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High Country News

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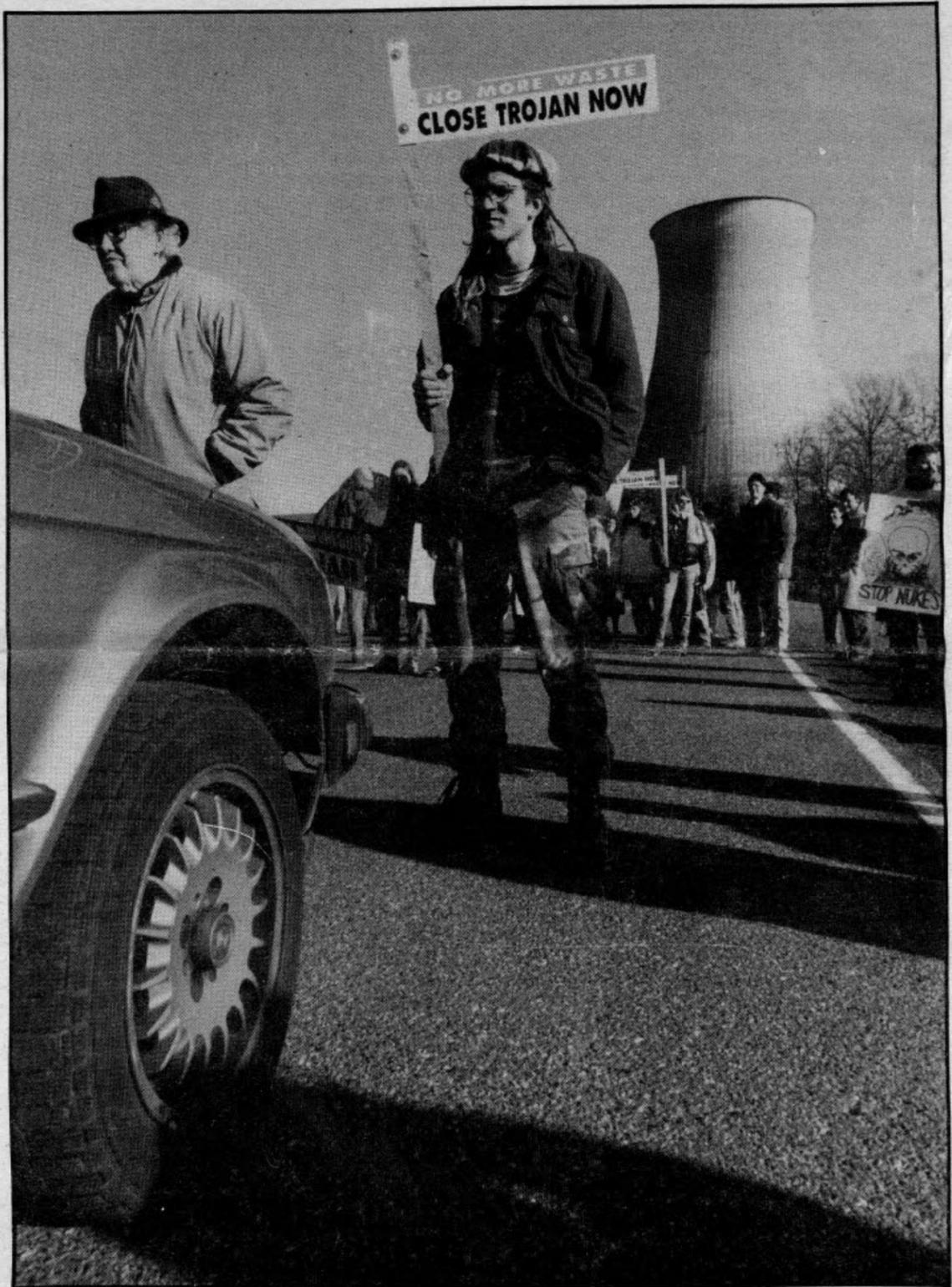


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Oregon's Trojan horse



Protesters got their wish when the Trojan nuclear power plant closed this year

Tim Jewett/The Oregonian

What did Portland General Electric know? And when did it know it? That's what critics of the Oregon utility are asking as early closure of its Trojan nuclear plant raises questions of safety and financial accountability. The closure may also echo around the United States, because scores of nuclear plants apparently face the same problems that forced PGE to unexpectedly close its half-billion-dollar plant.

Stories begin on page 10.



HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

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Dear friends,

New intern

New intern Orna Izakson spent enough summers on the New England coast for the brine of the Atlantic to get into her blood, but says she also fell in love with the big trees of California. Orna spent two years in Berkeley doing stints as an art director and sometimes-writer for a small magazine and a free-lance designer, learning about trees, timber and Native American issues on the side.

Tired of the city, she spent last summer hiking, camping, swimming and talking with locals in the Rockies on her way to graduate school. For the past nine months, Orna has pursued a master's degree at the University of Missouri School of Journalism and worked as an environmental reporter for the daily *Columbia Missourian*. Her thesis, if she writes one, will be about objectivity and advocacy in environmental reporting, looking at the role of the press in a democracy and perceptions of media bias.

Orna — whose name means pine tree in Hebrew — says she's tickled to be out of Missouri and back in the hills among the trees where she belongs. Since arriving in Paonia she's

barely managed to get her eyes off the mountains and onto the computer.

Odds and ends

Former intern Ashley Wills recently wrote to say how much he enjoyed his time at *HCN*. "You can't imagine what a different world it was for me. There were days when I thought I was living in a parallel universe."

He is now back in his universe, working as Counselor for Public Affairs for the U.S. Information Service in Brussels. In

response to a question from staffer Steve Hinchman, he wrote to tell us that 3,000 Bosnian refugees will be admitted to the United States. Those interested in the resettlement program, Ashley says, should contact the Bureau for Refugee Programs at the Department of State, 202/663-1077, or 202/663-1048.

Visitors this rainy spring have included Tom and Janet Stanwyck of Troutdale, Ore., and Ann Christiansen, map editor for the U.S. Geological Survey in Lakewood, Colorado.

Apologies to Jean Drescher, the artist whose name we misspelled May 17.

— the staff



Intern Orna Izakson stands above the flooding North Fork of the Gunnison near Paonia

Cindy Wehling

Colorado passes mining reforms

Colorado lawmakers passed a mining reform bill that some environmentalists say finally changes the state's attitude from "we'll clean it up later" to "let's make sure another Summitville never happens again."

The bill requires mining companies to pay higher bonds for reclamation, allows state regulators to update mine permits at any time, requires companies operating "high risk" mines to design and implement environmental protection plans, and sets up a fund to respond to mining emergencies. It shot through the legislature in less than two weeks.

Driving the bill was the mining disaster at the Summitville Consolidated Mining Co.'s cyanide heap-leach gold mine, high in the rugged San Juan Mountains. The company wiped out all life in a 17-mile stretch of the Alamosa River with spilled mine wastes and left a 170 million-gallon tailings pond leaking large amounts of cyanide (*HCN*, 1/25/93).

"This is the year the mining industry had to come to the table," says Roger Flynn, a staff attorney for the Denver-based Law and Water Fund who helped negotiate the bill. "Unfortunately, it took a tragedy to make it happen."

Flynn says the bill lays out a broad framework for reform, but the task of "putting some meat on the bones" is left to the state Mined Land Reclamation Board. The board will write new regulations later this year.

Colorado lawmakers also grappled with takings legislation. Both the House and the Senate considered bills that required the state attorney general to examine whether new regulations would affect the value or use of property or the operating costs or profits of a business. Under the bills, the attorney general would then provide a legal opinion to a state agency on whether an action would

be a taking and what kind of liability the state might have to pay.

Colorado attorney general Gale Norton, a protégé of former Interior Secretary James Watt, lobbied hard for the bills' passage, saying they would reduce burdensome regulations and help the state avoid expensive lawsuits. Environmentalists said the legislation gave industry a way to avoid public health and environmental regulations.

"The bills would put us in the bizarre position of saying we have to pay polluters not to pollute," says Jo Evans, who lobbied against the bills on behalf of a coalition of environmental groups.

As in most other Western states, the argument that prevailed was economic: Takings legislation adds an expensive layer of bureaucracy to state government, says Carmi McLean, a lobbyist for Clean Water Action.

"We told legislators that the best way to bankrupt a government is to pass a takings bill," says McLean, who helped organize a "best use" coalition to counter

wise-use lobbyists.

Environmentalists also found themselves in a battle to keep Amendment 8, an open space initiative passed by voters last November, out of the clutches of Amendment 1, which puts a cap on state spending. Senate Bill 74 originally said lottery funds which voters earmarked for open space and park acquisition were actually revenue subject to Amendment 1.

The issue was decided by the state supreme court. Just days before the legislative session ended May 12, the court ruled that lottery funds are exempt from Amendment 1.

The legislature left a number of defeated water bills in its wake. Lawmakers failed to pass — for the third year in a row — a water conservation bill allowing farmers to save and sell water. And Western Slope water interests narrowly defeated a bill that would have streamlined the legal process for the transfer of agricultural water rights to municipal use.

— Paul Larmer, *HCN* assistant editor

HOTLINE

Fish gotta spawn

Hoping to save a trout fishery, the Bureau of Reclamation is steadily increasing flows down an Idaho river it buried in mud last fall. When BuRec drew down the Island Park Reservoir last September, it flushed 50,000 to 100,000 tons of silt down the Henry's Fork from Box Canyon south to Harriman State Park. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game asked for last year's drawdown to poison "trash" fish and restock the reservoir with game fish. But environmentalists and fishermen

say the thousands of tons of mud released from the reservoir probably harmed the Henry's Fork blue ribbon trout fishery downstream. "We're talking about sediment in feet in some places," said Jan Brown, executive director of the Henry's Fork Foundation. Brown told the *Idaho Falls Post-Register* that the sediment might have covered winter hiding places for young trout and buried spawning grounds. Mark Gambin, a state fisheries manager, admitted that such a large amount of sediment was "unprecedented." But he says fast flows have already begun to flush sediment downstream.

WESTERN ROUNDUP

Farmers outgunned by the oil and gas industry

When people describe a recent political encounter as a learning experience, you suspect they emerged as the losers.

That's what happened to 1,000 farmers in northeastern Colorado. The prosperous growers — who raise vegetables, grains and alfalfa on some of the most productive irrigated land in the West — found themselves trounced in the Colorado Legislature. Although the farmers are a powerful force they were handily beaten by the oil and gas industry, which massaged a strong reform bill into a compromise bill so weak the farmers finally urged its defeat.

"We were outgunned by 50 lobbyists and an industry that spent \$1 million," says Dennis Hoshiko, an onion farmer in Weld County and one of the founders of the Front Range Land and Mineral Owners Association. Hoshiko says the farmers' bill was rewritten until it "stunk to high heaven."

Susan Cox-Wagoner, a Colorado director of the eight-state Rocky Mountain Oil and Gas Association, says industry sent at most five lobbyists, not 50.

The farmers' original bill would have compensated landowners for damages caused by oil and gas drilling and added two farmers to the state's Oil and Gas Commission, now dominated by industry.

Hoshiko says the commission suffers from a conflict of interest because its mission — promoting oil and gas and preventing waste of resources — conflicts with a third goal, that of protecting health and safety near oil and gas wells.

In Colorado, a landowner cannot say "keep out" to drilling rigs if a company owns subsurface mineral rights. Under the state constitution, the mineral owner's rights are paramount. The result, says Ivan Grein, a dairy farmer in Adams County northeast of Denver, is often environmental damage that a leasing fee of a few thousand dollars fails to cover.

Access roads criss-cross a field, he says. Five-acre drilling pits filled with mud and a sealer, bentonite, are left on the property for up to six months. Most farmers get only a seven-day notice that a driller is coming on the land.

The battle in the state Legislature was preceded by mediation. Grein, 61, was the Colorado Farm Bureau's representative during some 15 meetings with lobbyists for the oil and gas industry, Hoshiko's landowner group, and a mediator. Grein says industry got an earful about damage caused by drilling. And the farmers learned that drilling is booming in Colorado because of tax incentives and because a new market is being opened up by a new transcontinental natural gas pipeline under construction through Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico.

The activity is intense. The rich farmland, which is irrigated mainly by water that flows out of the Rockies to the west, is underlain by large amounts of oil and gas. Grein said Weld County, located east of Denver, has become the most active drilling area in the country. Regulatory changes have also increased the impact. The state now allows a well for every 40 acres — in years past the limit was one well every 320 acres.

The unknown: aquifer contamination

Farmers are most immediately affected by what happens to the surface of their land. But there may also be serious prob-



Oil and gas equipment on a farm east of Denver, Colorado

Dennis Hoshiko/Front Range Land and Mineral Owners Association

lems underground. Some contamination of the area's shallow, tributary aquifers has been caused by the farmers, through their use of fertilizer and chemicals. But the deep, non-tributary aquifers may have been damaged by oil and gas drilling.

In January 1993, David Smink, then second-in-command at the Oil and Gas Commission, told the commissioners that their regulatory practices had a serious hole in them — a hole that could pollute aquifers.

According to Smink, an unknown number of dry or no-longer-producing oil and gas wells had been improperly sealed. As a result, he said, deep aquifers could be contaminated by migrating oil and gas or by salt water flowing into pure water.

In theory, all dry and abandoned wells should be sealed by concrete. But Smink told the commissioners that commission employees had found concrete seals so weak in one well that they could be swept away by just "kicking the rig pump on."

The owner of that well, Gear Drilling, was later fined. But Smink told the commissioners he feared that hundreds of other improperly sealed wells exist.

"We don't know how big the problem is. Each of these wells is a threat to the environment because each is a threat to the water supply. We consider this to be a very serious matter."

