pointing and trash-talking generally.

That sounds like the headlines in 2016!

The 2014 standoff in Nevada, for example, between Cliven Bundy and federal agents over his abuse of grazing privileges on public land, as well as the armed seizure two years later of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon by his sons and their comrades, is highly reminiscent of the so-called 'War on the West' rhetoric leveled at the Clinton administration by 'wise use' advocates twenty years earlier, though ratcheted up several notches. Back in 1995, a Nye County commissioner in Nevada by the name of Dick Carver made the cover of *Time* magazine after he drove a bulldozer illegally into a proposed wilderness study area while proudly carrying a copy of the U.S. Constitution in his shirt pocket. His publicly stated goal was to assert local control over federal land (an argument repeatedly rejected by the courts), but in reality it was just the most visible face of widespread conflict over natural resource management taking place in the West in the 1990s, much of which didn't make headlines.

The anger and frustration was not confined to rural residents. One of the chief antagonists was an extremist environmental group called Earth First! whose motto "No compromise in defense of Mother Earth!" emboldened its members and sympathizers to commit 'ecotage' against logging, road-building, and mining projects – at least until the FBI cracked down on its leadership. Most famously, Earth First! activists unveiled a 'crack' down the face of the much reviled Glen Canyon Dam. It was great theater, but it was also heartfelt – and symbolic of the strong emotions at work on both sides.

Looking back, it all feels so *quaint* by today's vitriolic standards!

It is often said that history doesn't repeat itself, but rhymes instead. Attempts to give away public land date back at least to 1947, when Congress quietly began a

process to transfer large blocks of federal property to the states. Fortunately, a crusading, bespectacled historian writing for *Harper's* magazine by the name of Bernard DeVoto foiled this under-the-radar plan by exposing it in his weekly column *The Easy Chair*.

The next run at a western land grab, dubbed the Sagebrush Rebellion, began in the mid-1970s with the vigorous opposition by rural residents to expanded wilderness protection on public lands, which they perceived as part of a broader attack on rural values and land use traditions, including ranching, logging and mining. The flames of rebellion cooled with the election of westerner Ronald Reagan to the presidency, but flared brightly again in 1993 with the arrival in Washington of President Bill Clinton and his environmentally-minded Interior Secretary, Bruce Babbitt. The rhetoric from both sides quickly surpassed previous tirades, reflected in two popular bumper stickers: "Cattle Free in '93!" and "Cattle Galore in '94!" Soon, it escalated to unending combat between urban and rural constituencies, mirroring the political partisanship emerging at the time in Washington. Emotions simmered down under President Bush, an oilman, but came back with a vengeance on President Obama's watch prodded by Tea Party "rebels" in Congress and widening blue/red divides across the country. Alas, the tone of the rhyming is harsher today and the stakes higher than two decades ago.

What effect the election of Donald J. Trump to the presidency will have on the "rebellion" out West is unclear, though it's a safe bet to say the quantity of natural resource extraction will go up, possibly considerably, and the level of regulatory protection for the environment will go down, probably proportionally. Whether the ardor of the 'take back the West' rebels will cool off, as it did under Reagan, or go for the kill remains uncertain, though I worry more about the motivations of a coldly calculating Congress than anarchic Bundy-style militia groups.

Whatever happens, there's a crucial difference between the 1990s and today that needs to be highlighted: back then, public opinion mattered. Facts mattered too. The onslaught of anti-environmental legislation introduced as part of Rep. Newt Gingrich's "Republican Revolution" in Congress after the 1994 mid-term elections was turned back in large part by an avalanche of negative public reaction. Today, however, thanks mostly to the deeply cynical *we-don't-give-a-damn-what-people-think* attitude of the George W. Bush administration toward governance (and war-making) a tidal wave of public revulsion to a renewed assault on our heritage of public lands may not be enough to stop the 'rebellion' this time. It's a sign of the times, I'm afraid – *We the People* just doesn't mean what it used to.

Which brings me to the *radical center*.

If problems are cyclical so are solutions. I'd like to share one that I and many others helped to create, starting in the late 1990s, in hopes that it can provide a useful response to this particular turn of history's squeaky wheel. Our effort focused on resolving the long-standing feud between ranchers and environmentalists, a bloody and hopeless fight that had imperiled the wide open spaces of our beloved West. Environmental activist Dan Dagget, who I met through the Sierra Club, called this fight an example of the "conflict industry" – a continuous brawl over natural resource management with the primary goal of beating the other side in court and in the court of public opinion. Conflict was profitable emotionally and financially, Dan observed, and thus self-perpetuating to the detriment of the land, its residents, and the American public. I saw it too: conflict begat conflict, negative attitudes begat negative energy, and everything we loved spiraled downward as a consequence.

Determined to break away from the brawl, Dan became an early leader in an effort to find a 'third way' beyond polarization in order to implement practical, on-the-ground progress through collaboration, not confrontation. His pioneering book about ecologically-minded ranching titled *Beyond the Rangeland Conflict: Toward a West That Works*, published in 1995, became a rallying cry for those of us looking for this 'third way.' Personally, it inspired me to cofound the Quivira Coalition. We called this third way the 'radical center' and defined its mission as *a grassroots coming-together of diverse people to discuss their common interests rather than argue their differences, and who agree to work cooperatively on a pragmatic program of action that improves the well-being of all living things*.

Bill McDonald, a rancher in southern Arizona, coined the term in the mid-1990s to describe an emerging consensus-based approach to land management challenges in the region. The conflict between ranchers and environmentalists was a main reason the West had balkanized into ideological fiefdoms, each determined to prevail over the other, as Bill witnessed first-hand. An important consequence was gridlock on the ground. Very little progress was being made on necessary projects, such as restoring degraded ecosystems, improving the chances of endangered species on private land, or helping ranchers fend off the rapacious interests of real estate developers. Instead, it became a war of attrition with the only real winners being those who had no interest in the long-term health of the region.

The *radical center* was a deliberate push-back against this destructive process of balkanization. It was *radical* (whose dictionary definition means "root")

because it challenged various orthodoxies at work at the time, including the conventional belief that conservation and ranching were part of a 'zero sum' game – that one could only advance if the other retreated. There were plenty of examples to the contrary, as we discovered. Success, however, also meant working in the *center* – which refers to the pragmatic, middle-ground between extremes. It meant partnerships, respect, and trust. But most of all, it meant *action* – a plan signed, a prescribed fire lit, a workshop held, a hand shook. Words were nice, but working in the *radical center* meant walking the talk.

In the case of the Quivira Coalition, this meant no lawsuits and no legislation. Instead, we were determined to be a grassroots organization literally focused on the *grass* and the *roots*. Our early workshops were conducted on progressive ranches and our Board consisted of ranchers, conservationists, scientists and public land managers. Encouraged by the response to our work, in 2002 we launched an annual conference with the goal of having it become the epicenter of the *radical center* and help fan small bonfires of change into a larger movement.

In an article for a Quivira Coalition newsletter, author and *radical center* leader Bill deBuys identified four key components of this movement:

1. Work in the Radical Center involves a departure from business as usual.

2. Work in the Radical Center is not bigoted. To do this kind of work, you don't question where somebody is from or what kind of hat he or she wears, you just question where that person is willing to go and whether that person is willing to work constructively on the question at hand.

3. Work in the Radical Center involves interesting tools. There is not one way of doing things. There can be many ways of doing things. We need to have large tool boxes and to lend and borrow tools freely.

4. Work in the Radical Center is experimental – it keeps developing new alternatives every step along the way. Nothing is ever so good that it can't stand a little revision, and nothing is ever so impossible and broken down that a try at fixing it is out of the question.[1]

It worked. Over the ensuing years, the attitude toward ranchers and livestock among a cross-section of the American public, including lawmakers, opinion leaders, newspaper letter-writers, and many conservationists, shifted substantially toward the positive. As a result, the so-called 'grazing wars' largely faded from view, though there is still some shouting going on in places. Today, there are signs of progress all over the West as people work together toward common goals. Especially encouraging has been the explosion of watershed-based collaborative organizations across the region. Cooperation has become the norm, not the exception as it was when I began my work in conservation.

The rhyming of history in 2016, in other words, is richer and potentially more hopeful than before, the result of many individuals, organizations, and agencies across the West working together in the spirit of respect and collaboration. As a result of the increased acrimony in the nation, however, getting through this turn of the wheel means we'll need even more cooperation than we have right now. To that end, in early 2016 I reread the articles I wrote for the Sierra Club and the Quivira Coalition from the early days of the *radical center*. I was struck by how relevant they remain! I decided it would be useful to reprint them as a way of demonstrating how the original *radical center* came about in hopes it is helpful to present and future participants.

This book consists of three columns I authored between 1995 and 2011. The first was *The Uneasy Chair* (1995-1997), published in the newsletter of the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club. In the column, whose title I borrowed from Wallace Stegner's biography of Bernard DeVoto, I tried to comprehend the assault on national environmental legislation taking place at the time by Republican leaders in Washington as well as the role environmentalism played in the white-hot emotions in the region. I wrote the second column, *The Far Horizon* (1997-2006), for the newsletter of the Quivira Coalition. It covers the rise and expansion of collaborative conservation during this critical period. I wrote the third column, *The Next West* (2009-2011), for my web site *A West That Works*. It analyses the question "what happened to the *New West*?" – a concept widely touted by academics, activists, and businesspeople that became a kind of economic and cultural holy grail that would deliver us from various troubles afflicting the region, but did not.

Taken together, they offer a unique look at history from the perspective of someone on the frontlines. By way of background for the columns, which were written as current events were happening and thus occasionally lack context, I

have included a condensed version of my Prologue to *Revolution on the Range: the Rise of a New Ranch in the American West*, published in 2008 by Island Press.

I have become convinced that the *radical center* is needed now more than ever and remains an important path forward in resolving the multiplying challenges facing the West and the nation.

Prologue to Revolution on the Range:

"In 1996, I had an anguished question on my mind: why didn't environmentalists and ranchers get along better? In theory they shared many of the same hopes and fears – a love of wildlife, a deep respect for nature, an appreciation for a life lived outdoors, and a common concern for healthy water, food, fiber, and liberty.

That was the theory, anyway. The reality was that by the early 1990s environmentalists and ranchers, along with loggers, federal land managers, elected officials, private citizens and others in the American West, were locked in a bitter struggle with one another. I felt anguished because this fight had all the hallmarks of a tragedy: both sides, and all of us in between, seemed destined to lose what was most valued by everyone – the health and diversity of the West's wide open spaces. And it wasn't just the West, the hard-headedness of this particular fight reflected other divides in the nation at the time – the "red" and "blue" split, for instance, that would soon engulf our national politics.

The struggle focused primarily on the publicly owned half of the American West's 425,000 square miles, including the national forests, rangelands, and wildlife refuges. The fundamental issue was *influence*. For a century or more, these federal lands were in the *de facto* control of those who lived near them and worked on them – ranchers, principally. After World War Two, however, influence began to shift to a new breed of westerner, including hikers, fishermen, and other types of urban-based recreationalists. At first, their influence was largely economic though over time it grew politically, especially as the populations of western cities boomed.

Increasingly, the attention of environmental activists turned toward actual and perceived abuses of the public domain, including clear-cut logging, open-pit mining and overgrazing. The alarms they raised contributed to a raft of consequential environmental legislation passed by Congress and signed into law by President Richard Nixon. The downside, however, of all this activism and bill-passing was the commencement of a kind of tribal warfare between denizens of the 'Old' West and advocates of the 'New' with lassos on one side and lattes on

the other. Caught in the middle were the employees of the federal land management agencies – the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Fish & Wildlife Service. The "feds," once considered by environmentalists to be in the pocket of ranching, mining and timber interests, by the 1980s were viewed by ranchers, loggers and miners as allies of their enemies instead.

Meanwhile, across the West, accelerating ex-urban (ranchette) growth shared the same source: former farm and ranch land. When making their case against cattle, environmental activists frequently pointed out that half of the West is publicly owned and therefore should be managed with public goals in mind. But they overlooked their own statistic – the other half of the West is privately owned, much of it by ranchers. Deliberate or not, by weakening ranchers, environmentalists abetted the very thing they decried loudest about the New West – its breakup by development and other forms of land fragmentation.

By the mid-1990s, the feud had reached a dispiriting crescendo. Newspapers reported a seemingly endless cycle of unhappy news: effigies of environmentalists hanging from street lamps; road building equipment disabled in the dead of night; federal property attacked by anonymous assailants; hiking trails booby-trapped with explosives; trees 'spiked' with large nails to prevent their harvest; endangered species threatened by a campaign of 'shoot, shovel, and shut up;' public meetings dissolving into shouting matches; federal raids ending disastrously; livelihoods ruined by lawsuits; and so on.

Emblematic of the times was a lengthy brawl in the mountains above Silver City, in southwestern New Mexico. Called the 'Diamond Bar' fight – named for the 90,000-acre Forest Service allotment (ranch) on which the fight took place – it featured an angry young ranching couple, Kit and Sherry Laney, and an angry local environmentalist determined to put them out of business. The fight pivoted on the government's attempt to force the Laneys to abide by certain regulations – restrictions that the young ranchers rejected and that environmentalists demanded be upheld.

In the end, the Laneys lost. They refused to sign their grazing permit, asserting that the government had no right to regulate them. When a judge upheld the Forest Service's position, the Laneys lost their permit and their ranch, as well as their livelihood. Environmentalists were elated. A significant corner, they said, had been turned in the struggle over public lands in the West.

To this particular environmentalist, however, there was no cheer in the court's verdict. I did not join the celebrations when the victorious activist came to Santa Fe, but neither did I mourn the demise of the young ranchers who had

arrogantly thumbed their noses at public opinion. There were no winners in the Diamond Bar fight. Nothing was gained – lives were ruined, not enriched; land was abandoned, instead of stewarded properly; bad blood had been created, instead of hope; anger ruled, not joy.

The fight fit the national mood in the mid-1990s that had suddenly veered onto the rocky shoals of partisanship, confrontation and political brinkmanship. From the jeremiads of talk radio hosts, which capitalized on the new rancor emanating from Washington, D.C., to repeated shutdowns of the federal government, America seemed suddenly caught in a destructive tug-of-war between Wrongdoing (Them) and Rightdoing (Us) with no room for anybody in between.

And the more we yelled at one another, the deeper my spirits sank. Then one day something snapped inside me and I knew I had to act.

It happened on April 15th, 1995 – the day Timothy McVeigh blew up the Murrah federal building in downtown Oklahoma City, killing 164 innocent people, including nineteen children. I worked for the National Park Service as an archaeologist at the time, as did my wife, and I remember vividly my reaction as I listened, stunned, to the news report of the bombing coming in over a radio in the office.

At first I was mortified, and then I grew angry – but not just at McVeigh. I was angry at the whole culture of conflict and odium represented by this horrible tragedy. McVeigh wasn't simply a madman – he had *motivation*, as he explained later. He *hated*. It didn't matter that the object of his ire was the federal government, what mattered was the emotion itself – the same negativity circulating around the nation at the time. Although some pundits later denied any causal connection between McVeigh's act of terrorism and the partisan cultural climate in America, I knew the bombing had happened for a reason.

It happened because it was ok to hate.

I had to do something – but what? The previous fall, alarmed by the 'Republican Revolution' in the 1994 mid-term elections and Speaker-elect Newt Gringrich's declared intention to rollback twenty-five years of critical environmental legislation, I called a representative of the Sierra Club to volunteer my services. I was quickly recruited as a foot soldier for the Club's local group in Santa Fe. Eventually, an unexpected opportunity to act on my anguish came. Walking into a statewide meeting of the Sierra Club one day, I saw a cowboy hat sitting on a table. It belonged to Jim Winder, who lived and ranched nearby. If that wasn't surprise enough, I was told Jim was there because he had accepted the invitation of the chair, Gwen Wardwell, to become a member of the Executive Committee.

A rancher on the statewide Executive Committee of the Sierra Club? And a Republican to boot! What was going on here?

Jim boasted that he ranched in a new, ecologically friendly style. He bunched his cattle together into one herd and kept them on the move so that any particular patch of ground would be grazed only once a year, mimicking the manner in which bison covered the land. He didn't kill coyotes. In fact, he didn't even mind wolves, because bunched-up cows can protect themselves. There was more: because he ranched for rangeland health he got along great with government employees, he had more water in his streams, and most importantly, he was making money.

It sounded too good to be true.

Curious about this new-fangled ranching, in early 1996 I joined a tour of the family ranch Jim had organized for a small crowd of his fellow Sierra Clubbers. Attending was an anti-grazing activist named Tony Merton, who had recently moved from Colorado to a remote part of southern New Mexico. I didn't know it at the time, but Tony was the prime suspect in a spate of cattle murders in the area. It would be an investigation with tragic consequences – Tony committed suicide three months after the tour of Jim's ranch.

On that day, however, it quickly became clear that Tony's mission was to provoke Jim into a confrontation. He challenged nearly every positive statement Jim said about cattle, grass, or termites (a favorite subject of Jim's). It didn't work. Jim parried each attack with a patient explanation of ecological principles and a fine sense of humor. Impressed, on my return home I picked up *Beyond the Rangeland Conflict: Toward a West That Works* a book by environmental activist Dan Dagget. In it, I learned there were other ranchers of Jim's stripe across the West – people managing for healthy ecosystems through progressive cattle management and collaboration. The book confirmed what I saw on Jim's ranch: thick grass, healthy riparian areas, young plants, wildlife, open space – all the things I *said* I wanted as a conservationist. Of course, I saw livestock too.

I called Jim up and asked him if we should try to create a neutral forum where anyone could meet, look, learn, and listen. He enthusiastically endorsed the idea. We were joined by Barbara Johnson, another Sierra Club activist. The three of us quickly decided that there was no point in engaging the extremes on either side of the grazing debate. Instead, we would walk to a new field, beyond the continuum of argument, where we would wave our arms and ask people to join us. Jim called this place the "third position."

I called it The New Ranch. I wrote a definition: "The New Ranch operates on the principle that the natural processes that sustain wildlife habitat, biological diversity and functioning watersheds are the same processes that make land productive for livestock. They are ranches where grasslands are productive and diverse, where erosion has diminished, where streams and springs, once dry, now flow, where wildlife is more abundant, and where landowners are more profitable as a result."

The New Ranch became the foundation for our version of the *radical center*. In pockets across the West groups of ranchers, federal managers and environmentalists had been attempting to start meaningful dialogues. One successful effort was located in the 'bootheel' of southwestern New Mexico, where a diverse group had come together to put ecologically beneficial fire back on the land as well as shield private lands from the predatory attention of subdividers. They called themselves the Malpai Borderlands Group.

We called ourselves The Quivira Coalition.

Following the lead of other 'common ground' efforts, we vowed to avoid lawsuits and legislation, sticking instead to the grassroots – literally the "grass" and the "roots." We believed the grazing debate needed to start over at the place it mattered most – on the ground. In the years that followed, as the grazing debate faded in the region and as hope and trust began to grow alongside the wildflowers and bunch grasses, an answer to my anguished question began to reveal itself. Ranchers and environmentalists *could* get along, and in places *did* – especially where the dialogue started with soil, grass, and water.

Peace, in other words, was possible – and as a result, progress was possible as well."

An Invitation to Join the Radical Center

For more than thirty years, environmentalists and ranchers have fought over the heart of the American West—the wide-open spaces that stretch from our cities to the "purple mountain majesties" we sang of in school.

The combatants have fought long and hard, but as their struggle over the working landscapes of the West pulled in citizens, agency officials, attorneys, and judges, one consequence is clear: during the fight, millions of acres of the West's open spaces and biologically rich lands were broken by development.

There have been other unintended consequences. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management officials who once physically managed our purple mountain majesties now mostly manage mountains of paper. Endangered species hang on by claw or beak despite hundreds of lawsuits. Rural towns simply hang on.

Meanwhile, human communities divide into factions. Most tragically, the stewards of working landscapes are surrendering their lands at unprecedented rates to the pressure that tears the quilt of nature into rags.

Perhaps the fight had to happen. The West's grasslands and streams and wildlife were in trouble from a century or more of hard use when this fight was joined. The nation had to debate the use of 420,000 square miles of grazed public land across eleven states. But the fight has gone on far too long. In recent years, the American West has witnessed tremendous positive changes, including the rise of models of sustainable use of public and private lands, the shift of conservation and scientific strategies from protection alone to include restoration, and the expanding role of cooperative efforts to move beyond resource conflicts.

As a consequence of these crises and trends, we believe it is time to cease hostilities and enter a new era of cooperation.

We believe that how we inhabit and use the West today will determine the West we pass on to our children tomorrow, that preserving the biological diversity of working landscapes requires active stewardship, and that under current conditions, the stewards of those lands are compensated for only a fraction of the values their stewardship provides.

We know that poor management has damaged land in the past and in some areas continues to do so, but we also believe appropriate ranching practices can restore land to health. We believe that some lands should not be grazed by livestock but also that much of the West can be grazed in an ecologically sound manner. We

know that management practices have changed in recent years, ecological sciences have generated new and valuable tools for assessing and improving land, and new models of sustainable use of land have proved their worth.

Finally, we believe that the people of the West must halt the further conversion of working landscapes to uses that destroy this wellspring of ecological, aesthetic, and cultural richness that is celebrated around the world.

Time is short. The cost of delay is further irrevocable loss.

We therefore reject the acrimony of past decades that has dominated debate over livestock grazing on public lands, for it has yielded little but hard feelings among people who are united by their common love of land and who should be natural allies.

And we pledge our efforts to form the "Radical Center" where:

- The ranching community accepts and aspires to a progressively higher standard of environmental performance;

- The environmental community resolves to work constructively with the people who occupy and use the lands it would protect;

- The personnel of federal and state land-management agencies focus not on the defense of procedure but on the production of tangible results;

- The research community strives to make their work more relevant to broader constituencies;

- The land-grant colleges return to their original charters, conducting and disseminating information in ways that benefit local landscapes and the communities that depend on them;

- The consumer buys food that strengthens the bond between his or her own health and the health of the land;

- The public recognizes and rewards those who maintain and improve the health of all land;

- And that all participants learn better how to share both authority and responsibility.

As the ranks of the Radical Center swell with those who are committed to these goals, the promise increases that "America the Beautiful" may become an image of the future as well as of the past and, with the grace of good fortune, the West may finally create what Wallace Stegner called "a society to match its scenery."

- signed by twenty ranchers, conservationists, and scientists, January 2003

The Uneasy Chair
1995-1997

(published in the newsletter of the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club)

1995:

- President of the United States: Bill Clinton
- Party in control of U.S. Senate and House: Republican
- Net gain of seats in U.S. House by Republicans in 1994 mid-terms: 54
- Last time the Republican party controlled Congress: 1952
- Price of oil: $18 a barrel (in 2016 dollars)
- Atmospheric carbon dioxide: 360 ppm
- Dow Jones: over 5000 (for the first time)
- Gallon of unleaded gas: $1.10
- Top Internet companies: Netscape and Yahoo!
- Top technology event: release of Microsoft's Windows 95
- Size and shape of a mobile phone: a brick
- Founded: Amazon, eBay, Craigs List, World Trade Organization
- Ended: Calvin & Hobbes, The Grateful Dead, Operation Desert Storm
- Returned: Michael Jordan to the NBA
- Top-rated TV show: Seinfeld
- Time's Man of the Year: Newt Gingrich

September 1995

I can sense the uneasy spirit of Bernard DeVoto stalking the land.

Novelist, historian, author of a popular World War II-era column in *Harper's* magazine called *The Easy Chair*, and a professional provocateur, according to his friend and protégée Wallace Stegner, DeVoto almost single-handedly stopped the wholesale giveaway of our western public lands in the late 1940s. Campaigning from his easy chair against an imminent transfer of federal land to the states, DeVoto called the backroom deal "one of the biggest land grabs in history" and accused the politicians in Washington, D.C., who were orchestrating the transfer, of wanting to "shovel most of the West into its rivers." [2]

Fortunately, DeVoto's outrage proved infectious and a chorus of complaint rose across the country. The land transfer died the old fashioned way – by public objection. Now, nearly fifty years later, another land grab is underway and I can hear the curmudgeon from Salt Lake City pacing creakily in the shadows, muttering to himself despairingly about the never-ending cycle of things and the stunning familiarity of it all.

As should be clear to anyone who believes in the intrinsic value of public land, there can be no doubt that another attempt at a massive land grab is underway in Washington, D.C. Bills before both houses of Congress attack the fundamental philosophy of public land: equal access and every citizen's right to share in the stewardship of that land. Most politicians know that a wholesale giveaway of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) or Forest Service land to states is impractical, so a more sinister stratagem has been employed: pick apart the federal lands puzzle, piece by piece. Open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling, defund Mojave National Park, disarm BLM rangers, gut the Endangered Species Act, put pro-development language into a Utah wilderness bill, kill a twenty-five year-old land acquisition fund, downsize the federal land agencies, put a bounty on the head of a wild wolf, propose a national park "decommissioning" committee, legislate cattle ranching as the 'highest and best use of public land' and so on. Individually, these efforts accomplish much the same task as Senator Robertson of Wyoming tried in 1947, only in a bitterly cynical 1990s style. At least that fight was in the open.

DeVoto once marveled at the West's obsession with suicide. Why would a land, he wondered, with so much natural abundance, both material and spiritual, try so relentlessly to slit its own throat? He couldn't proffer an answer – no one can. Still, it is disheartening to see, fifty years later, the same debate being waged,

the same half-truths and full lies being hurled, and the same fingers pointed. Has nothing changed in two generations? The West, despite the best intentions of public users and disapprovers, appears to be just as suicidal as ever. Western senators and congresspeople in Washington have grabbed a sharp knife and are holding it directly over their own hearts, saying "Don't try to stop me! I know what's best for the land!"

"Things have changed," I say to DeVoto's restless shadow, which appears to be searching vainly for a mechanical typewriter. "You have friends, for example, lots of friends." The entire modern environmental movement, I remind him, has flourished since he played the Lone Ranger riding a stuffed chair, caressed by a gentle eastern breeze. Public land is not alone anymore, I tell him, it has millions of advocates. It didn't do any good. I could still hear him pacing across the floorboards, hands clenched tightly behind his back. Why, his nervous behavior implored, was this happening again then? Why had the suicidal impulse come back? How could a handful of politicians fly in the face of millions of campers, hikers, fishermen, and other outdoor enthusiasts of every stripe and *think they could get away with it*? He stopped pacing and turned around, shadowy head toward me. How, he asked silently, could this be happening?

I didn't have an immediate answer. Nearly three hundred million Americans visited the national park system last year which means the National Park Service should have three hundred million constituents. [3] So how could a group of vote-sensitive politicians think they could propose closing any national park and not get publicly disemboweled for their trouble? Well, the answer appears to be…because they can. They are acting with impunity because they don't sense a backlash, so they don't fear one. Perhaps they sense no Bernard DeVotos out there. Or, perhaps they sense voter apathy. Perhaps they are depending on that apathy. Perhaps after fifty years this is the greatest difference between DeVoto's age and our own.

DeVoto's spirit resumed its fretful pacing. He was beginning to make me feel uneasy.

November 1995

"Why is this happening?"

I tossed this question to Dave Foreman, the original wilderness warrior, during a conference on wild land held recently at the College of Santa Fe. I pointed at a classroom blackboard where the names of two dozen public land

giveaway bills before Congress had been etched in chalk. The bills closed national parks, gave away all BLM territory to the states, gutted the Endangered Species Act, opened the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling, authorized the Animas-La Plata dam in southern Colorado, mandated higher timber targets on the Tongass National Forest in Alaska, and ruined redrock wilderness in southern Utah forever, to name a few. Minutes earlier, Foreman had called the combined effect of these bills "a theft of our public lands" and an audacious attempt to remove the "public" from public lands altogether.

Why was this assault happening now, twenty-five years after the first Earth Day? From clean water and clean air to wilderness and wildlife, polls say environmental causes enjoy substantial support. Three hundred million people hollering all at the same time for national parks should wake up even the most cynical member of Congress. Why, then, do we have a bill threatening to close national parks? How could this be? Who are our congresspeople and how could they flaunt public opinion so brazenly? Take the park decommissioning bill, for example. Defeated in the House of Representatives recently when sixty-seven moderate Republicans broke ranks and joined the Democrats, the Republican leadership responded by cynically attaching the same bill to a mandatory budget appropriations bill and dared President Clinton to veto it. Remember, the parks bill had been voted down! Is this democracy? I think not. And politicians wonder why people hate Washington so passionately? [4]

Why is this happening? As I said, partly because it can. But part of the blame must be directed at ourselves as well. The environmental movement has stalled. We have become complacent, Foreman told the audience, gorged on our success, fat and lazy. We have also allowed ourselves to become demonized by reactionary forces who stand to profit from a roll-back of environmental laws and regulations. In the great shouting match between supposedly "competing" interests over the future of public land, some environmentalists have been the loudest agitators. If we are going to play the blame game then we need to point a few fingers at ourselves.

Foreman's answer to this stagnation is to organize, organize, organize – as we did at the weekend's conference. We should get back to the grassroots, he insisted, and start knocking on people's doors. If we don't then we'll become exactly what our detractors say we are: elitists. We're in danger of losing our relevancy because we're losing touch with our primary constituency: fellow human beings who care about nature. Obviously, the support for environmental causes is still out there, as Congress is slowly learning, the problem is how do we tap it?

Foreman suggested that we mobilize, and he's right of course, but I have another idea. It is beginning to dawn on me that it is the message not the messengers that needs to be revitalized. Environmentalism has been backed, snarling, into a corner. We seem to be perpetually on the defensive – block this, stop that, don't do this, don't do that. We seem to be perpetually objecting to things. The stereotype has become a negative one and is in danger of sticking. I am reminded of a comment made last year by the head of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service who said the only time she ever heard from the environmental community was when we sued. Otherwise, there was no communication. That is clearly a mistake on our part. [5]

I believe we need to rediscover a positive message. Our effort to provide clean air, water, and wilderness has always been packed full of positives, even if they don't get touted that way in the press (though let's admit that the slogan "Cattle Free in '93" was a disaster; by being needlessly inflammatory it obscured the genuine debate over healthy rangelands). Our chore, however, is greater than simply putting a new spin on old wine bottles. We need to get out of the 1970s. We need a message that speaks to the concerns of today, one that embraces the issue of common values and responsibilities. What form this message takes isn't clear to me yet. In the meantime, we must work overtime to block, object, derail, and defeat the Congressional assault on our land, even if it reinforces our obstructionist image.

Why is this happening? We used to be the good guys.

January 1996

I have been thinking about dwindling fish populations, bumper stickers, trash compactors, and the future of the environmental movement. And it's making me feel uneasy.

Over the past year or so, a deluge of alarming stories have rained down on our heads concerning the precipitous decline of wild fish populations in the world's oceans. Fish stocks have dropped so rapidly that many governments have been forced to impose moratoriums on the harvest of particular types of fish in fear that these populations might actually go extinct. Needlesstosay, these decisions have created havoc in the fishing industry, which is in jeopardy of collapsing altogether, especially along the northeastern coast of Canada. In turn, many fishermen have pointed their fingers at the environmental community, saying in effect "get off our back!" It's a charge that baffles me entirely.

What alarms me the most, however, is the lesson not being learned from this tragedy. The cause of population decline – overfishing by humans – is beyond debate and yet no one in the industry seems willing to admit fault or share any responsibility. People would rather point fingers and swear oaths. The truth is the fishing industry appears incapable of living within one simple rule: there must be a limit to the catch. Obviously, there are only so many fish in the sea; harvest them all and everyone suffers. Conversely, if the fishermen chose to live and work within certain limits then they could have their fish and eat it too, so to speak. It really seems that simple: fish together in moderation or die together in exploitation.

Living Within Limits

If I had to boil down environmentalism's central thesis into a bumper sticker I would write this: *learning to live within limits*. Everything we say and do as members of the movement when, we stop to think about it, comes back to this message. If we want to live in a healthy, attractive, and profitable world then we must abide by limitations to our wants and needs. We simply cannot have it all. This rule applies not only to Canadian fishermen, or to ranchers, loggers, and other commodity-based lifestyles, but to environmentalists too. A rangeland free of cattle is simply an unrealistic goal. We must accept limitations to our dreams and actions as well. This is a lesson we can all share: living within limitations means striving for a balance of dreams and realities.

The trouble is nobody likes limits. Nobody likes to get their hand slapped when it is caught in the cookie jar. A stern parent, shaking a finger, saying "no, no, no" isn't anybody's idea of fun or profit. For over a generation, the environmental movement has acted as this country's stern parent, shaking a finger at polluters and recalcitrant federal agencies (and occasionally striking them). It was a tough role to play, especially when the children threw noisier and more violent tantrums. But as any good parent knows, it is a job that *must* be done if he or she intends for the child to grow into a healthy and productive citizen.

But something has changed in the last five years or so. The tantrums by natural resource users and others have grown to deafening proportions, inciting some on a national political level to attempt to dismantle the very limitations that were considered reasonable by most people. The stern parent has suddenly become a bad person – someone to be reviled as a totalitarian bent on imposing his or her will on our playpen private rights. We seem, suddenly and in a heat, to resent any and all limitations on our behavior and damn the consequences.

I'm not a sociologist but I will hazard one explanation for this turn of events: we act as if we lived in a trash compactor. It might be true. By all indications we are being squeezed on four sides: by a shrinking base of natural resources, by stagnant wages, by a breakdown in cultural norms and values, and by a loss of faith in the political process to make a constructive impact in our lives. Slowly and inexorably, the compactor keeps squeezing us, resulting in a great deal of anger. A convenient target for this rage is the stern environmental parent. A resentment has begun to build about our message – living within limits – because it is not what people want to hear when they are being compressed into a little ball. It is still a good message and one, I believe, that will allow us ultimately to climb out of the compactor, but that may not be the point anymore.

Cynical attitudes about the corporate motives of the Republican leaders in Congress aside for the moment, I believe the attack on environmental regulations at the state and federal level is rooted in this 'compaction' of American life. The anger appears to be genuine as does the resentment and it would be a serious error on the part of the environmental community to dismiss them as the illogical rantings of a lunatic fringe. There is more substance to this complaint than we realize. People are hurting, frustration is mounting, and the environmental movement as a consequence runs the risk of irrelevancy. We must turn our attention to the noise in our midst. We must find a new way of articulating our message – to accept limits as a form of salvation – so that it means something to the majority of Americans. Right now we're not doing that.

March 1996

As the eye of the congressional hurricane passes over the country, giving us a temporary respite from an unreasonable tempest, I find my thoughts turning to history and lessons that have been apparently unlearned.

In my quest to understand how we arrived at this moment in time, in which a shockingly brazen frontal assault is being waged on a generation's worth of environmental achievement against the will of public opinion, I have turned to history of the conservation movement for clues.

Reading history in the shadow of a new and uncertain century, I am struck by how familiar the hopes and fears of 1896 sound, especially to the ears of today's conservationists. A century ago, John Muir and friends grappled with the

increasingly bleak aftershocks of the Industrial Revolution as physical and spiritual soot spread at an alarming rate. Cities overflowed with crime, alienation, and anxiety. The nation's quality-of-life was under siege. Turn-of-the-century America, wrote historian Roderick Nash "appeared to be overrun by confusion, corruption, and a debilitating overabundance." People became deeply concerned about "the eclipse of morality, refinement, and idealism by urbanization, industrialization, and business values." [6]

In response, Muir urged "nerve-shaken and overcivilised" city-dwellers to wander in the wilderness, post haste. In heeding his advice, many became leaders in the burgeoning conservation movement. The sentiment of Will Dilg, founder of the Isaak Walton League, was typical: "I am weary of civilization's madness…I am tired of your piles of buildings and I ache from your iron streets…I long for the unharnessed freedom of the big outside." He and others urged the populace to fish, hunt, hike, camp – whatever it took to restore mental health. As a result, open space became a prerequisite to a healthy society. Nature became a source for aesthetic experiences, spiritual contemplation, and physical fitness. Even business-minded President Calvin Coolidge endorsed a "life in the open."

In the process of protecting open space, the conservation movement also became profoundly anti-modernist. It savaged society for its "loss of illusions," as historian Michael Cohen wrote, and "its loss of trust in ideology, in God, of love, science, art, and faith." The answer, for activists such as Bob Marshall, was a redefinition of wilderness as the salve and savior of civilization. In nature could be found not only health, beauty, and spiritual renewal, but an antidote to the shortcomings of a materialistic culture. Conceptualizing wilderness, as much as walking through it as Marshall did, meant challenging the standard definitions of growth, progress, and economic value. [7]

Protecting wilderness meant accepting boundaries. Nash put it this way: "Preserving wilderness means establishing limits. We say, in effect, we will go this far, and no further." Unfortunately, self-restraint has proven to be a very elusive goal for Americans.

Ringing in the Ears

The so-called Information Revolution shows every sign of becoming the Industrial Revolution redux. The incessant clamor of our age, the babbling heads on television, the petty vindictiveness of our politicians, the congestion in our cities, not to mention the breakdown in basic civics, morals, and manners, has

caused a terrific ringing in my ears. I, too, am beginning to ache from our iron streets.

If others feel as I do, then a return to the natural world as the antidote to our creeping madness should logically follow, especially in this era of shrinking open space. The rush to nature, however, does not seem to be materializing, at least on the political level. It is true that more Americans than ever are using our public lands, but it also seems true that fewer Americans are demanding that their representatives do something to protect that land. On top of this apathy is the shocking attempt by Congress to give away the very land that is so intensely cherished by its constituents.

Why is all this happening? Political hubris on the part of Congress can't be the only answer. Part of it must be found in history. I believe the success of the conservation movement in the early part of this century was directly tied to the link its leaders made between wilderness and human health – mental and spiritual – not just the physical as we emphasize today.

Conservation in that earlier age wedded itself to human needs and human values in a way that is no longer promoted or even tolerated in some quarters. A deep faith in science seems to have supplanted human emotion as the primary interpreter of the natural world and I wonder if it's turning people off. The movement's capacity to critique society also appears to have been undercut by our obsession with hard science. What good are a few thousand facts and figures unguided by a convincing social message spoken in human terms that we can all understand?

Science has produced significant progress in our effort to protect the environment and hopefully will continue to do so, but looking back over the course of conservation history it seems to me that this loss of the human element in the argument for the preservation of open space has endangered the entire movement. Combined with the creeping chaos of our time, I believe it is time to restore 'the human' to the conservation movement.

May 1996

I returned recently from an annual meeting of professional archaeologists where a number of the papers delivered and theories discussed have set me to thinking and worrying about the state of things environmentally.

Much of what archaeologists do and write about involves the environment. There are two reasons for this: first, environmental variables are relatively easy to

discern in the prehistoric record. Tree-rings tell us a great deal about changes in climate, such as the onset of a drought, over a long period of time. Pollen analyses reveal what plants were in bloom, when, and how frequently. Animal bones talk of wildlife. Human artifacts talk of agriculture, hunting and warfare. Secondly, the environment played a huge role in all prehistoric people's lives. Living 'close to the land' really meant something a thousand years ago. In order for an archaeologist to truly understand a culture he or she must come to grips with the dynamics of human-environment interactions. In many ways, it is the key to what happened so many years ago. I believe it is a useful key for us today.

A Lesson of Prehistory

Contrary to popular expectation, what most archaeologists will tell you about the relationship between prehistoric cultures and the environment is this: it was rough. Far from being an edenic, harmonious balance of give-and-take between nature and culture, it was mostly take-and-take by humans. Most often prehistoric peoples would move into a particular region, exhaust its natural resources – water, wood, and wild game – and move on. It was a cycle as "natural" as the seasons.

Sometimes this cycle took two centuries sometimes it took a lot less. Sometimes it ended spectacularly, such as what happened at Chaco Canyon where a rapid rise in population put tremendous stress on scarce resources. When the region entered a prolonged drought, the whole social structure collapsed in a heap. Communities broke up and scattered across the landscape. A grand experiment in social aggregation, much like what we're trying today in our big cities, proved environmentally unsustainable. [8]

The archaeological record is replete with similar stories of boom-and-bust. Prehistoric New Mexico, in fact, can be viewed as one long migration flowing from northwest to southeast with communities flourishing and expiring in regular order according to differing rates of environmental exhaustion. Ask an archaeologist. This cycle was broken only by the arrival of the Spanish and enforced settlement.

From my own experience as an archaeologist, reinforced by what I have read and heard over the years, one lesson of prehistory appears to be this: humans are predisposed to short-sighted exploitation of natural resources. Unless a social or environmental check is put in place somehow, such as economic self-restraint or a drought, the human inclination to take-take-take and damn the consequences

will cause ecological damage and social displacement. It is a lesson we have refused to learn or chosen consciously to ignore.

Moderation

Everything, as Einstein once despaired, has changed except the way we think. This especially applies to technology – another arena of intense archaeological investigation. Resource exploitation was tolerable in prehistoric times because populations were small, open space abundant, and technology simple. Of course, all three of these conditions have changed profoundly by 1996, but none more than technology. Our ability to affect nature by technical means has shot forward by light-years. Our thinking, however, remains Neolithic.

Technology-bashing is not the answer to our current conundrum, of course, despite its faddishness. Instead, our thinking needs to evolve. We need to come to grips with our predispositions and profligate habits and make decisions about how we want to live our lives. We don't need to roll back technology, as some suggest. Rather, we need to roll forward our thinking and priorities – reuse over waste, open space over 'No Trespassing' signs, self-health over self-abuse.

I think one answer is *moderation*. This is a radical idea when you think about it. Everything in our culture points directly to excess: eat what you want, buy more than you can afford, curse public officials as loudly as possible, expose every fetish on television talk shows. There is nothing too outrageous anymore. Urged on by advertisements we seem to have thrown all restraint and caution to the wind.

So it is with the environment. Regulations that protect the safety of our air and water have suddenly, according to some lawmakers in Congress, become "burdens." They are obstacles to future growth and profit – i.e. continued excess and waste – they are impediments to the American Dream, they insist. The environment, by their thinking, has come to symbolize a wet blanket to a society determined to "Just Do It."

That's alright. Environmentalism's lesson is – or should be – moderation and self-restraint. Moderation is not the same thing as a monastic life, or a Neolithic one, however. It means putting strong curbs on our appetites – less growth, less consumption, and generally treading more lightly. It means breaking our predisposition to take-take-take. It means giving something back, and slowing down. It means changing the way we think – before it gets changed for us.

July 1996

As most of us are well aware, a recent Sierra Club referendum on forest policy netted a new national policy that demands a ban on all commercial logging on public land. Although the referendum did not muster anything resembling a mandate – less than 7% of the Club's total membership voted in favor of the ban – it is official Club policy. Now we must live with the consequences and I, for one, am rather alarmed.

Wise-Use antagonists, abetted by a salacious press whose appetite for controversy is downright carnal at times, are already demagoging the new no-cut policy as Exhibit A in environmentalism's slouch toward extremism. True or not, the new policy is terrible timing. Just when it seemed that the flames of conflict between rural and urban residents could not get any higher, along comes a new log for the rhetorical fire, placed there by Sierra Club hands. [9]

I'm upset because, as anyone who has read this column knows I believe the solution to the myriad problems confronting us and the environment on which we depend lies in moderation, not more extremism. As a society we must learn to curb our appetites, acknowledge our mistakes, and check our exploitative instincts. We must teach others to live in moderation, which is not the same thing as denial so that we might all have a bright future together.

This is no less true for activists in the environmental movement than it is for all those "others" out there – Wise Users, industry executives, ignorant consumers, as well as the 80% of Americans who insist, poll after poll, that they want a healthy environment. In fact, it is *more* true for us. We cannot preach moderation while behaving like an extremist organization as this no-cut logging policy would have us do. To do so destroys our credibility, which, in turn, destroys our ability to affect change.

It is a brass-knuckle policy. It suggests that the Club is ready to swing energetically at any person who eyes a tree as a source of revenue. There are no nuances in this bullring, no compromises, and no common ground; the forest product industries, no matter how big or small, will view this policy as a threat to livelihoods, and by extension, their lives. It is an invitation to rumble.

Spy vs. Spy

I am beginning to understand why the Republican-led assault in Congress on twenty-five years of environmental legislation went as far as it did. The answer

in a nutshell: we helped. Not by complacency, as has been suggested often, or by ineptitude, also suggested. No, environmentalists helped by losing touch with the hopes and concerns of middle- America. We quit making our case to ordinary Americans and then resorted to threats and denunciations when the chickens came home to roost in the '94 elections.

Fortunately, the irresistible force was met by an immovable object – public opinion – and the Republican war on the environment ground to a halt. The only genuine accomplishment has been stalemate. As a result, many middle-Americans became educated to the precarious nature of the laws that were designed to protect them. They responded and were largely responsible for stopping the bad bills in Congress. The Club was a leader but the people followed.

In the process, however, the environmental movement's disconnection from ordinary citizens was laid bare. We know people want clean air and clean water but we do not really know much more than that. Nor do some of us seem to care. It is this attitude that produces policies such as the commercial logging ban. I cannot believe that, if asked "Do you favor the elimination of commercial logging on federal lands even if it means the destruction of rural communities and the livelihoods of people who live there?" that the majority of Americans, or Sierra Clubbers for that matter, would respond "Yes! Of course!"

Some in the Club see it differently. The lesson they have learned from the year's Washington wars is this: we must fight fire with fire, extremism with more extremism until, like the two comic strip spooks hell-bent on destroying one another, both sides perish in a blaze of sound and fury, achieving nothing.

September 1996

Now that Hurricane Newt has been downsized to a tropical depression, I believe it is time to deliberate on the damage it hath wrought and contemplate how we might avoid similar maelstroms in the future. We might need to do this quickly. Hurricane Newt may swing out to sea over the next few months, gather strength, and return to our coasts in full fury in early November – a prospect that makes me extremely uneasy.

