



High Country News



2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT



Dear Readers,

If there is one word we've used more often than any other to describe *High Country News*, it's probably "scrappy." We've always been proud of our ability to roll up our sleeves and take on big challenges, even as a small organization, and we're still committed to making the most of every precious dollar. Why? Because most of our funding comes directly from people like you: folks who are as resourceful as you are generous.

Through your subscription dues and donations, you provide three-quarters of the revenue that not only pays our editors and writers and photographers, it also covers the printing and mailing bills, and keeps the lights on and the computers humming in our offices around the West. Over 11,000 *HCN* readers make donations each year, and we believe that we have a sacred duty to spend those dollars wisely and well.

But we're retiring "scrappy." While we nod to our humble beginning and take with us that fierceness, work ethic and frugal sensibility, after 51 years, we are no longer beginners in the game, scrambling to stay afloat.

These days, we're working hard to ensure that this institution is professional, equitable and durable. We're raising pay for staff and freelancers and putting best practices in place for financial management that will enable *HCN* to weather any storm. And, of course, every day we're striving to create a publication and an organization that reflect the full, diverse West.

A few of the highlights of our work this year:

- With the support of thousands of *HCN* readers, we wrapped up a remarkable 50th Anniversary Campaign, raising \$6.5 million to expand our editorial work, build a robust marketing team, and invest in improvements to the technology that undergirds all of our work.
- Our new editor-in-chief, Jennifer Sahn, is working tirelessly with her staff to ensure that

all of our journalism is fair, accurate and driven by genuine curiosity — and that our stories speak to, and reflect, longtime *HCN* readers and newcomers to the conversation as well.

- Gary Love, our director of product and marketing, and his team are taking care of our current subscribers while finding new ways to help us reach larger and more diverse audiences.
- Director of Business Administration Erica Howard implemented new financial controls that allow us to better track our spending and ensure that we always have at least 2.5 months of operating funds on hand — an important financial foundation in turbulent times.
- The *HCN* board of directors welcomed six new members — a remarkable group of individuals from diverse backgrounds. They have experience not just in nonprofit management, fundraising and journalism, but also in work for advancing diversity, equity, inclusion and justice.

In short, we're laying the foundation for *HCN* for the next 50 years. The organization is changing, but our goal remains the same: to bring you the information and context you need to make this region, and this world, a more just, equitable and sustainable place.

This year, you may notice a few changes in our Annual Report: We've chosen to open up the inner workings of our operation and list our impacts, rather than the names of our donors. (Our donors will continue to be listed by name in each issue of the magazine.) Please reach out to me with your feedback.

Thank you for making
it all possible,

Greg Hanscom

*Executive Director/
Publisher*



Hello donors, readers and friends,

The end of this fiscal year falls at the six-month mark since my arrival as editor-in-chief, and boy, have we been busy! My predecessor, Interim EIC Katherine Lanpher, steered the team through the many challenges of a pandemic year and the end of a controversial presidency, publishing inquisitive and illuminating stories that addressed *HCN's* banner subjects — public lands, energy infrastructure, Indigenous sovereignty, and, of course, water and wildfire.

I spent a portion of my early days envisioning how *HCN* can publish top-shelf journalism about the West's lands, water and wildlife while also addressing the social and economic issues that are inseparable from any thoughtful discussion about natural resources and the environment. This magazine isn't just about the land, or the high country; it's about creating a better future for people as well as wildlife and the places we all inhabit and love. Our mandate is to cover the contemporary West in all its diversity and complexity, to dispel outdated ways of thinking and to try to offer solutions to the vexing problems our region faces. At the end of the day, *High Country News* is about what is possible.

We're planning now for 2022, dreaming up special projects and assigning stories that we believe can inspire and inform our readers and make a difference in communities around the West. We're putting more resources into our digital operation, too, so we can deliver a weekly dose of news and analysis at *HCN.org*, thereby helping our

audience understand and respond to current events in our region. It is good and important work, and we are honored to be able to do it each and every day. Thank you for being a part of it.

Jennifer Sahn
Editor-in-Chief



AWARDS

“Land-Grab Universities” by Tristan Ahtone and Robert Lee won four prestigious awards: the **2020 Polk Award for Education Reporting**, the **2020 Investigative Reporters and Editors Award**, the **2021 Sigma Award**, an award of excellence from the Society for News Design’s Best of Print News Design and the **2021 Richard LaCourse Award for Investigative Journalism**.

The Best Feature Story at the Native American Journalists Association 2021 National Native Media Awards went to “How the Supreme Court upended a century of federal Indian law” by Graham Lee Brewer and Cary Aspinwall.

“On the deep human need to be outside” by Kiliiii Yuyan received **Third Place, Best Feature Photo at the Native American Journalists Association 2021 National Native Media Awards**.

“The only catfish native to the Western U.S. is running out of water” by Maya L. Kapoor received the **2020 AAAS Kavli Science Journalism Silver Award** and was selected for a place in **Best American Science and Nature Writing 2021**.

STORIES THAT MADE A DIFFERENCE

Journalists often feel called to this profession because they're intrigued by unanswered questions, or because they see an injustice that they believe needs to be revealed and then righted. The greatest reward is when you send a story out into the world and realize that it has changed at least a few hearts and minds — and perhaps even affected policies!