According to Smink, a well must be sealed in concrete where it passes through a porous layer that could seep oil, gas, salt water or fresh water. Unless all such layers are sealed, he said, salt water, oil or gas seeping out of those layers will migrate up or down the well and contaminate other layers.

Sealing is cheap — about \$1,600 per well — but Smink said that some firms simply dump bags of dry cement down the wells, file an affidavit swearing that the permeable layers have been sealed, and walk away.

Such actions have been discovered, Smink said, when salt water or oil and gas flowed out of the well, or when a new owner decided to redrill a well, and discovered that it had no seals.

Smink, who calls the so-called "top plugging" of wells "the scandal of the decade," told the Oil and Gas Commission of the problem on Jan. 21.

On Feb. 10, Smink, 58, was fired and escorted from his office by two state patrol officers. The registered engineer has appealed his dismissal to the state personnel board. Oil and Gas Commission technical secretary Patricia Beaver would only say of Smink's firing that it was a personnel matter. She also said that methods of plugging dry wells depend on geological conditions and what staff engineers recommend.

Jim Kenney, senior engineer for the state Oil and Gas Commission, says Gear Drilling is the only operator who illegally closed a well, and that he believes 99 percent of the others comply with the rules. "We don't allow dry cement and never allowed poor engineering. I just can't believe it was condoned."

According to Kenney, "We have 15,000 producing wells and 40,000 to 50,000 dry holes. How many (improperly sealed wells) there could be is speculation — you can't operate on that."

Kenney says that aquifer contamination does not necessarily occur even if a well is improperly sealed, and that a leaking well might affect an area no greater than a mile. An Emergency Response Fund, which now contains \$200,000 from an industry tax, covers the cost of repairing wells, with each job costing about \$20,000, Kenney says. So far, he adds, 14 leaking wells have been replugged; 44 are ranked "high priority."

Why would a drilling company prefer to dump cement down a well rather than properly seal it with concrete? It's cheaper by some \$1,000 and a lot faster, says David Smink.

Smink, who says the commission charged him with "poor performance, deliberate disobedience and making fraudulent statements," looks forward to his appeals hearing. He says in his 30 years as an engineer he has never seen wells left in worse shape than in Colorado. He cites water taps that leak methane, water systems serving 50 families that are now undrinkable, and a lumber yard that burned up in 1985, when an improperly plugged well leaked enough volatile gases to ignite.

The drilling issue won't disappear. Next year, the Front Range farmers will be back, according to their attorney, John Evans. "In 1990, we never got a chance to introduce a bill," he recalls. "In 1993, we

had a bill but it was 'reformed' past recognition and so was never voted on." Evans says next year the group may go to court, get on the ballot with a constitutional initiative, and introduce yet another bill. This time they may have an ally from a neighboring city. An oil and gas firm has just announced that it will drill a well into open space owned by the city of Boulder.

For more information, contact Dennis Hoshiko, secretary of the Front Range Land and Mineral Owners Association, 303/353-8780; Jim Kenney, senior engineer with the Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, 303/894-2100; David Smink, petroleum engineer, 303/798-9973; Susan Cox-Wagoner, Rocky Mountain Oil and Gas Association, 303/860-0099.

— Betsy Marston, HCN editor

HOTLINE

Lawsuit cools Rogue River jets

For more than 30 years jet-boats have buzzed through the Rogue River in southern Oregon. Now a homeowner and an environmental group have filed suit to stop the noisy and intrusive boats, saying an environmental impact study is long overdue. The Oregon Natural Resources Council and John McLoughlin, a resident of Grants Pass, Ore., who owns property on the Rogue, hope to stop jet-boating on 27 miles of river in the Hellgate Recreation Area. The lawsuit, now in federal district court in Oregon, charges the Bureau of Land Management with violating the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act because the boats disrupt rafters, fishermen, wildlife and the people who want to see wildlife. But BLM staffer Jim Leffmann in Medford, Ore., says the 1968 law never was intended to disrupt existing businesses, including motorized boat tours that have operated on the river since 1959. Robert Hamlin, owner of Hellgate Jetboat Excursions and Rogue Jetboat Excursions, says no study has ever shown that jet-boating harms the river.

HOTLINE

Do grizzlies need more protection?

High in northern Idaho's Selkirk Mountains, up against the Canadian border, a small population of grizzly bears will soon awaken from winter hibernation. Down below, a legal battle has already begun between environmentalists and a federal agency. In February, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refused environmentalists' petitions to reclassify the estimated 22-36 bears in the Selkirks from threatened to endangered. Now the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, on behalf of several environmental groups, says it will sue the agency. The defense fund says it will also sue for the reclassification of Montana's diminutive Cabinet/Yaak grizzly population, estimated at 15 bears. The Fish and Wildlife Service says decreases in human-caused bear deaths and healthy reproduction rates among Selkirk bears show that current protection is adequate. But Doug Honnold, a lawyer with the defense fund, says the bears will lose ground to hunting and logging without the more restrictive status of endangered. "There's been a media campaign by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to tell a 'good news story' about the grizzlies," Honnold told the *Spokane Spokesman-Review*. "We need to convey to the public that we have populations in dire straits." Chris Servheen, who heads the federal recovery effort, cautions environmentalists against hindering recovery efforts. "The more you guys inflame the local public against the grizzly bear with your lawsuits and press releases," he said, "the longer it's going to take to get anything done."

Incineration plans burn up some Utahns

For decades, three Army outposts in the West held a tightly guarded, deadly arsenal. Now that the world agrees it is time to beat weapons into plowshares, a growing chorus of critics says the Army doesn't know how to do that without harming people the weapons were meant to protect.

The stockpiles include rockets, bombs, land mines, mortars and spray tanks loaded with the deadliest chemicals the military could devise. Almost half the weapons are locked in earth-covered concrete bunkers at Tooele Army Depot in the valley immediately southwest of Salt Lake City. Another 11.6 percent of the chemical arms are stored at Umatilla Army Depot in Oregon, and nearly 10 percent are stored at Pueblo Army Depot in Colorado. The rest are scattered at five smaller depots in the Midwest and East.

Chemical weapons such as GB and VX nerve gas can kill a human on contact. It is an arsenal no one wants, including the Army, which is taking steps to get rid of it.

But some organized groups want to halt current destruction plans and search for new solutions. Opponents living near Army depots holding chemical weapons met earlier this month and launched a campaign to convince Congress it should freeze Army funding to destroy the weapons.

The Army plans to burn the weapons at each location in specially designed incinerators. It built one prototype incinerator on Johnston Atoll in the South Pacific, and after trial burns began construction of its \$300 million twin at Tooele, pronounced two-illa. The Army then plans to build similar incinerators at Pueblo, Umatilla, and the bases farther east to eliminate the risk of an accidental release of chemicals during transport.

That makes some people nervous. Tooele County resident Chip Ward says,

"The way people will find out what the dangers of incineration are is they'll look at our health 10 or 15 years down the road and then we'll find out. We are, in a sense, guinea pigs."

Cindy King, who monitors the issue for the Utah Sierra Club, worries that an accidental release would quickly spread downwind, to the heaviest population centers of Utah. "Call me a hysterical housewife, but if there was an incident during the burning of chemical weapons it wouldn't just affect the small communities of Tooele County, but will also impact Utah and Salt Lake counties."

The Army thinks incineration is safest after trying to neutralize GB and mustard gases with chemical treatments during 1982 experiments at Rocky Mountain Arsenal near Denver. It also ran a small experimental incinerator at Tooele, and selected incineration as the preferred alternative. "The Army wasn't happy with the results at Rocky Mountain Arsenal," says Marilyn Tischbin of the Army's Chemical Materials Destruction Agency in Aberdeen, Md. She says in 1982, the Army chose incineration because it releases only CO₂, water and trace amounts of organics. "It will comply with the Clean Air Act and meet all state standards."

The Boston-based Military Toxics Project disagrees. "The Army tried one half-baked experiment 12 years ago and decided incineration was best," the project's Bob Schaeffer says. "There have been technological advances since then, substantial improvements have taken place ... but the Army is locked into incineration and doesn't want to hear alternatives."

Schaeffer says techniques like treatment with biological enzymes, superheated water, high temperature plasmas and chemicals deserve consideration, "as long as they're closed-loop processes which

vent nothing into the atmosphere." He and other incineration opponents want Congress to first order a crash program to research alternatives before allowing the Tooele incinerator to begin burning.

"We don't know enough about those techniques," Tischbin says. "We do know they've never been applied to chemical weapons." To find out more, the Army asked the National Academy of Sciences to evaluate alternatives. Its report is due this month.

As for the "closed-loop process," Tischbin doubts it exists. "You're still going to wind up with a waste product," she says. "We can't make it all disappear."

The Army wants to get moving. The longer the chemical munitions remain stored, the more dangerous they become. After 40 or more years in storage, casings are starting to deteriorate. Monitoring equipment in Tooele's bunkers indicates minute amounts of chemicals are beginning to leak, although at levels not considered dangerous.

While incineration opponents lobby Congress for delays, construction is on schedule at Tooele. The incinerator should be completed by July 31, but testing and training could delay burning weapons until 1995.

Two advocacy groups working to find alternatives to incineration are the Chemical Weapons Working Group at P.O. Box 467, Berca, KY 40403 (606/986-7565) and the Military Toxics Project in Boston at 617/489-0461. The Army's Chemical Materials Destruction Agency is in Aberdeen, Md., telephone 410/671-2583.

—Larry Warren

Larry Warren is environmental reporter for KUTV News in Salt Lake City.

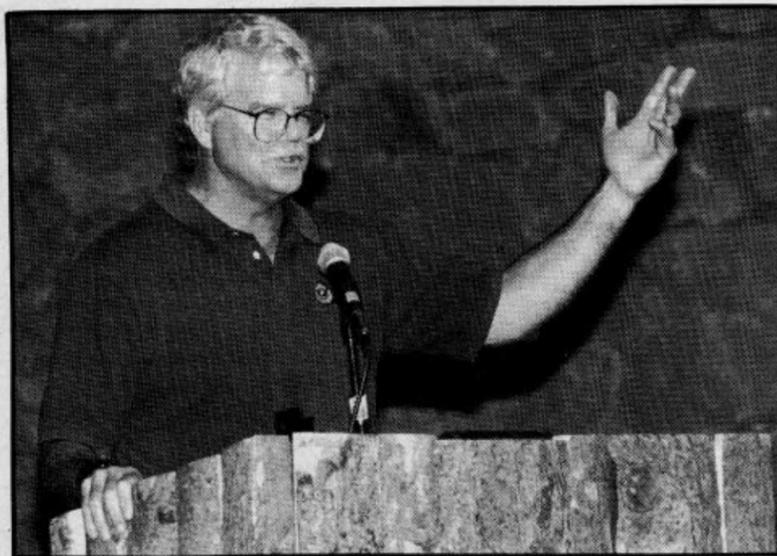
Group formulates a new vision for Yellowstone

WEST YELLOWSTONE, Mont. — The Greater Yellowstone Coalition began developing its goal of a unified approach to land management around Yellowstone Park during a back porch conversation in 1981.

A dozen years later, the coalition hopes to make the region a model for a policy based on ecosystems instead of bureaucratic boundaries. The 300 pages of detailed recommendations — expected mid-summer — include a push for Congress to designate the Yellowstone region as a "National Sustainable Ecosystem." That would mean logging, mining and grazing take a back seat to sustaining the ecosystem in any federal management decisions.

The plan, titled *Blueprint for the Future*, calls for protecting all remaining roadless areas in the ecosystem's 20 million acres. It recommends 3.6 million additional acres of wilderness on national forest and Bureau of Land Management lands as well as over 2 million acres of new wilderness within Grand Teton and Yellowstone parks.

The *Blueprint* also pays attention to maintaining the viability of communities. It calls for everything from land-use planning to changes in tax law to keep agricultural lands from being subdivided. "We have to recognize that people occupy most of the ecosystems on earth and they're not about to disappear," said



Rep. George Miller at the Greater Yellowstone Coalition annual meeting

Blueprint coordinator Dennis Glick.

The broad approach drew support at the group's annual convention in May from a powerful congressional ally, Rep. George Miller, the Democratic chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee.

Ecosystem management "is coming no matter what. We're not going back to old ways of doing business," Miller told a crowd of 500 at the coalition's 10th annual conference. "We've just got to drag the last few (opponents) across the

finish line."

The coalition spearheaded a similar attempt in the mid-80s that urged unified management of public lands around Yellowstone. That effort ended with the Park Service "Vision" document, which was scuttled by the Bush administration and a coalition of Western senators (HCN, 1/25/93).

But spokesmen for the group said they hope to take advantage of a new mood in Washington that increases

chances for success this time around. Coalition program director Louisa Willcox said the Clinton administration's recent decision to sign the international biodiversity treaty, which requires a national policy to preserve plant and animal species, is a positive sign.

A Yellowstone ecosystem plan could also get a boost from the Pacific Northwest's spotted owl, which has been almost wiped out by heavy logging. That crisis, according to Miller, was precipitated by a federal policy that intervenes too late in environmental conflicts.

"You can no longer just draw lines on a map," Miller told the conference. "We're going to have to start asking questions that have never been asked before in land policy. ... What's going on upstream and what's going on downstream? If we don't start asking those questions, we're going to find ourselves in crisis just as the Pacific Northwest or Southern California find themselves in crisis today."

For more information about the Greater Yellowstone Coalition's *Blueprint for the Future*, write the coalition at 13 S. Willson, Box 1874, Bozeman, MT 59771 (406/586-1593). The publication is free.

—Michael Riley

The author reports for the *Casper Star-Tribune* from Sheridan, Wyoming.

Idaho ranchers finally get their man

After years of controversy, public lands ranchers on the Sawtooth National Forest in southern Idaho are getting their wish: The Forest Service plans to transfer District Ranger Don Oman.