A few months ago, Congress passed a tolerable Safe Drinking Water Act, which President Clinton has promised to sign. It was, however, mostly a symbolic act. It signaled the capitulation of the Republican leadership's strenuous effort to gut a generation's worth of environmental legislation. It also marked a 180 degree reversal from an early effort to write an Unclean Water Act, thus setting a World

Record for the cynical depths to which politicians will descend when faced with overwhelming public sentiment. Thank heavens for election years!

The shameless attempt to line the pockets of corporate fat cats in the name of a smaller and "more efficient" government was exposed for what it was – a fraud. Newt and Company took a direct shot to the jaw from an outraged citizenry for their malfeasance, as they should have. Unfortunately, it was not a knockout punch and I am beginning to wonder how many rounds this fight will go.

The Good Guys won, that much is clear. What is less obvious is the moral of this fable. What is the lesson we have learned? Not to elect Republicans? Not much of a lesson there. Pound the pavement and get out the vote? Possibly, but Democrats don't always bring a brighter sunrise either. Keep the heat on Washington? Better, but waging a constant defensive campaign is exhausting. Get in touch with the grassroots? Good, but this is hard work and most environmental organizations seem more eager to focus on capitol houses. Blame the Bad Guy? This is effective and makes us feel good, but does not accomplish much in the long run. Beg for more money? I don't think so.

What have we as citizens concerned about the environment learned about this near miss? One thing seems crystal clear: it's World War I out there. Both sides have dug deep and elaborate trenches, hunkered down, and refuse to come out. The Big Berthas [10] of both sides rain bombs of incendiary rhetoric down over the field, igniting any flammable material. Poisoned emotions flow across No Man's Land like a gas, choking combatants and neutral civilians alike. Futile charge and counter-charge are mounted, resulting in carnage. It is war out there, right vs. wrong, good vs. bad; and the casualty list keeps climbing. A famous Civil War general when asked which ideological position he stood for in the war, responded wearily: "I just want to win." That describes Hurricane Newt's philosophy well, I think – but it also describes our own. Winning, it seems, is all that matters anymore.

Certainly winning is important, mostly because the price of losing is so high. Newt simply had to be defeated, no ifs, ands, or buts. Now that we have succeeded – at least for the time being – what next? A truce? A treaty? Or more fighting? Do we continue the Great War of Attrition at all costs? Do we, as Tacitus once observed about the Roman invasion of Britain "make a devastation and call it peace?" Do we sit in our trenches, catching our breath and mending our wounds while waiting for the next round of bombardment or do we look for a way out of the battlefield?

When Senator Bill Bradley of New Jersey [11] announced his retirement from Congress last year, he said that the 1994 elections had been fundamentally misunderstood by both sides. The electorate, he said, wanted solutions to problems not another round of finger-pointing and name-calling. The Democrats had failed to solve fundamental concerns, such as the deficit, low wages, and an uncertain financial future. So they were tossed. The Republicans in turn thought they had the solutions but these proved to be even more unpalatable than Democratic attempts to change things. What people want, Bradley said, was a coming together to solve mutual problems mutually. He saw, however, little or no hope of this being accomplished, so he quit.

How can we find solutions to the economic and environmental conflicts that are strangling the West and the country? The trenches are deep and intractable and very few seem willing to climb out for fear of being shot.

Can we find solutions? If so, can we do so before Bob Dole becomes President and a handful of extremists dismantle legislation the public so obviously cherishes? Probably not. If Dole wins then there will be just two options: full-out conflict, or despair. There can be no compromise with the sort of administration that Dole will lead, especially if Newt still rules the congressional roost. That much is clear. If Clinton wins reelection, however, I think serious efforts should be mounted to find solutions to these problems. I am not exactly sure what those solutions are, but I am willing to look.

November 1996

Recently, I attended two events that though unrelated proved to have a provocative connection. One was an informal gathering of forest activists, dominated by Hispanic loggers and members of the Green Party. The purpose of the meeting, it seemed, was to vent various grievances under the guise of consensus-building. The other was a formal workshop on wilderness and culture in New Mexico hosted by the Sierra Club, whose purpose also involved the airing of opinion, albeit a bit more dispassionately.

At the root of both meetings was the uneasy relationship between culture and wild lands. Nearly every speaker at both meetings agreed that we should make room for wilderness in our lives, but no one really knows how to do that anymore.

The primary grievance voiced at the forest meeting was directed at the Dominant Culture – meaning Euro-Anglo society – which was castigated for its inherent greed, its rapacious actions against the earth, its consumerism, and above all its stubbornly colonial attitude toward indigenous people. Which is probably all true. Our society *is* intolerably short-sighted. We eschew the Big Picture and have for a very long time, which is why we find ourselves in such a precarious position not just environmentally but socially as well. Imperialism-bashing, however, rarely creates a solid foundation for consensus or common ground especially when expressed so hotly, as it was that day.

It was, however, what followed that disturbed me. The environmental movement was thrown into the evil capitalist sink along with all the other sinners. We were considered to be part of the Dominant Culture, part of the problem, and dismissed almost out-of-hand. The forest community activists admitted there were a few enlightened environmentalists out there – the Green Party for example – but the rest of us were just another set of players in the great colonial game, bent on steamrolling everything and everyone who disagreed with us into the earth.

This incensed me at first. Since its inception in the late nineteenth century, the conservation movement has been one of the chief attack dogs biting at the heels of the Dominant Culture. "Stop Polluting the Air!" we yelled. "Stop Despoiling Our Water! Leave Some Wilderness Alone! Stop your greedy, wasteful, destructive ways!" As I quoted in an earlier essay, the sentiments of Will Dilg, founder of the Isaak Walton League,[12] was typical of the age: "I am weary of civilization's madness…I am tired of your piles of buildings and I ache from your iron streets…" What is this sentiment if not a direct challenge to the Dominant Paradigm?

This challenge is as true today as it was a century ago, if not more so. Why, then, were we being lumped together so casually with the elements of society that we were working so strenuously to change? Because a roomful of local folk felt dispossessed and colonized? Republican leaders in Congress, after all, tried mightily last year to subvert what *they* considered to be culturally dominant environmental legislation. They were the outsiders, they insisted with a straight face, attacking the status quo, not environmentalists. How then could we be perceived as being imperialistic by both indigenous peoples *and* their true colonizers? What was going on?

The second meeting involved a day-long conference on the meaning of federally-designated wilderness to the cultures of New Mexico. The themes were multi-culturalism and management – were they compatible? The overall goal will be to create a BLM wilderness bill that most New Mexicans of all stripes can support, and pass it through Congress. To that end, Rep. Bill Richardson showed up to promise his assistance if we could cobble together a true coalition proposal. Could we? We met for a frank discussion to find out.

A more personal goal was at work that day. As one of the workshop's organizers, I wanted to see if we could make a case for wilderness on cultural instead of biological grounds. The ecological argument for wild land has, in my opinion, come to dominate nearly all debates about setting aside wilderness. It is a good argument, but it is overwhelming all other theses. This is ironic considering that the Wilderness Act is primarily a cultural document. The word "biodiversity" is not mentioned once. It may not even have existed, as a word, in 1964. [13]

Much of the discussion at the workshop focused on wilderness as sacred land. This was certainly the Native American perspective, but it was almost everyone else's as well. To most Anglos such as myself a wilderness area is a sacred place, a spiritual place for rest, contemplation, prayer, and healing. It is also a place for biodiversity – but I view ecological integrity as simply another type of sacredness. It is a sacred place even if we never visit it. Simply knowing that holy places exist is enough. The act of reserving wild land, especially against the background of an unrelenting assault by the Dominant Culture is exactly the sort of challenge to the paradigm that must continue.

However, as I listened to the speakers make a strong multi-cultural case for wilderness, I began to understand why the forest community activists at the first meeting wedded our movement so easily to a Dominant Culture they despised. They view the ecological argument for wild land as imperialistic as any big corporation's business strategy. I had to agree. Divorced from a cultural thesis, the biological imperative looks an awful lot like another capitalist tool – as incredibly ironic as that sounds – which is why ecology is often referred to as a sledgehammer. Or, as one forest agitator likes to complain constantly about environmental activists: "They shut logging down even though they can't even *find* any Mexican owls in the forest!" [14]

There must be a balance between cultural and biological arguments for environmental policy. After all, John Muir implored us to come into the mountains to

get their "glad tidings" not to stay away. Even Aldo Leopold, one of the founders of ecology, once pleaded for "the preservation of some tag-ends of wilderness, as museum pieces, for the edification of those who may one day wish to see, feel, or study the origins of their cultural inheritance." Culture and biology – two halves that should be equal in the conservationist message, but are not. It's time to change that. It's time to restore 'the human' to the environmental movement and put it back on an equal footing with 'the biological.' How we can do this without diminishing efforts to protect biodiversity, which are critical to the health of these sacred places, will require careful navigation.

January 1997

Upon President Clinton's reelection in November, an audible sigh of relief could be heard rippling through the environmental community. Despite some misgivings about Clinton, which culminated in a painful endorsement process by the Sierra Club, environmental leaders knew they could breathe a little easier for the next four years, even with Republicans in charge of Congress. No one expects a reprise of the unprecedented assault on national environmental legislation that occurred two years ago. Everyone seems chastened by that experience, including us.

During this lull (the bad guys, after all, haven't packed their bags and left town) while the air is full of talk about cooperation, consensus and achievement, sincere or not, it will be worthwhile to ponder the lessons from this period of high anxiety and then act. It is a critical moment; the public, stirred to action and paying attention to the environment as never before, awaits leadership. The goal-line stand was successful; now the ball is in our possession.

Where do we go from here? Do we march down the field to the same tune that put us in such a precarious position in the first place or are we going to reach out to middle-America and say "Your concerns are our concerns too?" Are we going to put the human back into our movement, as I believe the public is asking us to do, or are we going to keep pushing people away with misanthropic policies? We sit, nervously, at an important crossroads.

People-Free Wilderness

Our movement is out of balance. It should be equally weighted between ecological concerns and human needs, but is not. A century ago, the conservation movement was driven by human desires – solitude, spiritual refreshment, a rejection of

modern industrial life, to name a few – but often shortchanged ecosystems in the process (feeding bears at Yellowstone dumps is a good example). The movement was brought into balance by Aldo Leopold, Olaus Murie and others, who demanded that we consider the biological health of land as well. Science balanced emotion and for a while there was harmony.

Today, the pendulum has swung too far toward science. Ecology, particularly in the form of endangered species protection, seems to be driving most of the movement's policies. Not only have the 'rights' of wildlife been placed ahead of human needs, but a deliberate demonization of human in general has occurred.

For example, a resolution was passed recently by a Sierra Club group in another state that called for the "setting aside of some habitat areas that are off-limits to all humans ("pure" habitat), preferably connected to each other by wildlife corridors that are also inviolable." The reason? "…the mere presence of human and hence any type of recreation," continues the resolution, "can be harmful or even deadly to wildlife." It goes on to say that wildlife have "as much right not to be molested in their homes as we do."

Politically, of course, this resolution is suicidal. It reinforces the cliché that our movement is simply determined to "lock up" the landscape and will be used by our enemies against us. Pragmatically, it is a stretch as well. The number of humans who actually go into designated wilderness areas is small. Are they really having such a deleterious effect on wildlife? What is "pure" habitat anyway? Humans have been mixing it up with wild animals for 15,000 years or so in North America. Does "pure" mean a pre-contact environment with Woolly Mammoths and Saber-Toothed Tigers?

While I can support the quarantining of critically endangered species from human contact in order to ensure their survival, that is not what this resolution is about. It has at its heart a fundamentally misanthropic message: humans are bad. We are the source of the plight that has befallen wildlife in this country, which is true – but banishment is not the answer. It also belittles the legitimate use of wilderness for enrichment and recreation. Wildlife *uber alles* is not a solution it is part of the problem.

Fighting the Wedge

Policies such as 'people-free wilderness' drive a wedge between people and nature. It says, in effect, that people are "unnatural" and do not belong in the normal order of things. The Sierra Club's call for a ban on all commercial logging on

public land drives a similar wedge between people and the land. These policies are wrong because in an age of increasing and overwhelming urbanization we should be making every effort to reacquaint people with the natural world, not driving them away. We should be investigating ways that wildlife and people can get along, not categorically rejecting any association.

I believe it was the environmental movement's determination to drive a wedge between people and wildlife that partly fueled the recent Congressional assault on our conservation heritage. Although greed, politics, and corporate shenanigans were significant forces stalking the halls of Congress too, there is no doubt in my mind that a backlash to our creeping misanthropism was also at work. The public struck back at Congress, of course, but they responded primarily to human issues – clean water in their homes, clean air in their cities, open space for their children, the opportunity to see wildlife in their natural habitats, and a chance to relax in their favorite national parks. It was a fight for the integrity of biology *and* people.

The lesson learned is this: we need to swing our movement back into balance. We need to balance the needs of the ecosystem with the needs of people, and not just hikers and campers, but hunters, fishermen, even loggers and ranchers. We must require that people tread more lightly on the land and learn to respect the rights of all living things to exist there, as Aldo Leopold implored us to do years ago, but we must also acknowledge the "naturalness" of humans and their "right" to use public land. We must also learn to get along; coexistence is not an option, it is a requirement.

We must say, for example, that the proposed Animas-La Plata dam is equally bad for symbolic as well as ecological reasons.[15] We reject the dam on spiritual, aesthetic, and social grounds not simply because it might endanger a fish. Why dam one of the last free-flowing rivers in the West? Why must there be more agriculture in a desert? Who died and appointed engineers God? Forget economics, that dam is simply an ugly idea. Let's curb our addiction to growth, change our ethics, and kill the dam. If that's good for the fish too, then so be it.

No social movement in history has succeeded without the support of people – many people. If we are to reinvigorate the environmental movement and capitalize on the groundswell of support generated by the recent fight with Congress then we need to restore the needs of people to our cause. Otherwise, we are doomed to goal-line stands in perpetuity.

March 1997

In my effort to comprehend recent events and to explore my belief that our movement is out-of-balance, I have sought advice in recent months from books by authors that I respect. It is important to seek wise counsel from those who have gone before, who have thought and fought over the same issues in the past, and who might have something to teach us today. Unfortunately, more and more of us are plowing ahead in ignorance of the history, philosophy, and literature of our movement. And it makes me very uneasy. Two authors in particular, one living and one living in spirit, provide a provocative, and corroborative, commentary on our movement's imbalance. Both speak to the 'human element' in conservation in a thoughtful and eloquent manner that needs to be shared here.

Wallace Stegner

Novelist, essayist, short story writer, and all-around gentleman, Stegner became an eloquent and effective champion of conservation causes during his lifetime, especially the defense of public lands (he served on the Sierra Club's Board of Directors for a time in the 1960s). Together with his good friend Ansel Adams, Stegner had a significant impact on critical fights – stopping the dams in Dinosaur National Monument and the bottom of the Grand Canyon, protecting wilderness areas, and decrying the exploitation of the American West and its natural resources. His death in 1993 created a void that has not been filled.

Stegner's perspective on conservation was almost entirely humanistic. In his famous "Wilderness Letter" of 1960, he wrote: "We need wilderness preserved because…the reassurance that it is still there is good for our spiritual health even if we never once in ten years set foot in it. It is good for us when we are young, because of the incomparable sanity it can briefly bring, as vacation and rest, into our insane lives. It is important to us when we are old simply because it is there – important, that is, simply as idea."

In his essay on why we should save Dinosaur from the clutches of dam builders comes this provocative statement: "It would be idiotic to preach conservation of a wilderness in perpetuity, just to keep it safe from human use. It is only for human use that it has any meaning, or is worth preserving." [16]

He elaborates: "A place is nothing in itself. It has no meaning, it can hardly be said to exist, except in terms of human perception, use, and response. The wealth and resources and usefulness of any region are only inert potential until

man's hands and brain have gone to work; and natural beauty is nothing until it comes to the eye of the beholder. The natural world, actually, is the test by which each man proves himself: I see, I feel, I love, I use, I alter, I appropriate, therefore I am. Or the natural world is a screen onto which we project our own images; without our images there, it is as blank as the cold screen of an empty movie house. We cannot even describe a place except in terms of its human uses."

Whether you agree or not with those sentiments, they strike an important chord in us. It tells us that powerful arguments can be made for the preservation of wild land for humanistic reasons – arguments, I submit, that resonate strongly with the public today. Or, as Stegner puts it: "We simply need that wild country available to us, even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in. For it can be a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures, a part of the geography of hope."

We need that hope now more than ever.

Wendell Berry

Novelist, poet, essayist, and farmer in rural Kentucky, as well as a former pupil of Stegner's, Berry has emerged as the leading voice of a new conservation ethic based on getting one's hands dirty in the soil. A passionate critic of corporate capitalism, Berry champions the conservation of rural communities as a way to simultaneously preserve the ecological integrity of the land and heal our wounded society.

Like Stegner, he too is a humanistic conservationist. In a collection of essays entitled *What Are People For* Berry writes "Our environmental problems are not, at root, political; they are cultural. As Edward Abbey knows and has been telling us, our country is not being destroyed by bad politics, it is being destroyed by a bad way of life." And "I believe that until fairly recently our destructions of nature were more or less unwitting – the by-products, so to speak, of our ignorance or weakness or depravity. It is our present principled and elaborately rationalized rape and plunder of the natural world that is a new thing under the sun." [17]

For Berry, the answer is not more science, but more affection. "The sciences are of no help, indeed are destructive, because they work, by principle, outside the demands, checks, and corrections of affection." Humans, insists Berry, need to retune their attitude to the land, to develop a love for nature that also includes respect for it.

In his most recent collection of essays, entitled *Another Turn of the Crank*, Berry aggressively and eloquently links human health to the health of the land. He

writes: "People are seeing more clearly all the time the connections between conservation and economics. They are seeing that a community's health is largely determined by the way it makes a living." He continues: "The natural membership of the community consists of small farmers, ranchers, and market gardeners, worried consumers, owners, and employees of small shops, stores, community banks, and other small businesses, self-employed people, religious people, and conservationists. The aims of this party really are only two: the preservation of ecological diversity and integrity, and the renewal, on sound cultural and ecological principles, of local economies and local communities."

Berry, like Stegner, sees the conservation movement as a two-pronged effort: to protect the ecology of wild land and to preserve the best aspects of human cultures. Both writers view these goals as inseparably entwined. The ruination of the environment shares a root cause with the destruction of culture. The same remedy must be applied to both symptoms. To fight strictly for biodiversity and the rights of wildlife while ignoring the simultaneous destruction of beneficial cultural traditions is foolish and dangerous. We need to embrace 'the human' along with 'the natural' and think of them as coterminous.

As Berry puts it "When we include ourselves as parts or belongings of the world we are trying to preserve, then obviously we can no longer think of the world as 'the environment' – something out there around us. We can see that our relation to the world surpasses mere connection and verges on identity. And we can see that our right to live in this world, whose parts we are, is a right strictly conditioned…There is simply nothing in Creation that does not matter."

Including people.

May 1997

An uneasy calm seems to have settled over the nation's environmental wars. Whether this calm is simply a lull in the fighting, a temporary truce, or pure exhaustion on the part of the combatants is not clear. While the skirmishing continues, the principal armies have returned to their camps to rest and reconsider their strategies. I wonder what it all means.

In Washington, D.C., Congress is off to its slowest start in decades, thankfully. Although a few bad bills have been introduced, notably Senator Craig's 'Logging Forever' vision for our national forests, the scale of potential harm is significantly lower than two years ago. The much-touted "Republican Revolution" failed to stir the masses and is no more. [18]

A similar lull is spreading across New Mexico. In recent weeks, two generals of opposing armies, a rancher and a forest activist, were tried by their peers and sent packing. On the Gila National Forest, the capitulation of the Laneys means the Diamond Bar grazing fight is ending with a whimper, not a bang. Although the sounds of chainsaws can be heard once again in our forests, the sound is thin and solitary. And no one has been hung in effigy for quite a while. [19]

What will we make of this uneasy calm? Where shall we go from here? Back into battle one more time? Or call a truce? We are at an important crossroads, and I think we should pick our direction very carefully.

The Upper Hand

By most indications, the environmental movement has prevailed in its struggle with the rural extractive industries. Backed solidly by rising public opinion, we have scored important and lasting victories, such as the recent decision to reintroduce the endangered Mexican Wolf. The public's mood is in favor of cleaner air and water, healthier land, increased open space, and tighter regulations. The public is demanding more environmental protection, not less.

Concurrently, the strategic plan of the Wise Use Movement has failed on nearly every score. For example, the County Movement, which was a nutty scheme to seize control of federal land, has been rejected unanimously by the courts. It was the latest and perhaps the last desperate gamble to maintain an exploitative status quo. Its demise signals a curtain call of sorts for this particular western melodrama and its colorful cast of characters. [20]

A surging tide of demographics and resulting culture change may be the final nail in the coffin of the "good old days" as well. Recent immigrants, including Baby Boomers, urban refugees, cappuccino liberals, and other restless souls, have been changing the face of the rural West for a decade. Their political and social influence was bound to alter the nature of traditional western communities, whether anyone likes it or not. Today, these changes look to be permanent.

How should the environmental movement react to the state-of-things in the rural West? Should we go in for the kill, demanding that all chainsaws be silenced in our forests and that all public rangelands by cattle-free by 2003? Now that we have slipped the knife into the body of traditional communities, should we twist it and watch what happens?

No. I believe it serves no one's greater good to exterminate the rural West, especially our own. Nature abhors a vacuum; if we kill off rural communities,

who will step into the breach? If your answer is wildlife or other agents of biodiversity then you are more naïve than I am. More government? No way. If federal land is emptied of working people, irresistible political pressure will build for its disposal. Of that, I am confident.

Who will fill the vacuum? The answer is easy: the same people who are already rushing in – land developers. Residential subdivisions and commercial urban sprawl are the true enemies of the land and its health. Which does more long-term damage to the land: a herd of forty cattle, or tons of concrete, asphalt, auto emissions, and Bermuda grass?

The trouble is we know this already. We know that urban sprawl is killing the West. We lament this development in books, articles, and op-ed pieces, we decry it on street corners, at workshops and potlucks. We wring our hands and shake our heads, debating simple solutions to terribly complex problems over beers. Then, when we are done complaining, we get back to the business of trying to Kill The Cowboy.

Why? What has the Cowboy done to us, really? He has overgrazed the land, to be sure, and he has been obstinate, politically belligerent, and occasionally rude too. He would rather fight than switch, but that's his problem. He taunted us into the boxing ring and we happily obliged. It was his mistake. Now our blood is up and the KO is in sight. So we wait, panting, for the next round to start. Meanwhile the West burns around us.

Compassion

These should be our goals: to put an end to overgrazing, clearcutting, and bad mines. The prize must be healthy land and a healthy future but not at the price of exterminating rural cultures. We should convince ranchers, for example, to behave better, to graze in an ecologically sensitive manner (yes, it can be done!) and to become the environmentalists they keep insisting they are. We should help them do this, which helps all of us – city and country.

The time is ripe for compassion, which the dictionary defines as "sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it." This should be our marching orders. We should extend a hand now, not a knife. However, though I believe rural communities have a right to survive and prosper, they do not have a right to continue their abusive ways. They will need our compassion to endure, but they must show some compassion of their own, particularly toward the land. Kindness must be a two-way street.

Some will interpret compassion as a form of weakness. Nothing could be farther from the truth. I am not suggesting that we slacken our vigilance or our standards. Quite the opposite. We are still in a desperate struggle with the destructive muscle of corporate capitalism in this country. We just don't need to take our frustration and anger out on the Cowboy any longer. In fact, there is a possibility we could be friends in this fight.

Forget the olive branch. What we need to do is roll up our sleeves and get to work. There are reasonable answers to the environmental and social ills that plague the West. There is a sensible solution to the grazing debate, for example – one that allows ranchers to make a decent living and protects the environment simultaneously. Significantly, this solution does not include the word "compromise" as part of its vocabulary.

It does, however, require compassion.

July 1997

On April 1, 1996, Taco Bell, a subsidiary of the mammoth PepsiCo conglomerate, took out full-page newspaper ads to announce its recent acquisition of a famous Philadelphia landmark – the Liberty Bell. Its purchase, the ads said, was made in the magnanimous cause of reducing the federal deficit. The chime henceforth would be called the Taco Liberty Bell.

The truth was revealed at noon. April Fool. Unfortunately for PepsiCo, not many people were laughing. Sold the national symbol of liberty to a private business? Ha-hah. Privatized a piece of our beloved national park system to save a few bucks? Ho-ho.

The timing of this 'joke' was quite illuminating, coming as it did at the tail-end of Republican attempts in Congress to dismantle significant environmental laws. Although late to the party, PepsiCo's contribution to the knife-sharpening chorus was no less noisy than any of its fellow wishful-thinkers. The table was set and the guests were in place. Fortunately, the waiters refused to answer the bell.

Corporations are out of control. They are everywhere, telling us what to eat, how to dress, what to buy, where to vacation, who to emulate, how to live. They have gone global and are now telling everyone else how to behave. They will not stop until each of us becomes a predictable consumer. There are few aspects of our world left that have escaped the often pernicious attentions of corporate conglomerates.

One of them is public land. Our national parks, forests, and wildlife reserves remain mostly unsullied by the hand of corporate America. True, our national parks are cluttered with cars and snack stands and our national forests continue to be managed to benefit a handful of corporate timber 'beasts,' but escape is still possible. We can leave it all behind, sneak off into the wilderness and be alone. And it is driving the corporations crazy.

Last year a plan was proposed in Congress that would allow corporate sponsorship of selected national parks. I was dumbfounded. Parks are for people, not corporations. They are designed to reflect and encourage public values, such as egalitarianism and a love of open space unfettered by 'No Trespassing' signs. Anybody can get in. Parks are about nature and beauty, commonly shared. They are also about history, a national story that resonates in each of us no matter what race, sex, or religion. There are not about money.

In this context, the Taco Liberty Bell 'joke' becomes ominous. Corporations are trying to find ways to chop down the significant obstacle in their path, i.e., the "public." Much of the recent effort in Congress to demolish environmental laws was prodded, funded, and *written* by Big Industry. Their goal was a simple one: separate the public from the laws that protect it and then go in for the kill. They almost succeeded. [21]

Heart and Soul

I am not an anti-capitalist, not by a long-shot. I believe, however, that the system should have a heart. Let me explain: a very famous person once said "Capitalism has no soul." The speaker wasn't Marx or Lenin. It wasn't even John Lennon. It was the Pope, John Paul II. He meant that the free market has no *inherent* soul. It is intrinsically indifferent, cold, calculating, and occasionally cruel.

It is a machine, John Paul suggested, that comes without a heart included. It is not an evil or bad machine by nature, just one without morals or rules, other than the rule of the jungle. Soul must be brought to the free market by the individuals who chose to work there, or profit by it. The heart of the machine, in other words, will be no greater, or less, than the quality of souls which inhabit it.

The father of a friend of mine is the best capitalist I know. He began his career as an elementary school teacher but quickly became disgruntled with the poor quality of teaching materials forced upon him by megalithic publishing houses. He decided to go into business for himself. He hired the best teachers and

writers he could find and launched a company dedicated to high-quality, affordable, and innovative primary school publications. Teachers welcomed him like rain after a drought. Business boomed. He won awards. He expanded his mission to Grades 4-6. The accolades, as well as the money, poured in.

He succeeded, in part, because he brought a very big heart to his business. Not only did he affect people's lives constructively (there are few nobler goals than educating children) but he also ran his company with compassion and consideration – and did it profitably. Eventually he sold the publishing firm to another corporation for multiple millions of dollars and retired knowing he had made a difference to schoolchildren, to teachers, to coworkers, to family, and to friends of his family who were overjoyed to see the system work beneficially for others.

Our Work

In the aftermath of the 104th Congress,[22] two jobs seem crystal clear. First, we must expand environmentalism's role in criticizing bad capitalistic behavior. It is part of our roots. The environmental movement was born in part as a strong reaction to the ugliness of the Industrial Revolution. If anything, things have become uglier. Short-sighted self-interest still rules the roost and shows no sign of abating anytime soon.

We must also strenuously defend the "public" in our society, particularly public land. We must not let national parks become toys of advertising agencies. We must put an end to the corporate rape of our forests. We must zealously guard every acre of BLM land against increasing pressure for its disposal. Sprawl is lapping at the fence line of public land today. Tomorrow it will demand an additional sacrifice of open space. We must say "no!"

Secondly, we must find ways to inject soul into our dominant and dominating economic institution. While fighting the egregious elements of capitalism, such as clearcuts, toxic spills, bad mines, and air pollution, we must also foster sensible alternatives, ones that address the heart of the way we live.

I don't just mean solar power, permaculture, straw bale houses, or recycling. We need to address cultural issues too, not just technological ones. We need to seek out the good capitalists and reward their good behavior. We need to teach moderation, sustainability, and sensitivity. I include ourselves among the pupils.

We also need to help. If a rancher, for example, manages their operation in an ecologically sustainable manner, we should be there to encourage him or her. A ranch, like a farm, if handled with care can be the very model of soul. What

greater affection can one have, besides for one's family, than for one's home and the land it rests on?

On that we can certainly agree.

September 1997

Two years ago, when I began this column, I promised myself three things: first, to be open-minded about the causes of the Congressional assault on environmental laws; second, to be willing to level blame at ourselves if we deserved it; and third, to shut up after a reasonable period of time. Having stuck to the first two promises as best I could, I now keep the third. Before I go, however, I would like to revisit a few of the points discussed previously and offer a final recommendation or two. The roller coaster ride called 'perpetual vigilance' never ends, of course, but there are ways to make it more effective.

Reinventing Our Roots

The environmental movement must broaden its focus, rearticulate its message, and find more eloquent heralds. It must get away from its current 'ecology *uber alles'* approach by looking to its roots, which are grounded in the humanities, not science. It must reincorporate human needs into its paradigm, such as physical and mental health, spiritual questing, aesthetics, relaxation, and contemplation. After all, the two goals – ecology and human need – are connected at the root and can harmonize with little effort.

The environmental justice movement is a good example. It attacks the exploitation of people *and* land, insisting that both are suffering from a common ailment. National environmental organizations, however, have been very slow in addressing environmental justice issues, mostly as a result of their continued ecological focus. [23]

Our goal should be this: since human beings are predisposed to short-term environmental abuse, we must devise strategies that encourage long-term behavioral change. We must get people to look at the Big Picture. People must also learn to accept limitations to their appetites and think about sustainability in the long-term. Ecological damage is just one manifestation of our perpetual shortsightedness. We must change fundamental behavior.

To do this we must find eloquent and creative leaders. Our movement has suffered from the recent deaths of passionate and articulate fighters, Edward

Abbey, Wallace Stegner, and Ansel Adams among them. Their shoes lie vacant. We are losing ground as a result; while we can promulgate an avalanche of letters and phone calls to stave off a congressional crisis, we need philosophers and motivators to keep our fires burning for the long haul. Some exist but we need more, and we need to encourage their activism.

Creative Solutions

Long-term change in human behavior will only occur if it is done voluntarily. People will change the way they conduct their daily business only if they are persuaded to do so, not arm-twisted into compliance. Recycling is a great example; a long and thoughtful campaign to change people's attitudes toward their daily garbage has succeeded beyond most people's dreams. Recycling now appears to be embedded in our national psyche.

Unfortunately, environmentalists are increasingly abandoning their persuasive powers in favor of the sledgehammer lawsuit. Moral, ethical, and economic arguments for changing our destructive ways are replaced by legal opinion and enforcement. We are achieving narrow ecological victories at the expense of long-term change.

At the same time, we must not abandon the 'big stick' when exploiters do damage to the land. Lawsuits, letters-to-the-editor, protests, and public denunciations will always be a part of the toolbox of perpetual vigilance, and rightly so. But we need a carrot to go along with our stick otherwise things will never change substantially.

We need to persuade people as to the moral, ethical, economic, and spiritual 'rightness' of our cause. Theoretically, everyone should already be on board. After all, who in their right mind could oppose clean air, clean water, open space, or the protection of wildlife? Well, *some* could, and do; but the majority of Americans are with us.

Personally, I am putting my words into action by devoting large chunks of time and energy to an effort to bring ranchers and environmentalists together over a new ranching technique that protects ecosystems while allowing ranchers to make a living. The response to the effort, called the Quivira Coalition, has been extremely positive, and overwhelming.

Quivira's goal is long-term, voluntary change in behavior on the part of everyone – ranchers, environmentalists, agency folk, and the general public. We're not arm-twisting anyone. Instead, we're letting the power of our idea do

the talking. Through workshops, site tours, and lectures we hope to educate and persuade people to change their attitudes. Already it is working. A few ranchers and environmentalists have put down their swords and begun talking about cooperating. It's a great first step down a long road.

I go with fingers crossed.

The Far Horizon
1997-2006
(published in the newsletter of the Quivira Coalition)

2005:

- President of the United States: George W. Bush
- Party in control of U.S. Senate and House: Republican
- Significant bill: hydraulic fracking exempted from Clean Water Act
- Top news event: Hurricane Katrina strikes New Orleans
- Price of oil: $55 a barrel (in 2016 dollars)
- Atmospheric carbon dioxide: 379 ppm
- Dow Jones: over 11,000 (for the first time)
- Gallon of unleaded gas: $2.27
- Top Internet companies: Google, Facebook
- Size and shape of mobile phones: clamshell, Blackberry
- Started: YouTube, Reddit, Kyoto Protocol (climate), housing bubble
- Notable deaths: Pope John Paul II, Rosa Parks
- Top-rated TV show: American Idol
- Time's Person of the Year: Good Samaritans (Bill Gates, Bono)

November 1997

> *"Men who look on nature, and their fellow-men, and cry that all is dark and gloomy, are in the right; but the somber colors are reflections from their own jaundiced eyes and hearts. The real hues are delicate, and need a clearer vision."*
>
> – Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*

What do environmentalists want? Concerning the grazing debate a few years ago, I thought the answer was easy: Kill the Cow. Rest the West. No Moo in 2002.

I learned this answer in 1993 at an "anti-grazing" conference in Albuquerque one fine fall day. I sat in the dark, transfixed by colorful slides of lunar landscapes that had once been healthy green pastures, naked and starving streams, which looked like the victims of medieval torture, and a parade of endangered species that had been pushed to the edge of extinction by the unfeeling bovine. The environmental destruction I saw shocked me.

At lunch I went outside with my fellow environmentalists and sat on a cement curb. As I chewed my vegetarian sandwich thoughtfully, I peered at a nearby throng of people wearing cowboy hats and carrying handmade signs. They milled sullenly around a black coffin that had the word "RANCHING" stenciled on its side. I listened impassively as one cowboy stoked the crowd electronically with declarations of ranching's immortality. When I finished my sandwich, I raised my hand and confidently waved 'goodbye' to the throng.

Why not? We were right and they were wrong. It was as simple as that. The color slides did not lie. Cattle had nuked the West's environment to the point of no compromise. The land was "cowburnt," to use Edward Abbey's famous phrase, and had to be healed with emergency action. [24]

The answer, everyone said, was the extermination of the cow and the cowboy. Now.

Having Doubts

My comfortable ride took a rocky turn when I elected to take a tour of Jim Winder's ranch. Increasingly suspicious of bumper-sticker solutions to environmental problems, I was curious about Jim's talk of progressive ranching techniques. He

told anyone who would listen, which wasn't many, that a healthy ecosystem was compatible with ranching. I found that hard to believe.

When I met Jim he sat on the Executive Committee of the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club. What, I wondered initially, was he doing there? Were we out of our minds? Ranchers were our sworn enemies. A book I was reading at the time declared ranching to be the West's most environmentally destructive land use, and one of the rural West's most economically, politically, and socially harmful influences as well. But there was Jim, talking about sustainable ranching. So who was telling the truth? I took a tour to find out.

What I saw opened my eyes. I saw healthy grass; I saw running water in a previously dry streambed; I saw wildlife. I listened to Jim talk about herding his cows, rotating them through small pastures, and grazing the land during the dormant (winter) season. He said positive things about biodiversity, coyotes, Mexican wolves, and termites. He talked about managing his land for ecological and economic health simultaneously. He said bad management was the problem in the West, not the cow.

Although I liked what I heard, I had to admit that I knew little about the ecology of rangelands. I, like many environmentalists, could not tell the difference between black grama grass and tobosa. What did I want the land to look like, asked Jim? I said I wanted clean and abundant water, loads of diverse wildlife, natural grasses, and the protection of open space. Jim said he did too.

The answer to the grazing debate, I suddenly realized, was a complicated one.

The trouble was I had been indoctrinated into the doom-and-gloom school of environmentalism. The goals of our movement are mostly punitive – close that bad mine, stop this awful clearcut, clear the air, clean the water, sue the bastards. As it should be. The Big Stick should never be put away, at least not until people begin behaving better. But this gloomy approach precluded clearer vision; we were spending all our time whacking the bad guys and not spending any time encouraging the good ones. There was a critical shortage of hope out there which blocked creative solutions. There was little education and no dialogue among combatants. Meanwhile, the land kept deteriorating.

Trust

Shortly after the tour of Jim's ranch, I read Dan Dagget's book *Beyond the Rangeland Conflict* [25] which profiled ten ranches around the West that managed

their land in a style similar to Jim's. In each case the twin goals of ecological restoration and economic growth were approached or achieved. Jim's method was not as mad as it first appeared; others were doing it too.

Dan's book tells the story of ranchers who "changed their grazing practices and reversed the loss of riparian habitat, biodiversity and recreational opportunities on public lands." Success is measured in improved wildlife habitat *and* economic returns. "We have come to know and respect communities and individuals around the region that grew up ranching – and loving – the same lands we do. We've discovered that neighbors don't have to agree on everything to work together when there is some common ground."

The key is trust. Progress in the grazing debate will not be possible without the establishment of a dialogue between reasonable players. Ranchers, environmentalists, land management agencies, and others need to open lines of communication to one another. It can be as simple as meeting for coffee around a kitchen table or taking a tour. Of course, dialogue is the first step toward building trust.

As Jim and I, and eventually Barbara Johnson [cofounder of the Quivira Coalition and editor of the Quivira newsletter], talked we began to see that an organization would be required to encourage further discussion. We proposed a big tent, under which any person with an open mind could gather to exchange ideas, learn things, and make friends. There is no "one way" to graze properly while restoring ecosystem health, we realized. Rather, there are many ways, though most point in a similar direction.

In June, we founded The Quivira Coalition as our big tent. My personal odyssey from bumper-sticker activist to tent builder took less than three years. In the past four months, the Coalition has been swamped with positive press and very favorable newspaper editorials from around the state, indicating that we have struck a nerve. All sorts of people have said kind things and they are walking into the tent.

Slowly but surely, trust is beginning to grow.

The question remains, however – what do environmentalists want? Take riparian areas, for example. This complex nexus of land and water is the source of much debate and litigation in the arid West. If environmentalists could communicate clearly their conception of healthy riparian zones, and if ranchers would resolve to protect these areas then much of the contention in the grazing fight would be greatly reduced.

We know that a healthy riparian area, full of native grasses and trees, provides critical habitat for wild fish and animals, slows floods and retards erosion,

ensures the high quality of drinking water, reduces sedimentation that can shorten the life of a lake or reservoir, enhances the aesthetic experience of a hiker or fisherman, and contributes vitally to the overall ecological health of a region.

We know that by stripping riparian zones of their vegetation, overgrazing causes ancient topsoil to be washed away, downcut erosion to accelerate dramatically, water temperatures to rise unacceptably, sediment loads to increase substantially, native grasses to be replaced with sagebrush, and wildlife to become threatened and endangered.

We want the damage to stop and the healing to begin. How *exactly* that is to be accomplished is why we have built the big tent. We need the advice of good science, the experience of good land stewardship, the example of good livestock management, and the help of good environmental guidelines.

I know it can be done – because it has already begun.

March 1998

"All great truths begin as blasphemies." – George Bernard Shaw

Fortunately for progress, human beings never stop questing. If we did, we would stop learning and the day we stop learning is the day we stop being human. The key to progress, both materially and intellectually, is education – without it we are stuck in stalemate. This is one of the reasons why we chose a newsletter as the primary vehicle for the Quivira Coalition – to educate and be educated in turn.

The importance of looking and learning was driven home with force to me in early December while touring the Arroyo Chico, a tributary of the Rio Puerco in the desiccated country west of Cuba, New Mexico. In less then ten hours I learned a lesson about the tyranny of false expectations and the value of an open mind that I feel compelled to share.

It was a hard lesson, one that rubs against conventional thinking about repairing landscapes degraded by grazing. It is a lesson that some of my fellow environmentalists will find difficult to swallow, especially since it contradicts the rising trend toward bumper-sticker cure-alls to pressing environmental problems. At the same time, it reinforced my belief that the ecological impact of grazing in the West is a complex problem that requires complex solutions, none of them easy. Relinquishing cherished preconceptions is painful, I know. So is change.

On a cold, but crystal-clear winter day, Jim Winder, Dr. Kris Havstad [a USDA range scientist and founding Quivira Board member] and I, representing the Quivira Coalition, together with environmental historian Bill deBuys and Forest Service grazing specialist Jerry Elson, inspected the Arroyo Chico at the invitation of Steve Fischer, watershed team leader for the Bureau of Land Managment's Albuquerque office.

We were joined in the truck by Orlando Lucero, the grazing permittee whose allotment embraced the Arroyo Chico and its tributaries. An affable and open-minded fellow, Orlando sought advice from us, mostly on how to improve the land and his bottom line simultaneously. We were happy to help.

We also went because Quivira was invited by the BLM to look for another riparian demonstration project. Based on our experience at Macho Creek,[26] we wanted to find a degraded riparian area, change the grazing management strategy there, and scientifically monitor the results. We believe that progressive cattle management and ecologically healthy riparian zones are compatible and intend to back up that belief with data.

Steve thought the Arroyo Chico, which pours nearly 30% of the sediment load into the Rio Puerco, was a likely candidate. He was eager to have Quivira's help, especially our scientific knowledge. The Rio Puerco watershed has been the subject of much attention in recent years, culminating in the establishment of the multi-party Rio Puerco Watershed Management Committee (of which Quivira is a member) whose mission is to heal land with innovative management strategies.

Healing has already begun. Over the past few years, the BLM had fenced out cows from the Rio Puerco itself and most of its tributaries – all except the Arroyo Chico. A well-known environmental group, based in Santa Fe, had leased some land from the state along the Puerco and "retired" it from grazing. A prohibition on all cows in all riparian areas seemed to be the only acceptable answer to the problem. Or was it?

We drove across the Chico, which was wider and held more water than I expected, and parked on the opposite shore. We climbed out of the truck, stretched our backs, and looked around. Tall, ugly, eroded banks greeted us impassively. It was a familiar sight in the Puerco drainage – the dramatic downcutting of loose, silty soil.

Jim and Kris wandered off by themselves. Shortly afterward, they were involved in a great deal of finger-pointing and stooping to inspect the vegetative

cover near the stream edge. A small herd of cattle shuffled away from their gesticulations as if afraid of what they might overhear.

I wandered over, with a frown on my brow. "It looks good," Jim said to me unexpectedly, smiling. "Everything I see here is on an upward trend. Orlando's doing a good job." Jim pointed to the ground beneath our feet. "Look at the toe of this bank," he continued, "it's stable, reclined, and well-rounded." It was also covered with grass. The tall, eroded banks behind us, in other words, were artifacts from an earlier age, not the results of recent grazing.

As we walked, Kris pointed out other indicators of riparian health – there was abundant western wheat grass, a perennial which cows normally eat to the ground, as well as salt grass and sacaton. There were coyote willows everywhere, very few of which showed any signs of being clipped by cows. The place was bursting with regeneration.

Jim said the uplands looked good too. On the drive in, he saw lots of species diversity among the plants (not to mention the two large elk herds we spooked). He pointed back down at the ground. "Soil is being captured here," he said, "which is big news considering how highly erodible this stuff is." Kris concurred. Orlando's allotment was definitely on an upward trend.

There was one sign of trouble: a conspicuous lack of cottonwood regeneration. Orlando led us to one big tree where we looked around for shoots, without luck. Kris pointed to a patch of alkali sediment on the Chico's bank. "Perhaps that's the culprit," he said. Jim pulled off a small branch of the cottonwood, sharpened it with his knife, and pole planted it in the ground. "Got to get it started sometime," he said with a smile.

Jim and Kris's recommendation to Orlando and Steve? No fencing on the Arroyo Chico, at least not here. "Think about the message fencing sends," said Jim. "It says that management is the problem and that the only solution is keeping the cows out. That's the wrong message here. Orlando's doing a damn fine job."

No fencing along a riparian area in the Rio Puerco drainage? It sounded like heresy. Steve said he came on the tour fully expecting to fence *something*, and the BLM will likely present that option as one of its management alternatives. But here were Jim and Kris, talking about good cattle management in a riparian area which has reversed the downward spiral of soil erosion and vegetation degradation, recommending that cows be allowed to remain. That was quite a message indeed.

To be sure, Orlando's system needed to be tweaked. He grazes the Chico only during the dormant season (winter) with a relatively small herd. But he keeps

his cows in the riparian area too long. Jim said he should move them out at the first sign of spring budding among the plants. That way, the vegetation gets a full growing season to do its thing.

There were other recommendations, but none changed the simple truth that Orlando, by grazing lightly in the dormant season and by moving his cows around on a regular basis, had allowed the riparian area along the Arroyo Chico to recover.

There is a good chance that Quivira will still establish a riparian monitoring project along the Chico. However, instead of documenting the resurrection of degraded land by a change in management style, we will be monitoring health and the tweaks that are necessary to make land healthier. We will be monitoring hope, in other words.

Lessons Learned

For years, I have listened to the steady drumbeat of "kick the cows off" as the only solution to the deep damage in the Rio Puerco watershed. I mostly believed it, especially when I learned that the BLM over the past few years had fenced cows out along the Puerco's length. Rest, I knew, was certainly required in the riparian areas – possibly permanently.

Orlando Lucero's work along the Arroyo Chico, however, muted the drumbeat. Certainly, there are poor cattle managers out there who deserve to have their cattle fenced out, but as Orlando's example demonstrated, bumper-sticker solutions to this environmental problem will not work.

Ranchers in the Puerco watershed could learn from Orlando's example. He is still in business, his cows have access to water, and there is plenty of forage for cow and wildlife alike. The land is healthy, the family traditions continue, and open space is protected. It is very beautiful country – an enterprising real estate speculator or two could make a killing here. If we let them.

These are important lessons for environmentalists too. Killing the cowboy is not necessarily a good thing and may, in fact, be detrimental to our goals in the long run. The lesson learned on this tour focused on the dangers of looking at the world in black-and-white. "I win and you lose" will sink all ships. We need healthy land and we need healthy stewards to watch over that land. It is not an impossibility, not if we try.

Re-examining our preconceptions is the first step.

May 1998

"Where there is life, there is hope." – Cicero

It is always dangerous to talk about history before it happens.

Heedless, a veritable industry of prognostication has sprung up in recent years, full of pundits, talking heads, analysts, and experts babbling on about the profound import of this or that minor event. With so many people talking at once, it is a wonder history happens at all.

Most talking heads, of course, are not actual players in any drama and are often disdainful when the players speak up.

Nevertheless, a perceptive actor should be able to articulate the deeper themes of a play. He or she may not be able to deviate from the script or change the ending, but the general flow of a production should be clear. And I think the drift of the western drama called "grazing" looks promising.

New Ideas

This thought came to me one day while I sat in an old opera house in Socorro, New Mexico, listening to a panel discussion about the future of organic farming. The workshop was entitled "Growing Your Farm/Ranch Into the 21st Century" and it was organized by a group of farmers and ranchers who are determined to see their livelihoods survive.

The threats are urban development and the spread of monopolistic agribusiness, which, according to one speaker, will result in "the end of the rural West and wide open spaces we grew up with. Nobody who loves the West benefits: rural community character and values are lost, wildlife habitat suffers, and our nation's ability to grow its own food continues to erode."

In other words, it was a workshop of new ideas and new hope.

Topics included the high value of conservation easements to ranchers, the economics of organic farming and strategies for keeping the family in the family ranch. One rancher was so motivated by the discussion that he went off and organized his own workshop a month later. Now he is starting his own non-profit land trust.

What I heard encouraged me. People from diverse backgrounds with diverse goals, were linking hands and mulling new ideas for preserving open space, rural communities, and small businesses. To me, it sounded like history.

At the risk of sounding like another talking head, I believe the intense social and political changes that have rocked the American West since World War II have brought us to a fascinating and critical juncture. The fires of conflict, fueled by the friction created when the irresistible force of change rubs against the immovable obstacle of tradition, have cooled down somewhat in recent years creating an opportunity for hope.

Despite the steady rain of lawsuits, the occasional flash of hot rhetoric, and the familiar rumble of angry thunder through the woods, the land and the populace appear ready for reasonable solutions to age-old debates. The extremes have succeeded brilliantly in discrediting themselves and now the *radical center* holds the stage.

Judging from the strong positive response we have received, the timing of the Quivira Coalition was perfect. No entrance could have been possible five or ten years ago and if we had waited any longer it might have been too late. The *radical center* wants dialogue, collaboration, and new ideas, and we are laboring mightily to deliver them.

We are not alone, fortunately. We fit into the broad sweep of events washing over the West as individuals and organizations begin to use their brains and their hearts, instead of their fists, to solve problems. This is exactly what the Socorro farm/ranch workshop was all about – innovation, cooperation, and motivation.

Perhaps what is most intriguing about this broad turning of the tide, if I may be so bold, is its populist foundation. The debate about the future of the West is being taken back from the small and shrinking pool of gladiators and given to cooler heads. Suddenly, people see a role for themselves in shaping their home and are enthused again.

I see it happening with the Quivira Coalition. People from all over the region and all walks of life have called or sent money in support of our efforts. These are good people too, without axes to grind, or chips to knock off. As the word spreads – and it is spreading quickly – the foundation of good will grows bigger and more impressive. This positive populist expression, especially in these days of intense commercialism and deep cynicism, makes my heart glad.

It proves that we are still a democracy and the public is still judge and jury.

Northern New Mexico

A good place to watch the turning of the tide is in the mountains and valleys (and cities) of northern New Mexico. The site of effigy-hanging acrimony

between environmentalists and natural resource users, the region has cooled off somewhat as reasonable people begin to explore new ideas to old conflicts.

The grazing debate is a good example. In June, a group of ranchers, conservationists, scientists, forest service employees, and members of the public will meet in Peñasco to listen to common-sense solutions, including development of a grassbank, the reintroduction of fire into the ecosystem, and the thinning of the forests – solutions that are cooperative and benefit everyone's needs.

It is an opportunity and a challenge for everyone, including the Quivira Coalition. The economic, ecological, cultural, and governmental differences between ranching in the northern and southern parts of New Mexico are profound. Ideas that work well on a large, ranch may not be terribly useful on a 600-acre ranch. On the other hand, riparian areas still need to be fenced, dormant season grazing still needs to be tried, cows still need to be herded together and moved around regularly. The basics of the New Ranch sometimes transcend many cultural and environmental particulars, and sometimes dovetail.

For example, what is the 21,000-acre Ghost Ranch, with its nine hundred head of cattle belonging to fifty-five local ranchers and its holistic style of management, but a Mexican-style *ejido* – or traditional commons land? These are new ideas with an old purpose.

The past, as Faulkner once observed, is never very past, especially in northern New Mexico.

My hope is for an economic, environmental, and cultural renaissance in the north. Let's help the organic farms get on their feet, let's help people find a way to use their forests sustainably, and let's find innovative ways to keep the family in the family ranch.

The potential exists for "Vermont-style" economic development – family farms and ranches producing high quality food through co-ops and other associations for markets in Santa Fe, Taos, and points beyond. A "Grown in Northern New Mexico" label, assisted by skillful advertising, could very be popular – and profitable.

The return of economic vitality to the villages of the region would stabilize eroding cultural traditions. Kids might desire to stay on the farm, or work in the woods, or raise a cow. The pressure to sell property might be alleviated; and the need for a city job might be reduced. People could get reacquainted with the joys of knowing the land again.

A healthy environment would lift all boats. Holistic ranch management, organic farming, forest restoration, and the availability of grassbanks, all work

toward the economic and cultural advantage of every community. And that's just for starters. There are many other environmentally sensitive strategies that work harmoniously with economic goals. We just need to roll up our sleeves and get to work.

September 1998

"The central thesis of game management is this: game can be restored by the creative use of the same tools that have heretofore destroyed it – axe, plow, cow, fire, and gun. Management is their purposeful and continuing alignment." – Aldo Leopold, *Game Management*

Ignorance is killing us. It is killing the environment too and all the wild creatures that depend on it. Just look around you. Decisions are being made in courtrooms and meeting rooms without an adequate foundation of facts and the consequences of these decisions are ruining us.

Ignorance rules because no one looks at land anymore. Federal land managers can't because they are chained to their computers responding to lawsuits; environmental activists can't because they're buried too deeply inside concrete jungles (or too busy rushing in and out of courthouses); ranchers can't because they're too focused on their animals (and on survival).

This is a crime because the answers to our questions can be found on the land – how it looks, how it is eroding, how it is healing. We must understand how an ecosystem properly functions before we can do anything else. We must understand how water cycles, how energy flows, how minerals work their way up to the surface of the ground. We must comprehend how a plant functions before we can preserve it – or eat it.

It is time to get out of our chairs, off of our political agendas, and away from our know-it-all confrontational posturings. It is time to go outside and *look* at the real world. We might be surprised at what we discover.

Nowhere is the need for looking and learning from land more critical than with the issue of threatened and endangered species. The bad blood between environmentalists and ranchers, which has come to the boiling point in recent months over the protection and management of these rare creatures, has completely obscured any messages land might be sending us. Even land management agencies have lost track of the facts.

It has become painfully clear to me that this fight is hurting the chances for some species to recover. When a rancher in the boot heel of New Mexico recently decided to shoot a rare jaguar with his camera instead of a rifle, he was rewarded for this brave act of stewardship with a lawsuit from an environmental organization. Now the rancher is angry that he tried to help.

A handful of environmentalists is pursuing a political agenda in court that has very little to do with real world biology and they should admit it. Conversely, some ranchers are using endangered animals as a club to fight to maintain political control over public land and they should admit that, too.

Meanwhile, the imperiled creatures continue to suffer. This isn't right. All creatures, big and small, should have an inalienable right to life and liberty. No species should be allowed to go extinct, unless we can prove unequivocally that it did so as a result of a "natural" process (if such a thing even exists anymore in our increasingly "unnatural "world).

We should stop threatening species and start saving them – *really* saving them. This won't happen with lawsuits or regulations. At best they are stopgap measures whose benefits are often neutralized by the hard feelings they engender. Long-term environmental health will not arrive until we get out onto the land and learn, as Aldo Leopold urged us to do so many years ago.

We should go directly to the homes of the Mexican Wolf, the Spikedace Minnow, the Spotted Owl, and the Willow Flycatcher and ask them what they need rather than revel in our destructive ignorance from afar.

Rest

One of the first things you learn when you actually get out on the land is how limited "rest" can be for restoring ecological health. This is big news because retiring land from livestock grazing – or "unranching" as some call it – is the mantra most often chanted by environmental activists, especially in regard to endangered species protection. Kick the cows off, they say, and Eden will be restored.

The truth is somewhat different. It is true that short-term rest can have a tremendous beneficial impact on an ecosystem, especially if the land has been overgrazed. Like a coiled spring, hammered land will often rebound energetically when released from year-round grazing. The results are often as dramatic as they are substantial.

But long-term rest often has deleterious consequences for land. Ecosystems require disturbance to "stir" things up periodically either through fire, or animal

impact, or hydrologic event. Nature was never "preserved" in its original state. It was constantly subjected to the forces of change, including the grazing of bison, elk, and deer. Human beings have been impacting "wilderness" for nearly 15,000 years in North America.

To tell the public, as so many activists do, that "resting the West" will automatically restore endangered species is misleading at best. Instead, the public must learn that "rest" is only one tool in the tool chest; others include fire, technology, money, people, and, yes, grazing. Each piece of land will require different combinations of different tools.

In dry environments such as the Southwest, "rest" often results in ecological stagnation. The absence of water will cause plants to wither and turn gray without decaying significantly. As a result, nutrients and minerals will remain trapped in each plant until a disturbance of some sort occurs, such as a wildfire.

When the "tool" of grazing can be carefully controlled and selectively applied, it can be very beneficial to the proper functioning of an ecosystem. Grazing animals help recycle plant material both by defecating and by pressing seeds into disturbed soil with their hooves.

Besides, who said "rest" was "natural" anyway? Certainly not an ungulate.

The consequences of "rest" both positive and negative are readily apparent to anyone who has walked across grazed land with their eyes open. "Rest" has its benefits, but so does progressive grazing management. The results don't lie.

Status Quo?

It is critically important for ranchers to look beyond the avalanche of lawsuits. They need to look beyond beef production as well. They need to look long and hard at what is coming next.

Jim Winder likes to tell people that any rancher who thinks he's going to be only in the beef production business in the 21st century will be out of business very soon. Ranchers need to look at their whole ranch, including potential conservation, recreation, and other economic values. They need to become "resource managers" to use Jim's terms, not just livestock operators.

A good place for ranchers to start is by restoring ecological health to their land. This will not only help with the lawsuits (the appearance of an endangered species on a ranch should be a *good* thing), it will help with the bottom line as well. More grass means more forage; more plant diversity means more wildlife; more wildlife means more hunting and more bird-watching (you

would be surprised what people will pay for recreation). More environmental health means more economic health.

The trick is to turn problems into opportunities. Don't treat an endangered species as an obstacle, tackle it instead as an opportunity. Make allies with friendly environmentalists (there are lots of us out there!). Get them to help you build a fence, or pay you to scout for birds. Turn the tables. Marginalize the extremists by shaking hands with the friendlies. Look for opportunities and test new ideas.

New thinking, however, requires new looking. This is why the Quivira Coalition has begun a series of Outdoor Classrooms, starting with two on recognizing Rangeland Health. [27] Do environmentalists know what health really is? Hint: it has nothing to do with a judge's ruling or grazing fees. Do ranchers? Hint: it has nothing to do with ear tags or weaning weights. Could they recognize rangeland health if they saw it? Could you?

Eventually, we will expand our offering of Outdoor Classrooms to include sessions on riparian function, ranch/resource management, monitoring, and the effects of fire. We might even have one on the needs of endangered species. We will continue to include ranchers, environmentalists, public land managers, academics, and others in our Classrooms so that everyone has the same opportunity to look and learn.

We will learn, as Aldo Leopold instructed us fifty-five years ago, that we already have the tools we need to solve our problems. They are the same tools that created them, of course. We just need to use them differently. It starts with looking, listening, and asking questions. I invite everyone to join us.

January 1999

"What a young American coming of age confronts now is not a limitless potential, but developed power attended by destruction and depletion. Though we should have recognized the land as a living organism demanding care and stewardship, we have treated it as a warehouse, and now it is a warehouse half emptied." – Wallace Stegner, *American Places*

What do we lose exactly, when we lose open space?

This question confronted me a few years ago while spinning through Phoenix, my hometown. Bent on nostalgia, I drove my wife through a cavalcade of former homes, schools, and other childhood haunts, eventually aiming the truck toward what had once been the edge of town. To my dismay, there was no edge; subdivisions rolled on and on without pause.

We prospected for an apparition from my childhood entitled *Powderhorn Ranch*. It wasn't much of a ranch, even in my memory. It had been a collection of rambling corrals, full of weeds and manure. There had been a small headquarters, a mobile home, and lots of open space. Our only neighbor had been a mysterious, dilapidated palm tree nursery.

My father had rented the "ranch" for a few years, mostly to get out of the office. We hired a wrangler, installed a handful of horses, and spent nearly every weekend there, fixing things. I remembered the smell of the horse feed, the look of the crooked fences, the freedom of the long trail rides. I remembered trying to build a miniature golf course among the anthills and creosote.

I also remembered living on the edge of a vast desert wilderness.

Sign of the Times

We drove back and forth among unfamiliar boulevards looking for a sign of the past. We eventually found it at a generic street corner: *Powderhorn Ranch* the subdivision.

As my wife and I stared at the vast cement holocaust, we wondered out loud what had happened to the desert. Its only visible vestige was a strip of open space beneath the massive electrical towers that marched across the shattered landscape like steel kachinas.

Where did the coyotes go? Or the cactus? Or the other animals? I remembered riding a horse across an endless horizon of living land. I remembered the scant evidence of human impact – an occasional jeep track, an old stone home, a prehistoric canal. But mostly I remembered mile after mile of life.

I also remembered the signs. Driving back and forth to the ranch from our home downtown, I had spied real estate signs stuck into the desert like spears. Most had been defaced with a simple spray-painted message: SAVE OUR DESERT. I remembered cheering the vandal silently.

Now the desert was gone.

Physically, Phoenix has become the largest city in America. In 1995, the Phoenix metro area occupied nearly 1000 square miles of former desert; it consumed open space at the rate of twenty-four acres per day; and it added 230 people to its population every twenty-four hours. The numbers can only be bigger today. [28]

Some environmentalists write off cities like Phoenix, preferring to vent their outrage at smaller, more tempting targets like the family rancher. Tackling sprawl

requires financial and emotional resources that many environmental organizations do not have. It also cuts a little too close to home. However, the metamorphosis of Powderhorn Ranch told me unequivocally we are losing our desert ecosystems at an unacceptable rate – an acre every hour of every day of every year.

Losing land is only the beginning. The loss of open space also increases the urban dweller's estrangement from nature. As society's cement cocoon expands daily, we push nature farther and farther away until it exists mostly as an abstract ideal on the periphery of our lives.

City folk still adore nature, perhaps even treasure it; but it is a leisurely love, conducted on weekend trips to the mountains or a dayhike in the desert. Nature has become a pastime for most Americans, something remote and sanitized.

Meanwhile, our children are growing up without the feel of dirt under their fingers, the smell of wet creosote in their lungs, the sight of a sunrise on the hills in their eyes. There is nothing abstract about nature, not if you feel it, live it, and see it on a daily basis. Nature cannot be intellectualized; it needs to felt.

I learned this as a child at Powderhorn. During our brief but intimate existence on the edge of the desert, I learned the timeless value of contact with nature. I began to detect why human beings have spent millions of years evolving in a very tight bond with wild things – a bond that defines our "humanness" as much as our ability to make music or fly to the moon.

Yet, standing in the middle of that asphalt wilderness I also learned that in only a few years we have badly damaged this bond and we have done so with gusto.

Losing Memory

We are also losing our memory when we lose land. Not only childhood hopes and dreams are lost, but larger dreams as well. Liberty, for example, has been historically bound up with open space. Go West young man and be free. In the late nineteenth century, a famous historian postulated that the very essence of American democracy was dependent on the availability of open space.

We lose touch with our roots when we pave over paradise. We lose touch with our parents and their parents; we lose our connection with the lessons of nature; and we lose our center as human beings.

Who has not returned to a cherished childhood landscape only to be shaken at the sight of new construction? A favorite field lost, a secret arroyo exposed, a sacred fishing hole desecrated. All of these represent ties to the past that are damaged or severed with important consequences for the future.

Progress can be measured as the sum of experience and ingenuity. What is experience, however, but memory? If we lose touch with our past, with our families, or our ideals, then we jeopardize our ability to build a sustainable future.

My father died a number of years ago. Now the Powderhorn Ranch that I knew and cherished is gone too and with it went another tether to my roots. How many memories can we cut before we become unmoored?

We need to redouble our efforts to save open space because it protects ecosystems, keeps us connected to the land, and encourages memory (and puts food on the table). Protecting land is also a necessary act of defiance against the destructive powers of our society. Nothing is inevitable, even sprawl – not if we put our shoulders into the task.

March 1999

"Stewardship: the individual's responsibility to manage his life and property with proper regard for the rights of others." – Webster's Dictionary

So much to do, so little time.

In February, the U.S. Department of Agriculture released alarming numbers from a census of farms and ranches in New Mexico. According to a news release, between 1992 and 1997 the total acreage of farms and ranches in the state declined by more than a million acres, mostly lost to development. In Arizona during the same period, eight million acres of farm and ranch land went out of production. [29]

A million acres in New Mexico! To producers, that's a million acres no longer available to maintain an agricultural way of life; to consumers, that's a million acres no longer available to grow food for our tables; to environmentalists, that's a million acres no longer available for maintaining wildlife habitat and biodiversity.

There is little doubt that this rate will continue into the future and possibly accelerate as the long arm of urban expansion continues to consume land. Not even public land is immune; as private land is lost, pressure will build for the disposal of public property for private use. Various attempts along this line have been tried in recent years in state legislatures and in Congress. Well-heeled development interests will try again.

The loss of private land to development will also increase pressure on wildlife populations. According to one estimate, 65% of all endangered species

exist on private land, mostly in riparian areas. The loss of this habitat raises the specter of extinction.

In other words, time has become our most precious commodity.

Our Mission

Over the past six months, there has been a steady increase in requests to the Quivira Coalition for our assistance. The variety of these requests speaks eloquently to the crisis confronting all of us.

Some requests are for help in arranging a conservation easement on a ranch. This is a legal agreement by which a nonprofit organization buys the "development" rights to a piece of land owned by a private individual. It means the landowner may never subdivide or otherwise develop his or her property – ever. The ranch remains a working ranch in perpetuity and the landowner earns a substantial tax break in the process.

It's a great idea, and one that is catching fire across the West especially since it protects private property rights while conserving the environmental value of the land. It's a job for land trusts, however, not the Quivira Coalition.

Some people have suggested that we become involved in the free market side of conservation ranching. This includes the promotion of organic beef, the certification of "predator-friendly" meats, and the development of niche markets for products created in tandem with progressive ranch management. These are great ideas, especially since they allow the public to vote with their pocketbooks for good grazing management. It is not, however, part of our current mission statement. [30]

A few people have asked that we use our skill at bridge-building to help them facilitate or mediate agreements between hostile camps. This is important work too, but we are not a consensus group. We don't search for "middle" ground; and we don't use the word "compromise." There simply isn't enough time.

Stewardship

Our focus is on land and on the people who are its stewards. Our work is aimed at restoring rangelands, protecting open space, encouraging ecologically sensitive ranch management, acting as a resource for other innovative ideas, and working as a catalyst for change. This is important because so much of the grazing debate in the West, when you look at it closely, is not focused on stewardship.

For example, anti-grazing activists regularly deride government assistance to ranchers as subsidies for "welfare cowboys." [31] Recently, a long litany of complaints against the "special treatment" afforded the cattle industry by "cowed" state and federal governmental agencies was published on the Internet. Not once does this document mention good stewardship.

Similarly, the agitation by the ranching community over private property rights, custom and culture, and federal "oppression" has little or nothing to do with conditions on the ground. Even the struggle over the reintroduction of the Mexican Wolf has more to do with power and politics than biology.

Another good example involves grazing fees. Combatants on both sides of this debate use the price the federal government charges for grazing animals on public lands as a club on the American public. What, however, do gazing fees have to do with stewardship? The answer: almost nothing.

It is important to recognize that most of the grazing debate in the West is political, not environmental. That is why so much confrontational energy is being spent in the courts and in Congress rather than in dialogue out on actual land. There are many reasons why this brawl became political: lack of communication, conflicting economic concerns, ideological rigidity, even bad manners. One reason stands out, however: desperation. Both sides feel that time is running out, and they're right.

The answer, of course, is to get back to the land and start a discussion about stewardship. What should land look like? How does it function properly? What sorts of human activities are sustainable? And how do we work together to achieve common goals before it's too late?

This is why herding is so attractive. By congregating cattle together and moving them every day under the watchful eye of a professional herder or by some other stratagem, overgrazing is easily avoided. Under holistic principles, herding can be a tool to restore rangelands to health. For ranchers, herding relieves the pressure from fence building, low weaning weights, hungry predators, declining forage, conflicts over riparian areas, and seasons being shortened because of a lack of spring grazing. Herds could even increase in size, if environmentally sustainable, with obvious economic benefits.

Herding is an old idea whose time has returned. Great herds of bison and other ungulates roamed the range for hundreds of thousands of years. Pastoralism – the human-directed herding of domesticated animals – is at least ten thousand years old and deeply embedded in cultures around the world. [32]

The trick is to look at herding with modern eyes. For example, we need to better understand how an ecosystem functions and what role grazing animals play in that system before we can create a sustainable herding program. Water, soil, plants, sunlight, wildlife, fire, disturbance, and the timing, intensity, and frequency of cattle grazing are all interconnected. Science is critical to everything. Long-term monitoring of the effects of herding on the land should be a key element to any effective program. Ignorance is not bliss; we need to understand a resource before we begin to restore it. That means getting back to the land.

June 1999

"I don't like work, no man does, but what I like is in work – the chance to find yourself, your own reality – what no other man can ever know." – Joseph Conrad

It is a standard belief within the environmental movement that recreation is preferable to grazing on our public lands.

I encounter evidence of this belief every time I open the mailbox. On the one hand, I receive countless magazines from environmental groups filled with glossy stories extolling the liberating virtues of recreation. On the other, groups solicit my membership by attacking nonrecreational use of the land as universally destructive.

The supposition that recreation is a benign activity has permeated nearly every level of the debate over the purpose of public lands. The press accepts it uncritically, environmental leaders tout it as an acceptable alternative to "exploitation," and public land managers bank on it.

As a hiker and camper, I want to believe it too. But something always nagged me about recreation and it wasn't just the trash I saw in the overused campgrounds or the off-road vehicle damage I saw on the hills. What bothers me is the implication that work is always "dirty" and destructive, our public lands always prosper as playgrounds, and the axiom "recreation good, grazing bad" is always true. It isn't.

Over One Billion

According to public records, over 800 million day-visits were made to our national forests last year. Combine that figure with the nearly 300 million day-visits to our national parks during the same period and you have over *one billion* trips by people to their public lands every year. [33]

And they didn't go there to chop down the trees or graze cattle.

One recent scientific study identified recreation as a greater threat to endangered species on public lands than grazing. I find this news astonishing and significant. And yet, how many lawsuits have been filed by environmental groups against the government over recreational damage to the land? I can't think of a single one.

Why have environmental groups not made "overrecreation" a priority? The impact of one billion day visits to our public lands must be tremendous. How could it not? But where is the national call to action? Where is the demand for scientific research? [34]

A cynic might say that environmental groups are not about to bite the hand that feeds them. I think the problem is different. Many environmentalists that I know are genuinely concerned for the health of the land and will chart a fair and constructive course of action once they are properly informed. But they need to have *knowledge* first. And that means chopping down a few hardy paradigms.

We need to look and listen to the needs of land first and foremost. Demonizing ranchers while turning a blind eye to the deleterious effects of overrecreation will not, in the long run, help restore or maintain ecosystems. Does an overgrazed plant care what animal bit it? Can a meadow tell the difference between damage caused by too many hooves, tires, or vibram soles? Does an endangered species care if it is being pushed to the brink by too many cows, campers, or off-road vehicles?

Of course not. But in a world gone mad with finger-pointing, few people seem willing to listen to the land anymore – or each other. This is the tragedy of the grazing debate. The investment in conflict overrides the needs of land or people. There are plenty of answers to grazing-related problems, but few eyes want to see. Meanwhile, the land and the life it supports, continues to suffer.

Demonizing recreationists, of course, is not the answer either. While we need to acknowledge the environmental costs of overrecreation on public land, we should resist the temptation to indulge in another round of "us vs. them" rhetoric.

Let the land be our guide. When damage occurs, let's correct it. Let's get control of the cows, the recreators, the elk, the cars, the smog, and all the other sources of environmental degradation. Let the land rest when it needs it; let it burn when it requires it; let it be used when it can sustain it.

By demonizing ranching and championing recreation as a "benign" alternative, environmentalists diminish the value of working with the land. This has two unfortunate consequences. First, it fails to distinguish between work that restores and maintains rangelands in an ecologically sensitive manner and work that does not. There are plenty of examples of the former, but we can't encourage them if we don't recognize their benefits. If we categorize all ranch work as destructive, we punish those stewards who are trying to do a better job.

The only way to ensure real range restoration is through the application of a ton of elbow grease. Many ecosystems are too much out-of-kilter to be restored simply by kicking the cows off the land (what about ozone depletion and CO_2 buildup, for example?). Resting the West was never the answer; rolling up our sleeves is.

Who, however, is going to do all that work? Our public land managers? I don't think so. Agency budgets and staffs are shrinking, not expanding. Work gangs? Maybe, but I doubt Congress is willing to pony up the necessary money right now. Volunteers from the environmental community? Possibly, but there is a lot of work to be done many miles from urban centers. I have an idea – what about the folks who already live and work on the land?

Second, replacing labor with recreation further estranges us from nature. Under the recreational paradigm the land becomes something "out there," precious and remote. We love the land, we seek its pleasures, and we delight in its aesthetic qualities, but we don't really know it in detail. Not anymore.When we lose intimacy with the land we lose knowledge and when we lose knowledge, we begin to make flawed decisions. Evidence of this abounds at almost every level of the debate over the role of public lands. For example, someone told me recently that there is a shortage of trained botanists available for work. They said it was verging on a crisis. There is certainly no shortage of lawyers, in contrast.

Of course, work is only one way to gain an intimate knowledge of land; scientific study is another. There are others, but the question remains: do we really want to replace work with recreation on our public lands? Isn't there room for both?

It is my profound hope that if we can tear down the false wall that separates recreation from grazing we can make real progress toward sustainable use of our public lands. The first step on this road is to stop the finger-pointing. The second is to listen to the land. The third is to get to work. It's not as crazy as it sounds.

November 1999

"Off with their heads!" – The Red Queen, *Alice in Wonderland*

I really hate bumper-sticker environmentalism.

On October 4th, while traveling to speak at a conference honoring the legacy of Aldo Leopold, I innocently bought a copy of the *New York Times*. I opened it only to be confronted by a full-page advertisement entitled *"End Welfare Ranching."*

The ad was the fourth in a series on the *"Extinction Crisis,"* paid for by an organization called the Turning Point Project. It contained the customary shock rhetoric about beer and oil barons feeding at the federal trough while their cattle denuded the land. The standard catalogue of ills associated with overgrazing were reiterated along with the requisite "before" and "after" photos of a healthy stream vs. one nuked by cattle.

The ad's authors even had the audacity to cite an article in *Bioscience* [35] in support of their position without stating one of the article's conclusions: that recreation posed a greater threat to endangered species than grazing. I wondered if the next ad in the series would be *"End Welfare Recreation."* I bet it won't.

In addition to the usual suspects, the list of sponsors for the ad included, to my surprise, Earth Island Institute, Friends of the Earth, U.S. Public Interest Research Group, Wild Earth, and Defenders of Wildlife (a co-sponsor of the Leopold conference!).

I was appalled, to be frank. We all understand that overgrazing is a huge problem that needs immediate attention. Livestock grazing in the American West, however, incorporates a complex web of ecological, cultural, historical, political, and commercial concerns; to wave the "magic wand" of abolition over the problem is not a viable solution.

Of all the issues on the "To Do" list of activists, grazing reform should be one of the most resistant to bumper-sticker sloganeering. So why is this train gathering speed?

Why Now?

Lately I have wondered aloud to friends and neighbors why so much momentum is building to extinguish public lands ranching. Why now, when so much scientific evidence points at decades-old overgrazing as the primary culprit

in the poor condition of some rangeland? Why now, when the numbers of livestock on public lands are at historic lows?

Why now, when the economics of the cattle business already have ranchers on the ropes; when the status quo, traditional ranching paradigm is crumbling before our eyes; and when a progressive ranching movement is beginning to make a difference?

Why now, when public land management agencies are giving greater weight than ever to ecological values as part of their "multiple use" mandate; when new ideas in land stewardship, particularly livestock and wildlife management, are beginning to take root among agency decision-makers; and when scientists are stepping up to the plate in increasing numbers to help solve environmental conflicts?

Why now, when urban sprawl, often implemented at the expense of private farm and ranch land, has become a major concern of environmental organizations (fighting sprawl is one of four long-term national campaigns being conducted by the Sierra Club); when industrial-strength factory farms threaten our land and water; and when wildlife habitat is being fragmented by subdivisions across the West, sometimes at the rate of an acre an hour?

Why now, when our food supply is increasingly centralized in the hands of a very few corporate conglomerations; when the demand for organic food is on the rise; and when biochemical companies and feedlot operators insist on injecting meat with a widening array of genetically-altered, technology-inspired supplements?

Why now, when the corporate globalization of our economy threatens to wipe out the last vestige of our family-scale agricultural heritage; when indigenous peoples around the world are fighting to maintain their integrity and identity; and when collaborative efforts between rural and urban activists (who often share similar goals) are beginning to blossom?

Why now call for the end of public lands ranching? Why now, when solutions to problems so plainly exist? Why?

Trouble with Priorities

Mounting frustration by environmental activists at a conspicuous lack of progress on key issues, such as wilderness designation, is one partial answer. An embedded and souring "us vs. them" paradigm is another, especially since so much of the debate over the environment has shifted into the political arena. Ignorance, I'm sorry to say, is another explanation, as is anger.

A current event illuminates my concern. This summer, Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt proposed the creation of a 450,000- acre National Monument in the 'Arizona Strip' country, north of the Grand Canyon. He called the land one of Arizona's "last best places" and urged that it be preserved by an act of Congress. Conservation organizations immediately demanded that the ante be upped to one million acres.

A few years ago, I would have energetically applauded both proposals. Today, however, I have decidedly mixed feelings.

Babbitt made his proposal in order to "protect" the land. But protect it from what? Not from livestock grazing, since that use will be grandfathered into the legislation. Not from residential subdivisions since most of the land is public and very remote. Not from the destructive attention of a foreign-owned mining company since the area is not minerally attractive (the threat of a coal mine was the catalyst for the creation of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument across the border in Utah).

The Secretary cited concerns about potential oil-and-gas development and off-road vehicle use. Doubtless these are legitimate threats to the area's integrity, but I wonder if the benefits of their exclusion will be offset by the rise in tourism and other recreational pressures that will inevitably follow in the wake of the Monument's designation? I, for one, am tired of seeing our "last best places" turned into playgrounds.

The point is this: our priorities are upside down. Damage is damage, no matter what or who causes it. We should work from the ground up. We should embrace complexity, not fight it. Preservation, as we have defined it for nearly a century, may not actually preserve much of anything anymore. Drawing a line around one million acres of land may no more guarantee its "preservation" than kicking all the cows off public land will guarantee long-term environmental rejuvenation.

As John Muir correctly observed, the universe is a complex system of interlocking parts, each one affecting the other. To pull on one is to pull on the whole; nothing can be or should be, separated and isolated. Reductionism is as dangerous as absolutism. Of course, John Muir never saw a bumper sticker.

Restoration

I believe the environment, especially public land, is in dire need of restoration, not just preservation. I'm not a scientist, but it doesn't take a Ph.D. to know

that things are seriously out of kilter across the West. Overgrazing, overlogging, overmining, overrecreating, and many other forms of overuse (as well as neglect) have imperiled many of our natural systems. Throw global warming and population pressure into the pot, and you have a recipe for a crisis.

The goal, it seems to me is to solve these problems. The debate should move back to issues surrounding the basics of environmental health – what some call "proper functioning condition." Values, such as grazing, mining, recreation, and preservation, should be secondary to function. Get the system to work properly first, then let's have a debate about which value we wish to see occur there.

This isn't rocket science; we already know how to restore many natural systems to functionality and how to do it in an ecologically sensitive, self-sustaining manner. What we lack is the willingness to pull the debate out of the political arena and back into an environmental one.

This doesn't mean turning over the keys to scientists. What it means is an energetic debate about environmental and economic health that engages the expertise of all the players. It means education, dialogue, cooperation, patience, respect, and trust – all of which are sorely lacking in the current debate over the future of our public lands. It means the creation of more organizations like the Quivira Coalition. It means rolling up our sleeves, shaking hands, and getting to work on the real grassroots.

By that I mean the grass and the roots.

February 2000

"The most significant weakness of the conservation movement is its failure to produce or espouse an economic idea capable of correcting the economic idea of the industrialists."
— Wendell Berry

Recently, a member of my wife's family asked me what I did for a living. I hesitated before responding, perhaps for a beat too long. He greeted my answer, that I directed a non-profit organization that was trying to influence the grazing debate, with a silent nod. Either he didn't give a damn about cattle, or else he did and didn't want to cause a stir.

My hesitation intrigued me, however. What I really wanted to say was this: I am a professional saboteur. I should have told him that everyone involved with the Quivira Coalition were saboteurs of one sort or another. Like our European

predecessors who protested the Industrial Revolution by throwing their wooden shoes (*sabots*) into the machines that were replacing them we are protesting the expanding machinery of corporate globalization.

Education is our Molotov cocktail. While some choose to blockade streets with their bodies or break the windows of multinational shopkeepers as a way of protest we prefer to fight back by provoking a dialogue about land, local economies, communities, grass, trees, wildlife, and dirt. Our sabotage is aimed at a remote and humorless industrial economy that is consuming souls as efficiently as it is chewing up open space.

Our *sabots*, in this case, are ideas.

The Second Industrial Revolution

One can hardly open a newspaper or turn on a television today without being bombarded with evidence of what some are calling the Second Industrial Revolution. Between the expanding influence of the Internet, the globalization of the economy, the megacorporate mergers, unprecedented wealth creation, and an addictive dependence on technology, we are creating an awesome corporate machine, one that grows bigger, faster, and hungrier by the day.

By now, it should be clear who the victims of this Second Industrial Revolution will be: endangered species, rural communities, open space, air, earth, and water. We are a nation beset by materialism and commodification and nowhere is this more apparent than in our evolving attitudes toward nature. Technological "advances" combined with expanding global demands for raw natural resources have placed an unprecedented stress on our ecosystems. At the same time, the recreation industry has commodified nature into a playground for fun and profit.

Meanwhile, the environmental crisis continues to build, as does the need for protest and action. Unfortunately, the response of some environmental activists to this global turn of events is an attempt to separate the "social" from the "environmental" and focus strictly on the latter. They call it "pure environmentalism" – i.e., do whatever is best for the critters and the trees and damn the consequences for people. Ironically, their hero is John Muir despite his famous observation that "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe."

Like a virus, "pure environmentalism" has injected itself into many ongoing national environmental campaigns including the "zero cut" and "zero cow"

movements. It has created its own illness in the process, however, in the form of cascading litigation and bad blood without affecting the industrial sickness that is besieging world health.

The appeal of absolutism is obvious as is its desperation. It does not tolerate shades of gray or moderation. It is a blunt instrument, being used purposefully and indiscriminately by certain environmentalists in the struggle against the hegemony of the industrial economy. Their anger and frustration are understandable, though their double standards and their misanthropism are not.

Their blows, however, either by accident or design have fallen mostly on rural people, not corporations. That's because their goals, when you look closely are primarily political, not environmental. Which is why as an act of resistance, "zero cut" and "zero cow" are doomed to failure. Meanwhile, the global economy rolls on.

Radical

Absolutism is not the answer, but collaboration might be. If a broad alliance of diverse, yet like-minded dissidents heaved their sabots into the machine all at once, it might make a difference. It is certainly worth a try.

Chief among the dissidents is farmer Wendell Berry. In books, essays, and lectures, Berry has been imploring conservationists, rural people, city people, all people to heed his advice that the "social" and the "environmental" are inseparably intertwined. The key link, he insists, is economics.

"You cannot specialize the work of conservation," writes Berry. "You cannot save the land apart from the people or the people apart from the land…to save both the land and the people, you need a strong rural economy."

Land, he observes, is always in use by somebody, even wilderness. The goal of conservationists should not be an attempt to eliminate use, as the absolutists insist, but to demand that land be used sustainably. "A good…land-based economy," says Berry, "would aim to join the local human community and the local natural community or ecosystem together as conservingly and as healthfully as possible."

Berry cites two principle reasons for the ruination of land: ignorance and economic necessity. They are often connected. People have ruined land, says Berry "mainly by overusing it…And behind this overuse, almost always, has been economic need." Too often, this "need" is nothing more than greed (if you have a million dollars, for example, do you "need" another million?).

Berry blames the economic exploitation of our natural world on an industrial economy that exists solely for its own enrichment, and for the impoverishment of the countryside. "The era of cut-and-run economics ought to be finished," laments Berry. "Such an economy cannot be rationally defended…the proofs of its immense folly, heartlessness, and destructiveness are everywhere."

The answer is the development of a community economy whose "aim is generosity and a well-distributed and safeguarded abundance." To do this, we must do nothing less than rediscover our humanity. "In order to preserve the health of nature," concludes Berry, "we must preserve ourselves as human beings – as creatures who possess humanity not just a collection of physical attributes but also as the cultural imperative to be caretakers…to one another and to the other creatures."

Within the modern environmental movement, that is truly a radical idea.

How can the environmental community assist local communities to build self-sustaining economies (as an act of sabotage)? I have four suggestions:

1) Create alliances. It is time to drop the "us vs. them" mentality toward rural people that has dominated so much of the struggle to preserve our natural heritage. Our fight is with the corporate economy, not with the family farmer or rancher. We should be allies instead. Mom-and-Pop, agrarian-based capitalism is a powerful countervailing force to global industrialism. It should be supported by conservationists, not destroyed.

2) Participate in local economies. Vote with your checkbook, especially when good land stewardship is involved. There is a renaissance of small-scale, sustainable, ecologically sensitive economic activity going on out there – organic farms, holistic ranching, farmers' markets, predator-friendly beef products, and certification programs. Best of all, not only are the products of these activities good for the land, they're good for *you*. They taste better too (compare an organic steak to a non-organic one sometime!).

3) Get out on the ground and ask questions. How do ecosystems actually function? What role do grazing ungulates play in the maintenance of rangelands? What plant is that? Why is there a subdivision here? How can I help? Information is the foundation to knowledge and action.

Of course, this applies to rural people as well. They need to ask questions too, such as: why *is* that species endangered? What can I do to help it recover?

4) Work in the *radical center*. Stop supporting absolutist organizations and causes that purport to help the environment, when, in reality, all they do is give aid and comfort to the industrial economy. Instead, support local and regional efforts that build alliances, engage in education, and work to establish sustainable local economies. There are more "centrist" organizations out there than you might realize; and more are being created every day. At the same time, we should encourage the national environmental organizations to work in the radical center too.

Grab a *sabot* and join us.

May 2000

"The times they are a-changing." – Bob Dylan

The War for the West is over and the environmentalists won.

That's the thrust of a frontpage editorial by Ed Marston in the April 10th issue of *High Country News*, which he publishes.

"The war between extractive interests and the environmental movement for control of the Interior West's public lands is drawing to a close," he writes. "The timber era, the cattle era, the mainstream big-dam era, the wise-use era are ending. An immense landscape is going from one set of uses to another…in an astoundingly short time."

As evidence of the environmentalists' triumph, he cites the successful reintroduction of the wolf, the rapid rise of recreational use on public lands, the failure of a Newt Gingrich-led Congress to roll back any significant environmental law, the diminishing economic impact of the extractive industries (with a corresponding decline in political muscle), and the impunity with which Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt is steamrolling new national monuments across the western landscape.

The struggle, Marston suggests, was always about sovereignty. Rural westerners viewed their home as a region apart from the rest of the nation, a private domain for use as they saw fit. Environmentalists, on the other hand, insisted that

public land belonged to the whole public, from sea to shining sea. And the jury, says Marston, has delivered its verdict: the West belongs to America, now and forever.

What Next?

If Marston's observation is accurate that the struggle for the West is in an endgame, what happens next? Who or what steps into the breach to pick up the pieces and restore order? Who will come to the negotiating table to discuss a peace treaty?

Marston suggests the business of peace-making is already underway. As an example, he cites the "patchwork quilt of watershed, consensus, collaboration, community forestry and range-restoration efforts that have appeared everywhere in the West, as if by magic." Many of these attempts at collaboration and problem-solving have caused a certain amount of hand-wringing among national environmental organizations. They're worried, they say, about a loss of command-and-control over public lands management. They are also suspicious of any process that engages their former enemies in dialogue.

Frankly, I think they don't know how to respond to victory.

What I see is this: in the wake of its success, the environmental movement needs to adopt a new approach to public and private land activism. Having fought and won at a national scale, the focus now needs to turn to the ground – to watersheds, to restoration, to dialogue and cooperation.

If the national organizations are unwilling or unable to do the hard work of restoration then they should get out of the way and let local and regional groups give it a try.

Many of these local groups are taking their cue from the organic farming movement, which is succeeding in ways that should make national environmental activists turn green with envy. The key to the farmers' success is their belief that everything starts with the soil; healthy soil means healthy plants, healthy plants mean healthy animals, including people; and healthy animals mean a healthy world.

The local conservation groups are focusing on soil, sunlight, trees, grass, and roots. They are reacquainting themselves with the fundamentals of ecosystem health – water and mineral cycles, the dynamics of plant and animal communities, and the energy flow between sunlight, soil, and plants. They are striving to understand how aquatic and terrestrial systems function properly, and how to recognize the indicators of environmental health (or lack thereof).

This knowledge does not require a Ph.D. in Ecology or years of field experience. The basic principles can be learned in a weekend, especially if the training actually involves getting out on the land. All one really needs is a capable instructor, a pair of eyes, and a willingness to look and listen.

Take soil, for example. Is compacted or crusted soil a sign of a healthy system or not? What role do minerals play in plant vigor? How do minerals get to the surface? How is the organic content of soil replenished? What role do insects and animal dung play in maintaining health? What about decay? Water? Wind? It is at this soil-level scale that many of these new conservation groups start.

Hands-On

The new conservation movement is willing to roll up its sleeves.

The days of long-distance public-lands environmentalism are winding down. Roughing up federal land managers through the courts or the press or even the NEPA process can no longer guarantee preservation or restoration of natural and cultural landscapes. The idea that an overworked, understaffed, malnourished, and much maligned federal government can do the hard work of good stewardship all by itself is a fallacy.

The same can be said of the legislative process. The motivation of so much arm-twisting these days in the halls of Congress and state capitols has become punitive, retributive, and exclusionary – on both sides. It's all about power – who has it, who lost it, and who wants it back. Fighting is inevitable, I suppose, and necessary at some level; but we are not making progress in the meantime and in danger of backsliding in many areas.

Politics is effective at the broad gesture, such as authorizing the construction of a massive dam, or its removal, but it can no more ensure the proper cycling of nutrients through soil than a lawsuit can.

For example, the old movement's reliance on legislation, politics, and media pressure exposes one of its greatest failings: to affect significant change on private land. A recent science article stated that only 12% of all endangered species exist exclusively on public land. If nature does not recognize the difference between private and public land, why do conservationists? It's because their toolbox lacks critical tools.

The new conservation movement adds cooperation to the toolbox. It believes long-term ecological and economic restoration will only take place when humans agree to change their behavior peaceably through the cooperative effort

of many hands. This means working with landowners one-on-one. It means travelling to ranches, both public and private, and volunteering to help. It means getting involved.