Oman gained national recognition several years ago, when he stood up to local ranchers — in spite of threats against his life — and insisted they abide by grazing regulations.

But Forest Supervisor Jack Bills said Oman has become the issue in rangeland disagreements. By transferring Oman, he will remove an obstacle to getting decisions carried out, he said.

"There's some things I want to put behind us if we can," Bills said.

Oman was surprised by the decision, he said. Last fall Bills had assured Oman that he could stay on the district for at least another 18 months to complete projects he has started.

Environmentalists accuse the Forest Service of giving in to ranchers.

"When push comes to shove, the Forest Service caves in and lets private ranchers treat public lands like their personal feedlots," said Craig Gehrke, the Wilderness Society's Idaho representative.

Oman has been the center of controversy nearly since the day he started on the Twin Falls Ranger District six and one-half years ago. Ranchers have accused him of being heavy handed and biased against livestock grazing.

But Oman said he has simply tried to protect the land and hold ranchers to promises made when they signed their grazing permits.

For his efforts to protect public lands resources from poor grazing practices,

Oman was awarded the Wilderness Society's Olaus and Margaret Murie Award in 1991. The annual award is given to federal employees who show outstanding dedication to natural resource protection.

This is the second serious attempt to oust Oman. In 1989, the Forest Service secretly promised complaining ranchers that Oman would be transferred within one year (*HCN*, 5/7/90). Oman filed a whistle-blower complaint when he learned of the deal and has kept his job as district ranger.

In August 1990, the controversy went national when *The New York Times* quoted Oakley rancher Winslow Whiteley as threatening Oman's life. The White House called Oman to offer protection.

Ranchers, undeterred by the national attention, continued to insist on Oman's transfer. As recently as March of this year, Oakley rancher Don Pickett wrote to

Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, to ask for help.

"We trust that if you cannot assist us in having Ranger Oman removed, perhaps something can be done to at least bring this tyrant against grazing on public lands under control," Pickett wrote.

Sen. Craig replied April 14 that he hoped "this matter can be resolved soon." He repeated a promise to discuss the issue with Regional Forester Gray Reynolds.

Bills, however, insisted he made the decision to transfer Oman.

"The decision was made right here, essentially between Don and I," Bills said.

Oman denied it was a mutual decision. He agreed to move only reluctantly, and only if it meant a move to a "decent job in a decent location." He would like eventually to return to his native Montana, he said. Oman will remain as district ranger in the Twin Falls District until a location is found for him.

Brian Hunt, spokesman for Association of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics, said of the move:

"If the Forest Service won't protect its good employees, then there is no reason to believe they will protect our national resources," Hunt said.

Jim Prunty, a retired Forest Service fire management officer and supporter of Oman, quoted former AFSEEE director Jeff DeBoni: "It's unfair to blame Oman for not learning to get along with ranchers, when getting along with ranchers means bowing to their whims and looking the other way when forest resources are damaged."

— N.S. Nokkentved

N.S. Nokkentved reports for the *Twin Falls Times-News* in Idaho.



More Clinton appointees are confirmed

Jim Baca was confirmed May 18 as director of the Bureau of Land Management. The former New Mexico lands commissioner had earlier won unanimous approval from the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, but only after being roughed up a bit by Western Republicans.

Sen. Malcolm Wallop, R-Wyo., questioned whether Baca would be unbiased in light of statements he made about the leaders of the wise-use movement. Baca said he regretted that he once compared those leaders to former Ku Klux Klansman David Duke, but assured senators he would be fair-minded to all public-land constituents, reports the *Casper Star-Tribune*.

In addition to Baca, the Senate approved a number of key Interior Department assistant secretaries, including Bob Armstrong, who will oversee Baca, and Elizabeth Rieke, the former director of the Arizona Department of Water Resources, who will guide the Bureau of Reclamation. Former president of the Wilderness Society George Framp-ton, nominated by Clinton to manage the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is still awaiting committee confirmation.

The Senate also confirmed Dan Beard as commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation. Beard is the former staff director of the House Natural Resources Committee.

The Clinton administration picked historian and museum director Roger Kennedy to head the National Park Service. Kennedy, director of the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of American History, was once an NBC White House correspondent and an Eisenhower administration official, reports AP. A spokesperson for

The National Parks and Conservation Association, a non-profit Park Service watchdog group, said Kennedy would bring needed emphasis to the historical and cultural assets of the Park Service, but is "somewhat of an unknown" with regard to park management.

Kennedy does not need Senate confirmation, but Clinton's choice to head the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mollie Beattie, does. Beattie, a veteran natural resource official from Vermont, would be the first woman to direct the Fish and

Wildlife Service.

President Clinton also announced the nomination of Ada Deer as assistant secretary of Interior for Indian Affairs. Deer, a member of the Menominee Nation of Wisconsin, gained prominence as an Indian activist and tribal leader when she led the struggle to restore federal recognition to her tribe, reports *Indian Country Today*. Last fall, she made an unsuccessful bid for a seat in the House of Representatives.

— Paul Larmer

Glacially slow sewage study angers tourists

"Reopen the chalets now," some 150 people told Glacier National Park managers in Kalispell, Mont., May 24.

The occasion was the first of two scoping sessions that sought solutions to toilets and other problems that forced the closure of two popular backcountry chalets for the 1993 summer season.

"They are a singular experience. They should be open now," said Doug Hetrick of Kalispell. The overwhelmingly pro-chalet crowd responded with applause and cheers.

The reopening of Granite Park and Sperry chalets could be two to three years away — longer if an environmental impact statement is needed. Park officials estimate upgrading the chalets could cost \$2.5 million. A Helena group, Save the Chalets, fears the "temporary" closure could become permanent, and vacant chalets easy targets for vandalism. But Pete Peterson, Glacier assistant superintendent, insisted the

National Park Service was committed to reopening the chalets once "the problems are fixed."

The 80-year-old national historic landmarks, complete with flush toilets and daily fresh linen, accommodated nearly 4,400 visitors in 1992. Yet the remote, high-altitude chalets frequently violated health and clean water regulations. For years, park maintenance workers simply opened a valve each fall, dumping hundreds of gallons of human sewage over nearby cliffs. The Sierra Club threatened a lawsuit, claiming the waste attracts grizzly bears.

Then last October, the Montana Water Quality Bureau cited the facilities for improper gray water disposal and surface discharge of septic effluent, giving the park 60 days to develop a plan to correct the problems.

Park officials said that wasn't enough time given the winter inaccessibility of the chalets and, in December

HOTLINE

Drought costs firms big bucks

Befouling Lake Powell can be costly. Two concessionaires recently paid a total of \$1.3 million in fines for using the lake as a dump. ARA Leisure Services, a multinational company, and Marina Operations Corp., a subsidiary of Del Webb Corp., agreed to pay the largest criminal environmental penalty ever charged in Arizona, reports AP. Between 1981 and 1990, the two companies dumped more than 1,000 batteries and 100 truckloads of debris at five marinas around the lake, said Arizona Attorney General Grant Woods. During that nine-year period, employees of the companies routinely threw boat and motor parts into the lake as they readied houseboats for customers, according to Woods. Until drought caused a drop in the lake level in the late 1980s, the underwater garbage dump of batteries, propellers, refrigerators and other debris remained undetected. But even after supervisors at Marina Corp. learned of the dumping, they took few steps to stop it, Woods said. In addition to the \$1.5 million ARA Leisure Services has already spent to clean up the underwater scrapheap, the company paid a \$225,000 fine and Marina Operations paid \$1 million after pleading no contest to a criminal damage charge. The companies also split the \$100,000 cost of investigating the case.

BARBS

All's fair in love and some religions in Colorado Springs. At the Cornerstone Baptist Church carnival in Colorado Springs, Colo., children were lured with candy, then baptized without parental consent, AP reports.

1992, announced the chalets' temporary closure. "We probably operated the chalets longer than we should have," Peterson said.

No one in the audience spoke in favor of permanent closure or questioned the necessity for full service hotels in the backcountry.

Park administrators expect to have a draft environmental assessment complete by October. The public will then have 45 days to comment before the agency makes its final recommendation on the chalets' fate.

Comments can be addressed to the Superintendent, Glacier National Park, Box 128, West Glacier, MT 59936 (406/888-5441). Save the Chalets can be reached at 704 Birch, Helena, MT 59601 (406/449-2103).

— Jean Emery

Jean Emery reports from Missoula, Montana.

Supervisors ask: Was it coincidence or treachery?

Two Montana national forest chiefs say the U.S. Forest Service ended their careers based on allegations from a cryptic government investigation that targeted them — in one instance for following orders.

Custer National Forest Supervisor Curt Bates and Helena National Forest Supervisor Ernie Nunn, who are both leaving the Forest Service to avoid forced transfers, asked whether a hidden motive drove the two-year probe, which Bates called petty and vindictive.

And a Forest Service employees' group said the investigation, denounced last year by a Colorado judge, was a political device used to maintain control by those who favor intense logging.

Both Bates and Nunn noted they were among the 13 forest supervisors in Montana and Idaho who signed a 1989 letter to Forest Service Chief F. Dale Robertson complaining that the Service had strayed from its land stewardship mission, and become an organization out of control.

With their departure, only four of those 13 supervisors remain in their jobs, the two said. The rest have retired, transferred or been reassigned to new posts.

"Most of people on that list have been affected one way or another since then," said Bates, who has run the Billings, Mont.-based Custer Forest for five years. "And now when Ernie and myself have done whatever we do, then that's two more off the list."

Regional Forester David Jolly in Missoula, Mont., said there was no effort to dismiss those who signed the letter, which he admitted "created a lot of consternation within the outfit." Any personnel moves were routine, he said.

Bates and Nunn both have taken early retirement after being ordered to new jobs in Washington, D.C., following an investigation of the Forest Service's pack-horse program.

One allegation was that, at the direction of then-regional chief John Mumma, the two solicited private donations to send a Forest Service mule train to the 1991 Rose Parade in California.

Federal prosecutors considered cases against Bates, Nunn and Mumma, but did not find enough evidence to charge them, said Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert Brooks.

Bates and Nunn are both 30-year Forest Service veterans known as progressive leaders in their agency. Bates said they were told by their superiors "that we should not, would not, go to the public with this."

Jolly said no such order was given. However, he declined to discuss the allegations, except to say the charges involved the men's conduct, not performance. Jolly said the transfer order came from Robertson's office.

A Forest Service employees' group said Bates and Nunn are victims of "political cleansing" by Forest Service brass before the Clinton administration can get on its feet.

There is a Clinton moratorium on high-level personnel shifts. But the agency has used an exception that permits disciplinary action to target 23 top personnel for transfers, said Brian Hunt of the Association of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics.

"This is a midnight massacre to move good people out and replace them with supervisors who are more aligned with an old rather than a new outlook on forest management," he said.

Nunn said other forest supervisors face hushed reassignments, indicating a disturbing trend, but Forest Service spokesman Chris Holmes said internal transfers are common: "We try to take

care of our own problems as quietly as possible, for the sake of the agency and the person involved."

In a May 3 letter, Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., asked new Assistant Agriculture Secretary James Lyons to revisit the transfers of Bates and Nunn.

"Both enjoy broad-based community

**The investigation
'seemed unrelenting,
it seemed vindictive
at times, it seemed
trivial.'**

— Curt Bates
Former supervisor,
Custer National Forest

support and engender professional respect," Baucus wrote. "Many Montanans were surprised, and more than a little suspicious, when the Forest Service announced that these two individuals were being transferred for disciplinary reasons."

The departure of Bates and Nunn, both hired by former Regional Forester John Mumma, comes almost two years after Mumma was reassigned to Washington, D.C., when the Northern Region failed to meet logging quotas. Mumma retired instead and denounced political pressures that led the agency to cut more timber than forests could tolerate (*HCN*, 10/7/91).

Mumma told Congress that an investigator probing the agency's horse program told him he was sending weekly reports to Sen. Conrad Burns, R-Mont., and Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho. Neither senator admits to initiating the probe.

The two-year investigation, which touched on most national forests that keep horses for backcountry work, Bates said, "seemed unrelenting, it seemed vindictive at times, it seemed trivial."

The decorated forester said, "I'm con-

vinced in my mind it's linked to something else ... We may just be the tip of the iceberg."

The 1989 letter to Robertson, named the "Sunbird Letter" after the Arizona resort where foresters gave it to him, "did not get a favorable response from the chief at all," said Bates. The letter said the Forest Service must better balance logging demands with wildlife and recreation needs. That still hasn't happened, said Bates.

Nunn said that while he hopes the action against them is not retribution for the letter, "it's hard to believe and understand" otherwise.

The departures of nearly three-fourths of those Northern Region supervisors who signed the missive appeared above-board "but awfully coincidental," Bates said. "I don't know what could be made of that."

In Bates' case, he learned in November 1992 that he faced a 30-day suspension and forced reassignment to a range management job in Washington due to two conduct allegations.

One focused on a 1990 letter he signed seeking donations to pay the way for a Forest Service pack string to the 1991 Rose Bowl parade. Mumma had instructed all forests in the region to solicit that support, and the regional office in Missoula provided a model letter for forests to copy onto their letterhead. Nunn faced the same charges.

Other forests followed Mumma's directive; only Bates and Nunn were charged.

The second charge against Bates centered on his private sale of horses to the National Park Service.

Since he knew Bates owned Missouri foxtrotter horses, Yellowstone Chief Ranger Dan Sholly in 1989 had his staff ask Bates for help locating affordable steeds of that breed.

In turn, Bates contacted Paul Senteny, a retired Forest Service employee and Colorado horse breeder. Senteny obtained eight horses and sent them to Bates, who sold them to the park for a small profit that did not even cover his costs, Bates said.

"We initiated the whole deal," said

Sholly, who was questioned but not accused in the probe. "Curt was always a good, cooperative friend of the park. He's as honest as the day is long."

Senteny, who retired from the Gunnison National Forest in western Colorado, was the only one charged in the horse probe. He received a year of unsupervised probation for conflict of interest in an unrelated horse sale. U.S. District Judge Lewis Babcock, who sentenced Senteny, said the horse probe "smacks of personal vendetta." The judge apologized to Senteny for the ordeal, calling it "overkill in the extreme."

Jolly said government rules prohibit any federal employee from engaging in private business without the approval of superiors.

Bates said neither he nor park staff felt there was any conflict "because it was not my agency, it was people that I didn't have anything to do with in any capacity." He compared the one-time horse sale to selling a car.

When Bates appealed his punishment to Washington, D.C., officials dropped the 30-day suspension, but insisted on the transfer.

So many rules govern federal service that civil servants probably break rules whenever they act independently, Bates said. Someone intent on proving any employee's wrongdoing could probably find a way.

"I think that's what was done in this case. Why? That's something I don't have an answer to in my own mind yet. And I doubt I ever will."

Nunn retired June 11. June 1 was the last day for Bates. He had joined the Forest Service as a firefighter out of college 30 years ago. His superior performance ratings continued through this year.

Although he said he could beat the allegations, Bates said, he had already run up a big legal tab. By retiring, "I'm out of this and I don't have to deal with it anymore."

"It is something that I'm not pleased ever happened and I don't think it ever should have. But I guess I'm not going to let it destroy the rest of my life. I'll go forward anyway."

— Michael Milstein

Michael Milstein reports for the *Billings Gazette* in Montana.

Washington doesn't get it, officials say

The Billings, Mont.-based Custer National Forest has been under intense pressure from Washington, D.C., in recent years to resume oil and gas leasing, said retiring forest supervisor Curt Bates.

The Custer supports a major part of the oil and gas leasing program in the U.S. Forest Service's Northern Region, which covers Montana, Idaho and the Dakotas.

After the Forest Service was required by the courts to do an environmental review of oil and gas leasing plans before permitting new drilling, the Custer came under pressure to complete environmental impact statements quickly.

"Oil and gas is a top priority in the region and has become such for us because we carry the brunt of that program," said Bates. Instructions came from the office of Forest Service Chief F. Dale Robertson to renew oil and gas offerings as soon as possible.

Custer oil and gas leasing has drawn intense interest both from environmentalists and the oil industry because the Custer and the national grasslands it manages in North Dakota and South Dakota contain more oil and gas reserves than any other unit in the forest system.

"It is a big ticket item," Bates said.

"The emphasis (on mineral leasing) has been high in the Forest Service, just like interest in producing a certain amount of timber volume has been high," he said. The forest struggled to meet the time demands from Washington, D.C., and did so, Bates said, despite a limited staff.

Bates first issued an oil and gas decision for the grasslands in the Dakotas. Another, for its Beartooth District, is due out soon.

In a draft decision issued earlier this year, Bates placed 30 percent of the Beartooth area off-limits to oil and gas leasing. It was a "balanced approach," he said.

Sierra Club Representative Kirk Koepsel said while Bates' decisions did not always please environmentalists, the supervisor was open to new opinions and compromises.

"It looks like the Forest Service is just trying to get rid of any dissent or any open-minded people in the agency," Koepsel said.

No bosses ever told him to expand mineral development, Bates said, "even though there's a lot of emphasis placed on producing oil and gas leases just like

there is on producing timber."

Helena National Forest Supervisor Ernie Nunn, who is also retiring in the face of a forced transfer, said Forest Service brass must remember that logging is a management tool, not an objective.

"Sometimes we let other wants and needs get ahead of good, sound forest practices," said Nunn, who, in 1991, was asked to leave the Helena Forest. Nunn said he thought that directive came because the forest fell short of its logging quotas.

The 1991 directive was withdrawn as a result of a public outcry in support of Nunn.

Bates said that despite the investigation that prompted his resignation, he felt good about his 30 years in the Forest Service. But he said the Washington office, which is buffeted by political pressure, cannot always tell what's best for the forests.

"There's a gap between us on the ground and the Washington office as to what's going on and what's right and wrong," Bates said. "There doesn't seem to be enough recognition given to the fact that we can only do so much out here, and that sometimes falls short of the expectations at the Washington office level."

— M.M.

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HOTLINE

County says Hell, No

Wallowa County, Ore., voters solidly defeated a ballot measure asking if they favor creation of a Hells Canyon National Park. But the leader of the environmental group pushing for a park called the 3,044-178 defeat a "victory for accuracy." Ric Bailey, executive director of the Hells Canyon Preservation Council, said the wording of the write-in measure was so riddled with inaccuracies that he took out an advertisement urging voters to reject it. The county based its measure on the Preservation Council's proposal but never consulted the group about writing it, says Bailey. "Now the county has a false representation of how people feel." Wallowa County Judge Arleigh Isley says the county will present the results to Congress and state legislatures to deter a national park designation. A park would unite federal lands straddling Washington, Oregon and Idaho. Bailey says county officials "want to live in a fantasy world where nothing changes." Says Bailey, "If local people decided on the creation of national parks, this country would have no national parks."

State can cut its trees

A federal court in San Francisco, Calif., overturned a federal law designed to keep Northwestern logging mills open by prohibiting timber exports from state-owned lands. The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals decided May 4 the law is unconstitutional because it violates states' rights. Washington, the only Western state without a ban on its timber exports, contested the law, charging it doesn't help local timber mills and would lose the state about \$500 million in timber sales through the 1990s. Export prices are \$500 to \$800 higher per 1,000 board-feet than domestic prices. According to Washington Lands Commissioner Jennifer Belcher, the law created a disincentive to harvest available state timber. "When you try to create a subsidy for a group of people you create as many problems as not," she said. The decision came as environmentalists push for a total log-export ban that includes private forests.

BARBS

The real West, where senators ride whatever will bring them a few votes.

Sen. Ben Campbell, D-Colo., is one of the newest members of the American Motorcycle Association, reports The Wilderness Society's newsletter, *New Voices*. The bikers talked the senator into proposing amendments to the California Desert Protection Act, which environmentalists say weaken the bill.

Would that everyone would. At the Mountainfilm '93 festival in Telluride, Colo., organizers were trying to end a question-and-answer session when David Brower, the 80-year-old former Sierra Club executive director and the event's guest of honor, raised his hand. Festival director Rick Silverman allowed his question, saying: "We always defer to old-growth."

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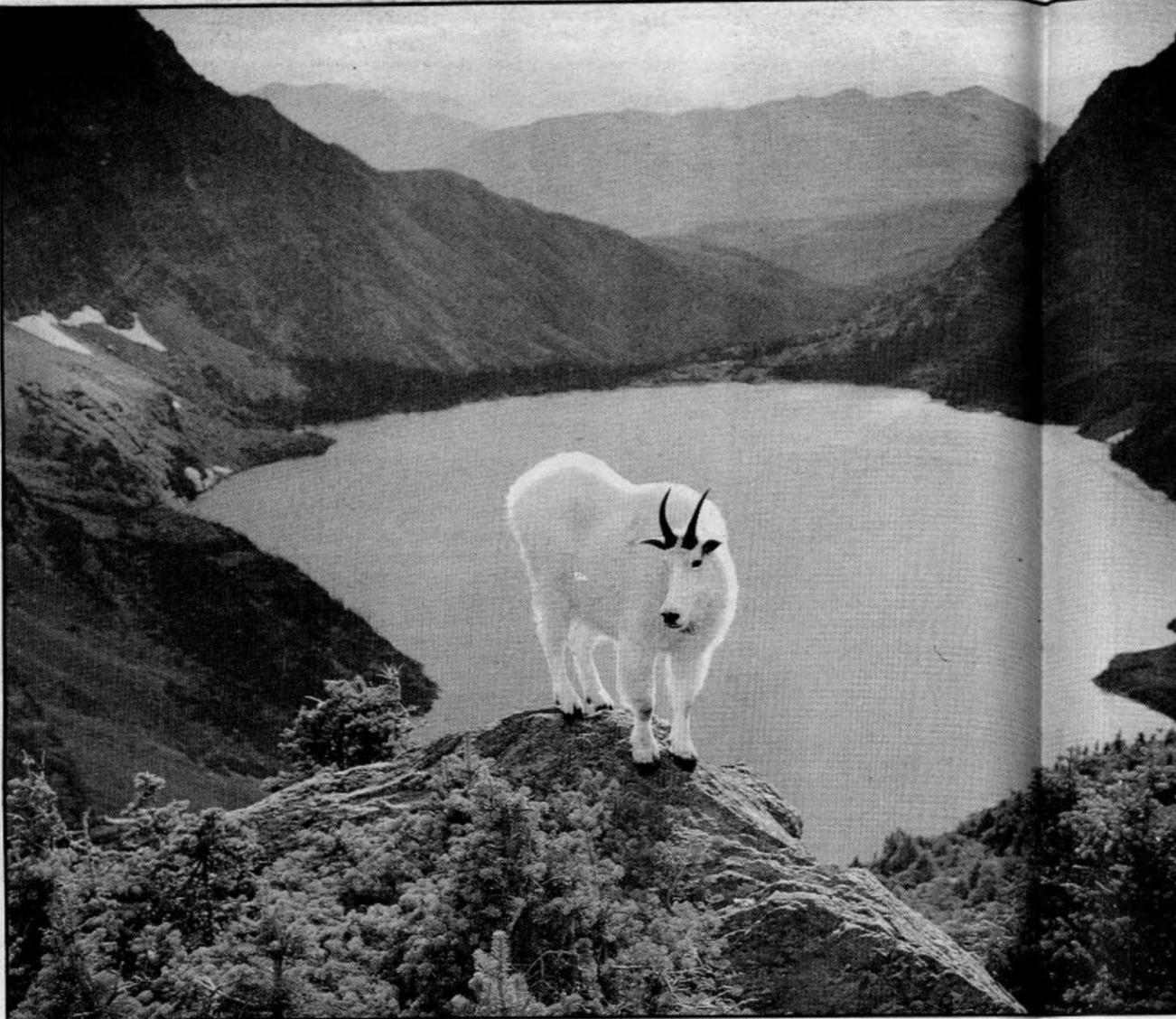
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Mountain goat in Glacier National Park

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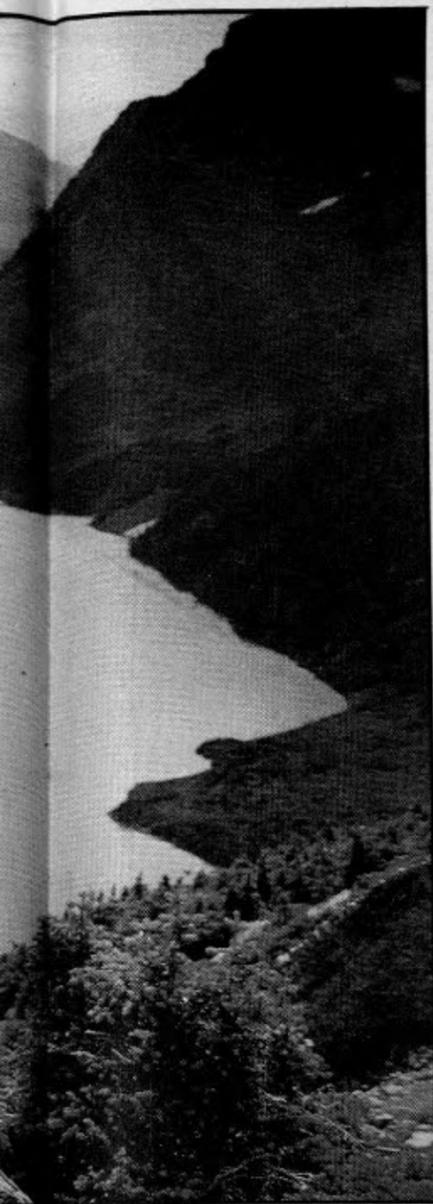
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Mountain goat nanny and kid

Stewart Cassidy

Fatally flawed nuclear power plant is shut

by Jim Stiak

Like the release of hostages minutes after Ronald Reagan's inauguration or a tax cut in an election year, the timing was suspicious. Six days after Portland General Electric (PGE) defeated two ballot measures that would have closed its Trojan nuclear power plant, it closed the plant forever.

PGE, Oregon's largest utility, had spent millions to defeat the measures, even promising to close the plant early, in 1996. But last Nov. 9 those plans changed. A cracked steam tube released radioactive gas into the plant, and Trojan was temporarily closed for repairs. Two months later the temporary shutdown was made permanent.