This is not as difficult as it sounds. Many observers have pointed out that land managers, environmentalists, and rural residents have much in common. The biggest stumbling block is trust. Once the ice has been broken, however, the potential for progress is huge.

No Compromise

The new conservation movement considers education a two-way street. Its leaders are willing to accept the ideas and wisdom of people different from themselves, particularly from people who don't live in asphalt jungles. They are willing to take the time to read the scientific literature, tour a progressively managed ranch, or attend a workshop.

At the same time, they are willing to share what they know with other open minds. A rancher may know a lot about a certain soil type or a particular plant, but may not know that streams need sinuosity to be healthy. A federal land manager might know how to read a vegetative transect, but might not know how to calculate Animal Days Per Acre [36]or understand its usefulness. An environmentalist may know how to determine the "proper functioning condition" of a riparian area but not know how it can be grazed by cattle in the dormant season without harm.

A great place for education to start is in the marketplace because the easiest way to influence human behavior is to tie it to economic self-interest. Demonstrating how healthy economics flow from healthy ecosystems is one of the best tools for change, including getting paid, if you are a rancher, to do conservation work. Or go organic.

The new conservation movement does not use the word "compromise." It searches instead for innovative solutions to complex problems that aim at simultaneous economic and ecological self-sustainability. It does not mediate or facilitate extremes; it works in the *radical center* using common-sense ideas. It does not file lawsuits to achieve its goals. It has no need to compromise its ideals.

The new movement steps out of the political, legislative, and judicial arenas, leaving the combatants to duke it out. Instead, it studies soil, identifies plants, herds cattle, raises water tables, shakes hands, makes a profit. The war is over. Let the healing begin.

August 2000

"What the public domain needs is just one good rain." – Dr. S.W. McClure, 1936

Rising from the ashes of the recent forest fires and the dust of the drought is a central question: do humans have the right to manage nature? And if so, what sort of management and for what purpose? It is a question that lies at the very heart of the grazing debate as a new book demonstrates. In fact, whether nature should be "managed" or "left alone" has become a Great Divide for the public lands wing of the environmental movement in general, as well as the fuel for the bonfire of lawsuits and the call for "zero cow" policies.

The new book is *The Western Range Revisited: Removing Livestock From Public Lands To Conserve Native Biodiversity* by Debra Donahue, [37] a law professor at the University of Wyoming. The ostensible goal of the book is to catalogue the sins of traditional ranching, but its ultimate objective is to make a case for "unmanaged nature." As such, it is a useful illustration of the philosophical tensions at work within the environmental community.

Old News

Ms. Donahue's thesis is straightforward: "Livestock grazing is incompatible with preserving landscape-scale native biodiversity on western ranges averaging twelve inches or less of annual precipitation." Which just happens to be most of the West. When it rains.

She considers ranching to be an irredeemable activity. "Livestock grazing is simply not ecologically sustainable," she writes, "at least on a scale that is economic …Merely curtailing livestock use will not achieve the goal of preserving and restoring arid land biodiversity. Evicting livestock will be essential."

She rips traditional ranching on political, economic, and social grounds as well. She even dismisses as "plainly speculation" the threat of sprawl and habitat fragmentation as a result of private lands development on former ranches. "The prediction of more real estate subdivisions is seldom supported by the facts," she writes.

She closes her book with a cold-blooded summation: "Eliminating grazing in arid regions of the West would offer tremendous potential benefits while imposing very few costs. The economic impact would be minor…and the cultural concerns overblown."

Unless, of course, you are the one being eliminated.

The first problem with *The Western Range Revisited* is that it is packed with old news. Her litany of outrage is all too familiar: historic overgrazing tremendously damaged rangelands; ranchers have enjoyed a cozy relationship with federal overseers for generations; ranching is an economically marginal activity; overgrazing continues to affect biodiversity; ranchers exert disproportionate political power in excess of their numbers; the cowboy myth is largely a creation of Hollywood; and federal subsidies to ranchers explode the image of self-sufficiency. As an argument for a judgment of execution, however, *The Western Range* falls flat. That's because the second problem with the book is more consequential – it is out of touch with current events.

Biodiversity

The fatal flaw in Professor Donahue's argument is easy to identify. It's called the Empire Ranch. And Ghost Ranch, the Tipton Ranch, the Gray Ranch, the Deseret Ranch, to name only a few ecologically oriented New Ranches. The omission of holistic ranchers like Sid Goodloe, Jim Winder, Roger Bowe, Cathy and Mike McNeil, Terry Wheeler, and many others is significant and damaging.

That's because these progressively managed ranches and their ecologically-minded stewards not only conserve native biodiversity, they often increase it. And many of these ranches do so while operating below Ms. Donahue's 12-inch rule.

Take the U Bar Ranch, for example. Located on the Gila River near Silver City, New Mexico, the U Bar, which is owned by a mining company, managed by a rancher, and employs irrigated agriculture, supports the largest concentration of endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatchers in the world. And the numbers have gone *up* every year since 1996, the year a long-term study began. In fact, the U Bar apparently has become a source population of Flycatchers for the Gila Valley! [38]

Additionally, according to Dr. Scott Stoleson, of the USDA Rocky Mountain Research Station and lead researcher on the Flycatcher study, the U Bar is home to the largest concentration of neo-colonial migratory birds in North America.

On a working cattle ranch. In a desert.

One reason for the rise in biodiversity on the U Bar is the willingness of the rancher, David Ogilvie, and the mining company to try new ideas, such as grazing the bird habitat only in the dormant season. David also *likes* the Willow Flycatcher

and wants to see it thrive. In other words, his environmental ethic is large and his managerial abilities skillful.

The U Bar's biodiversity may not depend on farming and ranching, but its presence on an intensely managed landscape does contradict Ms. Donahue's assertion that conserving native biodiversity starts with eliminating agricultural use of arid lands. More importantly, however, I believe the Flycatcher is flourishing *because* of David's management, not in spite of it. Thus we arrive at the crux of the debate.

To Manage or Not To Manage

Debra Donahue's prescription for conserving native biodiversity in the West, beyond simply killing the cowboy, is to employ large contiguous blocks of land as bio-reserves connected to each other by corridors for migrating wildlife. These wildlands would be huge, in her estimation, encompassing the majority of BLM lands. They would be so large, in fact, that "active management may not be required," she writes.

Ms. Donahue proposes that nature should be left alone. Other than a few types of ecological restoration, she considers the management of nature by humans to be undesirable. She blames the current ecological crisis on anthropocentrism. "A utilitarian, mastery-over-nature attitude, along with its biblical roots, is considered fundamental to the Wise Use movement in the West, in which livestock and other commodity interests are prominent."

It is a view shared by other environmentalists. In *Unmanaged Landscapes: Voices for Untamed Nature* editor Bill Willers argues for "Nature's autonomy" which can only be found in wild landscapes. "When managed for some human-centered purpose, its autonomy is lost," he writes. "Restoring wilderness conditions on landscapes of all sizes can allow for self-regulation in a state of ancestral wholeness."

His goal is to recreate an ancestral past – which ancestral past, among so many, is not clear – and to accomplish this goal management "must become an erasing, a reversing, a minimizing of human impact – a science of letting things be."

But what about the birds on the U Bar? Or all the healthy rangeland on the Empire Ranch? What about all those riparian areas blossoming and healing under the watchful eyes of Sid Goodloe and Jim Winder? What about the biodiversity restored under the intense management of Terry Wheeler? What

about the environmental ethic of Roger Bowe or the Davis family? What about the forest fires? The drought? What about the fragmentation of wildlife habitat due to urban sprawl? What about the one *billion* day-visits made to our public lands annually by recreationists? What about poverty and population pressure? What about industrial corporate capitalism and the globalization of the economy?

'Letting things be' does not solve these problems. Neither does pining for an ancestral past (which was full of land-managing Native Americans, by the way). Instead, I believe we should use the past to inform the future, and we should get to work – now.

That means management.

Democracy

In a world seriously out-of-kilter ecologically and economically, the visionary idealism of Donahue & Co. is not only impractical, it is harmful. It denies that well-managed landscapes can conserve or even enhance native biodiversity while accommodating family-scale commercial activity. Their vision ignores or dismisses contradictory evidence and masks its mean-spiritedness under the banner of "science." In a pluralistic society, such as ours, it is a vision that smacks of totalitarianism.

I vote for well-managed landscapes instead.

I vote for the U Bar, the Empire, and Ghost Ranch. I vote for an expanding Southwestern Willow Flycatcher population, healthy riparian zones, and native biodiversity. I vote for open space protection, viable rural communities, strong families, and cultural diversity.

I vote for growing grass, clean water, and cool fires. I vote for sustainable wildlife populations, healthy forests, and robust rangelands.

I vote for well-managed herds of cattle living side-by-side with native species, conserving and expanding diversity together. I vote for wilderness, and ranches.

I vote for the values that promote good stewardship of the land. I vote for a real land ethic, one that seeks to create sustainable, self-regulating natural *and* human communities simultaneously.

I vote for cooperation, innovation, conservation, restoration, and work. I vote for an end to bigotry, ignorance, and tyranny.

I vote for democracy. *Real* democracy.

I may be a dreamer, but as someone famous once said, there's more of us every day.

November 2000

"Man's curiosity, his relentlessness, his inventiveness, his ingenuity have led him into deep trouble. We can only hope that these same traits will enable him to claw his way out." – E.B. White, author

The great irony of the environmental movement is that it is not about water, wilderness, or wildlife at all; it is, first and last, about *people*.

Specifically, it is about our behavior, good and bad, and how we got ourselves into this mess we call the "state of the planet." The various crises confronting us – the Biodiversity Crisis, the Population Crisis, the Desertification Crisis, the Global Warming Crisis, to name only a few – are not fundamentally about the environment. They're about *people*. They were created by destructive behavior, maintained by poor judgment, greed, ignorance and other follies, and will only be resolved by fundamental changes in the way we do business and live our lives.

Over the decades, the reaction of the "environmental" community to these crises has been largely a defensive one – stop that dam, end those clearcuts, sue the bastards – and appropriately so. Lately, however, some activists have begun to demand that we separate the "environmental" from the "cultural" and only do what is "best" for nature. The irony, of course, is that their demands are often cultural proscriptions, such as "zero-cut" and the call to end public lands ranching.

The general drift toward environmental absolutism is a mistake. The plight of the endangered silvery minnow, or the unhealthy condition of our forests, is directly, and unalterably, linked to our culture, our norms, values, and beliefs. Separating nature from culture is like separating the minnow from the Río Grande; both, ultimately, will perish.

Instead, we should focus on those aspects of human behavior that restore nature, heal it, enhance it, and make it whole. We should seek out restorative behavior, encourage it, share it, and spread the news.

Nature and Culture

We should begin our quest for answers to the various dilemmas confronting us by looking for examples of good stewardship – role models, essentially, for the rest of us. And a good place to start this search is with the complex and intimate relationship between biological and cultural diversity.

According to naturalist and ethnobotanist Gary Nabhan, good stewardship of the land often goes hand-in-hand with healthy biodiversity. In his book *Cultures of Habitat* Nabhan examines the relationships among cultural diversity, community stability, and the conservation of biological diversity in natural habitats. His discovery? "Where human populations had stayed in place for the greatest duration," he writes, "fewer plants and animals had become endangered species."

Looking around the world, Nabhan is struck by the way biological diversity is "nested" with cultural persistence. He cites as an example the case of Ecuador, which "is home to some 1,100 kinds of butterflies and nearly 300 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. It harbors more plants in its 110,000 square miles than you can find in the entire United States."

And most of Ecuador's biological diversity, he says, is located in areas where indigenous peoples are still practicing traditional agriculture and husbandry. This cannot be an accident, he insists. Digging deeper, he observes that of the nine countries in which sixty percent of the world's remaining 6,500 languages are spoken, six of them are also centers of megadiversity for flora and fauna: Mexico, Brazil, Indonesia, Zaire, and Australia.

Nabhan is not suggesting that all indigenous cultures are good stewards all the time; nor is he saying that the presence of humans is a requirement for biological diversity. He does refute, however, the doctrine that human behavior is inherently destructive to the environment by asking conservationists to contemplate the question "why are naturally diverse regions also culturally diverse?"

He also wants us to understand the link between the destruction of native cultures and the extirpation of native species around the globe. "Why do such similar forces seem to undercut both biological and cultural diversity," he writes, "and what can we do to control these forces?" Before it is too late.

An Ark?

Nabhan's observations are provocative because they stab at a central paradox within the conservation movement: which is the better path to restoring damaged ecosystems, better stewardship or more "wildness?"

The lesson of Nabhan's work – that natural and cultural diversity are linked significantly to each other – appears to contradict the goals of the resurgent wilderness movement, whose aims include protecting our remaining wild lands through federal designation as wilderness, a call to "rewild" our open spaces by

restoring keystone predators, and the establishment of large "natural areas" as corridors and buffers for wildlife.

These are laudable goals and I support them in principle, but I wonder if it is right to separate wildness from good stewardship as many wilderness proponents do? Is it right to think of our wilderness areas as "arks" without wondering whose hand rests on the steering wheel? And what about the human inhabitants of these "wild lands?" If, as Nabhan says, biodiversity is often linked to the good stewardship of indigenous peoples and cultural persistence, shouldn't wilderness advocates be working *with* reasonable rural people instead of against them as is so often the case?

Nabhan himself is critical of constructing an "ark" for biodiversity. Most conservationists, he writes, "have been willing to usher along every kind of plant and animal as long as no other *peoples* are given a place aboard the ark, forgetting that until the very moment of crisis, a diversity of cultures served to safeguard that biodiversity."

He goes on: "It is ironic how many conservationists have presumed that biodiversity can survive where indigenous cultures have been displaced or at least disrupted from practicing their traditional land-management strategies. Ironic because most biodiversity remaining on earth today occurs where cultural diversity persists."

Also, the ark mentality does not fundamentally challenge the forces that are creating the biological holocaust in the first place. How does drawing a line on a map, declaring it "protected" and then "rewilding" it with animals alter the *culture* that nearly obliterated wild lands in the first place? What does designating more wilderness really achieve if we continue, as Wendell Berry called it, a "bad way of living?"

After all, shouldn't "rewilding" a landscape mean fundamentally "rewilding" *us*?

March 2001

"What goes around, comes around; and it's all coming back to me now." – Blues song

For all of the contradictions and prejudices of the modern environmental movement, one of its principal achievements must be taken seriously by ranchers, federal land managers, and anyone else involved with grazing – that the bar of environmental standards has been raised high for legitimate reasons and is supported by a large majority of Americans.

Moreover, this bar will not be coming down, at least not very far, any time soon. As a result, it is in everyone's interest to get ahead of this bar and stay there.

Rising environmental standards are being borne by city and rural dweller alike – by rancher, logger, construction worker, and commuter. City folk face "No Burn" nights, water restrictions, smog stations, land use covenants, and hundreds of other regulations.

The rising tide of restrictions cannot be blamed on environmental extremists, who are, truthfully, too few in number to affect significant change, or on callous government bureaucrats because government is almost always reactive to circumstance (expressed in the common lament "Why does someone have to die before the government does something?").

Instead, the bar is being pushed up voluntarily by many hands – by soccer moms and work-at-home dads, by bankers and insurance company executives, by teachers and scientists, by lawyers, farmers, musicians, hairdressers, couch potatoes, and tour guides.

By us. And the reasons for change are easy to catalogue. Remember DDT? And asbestos? And exploding rivers? Remember Love Canal and the Exxon Valdez? Remember the Passenger Pigeon and the Dodo bird? Remember Glen Canyon, and Dinosaur, and Hetch Hetchy (you do remember them, don't you)?

Remember Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle*? Published in 1906, it chronicled the appalling conditions inside Chicago's meat-packing industry in such shocking and stomach churning detail that an outraged citizenry provoked Congress into passing the *U.S. Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906*. By placing significant restrictions on the food industry, it became the first important food safety law in U.S. history.

What Comes Next

In October 2000, the Board of Directors of *People for the USA!* (formerly known as *People for the West!*) voted to go out of business. A national organization well-known as an aggressive advocate for states' rights, private property rights, and unrestrained development of natural resources, especially on public lands, *PFUSA!* led the charge against the environmental movement.

Whether they were condemning the Endangered Species Act, or fighting for relaxed government regulations, or stumping for the privatization of federal lands, the leaders of *PFUSA!* struggled mightily to slow or reverse the rising bar of environmental standards.

They did so with gusto, fiery rhetoric, and flashes of humor.

And they failed.

In explaining why they voted to disband, the leaders of *PFUSA!* cited declining membership and a shortage of reliable funding (chiefly from corporations which profited by exploiting public lands). But there was another reason – they had become an anachronism in an age that no longer shared their values. Jeff Harris, Executive Director of *PFUSA!*, admitted as much in a recent newsletter when he wrote "Americans have embraced the environmental ethic; it is part of our value system like motherhood and apple pie." [39]

This wasn't a triumph of environmental extremism either. Instead, it was an expression of mainstream values changing color, of the old giving way to the new.

This was not an isolated incident. Laura Skaer, Executive Director of the 106-year old Northwest Mining Association, was quoted in a newspaper recently as saying "The public's attitudes have changed, and our industry needs new approaches and new solutions if we are going to have a viable North American mining industry in the 21st century." [40]

There were other notable quotes from mining leaders in the article, including, "The public has the right to hold mining accountable," and "Future legitimacy will rest on our contribution to sustainable development."

Whatever *that* means. Skepticism aside, the simple fact that industry leaders feel compelled to even use the term "sustainable" is significant. It is an acknowledgement that the environmental bar not only rests in a high place, but that it is not coming down. It is an admission that a new society, with new values, is firmly in place.

History tells us that custom and culture have never been static; they constantly evolve and for a variety of reasons. For ranchers and people who care about the relationship between ranching and environmental values the question is – will ranching evolve with direction and purpose, or will it fade away like the Dodo bird and the Pony Express?

Or, as environmentalist Dan Dagget puts it in explaining why he works closely with ranchers, "I'm not trying to save ranching. I'm trying to help control what comes next."

Burden of Proof

Ed Marston, publisher of *High Country News* and self-titled obituary-writer for the Old West, proclaimed our time as the "Environmental Age" in a recent essay. [41] By way of explanation, he writes "We no longer reflexively choose to

clear-cut and drill and graze wherever possible, just as we no longer light up on airplanes or assume that the only good wolf is a dead wolf. The burden of proof – making the case to mine or log – lies with natural resource industries."

This is news. Thirty years ago, the burden of proof was on environmental activists to make their case in front of a skeptical jury. When the federal government proposed building two dams in the bottom of Grand Canyon National Park in the 1960s or when the Disney corporation proposed constructing a new ski resort in a remote Sierra Nevada valley in the 1970s the onus was on the environmental community to stop them.

And they did. In one landmark case after another, the activists triumphed, aided by major miscalculations on the other side (when the IRS cancelled the Sierra Club's tax-exempt status during the Grand Canyon dam fight in what many saw as an act of retaliation by the government the Club's membership shot through the roof).

Environmental groups were both shaping and responding to public opinion. That's how we got the Wilderness Act, and NEPA, and the ESA, and the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts – not by pressure applied by a handful of crazy zealots, but through a deliberate and democratic political process that weighed public opinion carefully. It is not a coincidence that most of these laws carry the signature of a Republican president.

The values of our time have shifted along with the demographics and will continue to do so. Now it is ranching's turn. The environmental bar has been raised no less high for them than any other group at work in the West. And the burden of proof is becoming just as painful. Take the current round of litigation over grazing in national forests, for example. The issue of contention centers on monitoring, or rather, the lack of monitoring data. The Forest Service by its own admission has not done a good job here.

Prior to the Environmental Age, monitoring was not a particularly important concern. Ranchers grazed pretty much wherever and however they wanted on their allotment and their federal overseers made only cursory efforts at documenting the effects of grazing on the land, and then usually just to calculate utilization rates. The idea that monitoring would be a source of debate twenty years ago was unimaginable.

Not any longer. Now, at nearly every meeting I attend the bulk of the discussion centers on monitoring. I also hear talk about inventorying, rangeland health, proper functioning condition, watershed restoration, riparian recovery, and so on.

To their credit, many ranchers, especially those on public lands, understand the need for monitoring and are willing to face increased scrutiny. At the same time, however, many ranchers dislike what they see as the constantly shifting sands under their feet. They want stability and uniformity in the regulations and standards. They need targets to aim at.

Unfortunately, the only constant in life is change. The Current West is already being replaced by the Next West and the environmental bar continues to rise.

July 2001

"When the West fully learns that cooperation, not rugged individualism, is the pattern that most characterizes and preserves it, then it has a chance to create a society to match its scenery." – Wallace Stegner

The recent proliferation of collaborative organizations across the West, many of which are organized around specific watersheds, is beginning to look like an act of radical democracy in action.

The reasons for this proliferation are as diverse as the organizations themselves, but two stand out. The first is a sense of frustration by westerners at an appreciable lack of progress on the ground. We need problems solved and we need them solved soon. Gridlock is hurting, not helping, the land and the people who live on it.

The other reason is the American tradition of fighting tyranny. In the mid-1990s, debate about natural resource use and conservation in the West was dominated by the extremes on both sides. There was no *radical center* to speak of – no mechanism by which ordinary folks could participate in events that directly affected their lives.

The grazing debate, for example, was ruled by individuals and organizations that were not accountable to the average citizen. The debate had become a shoving match between tyrants. And when the water buffalo fought in the marsh, to use a Chinese parable, it was the frogs that paid. Finally, the frogs are fighting back.

The Frontier

The rise of collaborative groups is the latest expression of a long and intimate relationship between the landscape of the West and the history of American democracy. In his famous 1893 paper entitled "The Significance of the Frontier

in American History" historian Frederick Jackson Turner went as far as to declare American democracy is fundamentally the outcome of the experience in dealing with the West. "The existence of an area of free land," wrote Turner, "its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development." The process of conquering the wilderness, creating new communities from scratch, and enduring many hardships, promoted, according to Turner, "individualism, economic equality, freedom to rise, democracy."

Over the years, Turner's "frontier thesis" has been subjected to vigorous attack, for good cause. What remains indisputable, however, is Turner's premise that this nation's interaction with its western landscape has influenced the character of its democracy. For example, President Franklin Roosevelt once said "There is nothing so American as our national parks. The fundamental idea behind parks is native. It is, in brief, that a country belongs to the people."

It is a premise that resonates today. Edward Abbey, a self-professed anarchist, once wrote "True human freedom, economic freedom, political freedom, social freedom remain basically linked to physical freedom, sufficient space, enough land." Similarly, Wallace Stegner wrote "What freedom means is freedom to choose, and between what options. Democracy assumes, on the strength of the most radical document in history, that all men are created equal, and that given freedom they can become better masters for themselves than any king or despot."

The American West has always been about options. It has been a place of renewal, of reinvigoration, of hope. It has existed as an ideal almost as long as the ideal of American democracy has and helped spawn generations of idealists and dreamers – everything from the Monkey Wrench Gang to the Militia Movement. People worked hard from the frontier period on to create their vision of a society to match the West's scenery – and most did so cooperatively, a point made by historian Bernard DeVoto who observed "the only true individualists in the West wound up on the end of a rope whose other end was in the hands of a bunch of cooperators."

The West, in other words, has invigorated American democracy over the years – and is doing so again.

Watersheds

Collaborations are stirring the democratic pot by employing a radical motivating principle: get on-the-ground results. Organized mainly around watersheds (a development that would have warmed the heart of the great explorer Major

John Wesley Powell who argued over a century ago that the West should be organized by ecological boundaries, not political ones) collaboratives bring together people who are willing to explore their common interests, not argue their separate positions. People who want results.

For many in the West, including many environmentalists, writes Donald Snow in *Across The Great Divide: Explorations In Collaborative Conservation and the American West*, [42] collaborative conservation "represents a kind of homecoming, a way of bringing the implementation of sound environmental policy down to the ground and back into the lives of people who are directly affected by the outcomes."

Moreover, the idea of getting results is proving infectious. "Collaborative processes are breaking out in many other settings and across nearly all environmental issues," writes Snow, "from the reintroduction of species to the management of timber, wildlife, and grazing, to the control of suburban sprawl and the protection of valued habitats, and more."

Despite its obvious appeal, however, "getting results" remains a difficult concept for many to accept, especially those more interested in process and conflict than product. That's because, according to Snow, "collaborative conservation runs counter to the normal course of environmental politics, counter to the course of most politics of any kind in the United States."

This may be why Michael McCloskey, when president of the Sierra Club a few years ago, attacked the concept of collaborative conservation in a now-famous broadside. The issue, he admitted, was power. "This redistribution of power," he wrote, "is designed to disempower our constituency," [43] which is heavily urban. Few urbanites are represented as stakeholders in communities surrounding national forests.

Disempowerment, however, is not the only threat to the modern environmental movement posed by collaboratives. They challenge a variety of paradigms, including some cherished ones.

Philip Brick frames the issue well in *Across the Divide* when he writes: "Where contemporary environmentalism emphasizes ecocentrism, collaborative conservation integrates ecocentric and anthropocentric goals; where most environmentalists embrace regulatory democracy, collaboratives prefer civic democracy; and where environmentalists put great faith in science and technocratic management, collaboration advocates seek to integrate science with local knowledge."

By demanding, and achieving, on-the-ground results, collaboratives challenge the increasingly individualistic and oligarchical behavior of the traditional players on the western stage, including national environmental organizations. The rise of the *radical center* – represented by collaboratives – constitutes a direct threat to the "Cattle Free" and "Cattle Galore" tyrannies of recent years.

Growing grass cooperatively has become a subversive endeavor.

Citizenship

How does collaboration contribute to civic democracy exactly? Historian David Crislip has an idea. In an article he wrote for the *Chronicle of Community*, [44] he sets out four criteria for a "new" democracy:

- Any activity must produce tangible, substantial, and sustainable results.
- Any activity must bring people together in ways that heal rather than divide.
- Any activity must engage citizens in new and deeply democratic ways in the process of defining visions and strategies for their communities and regions.
- Any activity must enhance the civic culture of the community or region.

Crislip thinks collaboratives accomplish all four goals. "The experience of working together," he writes, "creates the norms of trust and reciprocity, the sense of responsibility for the common good, and the networks of concerned citizens that undergird the success of governing institutions and civil society."

It's all about citizenship – identifying it, exercising it – what Crislip calls the "politics of engagement." Citizenship requires partnerships, trust, respect, and results. To be effective it requires participants to explore their common interests and seek solutions that lift all boats evenly. Citizenship is anti-oligarchy; it rejects the politics of advocacy – a process by which small groups of people attempt to overpower other groups to achieve their ends. As Crislip observes "When advocacy works, it leaves us divided. When it does not, it leaves gridlock."

Democracy still matters, in other words.

The success of the collaborative movement across the region means we are at another watershed moment in the West's history (pun intended). A generation's worth of paradigms are being challenged at a variety of levels resulting in the erosion of oligarchical hegemonies. The Conflict Industry, the Compliance

Industry, the Custom-and-Culture Industry, the Wilderness Industry, and others are showing visible cracks in their foundations as the cyclic and inevitable replacement of another "Old West" with a "New" picks up steam.

This time, however, there is a difference. This time the forces at work are democratic, community-based, and cooperative. This time, hopefully, we will finally begin to construct the society that Wallace Stegner called for – a landscape of shining rivers, healthy land, and robust communities. It is a society within reach, as the recent proliferation of collaboratives across the region implies. It all starts with soil, grass, and water.

And a handshake.

June 2002

"We spend too much time chasing symptoms, not causes, of problems." – Lani Lamming, goat rancher

When my wife, Gen, and I decided to start a family, we sat down at the kitchen table and asked ourselves a difficult question: Were we doing our children a favor by bringing them into this world?

While we suspected that millions of parents had asked themselves this question over the centuries, it seemed especially pertinent now given the escalating quantity and quality of challenges confronting society. We were not thrilled with what "progress" had wrought so far and we were not convinced things were going to get better before they got worse.

So, we wondered: Did "good" parenting extend to not becoming parents at all?

Being optimists, we took the gamble creating beautiful twins, a boy and a girl, the pride of our lives. We also vowed to work hard to make the world a little bit better so that Sterling and Olivia's patrimony would be as nourishing as possible. And the one big lesson that parenting has taught me is this: real change begins at home.

Environmentalism

My home is in the environmental movement. I've been a member of one green group or another since prehistory, it feels like. I've run the gamut from checkbook activist to letter writer to wilderness warrior to volunteer lobbyist (I

even went to D.C.). In the mid-1990s, I became active with the Sierra Club in response to worrisome political trends and in 1997 I took the fatal final step, with the founding of The Quivira Coalition, into a professional career. In the process, I have come to see that my home, like any home, needs periodic repairs.

I'm not the only one who thinks this way. In an admiring review of the movement entitled *Earth Rising: American Environmentalism in the 21st Century* author Philip Shabecoff, a former journalist for the *New York Times*, writes that while the old environmentalism brought "profound changes in American life – to its landscape, its institutions, and its people," today it "seems to have no broad, shared vision of where it wants to take us." He insists the movement refocus and redouble its efforts.

The need for action is urgent. "If environmentalists and their cause do not prevail in the next few decades," he writes, "our habitat, our quality of life, and our democratic institutions could erode to the point that they might take centuries to recover."

Far from preaching absolutist nonsense, however, Shabecoff urges the movement to return to its roots – to the vision of Teddy Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot, who saw conservation as "a core value of progressive politics, as an issue of democracy, as a means of bringing science to bear on the creation of policy, and as a means of achieving economic and social equity for present and future generations."

To take this vision into the twenty-first century, Shabecoff proposes an ambitious agenda: tackling global climate change; working on "full-account" capitalism, including the creation of sustainable economies; encouraging political reform, including an overhaul of campaign finances; re-democratizing science and technology; and enlarging the struggle against globalization. At the same time, he urges an expansion of the word "environment" to include the "workaday world" – where we work, play, and go to school.

The problem with the old environmental movement, he says, is its fixation on symptoms, rather than causes, of global ills. "The underlying flaws in our social systems that cause or contribute to the environmental predicament are rarely addressed by environmental organizations," he writes. The movement can no longer simply "nibble" at the edges. It needs to transform itself into a *social* movement, one that digs at the roots of problems.

A key task of this new social movement will be creating a *regenerative* economic system based on nature's model, one that "grows not by continual production and consumption but by constant self-renewal."

It is a tall order, but Shabecoff remains optimistic. "We possess sufficient knowledge and tools with which to transform the future. Our science and technology have the capacity to restore much of what has been harmed…our economies still generate enough wealth to meet the needs of the transition; [and] our ability to communicate information and ideas to one another is growing with exponential speed."

Causes

There are good reasons to take Shabecoff's vision seriously. One lies in a report that he cites from the Environmental Defense Fund which says "An historic threshold has been crossed. A shift has occurred in the balance of strength between nature and humankind. We have passed, almost without noticing it, from a world in which the overall stability of the Earth's environment could be taken for granted to a world in which major, often irreversible manmade alterations of the environment are under way."

In other words, continuing to separate man from nature – one of the principal philosophies of the old environmental movement – is not only impossible today, it is foolish. The two are now inextricably linked, as biologist Peter Raven points out: "There is not a square centimeter anywhere on earth, whether it be in the middle of the Amazon basin or the center of the Greenland ice cap, that does not receive every minute some molecules of a substance made by human beings."

This raises fundamental questions about the goals and methods of the old movement. If no place is truly "pristine" anymore what does "protection" really mean? We are certainly not "protecting" wildlands from global climate change, acid rain, carbon dioxide buildup, or even the rapid spread of noxious weeds. So, what do we accomplish by "protecting" additional landscapes without addressing the social and economic forces that are threatening them in the first place?

Spencer Beebe, former vice president of The Nature Conservancy, puts it this way "The old environmental movement is over, in a sense. That movement arose as a defense against the industrial economy and to save some precious pieces of the landscape from human industrial endeavor. It was appropriate. But we need now to move to a new era where we find synergy and sympathy between the built and natural environments. We need to move from a strategy of defending bits and pieces of nature to recognizing the links between a healthy community and a healthy environment."

This means a whole new strategy based on answering a vital question: how do we live sustainably in our native landscapes? How do we address the causes of problems, not simply fixing symptoms, with the goal of creating a sustainable mode of existence in harmony with nature and do so quickly, before our landscapes deteriorate further?

Healing

My native landscape is the American West. I've surveyed its deserts, climbed its mountains, backpacked its national parks, traveled its dusty backroads, photographed its frontiers, lived in its cities, and met a countless variety of its citizens. I have also read its literature, studied its history, poured over its maps, drunk its beer, and most recently, worked to help shape its future.

All of this reading, thinking, meeting, and traveling has led me to one inescapable conclusion: the West needs more restoration, not more protection.

By "restoration" I mean restoring to good working order what Aldo Leopold called the "land mechanism" – stable soil, diverse plant communities, functioning watersheds. As an activity it should be humble and modest, working one acre at a time, with the goal of creating a regenerative system on the land.

My definition of "restoration" also includes people and their economies, both urban and rural. Fundamentally, it means restoring hope. I like Wendell Berry's definition of sustainable agriculture: "That which depletes neither soil nor people." We desperately need to stop depleting our land and our people in the American West.

Restoration should be an act of healing. It is a useful metaphor. As with a sick patient, land can be restored to full health under the caring guidance of knowledgeable professionals trained to the latest methods, including a land health version of homeopathy. Under this paradigm, land protection becomes useful as a form of preventive medicine.

Rather than simply continue to treat symptoms, a land health paradigm can direct us to causes of problems. Healing can be collaborative, democratic, and life-changing, with the long-term goal of a sustainable, fruitful, and hopeful future.

Fortunately, the land health paradigm is not just wishful thinking. I see it in operation almost every day, from collaborative watershed groups to the rise of progressive ranching techniques. The recent re-emergence of goats as a tool for controlling noxious weeds is a good illustration of the land health movement at work. "Using nature to heal nature" could be the motto of these efforts and the movement as a whole.

All of these developments give me hope for the future, and reassure me that my children could still inherit a world rich in ecological and cultural diversity. If I can contribute to this patrimony in some small way, I'll consider my job as a parent to have been successful.

September 2002

July 1, 2002

To: Carl Pope, Executive Director, The Sierra Club

Dear Carl,

"On June 11th, I resigned from the Executive Committee of the Santa Fe/Northern New Mexico Group of the Sierra Club. I did so principally in order to create more elbow room in my life for my family. However, I have also moved on to a new type of environmental activism, one that does not fit well with the Club's current policies and approaches. "In fact," I said in my resignation letter, "I have deep concerns about the future effectiveness of the Sierra Club on issues related to the public lands in the West."

"I want to explain this last thought, gleaned from nearly eight years of intensive environmental activism at the grassroots level, in hopes of nudging the Sierra Club, an organization I still greatly admire, in a new direction.

"The American West has witnessed tremendous changes in the last fifteen years. These changes include the rise of models of sustainable use of public and private lands; the widening threat of recreation to biodiversity; the emergence of a "land health" paradigm from the scientific community; the shift of conservation strategies from "protection" to "restoration" and the expanding role of collaboration to resolve resource conflicts.

"However, these changes, which are here to stay, are not yet reflected in the work of most mainstream environmental organizations, including the Sierra Club. As a result, environmentalists have begun to marginalize themselves in the debate over the future of our public lands. If the Sierra Club desires to remain a player at the grassroots level – by that I mean the level of grass and

roots – significant changes will be necessary. I will use the issue of public lands ranching as an example.

"It is critically important for the environmental community to understand that a model of sustainable use of public rangelands by livestock has emerged over the last fifteen years. Its form takes a number of shapes – herding, planned or rapid-rotational grazing, grassbanks, dormant season grazing, etc. – but its underlying principle is the same: that controlling the timing, intensity and frequency of livestock impact on the land can yield positive ecological and economic benefit to resource managers.

"The science supporting this principle is strong and diverse; as is the small but growing number of ranchers who put the principle to work with demonstrable results. There is also a growing body of evidence which says well-managed ranches harbor as much biodiversity or more than "protected" landscapes, such as wilderness areas. This is not to excuse overgrazing, which remains a persistent problem in the West. But the existence of ecologically-sensitive ranch methods means the goal of activists needs to shift from extermination to reformation.

"However, this requires a big first step – an admission by environmentalists that "work" is no longer a dirty word. The history of the environmental movement is chiefly the story of the struggle against bad management. Clear cuts, strip mines, overgrazed rangelands, toxic dumps, poisoned rivers, and now rampant oil and gas drilling – the catalog of abuse is all too familiar. As a result, a prejudice against commercial use of public land developed among activists, and rightly so. Ed Abbey was on target in his outrage when he called the West "cowburnt."

"But it is not the 1980s anymore. The emergence of the progressive ranching model across a wide variety of Western landscapes, including those that receive less than twelve inches of precipitation a year, means the goal of public lands environmentalism can no longer simply be to "protect" the land from human activity. Instead, its goal should be the same as the progressive ranchers' – to figure out how to live sustainably in our native landscapes.

"In the fall of 1999, twenty two environmental groups (not including the Sierra Club) took out a full page advertisement in the *New York Times* entitled 'End Welfare Ranching.' It called public lands ranching 'ecologically and economically

unsustainable' and proclaimed livestock production to be 'the single largest source of water pollution, soil erosion, and species endangerment in the western U.S.'

"In support of its call for the abolition of ranchers, the advertisement cited an article published in the peer-reviewed journal *Bioscience*, which claimed that livestock grazing had contributed to the decline of 22% of endangered animal species and 33% of endangered plants in the U.S. This article reported the conclusions of a study conducted by a group of scientists who had analyzed the effects of various extractive industries on the viability of endangered plants and animals and ranked them according to their severity.

"Contrary to the claims of the ad's authors, the greatest threat to endangered plants and animals, according to the researchers, was NOT ranching. At the top of the list was water diversion, principally dams. Ranching checked in at number three, ahead of logging and mining. In second place was recreation.

"Although the chief recreational threat to wildlife was identified as off-road vehicles, the underlying message of the study was clear: recreation is officially an "extractive" industry on public lands and should be treated as such. Naturally, there has been no full page ad in the New York Times calling for an end to public lands recreation. The reasons are obvious, including a huge case of denial. However, the 800-pound gorilla called "recreation" can no longer be ignored and if the environmental community does not begin to put play on public land under the same microscope that it does work then its credibility will continue to erode.

"Work and play need to be treated equally and fairly. To do this, environmentalists should heed Aldo Leopold's advice that any activity which degrades the quality and quantity of an area's ecological integrity should be curtailed, changed, or stopped while any activity which enhances, restores, or expands ecological values should be supported. It should not matter if that activity is recreation or ranching.

"I was encouraged to learn that Wendell Berry spoke recently to the Sierra Club's Board of Directors. His invocation that "You can not save the land apart from the people – to save either, you must save both" has been the guiding principle of my environmental activism. I believe the ecological crisis confronting us is at root a cultural crisis. Poor human behavior caused much of the environmental damage

that surrounds us today and only good human behavior will restore the land to health. Isolating people from nature, a current trend of thought among some activists within the Club, will only further alienate us from our roots and compound the environmental challenges confronting us.

"Take the homesteaders, ranchers, and BLM managers of the 'forgotten' sageland near Taos, New Mexico, for example. They love the land and have developed a strong sense of place by living on it, working it sustainably, and acting collaboratively to restore it to health. Each values the land in a different but legitimate way with the common goal of seeing it become healthy and productive for wildlife and people. Their sense of place along with the new toolbox and scientific protocols for measuring land health is the key to the future of the environment in the West. This is something difficult for the average city–bound Sierra Club member, much less an activist, to understand – that our western lands, all of them, need more and better stewardship, not less.

"The Sierra Club's sense of place needs to expand beyond wilderness and national parks. It needs to include the 'forgotten' lands and the people who live there and it needs to expand beyond knowing a place principally through recreation. Club members and leaders need to support reasonable rural people and encourage good stewardship. There are plenty of both out there as well as a ton of common ground, literally, where urban and rural people can meet to bridge their differences.

"As the saying goes, the only constant in life is change. Ranching is enduring big changes to its very nature but so is public lands environmentalism. Where this evolutionary process is headed is anyone's guess, but I remain hopeful the Club will develop a new sense of place to go along with the changing times."

Sincerely,
Courtney White

June 2003

"Without the threat of environmental disaster caused by the short-sighted unbalancing of natural forces, how are we to bring about positive change in the world?" – satire from *The Onion*

Periodic retreating, like fasting, is probably part of nature's plan.

In mid-January, after a hectic year came to a noisy crescendo with an intense week of Conferencing and Retreating in Albuquerque, I decided I needed to clear my head of sound and motion. I needed space and peace to straighten out the many strands of thought that were occupying an increasingly large amount of my diminishing mental capacity. I needed fresh air to organize, prioritize, clarify, and make sense of competing, sometimes conflicting, ideas, notions, hunches, hopes, and dreams.

In other words, I needed to retreat to go forward.

So, in late February I jumped in the truck and drove rapidly to the James Ranch, located on a pastoral stretch of the Animas River north of Durango. Once happily ensconced in David and Kay's quaint A-frame, I laid every idea I had on the table, literally, and began the laborious process of uncovering a hidden unity that might provide a semblance of order amongst the chaos.

In addition to Quivira work, I tossed in personal goals as well, including plays and books I wanted to author, essays on parenting and "growing up Western," photography projects, novels, and even a trio of children's books that I wanted to compose.

It quickly became an exhilarating, if daunting, lifelong "To Do" list.

I searched for a theme that connected these projects together – the personal stuff, the Quivira Coalition, the New Ranch, the *radical center*, a land health movement, restoration, education, sustainability, profitability, food, wildlife, family, culture, history, soil, grass, and water. My motto up to this point had been simply "Do good work and have fun doing it." But clearly this was not going to sustain me for much longer, not without imbibing toxic levels of caffeine.

Clearly, I needed a mission statement. Trouble is I suffer from a college-bred skepticism of "themes" and other forms of bumper-sticker reductionism. Knowing that life looked better in shades of gray than in black-and-white was one of the reasons I cofounded the Quivira Coalition in the first place. At the same time, I knew a thread existed someplace among the books, projects, and ideas. There had to be.

There was.

Nature's Model

During the course of her talk at the banquet event of our Second Annual Conference, Jo Robinson made an eloquent case for the raising and consumption

of grass-finished beef, arguing that recent scientific research demonstrated that humans are healthier consuming a "paleolithic" diet rich in Omega 3s and other essential nutrients found in grass-fed food. Her mantra "If it's in the feed, it's in the food" rang loud and clear around the room.

Jo concluded by arguing for a return to the food nature meant for us to eat – for the way nature meant animals to be raised – and for the way in which the environment was supposed to function properly. Her final slide said simply "Returning to Nature's Model." Sitting at the little table in the James' A-frame it dawned on me that was exactly what the Quivira Coalition has been trying to accomplish since its inception. It was the message Jim Winder pushed the first time I met him – how to graze livestock in nature's image. It was the underlying theme of our just-concluded Conference – how to forge a West that Works by understanding and employing natural principles. And it was the core of all our work in between – that meaningful, long-term, ecological and economic health is only possible when we work with nature, not against it.

It was the same message that Kirk Gadzia has been teaching for years – that we need to learn from nature instead of trying to "break" ourselves on the "rocky shore" of fundamental ecological principles, as has too often been the case. In fact, much of the substance of progressive ranch management, including the issues of timing, intensity, and frequency of livestock impact on the land, and questions of recovery, movement, planning, and profit, involve "returning to nature's model" of herbivory in grass-dominated landscapes.

It is the same message that Bill Zeedyk has been promoting in his quiet way through his work. "Thinking like a river" and "Letting nature do the work" are two phrases often employed by Bill, who has pioneered a riparian restoration strategy premised on nature's model. His approach is based on humility rather than on arrogance and on healing rather than hurting. The goal of Induced Meandering, for instance, is to get creeks and rivers back into health "by goosing nature along" as Bill puts it with simple structures and small flood events rather than strong-arming it with cement and impatience.

It is the same message, though in different language, taught by a new generation of scientists and specialists in range, forest, and riparian systems. From issues of functionality, biotic integrity, and soil stability to strategies focused on restoring keystone ecological processes, the goal of the scientific community is today, in the words of forest ecologists Craig Allen and Melissa Savage, to "reset ecosystem trends toward an envelope of 'natural variability' including the reestablishment of natural processes."

Their goal, in other words, is getting back (or going forward) to nature's model.

Whether it is Lani (Lamming) Malmberg using her goats to mow down noxious weeds, Bill deBuys working hard on his Grassbank so that fire can be restored to the mountains of northern New Mexico, Tony Benson and Mike Jones pounding sagebrush to death with their cattle near Taos, Terry Wheeler or the Tiptons jump-starting natural processes on arid mine tailings with their cattle "poop-and- stomps," or dozens of other acts of healing, maintenance, or improvement, the theme is the same: nature has the best ideas. And in the long run, they are the only models that will be truly sustainable ecologically and economically.

As Aldo Leopold noted so many years ago "Healthy land is the only profitable land."