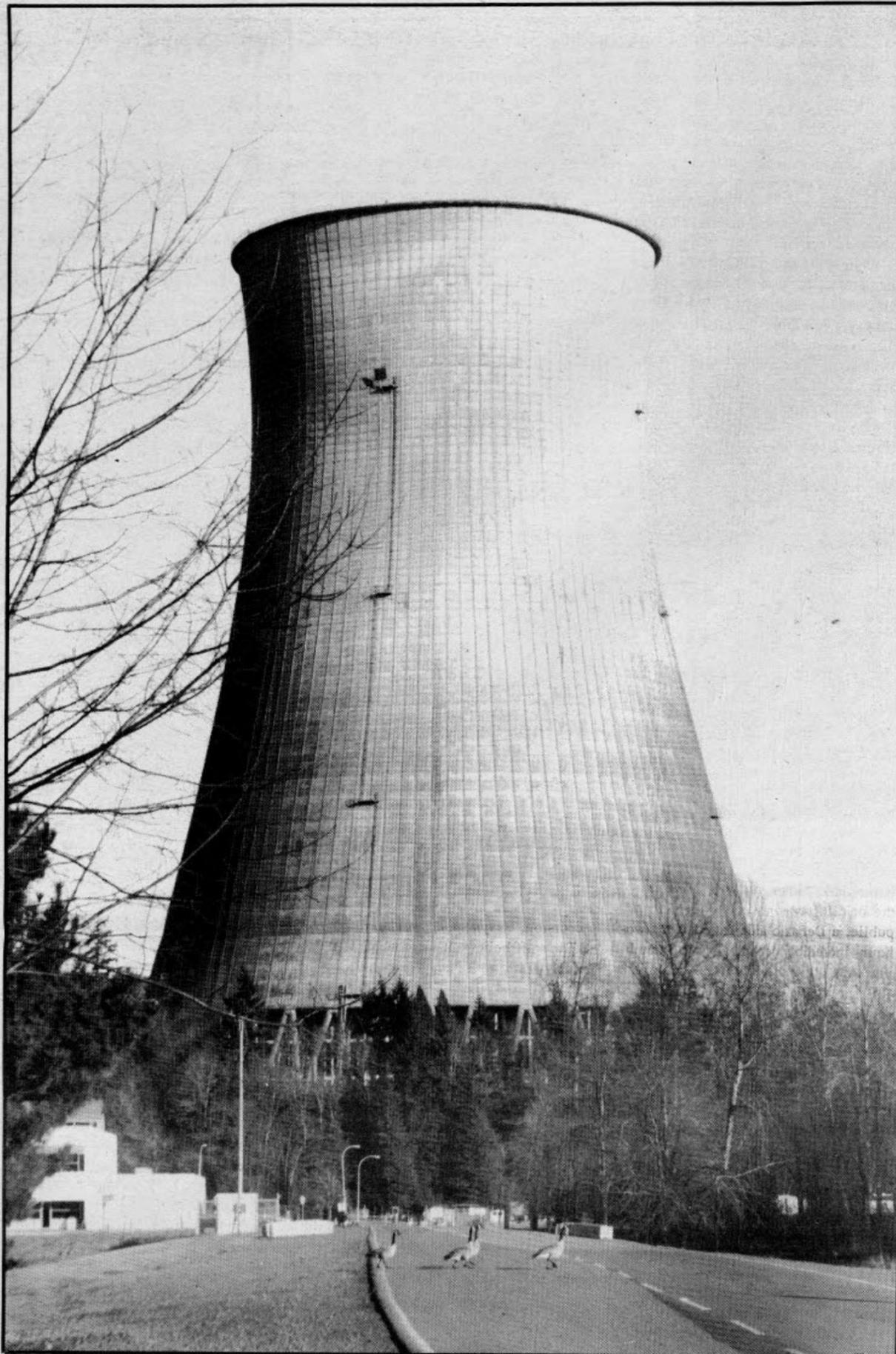
New information had arisen, PGE explained. Trojan's steam tubes were discovered to be more corroded than previously thought. Inexpensive replacement power had become available from California. It would be cheaper to close Trojan immediately, PGE decided.

Trojan's nuclear fuel rods now sit submerged in a pool of water a Geiger counter's toss from the Columbia River. Most of the plant's 1,300 employees have been let go to search for new livelihoods in the shrinking job markets of the rural Northwest. And PGE is squaring off against anti-nuclear activists in what will surely be a lengthy legal battle to determine who gets to pay for Trojan's early demise.

This encounter is being watched by a nuclear power industry that faces many such bouts in the future. For the same corroding metal that killed Trojan is also used in almost two-thirds of the nation's commercial nuclear reactors. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission recently loosened its regulations to keep these reactors open, but there are some who hear, in Trojan's silence, a dirge for nuclear power.

When it was built on an ancient Indian burial ground overlooking the Columbia River in the early 1970s, Trojan was part of the euphoria of atomic power that had seized the nation. Mindful of the fabled promise of "electricity too cheap to meter," regulatory agencies swiftly approved construction of Oregon's first — and, as it turned out, only — nuclear power plant. Bechtel Corporation erected the massive concrete tower that greets motorists driving I-5 between Portland and Seattle. Westinghouse installed the reactor.

In May 1976, Trojan began producing electricity. But problems were close behind. Two years later, PGE announced that Trojan did not meet federal earthquake-protection standards. For nine months in 1978, the plant sat idle while changes were made. Over the next 14 years, defects and deterioration in Trojan's various components kept the plant closed almost as much as it was open.



Geese cross the street near Trojan

Doug Bechtel/The Oregonian

Political winds also shook the plant. Originally, the Eugene Water and Electric Board, the utility serving Oregon's second largest city, signed on as one-third owner of Trojan. But after Eugene's citizens expressed disapproval, the utility traded away its share to the Bonneville Power Administration.

In 1980, after the Three Mile Island accident, Oregon's voters passed an initiative banning new nukes in the state. In 1986, Lloyd Marbet, a long-haired warrior who had dedicated his life to the anti-nuclear cause after reading Richard Curtis' *The Perils of the Peaceful Atom* in 1972, placed a Trojan shutdown initiative on the state ballot.

Although PGE defeated the initiative, Marbet came back four years later with a similar measure. PGE also beat that move, but anti-nuke forces were growing. By 1992, they had split into two camps as Jerry and Marilyn Wilson,

millionaire owners of the Soloflex fitness-machine company, decided to launch an effort more mainstream than that of the bearded, blue-jeaned Marbet. Although PGE beat both ballot measures, the plant's closing raised new questions.

PGE says that it had slowly learned, along with everyone else, that Trojan's problems were serious. Last Nov. 23, the Union of Concerned Scientists, a watchdog group in Washington, D.C., began releasing internal documents obtained from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission through an anonymous source. Some NRC scientists, according to these documents, questioned the safety of tubes in Trojan and other nuclear power plants.

Discussions between PGE and the federal commission ensued, and on Dec. 28, PGE staffers asked their board of directors how they would react to a rec-

ommendation to close Trojan permanently. One week later, the board unanimously approved that recommendation.

Critics accuse both the NRC and PGE of devious spin control. More than a year earlier, points out anti-Trojan activist Greg Kafoury, NRC scientists were raising red flags. On Dec. 23, 1991, while Trojan was down for repairs, Dr. J. Hopfenfeld, an NRC safety issues expert, wrote a memo stating that it was "essentially impossible" to detect cracks in the steam tubes. Such cracks, Hopfenfeld wrote, could lead to a break in the main steam line, triggering a chain of events that could cause the worst nuclear nightmare — a core meltdown.

Over the next several months, Hopfenfeld and another scientist filed more memos detailing the dangers of running a reactor with cracked tubes. Nonetheless, in February 1992, the commission allowed PGE to reopen Trojan.

PGE claims it wasn't told of the dissenting opinions, and the NRC backs up this claim. "So far as we know, no outside agency was notified," says NRC spokeswoman Sue Gagner. "Dissenting opinions are not uncommon here, and I know of no requirement that the public be notified of every one."

Marbet says, "PGE claims they didn't know about this dissent, but I'm convinced they did."

Whatever the truth, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's actions puzzle some observers. "Why," asks Greg Kafoury, "was Trojan licensed to operate when NRC scientists had shown that the likelihood of a catastrophic accident was 300 times greater than allowable federal standards?"

"Why," asks Oregon Rep. Peter DeFazio, D, "weren't we told about these concerns?"

In February 1992, DeFazio says, both he and fellow Oregon Rep. Les AuCoin, D, received an NRC briefing on Trojan's safety. The congressmen were told that no safety concerns existed.

Two months ago, on April 21, DeFazio met with NRC officials for another briefing, at his request, to learn why he'd been kept in the dark. Although the briefing was not public, a DeFazio aide called it a "two-hour, incredibly technical, mind-numbing" session that left the congressman "utterly unsatisfied."

DeFazio says public hearings on the matter may be the next step.

At the heart of the matter is what could be the Achilles' heel of nuclear power: the steam generator tubes that carry cooling water through the hot reactors. The walls of these tubes are only 1/20 of an inch thick; to make them strong, Westinghouse and other reactor manufacturers used a metal alloy called Inconel 600, a chrome-nickel-iron alloy that has corroded faster than expected.

Tubes that were supposed to last 35 years in Trojan failed after 16 years.

This prompted the NRC to loosen its safety regulations. Robert Pollard, the Union of Concerned Scientists researcher who made the NRC's internal dissension public, explains the procedure.

Under old NRC criteria, Pollard says, if the tube wall's thickness was reduced by 40 percent, the tube would have to be lined or thickened. But this cuts down the flow of water to the reactor, and when too many tubes are repaired, it can't run at full power. That's why Trojan asked for a relaxation of the 40 percent criteria, Pollard said.

Although the relaxation didn't keep

Trojan alive, it has enabled four other reactors in the United States to keep operating: Farley units One and Two in Alabama, Catawba in South Carolina, and Donald C. Cook in Michigan.

NRC is now considering relaxing the rules for a number of other reactors. And according to the NRC, 71 of the nation's 108 commercial reactors use the Inconel 600 tubes.

NRC defends its rule changes. "We have lots of data to support this

decision," says spokeswoman Gagner. "The staff believes it's reasonable to permit operation with these small cracks."

Pollard has his doubts. "I asked NRC what valid technical basis they have for relaxing the rules," he says. "They haven't answered yet. I don't know if these plants are unsafe, but there's a lot of uncertainty. In the meantime, they're letting them operate."

Lloyd Marbet sounds a stronger alarm. "They're stripping away one of the layers of defense against nuclear accidents," he says. "It could lead to a loss of coolant, which, combined with the possibility of an earthquake, could

'When the judge asked to see those documents, they dropped the case like a radioactive potato.'

WPPSS's endless saga

The shutdown of Trojan leaves the Pacific Northwest with only one operating nuclear power plant, known locally as Whoops Two. Even that plant, legacy of a grandiose dream that turned into a financial nightmare, faces an uncertain future.

The Washington Public Power Supply System (WPPSS, pronounced "Whoops") was born in the heady nuclear boom of the 1960s. Backed by Northwest utilities, its goal was to build five nukes in Washington state for \$4 billion. Only one of the five — Unit #2 in Richland — was completed, and it cost \$3.2 billion, about eight times the original estimate. When power demand didn't rise as quickly as predicted, construction of two of the other plants was halted in the early 1980s.

That triggered the largest municipal bond default in U.S. history, as WPPSS reneged on \$2.25 billion in revenue bonds. The default dried up financing for the other two plants.

The two plants that were started, Unit #1 in Hanford, which is 75 percent completed, and Unit #3 in Satsop, which is 65 percent finished, have been mothballed since. WPPSS has been spending \$10.5 million a year to keep them ready to be finished. But this April, WPPSS announced it would look into pulling the plug for good on the unfinished plants.

Northwest utilities, which pay the WPPSS bills, have been pressing

WPPSS to cut its losses. The Snohomish County Public Utility District announced in March that it would stop making its yearly payments of \$1.8 million. Clark Public Utilities threatened to sue to force termination of the two plants.

The WPPSS announcement came amid charges of financial mismanagement. Washington state legislators have made political hay of the WPPSS pay scale. A new managing director was hired at an annual salary of \$300,000, and 11 WPPSS board members are paid \$500 a day to attend meetings. Last year, board chairman Carl Halvorson pocketed \$54,500 in beer money that way.

For WPPSS, there seems no easy way out of the mess. Even razing the two plants and restoring the sites to farm land will cost more than is in its construction funds. And WPPSS Two, the only power plant working, costs \$140 million a year to operate. The plant recently experienced a series of unplanned shutdowns, with WPPSS losing more than \$500,000 each day it was closed.

The Bonneville Power Administration, which coordinates the entire Northwest power system, has threatened to shut down WPPSS Two if its record doesn't improve. But Washington Gov. Mike Lowry goes further. He has suggested abolishing WPPSS altogether.

— Jim Stiak

lead to the worst kind of nuclear accident, a meltdown."

It was these concerns, says Marbet, that led to some time behind bars for him and a noteworthy legal maneuver by PGE's lawyers.

When he discovered the possibility of a meltdown at Trojan, Marbet says, he wrote to every relevant public official he could think of. Getting no satisfaction that way, he decided to commit what he says was his first act of civil disobedience in two decades of activism.

On Dec. 1, 1992, Marbet and dozens of other protesters formed a human barrier in front of Trojan's gates, preventing

employees from entering. Police arrested 27 of the protesters and brought them before District Judge Rick Roll. Judge Roll released them on the condition that they never return to Trojan. Three days later Marbet and six others returned to the plant and were arrested again.

Marbet spent 12 days in the Columbia County Jail before posting bail and awaiting trial. But before the seven cases came to trial, PGE dropped charges. Like so many acts in the Trojan drama, the reasons for this are a matter of dispute.

continued on next page

How to repack and shut Pandora's box

What happens to Trojan may serve as a model for the nuclear power industry. It is the largest commercial reactor in the United States to face decommissioning.

Trojan's fuel rods have been extracted from the reactor core. Yellow-covered workers, operating cranes from an overhead catwalk, transferred 193 highly radioactive fuel assemblies, each of which contains 289 fuel rods full of uranium-dioxide fuel pellets, through an underwater tunnel to a nearby pool. There they joined 588 older assemblies.

The 12-foot-long fuel assemblies, which weigh almost 1,500 pounds each, sit at the bottom of a 40-foot-deep pool of water, contained by walls of steel-lined reinforced concrete five-to-eight feet thick. The water helps prevent them from overheating during the first years, when they are the hottest. It also protects workers from extremely high

radiation levels: An unprotected person near one of the rods would quickly receive a lethal dose of radiation.