The Iron Triangle

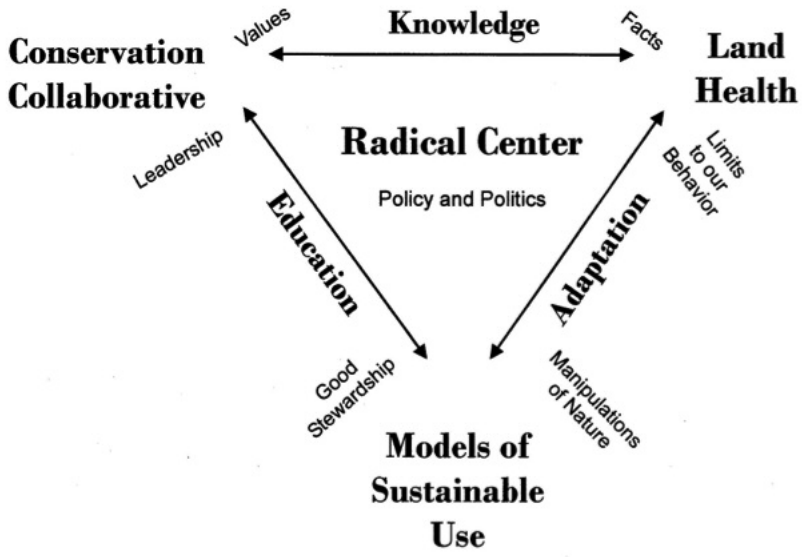
While wrestling with this emerging theme, I was suddenly struck with a desire to create a diagram. Normally, I shun graphs and diagrams like the plague, especially avoiding anything to do with circles, triangles, or pentagons. But suddenly I found myself drawing my very own "Iron Triangle" on paper, as if I were some environmental absolutist expounding on the evils of livestock grazing on public land. Had I gone crazy in the little A-frame? Had my coffee consumption finally passed a critical threshold?

No, a logical interrelationship suddenly seemed to reveal itself. On one corner I wrote "Quivira Coalition" with the word "conservation collaborative" underneath. On another corner I wrote "The New Ranch" with the words "working models of sustainability" underneath. Then I wrote "Land Health" at the third corner of my Iron Triangle, followed by the words "nature's model."

Then I drew the dreaded Arrows between the three corners, filling them in with works such as Education, Demonstration, Restoration, Profit, Food, Leadership, Monitoring, Labor, Values, and so forth. Each represented an activity or a program that I knew was already taking place in the real world.

When I wrote the words the "Radical Center" in the center of the Triangle, I knew I was in trouble. It made too much sense and it was far too neat and tidy. I thought about erasing the words, but it was too late.

The truth is conservation collaboratives, such as the Quivira Coalition, are forming all across the West with the goal of creating examples of sustainable use



of local natural resources based on ideas drawn from nature's model. Whether it is EcoResults! in Flagstaff, Arizona, helping ranchers get paid for healing damaged land, or the Chico Basin Ranch, on the Front Slope of Colorado, discovering all sorts of conservation values on the ranch that city-dwellers are willing to support, or the James Ranch producing grass-finished beef that is eagerly consumed in Durango, or a nonprofit like Earthworks which works to restore land collaboratively in the Galisteo basin south of Santa Fe – a version of the Iron Triangle is in operation someplace. That's because the goal for each is an interlocking of collaboration, land health, and sustainability.

And in the center of it all is the *radical center* – the political will of all the participants. Currently, this political will is small, but as time goes by, and as the three sides of this equation grow stronger, the *radical center*, like a whirlpool, will gather momentum and strength as well.

At least I hope so.

Before packing up and leaving my little sanctuary, I decided to take a stab at articulating the dreaded mission statement. I wrote it down quickly, knowing that I would, in a fit of unavoidable skepticism, revisit it later – probably a few miles down the road. Here's what I wrote: "Achieving sustainability in our native and adopted landscapes by returning to nature's model of land and human health."

October 2003

"The only thing I ever wanted to be was home." – James Galvin, *The Meadow*

"There is only one way to have grizzlies in these mountains, and that is on the grizzlies' own terms….This is roughly how the West itself must now be understood. Whatever the feelings nonwesterners have about the region – whatever affections, whatever myths – the only way to take care of the West now is to give it the room it needs to take care of itself."

So starts Dan Kemmis' controversial and provocative book *This Sovereign Land.* In it, Kemmis lays out a compelling case not only for western self-governance but also for its inevitability. That's because the history of the American West is the history of colonization by empire, both foreign and domestic, and the lesson learned is the same one from around the world – eventually all empires fall. Self-governance in the West is as inevitable as the Boston Tea Party.

Strong, imperial forces, Kemmis argues, have controlled the West from the get go. They started fast with the national land grab called Manifest Destiny. After the Civil War they gained industrial strength during the phase of buccaneering capitalism called the "frontier." Then, in reaction to the tide of environmental destruction that resulted, a new set of imperialistic forces coalesced under the paternalistic leadership of Progressive Era federal technocrats. After waning a bit, these bureaucratic forces gained new life as part of the New Deal. After mid-century, both sets of forces were reinvigorated by simultaneous and linked trends – a booming national economy, which encouraged another round of exploitation of the West's natural resources, and the rise of an urban-based environmental movement which demanded greater bureaucratic command-and-control.

The West, in other words, has never been free from the grip of empire.

As an illustration, Kemmis focuses on the West's public lands, which remain important for two reasons: they allow equal access for all Americans, and they include all Americans in the decision-making process that determines how the lands will be managed.

However, many rural westerners now view the public lands system as anti-democratic. They feel ignored by a decision-making process that is supposed to include them, causing them to vent their frustration and anger at employees of public land management agencies, politicians, and environmentalists. This anger and the resulting emotion it provokes among its targets has created a paralysis that now characterizes the region. This paralysis must be overcome. "The future of the

West," Kemmis writes, "must involve a radical and permanent transcendence of the region's embedded struggle between imperial-type environmentalism and Sagebrush Rebellion-type resistance."

However, this transcendence will require political reform that cannot take place until we settle the question of liberation. "No viable, democratic, ecologically sustainable institution for governing western landscapes can be successfully devised," he writes, "without in some fundamental and innovative way addressing the question of sovereignty. In the end, this is the question of who rules – of who will be in charge of the West."

Collaborations

Out of the ashes of gridlock, frustration, and anger, has come a resurgent movement based on the radical (and very "frontier") ideas of collaboration, cooperation, and progress. And it is in this movement that Kemmis sees signs of revolution.

Many of the collaborations he highlights are familiar to us by now. But Kemmis takes us an important step further – he links the rise of the collaborative movement to the question of sovereignty. "The steadily expanding collaboration movement is an indigenous, democratic phenomenon," he writes, "through which westerners have begun to translate their land rootedness into direct and effective control over their home ground."

However, Kemmis does *not* argue for the privatization of public lands, as some of his critics have assumed. Instead, he argues *for* what he calls "watershed democracy" – collaborations of individuals and organizations working toward on-the-ground solutions to common problems. It does not mean the abdication of federal control of public land, but it does mean a reinvention of federalism as well as the revitalization of democracy in general.

He concludes: "Americans cannot nurture democratic practice worldwide if they do not trust their own people to govern their own landscapes. If there was a time when national control of most of the West was the most democratic and the most ecologically sound approach, there is also a time when that approach must give way to a more vital, more human-scale, more grounded form of democracy. The time has come when westerners must be allowed to be in charge of the West."

I wholeheartedly agree. But Kemmis' book leaves an important question unanswered: How is the West supposed to achieve its emancipation exactly? I

agree that conservation collaboratives hold the key to self-governance, but many of the collaborations he describes are notable more for their dissimilarities than for their unities.

There are as many permutations of "watershed democracy" as there are watersheds. Some include all stakeholders in a watershed, from loggers to bird-watchers, and some consist solely of a coalition of disparate environmental groups. Some focus on resolving a specific dispute in a specific place, while some work at a regional scale. Some file lawsuits, and some have vowed not to. Some exist to influence the political process, and some stick to the "grass" and the "roots."

While diversity is a strength of the movement, it is also a weakness. How, for example, do we get from this relative state of chaos to orderly self-governance of the American West? How do we achieve emancipation without subsequently dissolving into feudalism? Without unity, how do we fulfill the inevitability of change and progress without letting the empire strike back? And perhaps most importantly, how do we make self-governance last?

Nature's Model

An answer can be found, I believe, with a deeper look into the movement. Despite its apparent disunity, there is a key commonality that wends its way through many collaborative efforts. It is the goal, whether outwardly expressed or not, of "returning to nature's model of land health."

Nearly all collaborations have an ecological restoration element to their work. For many, it is a significant part of what they do. For example, one of the unifying objectives that brought the Malpai Borderlands Group together in the early 1990s was the desire to reintroduce prescribed fire into the landscape. The Applegate Partnership, in southern Oregon, came together to address the problem of unhealthy forests in their watershed. The list goes on and on. Much of this work expresses new knowledge about nature's basic principles. When Aldo Leopold bought a worn-out piece of farm land on the banks of the Wisconsin River and set about restoring the land to health he was mostly guessing at what to do. Seventy years later, ecological science has developed to the point where we can make sound decisions about what to cut, where to burn, when to graze, and how to measure the effects – all with the goal of restoring the "natural range of ecological variability."

The significance of "returning to nature's model" to the collaborative movement, and ultimately to the question of sovereignty in the West is this: It creates an unambiguous baseline from which we can commence our work together. This is how revolution starts – not just with the requisite handshake and declaration of good intentions, but with common and measurable goals of human and land health.

It is noteworthy that the vocabulary of land health developed over the last twenty years can be applied to evaluating political health as well. Words and terms such as self-renewal, diversity, stability, resilience to perturbation, vigor, adaptability, and functioning properly at the grassroots level suggest that the health of a watershed democracy can be maintained and monitored in much the same manner a watershed itself can.

Perhaps we need to develop a "seventeen-point checklist" of indicators of political health in the West to go along with ecological evaluations.

In any case, the tyranny we wish to throw off is not just the last vestige of empire, but the legacy of history itself. Creating a society to match the West's scenery doesn't just mean "getting along with each other" but actually drawing to a close both the environmentally destructive exploitation of our natural resources and the socially destructive exploitation of our anger and frustration.

It will be hard work, but I know it can be done. That's because it has already begun. I don't know if we need a Missoula Tea Party or not, but liberation is coming. Only through unity, however, can we hope to control what happens next.

February 2004

"What's past is prologue." – William Shakespeare

One of the reasons I became involved with the environmental movement years ago was the lesson it taught about living within limits.

As a member of the Baby Boom generation, barely, I had grown up in a world of excess – there was no shortage of food to eat, things to buy, or land to gobble up. There were no limits in my youth. Everything was there for the taking, at least for those who had the means, encouraged by a culture of "Just Do It."

Gradually, I became aware that I lived in an age where our desires far outstripped our needs. Watching new stoplights near my home plod on, one by one, into the desert I decided to enroll in the conservation movement in order

to support its effort to draw the line *someplace*. By the time I graduated from college I was swept up in the work to protect our national parks and wilderness areas against short-sighted exploitation.

At the same time, as a student of anthropology I began to understand that the question of limits was culturally based - that most things began and ended with human behavior.

But the movement's message about limits seems to have been lost amid the sound and fury of recent years. The movement today seems to be motivated more by issues of power and control, as well as an unattractive desire to punish people, particularly rural people. There isn't much constructive talk about limits, ecological or social, anymore, or how we might live and work sustainably within nature's model. Instead of acting as the nation's teacher, instructing and encouraging good behavior, it has become a movement of scolds.

Too much of the movement today is focused on the symptoms, not causes of environmental problems – "fixing the pump, not the well" is how Aldo Leopold put it. And addressing causes means, in my opinion, addressing the issue of limits. This, I've decided, has to be a main goal of a new conservation movement.

Dust Bowl

For anyone interested in limits, I highly recommend two books. The first is Donald Worster's gripping history of the Depression-era ecological and social tragedy called *the Dust Bowl*. [45] It is a highly instructive lesson in what happens when humans shatter ecological boundaries as well as a cautionary tale about culture and society.

The 'dirty thirties', as they were called, were primarily the work of man, not nature, Worster argues. Nature had a role, to be sure – without the winds the soil would have stayed put and without drought the land would have been covered with healthy crops. "But natural factors did not make the storms," writes Worster, "they merely made them possible." Farmers had stripped the landscape of its grass cover to such an extent that there was no defense against the dry winds. "The sod had been destroyed to make the farms to grow wheat for cash."

Between 1925-1930 more than five million acres of grassland were torn up by tractors. Then drought returned, as it always does. When the dust storms began in 1935, one-third of the Dust Bowl region – thirty-three million acres – lay exposed to the winds. Kansas and Oklahoma topsoil blew as far as Washington, D.C., and then out to sea.

Society, in the form of mechanized agriculture, had destroyed a unique ecological complex. Eons of alternating cycles of drought and rainfall in the southern plains had created an ancient but fragile set of natural alliances, much of it based on the presence of grass. Out of some 4500 species of grasses that have evolved on the planet, Worster notes, the Great Plains was home to several hundred. And the grass had endured every disruption – drought, silting, and Ice Age climate shifts – everything but the plow.

Of course, the farmers didn't see it this way. The dominant slogan of the age – "rain follows the plow" – suggests that many thought they worked within natural limits.

They didn't. In fact, according to Worster, all this demonstrated a complete absence of environmental realism. "The ultimate meaning of the dust storms in the 1930s," he writes, "was that America as a whole, not just the plains, was badly out of balance with its natural environment. Unbounded optimism about the future, careless disregard of nature's limits and uncertainties, uncritical faith in Providence, devotion to self-aggrandizement – all these were national as well as regional characteristics."

Actually, it went deeper. The real trouble, according to Worster, started two centuries earlier when humans began to believe they were autonomous from nature – free of the restraints that control other species. "There has been no more important change in the human condition," he writes, "than the transition from a traditional sense of intimate dependence on the ecological community to the modern feeling of absolute free will and human autonomy…[that] all ecological limits were simply challenges to be overcome by human energy."

The Dust Bowl is a lesson in the consequences of breaking these limits. It is a lesson we keep relearning.

"The discovery of expansionary limits has recurred in modern American history," Worster concludes, "like the experience of a runner pausing for breath along his course. Each time he rests is in a different place, sees a new terrain, assess his reserves by what lies ahead – and then goes on to run again." During these pauses the nation is filled with mixed feelings about the race itself, whether it has been worth the effort, and what could be done to run the next leg more wisely. "'Conservation'," he writes, "is the word that sums up these disparate attitudes; it has meant for some a rejection of the race itself, for others a preparation to plunge ahead."

Plunging ahead is exactly what worries Bill McKibben, author of the 1980s bestseller *The End of Nature* and a long-distance runner himself. In his new book *Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age* [46] McKibben tackles the thorny and alarming questions surrounding the rapid advance of biotechnology, including the brave new frontiers of genetic engineering, nanotechnology, cryogenics, and cloning.

He worries about a future described candidly by bioengineers and other techno-prophets as "posthuman." He observes that we have come to a technological threshold where we are poised to alter the very essence of what it means to be human, both biologically and socially. For example, he argues that enhancing intelligence or longevity, perhaps even to the point of eliminating death altogether through gene manipulation, will change us fundamentally – and not for the better. Not only will it change us profoundly physically but who gets to be immortal first? The rich?

Imagine the religious, social and environmental consequences of breaking the mortality boundary!

The biofuturists, he notes, believe we are deeply flawed as a species, starting with our bodies. Our multi-purpose mouth, for example, is awkward to the point of "absurdity" they say. One theorist puts it this way: "I don't much like how people are now. We're too shallow, slow, and ignorant….we seemed to have reached a plateau in our intellectual development. There's no sign that we're getting smarter." This theorist sees it as a hard-wiring problem that can be fixed by technology – creating neural connections between our brains and the Internet, for instance.

Here's another example from another theorist: eventually "smart chips" will be implanted inside you, then "your body temperature might give your stereo system clues as to your mood and it would select appropriate music." The chip could also, according to the theorist, "compute how much of your body weight is fat, and offer suggestions for diet recipes *to the refrigerator*." [emphasis added] McKibben is not making this stuff up. It is quite real, as he documents in detail, and it is hurtling toward us with great speed.

The bottom line in all cases is this: these Transhumanists, as they call themselves, oppose limitations, technical, social, or biological. Transcending mankind's tragic flaws, in fact, is their overriding goal.

McKibben's response is to shout: "Enough!"

"We need to do an unlikely thing," he writes, "we need to survey the world we now inhabit and proclaim it good. Good enough. Not in every detail…but good enough in its outlines, in its essentials. We need to decide that we live, most of us in the West, long enough…[that] we have ease enough….we have enough stuff. Enough intelligence. Enough capability. Enough."

He lays some of the blames for this emerging "posthuman" world at the feet of the environmental movement. "The movement to value everything else on earth has often talked carelessly about people, spreading the idea that we are a grim and uncontrollable race, a cancer cell metastasizing unchecked across the defenseless fabric of nature."

He notes that some environmentalists are embracing this brave new future, believing that new technology, will, in the words of one bioengineer "reverse the harm done by the industrial revolution." Cloning could be the solution to the endangered species crisis, they argue. Nanotechnology could replace farming. "Humanity will become a low-pollution system largely decoupled from nature," exults one writer.

McKibben thinks this is a bad idea. "We are leaping across thresholds," he writes. "While the jump to microscale technology may have made life easier, the further jump to nanoscale engineering will eventually drown us in a gushing cornucopia. While the jump to modern medicine may have freed us from many ills, the next leap to human genetic manipulation will imprison us in a house of distorting mirrors. That's how thresholds work: up to a certain point something is good, and past that point there's trouble."

We are approaching that threshold now. "Our food has been genetically modified," he writes, "which makes us uneasy; our children are about to be, which should make us cringe."

For McKibben, it's a fundamental choice between Enough and More. As a species, we have procrastinated the decision. "But now the hour draws near," he concludes. "Faced with a challenge larger than any we've ever faced – the possibility that technology may replace humanity – we need to rally our innate ability to say no."

Yes

Worster and McKibben are not scolds. Their message about living within limits, while alarming and disturbing, is not punitive or misanthropic. It is, in fact, a message of optimism – and a guide for a new conservation movement.

Worster argues for reform of an economic system that he sees as unnecessarily exploitative, not for its abandonment. He also argues for a stronger 'sense of place' among all Americans. The possession of more knowledge is not enough – if it were, he writes, "then the most highly advanced cultures in terms of science and machinery would also be the most well fitted to their environments. In fact, those cultures are among the least well adapted in the world."

Adaptation is the key. It requires knowledge, of course, and appropriate technology, but it also requires a sense of place – a sense of self-identity intimately connected to the land. "Adaptation follows almost instinctively," he writes, "like a pronghorn moving through sagebrush. Houses and fields, tools and traditions, grow out of the earth with all the fitness of grass; they belong in their place as surely as any part of nature does. This is genuine adaptation, and it implies much more than shallow managerial skill. It comes from having a sense of place, which is at once a perception of what makes a piece of land function as it does and a feeling of belonging to and sharing in its uniqueness."

When McKibben argues that things are "good enough" he means those things that have adapted themselves to limits. He points to the theory of nonviolent civil disobedience, as an example, as well as the protection of wilderness. Wild areas "are crucial ecologically," he writes, "but in some ways their greatest value is philosophic: here are places where people have actually decided to take a step back."

There are other signs of our maturation as a species in regard to limits. We've slowed global population growth. We've begun a conversation on global warming. Sprawl has become a major concern of many. Sustainability has become a target of some.

Both authors argue that limits can be a positive thing. "We could decide that instead of endless technological growth and economic expansion," writes McKibben, "we want to focus a larger fraction of our joint energies on other things: service, art, celebration, love…It wouldn't require that we lead lives of sacrifice and poverty; merely that we lay aside childish fantasies of eternal wealth and eternal life. We could decide to stay mere humans."

Staying human may be the ultimate goal of "conservation." I'll let McKibben have the last word on the topic:

"Immortality matters less among the rotting trees and the sprouting saplings, just as 'enhancement' matters less among people who take good care of each other."

June 2004

"Conservation is a positive exercise of skill and insight, not merely a negative exercise of abstinence or caution." – Aldo Leopold

On the eve of the fortieth anniversary of the landmark Wilderness Act, I am compelled to ask a heretical question: should wilderness protection continue to be a top priority of conservation activists?

It is a maxim of any social movement that old ideas, and the motivations that inspired them, unless reinvigorated by fresh meaning become, well, old. Like any enterprise, to maintain "profitability" movements must evolve in response to changing knowledge, technology and values or else run the risk of becoming anachronistic.

This is exactly where the wilderness concept finds itself today – struggling for relevance in a modern world gripped by climate change, rampant consumerism, political gridlock, and social lethargy. Even in the American West where I live, wilderness protection is increasingly like, to quote Aldo Leopold, "fixing the pump without fixing the well." Shielding bits of land from the destructive behavior of human beings without effectively influencing the forces that threaten them in the first place means they are not really protected in the long run.

That's because the essence of the crisis confronting us today, as it was a century ago, is social and cultural, not ecological. The Wilderness Act is a social document, not an ecological prescription. It was a legal and thus cultural response to the nation's frontier hangover which was destroying the primitive nature of our landscapes at a rapid clip. Leopold and others made ecological arguments for wilderness protection, but the potency of the concept primarily lay in its social value – what it said about ourselves, our behavior, our strengths and our weaknesses.

Does the wilderness idea retain that potency today? I think it does not. "Protection" does not mean what it did forty or eighty years ago. The threat from motorized vehicles, for example, no longer compares to the effects of climate change or noxious weed infestation, both of which ignore lines drawn on maps. The vigorous arguments for the expansion of protected areas on ecological grounds, which, while meritorious, do little to solve the underlying issue: how do we alter the coalescing social forces that are threatening the ecological integrity of the planet? Reinvigorating the wilderness idea can't "fix the well" anymore. Instead, I think we need a new strategy altogether.

What worries me most about the current state of affairs is the steady disengagement of people and society from the natural world. This concern might seem ironic given the dramatic rise over the past two decades of recreational use of our public lands, but I'll argue that the overall trend in society is one of increased isolationism, especially from nature. We are spending more time in front of our computers and less time outdoors. The trend of work continues to flow toward cities – just ask the sons and daughters of farmers and ranchers about their future plans and dreams. What flow there is toward the rural tends to be in the form of recreation or subdivisions, both of which create more problems than they solve.

Meanwhile, the science community has determined that much of the land under our care is in need of ecological restoration. New protocols for the qualitative and quantitative assessment and monitoring of land health have been developed, allowing us to gauge the relative "health" of landscapes. And the emerging picture isn't pretty. At the same time, an entrepreneurial spirit has spread across the West focused on "fixing" degraded land by employing methods modeled on nature's principles. As a result, a shift is underway in the region away from acts of "shielding" and towards acts of "healing."

The conservation movement needs to catch up with this shift. In fact, I think the primary challenge confronting the conservation movement is to develop a paradigm that re-engages people with the land that emphasizes *work* and not simply weekend recreation. Play and aesthetic appreciation are fine as far as they go, but if our goal is to join the movement to restore and maintain ecological integrity of land for the long run then our engagement with nature needs to be deeper than a quick trip to a national park.

And it is only through the meaningful engagement called 'work' that we will influence the social forces that threaten our planet and existence.

I have a vision of a new conservation movement that sends volunteers into riparian areas to plant willows and construct structures that heal creeks collaboratively with landowners; I see ranchers being paid by city folk to repair historically damaged arroyos so grass can grow and water can be stored in the banks for downstream use; I see conservationists learning from scientists how to restore a landscape properly and sustainably; I see birders and ranchers looking for ferruginous hawks together; I see open space protected not by fences but by work – people restoring, managing, healing, and earning a paycheck from labor within nature's model.

I see a new conservation movement that cascades *upwards* from the real grassroots (grass and roots) toward social and political centers of power, changing our behavior in ways that, to paraphrase Wendell Berry, no longer deplete soil or people. By a profitable and regenerative re-engagement with nature based on work and restoration, we can begin to influence those social and economic forces that imperil the very heart of what we love and know to be essential to our existence – a healthy relationship with the natural world.

Six Steps

A new conservation movement will come into existence, however, only with difficulty. Old ideas and prejudices will take time to tear down or replace. I propose, therefore, that individuals and organizations consider six steps, or transitions, as key:

1) Give Up the Myth of Pristineness
   Whether a "pristine" environment ever existed before or not, it doesn't exist now. Anywhere. Pollution, climate change, soil erosion, and a myriad of other global anthropogenic changes are here to stay for a very long time. Additionally, ecologists are telling us that the myth of the "balance of nature" was just that – a myth. Instead, they argue that nature exists in a "state of flux" – always changing, always adapting to perturbations, and a little bit chaotic. So, rather than try to "conserve" the natural world, I think activists should encourage a dynamic relationship with nature that acknowledges the "impure" world that we now inhabit.

2) Soil First!
   Our land needs more and better stewardship, not less. Much of the American West, for instance, exists in various degraded conditions, the result of historical damage, poor mitigation strategies, and, now, global changes. At the same time, ecologists have developed a much clearer picture of what constitutes land health at the level of soil, grass, and water – what they call 'functionality.' Consequently, restoring, maintaining or improving this "land mechanism," as Aldo Leopold called it, should be a top priority for conservationists, including restoring health to wilderness areas and national parks. Preservation alone is

no longer an option, because without healthy land at a baseline level much of what we value will be jeopardized over time.

3) Be More Balanced

The old movement's habit of stratifying land by degree of "pristineness" – with national parks and wilderness areas at the top and working landscapes at the bottom – created a hierarchy of land quality that was elitist and had the effect of encouraging disengagement. Wilderness can still be a "gold standard" for a new movement but it should also acknowledge that working landscapes matter. This means a new movement needs to be more democratic than in the past – questions of ecological function, wildlife protection, cultural diversity, economic prosperity, justice, and egalitarian access for all citizens need to be balanced together. This is crucial because as America continues to urbanize the need to reconnect its citizens with its natural heritage at many scales and many locales becomes increasingly important.

4) Talk About Boundaries

A new conservation dialogue needs to expand from simply doing "what is right for the caribou" to questions about curbs to society's appetites and behaviors. Scientists talk about negative environmental consequences when systems cross ecological thresholds, but social and political thresholds exist too. And all three are often connected. The Dust Bowl of the 1930s, for example, was as much about an unsustainable social activity as it was about breaking natural boundaries. Conservationists should talk about both – not only what constitutes "nature's model" but how we might learn to adapt to it.

5) Profit Is Not a Dirty Word

If it isn't about economics and profit at some level then long-term environmental and social health will not be achieved. Lectures by conservationists about ethical behavior without pragmatic solutions that help people make changes in order to reach a more sustainable future will always be just that – lectures. Fortunately, new models of sustainable work have emerged in the last twenty years. The new entrepreneurial spirit on the land aims at creating a "healing economy" – as opposed to the traditional one that exploits natural resources for short-

term gain – and doing so with the aim of making it pay. Restoration, for example, should, and can be, profitable. Conservationists should help by supporting this type of new business activity.

6) Join the Radical Center
A new movement should eschew the extremes. It needs to focus on pragmatic solutions that solve real problems – and that means mobilizing the middle. This means engaging ranchers, scientists, public land managers, poets, farmers, dayhikers – anyone dedicated to restoring ecological and economic health to this country, and doing so collaboratively, and with meaningful measurements of our success. It is in the middle – the Radical Center – where the work can begin. Reengagement means asking not what the land can do for you, but what you can do for the land.

November 2004

"The difficulty lies not in new ideas, but in escaping from the old ones." – John Maynard Keynes.

Looking back over the past century, the greatest shortcoming of the conservation movement in the American West is its near total failure to devise an effective strategy for privately owned land in the region. By any yardstick – watershed acres, animal species, ecological processes – the sum total of conservation success on private land has been small.

While many environmentalists correctly note that half of the West is publicly owned and thus held in trust for the public good, they rarely mention the other part of that equation – that half of the West is in private hands.

This is significant because, as many researchers have written, private lands contain the most productive soils, are located at lower elevations, and often include key riparian areas – all of which make them critical to conservation efforts.

Wildlife biologist Rick Knight of Colorado State University put it this way: "We will not be able to sustain native biodiversity in the Mountain West by relying merely on protected areas. Future conservation efforts to protect this region's natural heritage will require closer attention being paid to the role of private lands."

But how? One reason why the movement has failed to develop an effective conservation strategy for private land is because its toolbox is so deficient. The tactics of demonization, litigation, regulation, and pressure politics – effective on public lands (though to a diminishing degree these days) – are essentially useless on private land.

For good reason. They are tools of coercion, useful, perhaps, to right a wrong or quick-fix a crisis, but not very effective for chronic afflictions, such as the slow decline of threatened and endangered species. That's because at root our ecological crisis is really a social crisis and you don't achieve long-term change in human behavior with a hammer.

Not unless you want a fight.

Bifurcation

It is the idea of a bifurcated West – half public, half private – that lies at the heart of the movement's troubles. Until conservationists can conceive of the region as One West, indivisible in the things that matter such as water, wildlife, soil, community, and the common good and develop strategies that work evenly and fairly, the ecological trend will continue downward.

A few years ago, I was part of a panel discussion in Silver City, New Mexico, focused on the question of livestock production and native plant protection. On the panel with me was a vigorous local environmentalist who drew a sharp line in the sand when it came to cows. In response to a question from the audience, I cited a statistic that I had heard recently: that over 100 million acres of private land in the West are owned by public lands ranchers, most of who need the grazing provided by public lands to stay profitable.

I turned to the activist and asked: "If you're successful in eliminating public lands ranching, as you desire, what happens to all that private land? Who's going to keep it from being sold to subdividers?"

The environmentalist responded by saying his only concern was for public land. He was only interested in creating "refugia for native plants and animals."

This comment upset the Forest Service biologist at the other end of the panel. "What good is a refuge if it's also a biological desert?" he asked, hotly. "Because that's what's happening in the Gila wilderness." He went on to say that the suppression of fire and other natural agents of ecological disturbance, including, under the right conditions, animal impact, had contributed to ecological stagnation in the wilderness.

Right there, I realized, was the heart of the matter. Do we continue to divide the West into two parts based on philosophical ideals – such as whether we have a public or a private "right" to something on the land – or do we talk about processes, both social and ecological, that cross boundaries? Which is the stronger foundation for the long-run?

If you believe in an ideal, such as the sanctity of non-working landscapes, then there are only two strategies for private land: buy it or ignore it. While my environmentalist colleague chose the latter, other conservation organizations, including The Nature Conservancy have opted for the former.

The trouble with the 'buy it' strategy, however, should be obvious: there isn't enough money out there, not even for the purchase of conservation easements, to do the job right. And prices keep rising almost literally by the minute.

One response to the dilemma of limited funds has been to target for purchase those private lands considered "the last best places." It's been an effective strategy. The Conservation Fund, for example, reported last month that it had passed the four million acre mark nationwide in terms of protected land. It only took them nineteen years. I laud their efforts, but four million acres is a drop in bucket especially given the rapid pace of development in the country.

Perhaps as an acknowledgement of this dilemma, many land-buying organizations have recently turned to collaborative, community-based projects to widen their conservation impact across threatened landscapes. At the same time, other conservation organizations, such as Defenders of Wildlife and Environmental Defense, are offering incentive programs and other tools to encourage better land use among private landowners.

These are positive developments, but I wonder if they are enough to make a real difference. Do they dig deep enough at the social roots of the ecological conundrum we all face? Could there another way?

The Land We Share

I recently read a book that approached the question of private lands and conservation from the other side of the equation. Written by Eric Freyfogle, a Professor of Law at the University of Illinois, *The Land We Share* digs into the meaning and shifting definition of private property in America. His thoughts are provocative, to say the least.

Given the current, urgent problems confronting American society, he asks, how should we begin to redefine the role of private property rights? "Can private

development and resource-use practices continue as in the past," he writes "or have the complexities of modern life brought us to the point where a new approach is needed, some new understanding of how the private owner fits with the surrounding community?"

One emerging problem he sees, highlighted by recent advances in ecology, is the division between the law, which crisply defines boundaries, and nature, which does not. This division is at the root of so much conflict in the nation.

"Private land in the law is an abstract human construct; a bundle of legal rights and responsibilities typically defined without regard for the land's natural features," he writes. "In nature, the situation is starkly different. Nature is an interconnected whole, one parcel fully linked with the next. Even a seemingly slight action on one tract of land can trigger far-spreading ecological ripples."

In his book, Freyfogle seeks to close this gap between law and nature. His main argument focuses on the concepts of citizenship and community. While private property owners have secure rights in their land, to be sure, they also have public responsibilities to the common good. The law, Freyfogle notes, has been clear on this point for a long time: neighbors cannot "do harm" to each other by their actions. For instance, the state has a right to object if a landowner tries to build a nuclear waste dump on his or her property.

No private landowner, in other words, has an unlimited right to use of their land.

However, since the American Revolution, Freyfogle observes, the idea of "limits" on landowner rights has ebbed and flowed. Limits were strongest in Jefferson's day, when an agrarian-based economy dominated, and weakest in the late nineteenth century when Robber Barons ruled and industrial capitalism went mostly unchecked.

Today, we find ourselves somewhere in the middle. While "free to use" and market-based philosophies remain strong among many private property owners, public concern about the health of wildlife populations, particularly endangered species and other natural resource issues, has grown proportionately. Definitions of "limits" and "harm" are in flux with the main result being sustained conflict between the concepts of "public" and "private."

At heart, says Freyfogle, is a struggle to define the common good. When something works in the interest of both public and private landowners, such as securing high quality and abundant water supplies then everyone wins. When the common good is in dispute and conflict erupts, however, land degradation often results.

He sees evidence of this all over.

"In the view of fair-minded observers," he writes, "many occupied American lands continue to decline in quality. Natural ecological functions, particularly fertility and hydrologic cycles, are severely disrupted. Biological communities continue to unravel as many species decline. Farms, forests, grazing lands, and other working lands are typically used in ways that cannot be sustained ecologically."

The answer he suggests to this dilemma, however, is not what you might expect.

Land Health

For help, Freyfogle turns to Aldo Leopold, who for over half his career wrestled with the puzzle of encouraging good land use on private property. During the Dust Bowl years, Leopold saw first hand what short-sighted, unrestricted, "unnatural" land practices could do. He watched as thirteen millions acres of topsoil blew to the Atlantic Ocean.

Leopold supported private property rights, as does Freyfogle, but the main question for Leopold became how to get landowners to think of the community of life, plants, animals, and people, as a whole. "Leopold had reached the heart of the matter," writes Freyfogle. "People saw themselves as separate from nature, when in truth they were not."

One answer, Leopold determined, was to embrace the concept of land health – which he defined as the land's "capacity for collective self-renewal and collective self-maintenance." The common good was best served by restoring the land to properly functioning health. But it couldn't stop there. It also meant restoring and maintaining societal health. To Leopold, it was futile "to improve the face of the land without improving ourselves," as he put it.

It all came down to a healthy respect for human limits. "Nature was highly complex," Freyfogle says of Leopold's conclusions, "and even leading scientists could not predict its interactions or decipher the functions of all its parts. Only an attentive, caring landowner stood much chance of drawing sustenance from land without degrading it."

In the end, Leopold believed that land health should be the major indicator by which society calibrated the rights of private land owners.

"He had rethought," writes Freyfolge, "from the ground up, how humans related to nature, how they related to one another, and how their well-being was ecologically linked to the well-being of the larger natural order. The legal community was

not listening at the time; indeed, even Leopold's fellow conservationists had trouble making sense of his conclusions. But Leopold's ideas would remain alive, awaiting future readers."

The future is here. Nearly sixty years after Leopold's death, the science community has developed protocols that quantitatively and qualitatively measure land health. On-the-ground practitioners have developed models of sustainable use. And the community-based collaborative movement has developed suitable models for implementing change.

What remains, says Freyfogle, is for the law to catch up with the times by promoting healthy connections between land parcels.

"If the land community of the future is to remain healthy," he concludes, "the private property approach will need to take on even more of the trappings of a successful common-property regime. Landscape everywhere will be made up not of two types of land – private and commons – but of a wide array of variants that blend the two."

Many benefits would come, he says, from looking at land ownership as a smooth continuum. "It would become easier to imagine more flexible ways of protecting the public's interest in private land," he writes. "In addition, the never-ending controversy over public lands would be easier to address if a full suite of options were open to discussion."

It is to that full suite of options, grounded in the goal of land health, that the conservation movement should now turn.

April 2005

"Green fingers are the extensions of a verdant heart." – Russell Page, master English gardener.

It is time to walk out of the wilderness and into the garden.

It is time, in other words, to change our metaphors. From Thoreau, meditating beside his pond, to Muir, climbing Yosemite Falls, to Aldo Leopold, Olaus Murie, David Brower and beyond, the dominant metaphor among naturalists and other defenders of nature has been the wilderness – officially defined in the Wilderness Act as a place "untrammeled by man."

Of course, wilderness is more than a metaphor; it has been a fact of life from the very moment native and European colonists set foot in the New World. Over the centuries, North Americans responded to the presence of "wild" land around

them with strong emotions: either to tame, cherish, or protect wilderness. Love it or hate it, wilderness became the principle yardstick by which we measured the natural world and consequently ourselves.

No more.

Obviously it's not 1491 any longer, but neither is it 1909, the date when an energetic young forester named Aldo Leopold began his first assignment with the fledgling Forest Service in the remote mountainous country of eastern Arizona. In 1909, the Apache National Forest *was* wilderness – the place, not coincidentally, where Leopold watched the "fierce green fire" die in the eyes of a wolf that had just been shot by his comrades, an event immortalized years later in his essay "Thinking Like a Mountain."

But if Leopold could return to the Apache today, what would he think? After his initial shock, which would probably be profound, he might ask: where did the wilderness *go*?

What would Aldo say about the state of the things in the American West today? Literally, what metaphors would he use? I doubt he'd talk much about wilderness. Instead, I suspect Leopold would find hope in the emerging movement to revive damaged land, and damaged relationships, through restoration. After all, in the 1930s he led a pioneering program to restore native prairies near his home in Madison, Wisconsin – an effort that eventually gave birth to the science of restoration ecology.

Today, I think he'd employ the language of healing, of repairing and restoring. He'd also talk about humility, respect, and thoughtful action. I think he'd talk about wildness, but also about the knowledge of nature that comes with getting our hands dirty through weeding and growing things.

I think he might talk about gardens.

Second Nature

The debate may be moot. I believe global warming is destined to make us all gardeners. That's because "nature" no longer exists outside of "culture" anywhere on the planet, requiring, if we are to maintain the things we value such as biodiversity, deliberate and methodical action. Earth is now ours to tend.

Thinking like a garden could be a positive development for a number of reasons: it removes a wedge between nature and culture that has become increasingly destructive; it encourages a meaningful reconnection between people and land through active participation in nature's rhythms and mysteries; and it detaches

our concept of "wildness" from the anachronistic idea of "pristineness" – putting it in our hands, literally, to define in relation to our labor and goals.

Still, old metaphors die hard. The transition from "wilderness" to "garden" has been personally difficult, especially since much of my youth – our indelible years – is intimately bound up with wilderness adventures. Recently, however, I felt an increasing friction between my traditional faith in wilderness and the practical reality of working with land and people.

Relief came recently in the form of a book entitled *Second Nature: a Gardener's Education* by Michael Pollan, a journalist and author of the bestseller *The Botany of Desire*. His book hit home because he too struggled with this very 'American' conflict.

"Like most Americans out-of-doors, I was a child of Thoreau," Pollan writes. "But the ways of seeing nature I'd inherited from him, and the whole tradition of nature writing he inspired, seemed not to fit my experiences…Everybody wrote about how to BE in nature, what sorts of perceptions to have, but nobody about how to ACT there. Yet the gardener, unlike the naturalist, has to, indeed WANTS to, act."

Thoreau, Pollan noted, was the last important American writer on nature to have anything to say about gardening. The famous naturalist planted a bean field near Walden Pond but got caught in the messy contradictions between his needs and his perceptions of nature's prerogatives. Eventually throwing down his hoe and forsaking his beans, Thoreau declared that he would "prefer the most dismal swamp to any garden."

This led, says Pollan, to the very American habit of seeing nature and culture as irreconcilably opposed – that whenever one gains, the other must lose. And it is this paradigm that must now be overturned.

"We need, and now more than ever, to learn how to use nature without damaging it," he wrote. "That probably can't be done as long as we continue to think of nature and culture simply as antagonists. So how do we begin to find some middle ground between the two? To provide for our needs and desires without diminishing nature?"

To find an answer, he looks in his garden.

Weeds

Pollan's educational curve was steep. He chose, initially, not to fence his new garden (he lived in Connecticut at the time), which resulted in an invasion

of woodchucks, deer, and other hungry animals. But he also rejected his neighbors' response, which was to create, and constantly maintain, bright green lawns, which he considered a form of totalitarian rule over nature. The trick, he decided, was to find a middle ground between these positions – and that is what a garden is – "a place that admits of both nature and human habitation."

"But a garden is not, as I had imagined, a harmonious compromise between the two, nor is it stable," he writes, "from what I can see, it requires continual human intervention or else it will collapse. The question for the gardener – and in a way it's a question for all of us – is: What is the proper character of that intervention?"

His experience in the garden suggests that finding a good answer to that question is much more complicated than simply choosing between "raping the land or sealing it away in a preserve where no one can touch it" – both of which he considers to be dead ends.

"Gardening quickly teaches you to distrust all such absolutes," he writes. "Must we *always* shrink before our own power in nature? We are one of only a handful of creatures with the capacity to deliberately alter our environment. To simply renounce that power – isn't that in some sense to renounce our humanity? *Our* nature? And is that nature any less real than the nature we seem to think exists only *out there*?"

Take weeds, for instance. To romantic writers, who often lived at a distance from nature, weeds were emblems of freedom and wildness, and weeding stood for another form of domination of nature by man.

Gardeners have a different perspective. They know weeds don't originate in the wild. They thrive, instead, in disturbed soil such as vacant lots, railroad sidings, and gardens. They know weeds are often nonnative and exotic and very often the creation of hybridization – evolving with one end in view: to thrive in ground that man has disturbed.

"My weeds were no more natural than my garden plants," writes Pollan. "Those smug quotes in which naturalists like to coddle weeds were merely a conceit. My battles with weeds did not bespeak alienation from nature, or some irresponsible drive to dominate it."

Weeding is necessary; having changed nature irrevocably around the globe, humans are now obligated to tend to the consequences of our actions, which is to say, to garden.

"We have made so many changes in the land that some form of gardening has become unavoidable, even in those places we wish to preserve as monuments

to our absence," Pollan writes. "Even Yellowstone, our country's greatest "wilderness" stands in need of careful management – it's too late to simply leave it alone…wolves, tourists, fires, elk, all need active management…Today, even Yellowstone must be "gardened.""

Weeding, and thus gardening, involves making informed choices in nature – to apply our intelligence and sweat to the earth. To weed is to bring culture to nature in a way that is mutually beneficial to both.

"Weeding is what will save places like Yellowstone," writes Pollan, "but only if we recognize that weeding is not just something we do to the land – only if we recognize the need to cultivate our *own* nature, too. For though we may be the earth's gardeners, we are also its weeds. And we won't get anywhere until we come to terms with this crucial ambiguity about our role – that we are at once the problem and the only possible solution to the problem."

Pollan's education has much to teach us about the usefulness of the garden as a metaphor for a new relationship to the natural world. Gardening, for instance, requires an intimate knowledge of a local landscape.

"Gardening is a painstaking exploration of place," he writes, "everything that happens in my garden – the thriving and dying of particular plants, the maraudings of various insects and other pests – teaches me to know this patch of land more intimately, its geology and microclimate, the particular ecology of its local weeds and animals and insects."

By working intimately with land, whether it is restoring a patch of native prairie or restoring a riparian area, "gardening" reverses our alienation from nature. By cultivating a 'green thumb' work on the land restores an ancient relationship between humans and the natural world that is productive and spiritually uplifting.

Gardening is also a source of moral instruction as we seek a way to use nature without damaging it. Gardening can teach us about models of ecological responsibility and can, in the process, be a form of redemption for our sins against nature.

Gardening also teaches us humility. But perhaps most important of all, Pollan says, gardening teaches us forbearance – the very essence of culture.

"Conscience, ethical choice, memory, discrimination: it is these very human and decidedly unecological faculties that offer the planet its last best hope," he writes. "It is true that, historically, we've concentrated on exercising these faculties in the human rather than the natural estate, but that doesn't mean they *cannot* be exercised there. Indeed, this is the work that now needs to be done: to bring more culture to our conduct in nature, not less."

Aldo Leopold, of course, said much the same thing when he called for a 'land ethic.'

But what about Thoreau's "dismal swamp"? Should we forsake it? Not at all, says Pollan. But we must be pragmatic too – which is another lesson learned from the garden.

"It is too late in the day – there are simply too many of us now – to follow Thoreau into the woods, to look to nature to somehow cure or undo culture," he writes. "As important as it is to have swamps, today it is probably more important to learn how to…satisfy culture without offending nature."

To find that satisfaction, he turns to the very symbol of a garden.

"The habit of bluntly opposing nature and culture has only gotten us into trouble, and we won't work ourselves free of this trouble until we have developed a more complicated and supple sense of how we fit into nature. I do not know what that sense might be, but I suspect that the rose, with its long, quirky history of give-and-take with man, can tutor it as well as, if not better than, Thoreau's unsullied swamp."

August 2005

"For the duration of our time on the planet…restoration will be the great task." – Kenneth Brower, in an Introduction to *A Sand County Almanac*

For a while now I've been dogged by a Socratic question: who am I?

This has become a pressing concern because we live in a world of 'ists,' as in 'specialist' or 'generalist' – which are teams, essentially, complete with uniforms, rules, and expectations. And in our culture, if you're not a team you're probably on the sidelines.

For a long time I resisted signing up with any particular squad. Part of it was a college-bred skepticism of group orthodoxy in general, but most of it was indecision. Which team should I choose? Who would have me? The teams on my particular playing field included conservationist, environmentalist, naturalist, ecologist, scientist, and archaeologist.

I am not, and cannot be, a scientist. My predisposition leans toward the right brain. Even archaeology was a stretch – I preferred the romantic parts of hiking and camping in the desert over the artifacts and analysis. Birding is not in my nature, though I've recently taken an interest in plant identification. Still, I'd make a second-rate naturalist at best.

I've never considered myself an environmentalist, at least professionally. Part of it is how I defined the word 'environmentalist' – as someone dedicated to the *defense* of nature and people. Look at the vocabulary of environmentalism: defend, save, preserve, fight, protect, shield, sue. This is necessary work, but it's not my cup of tea.

I should have joined the 'conservationist' team but I decided early in the game not to. For starters, I was never attracted to the word 'conserve' which the dictionary defines as the effort to "keep in a safe place." Historically, this was exactly the aim of much conservation work – to keep safe what we valued in the natural world through parks, wildernesses, forest reserves, 'conservative' farm practices, and the like.

This is necessary work too, but it's not enough. To paraphrase Aldo Leopold, conservation is more about fixing the 'pump' than the 'well' – meaning the real challenge in front of us is not environmental, it's social and economic. Our ecological ills are manifestations of societal maladies and they won't be fixed until we employ social remedies. Conservation can't do that alone, as nearly 150 years of hard work has demonstrated. Nor can it do the job in partnership with environmentalism. Protect and defend are not enough.

I knew early that I wanted to fix the 'well' not the 'pump' or at least try, so I began to look for another team. I quickly discovered that this meant finding another playing field as well. Eventually, I found both and after scrimmaging and studying the rule-book (such as it is) for a few years, I think I'm ready to sign a contract.

I am a restorationist.

Redemption?

First and foremost, I am attracted to the language of restoration. Taped to my computer is a postcard that I found in a local coffee store. It depicts an ill-looking planet Earth, with its tongue hanging out, imprinted with the message: "The world could be in better shape." Surrounding this image are words: renew, heal, reaffirm, nurture, rekindle, revitalize, repair, revive, mend, soothe, rebuild, fix, regenerate, reinvigorate.

As the son of a doctor, these words have powerful appeal to me. They are the essential raw materials for communication and teaching. They are part of the 'common language that describes the common ground below our feet.'

They are words of action – positive, progressive, healing action. They are the words of advancement, not defense of safe keeping, and as such give people direction and hope. It involves us in a 'giving' rather than merely a 'taking' – a giving back to nature, an honoring, while we necessarily continue to take nature's bounty.

They are also words of redemption.

We have taken much from the natural world, often with tragic consequences, and we continue to take an accelerating rate. Restoration is a way to redeem our behavior – a kind of moral exercise, if you will. Perhaps "salvation" is too strong of a word to use, but it points us in an interesting direction.

It's an opinion shared by William Jordan in his book *Sunflower Forest: Ecological Restoration and the New Communion with Nature*. It is a book, by the way, that uses the word 'restorationist' so frequently that it suggests a larger team on a larger playing field than I suspected.

"Everything we have, we take from nature," he writes, "sometimes by persuasion or collaboration, sometimes by outright theft. Either way, the debt we incur is, or at lest ought to be, a constant concern. For many, restoration is an attractive idea because it offers a way of repaying this debt."

Jordan considers restoration to be a 'gift' back to nature, both in the restored ecosystem and in the greater understanding and self-awareness that restoration creates among its practitioners. It is a redeeming gift, a gift or reciprocity – we give so that nature may give back – not a one-way gift of charity or commerce. Restoration is an unending exchange of goods and services with the natural world. It is not, Jordan says, about settling accounts.

He goes on to say that the trouble with environmentalism and conservation is that there is no exchange of gifts in their actions.

"We can take from nature but we can never give back," Jordan writes of these two paradigms. "We accept its gifts of food, materials, place, and beauty but never offer back the clinching gift that would establish a basis of solidarity…and because we never risk the offering of a gift, we have no need for sacrifice…"

In contrast, restoration is all about giving.

"As for the gift, the basis for solidarity with nature, the restored ecosystem is perhaps as close as we can come to paying nature back in kind for what we have taken from it."

For over twenty years, Jordan directed the Education Program at the University of Wisconsin's Arboretum, home to an experiment in prairie restoration that began back in the 1930s under the guidance of Aldo Leopold. When Jordan started working at the Arboretum, however, very few people in the nation were doing restoration. Environmentalists almost universally ignored it, he notes, considering it at best a distraction from the serious work of preservation and at worst a threat.

Environmentalists didn't like restoration because they believed that the 'naturalness' of wild places was irreplaceable. The hand of man could only harm, not restore, the state of nature. Jordan believes this line of reasoning had devastating consequences.

"It implied that conservation was a one-way street," he writes, "essentially nothing more than a delaying action that might slow the inevitable decline of natural landscapes toward eventual extinction but can never reverse it. It also conveyed the idea, often expressed quite explicitly by environmentalists, that the influence of human beings on natural landscapes is invariably negative and destructive; though we may take from such a landscape, we can never give anything back."

But giving something back is exactly the point of restoration, and why it appeals to Jordan. Not only does it offer the opportunity to reverse environmental degradation, it also offers *hope* – something the environmental movement sorely lacks.

"Since restoration is an active process – in fact, a kind of gardening – it offers something that eluded environmentalists for the better part of a century – a way to "use" classic landscapes, such as prairies and forests, actually participating in their ecology, without changing their character or using them up."

By the early 1980s, Jordan realized that the work at the Arboretum was crucial. "It combined the best elements of two forms of environmentalism – the conservationist's willingness to participate in the ecology of a natural landscape, and the environmentalist's insistence on the inherent value of that landscape, independent of its value to humans – into a single act that linked engagement with total respect. This act, it seemed to me, provided the basis for a new kind of environmentalism."

Once upon a time, I thought so too – that a "new environmentalism" was in the offing. I've come to the conclusion, however, that environmentalism is

genetically predisposed to certain types of activities, the defense of nature for example, and indisposed to other work, such as restoration. Asking it to change would be like asking a gazelle to slow down. It is the same with the conservation movement – it doesn't need to change as much as it needs to be cognizant of its boundaries, where 'protection' begins and ends, for example.

We need a new movement – a restoration movement – with new language and a new 'ist' – to compliment the old movements and begin the gifting.

I'll be a restorationist. And I am confirmed in my resolution by a simple unorthodox fact: my computer's spellchecker doesn't recognize the word.

April 2006

When I began this column the horizon seemed very far away indeed.

In fact, I wondered at the time if we might be staring at a mirage. This is one of the reasons we chose the word "Quivira" – it signified an elusive dream as much as it marked unknown territory to early explorers of the Southwest. Dream or not, one thing was clear – we had no idea how long the journey would be or how far down the road we would go.

Almost as proof, we nearly stumbled on the very first step.

On a fine June day in 1997, Dan Dagget and I arrived at the Unitarian Church in Santa Fe to set up The Quivira Coalition's inaugural workshop, only to discover that I had the wrong key to the front door. We were locked out. Panicked (because we were running late) I drove to the nearby Sierra Club office and made a desperate call to a fellow activist, who, luckily, was home.

We secured a key and had a marvelous day. To our surprise and delight over fifty people attended, including ranchers, scientists, and conservationists. The mood was convivial, and the speakers – Dan, Kris Havstad, Jim Winder, Ray Powell and Frank Hayes – were as provocative as they were informative. Organizationally, we were armed with only two things that day: our first newsletter, which we distributed to every chair, and hope.

Our second event, held in a motel meeting room in Silver City the following January, went more smoothly. Over one hundred people came to hear the "Dan, Kris, and Jim show," including another healthy mix of ranchers, agency folk and conservationists. The meeting also attracted our first vocal anti-grazing activist, who held his tape recorder up in the air for all to see. It also attracted our first reporter.

The meeting had been denounced the day before in a press release issued by a coalition of environmental organizations who branded us, as I recall, "handmaidens"

to the cattle industry. This must have been news to the New Mexico Cattlegrowers' Association who had recently written me a very chilly letter.

I took both the denunciation and the chilly reception as positive developments.

Grassroots to Village

Meanwhile, we took our case to the ground. One of our original goals was to become a true "grassroots group" – meaning, we wanted to start over at the level of grass and roots. To do this, we organized Outdoor Classrooms on well-managed ranches, taught by Kirk Gadzia. These proved popular, drawing the now familiar mix of people.

We were also pleasantly surprised by the large amount of media attention we received in the first year. We assumed that since we were wearing neither a Black Hat nor a White Hat, the press would ignore us. Quite the opposite happened. In fact, over time a curious thing took place: the public denunciations dropped off – and not just of The Quivira Coalition, but of livestock grazing in general. Not so long ago, if a "pro" cattle story appeared in a magazine or newspaper article there would invariably be a tide of angry rebuttals, some of them personal.

But the rebuttals and the charges have evaporated – and I think this is a significant sign of change and success. At the same time, I believe the core message of the conservation community – that ranchers, especially those who run livestock on public lands, must perform to higher environmental standards – has been heard too. Is overgrazing still a problem in the region? A quick glance out the window as one drives suggests that it is. But it seems clear that 'business as usual' on our rangelands today is more hindrance than help in a rapidly changing world.

Meanwhile, the idea of the 'New Ranch' – a term I made up to describe the progressive ranching movement emerging in the region – continued to evolve and grow as we met more landowners, consultants, and conservationists doing innovative things. In particular, our work with Bill Zeedyk opened our eyes to the important possibilities of restoration. All of which led us to change our mission statement in the fall of 2002. It now reads: "The mission of The Quivira Coalition is to foster ecological, economic and social health on western landscapes through education, innovation, collaboration, and progressive public and private land stewardship."

Over the years, our work has expanded to include demonstration restoration projects on Comanche and Cedro Creeks and the Dry Cimarron River, owning and managing the only federal lands Grassbank in the West and publishing manuals on fixing ranch roads and monitoring grasslands. And yet we have tried hard not to lose sight of one of our core original goals – to provide a meeting-place for the *radical center*.

In the beginning we tried to provide a neutral ground on which various people of diverse backgrounds could meet, talk, look, learn, and listen. Upon the conclusion of our Fifth Annual Conference this past January, however, when another five hundred people showed up, it became clear that neutral ground has become a village.

And ours isn't the only village. Across the West, a movement has been building slowly for a decade focused on exploring our common interests rather than arguing our differences. Little villages, widely separated, popped up first in watersheds and on ranches – collaboratively determined to break gridlock. Over time, these villages proliferated to the point where they seem to be everywhere today.

Nine years later, in other words, the horizon doesn't seem so terribly far away anymore. We still have a long way to go of course, but I can say with confidence that the dream is no mere mirage.

It's time now to focus on the village, not the horizon – and even here we are consistent with our original goals. In fact, I'll conclude this column with a quote from the end of the original one: "A good place to start is with affection. We love the land, but so do ranchers and for reasons that are more similar to ours than we suppose. Each of us loves the open space, the blue skies, the wild critters that live there, and the feeling of a fresh breeze in our face. Going outside is going home, as Muir said; and it is a home that we all share."

The Next West
2009-2011
(published on my web site A West That Works)

2010:

- President of the United States: Barak Obama
- Party in control of U.S. Senate and House: Democrat
- Significant bill: Affordable Care Act
- Top news event: Oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico
- Price of oil: $75 a barrel (in 2016 dollars)
- Atmospheric carbon dioxide: 392 ppm
- Dow Jones: over 11,000
- Gallon of unleaded gas: $2.89
- Top Internet companies: Google, Facebook, Apple
- Size and shape of mobile phones: smart
- Started: iPad, Uber, video streaming takes off
- Top-rated TV shows: Big Bang Theory, NCIS
- Time's Person of the Year: Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook

Chasing Moab (Part I)

12/1/09 – In an interview included in a new book titled *Voices of the American West* [47]I was surprised to read author and law professor Charles Wilkinson state matter-of-factly that the much ballyhooed New West "never happened."

It didn't? I thought the New West was exactly what *did* happen to the region over the past thirty years. What about all those mountain bikes, lattes, art galleries, jeep tours, spiritual vortexes, fancy megahomes, microbreweries, destination resorts, pink coyotes, crab cakes, traffic jams, telecommuters, bird-watchers, river runners, downhill skiers, real estate agents, migrant housekeepers, foreign tourists, and myriad nonprofit employees?

You know what I mean: out with the cows, in with the laptops – *that* New West.

What did he mean it didn't happen? After all, the New West even has its own *Atlas*, published in 1997 by the University of Colorado. In it are maps and essays charting the region's rapid transformation from a place of big spaces, national parks, and cowboys to a landscape dominated by golf courses, walled estates, jetports, blue-ribbon trout streams, retirement hot spots, jazz festivals, and endless ranchettes – as plain to see as a For Sale sign.

Economically, the existence of the New West has been documented by Dr. Thomas Power, of the University of Montana, who co-authored a book in 2001 titled *Post-Cowboy Economics: Pay and Prosperity in the New American West* which dispelled the myth that the West is still dependent on logging, mining, and ranching for its economic well-being. In their place, his analysis showed, emerged a new economy based on environmental protection, amenities, services, and information technologies.

Even Wilkinson in his classic 1992 study *Crossing the Next Meridian: Land, Water, and the Future West* details how the "lords of yesterday" – the laws and policies created in the wake of the American West's vigorous frontier era – had become out of sync with the public's burgeoning interest in outdoor recreation and the protection of natural resources, resulting in a great deal of conflict between urban and rural residents across the region. From the "timber wars" of the Northwest, the "grazing wars" of the Southwest, and the "wolf wars" of the northern Rockies, he writes, the struggle between the "old" West and the "new" had kicked into high gear.

We know who won. Today, the New West is everywhere. So what does Wilkinson mean it "never happened?"

What he means is that the original sense of the term – "a hope for a new and better West," as he describes it – never happened. "The New West was about a lighter consciousness," he says in the interview, "a more environmental, more preservation-oriented approach toward the West. It partly came out of Wallace Stegner's [oft-cited] maxim "We need a society to match the scenery."" [48]

Wilkinson says we didn't get there.

"What has happened since then is that we've been overrun," he argues. "The new population has not respected the land or the communities and has not searched for a slower way of life. Instead, they've searched for a place to get rich."

In the process, we became too fast, too impersonal, too crowded, too jammed up, and too stressed, he insists. "Not that I know what to do about it," he concludes, "but we ought to talk about it."

The New West came to mind in August when I pulled in to Moab, Utah, for a pizza. My kids and I were driving home from a sojourn to Yellowstone via Salt Lake City, and I wanted to fill in a blank spot in their map of the West by speeding through Arches National Park (I know, I know). By the time we exited the park, the kids needed a decent pizza and I needed a good cup of coffee. I knew Moab would have both.

Shortly, we were cruising through the former stomping ground of miners, misfits, cowboys, and reclusive activists, including wilderness advocate and social critic Ed Abbey. Few of them would recognize Moab today. I barely recognize the place and I've only been coming here sporadically. I don't mountain bike, river run, climb, fish or bird watch – but I do like a latte, as well as a decent drive and a good book store. That means we've dropped in on Moab enough times over the years to witness its conversion from sleepy backwater to bustling New West mecca. Despite its growth, however, visiting Moab always felt like pursuing a phantom, fleeting and vapory. In fact, I feel like I've been chasing Moab across the West's psychic landscape most of my adult life.

But if Moab isn't the poster child of the New West, what is it? And if we didn't create a society to match the scenery, what did we do exactly? I think we should definitely talk about it.

Chasing Moab (Part II)

12/15/09 – If the Old West faded away and the New West never happened, as Charles Wilkinson says, then what went on in the West over the past generation? More importantly, what might be coming next to the region?

After picking up a pizza and a latte during a recent stopover in Moab, I wandered down to *Back of Beyond*, a great bookstore, where I found a few clues to my first question in a book titled *Brave New West: Morphing Moab at the Speed of Greed*. [49] Its author is Jim Stiles, a friend of author and social critic Ed Abbey, publisher of the alternative newspaper *Canyon Country Zephyr*, and long-time Moab resident and observer.

He clearly doesn't like what he sees.

Like many, Stiles discovered Moab as a tourist. Arriving from his native Kentucky decades ago, he fell in love with the canyon country and worked alongside his mentor Abbey to protect the area's wild character. Originally, he believed – as many of his fellow environmentalists did – that an amenity economy would reinvigorate the rural West, replacing the old extractive industries with something "cleaner."

It didn't work out that way. Instead, Moab was overrun by an economy that turned out to be just as exploitative as any in the past. Actually, it was worse. That's because the motivation of this economy was pure greed – all take and no give.

"Today many people come here because they are already rich," Stiles writes. "They come here to extract the very beauty of the land that they claim to love. What's happening today is extractive, too, and in the long run much more efficient and much more destructive. The old miners peeled off the West's skin; today we're removing her soul."

While Stiles reserves most of his Abbey-like ire and droll humor for get-filthy-rich land developers and their community-destroying ways, he also blasts the hypocrisy of environmentalists for turning a blind eye to the ecological damage created by land-fragmenting subdivisions, resource-sucking megahomes, and wilderness-wrecking hordes of tourists. Of course, Stiles didn't see trouble coming either. In the beginning, he supported the 'out with the old' and 'in with the new' promises of an amenity economy.

Not anymore.

Stiles' opinion about cows is illustrative. He's always had a love-hate relationship with bovines. He cursed the damage they did to his favorite meadows by turning them into cow-burnt wastelands (to use Abbey's term), but then, he noted, cows *taste so good*. He had a love-hate with ranchers too – he lost patience with those who abused the land but honored the good stewardship some provided.

But today he misses the cows and the cowboys. That's because they represent a value system that contrasts starkly with our materialist, consumer-driven

society, where everything must be marketed, sold, and show a huge profit. Back in the good old days of twenty years ago, he writes, we didn't give much thought to the ranchers or the communities that were built on ranching. We didn't consider what would happen to the ranches themselves, the old homes and barns tucked under century-old cottonwood trees, the alfalfa fields in the valleys that are as much a part of the Western landscape as the mountains that often rise above them.

"I understand the points made by cow-free advocates," he continues. "I still recognize the damage caused by reckless grazing practices. I know changes need to be made. But at a time when the amenities economy is rapidly creating an entirely new threat to the beauty, solitude, and health of the American West, a cow-free West as an end-all solution to resource degradation is foolish and simplistic. Never underestimate the greed of American entrepreneurialism."

Stiles believes that the United States has been so severely damaged by rampant greed and materialism, evidenced by what's happened to Moab (and Wall Street, I would add), that it's nearly impossible to imagine the democratic process working with the goal of creating a nation that we can actually be proud of again.

To this end, he quotes Ed Abbey: "If America could be, once again, a nation of self-reliant farmers, craftsmen, hunters, ranchers and artists, then the rich would have little power to dominate others. Neither to serve nor to rule. That was the American dream."

Which brings me to my second question: where are we heading? How do we recapture Abbey's sense of the American Dream – to neither serve nor rule – which was also the idea behind Wallace Stegner's famous instruction to westerners to "create a society to match the scenery?"

An answer is not clear yet, though I agree with Stiles that the place to start is with the remnants of the Old West still lying around and build something new from them.

After the Gold Rush

1/1/10 – When we talk about what happened to the West over the past generation or so and where the region might be headed next, I think it's important to place recent events in a historical context, as well as appreciate the good things that happened.

The context comes by way of a book entitled *The Age of Gold* by H.W. Brands, a history professor at Texas A&M University. It chronicles the momentous California Gold Rush, which began in January 1848 near present-day

Coloma, when John Marshall made a dramatic discovery. Gold! Within months, an infectious gold fever spread to all corners of the nation, as well as many points beyond. A great wave of gold seekers poured into sparsely populated California, each jostling for a stretch of creek someplace in hopes of making their fortune. Some became rich, many did not; but still they came, all lured by a vision of Easy Street.

According to Brands, it was a transformative event in American history. "In that moment a new American dream began to take shape," he writes. The old colonial dream of thrift, sobriety, modesty, and yeoman-like steady toil as the path to financial success gave way to a new dream of instant wealth, won by audacity and good luck. The Puritan vision of a shining city on a hill was rudely shoved aside by the dream of El Dorado. A new entrepreneurial spirit took flight. "And once a-wing in the West," says Brands, "the region to which America had always looked for its future – the spirit soared over all the country."

Sound familiar? Clearly, what happened to the American West since World War II – the land speculations, the tourists, the mini-malls, ranchettes and everything else – was a second Gold Rush. It was just as reckless, destructive, and greed-based as the original, but with better food and coffee. That we mined scenery instead of gold made no difference, the consequences were the same: displaced natives, ecological degradation, transitory populations, and lots of broken hearts.

But this is why history is important – the picture is not that simple. As Brands points out, there was an upside to the California Gold Rush too, one that I think we should keep in mind. Brands writes:

"Yet for its sordid side, the new American dream was an enormously creative force. It unleashed the energies of the American people…it raised the American standard of living beyond anything ever achieved so broadly…and it afforded the most basic freedom – the freedom from want…giving unprecedented meaning to that really revolutionary idea of Thomas Jefferson: that humans have a right to the pursuit of happiness."

His point came to mind as I pulled into Ouray, a former mining town located north of Durango, Colorado, in search of supper one chilly night a few weeks ago. Headed to a conference near Montrose, I needed to stop after driving for nearly six straight hours. My legs begged for a walk louder than my stomach cried for food, so I climbed out of the truck and took a careful stroll along icy sidewalks, admiring the town's attractive holiday lights in the crisp air.

Although nearly all stores were closed, I could tell that the amenity economy, for all its faults and warts, had been good to Ouray. It wasn't just the usual

assortment of cafes, organic bakeries, art galleries, knick-knack shoppes, real estate offices, restaurants, and motels that I saw – it was also the good-looking homes on the side streets, the neat courthouse near the center of town, and the general ambiance of quiet prosperity that permeated the small town. In my brief, frosty survey, I didn't see a single sign of economic distress.

Ouray, in fact, looked like a great place to live. It is a paradox that proves Brands' point: the downside of this Gold Rush had an upside too – including the ability of people to earn a living in a place they love; a decent level of social and civic services that come with a healthy tax base; a rise in social and occupational diversity; increased chances for advancement; and (of course) a varied suite of recreational opportunities, including good music, art, and theater.

I understand that Ouray might be exceptional. I know other towns are having a rougher go of it economically, especially these days. Perhaps because I was cold, tired, and hungry I was too easily impressed by surfaces – and the holiday lights. But having travelled around the West for nearly my entire life, both observing and participating in the amenity economy first-hand, I can confidently say there's been genuine progress…but up to a point. And it's that point – where the "New West" should have kicked in but did not, as Charles Wilkinson observed – that needs to be discussed, the good as well as the bad.

The Geography of Hope

1/15/10 – One of the enduring mythologies of the so-called New West was that it would last forever. Well, not forever, of course, but certainly past our lifetimes – long enough to create a sense of inevitability. You know: an amenity economy was here to stay, subdivisions were here to stay, crab cakes and free trade coffee were here to stay. If you liked (or profited from) this version of the New West, this meant you could relax and order another latte. If you were unhappy with these changes, well…tough.

I witnessed this sense of inevitability a few years ago while attending two separate conferences in Colorado. In talks by two different professors of geography, the same bleak future of the Rocky Mountain West was presented as a sort of *fait accompli*. Current patterns of growth would continue for decades, they reported. Business-as-Usual spread across their electronic maps like an unstoppable rash. On one, hundreds of second-home McMansions popped up all around a small rural town over a thirty-year period – as inevitable as flowers in May. I think everyone in the room felt their spirits sink with every new black dot.

I know mine did. Love the so-called New West or leave it – the maps didn't lie. Right?

Maybe not. By the time of the second conference I was beginning to have my doubts. At the end of the geographer's presentation, I raised a hand. "Your maps seem to be based on variables that fit current patterns of behavior, including certain economic assumptions. But what if one of the variables changed a lot?" I asked. "What if, for example, the price of gasoline rose to $7 a gallon?"

That got a discussion going. Though clearly skeptical, the professor picked up my challenge and tossed it to the audience: what *would* $7 gas do to the West? Animated speculation ran the gamut from less population growth, less tourism, and less little black dots on maps (huzzah!) to more unemployment, higher taxes, and expanded energy exploration (boo!).

While everyone enjoyed the intellectual exercise, by the end of the discussion the consensus to my impertinent question was clear: I should stop reading whatever nonsense I was picking up in airport bookstores. This was 2006 and the idea of $7 gas was as far-fetched as, say, the nation's real estate market developing a price bubble.

History had other ideas, of course. During the summer of 2008, gasoline crossed the $4-a-gallon threshold and a barrel of oil reached a record high of $141 (it was $12 in 2000). This was followed shortly by the Bubble-Burst-Heard-Round-The-World. Suddenly, the so-called New West looked a lot less inevitable.

Curious about history and current events, I recently reread what the editors of the *Atlas of the New West*, published in 1997, had to say about the region's future.

"The West has moved beyond extracting natural resources to appreciating them in place: mountainsides not excavated for copper or molybdenum; rangeland for wolves instead of cattle; and old growth forests rather than clear cuts," they wrote.

Economists, they continued, predict that the West will move beyond a wage economy, basing its new-found wealth on non-labor sources like investment, trust fund income, retirement, and welfare. As a result, we'll toss out the standard economic development model that says industries create jobs, which then lure people. Instead, the region lures people first, who then create jobs by starting their own businesses or attract footloose industries from cities.

"The New West," the editors concluded, "is truly built by New Westerners, not by the commodities industry, not even the corporate logic of economies of scale."

Except that it wasn't. Corporate logic ruled after all – at least until the real estate bubble and the Recession brought big parts of it down. An amenity economy, full of footloose types, proved to be built on shifting sand, as chimerical as a desert mirage. Meanwhile, an old-fashioned commodity industry – oil-and-gas – has had a field day. And if oil prices continue to rise, as I suspect they will, then many westerners will continue to earn wealth the old fashioned way: by taking it from the ground.

Wallace Stegner famously described the American West as the "native home of hope." Of course, he wrote that *before* the latest gold rush took off. That type of hope never really materialized. But now that we're on the backside of the bell curve, I think we can start feeling hopeful again. I see all sorts of progress taking place on the 'back forty' across the West. In fact, I think a new frontier is emerging from the mirage of the past thirty years or so. You just don't read much about it in the daily headlines or hear it in political speeches or see it in the electronic maps of geographers.

Not yet anyway.

Whither Public Lands?

2/1/10 – As we try to understand why the so-called New West never came to be, despite the film festivals and yummy food and what might be coming next to the region as a result, we can't neglect the question of public lands.

Although much of our failure to fulfill Wallace Stegner's famous instruction to "create a society to match the scenery" is focused on private land – the cascade of ranchettte subdivisions, golf courses, mega homes, low-paying service jobs, and so on – we shouldn't overlook the "other half" of the West, including our public forests, rangelands, parks, and refuges. That's because the so-called New West largely failed to live up to our expectations there as well. [50]

It doesn't matter if you're a logger, rancher, environmentalist, agency employee, local resident, or someone else with a strong feeling about public land, the past twenty to thirty years can't be called terribly progressive. For many, in fact, we may be farther away from Stegner's vision than ever. And as we tip over the top of the bell-shaped curve of the New West and enter a period dominated by 21st century anxieties, such as climate change, high fuel prices, water shortages and food security, how we view our public lands will be crucially important.

The first step, however, is to actually leave the 20th century behind.

This observation struck me a few weeks ago while attending a conference in Boise, organized by the Idaho Chapter of the Society for Range Management (SRM). Titled a "Western Congress on Rangelands" the two-day event featured hopeful stories of collaboration, wildlife/cattle coexistence, and innovative management from the ranching, academic, and agency communities.

The overall tone, however, was surprisingly "retro." With a sinking heart, I learned that a handful of anti-grazing activists are still stoking the 'range wars' that dominated the 1980s and 1990s. I listened gloomily to the defensive tone of presenters as they catalogued an all-too familiar landscape of litigation, appeals, bureaucratic inertia, and political gridlock. Even their responses, such as the desire by one rancher to "get the story out to the American people better" sounded out-of-date.

It was like a flashback to early 1990s. Twenty years ago, the 'range wars' made sense, I suppose. Back then, the tussle over public lands seemed like a straightforward choice between "use" and "protection" with nothing meaningful in between. The amenity economy was on the rise, commodity production was sinking. The highest and best use of public lands was recreation and wildlife habitat. Right? The so-called New West had arrived for good – the scenery had won. It was all pretty simple.

Except it wasn't, as we know now. But that's all beside the point. In the 21st century, we have bigger fish to fry.

Take local food, for instance. In the past few years, there has been a veritable explosion of interest in local, grass-fed, organic, and 'natural' food among the public, thanks to authors such as Michael Pollan and Barbara Kingsolver. The number of Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms and Farmer's Markets has grown steadily as have the number of ranchers who are supplying local meat to new customers. The reasons for these changes include concerns about the industrial food system, individual health, local economic development, 'food miles,' and sustainability – and rightly so.

In the December 2009 issue of SRM's *Rangelands* magazine, Dr. Jerry Holechek, a respected range scientist at New Mexico State University, describes the issue this way: "There are now compelling reasons to believe that the era of cheap and abundant food may be ending. They center around depletion of fossil fuels, limits to the green revolution, depletion of water resources, losses of farmland to development, global warming, changed farm policies by the US government, the return of inflationary monetary policies, and continuing human population growth."

These concerns registered hardly at all when I became active in rangeland issues in 1996, especially in the context of public lands. Few of them were even raised at the SRM event in Boise last month.

That's unfortunate. As Dr. Holechek notes, they're coming on fast. And they'll involve public lands. If we're serious about developing local food systems, for example, then we must engage the federal estate. Half of the West is publicly owned, which means federal lands are local to someone. Local food means public lands. That means ranchers. And livestock. No viable local or regional food system in the West can be created without them.

The New West wasn't just lattes and golf courses, it was the 'range wars' too. Creating a "society to match the scenery" requires a sense of community, with shared values, common goals, and respect for one another. We didn't do that.

But we need to do it now.

The Carbon West

2/15/10 – Whatever we think of the New West – the good along with the bad – it should be clear to all that the challenges of 21st century are different from those of the previous century, requiring a different response from the West's people, institutions, and policy makers. Whether it's climate change, food security, water scarcity, energy depletion, or ecosystem service decline, we'll need to increase innovation and cooperation in order to maintain human and animal well-being in the arid West.

In other words, we need to move on to the *next* New West.

It's happened before. In fact, what we call the New West today is just the latest in a sequence of New Wests stretching back to the colonial period of our collective history. Explorer, conqueror, trader, settler, rancher, miner, painter, camper, driver, backpacker, shopper, second homesteader – as one frontier closed, another always opened. The replacement of each Old West by a New was celebrated and lamented equally in what became a regular ritual in the region.

In his 2000 memoir *A Walk Toward Oregon*, historian Alvin Josephy, Jr., quotes the famous artist Frederic Remington who despaired in 1902 at the passing of the one True West: "I knew the wild riders and the vacant land were about to vanish forever," Remington said. "I saw the living, breathing end of three American centuries of smoke and dust and sweat, and now I see quite another thing where it all took place, but does not appeal to me."

"I knew what Remington had meant," Josephy writes, "but as a historian of the American West, I also knew that, before and after Remington, each generation in the West had lamented in its own way the passing of its Old West."

It happened to Josephy as well. "The Old West that I experienced was now gone too," he writes, "changed by industrial and military centers, interstate highways, recreation developments, trophy ranches and urban sprawl, conformity, high-tech pop culture, television, and economically stressed cattle and lumber operations struggling to survive against global competitors."

"Components," he adds, "that will become someone else's Old West."

I believe we're at another transitional moment. The latest New West is well on its way to becoming the next Old West – its passing to be praised and mourned by many and denied by some. To those who profited handsomely from the amenity economy, the passing of this Old West will be missed mightily. To those who profited in other ways, from antagonists in ongoing urban-rural brawls to day-trippers and other transitory souls, denial will rule. But as Josephy points out, history marches on. Resistance is futile.

What will the next frontier be, then? Or more importantly, having learned hard lessons from the current New West (hopefully), what can we do to create "a society to match the scenery" this time?

I don't know – but I bet it involves carbon.

At the Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen last December, [51] U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar gave a keynote speech in which he outlined a vision for a "new energy future" in the American West. Specifically, he identified three main goals: renewable energy production, carbon capture and storage, and climate adaptation.

On the renewable front, he noted that America's vast deserts, plains, forests and oceans are mostly unexplored for their clean energy potential. On the carbon capture front, he believes our public lands have a huge potential for sequestering atmospheric CO_2 in soils and trees through better land stewardship. On the adaptation front, he promoted landscape-scale partnerships to manage climate change impacts, requiring cooperation across a wide variety of borders and jurisdictions.

These are the "seeds of an American renewal," he said, "that will spring to life: new solar plants under construction in the desert; new wind turbines spinning over the prairies; new tools and technologies… Each new project completed and job created will propel us to the front edge of the world's most exciting and most important growth industry."

Welcome to the Carbon West.

I don't know if the Secretary's vision will come true or not, but taken together with the rising challenges of a new century they certainly portend something new under the sun. Personally, I think the carbon sequestration practices of good land management, including the restoration of degraded soils and riparian areas through progressive livestock practices and non-cattle conservation work has important economic and ecological potential for the West. But we're not there yet. The Secretary's vision has a long way to go before it's realized. But his words suggest that this Old West is giving way to something new.

And we should talk about it.

A Burger with a Mission

3/1/10 – If the American West were a business or a nonprofit organization, what would be its mission statement?

Thirty years ago, back when the current New West was taking off, the region's purpose seemed pretty clear: provide an attractive backdrop to an emerging amenity economy. Part playground, part nature reserve, with some residual natural resource extraction (cows, trees, minerals) thrown in, the American West after decades of argument among competing visions seemed to have found its calling as a majestic refuge. Its mountains, rivers, and plains were seen by many as a sanctuary for stressed-out wildlife and humans alike. Its chief product was relief.

Even as recently as a decade ago, this vision seemed to be holding despite the rise of new challenges, as well as the exposure of tourism's less attractive qualities. Questions of society's "sustainability" began to be asked, for example. Were our energy sources renewable? Was our food healthy? Where did it come from? Was our water supply secure? Should we being plowing under our best agricultural land for subdivisions? Was a materialistic culture undermining our youth? Why weren't they getting outside more often? Was the climate changing?

Today, these questions – and more – dominate many of our discussions, suggesting that our decades-old vision of the region needs to be revised. In fact, it's already happening. Here and there, a new frontier is opening as the West-as-sanctuary idea gives way to something else. Early signs suggest it will be a combination of something old and something new.

I caught a glimpse of this new frontier last week while visiting a burger joint in downtown Flagstaff, Arizona.

This was no ordinary burger joint. All the meat came from two large local ranches – the Flying M and the Bar T Bar. It also featured Belgian-style fries,

cooked in peanut oil, hormone-free whole milk milkshakes, herbs, onions and tomatoes from local farms, bread and cookies from a bakery called Simply Bread in Phoenix, citrus from McClendon's Select farm in Peoria, Arizona, ice cream from the Straus Family creamery, and beer from the North Coast Brewing Company, both located north of San Francisco.

In other words, it offered something old and something new: fresh, healthy local food.

It's called Diablo Burger. It is associated with (but operated independently from) the Diablo Trust, a collaborative nonprofit formed in 1993 [52] to "keep the work in working landscapes" near Flagstaff. The tiny restaurant opened in early 2009 and by every account that I heard and saw it has become a successful enterprise. Interestingly, it aims its business at residents, not tourists. Local food for local people. The restaurant takes only cash – in order to keep the money in the local economy.

Why local? Here's what the menu said: "Because local food retains more nutrients; because it supports the local economy; because it keeps local agricultural land in production, ensuring that future generations will still be surrounded by lots of open fields, grazing lands and wildlife habitat; because local food increases community food security by retaining the experts that know how to produce food; and because local food has a story – knowing where your food comes from means that its source is not anonymous, but accountable. Lastly, by eating local you are integrating ecology, community, and gastronomy…you are doing well by eating well."

I did well. The food was delicious. I went back for a second burger the next day.

Don't take my word for it. Here's an online review by one Katherine LaRue: "Upon my first bite, I realized this was not your average burger. The beef was the best I had ever eaten. It was lean and medium rare…equally delicious were the fries, which were cut on-site. All in all, the meal deserved a standing ovation…Their name might be Diablo Burger, but man, do they serve one holy cow."

It's all about the mission. Success depends on a clear vision. "While all of that may sound like it is trying to be noble," write the Diablo's owners on their web site, "for us it's really about being tasty. We want to connect the well-being of our community to the sustainability of our landscape through gastronomy…which is just a fancy word for cheeseburger."

What's a fancy word for the American West in the 21st century? What is its mission? Decades ago, Wallace Stegner gave us one when he implored us to "create

a society to match the scenery." That New West didn't happen. Now folks are trying again, starting with food – and new vision is emerging.

Author and eater Gary Paul Nabhan puts it this way: "You walk away from Diablo Burger with a lingering sense that your decision to eat there was pretty good for you, for the land, and for the local rural community. What more could you want?"

Up in the Air

3/15/10 – In early March, I had the privilege of visiting a project in northern California that felt very much like a preview of the future.

If the current New West is inexorably giving way to the Next West, as so many New Wests have done before, and if the region is in search of a new mission statement as a consequence, then clues to what's coming might be found among the bright green grass of a small ranch in Marin County.

It's called the Marin Carbon Project and its goal is nothing less than reversing global warming. That's a tall order, of course, especially for one family, a few hundred acres, a small herd of cattle, and a handful of scientists.

The idea behind the project is simple: it aims to sequester excess amounts of atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO_2) in the ranch's soil. This is important because we know that to reverse climate change we need to do two things: (1) reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, especially CO_2, by a lot; and (2) increase sequestration so that the level of CO_2 in the atmosphere drops from its current level of 389 parts-per-million down to 350 ppm (or lower).

While the vast majority of current climate change legislation, regulation, activism, and proposed solutions focus on reducing emissions, the truth is these actions won't avert a climate calamity by themselves (assuming they actually get implemented). That's because we're already over the 350 ppm threshold for CO_2. The science is clear: *we need to pull CO_2 out of the atmosphere as well as reduce emissions.*

That's where the Marin Carbon Project comes in. Globally, there are only three major 'sinks' that can readily absorb excess (or 'legacy') CO_2: the planet's oceans, vegetation, and soils. The oceans are absorbing a great deal of CO_2 right now – and acidifying as a result. This is not a good thing, for many reasons, and at some point the oceans will reach a saturation level. Vegetation – trees mainly – can take up a lot of CO_2 but it can just as quickly release it back into the air via fires, decomposition, and clearing for agricultural activity, which means it isn't a safe place to store carbon for long periods of time.

That leaves soils. By one estimate, three times more carbon is stored in the planet's soils than in the atmosphere. Small increases in soil carbon content, research shows, can sequester large amounts of legacy CO_2. In California, scientists estimate that an increase of 1 metric ton of carbon per hectare on 50% of the state's rangelands could sequester forty-two *million* metric tons of CO_2 emissions per year. That's almost equivalent to the total annual emissions from California's commercial and residential sectors combined. An increase of five metric tons per year across California's rangelands could nearly offset that Golden State's entire *transportation* sector!

I don't know about you, but I find this news both awesome and inspiring.

The partners in the Marin Carbon Project, including landowner and rancher John Wick, aim to expand and enhance the soil organic content of the ranch's soils through innovative land management that includes cattle. In a nutshell, the goal is to grow more *grass* – the deeper the roots the better. They can do this with active cattle management, but they are also experimenting with compost applications to the soil.

Early results are promising. At a presentation I attended for a visiting delegation of academics from China, the lead researcher, Dr. Whendee Silver of UC Berkeley, reported that the carbon content of the sample plots had increased in only one year – suggesting that the goal of a *net* increase in sequestration of greenhouse gases (after deducting methane and CO_2 production from the ranch) is possible.

Of course, more research is needed, as she said, before any definite conclusions can be drawn from this project.

But if this work holds up then all sorts of possibilities come into play. Nearly one-third of the planet's land surface is rangelands. That's a lot of potential CO_2 sequestration. There are a lot of rangelands in the West too. What if they were ranched for *carbon*? And that's just for starters. According to the leaders of the Marin Carbon Project, managing land for soil health produces a wide variety of co-benefits, including better wildlife habitat, an improved water cycle, and a local food economy (which reduces emissions).

At this point, all of this is a long shot. But as the West searches for a new mission statement to go along with its next New West, it might consider its role in the fight against climate change. I don't know if this is practical or possible yet, but it's definitely worth talking about.

Down in the Polls

4/1/10 – As we approach the 40th anniversary of the original Earth Day, two new polls, as well as one recent report, raise important alarm bells about our attitudes toward nature and should by extension influence a new mission statement for the next New West.

The first poll is Gallup's annual update on American feelings toward the environment. The news is sobering. According to Gallup, national concern continues a steady decline and has reached a point where "Americans are now less worried about a series of environmental problems than at any time in the past 20 years." [53]

On six of eight specific environmental problems, concern is the lowest Gallup has ever measured. Americans worry most about drinking-water pollution and least about global warming. On the latter, the poll shows that the public has become less worried about the threat of global warming over the *last two years*. Citizens are "less convinced that its effects are already happening," says Gallup, "and more likely to believe that scientists themselves are uncertain about its occurrence."

This unsettling assessment is backed up by a major survey conducted jointly by Yale and George Mason Universities titled the "Climate Change Generation" which focuses on Americans who came of age since the "discovery" of man-made climate change in 1988. The survey's authors assumed that young Americans "growing up in a world of ever more certain scientific evidence, increasing news attention, alarming entertainment portrayals, and school-based curricula, should be more engaged with and concerned about the issue of climate change than older Americans."

They're not. The survey revealed that Americans between the ages of 18 and 34 were split on the issue, and on some indicators they are relatively disengaged when compared to older Americans. In fact, the majority of both under-23 and 23-43 year-olds said they are either not very or not at all worried about global warming.

Why? Why the decline in concern about the environment – especially now, just as major trouble appears to be looming? According to Gallup and the climate survey authors, two factors are influencing national attitudes: (1) the sour economy has moved jobs, health care, and other economic needs to a high priority; and (2) there's a general belief among Americans that things have gotten *better* on the environmental front in the last twenty years, not worse.

But there's a third possibility that's even more alarming: *people simply care less about the environment with each passing year.*

This observation comes from a report published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* in February, 2008, by Oliver Pergams and Patricia Zaradic titled: "Evidence for a fundamental and pervasive shift away from nature-based recreation." That title alone should be a wake-up call for all westerners.

A previous study they did on national park visitation in the U.S. found that after a steady 50-year increase, attendance peaked in 1987 and has been declining ever since. This conclusion received widespread attention, including some vocal skepticism, so they decided to follow it up with a comprehensive study of sixteen new variables, including national park visitation in Japan and Spain, day-visits to BLM lands, national forests, and state parks in the U.S., as well as hunting, fishing, camping, and backpacking trend data going back in some cases to the 1930s.

Their discovery? The decline in U.S. national park visitation was no anomaly. All sixteen variables showed long-term downward trends, with each peaking in the mid-1980s, including visits to Japan and Spain's national parks.

Their conclusion is jolting: "The many short-tem correlations in declining public land use in the U.S. and Japan suggest that there has been a fundamental and general national and potentially international shift in people's participation in nature recreation over the past 20 years."

This trend has enormous implications, they insist. Among other things, research shows that environmentally responsible behavior results from direct contact with nature. No contact = no interest = no action. Peter Kareiva, of The Nature Conservancy, responding in the next issue of *Proceedings*, wrote that if this trend is maintained "then the pervasive decline in nature recreation may well be the world's greatest environmental threat."

As a result, he agrees with Pergams and Zaradic that *the decades-old argument for environmental protection based on the intrinsic value of nature is failing*, and needs to be replaced with an ecosystem services argument (services that provide food, water, and fuel for humans), especially since more than half of the world's populations now live in cities.

This is a big deal. Not only is it a far cry from the aim of the original Earth Day, it challenges the *modus operandi* of the current recreationally-focused New West. Clearly, important changes are afoot, and we should consider them carefully as we contemplate what we do next.

Dust in the Wind

4/15/10 – The apparent declining interest in the environment among Americans was much on my mind as I attended the 21st Annual Southern Plains conference in Lubbock, Texas, recently. Organized by the nonprofit Ogallala Commons, the event focused on a famous date in environmental history. It wasn't the upcoming 40th anniversary of Earth Day, but the 75th anniversary of 'Black Sunday' – April 14th, 1935 – when a massive dust cloud arose from the Great Plains like a biblical vision and blew topsoil all the way to Washington, D.C., and out to sea.

It was the Dust Bowl, of course – a national calamity of epic proportions that still reverberates today. It was a 'perfect' storm of ecological and economic havoc. Massive tilling of prairie topsoil, abetted immensely by the introduction of diesel-powered tractors, followed by a series of unusually dry years in the early 1930s, followed by big winds put hundreds of millions of tons of fertile soil into the air. Nearly one-third of the human population left the area as a result, most never to return.

It wasn't an act of God. The 1920s were a period of 'irrational exuberance' in the nation, characterized by rapid technological innovation, crazy speculation in real estate markets, a bull run on the stock market, distracted regulators, social excess, widespread consumerism, cheap products, fast deals, and an uncritical faith in Progress. On the land, this translated into the 'big plow-up' where nearly every acre of the Great Plains that could be planted to wheat or other grains was planted, whether there was a cloud in the sky or not. In their exuberance, farmers transformed a healthy, functioning prairie ecosystem – fabulous country for herbivores of all stripes – into a tilled-over wasteland. Then they prayed for rain.