Most of the rods' radioactivity will decay within the first few decades. After about three centuries, they will cease to give off almost all the highly penetrating types of radiation. But lower levels of radiation, dangerous if allowed into the food chain, will persist for millions of years. Federal standards say the rods must be kept away from living things for 10,000 years.

Three techniques have been developed to decommission a nuclear plant, known in the trade as "entomb," "decon" and "safstor."

Entomb involves sealing the radioactive parts in concrete. This is the least likely, since it would require continuous security for centuries. As one observer put it, "you'd need generations of Doberman pinschers." Decommissioning Trojan, say PGE spokes-

men, will probably involve some combination of the other two methods.

Decon (decontamination) requires taking the plant apart and shipping away the contaminated parts. Low-level wastes, such as pipes, insulation and walls, which aren't radioactive themselves but contain radioactive particles, may be deconned by vacuuming, mopping or sandblasting, or by dismantling, placing in steel boxes and burying.

A Westinghouse engineer working to dismantle the Fort St. Vrain nuclear reactor in Colorado explained another step in the process to a *Wall Street Journal* reporter: After the workers are done, you wash their uniforms, clean ions from the water, then cut up the washing machine and dryer, pack them inside steel boxes, cut up the floor the washer and dryer rested on, and bury it all.

Safstor involves keeping the plant mothballed for a while. Since radioac-

tivity decays over time, some of the components that today would have to be shipped to a low-level radioactivity waste site might, in years or decades, no longer require such expensive treatment.

The big problem is what to do with the spent fuel rods. In what critics call the tradition of George Custer and Andrew Jackson, the federal government wants to create temporary storage sites on Indian reservations in the West. The dumps would hold the hot rods for several decades, after which they would be shipped to the permanent repository planned at Yucca Mountain in Nevada (*HCN*, 2/24/92).

In the meantime, Trojan's spent fuel rods sit in a pool perched on a stone cliff 100 feet from the Columbia River, in an area geologists fear could experience a major earthquake.

— Jim Stiak

Fatally flawed nuclear plant ...

continued from previous page

PGE says it simply didn't want to spend the money to bring all the cases to trial. "It would have cost more than \$120,000 just to find and identify the documents the judge says he wanted to inspect," says PGE spokesman David Heintzman. "PGE wants to save money for its customers and stockholders, so we sought dismissals."

Kafoury, who is Marbet's lawyer, scoffs at the explanation. The real reason PGE wanted to avoid the trials, he says, is that they would have had to produce documents that would have proved they knew all along that Trojan was in "far worse shape than they ever let on."

"They wanted us prosecuted," Kafoury says. "They wanted us convicted. But when the judge asked to see those documents, they dropped the case like a radioactive potato."

While Marbet and fellow protesters avoided trial, the legal wrangling over Trojan is far from over. Trojan's owners are suing Westinghouse for damages from the failed steam tube. And PGE is moving through the state regulatory process to collect from its customers the costs of Trojan's premature death.

In the suit against Westinghouse, PGE claims that the reactor builder "misrepresented" the longevity of the Inconel 600 tubes. (The Eugene Water and Electric Board has filed a similar suit for the 30 percent of Trojan it still technically owns.) The cases are still in early "evidence gathering" stages, says PGE spokesman Heintzman, and the amount of damages sought is still unspecified.

PGE may have a tough time winning. The warranty on the tubes expired four months after the plant came on line — about three years before the first cracks appeared. And while some eight other utilities have filed similar suits against Westinghouse, the only two that have been settled have been settled in Westinghouse's favor.

Whatever the outcome, PGE's suit against Westinghouse is a sideshow to a bigger circus. The main event is occurring in the Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC), the agency that decides how much utilities can charge for electricity.

Through a series of requests filed with the PUC, PGE is paving the way to collect hundreds of millions of dollars for Trojan's closure. There are two big price tags here — the cost of decommissioning Trojan, and the money that PGE will no longer be able to make on the nuke's operation.

'This isn't money PGE had to pay out; this is money they expected to come that didn't.'



An aerial view of Trojan

PGE photo

The decommissioning costs are easiest to understand. When Trojan came on line in 1976, a retirement fund was set up. Some money was to be added each year, gradually swelling the account over the nuke's anticipated 35-year lifespan until it reached more than \$400 million.

But when Trojan died at age 16, there was only \$46 million in the account. Estimates of total decommissioning costs now range from \$400 million to well over \$1 billion. Even the low figure, spread over PGE's 600,000 customers, means that each customer will have to pay \$667 each. The rest will fall on other Northwest ratepayers, customers of Bonneville Power Administration, who, under the agreement with the Eugene Water and Electric Board, took over 30 percent financial responsibility for the plant.

The PUC, according to chairman Ron Eachus, has little choice but to allow PGE to pass these costs on to its ratepayers. "It's not something we do just for nuclear plants," he says. "It's the way we'd treat any kind of equipment."

Even Trojan's foes agree, although they want PGE to commit to energy conservation and renewable resources before being given the green light.

Those same foes, however, bristle at the other costs PGE wants to charge its ratepayers. Portland attorney Dan Meek has identified more than \$850 million in "unrecovered costs" that he thinks should be paid by PGE shareholders rather than ratepayers.

PGE spent about \$450 million to build the plant, Meek explains, and put about \$20 million a year into it. Those construction costs were to be depreciated on a straight line basis until the year 2011. Now that Trojan has closed less than halfway there, PGE still wants to be

repaid by its customers for the rest of the cost of the plant. Better, says Meek, that the people who own PGE's 47 million shares foot this bill out of the \$54 million in dividends they receive each year.

"This isn't money PGE had to pay out; this is money they expected to come in that didn't," Meek says. "It's basically lost profit for PGE." What's more, he adds, Oregon voters passed a ballot measure that prohibits a utility from charging ratepayers for a project not in service.

The PUC is expected to rule in PGE's favor. If that happens, Meek says, "we'll appeal it." Sooner or later, pretty much everyone expects the issue to wind up in court.

As it slips into a post-nuclear future, PGE is promising major investments in conservation, efficiency and renewable resources. The utility is planning new cogeneration plants powered by industrial steam, and dynamos driven by natural gas. Trojan itself, PGE has said, may be turned into one of these natural gas plants.

Still, the \$125 million that PGE has

pledged for conservation over the next five years is less than 3 percent of its annual revenues — far less than a post-nuclear utility in Sacramento is spending (see story below). Energy activists are clamoring for more.

However PGE replaces Trojan's 1,100 megawatts, it will tread a road soon to be traveled by many other utilities. Three U.S. nuclear plants have shut down in the last year, and the amount of U.S. electricity generated by nuclear power — about 20 percent — has begun to slip. New York investment brokers Shearson Lehman Brothers last year predicted that 25 nuclear plants in the nation may shut down within the decade because of soaring maintenance costs.

While the industry tries to rescue itself, drawing up plans for a second generation of simpler and safer nuclear power plants, the nails in the coffin of the first generation are being hammered home. ■

Jim Stiak reported this story from Eugene, Oregon. He recently moved to Maui, Hawaii.

Nuclear-free utility

One California utility has found that life after nuclear power can be sweet. The Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD), which had its Rancho Seco nuclear power plant shut by voters in 1989, has watched its bottom line turn from red to black. The last year that Rancho Seco ran, SMUD lost \$575 million. Today, the utility is making money.

Rancho Seco generated almost half of Sacramento MUD's power. But breakdowns kept the plant closed much of the time, so SMUD had to buy replacement power from other utilities as well as pay for costly repairs. By 1989, SMUD's 500,000 customers, who own the company, had had enough. They voted to pull the plug on the 15-year-old power plant.

Forced to quickly replace the nuke's power, SMUD now spends about \$52 million a year — 8 percent of its total revenue — on energy effi-

ciency. It pays homeowners to replace its old refrigerators with new super-efficient models, provides rebates for heat pumps and air conditioner replacements, supplies low-flow shower heads and solar water heaters, and has planted 28,000 shade trees to keep homes cool in central California's scorching summers.

In addition, SMUD is building four natural gas cogeneration plants, which produce steam for factories as well as electricity. The juice from these plants is expected to be cheap — about half the national average of 8 cents per kilowatt hour. SMUD is also pursuing the development of renewable fuels such as wind, solar and geothermal.

"There is a life after nuclear power," says SMUD general manager S. David Freeman, "and it's not a bad one."

— Jim Stiak

by Jon Christensen

Hazel O'Leary, the new secretary of Energy, has hit the ground running. O'Leary has shaken up the bureaucracy, restructured the chain of command, brought fresh faces to key posts, and proposed a budget that would sharply alter national energy policy.

But the Department of Energy is still besieged by nuclear partisans and Cold War warriors. Observers say it may take years for O'Leary to transform the agency from a bastion of secretive nuclear scientists and engineers to what she envisions as a "responsible, accountable and cost-effective" Energy Department that puts the public's interests first.

O'Leary describes her work as "reinventing DOE." She promises a historic change from nuclear and coal to energy efficiency and developing markets for renewable resources.

The DOE's fiscal year 1994 budget request for \$19.6 billion reflects these priorities. It asks for less money for nuclear weapons production and more for cleanup. The details, however, do not yet add up to the sweeping changes promised during the presidential campaign and the State of the Union address, when President Clinton said, "We're eliminating programs that are no longer needed, such as nuclear power research and development."

But the administration has signaled a change in direction. "It's a good first step forward out of the dark ages of Reagan-Bush energy policy," says Scott Denman of the Safe Energy Communication Council, a Washington-based coalition of 11 energy and environmental groups.

"They're moving in the right direction," agrees energy efficiency guru Amory Lovins of the Rocky Mountain Institute. "The early changes look promising. They seem to understand the need to demilitarize, to take economics seriously, to make the best and cheapest energy buys first, and to open up the culture. But O'Leary has her work cut out for her."

The pace and size of change will be determined in line-by-line budget battles in the trenches of Congress, the White House, and the Energy Department bureaucracy. The old-guard nuclear cadre appears to be losing ground, but it still holds a significant stake in energy policy.

Hard numbers tell the story. The administration's budget proposal backs research on commercial-fission nuclear reactors to the tune of \$230 million, down only \$30 million from this year's budget.

Research into fusion power will receive \$348 million next year. At the same time, research on solar, wind and other renewable energy resources will get \$327 million, a 30 percent increase. And programs to promote energy efficiency and conservation will rise 35 percent to \$789 million.

These figures will still be dwarfed by defense spending in the energy budget. It will drop 18 percent but will nonetheless add up to \$5.9 billion. And cleanup of the weapons complex will

cost \$6.5 billion next year, a billion dollars more than this year. Together, they absorb more than half the nation's energy budget.

The inertia is daunting. Most Energy Department watchers temper their enthusiasm for O'Leary and the new DOE with cautions about the bureaucracy's track record, Clinton's propensity to compromise, and the need to measure rhetoric against reality.

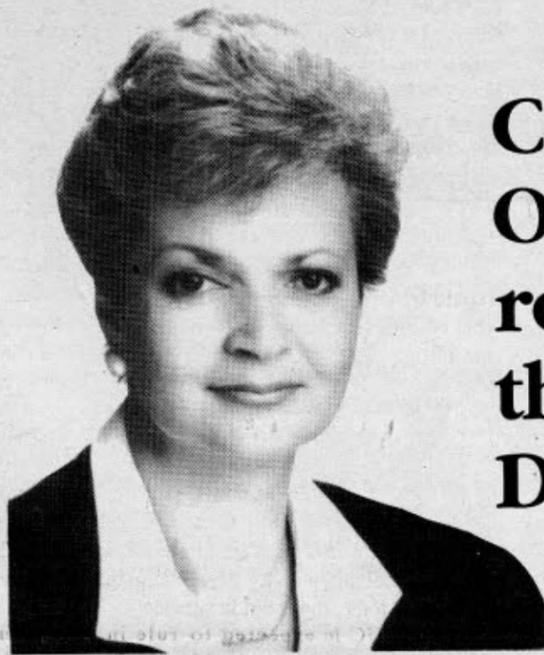
"What is discouraging is the way the administration has already responded to pressure," says Scott Denman. The nuclear industry is still being subsidized, Denman says, even though O'Leary has said she believes nuclear power has no future.

Amory Lovins is critical of the money being spent on nuclear fusion, which has "no prospect to be com-

notable exceptions, advocates of change in energy policy generally praise the appointments.

The new deputy secretary for energy programs, the number two position in the agency, for example, will be William White. A former House energy staffer and Houston lawyer who specialized in commercial fraud, antitrust, and oil and gas litigation, White raised money and campaigned for Clinton. But those qualifications should not be held against him, says Amory Lovins. "Just because he is from Texas one shouldn't assume he comes covered in hydrocarbons. He has got a good grasp of what needs to be done."

Another key nominee is Tara O'Toole, an analyst with the congressional Office of Technology Assessment, who was named assistant secre-



Can Hazel O'Leary reinvent the Energy Department?

petive," and what he calls the "clean-coal boondoggle." Overall, Lovins says, the department could do a lot more with less. "If they spend their money wisely, it's likely to do some good," he says. "But the devil is in the details. The department is trapped by dozens of years of hostility to sensible energy ideas. It will take years to rebuild."

Lovins and some other critics go so far as to suggest that the Energy Department jettison its nuclear weapons complex, perhaps to the Defense Department or another agency. But they are pleased by O'Leary's restructuring of the department into three distinct "mission teams": energy supply and demand programs, the nuclear weapons complex cleanup, and science and technology research and development.

CHARTING THE NEW COURSE

Most of the new directors of these teams have been named or nominated by Clinton, although none have been confirmed by the Senate. In the meantime, career civil servants are running the ship with "special assistants," who do not require Senate confirmation. Dan Reicher, for example, formerly of the Natural Resources Defense Council, is a special assistant for weapons cleanup and waste policies.