"The dust storms that swept across the southern plains in the 1930s," wrote historian Donald Worster in his seminal book titled *The Dust Bowl,* "created the most severe environmental catastrophe in the entire history of the white man on this continent. In no other instance was there greater or more sustained damage to the American land, and there have been few times when so much tragedy was visited on its inhabitants. Not even the Depression was more devastating, economically. And in ecological terms we have nothing in the nation's past, nothing even in the polluted present, that compares."

Not yet – but it could be coming.

That was the message of the Conference and its keynote speaker, Dr. Worster. He said climate change is on its way to dwarfing the Dust Bowl of the 1930s by an order of magnitude. He noted that according to climate models, one

of the worst 'hot spots' in the nation for drought sits directly atop the area of the previous Dust Bowl, which means we could lose America's breadbasket, for good possibly.

That wasn't all. According to Dr. Kevin Mulligan, a professor of Economics and Geography at Texas Tech, and another speaker at the event, serious trouble lurks underground. His sobering presentation focused on the Ogallala Aquifer, which is a vast underground reservoir of fresh water created over the span of millions of years and which has been drawn down dramatically in less than a century by irrigators up and down the southern Plains. Mulligan and his students have mapped the Aquifer extensively, discovering that not only is it shallower in places than people originally thought, it is also being drawn down (often at a rate of 800 gallons a minute) faster than anticipated.

In fact, they have determined that in many spots industry will run out of useable water (i.e., 30ft of water or less) not by the end of the century, as predicted, but by *2030* – only twenty years from now.

"This will certainly mean the end of pivot irrigation in the region," he announced calmly to the audience.

Of course, Dr. Mulligan's maps, much like Dr. Worster's history lessons and climatologists' prognostications about global warming are disputed by Industry, dismissed by politicians, and ignored by an apathetic public. One local activist I spoke with said this about the future: "When they run out of water, the irrigators will simply leave, and we'll have a different economy. Again."

This, of course, is the pattern of New West economies – exploit a resource until it is nearly exhausted and then move on. It doesn't matter if the resource is pelts, bison, gold, oil, trees, water, scenery, people, or climate – the desire to use until used up is powerful and terrifying. The trouble is we're beginning to run out of exploitable stuff, such as ancient aquifers. The question now, I believe, is whether the next New West will be "moving on" to the next exploitable commodity or something more enduring and resilient.

The Commonwealth Party

5/1/10 – America needs a new grassroots political party, one that literally starts over at the grass and the roots.

I've had this idea for a while, but I've kept it on a mental shelf as unworkable, unreachable, and just plain nutty. But the rise of the Tea Party and a recent poll released by the Pew Research Center showing that nearly 80% of Americans

have little or no faith that the federal government can solve the nation's ills, has convinced me to pull my crazy idea down from the shelf and blow some dust off.

What we need is a Party that focuses on municipal and county offices, and no higher. Let the Democrats and Republicans gridlock themselves at the state and federal level; what we need is action at the local level, such as the promotion of local food production, or the creation of local energy trusts. We need a Party that focuses on the wealth of local communities – by that I mean local history, culture, economic opportunity, and can-do spirit.

Let's call it the Commonwealth Party and let's say its mission is to build economic and ecological resilience to meet the steep and diversifying challenges of the 21st century.

A good example of the "common wealths" that all communities share can be found on the nonprofit Ogallala Commons' web site. They include: Health, Spirituality, History, Renewable Energy, Foodshed, Soil, Water Cycles, Wildlife, Arts, Education, Leisure, and a Sense of Place. [54]

Improving and maintaining all twelve sounds like a great Party platform!

City and county governments can do this work in a way that can no longer be accomplished effectively at the state and federal level. County governments, for example, have a great deal of policy and administrative power at their disposal. If they wanted to take the lead in fostering local food systems, for instance, they would have a big impact.

By contrast, state and federal governments, although they have the power to make a difference locally, seem hopelessly gridlocked politically and bureaucratically. This is important because we need innovation and we need it quickly. The multiplying challenges confronting us, such as climate change, require a flexible, energetic, and entrepreneurial (dare I say) political process to go along with the innovation coming out of the private sector these days.

But innovation doesn't describe the Democratic and Republican Parties, at least at the local level. But it could describe a Commonwealth Party. Now, I know there have been third parties before, such as the never-say-die Green Party here in New Mexico. But these parties can't resist the temptation of aiming for statewide or federal office, inevitably falling short in elections, and as a result fail to make a dent in the hegemony of the Two Party system.

I say, forget challenging the Status Quo at the state and federal levels. Let's concentrate our political will at the local level and focus on what many are calling the *radical center* – a place where city residents, farmers, ranchers, conservationists, scientists and many others can begin to build bridges across the

urban-rural divide. It's not a pipe-dream – in fact, it's been going on for a while in small pockets of collaborative effort across the American West. It's just never stepped up to a political stage.

Maybe the time has come to try.

A Commonwealth Party would be essentially non-denominational – by that I mean it would pledge to stick to building resilience locally, finding pragmatic solutions to pressing problems, and leave the 'political positioning' on certain issues to the Main Parties. Someone running for County Commissioner or a City Mayor or Councilor on the Commonwealth Party ticket would be neither a Democrat nor a Republican on issues of food security, renewable energy, or sensible development.

I think a Commonwealth Party could find a home in the American West, especially as we transition from the previous New West of standoffs over wilderness, endangered species, natural resource extraction, and growth to the next New West which is already confronting questions of sustainability and resilience in what is shaping up to be a tempestuous century.

Much of the sustainability 'toolbox' has been developed already (organic farming, progressive cattle management, watershed restoration, alternative energy technology), but what is lacking is a political process to put this toolbox into action. Personally, I've come to the conclusion that it won't happen at the state or federal levels. That's why we need to focus at the local political level. And that's why we need a Commonwealth Party.

A century ago, a crisis in democracy in America was met by a novel solution: more democracy (now called the Progressive Era). We need the same solution today, and the place to start is with the grass and the roots.

The Unquiet Crisis

5/15/10 – When former Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall died in March at age ninety, I decided to buy a copy of his most famous book *The Quiet Crisis*. Published in 1963, on the heels of Rachel Carson's more famous *Silent Spring*, I knew it had fired up a generation of activists to protect western lands and was a clarion call for action on behalf of the environment. I had never read it, but I was curious what Udall, quintessential westerner and democrat, had to say about an era that coincided with the onset of what we call today the New West.

To my surprise, I couldn't find a copy in local bookstores (Udall lived in Santa Fe). When a second edition arrived in the mail from a specialty dealer, I was

intrigued to discover that the former Secretary's 'quiet crisis' of the early 1960s sounded a lot like the rather unquiet crisis we face currently. "America today stands poised on a pinnacle of wealth and power," Udall wrote, "yet we live in a land of vanishing beauty, of increasing ugliness, of shrinking open space, and of an over-all environment that is diminished daily by pollution and noise and blight."

The book is a thoughtful history lesson on how America came to this moment of crisis. To make his point, Udall labels key eras with unsubtle sobriquets, such as "The Big Raid," The Ax Age," The Great Giveaway," and "The Myth of Superabundance." Basically, Udall says Americans took from nature without thinking. Then, when we began to think about what we were doing, we tried to slow down the destruction. History was a big circle, he argued, with the land determining the character of Americans, who, in turn, determined the future of the land itself – round and round to the present day.

"The result of this interaction," wrote Udall, "was the clearest example of the American ambivalence toward the land that continues to dominate our relationship to the continent and its resources. It is a combination of love for the land and the practical urge to exploit it shortsightedly for profit."

The New West that followed the book's publication was supposed to correct this ambivalence. With the rise of the science of ecology, the blossoming of environmental advocacy, and the rapid expansion of a recreation-based economy, the 'quiet crisis' of the 1960s was supposed to be resolved in favor of a new land ethic that would steer the West to a hopeful horizon of preservation, protection, and play.

It didn't quite turn out that way.

Even Udall himself could see the handwriting on the wall. In the Introduction to the second edition he wrote: "The quiet conservation crisis of the early 1960s has evolved into the very unquiet 'crisis of survival' of 1970."

But he didn't despair. Echoing author Wendell Berry, he insisted that we cannot save the land unless we save the people and that conservation must encompass humans and all of our manifold activities, including the livability of cities, regions, continents, and the planet itself. He urged us to get busy.

I think we shouldn't despair either. Although the current New West didn't resolve the 'quiet crisis' the way we had hoped, there are enough signs of change in the air and on the ground to suggest that we are in the early stages of turning an important corner in the region's history. You see it in bits and pieces right now, in the local food movement, in renewable energy development work, in

efforts to sequester atmospheric carbon in soils, in creek restoration projects, in local governance, and in innovative public-private partnerships.

What actually happens next is a mystery, of course, though it is safe to say much of it will be determined by young people – as it should be. On this point, Udall gets the last word: "Each generation has its own rendezvous with the land, for despite our fee titles and claims of ownership, we are all but brief tenants on this planet."

A Step Backward: the Valles Caldera National Park

6/1/10 – In May, Senators Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall introduced a bill in the U.S. Senate that transfers title to the 89,000-acre Valles Caldera National Preserve from the U.S. Forest Service to the National Park Service.

This is big news because the intention of the original bill creating the Preserve, located near Los Alamos, New Mexico, passed by Congress in 2000 and signed by President Clinton, was to maintain the formerly private property as a "working ranch." Congress also created a nine-member Trust to manage the Preserve and charged it with the unprecedented mission of combining ecological stewardship with financial self-sufficiency.

It was an audacious and visionary experiment in public lands management – and quite controversial. To many, myself included, it looked like an intriguing step forward in the effort to confront the fiscal, bureaucratic and procedural gridlock engulfing the federal estate. To others, however, it was a dangerous step in the wrong direction. Now, it looks like an experiment in danger of expiring prematurely.

According to the original Act that created the Preserve, the Trust had to balance and integrate six separate goals:

1) Operate the Preserve as a "working ranch" – which means creating an emphasis on stewardship that provides ecological and economic sustainability.
2) Protect the Preserve's exceptional qualities so they can be passed on to future generations.
3) Multiple Use and Sustained Yield – which means managing resources for revenue generation in a manner that does not impair the productivity and health of the land.

4) Public Access and Recreation – provide opportunities for hiking, fishing, camping, skiing, and hunting.
5) Local Benefits, Coordination and Cost Savings – which means provide benefits to local economies, be sensitive to the diverse values of neighbors, and utilize their skills to save money.
6) Optimize Income – which means Congress instructed the Preserve to *strive* to become financially self-sufficient by 2015. It did *not* mean that the generation of income should take precedence over other goals.

This last goal was the most controversial. What did "financial self-sufficiency" on public land mean exactly? According to a *Draft Framework* for the Preserve, published in 2003, it meant being *businesslike* so that the Preserve could eventually eliminate its reliance on annual federal appropriations. The *Framework's* authors admitted this was a novel, untested, and complex goal.

"This opportunity is bestowed upon few, if any, other federal organizations," wrote the authors, "and it is unique in the land and resource management arena." That's why it was imperative that the Trust view self-sufficiency as a means to achieve its primary mission, that of wise and measured stewardship, rather than an end to be achieved in and of itself.

There were two concerns among conservationists and others on this point: first, could the Trust resist the temptation to "optimize income" without overgrazing, overlogging, or overrecreating? And second, more philosophically, was it even *ok* to be businesslike on public land? Wasn't that the reason public land existed in the first place – to protect it from the profit motive?

These were – and are – legitimate concerns, but it is very important to acknowledge that it's not the 20th century anymore. Examples of sustainable management on private working ranches that maintain ecological integrity while providing financial self-sufficiency are widespread today. Also, the challenges of the 21st century require a new approach to public land stewardship.

Furthermore, in this era of massive federal deficits, the idea of financial self-sustainability on the federal estate is not a bad one!

I know that the implementation of the Preserve's mission has been a rocky road so far. I have first hand knowledge because I was part of the team that grazed the Preserve with livestock in 2007. I also know that the Preserve is nowhere near financial self-sufficiency yet. But is the answer to these problems abandonment of the vision?

The bill introduced by Senators Udall and Bingaman, replaces the original Act entirely and eliminates the Trust. It also eliminates the vision. While it allows livestock grazing and hunting to continue on the Preserve, the bill uses the words "may allow," meaning they'll take place at the discretion of the Secretary of the Interior. And since hunting and livestock grazing are generally inimical to the mission of the Park Service, "may allow" will likely become "won't allow" eventually.

I believe the transference of the Valles Caldera to the National Park Service is a step backward. That's because the national park idea, whose roots extend back to the 19th century, is not well-suited to the onrushing, global challenges of the 21st century. In contrast, the Valles Caldera National Preserve, under its current mandate, has the potential to keep testing an innovative model that addresses pressing problems. For this reason, I think the experiment should run for a while longer.

A Carbon Ranch: an Alternate Vision for the Valles Caldera

6/15/10 – If the mission of the Valles Caldera National Preserve is going to change, let's make it what I call a 'carbon ranch' and give it the goal of fighting climate change.

After all, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, Department of the Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, and nearly every leading environmentalist in the nation agree that confronting climate change is a crucially important challenge. I agree. I say, let's take on that challenge on the Valles Caldera.

A carbon ranch fights climate change in three ways: (1) by increasing carbon sequestration in vegetation and soils; (2) by actively reducing greenhouse gas emissions on the property; and (3) by creating a variety of climate-friendly co-benefits, such as watershed restoration and local food production, which contribute to an overall *carbon-negative* landscape.

The inspiration for a carbon ranch came to me last summer when I saw a publication from The Worldwatch Institute titled "Mitigating Climate Change Through Food and Land Use" by Sara Scheer and Sajal Sthapit. [55]

They argue that since more than 30% of all greenhouse gases arise from the land use sector, no strategy for mitigating climate change can be successful without reducing emissions from agriculture, forestry, and other land uses. Moreover, only land-based or 'terrestrial' carbon sequestration offers the possibility today of large-scale *removal* of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, through plant photosynthesis.

Scheer and Sthapit identify five strategies for reducing emissions and sequestering carbon: (1) enriching soil carbon; (2) farming with perennials; (3) climate-friendly livestock production; (4) protecting natural areas; and (5) restoring degraded watersheds and rangelands.

"Improved land management could offset a quarter of global emissions from fossil fuel use in a year," they write. "In contrast, solutions for reducing emissions by carbon capture in the energy sector are unlikely to be widely utilized for decades and do not remove the greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere."

In other words, to have any prayer of reducing atmospheric CO_2 from its current level of 390 parts-per-million (ppm) down to 350 ppm, as environmentalist Bill McKibben and many climatologists say we must, then we need to manage the surface of the planet for increased CO_2 sequestration. Which brings me to the Valles Caldera National Preserve. It's ideally suited for a carbon ranch demonstration site because of its ecology, geology, and high visibility. Here's my vision:

- All vehicles must park at the entrance to the Preserve and every visitor and employee reaches his or her destination by hiking, biking, horseback riding, horse-drawn wagon, or via a government-supplied biodiesel truck.

- All energy use inside the Preserve is provided by renewable sources – wind, solar, biomass and geothermal – generated on the property.

- Structures are retrofitted to 'green' architecture standards as much as possible. All services, including food preparation and administrative activities, are redesigned to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.

- Livestock are managed to enrich soil carbon (pulling atmospheric CO_2 down into plant roots by photosynthesis) via rotational grazing and herd effect. The increased carbon storage is scientifically verified.

- Livestock are part of a local, grassfed food system that reduces food-miles substantially while supporting local ranchers and a local economy.

- Forest and wildlife management activities are directed at increasing carbon sequestration in vegetation and improving habitat health and species diversity, a key to improving the overall ecological resilience of the Preserve.

- Watershed restoration activities, especially those that restore or maintain wetlands, are aimed at building soil and storing carbon.

- Science and research are directed at measuring, monitoring, and analyzing the emission/sequestration challenges faced by the Preserve.

- Interpretive and educational activities explain the various parts of a carbon ranch, including its goals, successes and failures.

- All activities are tested against the question: "Will this increase the carbon footprint of the Preserve?" If the answer is "yes" then the activity is modified or not undertaken.

This may sound pie-in-the-sky, but each piece of the pie already exists. We know how to measure carbon footprints, we know how to reduce emissions, we know how to graze cattle to improve soil health, we know how to restore creeks, we know how to manage forests sustainably, and we know how to make a profit from some of these activities.

What we don't know is how to put the pieces – hunting, fishing, hiking, grazing, wildlife, forestry, science, education and administration – together into a whole that works. That's why we need a demonstration project. The time for action is upon us. Instead of *talking* about climate change, let's *do* something.

The Valles Caldera, with its deep soils, abundant grasslands, inspiring beauty and high public profile, is the perfect place to try.

How about: *the Valles Caldera National Carbon Ranch?*

Out West

7/1/10 – I believe we live in a critical moment in American history. Like a watershed under a steady rainstorm, various currents of concern are flowing together into a worrisome stream. Whether it's the Gulf oil spill [56] – and all that it represents – or the fate of endangered species, or climate change, or obesity rates, or the health of democracy in America, anxiety seems to be the order of the day. It adds up to a critical moment of transition for the nation.

To gain perspective, I recently reread two books that influenced me years ago. The first was John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley.* In the fall of 1960, Steinbeck gave in to his restlessness and decided to circumnavigate the nation in a

truck he dubbed Rocinante, after Don Quixote's steady steed. Acknowledging the quixotic nature of his adventure, Steinbeck subtitled his book: "In Search of America."

It was a period of intense change in the nation. As World War II faded in the rear view mirror, Camelot became visible on the horizon. The civil rights movement was in full flower and revolutionary stirrings could be detected among America's youth. To the fifty-eight year-old author of *The Grapes of Wrath* and *East of Eden*, however, these winds of change didn't matter as much as the journey itself, which he saw as an irresistible opportunity to explore this great nation.

Leaving his home in Sag Harbor, New York, a few days after it was struck by Hurricane Donna, Steinbeck drove north and west, his only companion an elderly French poodle named Charley, who, like Steinbeck himself, felt the effects of advancing age. They drove together through North Dakota to Spokane via Yellowstone and then on to Seattle, where Steinbeck was shocked by what had happened in his twenty-five year absence. "Along what had been country lanes rich with berries," he wrote, "high wire fences and mile-long factories stretched, and the yellow smoke of progress hung over all, fighting the sea winds' efforts to drive them off." Upon reaching the city, he noted that the traffic "rushed with murderous intensity…"

But he wasn't bemoaning a lost idyll – Steinbeck was too sober for that. Instead, he was surprised to see something *totally different* at work in the land. "This Seattle was not something changed," he wrote. "It was a new thing."

He drove down the coast, camping among redwoods, eventually reaching his beloved Monterey peninsula. Everything was new there too, of course. And this wasn't necessarily a bad thing. Monterey, Steinbeck noted, was tidy, well-run and progressive. The beaches were clean where once they festered with fish guts and flies, and the stench of the canneries was gone too. Still, something vital had gone out of the town, he said, replaced by the ephemeral desires of tourists.

Steinbeck didn't feel outrage or resentment at the changes he saw. That's because he never resisted progress, he said, noting that strangers have always come to his home land and changed things. To many local residents these changes created resentment, but to Steinbeck, they were simply part of an age-old pattern. As he observed: "We were an outrage to the Spanish-Mexicans and they in turn on the Indians."

In his hometown of Salinas, he argued politics vigorously with his sisters as the presidential showdown between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon loomed, and visited what few friends and neighbors were still alive. At the end of his stay,

he climbed a favorite peak and surveyed his youth from its summit, including the old family ranch, visible far off. His search for America, he concluded, was really about a search for himself. Its strengths were his strengths, its weaknesses were his weaknesses.

"This monster of a land," he wrote, "this mightiest of nations, this spawn of the future, turns out to be a macrocosm of microcosm me."

As a restless westerner myself, born only a few days before Steinbeck departed with Charley on his adventure, I too have often wondered where America "went." Often, I think it went West. Steinbeck's microcosm included the intense transition from the blue-collar New West of his youth, with its unpleasant smells and long hours, to the rise of its current manifestation, with its various comforts and diversions. For more perspective, I'll now jump from 1960 to 1985.

Out West (II)

7/15/10 – Twenty-five years after John Steinbeck went west "in search of America" another writer did much the same thing.

James Conaway, who grew up in Memphis, Tennessee, was a reporter for the *Washington Post*, covering the politics and personalities of the Reagan years. Although not a native, he had always been fascinated by the West, particularly its less well-known public lands – the national forests and ranges – places, as he put it, that belonged to "no one." In 1985, he took a sabbatical from his job and went west in a van (but without a dog) in search not so much of America as a modern-day frontier.

What he found, published in his book *Kingdom in the Country*, made a big impression on me when I read it a few years later. Conaway had dug deep into current events, populating his portrait of the region with a representative sampling of intriguing characters and in the process created a fascinating mosaic of the West not frequently glimpsed in the national headlines. Here's the list of who he met:

- An 'old school' rancher in Roswell, New Mexico.
- A Forest Service range conservationist on the Santa Fe National Forest, along with a small-scale livestock permittee.
- A sheep rancher in central Idaho, along with his Basque shepherd.
- A group of cowboys rounding up wild horses on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land in northern Nevada, mostly by helicopter.

- A modern-day gunslinger in Wyoming who purportedly shot cattle rustlers (and who as a sheriff shot his deputy to death in a dispute but was subsequently acquitted).
- A small-scale gold miner on Forest Service land near Payson, Arizona.
- A major coal mine on BLM land in the Powder River country of northern Wyoming.
- Timber cutters in central Oregon's coast range.
- Marijuana growers, and the cops who pursue them, in Humboldt County, in northern California (where he participated in a raid).
- A windmill farm east of Los Angeles, and the residents of wealthy, nearby Palm Springs who opposed the project.
- An archaeologist with BLM in southern Utah who chased pothunters (he met a purported pothunter as well).
- A BLM cop near El Centro, California, whose patrol covered 2.5 million acres of desert.
- Forest Service firefighters in northern Washington.
- Friends and foes of the Grizzly bear in northwestern Montana, including Doug Peacock, a bear advocate made (in)famous by author Edward Abbey.
- A real estate developer in Telluride, in southwestern Colorado.
- A backpacking trip into the Gila wilderness, in southern New Mexico.
- Environmental activists with the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance and the Sierra Club, as they pushed for more wilderness designation.
- A rendezvous of radical Earth First! activists in western Colorado.
- And a brief visit with Edward Abbey himself, in a restaurant in Tucson, Arizona.

Conaway's book didn't draw any major conclusions about the West, preferring to let the various individuals speak for themselves. And unlike Steinbeck, he didn't see his search for the frontier as a microcosm of his own personality.

Still, I found the book inspiring. Not only did it accurately capture the tenor of the time, it did an admirable job of exposing the West as a dynamic, diverse, and essential American landscape, and not a backwater populated by stock characters from Hollywood movies and Madison Avenue ad campaigns. It was a West that I recognized and it lit a fire within me to explore this frontier on my own, which I did in 1990, though I used a camera instead of a pen to do the documentation.

Today, twenty-five years after Conaway headed west, it is fascinating to reread his book, which feels like an ethnography of another age that is almost as remote as Steinbeck's survey of his homeland. At the same time, there's a 'stockness' to Conaway's characters that feels stale in 2010. In 1985, Edward Abbey was still alive, ranchers and environmentalists still existed on opposite sides of a wide divide, real estate development was on the upswing, and tourism was king.

Of course, there's no portrait of a climatologist in Conaway's book, or a local food advocate, or an ecologically-minded rancher who produces grassfed beef. There's no discussion about ecosystem services, restoration, or collaborative conservation. Nor are many of the anxieties that bedevil us today mentioned – for good reason. The West has changed, a lot. In fact, I'll argue that the current New West, so capably captured in Conaway's book, is as over as Steinbeck's workaday Salinas country of the 1930s. It's not apparent yet because we're in transition to something new.

Coon Valley

8/1/10 – On a glorious Wisconsin summer day last week, I had the privilege of visiting an iconic landscape, though I suspect many Americans and most westerners have probably not heard of it. This is unfortunate since it is truly a success story – in an era when we need as much good news as we can find. It also is a good illustration of the shifting demands we make on farmers with modern lessons for urban and rural resident alike.

Seventy-five years ago, the USDA's Soil Conservation Service, along with five hundred farming families in the privately-owned Coon Valley watershed, located near La Crosse, in west-central Wisconsin, embarked on the nation's first collaborative conservation project. Their goal was to restore a degraded landscape to health and their inspirational mentor was none other than Aldo Leopold, the author *of A Sand County Almanac, who* helped to organize the project.

In 1935, America was deep into a period of profound crisis. The Great Depression was in full swing, triggered by a devastating collapse of the financial sector, wracked by high unemployment, and seared by the Dust Bowl, which sent clouds of precious Midwestern topsoil blowing across the Atlantic seaboard.

In Coon Valley, this crisis was captured in a single word: erosion. In a 1935 essay, Leopold recounts the story. The valley, like so many along the upper Mississippi River, was settled in the mid-19th century by hard-nosed immigrants from northern Europe and for decades its principle contribution to the "national dinner

pail," as Leopold put it, was butterfat, tobacco, and scenery. This is what the nation wanted from places like Coon Valley at the time, and as long as there were "more hills than cows" all was well – the soil was stable and the trout streams ran clear and full.

But eventually the nation decided it wanted *more* – more butterfat, more tobacco, more scenery – and Coon Valley changed. Cows began to outnumber hills, pastures were extended into formerly wooded steep slopes, tractors began to compact soils, and crops began to be planted from fence row to fence row. The result was ruinous.

"Every rain pours off the ridges as from a roof," wrote Leopold, and the "ravines of the grazed slopes are the gutters." Erosion became rampant; gullies were created where none existed before, dumping sediment and rocks onto the plowed fields and into the now muddy waters of the trout creeks. In this way, Coon Valley became typical of farm communities across the region, noted Leopold, which through its abuse of its rich topsoil "not only filled the national dinner pail, but has created the Mississippi flood problem, the navigation problem, the overproduction problem, and the problem of its own future continuity."

The nation now needed something new from its farmers: conservation.

One innovative answer was to embark on a collaborative experiment in watershed restoration. In exchange for free labor, seed, wire, lime, and technical advice provided by the federal government, each landowner in Coon Valley signed onto a new farm plan, which included planting trees, contour plowing, changing crop rotations, repairing gullies, and removing livestock from hillslopes. In the bigger picture, Leopold hoped to demonstrate how various public interests in land would be better off if they cooperated with each other rather than competed as usual.

I imagined him crossing his fingers.

I drove out to Coon Valley in the company of Curt Meine, a Leopold scholar and conservationist in his own right. Curt knew the rest of the story and was eager to show off the results. We stopped in the valley to scoop up Jon Lee, a farmer whose grandfather was one of the original participants in the demonstration project. An affable fellow, Jon led us on a quick tour of the project's success.

Indeed, everywhere we went, the land looked green, lush, vibrant and stable. It was impossible to imagine water "pouring off the ridges" as Leopold described it. Clearly, the farmers had delivered the conservation that was asked of them (Coon Valley is today a showcase for the USDA). That's not to say the valley isn't struggling. Jon said hard economic times had rocked farmers recently.

But he also said new opportunities for farmers are emerging, including grass-fed, local and organic food markets. Also, coming down the road are concerns about climate change, renewable energy, and ecosystem services, all of which present a new round of challenges and opportunities for the valley – as they do for us out West.

Taken together, it reminded me of a Leopold quote from his essay: "The farmer is still trying to make out what it is that the many-voiced public wants him to do."

Hopefully, the public will make up its mind soon, and equally hopefully, the residents of Coon Valley will still be listening.

Agraria (part I)

8/15/10 – In a few weeks I turn fifty, which is a good, round number to reflect on how much the West has changed during my lifetime and speculate on where the region might be headed next. I'll use my experience as a touchstone.

Born in Philadelphia, I lived on a farm for the first six years of my life, though my parents were not farmers. In 1966, we moved to Phoenix in a covered station wagon, where my parents became pioneers of sorts, joining the great flood of emigrants that would change the West fundamentally. That they homesteaded the suburbs, instead of the open prairie, didn't matter. A frontier was a frontier – the place where the old gave way to the new; the place where opportunity knocked. Theirs was the 'new' West that had dismayed John Steinbeck on his travels a few years earlier: a land of beauty and space rapidly filling up with people and cars.

Unlike Steinbeck, however, my parents knew no 'old' West and thus couldn't lament its passing. To them, the future looked bright and hopeful.

I loved my new home and quickly began exploring the territory. I rode horses into the desert, participated in archaeological digs, and plastered my bedroom wall with topographic maps. At sixteen, I embarked on a backpacking odyssey through a dozen national parks from Yosemite to Glacier that blew my mind. In a few short weeks, I became devoted to my adopted home. Upon my return, I joined the Sierra Club, vowing to fight for parks and wilderness at every opportunity. This new land, I saw, was worth defending.

In college, I began to explore the frontier in more detail, fascinated by the ongoing transition from the 'Shangri-La' West of my parent's generation to the emerging 'new' West chronicled in James Conaway's book *Kingdom in the Country*

– a complex land of competing and clashing self-interests: ranchers, environmentalists, agency professionals, miners, loggers, and real estate developers. It was a divided landscape (represented by the divisions in Conaway's book), full of us-versus-thems, misunderstandings, and heartbreak. In 1990, to mark the centennial of the 'official' closing of the western Frontier, I embarked on a photographic investigation of this dynamic landscape, feeling very much like an anthropologist at work.

The West kept changing. By the mid-1990s, the tribalism of the past decade or so had begun to give way to 'civilizing' forces as the region matured. Feuds eased as new threats and new ideas emerged. Indoctrinated to the sins of livestock grazing, I met a rancher who did things differently. He sought collaborative answers to problems, he managed his land for ecological and economic health and he wanted peace between tribes. At the same time, the juggernauts of tourism and real estate development rose swiftly to replace overgrazing and logging as main environmental perils. The frontier shifted as a consequence – the line between 'old' and 'new' could now be found on the working lands of the West, not its parks or wilderness areas.

Changes kept coming. By 2000, new anxieties loomed on the horizon, including a little-known issue called *sustainability*. Suddenly, people were talking climate change, water shortages, limits to growth, and food security. Not only would these topics have been a mystery to my parents, despite their impoverished childhoods in the rural South, they were largely mysterious to me. My lifetime was synonymous with the *Fiesta* – the post-war orgy of abundance, affluence, and ease. For years, I suspected we were overdoing things as a society, which is why I joined the conservationist tribe in college, but I never thought the word 'unsustainable' would become part of daily discourse.

The frontier shifted again. By 2007, people were talking about local food systems, grassfed meat production, local energy and other strategies that helped to build ecological and economic resilience in the face of climate and fossil fuel challenges. These were the 'new' things under the sun and the pace at which they burst upon the scene was breathtaking.

I tried to keep up. The New Ranch that I had explored a few years earlier, and wrote up in a book, gave way to the Carbon Ranch as the possibilities of carbon sequestration on western lands became clear. In fact, a vision began to take shape of a land where cattle, wildlife, local food, emissions reduction, renewable energy production, and a host of other sustainable activities could co-exist. I made a map and put it on a wall. Maybe this land is a hallucination – only time will tell. But one thing was clear: the frontier is shifting again.

And in keeping with the region's long history of pursuing visions and filling blank spots with names, I've decided to call this new land 'Agraria.'

Agraria (part II)

9/1/10 – Eight years ago, I went looking for the New Ranch a dozen miles or so north of Durango, Colorado, along the Animas River. I found it on a small ranch owned by the James family – Dave, Kay, and their children Danny, Jennifer, Julie, Justin, and Cynthia – who at the time seemed to be doing everything right. I opened an essay about them this way:

> *"One of the first things you notice about the James Ranch is how busy the water is. Everywhere you turn, there is water flowing, filling, spilling, irrigating, laughing. Whether it is the big, fast-flowing community ditch, the noisy network of smaller irrigation ditches, the deliberate spill of water on pasture, the refreshing fish ponds, or the low roar of the muscular Animas River, take a walk in any direction on the ranch during the summer and you are destined to intercept water at work. It is purposeful water too, growing trees, cooling chickens, quenching cattle, raising vegetables, and, above all, sustaining grass."*

The Jameses ran their cattle on 200,000 acres of public land and finished them on their home ground, entirely on grass from birth to death. They managed the animals holistically and sold the beef to Durango restaurants as grassfed, local, and sustainably raised. They had their act together, in other words, even to the point of writing out a vision for the land and community 100 years into the future. It included:

- "Lands that are covered with biologically diverse vegetation"
- "Lands that boast functioning water, mineral and solar cycles"
- "Abundant and diverse wildlife"
- "A community benefiting from locally grown, healthy food"
- "A community aware of the importance of agriculture to the environment"
- "Open space for family and community"

It was the New Ranch in action.

A few weeks ago, I stopped by for a visit after a stay at another ranch nearby. Ostensibly, I wanted to catch up with a young apprentice The Quivira Coalition

is supporting at Danny James' artisanal dairy operation on the ranch, but I also wanted a quick infusion of inspiration from the James clan. What I expected to find was the New Ranch again; what I found instead was a slice of Agraria.

The grassfed beef business is going great guns for Dave and Kay, who have more demand in Durango than they can fill. Danny's cheese operation is expanding too, as he steadily grows his cow herd and his customer base, raising organic pigs on the side. Jennifer's organic vegetable farm continues to grow, as does Julie's chicken-and-egg operation. Justin is opening his fourth "Serious Texas BBQ" restaurant, and Cynthia has recently returned to the nest to lead the family's educational program. And the roadside market they built on the ranch, which was just a twinkle in Kay's eye when I first visited years ago, is now a full-fledged business. They even conduct tours of the ranch for paying visitors in a special ranch golf cart!

Emblematic of their success, a restaurant in town now offers a "James Ranch" special once a week: beef, pork, cheese, vegetables, and eggs all from one source.

I stayed for supper, reveling in the good vibes and boundless energy of the family. Later, we moved to the back porch of Dave and Kay's new house, where we talked easily about local food, business, and children. I was in awe, again. Eight years ago, Dave and Kay were my favorite New Ranch. Today, they are something else…something bigger.

Looking out at the red cliffs that frame the eastern edge of the ranch as the setting sun bathed them in soft light I suddenly realized that I was in Agraria. Somewhere along the line, the James Ranch had left the New Ranch behind, becoming, instead, an example of what everyone *talks about* these days, but very rarely accomplishes: sustainability. It wasn't just words at the James Ranch, it was a living, breathing *real thing*. It wasn't just water in motion anymore, it was Agraria in action – a place where an ecological economy (in my definition) centered on food and land health, builds resilience, encourages ethical relationships, and celebrates life.

As I finished my dish of homemade peach sorbet, I thought: a celebration is certainly in order. The Jameses had made it to Agraria. I knew it had been a long, difficult journey, filled with setbacks. But they had accomplished their goal, and led the way for others to follow, recalling the quote I used to end my essay:

A vision without a task
Is but a dream.

A task without a vision
Is drudgery.
A vision and a task
Is the hope of the world.

Agraria is that vision and task.

Agraria (part III)

9/15/10 – Beynac, France. Today, I found another slice of Agraria, and it has set me to thinking. I found it while traveling through southwestern France with my family on holiday. We came to this part of France primarily to see medieval castles, paddle canoes down the Dordogne River, and marvel at the cave art in Lascaux, created 17,000 years ago by our ancestors, the Cro-Magnon. What we found in addition was a gentle landscape of farms and pastures that gave every indication of having been continuously used by humans for what must be *millennia*.

For an American, especially for someone from the Southwest where land has been worn out in places in only a matter of *decades*, this was a novel and inspiring sight indeed.

I had no idea if what we saw in the backcountry of the Dordogne area was 'sustainable' or organic or simply a French version of industrial agriculture that I couldn't recognize (though I doubted it), but there certainly was a strong sense of harmony to the landscape. Wherever we drove, we saw an enchanting mosaic of woodlands, small farmsteads, verdant grazing lands, picturesque villages, and healthy-looking riparian areas. We didn't see any overgrazing, obvious signs of erosion, or anything that looked like a feedlot. Maybe we were looking in the wrong places, I don't know, but I doubt it.

In the heart of this country was Lascaux, with its famous cave paintings of wild animals, including bison, deer, horses and aurochs (the ancestor of the cow). The cave's presence suggests that humans have managed to occupy this area for a very long time *sustainably* – an observation that recalled Aldo Leopold's famous lament that the oldest task in human history was how to live on a piece of land without ruining it. As Leopold knew all too well, it is a task we failed too often. But not in the Dordogne.

In fact, the area reminded me of Amish country I've visited in central Ohio, only without the horse-and-buggies. This wasn't a coincidence – the Amish heartland is

another slice of Agraria, a place where people have managed to live more-or-less harmoniously *with* the land, economically and ecologically, rather than against it. The main difference between central Ohio and southwestern France is, well, centuries.

This is important because we live in an age where the issue of sustainability is becoming more and more critical, especially as the pace of 'land ruination' picks up due to population pressures, energy demands, and food shortages. It behooves us, therefore, to study examples of sustainability in action, rather than in theory.

However, to many Americans this country may have little appeal. After all, there isn't much wilderness left in the Dordogne; it's all cultivated, to one degree or another, which means there's a reason why there are no wild bison, horses, or aurochs around anymore. If it's wildness you're after, then rural France may not be the best place to look. But if it's harmony you're after, as Aldo Leopold was, then the Dordogne might fit the bill.

I believe the 21st century will be dominated (and in some places it is already) by concerns for human well-being. That sounds selfish of us, but if our ability to find food, fuel, fiber, water, and shelter becomes strained then issues such as 'wildness' or endangered species protection will drop way down our 'To Do' list. And if the experts are right, especially on climate change, then human well-being may become our top concern.

This is why it's important to find slices of Agraria. We need its harmony along with its food. We need to understand why human settlement persists so well in some places while in other places – many other places – it has not. It's not simply a matter of rain, soil, climate or other local factors; plenty of places with ample amounts of each have been ruined over time. The difference, I think, is culture – by which I mean our values, norms, and economic incentives. Of course, I'm in no position to say why the Dordogne area appears to be sustainably managed (and perhaps it's not, as I said), but something important is going on.

Pioneer

10/1/10 – Last weekend, I drove to a ranch in central New Mexico to attend a party celebrating the 80th birthday of a hero of mine.

Actually, I had no idea that Sid Goodloe was eighty – I assumed he was a decade younger – but I suppose that's a benefit of a life lived primarily outdoors. Not looking his age is just one of the amazing qualities about Sid. Visionary rancher, watershed activist, collaborative conservationist, land trust founder,

grassfed beef producer, defender of western culture, and thorn-in-the-side of Smoky Bear, Sid is a modern-day pioneer in every sense of the word. He is also an all-around gentleman. I'm very grateful to count him as a mentor.

Back in 1998, Sid graciously hosted the Quivira Coalition's first workshop. We called it an Outdoor Classroom on rangeland health, which was led by Kirk Gadzia, another new friend at the time. We chose Sid's ranch because, well, it was so darn healthy. And because Sid is a great teacher, with a wonderful story to tell – which I won't repeat here since I've told it once already. As an inaugural event for Quivira, it couldn't have been better. A ton of folks showed up and we enjoyed two days of inspired learning. I was ready for more.

On the drive to the party, I recalled the workshop with a mixture of nostalgia and concern. Quivira was founded largely as a peace-making effort in an era of intense fighting between ranchers and environmentalists. Our 'hook' was land health – the good stewardship practices of ranchers and others, like Sid, who sustainably balanced ecology with economics. At the time, this balance was considered unimaginable by many in the conservation community, and unprofitable by members of the livestock industry. But Sid's example proved them all wrong – as he continues to do to this day.

But this is where the concern comes in.

Although the grazing wars have largely faded away, the question of how to live sustainably on the land without jeopardizing our children's future is still with us, more urgent than ever. In 1998, for example, no one talked about climate change. No one cared very much where our food came from either, or what was in it (Sid at the time sent his cows to a feedlot like everyone else). We knew the land had been damaged historically by hard use and that it needed to be healed, but we never talked about ecosystem services or sustainability the way we do today. Carbon ranching? What the hell was that?

Today, of course, these issues are on everyone's lips. And that's the concern: we didn't get far enough down the sustainability road. We've made some progress, but probably not enough yet to handle the trouble that appears to be lurking over the horizon.

As I drove to the celebration, with images of rural France still fresh in my mind from our trip (Sid once worked there too), I couldn't help but compare the sparse, dry, wild and very beautiful New Mexico rangeland that I saw with the lush, moist, cultivated and very beautiful agrarian landscape of the Dordogne valley. They couldn't be more different, ecologically and culturally, and yet there is an important link – this issue of sustainability (or what I prefer to call 'resilience').

For whatever reason, the Dordogne had managed to endure, and perhaps thrive, in the presence of human use all the way to the modern era. In the rangelands of New Mexico the story was not so clear. In some places, such as Sid's ranch, land and people had found a way to coexist harmoniously. In other places, land and people had come into repeated conflict, often with the land coming out on the losing side.

On the other hand, New Mexico has a wildness to it that the Dordogne lacks, though one could make a case that 'wildness' is in the eye of the beholder. Sid's ranch always struck me as suitably "wild" – meaning, wildlife loved the place. In the 20th century, wildness was a primary objective of conservationists, who sought the protection of wilderness and parks. But in the 21st century, this objective seems not quite so urgent, especially if human well-being declines – which brings us back to the issue of sustainability. This is why the yin/yang of rural France and New Mexico is so interesting, and so instructional.

I didn't bring any of this up at the birthday party. Sid is philosophical, but only up to a point. He'd rather get to work than talk about something for long. So I joined the celebration and wished Sid another 80 productive, happy years.

We're not where we need to be yet, which means we still need pioneers like Sid Goodloe.

The Fifth Wave

"There is another way to live and think: it's called agrarianism. It is not so much a philosophy as a practice, an attitude, a loyalty and a passion – all based in close connection with the land. It results in a sound local economy in which producers and consumers are neighbors and in which nature herself becomes the standard for work and production." – Wendell Berry

10/15/10 – The agrarian vision that I encountered in France last month revived an idea I've had rattling around in my skull for a while now: the conservation movement is entering a new phase in America.

Perhaps the best way to describe this idea is to employ a beach metaphor. The history of conservation is like a series of waves hitting a shore. Each wave goes through a similar sequence: swelling out at sea, cresting as it comes closer, rolling ashore, stretching to its limit, pulling back, and running back out to sea. This describes the various waves of the conservation movement pretty well – each gathered energy, moved to action, had a big effect, then pulled back as the next wave

rolled in. It's not a perfect metaphor, but it does help me explain my theory that an idea arises at a certain time for a certain reason, becomes popular, has an effect, and then gets replaced by a new idea as the times change and the old idea loses effectiveness.

In the history of conservation in America, as I see it, there have been four big waves: federalism, environmentalism, scientism, and collaboration. Or in other words, the 'protect it,' 'fight it,' 'buy it,' and 'share it' models of conservation, represented very broadly in sequence by: federal land agencies, environmental advocacy organizations, private land trusts, and collaborative groups. Up close, each overlaps with the other somewhat, but from a historical perspective they represent distinct waves, each with its own phase of growth and retreat.

The idea rattling around in my skull is this: a fifth wave is developing. It's called agrarianism and its contours can now be seen, swelling gently out at sea.

The idea first came to me in the aftermath of my trip to Italy in the fall of 2008, when I had the privilege of attending the International Slow Food gathering in Turin called *Terra Madre*. I went as a delegate from the U.S. – specifically as a producer of grassfed beef for local (slow) markets. This was a curious turn of events for a former Sierra Club activist, as I later wrote in an essay. Two things struck hard while I was there: the extraordinary amount of smiles on the faces of the participants – because food makes people happy – and the utter absence of environmental organizations. These two facts, combined with a decade of work in conservation in the Southwest, led me to open the aforementioned essay this way: "*I believe environmentalism is dying and will be replaced within fifteen years by a resurgent agrarianism, focused on food, and led by youth."*

What I didn't see at the time was that environmentalism is really a wave – it rose under certain circumstances, came ashore in a big way, did what it could, and now is pulling back out to sea. Just like the wave before it, and the ones that followed.

The Best Idea at the Time

11/1/10 – The First Wave of conservation in America was our most inspired. Its idea was simple and profound: some land would remain in federal ownership rather than be sold or given away to private interests. From this democratic ideal came our national park system, our national forests, and our national wildlife refuges – beloved by Americans of all stripes to this day. In particular, the establishment of Yellowstone as the world's first "people's" park in 1872 was viewed as

both revolutionary and quintessentially American, prompting a British nobleman and admirer to say that our national parks were "the best idea we ever had."

I certainly thought so. When I was sixteen, I embarked on a backpacking tour of Zion, Grand Tetons, Yellowstone, Glacier, Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks that changed my life. When school started that fall, I was a different person. I had discovered our public lands. The shock of their spectacular scenery, made tangible by hiking through their backcountry (rather than simply viewing it through a windshield), fused something in my psyche. I was hooked. I joined the Sierra Club, determined to defend these amazing places. A few years later, while attending college, my horizon expanded again to include the rest of the federal estate: our national forests, refuges, and seashores, rivers, and rangelands. I hiked, camped and explored with gusto, liberated both by youth and cheap fossil fuel.

As I explored, my conservation horizon grew as well. I joined a dozen organizations (evident by the pile of monthly newsletters and magazines that stacked up on my living room table) and became active in campaigns to defend this or that from a host of Bad Guys. I poured a ton of energy, for example, into the Sierra Club's vigorous objection to James Watt, president Ronald Reagan's infamously pro-development Secretary of the Interior. It was alright if we didn't win all the fights; conservation felt like a calling and I was happy to be a foot soldier in what seemed like a battle between the forces and Good and Evil at the time.

I was determined to learn more, so when a book titled *These American Lands* was published in 1986, authored by Dyan Zaslowsky of the Wilderness Society, I snapped it up. I learned that the federal estate came into existence at the end of the 19th century for an important reason: America was destroying its natural heritage at a blistering pace. The great white pine forests of the upper Midwest, for example, had been logged to oblivion in only a few decades (making an indelible impression on the young John Muir). The American West, whose frontier phase was declared to be 'over' in 1890 by the U.S. Census, was next on the chopping block. Something needed to be done, people cried, or else a land of spectacular and fragile beauty would be decimated.

That *something* was the federal government. As author and historian Wallace Stegner put it "on the evidence of several generations of exploitative freedom no one could guarantee the future its share of the American earth except the American government." And the First Wave was born. Dyan Zaslowsky put it this way: "The public lands system compensate for the chief shortcoming of free enterprise – which is its inability to respond to any but its own pressing demands…"

By 2010, however, this "best idea" had ebbed back out to sea, as I'll explain.

Thinking Like a Bureau

11/15/10 – In the fall of 1909, twenty-two year-old Aldo Leopold rode away from a ranger station in Springerville, Arizona, on his inaugural assignment with the new United States Forest Service. It was a pivotal moment both for the four-year old agency and for a man who would become America's greatest conservationist.

For this Midwesterner, an avid hunter freshly graduated from the prestigious Yale School of Forestry, the mountainous wilderness that stretched to the horizon before his eyes was inspirational. In fact, events over the following weeks, including Leopold's role in the killing of two "timber wolves" – immortalized nearly forty years later as the "green fire" section of his essay 'Thinking Like a Mountain' from *Sand County Almanac* – would influence his lifelong conservation philosophy in important ways.

The deep thinking would come later, however. In 1909, Leopold's primary purpose was to be a good forester, which is why he chose to participate in a novel and exciting experiment at the time: the conservation of natural resources by governmental action. It was no coincidence that the benefactor of Yale's Forestry School – Gifford Pinchot – became the Forest Service's first Chief, and primary cheerleader. Trained in Europe, Pinchot believed that the best way for a nation's natural resources to serve "the greatest good" for the greatest number of citizens was through scientific management and governmental ownership of the land.

It was part of an emerging trend. The world's first national park – Yellowstone – was created by an act of Congress in 1872. In 1888, the year after Leopold's birth, Congress created the national forest reserve system, the forerunner of our modern national forests. This system was dramatically, and controversially, doubled in the spring of 1906 by President Theodore Roosevelt who burned the midnight oil with Pinchot in order to beat a congressional deadline. Three years earlier, Roosevelt had also created the first national wildlife refuge, Pelican Island, in southern Louisiana. The reasons for these actions were straightforward to conservationists: the nation's natural resources were being destroyed at an alarming rate.

It was an experiment as radical as it was effective. From the founding of the nation in 1783 forward, the federal government vigorously supported the disposal of its public lands to retired soldiers, hardscrabble pioneers, commercial interests

(including a massive give-away to railroad corporations), and others who wished to fulfill America's manifest destiny. The decision to hold on to certain tracts of land, especially the productive forested country, was hailed by the budding conservation movement and vilified by the "locals," especially out West (where resentment lingers to this day).

This new conservation philosophy was captured in the U.S. Forest Service's first field manual, which stated its mission this way: "Forest Reserves are for the purpose of preserving a perpetual supply of timber for home industries, preventing destruction of the forest cover which regulates the flow of streams, and protecting local industries from unfair competition in the use of forest and range. They are patrolled and protected, at Government expense, for the benefit of the Community and home builder."

Thus the First Wave of conservation – federalism – rose at sea and began its long journey to America's shore. It would continue to pick up speed for decades, as the national park system expanded from a dozen units to over 400, as the remaining unsettled rangelands were organized into the Bureau of Land Management after WWII, as wilderness areas became officially recognized with the Wilderness Act of 1964, and as wild and scenic rivers became protected. It was a remarkable ride for those who caught the wave – heady days for professionals such as Leopold, but also exciting times for day-trippers and vacationers across the nation, newly liberated by rising affluence and the automobile. America embraced its public lands with fervor as citizens hit the great outdoors in record and rising numbers.

At the same time, federalism as a conservation philosophy extended beyond land ownership. It grew over time to incorporate a general belief in the necessity of governmental regulation, often in the form of new laws, on behalf of wildlife and ecosystems. Thanks to pressure from activists, more and more conservation work was assigned to the federal government over the decades culminating in the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency in 1969 and a raft of historic environmental legislation in the early 1970s.

But as it turned out, this work became the high water mark for this First Wave of conservation. Like all waves, this one eventually began to recede.

Today, federalism as a conservation strategy has lost its effectiveness and thus has pulled back out to sea. It was replaced by a succession of new waves, each rising in its own time and place for its own set of reasons, as Leopold's own career demonstrates.

Out To Sea

12/1/10 – All social movements have a cyclical nature. They arise at a certain period of time, for a specific reason, and work under a particular set of historical circumstances toward a defined goal. They gather strength, grow and become an effective wave of change. Invariably, however, circumstances change as the world evolves, creating a dilemma for all movements: achieve their goal soon, evolve with the times, and/or fade away. Like a wave, the tide of history is irresistible, pulling most movements back out to sea sooner or later.

Out West, federalism is one such movement. It rose in the first decades of the 20th century in response to the rapid and widespread destruction of the region's natural resources, gathered strength through the 1930s and 40s (partly by evolving to meet new demands), reached a 'high tide' as an effective conservation strategy in the early 1950s, and has been pulling back to sea ever since.

That's not to say the idea of public land has staled – it hasn't. The democratic ideal represented by public ownership of western lands is still strong and perhaps more needed than ever as the world drifts deeper into the 21st century. But while the ideal is still strong, the government's ability *to do conservation* effectively has faded dramatically. This happened for a variety of reasons, including shrinking budgets, reduced personnel, increased public demands, and a bevy of conflicting laws and regulations. To this I would add: a resistance to innovation, and a certain degree of arrogance. Taken together, they point to one inescapable conclusion that I doubt that many people would dispute very vigorously: federalism has waned as an effective conservation strategy.

In a sense, that's alright. One could argue that federalism achieved its original goal: to put a halt to the destruction of the West's forests, grasslands, and rivers via public ownership and enlightened stewardship. It also achieved a second goal: to provide diverse recreational opportunities for an urbanizing nation increasingly infatuated with the Great Outdoors. By the time that the Bureau of Land Management was created after World War II from the remains of the old General Land Office, which effectively ended the disposal of public land to private citizens, the original work of federalism had been accomplished. That the wave would continue toward shore for a while longer, propelled by the nation's love affair with its national parks in the 1950s and 60s, didn't change the reality that this wave was set to pull back.

Not that federalism didn't try to evolve with the times. Over the years, it embraced a variety of new conservation concepts, including wilderness designation,

sustained yield, adaptive management, endangered species protection, an ecosystem service approach, and so on. But none of them altered the basic fact that federalism as a whole was becoming increasingly bureaucratic, complex, and inefficient. What had once been its chief asset – its role as a buffer between nature and its exploiters – had by 1970 become a liability: its increasing inability to get innovative ideas implemented.

By the mid-1990s, when I began to interact with the federal land agencies as an activist, first with the Sierra Club and then with the Quivira Coalition, this wave was definitely pulling out to sea. While many people still looked to the federal government to protect natural resources from threats of degradation or extinction, fewer and fewer considered federalism to be the proactive conservation strategy it was in Aldo Leopold's day. In fact, what the agencies had become very good at was saying "no." This is a fine strategy if you are fighting a dam or a mine, but it's a poor way to get innovative ideas on-the-ground. Toss in declining budgets and the increasing demands of competing interest groups, each with a separate vision of the purpose of public lands, and you have a recipe for paralysis.

And in the 21st century, a "no action" alternative isn't an option anymore.

Take climate change, for instance. The effect of rising global temperatures on the forests, grasslands, and rivers of the American West is predicted to be highly deleterious, necessitating rapid, flexible and innovative land management responses. However, this is a tall order for federal agencies stuck largely in a Business-as-Usual paradigm. "No" won't cut it anymore. That's why federalism is now back out at sea. Perhaps it will reinvent itself somehow, gather strength and rise again as a new wave of conservation, headed for shore. I hope so – as I said, the idea of public land ownership is still an important one in a democracy.

The Second Wave

12/15/10 – The next wave of conservation to come shore in the American West is what we today call *environmentalism* and like the wave of federalism that preceded it, it too eventually reached a high water and is now pulling back out to sea.

The early stirrings of this wave can be traced back to the mid-19th century as the effects of the Industrial Revolution began to harshly impact the natural world, especially wildlife populations. The extinction of the once abundant passenger pigeon, for example, at the hands of trigger-happy hunters initiated widespread outrage. Early prophets of this new wave included Henry Thoreau and George Perkins Marsh, whose book *Man and Nature* raised alarm bells all across the nation.

But it wasn't until an itinerant mountain-lover and amateur geologist by the name of John Muir became active did the Second Wave begin to coalesce in earnest. Muir's vigorous, national campaign to preserve the magnificent sequoia trees of California's Sierra Nevada, which culminated in the creation of Sequoia National Park in 1890, and his founding of the activist Sierra Club in 1892, launched the American conservation movement. With the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1963, which chronicled the deleterious effects of toxic chemicals on humans and animals alike, the movement grew into what is today called environmentalism.

It's a familiar and well-documented story, and I won't repeat it here. For my purposes, I want to point out that this wave grew large and effective for three specific reasons: (1) it confronted the shortcomings of federalism; (2) it resonated with the times; and (3) it evolved to incorporate new and expanding environmental threats. But for all its success and popularity over the years, environmentalism ultimately shared the same fate as the First Wave (federalism): it became increasingly ineffective over time as a conservation strategy and is now fading away.

The early phase of environmentalism was consonant with the goals of federalism. Muir and his fellow activists in the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, and many other new and vigorous organizations, championed federal ownership of special places, particularly in the form of national parks and refuges. Espousing a preservationist paradigm, they believed nature needed largely to be left alone, or at least managed for natural values, such as healthy game populations. This required public ownership of land, which they believed would shield nature from the predatory behavior of private enterprise.

Cracks in this belief, however, began to appear in the 1930s. One of the leading dissenters was the great conservationist Aldo Leopold, who began his career with the U.S. Forest Service in 1909, thus becoming one of the first 'surfers' of the federalism wave. Beginning as far back as the early-1920s, however, Leopold began to have doubts about the ability of governmental agencies to effectively promote what he eventually called a "land ethic." Their incentives were more of the 'stick' variety than the 'carrot,' which he came to believe, was antithetical to good stewardship in the long run. A land ethic needed to come from the heart, he argued, not a bureau.

After World War II, as America's economy rocketed into the stratosphere, conservationists began to worry about the federal land agencies' motivations, particularly the U.S. Forest Service, which embarked on a vast timber-cutting program that it said

was necessary to supply the nation's housing needs. The newly organized Bureau of Land Management (BLM) drew criticism for its poor oversight of livestock grazing on its lands, and the Bureau of Reclamation began to draw intense fire for its proposed dam-building intentions across the West. Suddenly, it seemed to activists, federalism was the problem, not the answer.

In particular, a plan in the early 1950s by the U.S. Government to build a dam in the heart of Dinosaur National Monument ignited a firestorm of opposition. The so-called 'Echo Park' fight went all the way to Washington, D.C., catapulting the conservation movement into the limelight and changing it forever. Subsequent fights against proposed dams in the bottom of the Grand Canyon, over polluted rivers and air, against toxic chemicals, for new parks and wilderness, all flowed together into a large wave of conservation action that swelled and crested in the mid-1960s, rolling toward shore.

High Tide

1/1/11 – The Second Wave fought principally on two fronts: *against* a massive expansion of the federal government's dam-building program out West and *for* the protection of wilderness and parks. Two key moments in the early 1960s defined the nascent movement: the successful passage of the Wilderness Act by Congress, after a decade-long struggle; and the failure to prevent the construction of Glen Canyon Dam, which submerged an extraordinary stretch of the Colorado River upstream of the Grand Canyon.

Galvanized by both fights, the Second Wave expanded dramatically. Soon, it was fighting *against* strip mines, forest clearcuts, and overgrazing on public lands and *for* the protection of wild rivers and endangered species, swelling the ranks of environmental organizations with new members.

The Second Wave subsequently came ashore in an awesome crash in the early 1970s with the passage of a raft of environmental legislation, including a bill creating the Environmental Protection Agency, transforming the landscape of the nation.

On the economic front, it embraced recreation and tourism as new engines of prosperity, igniting what would eventually be called the New West – a booming amenity-based economy that emphasized play (hiking, fishing, biking, and 'ranching' the view) over traditional forms of work (mining, logging, farming, ranching). However, the denigration of *work* in favor of *play and protection*, especially on public lands, led to numerous clashes with rural residents, many of

whom staunchly opposed this new economy. Feelings on both sides hardened during the 1980s, causing environmentalists to dig in and redouble their fight.

That's the moment when the wave began to pull back.

The debate over livestock grazing on public lands is a good example. At the height of the Second Wave, environmentalists targeted poor livestock management on public lands as the culprit for a surfeit of "cowburnt" rangelands across the West, successfully raising a public alarm. Over the years, however, as livestock management improved and a new, holistic vision of *work* began to emerge, activists responded by digging their trenches deeper. "Cattle Free by '93" became the new mantra – and the Second Wave began its retreat.

What is important to understand is that this wave achieved great successes principally for era-specific reasons. Many of its leaders were born at the beginning of the Baby Boom. They traveled to national parks and camped in national forests with their families, they came of age loving the Great Outdoors from a recreational and nature advocacy perspective, and they were fired up by the paradigm-shifting, barrier-breaking 1960s. It was a wave of passion, confrontation, and poetry.

Environmentalism's Ebb

1/15/11 – There are three primary reasons why the Second Wave of conservation is ebbing.

The first is Wendell Berry's long-standing criticism that environmentalism never developed an economic program to go along with its preservation and health programs. It had no economic retort, in other words, for industrialism. It never truly confronted our economy, the source of most environmental ills, and without an effective alternative, the average American had no choice but to participate in a destructive model of economic growth.

Many environmentalists might argue, in contrast, that they did have an economic agenda: tourism and recreation. This is true – and for a while the benefits of both looked generous. But over time recreation and its associated side effects – congestion, exurban sprawl, transitory populations – began to take on darker hues and may have even made the situation worse in some places. And as the twenty-first century progresses, with its concerns about climate change, carbon footprints, peak oil (including $7-a-gallon gasoline), food-miles, and sustainability in general, an economy based on tourism looks rather shaky.

Second, environmentalism is ebbing because it left the land behind. The movement lost the feeling of "the soil between our toes," as Leopold put it, meaning it lost

an intimate understanding of how land actually works. As a result it lost what Leopold described as the role of individual responsibility for the health of the land. "Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal," he wrote, and "conservation is our effort to understand and preserve this capacity." But by losing the feel of soil between our toes, the movement missed the opportunity to understand, and thus preserve, land health – the foundation on which all health depends.

For example, I learned that while activists and others could recognize poor land use, such as overgrazing, and rightly worked to correct it, they lost an understanding of *good* land use, particularly those for-profit activities such as logging and ranching that could be conducted sustainably. Instead, as the movement drifted away from land, it began to equate non-use with the highest and best use of land, especially on the public domain. The exception was recreation, of course, though as historian Richard White has written in reference to our global environmental predicament, it has become clear that "play can't handle the weight." [57]

Third, the environmental movement never really walked the talk of a land ethic. While trumpeting Leopold's famous call to enlarge our ethical sphere to include plants and animals, environmentalists ignored his insistence that people and their economic activities be included too. "There is only one soil, one flora, one fauna, and one people, and hence only one conservation problem," Leopold wrote in the *A Sand County Almanac*. "Economic and esthetic land uses can and must be integrated, usually on the same acre." Or this from his essay "The Ecological Conscience" – "A thing is right only when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the community, and the community includes the soil, waters, fauna, and flora, as well as people."

A land ethic encompassed it all. But environmentalists didn't heed Leopold's advice. Instead, they engaged in a form of environmental isolationism. Work was segregated from nature, and nature was largely confined to parks, wildernesses, refuges, and other types of "protected areas." Not only was there no attempt to integrate people into nature economically under this preservationist paradigm, an energetic effort was made by some activists to curtail certain land uses, such as ranching, whether they preserved the integrity, stability and beauty of the community or not. The land, in their mind, had to be "saved" apart from the people, and their pitch to the public emphasized dehumanized landscapes – pretty pictures of wild country and charismatic wildlife. In general, while activists were quick to invoke Leopold in their campaigns to 'save' this or that, they ignored his holistic view that "bread and beauty grow best together."

These are some of the reasons why, after crashing ashore in the early 1970s, environmentalism reached its maximum extent in the early 1990s and has been pulling back to sea since.

The Third Wave

2/1/11 – The next wave of conservation built on the strengths of the first waves – federalism and environmentalism – while purposefully addressing their weaknesses. It stirred after World War II, formed into a wave in the 1960s, 'showed white water' in the late1970s, hit the shore in the 1990s and reached its high water mark in the early 2000s – and is only now pulling back to sea.

This wave has two distinguishing elements: an emphasis on ecology and other scientific disciplines; and a focus on private land protection. In fact, many of its land acquisition/land protection strategies were driven by ecological or biological objectives, which is why I call this wave "scientism."

The best known example of scientism is one of the world's foremost conservation organizations: The Nature Conservancy. A quick history of this landmark organization will provide a guide to this third wave.

In 1946, a small group of scientists in New England formed a group called the Ecologists Union and tasked it with the goal of saving threatened natural areas, especially those with imperiled native plant and animal species. Up until that time, the protection of biologically diverse parcels of land had been primarily the job of the federal government, state wildlife agencies, or private hunting and game groups. Parks, forests, refuges, wilderness areas, and hunting preserves were the dominant means by which protection was provided in the years leading up to WW II. But a growing number of biologists and ecologists believed this wasn't enough, especially since it mostly overlooked private land. Gearing up, the Ecologists Union changed its name in 1951 to The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and embarked on what was at the time a novel strategy for preserving biodiversity in the United States: private land acquisition.

TNC made its first purchase, sixty acres along the New York/Connecticut border, in 1955. Six years later it donated its first conservation easement, on six acres of salt marsh, again in Connecticut. By 1974, TNC was working in all fifty states, often in partnership with state and federal agencies. It also began an ambitious land trust program, including accepting conservation easements on land it did not own. All of TNC's programs grew dramatically over the years. In 2000, it launched the "Last Great Places" campaign, raising over $1 billion dollars for

land acquisition and research. By 2007, TNC was protecting more than 117 million acres of land and 5000 miles of rivers in the U.S. and directing over 100 conservation projects in marine environments.

But it wasn't just about buying land. With a staff of 700 scientists, TNC has based much of its conservation work on scientific research. It implemented a program called *Conservation by Design* which involves a science-based modeling approach to large landscapes which helps determine where to work, what to conserve, and what strategies should be employed. In other words, scientism was no longer simply focused on saving the rarest species here and there, but worked at the ecosystem level so that all species might thrive – a strategy TNC calls "enough of everything." They do this by establishing science-based priorities and then setting out to influence the social, political, and economic forces engaged in these critical landscapes.

TNC's success has been mirrored by many other third wave conservation organizations around the globe. For example, beginning in the mid-1970s, a land trust movement exploded across America. Today there are over 1700 individual land trusts, of every shape and size, from small community or regional trusts, to state-wide agricultural organizations. There's a Land Trust Alliance that facilitates and supports the diverse trust movement.

Concurrently, a great deal of science-based conservation work has taken place in a variety of organizations, agencies, and private landholdings. The emergence of ecology as a major discipline in the 1940s (thanks in part to Aldo Leopold) has led universities to embrace science-based curriculums and implement numerous environmental study programs across the country. Professional journals in ecology and conservation biology have proliferated; and many conservation organizations have implemented science-based research into their work, especially those focused on large predators, wildlife corridors, and interconnected landscapes.

This rich, diverse, and energetic movement built on the groundwork laid down by the first two waves of conservation, but it also filled important gaps. It was led not by government agencies, but by the private sector – principally nonprofits, universities, and private landowners. It also largely eschewed the emotionality and confrontational tactics of environmentalism. It was guided by data, not poetry, and it sought cooperation, not litigation, to accomplish its goals. It still adhered to a 'protection paradigm' which it shared in common with federalism and environmentalism, but its methods were much different.

But like its precedents, scientism too began to lose effectiveness over time, and is now beginning to ebb.

The Limits of Science

2/15/11 – A turning point for the Third Wave of conservation in America occurred in 1990, when The Nature Conservancy (TNC) purchased the beautiful and biologically rich, 322,000-acre Gray Ranch, located in the bootheel of southwestern New Mexico. This purchase also signaled the first swell of the Fourth Wave, which would gather quickly and begin its journey toward shore.

Sheltering more than 700 species of plants, 75 mammals, 50 reptiles, and 170 species of breeding birds, the Gray Ranch was considered one of the most significant ecological landscapes in North America. For this reason, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had coveted the Gray as a wildlife refuge for decades. Indeed, in the 1980s a similar-sized ranch in southern Arizona, called the Buenos Aires, was purchased by the Fish & Wildlife Service from the same millionaire who owned the Gray Ranch. This time, however, TNC was needed to broker the deal, which it did efficiently, though at a high financial cost. That was alright – TNC had every intention of reselling the Gray to federal government as quickly as possible.

In a way, the Gray Ranch deal engaged all three Waves of conservation in operation at the time: a nonprofit organization purchased a private ranch for its high biological value and proposed to transfer it to federal ownership for perpetual protection.

Except it didn't turn out as planned.

The transfer never happened. That's because when area residents heard of the sale, they raised vigorous objections. First, the Gray was part of the historic Diamond A ranch, one of the area's legendary operations and thus culturally important to residents in the region. Second, it was still a working cattle ranch, and thus a tax-paying, cowboy-hiring member of the local economy. Third, rural residents across the region were tired of seeing private land being turned over to the government. So, a spectrum of the local community surrounding the Gray complained loudly to TNC officials, elected representatives, newspaper reporters, and anyone else who would listen that *enough was enough.*

To their surprise, they found a sympathetic reception at TNC, which was hearing similar complaints in other places where they worked. TNC saw itself as a *cooperative* conservation group – they bought land and easements from willing sellers, they worked with the government, they held to high scientific standards, and generally maintained a low profile. In other words, the complaints stung. They caused TNC to ask itself an important question: could it accomplish its

conservation goals while keeping the ranch in private hands as a working cattle operation? And perhaps just as importantly: could it find a conservation buyer who would help them recoup their substantial financial investment in the property?

The answer to both questions proved to be "yes."

In 1993, The Nature Conservancy sold the Gray Ranch to Drum Hadley, a local rancher who also happened to be an heir to the Budweiser beer fortune. After the sale, Drum and members of his family created the Animas Foundation, named for the nearest town, to protect the property and to ranch it for conservation as well as community goals. A year later, both TNC and the Animas Foundation became charter members of the Malpai Borderlands Group – a pioneering collaborative partnership of landowners, conservationists, and agencies in the region. What had once been a very contentious landscape transformed quickly into a model of collaboration and conservation. In fact, the Malpai Group adopted many of the science objectives proposed by TNC and others, and to this day holds an annual science conference in Douglas, Arizona.

But the entire episode demonstrated the limits of a science-based approach to conservation. Over time, TNC realized that it could not achieve its goals with science, or the federal government, alone. To succeed, it needed the support of community members, especially other private landowners. It also became clear that TNC and other conservation organizations would never be able to buy all the critical land needed to protect species. There simply wasn't enough money. Nor would easements complete the job. To accomplish the landscape-scale protection that they said was needed, especially if it involved public lands, a new approach would be required.

The Fourth Wave

3/1/11 – The next wave of conservation in the American West started in the early 1990s as spot fires across the region and grew quickly; and in one place that meant *literally*.

When the Forest Service extinguished a grass fire that had flared up on privately-owned land near the U.S.-Mexico border, it did it over the objections of the landowner, a rancher who supported the ecological effects of periodic fire. This ignited an entire community into action. Tired of having their opinions ignored by the federal government and equally worn out by the never-ending

debate with environmentalists over livestock grazing, a coalition of ranchers, conservationists, and others banded together to form the nonprofit Malpai Borderlands Group. Their goal? Give collaboration a try.

Up in Montana, inspired by the Malpai example, two separate groups of ranchers responded to the threats of expanding subdivisions and new endangered species regulations by linking arms with conservationists, creating the Blackfoot Challenge along the Blackfoot River near Missoula and the Madison Valley Ranchlands Group, northwest of Yellowstone National Park. Their goals were the same as the others: to make progress on-the-ground through dialogue and cooperation.

It was all part of an emerging *radical center* in the West – a term coined by rancher Bill McDonald of the Malpai Borderlands Group to describe a consensus-based approach to land management challenges. It was radical because it challenged various orthodoxies at work at the time, including the conventional belief that conservation and ranching were part of a 'zero sum' game – that one could only advance if the other retreated. The 'center' referred to the pragmatic, middle-ground between extremes. It meant partnerships, respect, and trust. But most of all, the center meant *action* – a plan signed, a prescribed fire lit, a workshop held, a hand shook. Words were nice, but working in the radical center really meant *walking the talk.*

I know because I did a lot of walking myself.

In 1996, Barbara Johnson and I, both Sierra Club activists, and rancher Jim Winder had an idea: start a nonprofit that would step outside the continuum of brawling between ranchers and environmentalists and create a "third way" that emphasized progressive cattle and land management practices. We invited any rancher, conservationist, agency person, scientist or member of the public who was interested in "sharing common-sense solutions to the rangeland conflict" to join us. We took a public vow of no legislation and no litigation. We promised ourselves to not waste any energy trying to pry open closed minds. We focused instead on those who literally wanted to start over at the grass and the roots.

Mainstream

3/15/11 – The idea of collaborative conservation, once controversial, has now become a mainstream concept among many landowners, agencies, researchers, ranchers, and conservationists across the West. What remains a challenge, however, is actually implementing collaborative conservation on-the-ground, especially at scale. I'll offer

some lessons learned from the experience of the Quivira Coalition as an example of the Fourth Wave's benefits and limitations.

Since 2001, the Quivira Coalition has led a restoration project on Comanche Creek, located in the Valle Vidal unit of the Carson National Forest, in partnership with a wide range of organizations and agencies. The goal of this project is to restore to health degraded portions of the 27,000-acre watershed with the goal of improving the survival chances of the Rio Grande Cutthroat trout (RGCT), New Mexico's state fish.

Comanche Creek is typical of many areas that have experienced adverse human impacts, including poor timber management, overgrazing by livestock, and mineral extraction. These activities created inadequately constructed and maintained roads, overgrazed grasslands, depleted vegetation in riparian zones, and unprotected stream banks. The results of these land use practices increased erosion by amplifying the fine sediment load within the watershed. By 2000, populations of native Rio Grande Cutthroat (RGCT) trout had been reduced to 10% of their historic range in the American Southwest due to a variety of factors, including competition from non-native trout species, habitat degradation and loss, surface water diversion and depletion, stream fragmentation, and isolation.

Today, the few remaining populations of RGCT face a significant new challenge: climate change. This includes: a likely reduction in the abundance of clear, cold water that trout require for survival; rising water temperatures; increased incidence of diseases and parasites; decreased abundance of insect food sources; decreased dissolved oxygen levels; increased demand for water by human populations; increased potential for flooding; and increased fragmentation of habitat.

Our collaborative project addresses these challenges by implementing effective, cost efficient and low impact riverine restoration techniques that feature the use of native materials.

Over the past eight years, two hundred in-stream structures and exclosures for elk and livestock have been constructed with the aim of reducing erosion, improving water quality, and restoring riparian vigor to the creek. Our experience has taught us that on-the-ground restoration solutions include: (1) in-stream structures that stabilize stream-bank erosion; (2) side-stream restoration activities that reduce erosion, stabilize headcuts, re-wet meadows, and improve hydrological cycles; (3) mitigation of "bad" roads and road-related features that increase sediment erosion into the creek; (4) encouragement of the growth of bank-side native plants (to shade the water for the fish); (5) management of the impacts of

herbivory; (6) annual maintenance of structures as needed; and (7) annual monitoring and assessment of progress.

This project is still ongoing, but we can speak to some lessons learned about collaborative conservation:

- It's hard. The technical challenges of creek and habitat restoration pale in comparison to the 'people issues,' especially in a remote location such as Comanche Creek. The key to success, I believe, is the personality of the Project Manager. This person must be equal parts diplomat, agitator, ringmaster, and delegator. This person must be persistent, patient, and have a good sense of humor. They will need all three.

- Diversity is critical. The power of collaborative conservation comes from the ability to look at one problem, or one landscape, from multiple perspectives. That means having a variety of perspectives represented, and not just specialists. Volunteers have great ideas too. The key is to respect each perspective and learn from other people's ideas, which is hard to do sometimes, especially if they prick your paradigms.

- Keep innovating. New ideas are always coming down the pike. Keep your eyes and ears open. Don't get stuck in a restoration rut.

- Monitor, monitor, monitor. Collect qualitative as well as quantitative data at every opportunity. It helps in so many ways.

- Don't forget to have fun.

There is one sobering lesson from our experience: it is becoming increasingly difficult to do collaborative conservation on public lands. The level of complexity involved in dealing with federal agencies has steadily increased over the eight years of our work on Comanche Creek – to the point where it has verged on becoming a *disincentive* to collaborative work. The reasons for this rising complexity are various, including reduced agency staffing levels, increased workloads, the changing priorities of revolving line officers, a stifling bureaucracy, and a resistance to innovation or approaches that don't fit squarely in an agency's Business-as-Usual methods. At times, these obstacles have nearly derailed our work, especially the lengthening amount of time it takes to get decisions made within agencies.

At some point, these issues need to be addressed, or else collaborative work on public land may grind to a halt.

The Fifth Wave

4/1/11 – For the past year or so, I've been developing an idea that I call the Carbon Ranch, whose purpose is to confront climate change and resource depletion by exploring mitigation and adaptation strategies that sequester CO_2 in soils and plants, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and produce co-benefits that build ecological and economic resilience in local landscapes. This includes everything from building topsoil through rotational grazing practices, to generating on-farm energy, to providing local food to schools and cities. It's a Tall Order, I know, but a necessary and urgent one as well.

Not only are climate change and resource depletion (food, fuel, and water) becoming the dominant crises of our lifetimes, the speed at which they are moving is accelerating. Scientists are moving timetables up by decades for the bad stuff, such as sea level rise, and warning us that if we don't get a handle on greenhouse gas emissions soon the rate of acceleration will only continue.

The good news is that we know a great deal about how to implement these strategies. The toolbox, as I've been saying for years, is well-developed. Nothing needs to be invented or discovered. We could start sequestering CO_2 in soils tomorrow, if we wanted, and at scale too. We have all the land management knowledge, the animals, and the science we need. We're lacking the economic incentives, but I bet they'll develop soon. What we're missing are the *people*. Who exactly will do this vital work? And where will they come from if we hope to work at a scale that can make a real difference?

The quick answer is this: we need agrarians.

In other words, we need a Fifth Wave of conservation in America. None of the other Waves can get the job of carbon ranching done, though elements of each Wave will play an important part in the ultimate success or failure of our efforts. For example, members of the First Wave – the federal land agencies – can't (or won't) do the actual job of sequestering additional CO_2 in soils, mostly because they don't get out of the office much these days, but they could facilitate this work (or block it). Environmentalists can't do this work because they have deep paradigms to overcome, including a long-standing prejudice against work and working lands, before they could begin to support

practices that benefit the carbon-storing capacities of soils. They are supportive, however, of many of the co-benefits of a Carbon Ranch, such as local food and renewable energy production.

The ecologists of the Third Wave can't do it either. While science and land protection are important elements of a Carbon Ranch, they can't do much to increase carbon storage in soils, as well as provide food and other benefits. The Fourth Wave – collaborative conservation – is better positioned than the other Waves to support carbon ranching due to its focus on working lands and its emphasis on proactive management. But it has some old paradigms to overcome as well. Still, collaboration is key because increasing soil carbon at scale requires an interdisciplinary approach, inter-agency cooperation and multiple stakeholder participation.

All of these elements are critical to a Carbon Ranch, but none of them take us to where we need to be: a place where we are building topsoil, fixing creeks, producing food, creating local energy, and healing relationships. To get there we need agrarians, people who can roll all of the above into one effort, people who not only feel the "soil between their toes" every day, as Aldo Leopold once described conservation, but who are technologically savvy, open to new ideas, willing to collaborate, and effective at managing land. Fortunately, these new agrarians exist and more are coming along.

A Rising Wave

4/15/11 – Recently, I took a tour of a small parcel of land owned by the County of Santa Fe that set me to thinking about agrarianism and the future. Called the Bajada Ranch, the 470-acre property was purchased (at the top of the real estate market) in order to prevent a residential subdivision from being built. The plat was in place and the ground was ready to be broken for hundreds of homes. But vocal objection from the adjacent village of La Cienega caused the County to reconsider; eventually it decided to use bond money to buy the ranch and protect it from development.

The question is: now what?

In the old days, circa 2000, the answer would have been straightforward: make a park of the property. This would certainly satisfy the nearby villagers, as well as Santa Fe County residents, many of whom like to hike and bike. But this isn't 2000, and the options have expanded. In fact, the County wants to know if the ranch could be used for agricultural and recreational purposes simultaneously.

More specifically, it wants to know if it could be a demonstration site for a Carbon Ranch.

That's why we took a look.

The quick answer is 'yes.' The degraded range on the ranch could be rejuvenated, by a variety of activities, which means it could sequester more CO_2 than it is doing now while producing grassfed beef for Santa Fe. It wouldn't be easy – 470 acres isn't an economic unit. But the County doesn't need the ranch to be profitable (yet). It would rather do something educational and inspirational, a goal facilitated by the expansive ranch house on the property, which makes it ideally suited for tours, workshops, and other outreach stuff. All in all, it is a very intriguing idea.

But I have one big question: who would do this work?

No member of the first four Waves of conservation could carbon ranch this property. The County doesn't have the skill set or the flexibility to try; environmentalists don't know anything about managing land this way; ecologists don't either; and neither do ranchers, even as part of a collaborative effort. Most ranchers have other objectives on their mind, such as weaning weights, production costs, markets, and the weather. Building topsoil intentionally for carbon storage isn't on their radar screen. Who then, would manage the Bajada ranch for climate change?

New agrarians would. In fact, I can think of a number of young farmers and ranchers-in-training who might jump at the challenge of rejuvenating a parcel of land for carbon sequestration and local food production. For one thing, it's their future – they have grown up under the shadow of climate change, which means they don't have to be convinced that it is a clear and present danger. Nor do they need to be convinced that ecological and economic values can co-exist on one piece of land. And they understand the value of working landscapes. Preservation didn't (and won't ever) get the job done. A new approach is needed, one that draws strength from previous efforts while adding fresh ideas.

This is the Fifth Wave of conservation in the West. It constructively confronts the two overriding crises of the modern era: climate change and resource depletion. The future is clear under Business-as-Usual greenhouse gas emissions projections: things are going to get warmer, drier, and much more chaotic in the Southwest, a region that many climatologists consider to be a sort of epicenter for climate change impacts in North America.

But Business-as-Usual applies to the first four Waves of conservation as well. Take the Bajada ranch, for instance. It was purchased by a public agency to pro-

tect its environmental values from the threat of subdivision. Under Business-as-Usual it would become a park for recreation and nature education. But that won't cut it anymore. These are fine purposes, of course, but they don't confront the twin challenges of climate change and resource depletion (oil, water, food). The trouble is that while many people *talk* about these challenges, few seem prepared (or willing) to *walk* their talk. That's one of the reasons why a Fifth Wave is stirring out at sea.

Let me add quickly that this wave will be different from the rest. That's because the nature of the crises are more urgent and potentially much more devastating. The first four Waves operated under a set of economic and social circumstances that, while they lasted, were largely unified by their link to Progress: the belief that things will always get better. Climate change undermines this belief substantially. Things may, in fact, get much worse if we don't alter our behavior quickly.

It is this rising anxiety to which the new agrarianism – the Fifth Wave – now turns.

People in Nature

5/1/11 – One could view the history of conservation in the American West as a slow but inexorable journey from placing people outside of nature to placing people within it. In the late 19th century, early conservation efforts were designed primarily to protect nature from the long arm of civilization, be it in the form of overgrazing livestock, development, logging, or some other exploitative activity. That's why the early responses included national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, wilderness areas, and other "fortresses" of conservation that aimed to keep people at a distance. Fast forward a century, however, and everything has turned inside out.

Today, conservation is focused on sustainability, resilience, mitigation and adaptation – all of which aim to find a place for people within natural systems. Of particular concern are adapting to climate change and mitigating resource depletion, which are fancy terms for finding enough food, fuel, fiber, and fresh water to ensure human well-being. These needs are on the rise globally and it is conservation's challenge to promote coexistence between the needs of nature and the needs of people. Barring the fortress' door is no longer an option, especially under climate change. On a warming world, everyone and everything is in the same boat.

But don't take my word for it. In the current issue of *Nature Conservancy*, TNC's chief scientist, Peter Kareiva, says bluntly that the ultimate goal of conservation is "better management of nature for human benefit." He means that conservation will only advance now if it is expressly linked to human well-being. Kareiva makes his case plain in the title of a new college textbook he co-authored titled *Conservation Science: Balancing the Needs of People and Nature*. Kareiva believes that by restoring and protecting essential ecosystem services for humans, such as clean water or soil fertility, we'll end up protecting a significant portion of the natural world's biodiversity, as well as create legions of grassroots advocates for nature. The key, of course, is engaging in activities that ensure the health of both land and people. Besides, he insists, in the 21st century, we don't have much choice.

"Look," he says, "we're in nature. The deal is how to work with it and how to help it work for us."

Most of the world's seven billion people don't care about biodiversity, he says. What people want is security, food and shelter, and an opportunity to better their lives. They will use natural resources in any way they want to accomplish these goals regardless of what conservationists think. This means the movement needs to focus less on protected areas and more on working lands.

"The key is to take each of the major needs of people," he says, "and find the future that meets these needs and protects nature. This should be the endgame for The Nature Conservancy and the conservation movement…until we make a vivid and compelling connection between what people want and the need for conservation, our work will never save the world."

This is the Fifth Wave of conservation in the West. It is a vision of local, sustainable food production from farms and ranches that are managed for land health, biodiversity *and* human well-being. It is a vision of new agrarians working to sequester carbon in soils, improve water quality and quantity, restore native plant and animal populations, fixing creeks, develop local energy sources, and replenish the land for people and nature *alike*. It is a vision of coexistence, resilience, and stewardship – a place for people in nature, not outside it.

For the first four waves of conservation in the West – federalism, environmentalism, scientism, and collaboration – this vision was an anathema. Nature and culture were kept apart, partly by necessity – until models of good stewardship could be developed – but mostly by choice. Nature had rights, many activists insisted, including the right to be kept free of human influence. But global warming has changed all that, as has a global population projected

to swell to nine billion by mid-century. Nature and people can no longer be kept apart. Instead, they must find a way to work together, as Kareiva says.

It won't be easy. Old attitudes will die hard. Meanwhile, the pressure to exploit nature for human survival will inevitably grow. Time is short. That's why the Fifth Wave is emerging, led by young agrarians. They are able to stand on the shoulders of their predecessors and thus see farther. And what they see is both energizing and frightening. Fortunately, the toolbox is full of new ideas and practices, many tried-and-tested in the field. What is needed now are young surfers to ride this Wave all the way to the shore.

I can see them coming.

THE END

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About the Author

A former Sierra Club activist, Courtney White dropped out of the 'conflict industry' in 1997 to cofound the Quivira Coalition, a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to building a radical center among ranchers, conservationists, public land managers, scientists and others around practices that improve economic and ecological resilience in western working landscapes. He served as Executive Director of Quivira for nearly fifteen years before becoming its Creative Director.

Born in Philadelphia, Courtney grew up in Phoenix, earned a B.A. from Reed College and attended UCLA's graduate school in filmmaking. He worked as an archaeologist for Arizona State University and the National Park Service. He moved to Santa Fe, NM, in 1992 – the same year that Wallace Stegner wrote a Foreword to his photography book titled *The Indelible West*.

He is the author of *Revolution on the Range* (Island Press), *Grass, Soil, Hope* (Chelsea Green), *The Age of Consequences* (Counterpoint Press) and *2% Solutions for the Planet* (Chelsea Green).

About the Artist

Matilda Essig grew up in the eastern woodland of Pennsylvania, in a world full of art and agriculture. She received her BA from Reed College, and was trained in classical painting and drawing at the Art Students League of New York. After 10 years working in Natural Science Illustration in the Sonoran Desert, she returned to fine art with the tools of the future, and began to use digital imaging technology to explore the subtle diversity of open space in the American West. Inspired both by the beauty of grasslands, and by her perceptual experiences in traditional illustration, she now portrays her subjects with a fidelity that transcends her own hand. Her work is in private and corporate collections, national parks, and wildlife refuges throughout the southwest. Her clientele has included Dr. Jane Goodall, National Geographic, the US Department of the Interior, and Oxford University Press, among others. She lives on five acres of grasslands that she restored in the Apache Highlands of southeast Arizona. She keeps a traditional painting studio too.

Endnotes

[1] The Quivira Coalition newsletter, July 2001, Vol. 4, no. 3.

[2] 'The West Against Itself', Harper's, January 1947.

[3] National Parks for the 21st Century: the Vail Agenda, National Park Service, 1992.

[4] 'Public Lands on the Chopping Block,' by Paul Hansen, Izaak Walton League, Chicago Tribune, 9/16/95.

[5] A case study of urban-rural tension was the process of reintroducing the Gray Wolf to the wild in 1995.

[6] See Bibliography.

[7] The History of the Sierra Club, 1892-1970, by Michael P. Cohen, Sierra Club Books, 1988.

[8] For an overview, see Archaeology of the Southwest, by Linda Cordell, Routledge Press.

[9] For additional background see 'Mutiny at the Sierra Club' by Leora Broydo, Mother Jones, 11/3/98.

[10] A super-heavy howitzer developed by Germany for use in World War I.

[11] Former NBA star and three-term liberal Senator.

[12] A national wildlife conservation organization founded in 1922.

[13] The word first appeared in a publication in 1988; "biological diversity" first appeared in 1968.

[14] The conflicts between environmentalists and community activists during this period of time are chronicled in *Culture Clash* by Kay Matthews. See Bibliography.

[15] The project was approved by Congress in 2000 and the reservoir began filling in 2009.

[16] The dam in Dinosaur was never built.

[17] See Bibliography.

[18] Not true, alas, as recent political developments in Washington, D.C. attest.

[19] In 2004, the Laneys tried to restock their allotment, resulting in a federal charge against Kit Laney.

[20] The County Movement originated in Catron County, NM, which passed a resolution in the early 1990s asserting county supremacy over federal lands – a claim later rejected by the courts.

[21] Corporate sponsorship of national parks resurfaced as an issue in 2016.

[22] January 3rd, 1995 to January 3rd, 1997.

[23] A major survey of environmental groups in 2014 determined that racial diversity remains stuck at 12-14%. See: http://www.diversegreen.org/the-challenge/

[24] 'Even the Bad Guys Wear White Hats,' Edward Abbey, Harper's, January 1986.

[25] See Bibliography.

[26] The Quivira Coalition newsletter, November 1997.

[27] See Bibliography.

[28] In 2015, the population of Phoenix was 1.5 million.

[29] According to the USDA's National Resources Inventory, 500,000 acres of farmland in New Mexico were converted to residential development between 1982 and 2012.

[30] "The purpose of the Quivira Coalition is to teach ranchers, environmentalists, public land managers, and other members of the public that ecologically healthy rangeland and economically robust ranches can be compatible. Our mission is to define the core issues of the grazing conflict and to articulate a new position based on common interests and common sense." – Quivira newsletter, no. 1, June 1997.

[31] See Bibliography.

[32] Herding was the subject of the Quivira Coalition newsletter, vol. 2, no. 3, March 1999.

[33] A total that has stayed relatively constant to the present day.

[34] Recreational impacts on wildlife was the subject of the Quivira Coalition newsletter, vol. 2, no. 4, June 1999.

[35] Wilcove et al, Bioscience, 1998, 48 (8): 607-615.

[36] Calculated by multiplying the number of livestock x number of days in a pasture divided by its acres.

[37] See Bibliography.

[38] See Quivira Coalition newsletter, vol. 2, no.1, September, 1998.

[39] High Country News, December 18th, 2000.

[40] Albuquerque Journal, December 25th, 2000.

[41] High Country News, January 15th, 2001.

[42] See Bibliography.

[43] High Country News, May 13th, 1996.

[44] Chronicle of Community, vol. 2, no.1, 1997.

[45] See Bibliography.

[46] St. Martin's Press, 2004.

[47] By Meredith Ogilby and Corinne Platt, Fulcrum Publishing, 2009.

[48] Wallace Stegner, The Sound of Mountain Water, Penguin, 1997.

[49] See Bibliography.

[50] See 'Farming on the Edge' a report by the American Farmland Trust: https://www.farmland.org/farming-on-the-edge

[51] COP 15

[52] http://www.diablotrust.org/

[53] http://www.gallup.com/poll/1615/environment.aspx

[54] https://ogallalacommons.org/

[55] WorldWatch Report #179, 2009.

[56] A blowout at a deep-water drilling site that spilled five million gallons of oil into the sea.

[57] See Bibliography.