Appointments to top DOE positions appear to be coming from three centers of power, according to agency watchers: the White House, O'Leary, and Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee chairman Bennett Johnston, D-La. None of the nominees appear bound for any trouble in the Senate. And with a few

notable exceptions, advocates of change in energy policy generally praise the appointments.

Her nomination was welcome news, says Daryl Kimball of Physicians for Social Responsibility. Even more gratifying was the new power given to her post. The position was elevated to report directly to O'Leary, and the assistant secretary was given the authority to shut down hazardous facilities. At the same time, O'Leary agreed to submit the traditionally autonomous DOE weapons complex to oversight by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

Kimball and others were astonished to see these changes, which have been on their wish list for many years. If someone had predicted the Energy Department would volunteer to let OSHA in a year ago, says Kimball, "people would have laughed you out of the room."

DOE critics were less than thrilled at other appointments. The Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management, which is in charge of building a repository for spent reactor fuel and other high-level radioactive waste at Yucca Mountain, Nev., appears destined to be overseen by Daniel Dreyfuss, a close ally of Sen. Bennett Johnston. Likewise, longtime insider Victor Reis has been named assistant secretary for defense programs responsible for nuclear weapons research, development and testing.

Chris Brown of the Nevada group Citizens Alert says he is still wary of the work at Yucca Mountain, where workers have begun to dig a five-mile tunnel, and of the news that the Clinton administra-

tion plans to resume nuclear testing. Citizen Alert recently declined to participate in a panel the agency has formed to evaluate the Yucca Mountain project. The group is holding out for an independent "blue ribbon" panel to be convened by the White House.

Nevertheless, on a recent visit, Brown was impressed by some "big changes" at Energy Department headquarters. Visitors are no longer treated like criminals, he says, by being thoroughly searched by armed guards before they are allowed in and then accompanied by escorts at all times. O'Leary sat with Brown and a group of activists from around the country in a circle in her office.

"She is a very warm and open person," says Brown. He wonders if she can impart those qualities to an organization with a 40-year record of "secrecy, contamination and lying to the public."

O'Leary has taken some important steps, Brown concedes, including declassifying documents such as a recent safety analysis report on the Pantex nuclear weapons plant in Amarillo, Texas. And there has been a "dramatic change in the way public meetings are run," Brown says. Citizen Alert, for instance, has been invited to budget briefings on the Yucca Mountain project and the Nevada Test Site that it was never privy to before.

"The biggest job for activists is to keep her feet to the fire. There have been some changes," he acknowledges. "She's having some impact. But I'm withholding judgment."

Bob Schaeffer of the Military Production Network, a coalition of citizens groups that watch-dogs the nuclear weapons complex, agrees. "People are pleased with the openness, but they're waiting to see what's done about substance," he says.

"We were never invited to talk to the secretary or high-ranking officials in recent years," says Safe Energy Communications Council Director Scott Denman. "They couldn't have cared less about our positions. We have an ear now. We are frustrated with backtracking on the budget but we're pleased with the dialogue. And that's the nature of dialogues. You don't always get everything you want."

Denman also says it is a good time to call President Clinton and the Energy Department. "They're listening now."

To express your views, write to President Bill Clinton, The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20050, or call the White House comment line, 202/456-1111, or fax your message, 202/456-2461. Comments can also be sent by computer electronic mail on America Online to clintonpz@aol.com or on CompuServe to 75300.3115@compuserve.com.

You can write to Secretary Hazel O'Leary, Department of Energy, 1000 Independence Ave. SW, Washington, D.C. 20585. To report fraud, waste, abuse or environmental problems at DOE facilities, call the DOE Inspector General hotline, 800/541-1625. To make a comment or get information about DOE programs, call the public inquiries office, 202/586-5575. ■

Jon Christensen is HCN Great Basin editor.

Responses from Denver and the hinterland

BILL HORNBY:

Ed Quillen in *HCN* May 3 provocatively asserts that Denver is abdicating as economic capital of the Mountain West region. "The most probable scenario for the future of the Mountain West is that Denver will continue to decline in relative importance while Los Angeles continues to organize its new province." This should be a wake-up call for the Greater Denver Chamber of Commerce to redocument and repair the still-vital metropolitan links to the countryside.

Quillen admits his safari through the jungle of grievances that rural Colorado nurses toward its nearest big city was too thinly equipped. He found no factual study or "Great Formula Book of Urban-Hinterland Interactions." Our intrepid investigator was reduced to rounding up the usual anecdotal suspects, the staple bitches of Western Slope curmudgeons about modern Denver.

Thus Quillen has the entire metropolis attempting to "destroy" the San Luis Valley through unsuccessful groundwater transfer proposals, though these were the schemes of a few private developers. We revisit the old battle over Two Forks Dam and the ancient truculence of the Denver Water Board, though this has been demonstrably reduced by the regional sensitivity of the Webb administration. Again the fearful pitch that the big city's big airport and convention center will be of little or no importance to the rest of Colorado; again the nostalgic yearning for the good old days when Denver business leaders presumably "controlled" their own destinies and attended to regional relationships. Though we forget that those old leaders such as the much-mentioned Charles Boettcher were also beat up by rural critics for dangerous liaisons with the national railroads and foreign investors,

echoes of today's reactions to Denver's dalliance with national and international markets.

These chips on rural shoulders are created in part by the age-old, peasantry emotion of the dislike of the simple countryside for the complex city, the revulsion at finding what Leo Marx calls a "machine in the garden." This gut emotion has ignited writers from the poet Virgil, who hated Rome, to Thoreau and Twain, who feared the Industrial Revolution's citification of 19th-century America.

Most modern environmentalists salivate over Quillen's question, "Is Denver Necessary?" and with the blessing from such now-above saints as Wallace Stegner, would wish the West's growing cities away. But metropolitan cities with established populations of almost 2 million people, and with no rival of their scale within hundreds of miles, don't wish away easy. These big cities now have the critical mass to grow despite rural curmudgeonry. Questioning their necessity as if viable alternatives exist only lures serious management of urban-rural problems away from the real world. As in Quillen's concluding wail that "if Denver doesn't want to meet this challenge, if Denver believes it is now a world city between Munich and Tokyo, too sophisticated to concern itself with the Bozemans and Chamas of this world, we can only hope that Santa Fe will return to its roots and take the job."

Perhaps *CU Boulder's* posing of the rural-urban question as "Can This Marriage Be Saved" is a more useful formulation. If, in the real world, metropolitan Denver is not likely to hand its wedding band to Santa Fe, it must still realize that far too many of its rural neighbors think that it should. Where does Denver think many of the anti-urban votes in favor of Amendments 1 and 2 came from? From the dyspeptic rural view that most of the world's unwelcome changes in both economic and social values can be charged to the sprawling monster-city.

The point for Denver leaders and for rural civic leaders as well, is not that Quillen describes the real world, but that his scenario is widely believed. We must challenge this astute newsman by calculating and publishing the facts about the continuing and very necessary links between

city and countryside.

What value the educational, financial, governmental, cultural and communications services that only a metropolis can organize and distribute? It is highly improbable that rural Colorado, for example, would really like to depend on Santa Fe for the Broncos and the Rockies and the communications systems the city provides to carry them to far corners. Or for the education and health care systems that only a metropolis can create. Or for the tax revenues from the populous city that subsidize the sparser countryside's schools and roads. New economic research could demonstrate that the metropolis is still necessary to its rural hinterland, though in less immediately visible ways than in the past.

But if the urban-rural link is still necessary, is the affection that will save the marriage still alive? Here Denver leaders do need to take a hard look at themselves. In these past years of wooing global and national sirens, metropolites have been taking their regional partners for granted. The Great Denver Chamber has latterly organized goodwill missions to regional neighbors; hopefully it will keep these up.

But the more important task is to collect and distribute the facts about rural-urban interdependence that will rekindle tolerance if not passion in that old marriage. Denver has not divorced the Mountain West, but it has been flirting around, and it needs to remember whom it came to the dance with. ■

BILL HORNBY is a former editor of *The Denver Post* who has been observing rural-urban political battles in Colorado since 1957.

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DON MITCHELL:

Ed Quillen tries to hold the West to a 19th century standard when he judges Denver (*HCN*, 5/3/93) and finds its relation to its hinterland lacking. It is not so much that Denver has failed the surrounding rural areas as that the world has changed in the past century.

As Quillen shows in his excellent and provocative article,



Denver and its hinterland initially depended on each other. One was impossible without the other. They were an integrated whole (which itself was integrated within the Chicago regional city-hinterland relationship). On the expanding frontier, the interaction was local and place dependent.

Capitalists such as Charles Boettcher well understood that their livelihood demanded the economic integration of that region. Their concern with the hinterland was an economic necessity.

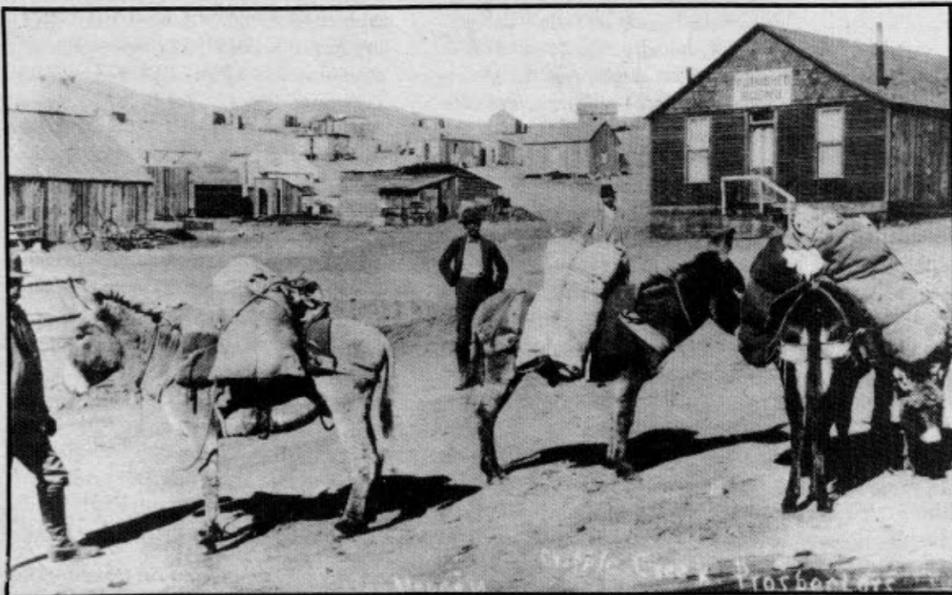
Chicago capitalists had to organize the hinterland so as to make their (urban-based) capital work, as historian William Cronon describes. Yet as the frontier was settled, and the market extended into all reaches of the region, the particular places within the region curiously enough became less important.

Boettcher again illustrates this point. His Great Western Sugar Company created a profitable agricultural landscape on the plains of Colorado. But Great Western was incorporated in New Jersey, most of its principals were capitalists based in New York, and labor was procured both from the region and from Mexico. Great Western Sugar was part of a national and international economy, in which Denver was incidental rather than integral.

With the development of the market throughout the West by the end of the 19th century, the heavy work of organization was finished. Hierarchies of places had been established and local economies integrated with the whole. But with the development of advanced transportation and communication, capital is no longer tied to the region. The steel mining work of Pueblo, for example, can just as easily (and more cheaply) be done in South Korea. Industrial capital is "footloose" these days. Even for a steel mill or auto plant, access to materials and markets and location at a transportation "chokepoint" are far less important now than they once were. Containerized transportation, telecommunications, and air travel have changed the locational equations. To a degree, any place with a road network, telephone lines, electricity and an airport is equivalent to any other place with those infrastructures.

The on-going struggles over the formation of the European Community or the North American Free Trade Agreement are indicative of the new scales at which economic cooperation and competition are organized.

Today, capital is free to roam the globe, playing largely equivalent localities off each other as they decide where



Early miners in Teller County, Colorado

Denver Public Library Western History Department

to locate production facilities, corporate headquarters, or back offices. Corporations and investors now operate in a global-scale market of *places*, any one exchangeable for the next. Like deciding between breakfast cereals, investors can now choose between towns and cities.

Within this system of footloose capital, elites in cities like Denver strive to make their cities "competitive in the global market place." Places, to be competitive, must provide inducements to footloose, global-scale capital, and they (and their residents) must be disciplined to accept the dictates of the market. If, to one way of thinking, the Denver International Airport seems foolish, to another it is absolutely necessary. Its value lies in its symbolism. It says to the managers of the market that Denver residents and companies are ready to be players in the global economy. Denver is a good place for business. Because Denver residents (and the rest of us!) are so willing to pay for this new world-class airport, global capital should understand that it is wanted. Denver is *better* than Salt Lake City (or Albuquerque, or Phoenix, or Kansas City) because its government and people are ready to make any sacrifice to become a world-class player in the capital market. Proposals for tax inducements to United Airlines or to Ziff-Davis are indicative of this willingness to undercut competitors and to improve "market share." Denver is the place being sold — the commodity — and if the way for it to be sold is to undercut the competitors, then so be it.

The rest of the region does not matter to Denver in this world of footloose capital, because the places within it are competing for the same investments. They too are part of the marketplace of places. If the various regional centers and small towns are connected to each other, then it is through the scale of global capital rather than by selling each other beef or coal. If Denver interests show concern about mountain communities or other outlying areas, it is only because they can be advertised as a feature of Denver itself. Look at the cover of the 1993 Denver Directory Company phonebook. Skiers in Denver! Denver is skiing. The good life is here (in Denver).

The point is not that Los Angeles is capturing Denver's hinterland from Chicago and that there is a resulting clash of values. Rather, Los Angeles is merely the best representation of a much larger-scale process at work: the thorough commodification of every aspect of place and everyday life.

Los Angeles represents itself as glamor and Hollywood and the ocean. Denver is the wholesome Midwest, leavened with spectacular views and mountain sports.

All this frantic image building is meant to attract the boardrooms of New York, Tokyo, Dallas, London, Paris, or wherever else large-scale investment decisions are being made. This is what undergirds the new culture of the West that concerns Quillen.

And the commodification of place — highly connected to the production of imagery (nature and cities as scenery) — will continue inexorably along. Unless, of course, we can find ways to disconnect ourselves from the global market of places, or find ways to discipline the market, rather than have it continue to discipline us and our places. Then perhaps some sense of regionalism, and a greater degree of *local*, democratic (rather than economic) control will be possible. ■

DON MITCHELL teaches geography at the University of Colorado, Boulder.



Colorado Historical Society

Farmers at the Denver market

STANLEY CRAWFORD:

Until recently, northern New Mexico has always been somebody else's outpost except for the Tanoan tribes that considered it to be the center of the universe. The question was probably first asked in Seville and Madrid, later in Mexico City, and then in Washington: Is it really worth it?

Denver's sphere of influence, as Ed Quillen points out, never extended very strongly into northern New Mexico, and never for very long (*HCN*, 5/3/93). The Denver and Rio Grande Western's Chile Line from Antonito down to Santa Fe lost money from the beginning to the end, which came in 1940. A couple of its old stations now serve as restaurants. Another branch of the D&RGW survives as the Antonito to Chama Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railway, carrying tourists away from their cars and motorhomes and then back to them.

Los Angeles? California flung out a tentacle in 1943, when the University of California became a front for the Manhattan Engineer District Project Y, and later became manager of what is now known as Los Alamos National Laboratory. Fifty years later, in March 1993, a committee of University of California regents finally made it out to northern New Mexico to see what all the fuss was about; fittingly the Pueblo leadership conducted their half of the private session with them in Tewa.

So long a relative backwater to metropolitan elsewhere, northern New Mexico may be indifferent to whether it is Denver, Los Angeles, Albuquerque, El Paso, Ciudad Juarez, or Dallas that is sending its emissaries and agents and laborers — and tourists — in droves.

What all have in common is that they are from somewhere else. Perhaps what we need to consider is the development of a "Hispanic Rim" pushing its way north and east from the two Californias, Alta and Baja. If official New Mexico policy faces in any one direction, it is toward Old Mexico, with a nervous eye on Texas, which would like to shop here for its future water needs.

But the large question, in an era of total physical and electronic mobility, may be whether ideas about spheres of urban influence tell us very much about

where we live. When everyone inhabits virtually interchangeable dwellings, moves through identical airports, drives up and down identical strip developments, and carries around a world vision formed by images on a TV screen created by a global commercial culture, a sense of place ceases to exist, or becomes largely scenic and decorative.

In ecological terms, I would argue, vast segments of the urban-suburban population no longer know where they live — and perhaps don't care. This is one way to account for the massive despoiling of the planet — and the great migrations to populate the less despoiled backwaters that still retain a sense of place, and which are largely defenseless in the face of the onslaught.

For this state of affairs, perhaps Los Angeles is the most compelling model: a city perpetually on the move, centerless, suburban, living off of imported water and food and energy, unable to dispose of its wastes within its political boundaries, which is to say unstable over the long term, and ultimately unsustainable. Its clones now populate the planet.

I cannot become excited about choosing between a Denver and a Los Angeles, even a Santa Fe and an Albuquerque. I await, perhaps in vain, the emergence of a city, somewhere, that bases its existence, and its growth, on sustainable and just forms of water use and energy production, and that can negotiate with adjacent farmland to feed itself, and that can work out how to recycle all of its wastes; and which can, above all, figure out how to refrain from devouring itself, its neighbors, and its region. Perhaps such an entity might not even call itself a city.

Utopian? No doubt. And though I'm a country dweller, I still must deal with cities. Yet I do not live near one I consider on the right track in most matters, nor do I know of one within the region. But it seems certain that in the long term their unsustainability will get them all in the end — and all of the rest of us, too. ■

Writer STANLEY CRAWFORD lives in the Embudo Valley of northern New Mexico, where he is mayor-domo of one *acequia* and president of the commission of another; he is also current president of the Santa Fe Area Farmers' Market. He has written several books, including *Mayordomo* and *A Garlic Testament*.

GEORGE SIBLEY:

Ed Quillen's essay on Denver and the city-hinterland relationship is another outstanding *High Country News* contribution to articulating the still-evolving West. The research alone puts a solid foundation under the kinds of intuitive discourse that have been evolving on the streets and in the bars — and even in the halls of government — in the non-metro parts of the Rocky Mountain region for years. But Quillen doesn't just "say it like it is"; he goes on to show why it is like it is.

Still, there are a couple of areas of contention one wants to address with Quillen: One a question of "degree" and the other a question of "kind." First, I question the degree of benevolence that Quillen imputes, a little nostalgically, to the relationship between Denver and its hinterlands in the 19th and early 20th centuries. My perception was forged in Crested Butte, where I caught the remnant oral history concerning that relationship from the last of the coal miners abandoned by General William Palmer's railroad-and-coal-and-steel empire.

From the "industrial hinterland" perspective, there did not seem to be much benevolence at all to that relationship. The Chicago-Denver money that underlay the "Rocky Mountain Empire" gave as little as it possibly could, in taking as much as it possibly could, as quickly as it possibly could; and then it left, taking every machine, building and rail, and leaving behind tailings and leaking tunnels. The pittances in wages were given grudgingly at best, and every effort was made to recapture even those pittances through company-store policies. And when the miners got up on their hind legs out of sheer anguish at the squeeze and struck the mines, troops to beat upon them were sent out from Denver by the best government the empire could buy.

Most of Quillen's examples are from the agricultural hinterland, where things may have been a little more "symbiotic." But in the industrial hinterland, the one-sided nature of the relationship lay closer to the surface. If a dollar came out from Chicago's Denver, it was only because someone thought it could be made to return to Chicago's Denver tenfold, or a hundredfold; and if anyone got in the way who couldn't be bought cut-rate, they would be blackballed, like Crested Butte's Pitsker Sprochich, or bought out of office, like Colorado's Gov. Davis Waite.

The argument that "places" like Crested Butte would not even have existed without Chicago's Denver to "coordinate and inspire" them doesn't wash either: the coal could have, probably would have, been developed locally with eventual expansion into regional export, like the Bear Mine in Paonia, Colo. across Kebler Pass from Crested Butte. Recreation and skiing in the Upper Gunnison Valley did in fact begin that way — Crested Butte mining families were doing "bed-and-breakfasts" for fishermen and hunters before the term was even invented; and Colorado's first chairlift was built in that valley, with

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Responses from Denver ...

continued from previous page

local money for local use. The "places" spawned by Chicago's Denver in the hinterland only became *communities* through the necessity of surviving in the face of the voracity of the Denver connection, not through any encouragement or nurturing from the city.

Which leads more or less directly to the question of "kind." Is there another, less necessitous perspective on the nature of the relationship between cities and the places cities live off of? Must a non-urban region have an urb? Or might there be a circumstance in which a hinterland without a city could become like a fish without a bicycle?

Quillen seems to be arguing that if his Salida and my Crested Butte have been "abdicated" by Denver, we have to find another city to which to attach ourselves. That's like arguing that every divorcee should remarry because that's the only way a woman can get by. Taken up a cultural notch — Denver cheated on us, so we should hitch up with Santa Fe? Which is already in bed with Los Angeles?

I think we have to explore the "Homeland Commons" alternative Quillen mentioned — the world as viewed from, say, the Gunnison Basin, rather than from the Olympian overview of megacity regions.

From a Gunnison Basin perspective, the world can be divided into two parts economically: what the people in the region's dozen towns and cities can create and control, and what they neither create nor control and therefore must figure out how to adapt to. The second part we can call "environment." Needless to say, it is larger than the first part, which we can call "system" — our set of adaptive responses to environment.

"Environment" for the Gunnison Basin includes mountains and valleys, mesas and canyons, streams and rivers and lakes, grasslands and forests, the climate, and ... Denver, Chicago, Los Angeles, the United States, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, income tax, Medicare, monetary policy, et cetera: everything Out There that we have to learn how to live with in order to survive.

"System" includes everything we create, and more or less control, to enable us to live with, and off of, all that environment. One requirement we should put on the system we create is that it not attract too much of the wrong kind of attention from the environment. A tree that grows too tall attracts lightning. And, a community that grows too successful in its adaptive systems attracts "wealth" from its environment above and beyond what it needs to live well. Aspen is everybody's favorite example of What We Don't Want To Become.

What happens in places like Aspen is that larger systems move in from the environment to buy out local systems. Nothing personal, just those godly and unquestionable market forces at work. And eventually, the local system is reduced to unprofitable tasks like keeping the roads and water pipes open and flowing — with the biggest flow of all being the "throughput" of wealth from the environment, which goes back out to the environment almost as quickly as it comes in.

Thus, a Crested Butte dominated in 1993 by Colonel Calloway's Big Ski Hill is not systematically different from a Crested Butte dominated in 1893 by General Palmer's Big Mine. The invest-

ment is not coordinated by the local system, so the return is not shared out locally. The housing is increasingly being transferred from ownership in the system to ownership in the environment, which means the system is increasingly unable to fulfill that most fundamental requisite of a good system: sheltering its people.

Maybe this is all as it should be in this best of all possible worlds, where bigger things are always eating smaller things. It may be impossible to create local systems capable of adapting to phenomena in the "cultural environment" like Denver or Los Angeles; the comparable challenge in the "biophysical environment" might be "adapting" to hurricanes, blizzards or extended droughts.

I would rather, however, be collaborating with other non-metro communities on possible strategies for "living with heavy weather" than trying to figure out which city's "harem" to join. Western State College, where I work, has a program called "Women in Transition," which offers support to women who are trying to break out of the cultural belief that the quality of a woman is measured by her ability to attach herself economically to a man. When we become a truly forward-looking non-metropolitan college, I think we will have a Communities in Transition program, which will offer support to communities that are trying to break out of the cultural belief that a good community has to be attached economically to a city.

But this, of course, is already somewhat the function of the *High Country News* — so the issue carrying Quillen's piece would *not* "be the perfect issue to end on," as the introduction to Quillen's article stated. Rather, that issue should help raise our awareness to a new level on which we will need *HCN* more than ever to help "coordinate and inspire the West." I would guess, in fact, that in terms of coordinating and inspiring the development of a workable local system, *HCN* has already done more for its region of influence than Denver ever did in a century. And you leave no tailings. ■

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RANDY RUSSELL:

I was pleased to see *High Country News* tackle the issues of hinterland economies, the ongoing power shift between the urban centers of Chicago and Los Angeles, and what happens to places like Denver in

between. Now working in Utah, I would enjoy an analysis of Salt Lake City, and a shift away from previous theocratic root relationships into the same global mix. But whichever urban area and specific history is looked at, Quillen did a superb job of describing what is happening to all rural Intermountain West communities.

I am struck by what this analysis means to all of us who struggle with building a vision of the future for the communities we work within, whether we are environmentalists, community developers or represent special interests.

Quillen's analysis calls upon us to recognize an underlying economic reali-

hinterlands markets. Although these ties are increasingly tenuous, they are still important psychologically, as a positive support for community identity and uniqueness. But these ties may also hinder the steps communities need to take to survive in these changing times.

Quillen asks, "Who will guide the West," while many of us also ask, "Who will guide our town?" Or rather, "What will guide our town" now that self interest and economic consequences have become so diffused. Put another way, "How do we recapture or kindle a new sense of deliberateness?"

How does any community make the transition from being a product of specific resources and markets to defining what new resources and markets that community will exploit?

At some risk, I would suggest that some of the changes being forced on us are healthy. We are witnessing the end of one-dimensional rural communities



A Denver street scene

Colorado Historical Society

ty. He suggests that we "follow the money" in trying to understand what is happening to us. He also implies, I think, that any solution needs to "cash flow" no matter what market we seek to serve.

"Following the money" in a rural Intermountain West community quickly shows that about 50 percent of its economy is dependent on transfer payments (Social Security, pensions, etc.), various forms of welfare, and other governmental expenditures. Smaller and poorer communities might exceed 60 percent. When you add utilities and other services to the economic mix, there is often very little "base industry" left as the remaining part of the pie.

This base industry, or several of them, have been the historic "dollar importers" and were previously much larger slices of those local economic pies. Often they are mining, logging, farming, ranching or, increasingly, tourism. They have also been the "dollar exporters," providing the basis for partnership with — and the self interests of — the urban centers.

Earlier and simpler economies led to more easily defined and understood relationships. Self interest, identity and community action ("community deliberateness," in a phrase) could grow from a clear sense of economic consequences.

My sense is that the economies of our hinterlands communities are becoming less tied to their specific environments, just as urban centers are becoming less tied to their

(mining, railroad, farming, logging, etc.) at the same time we see urban centers freeing themselves from their hinterlands and trying to be "global forces."

The scale may be vastly different, but the arguments are similar when a Denver struggles with building a new airport and a Leadville, Helper or Butte struggles with building a tourism infrastructure. Both represent new markets and taking risks.

What Quillen left us wondering is whether our small communities can both diversify and keep a unique sense of identity, along with whether our urban areas can abandon their previously exclusive hinterland economic ties and still provide important regional leadership and partnerships.

Finally, I suggest that partnerships have two sides. It is difficult to build a constructive relationship and explore new ways of exploiting urban assets when the chief sport in hinterland coffee shops is "big city bashing." Urbanites viewing rural areas as still one-dimensional or "park lands" doesn't help either.

As we all enter an era of greater community risk taking and responding to faster-paced changes, I suggest that we need to explore new ways of building multi-dimensional "joint ventures" to replace the romantic but stale ties of the past. ■

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