Last year, a number of *HCN* stories inspired action in our communities and legislative bodies:

Our story about lithium mining at Nevada's Thacker Pass not only spurred protests, but also **was referenced in the White House's new supply chain report.**

Eric Siegel's story about the Tenacious Unicorn Ranch in Colorado's Wet Mountain Valley created quite a stir and **inspired an onslaught of stories from other outlets**, including *NPR*, *9News*, *CPR*, *The Denver Post*, *Corey Hutchins' Colorado Media analysis* and *MelMagazine*.

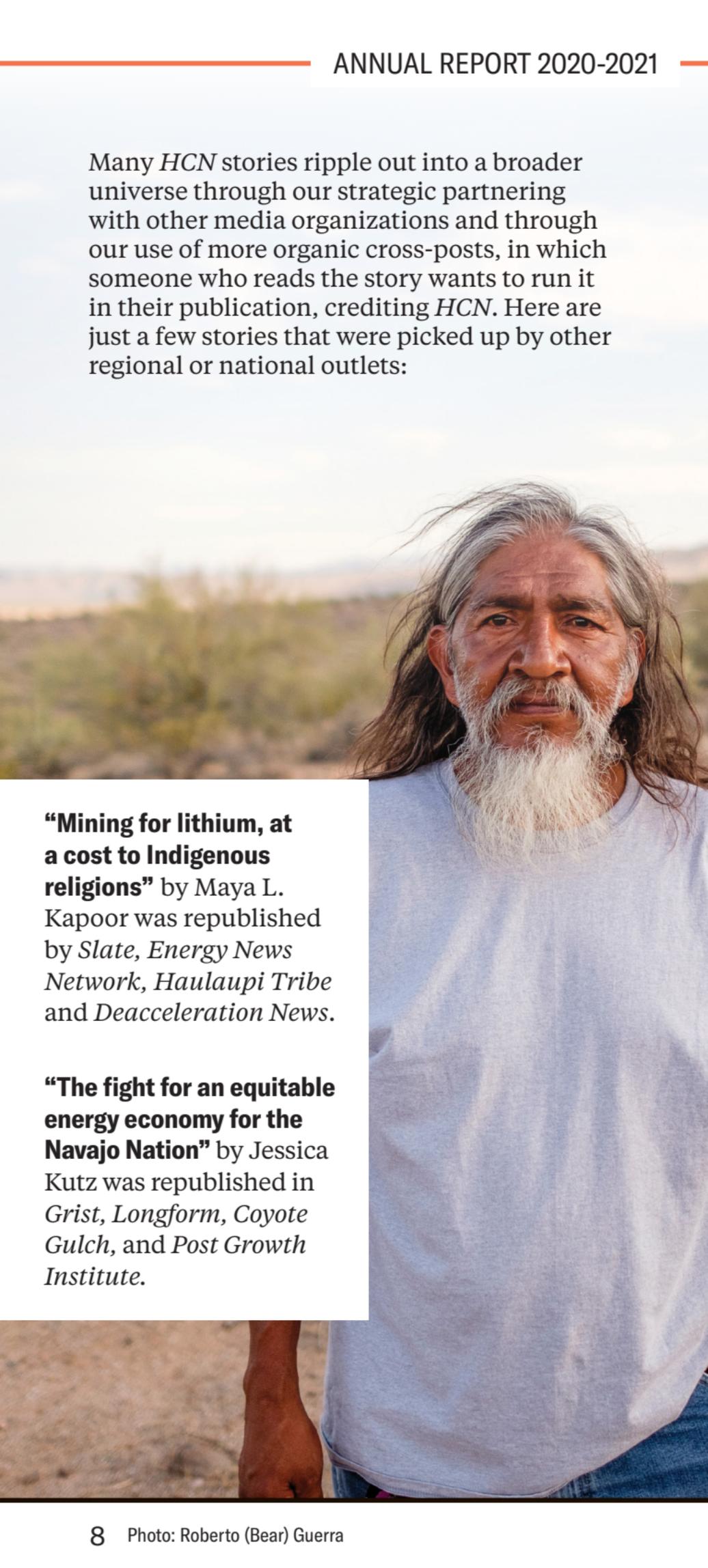


“Land-Grab Universities” was published over a year ago, but it continues to spark dialogue and influence institutions across the country including, Cornell University and Ohio State University. **The article also received an acknowledgement at the hearings on Oregon House Bills 322 and 327.**

Arizona Representative Paul Grijalva let us know that our piece on farmworker organizing in Washington, by Carl Segerstrom **“has gotten such remarkably high feedback/commentary —** at least all positive or at least thoughtful, from federal electeds to our individual consumer supporters. Remarkable amounts of feedback. Thank you again for running it.”



Many *HCN* stories ripple out into a broader universe through our strategic partnering with other media organizations and through our use of more organic cross-posts, in which someone who reads the story wants to run it in their publication, crediting *HCN*. Here are just a few stories that were picked up by other regional or national outlets:



“Mining for lithium, at a cost to Indigenous religions” by Maya L. Kapoor was republished by *Slate*, *Energy News Network*, *Haulaupi Tribe* and *Deacceleration News*.

“The fight for an equitable energy economy for the Navajo Nation” by Jessica Kutz was republished in *Grist*, *Longform*, *Coyote Gulch*, and *Post Growth Institute*.



“Wilderness rescuers brace for a busy winter”

by Jane C. Hu was republished by *Mother Jones*, *Wired*, *Crosscut*, and *The Sopris Sun*.



“Crowds swarm the public land” by Jonathan Thompson was republished in the *Colorado Times Recorder*, *Dakota Country Magazine*, *Missoula Current*, and *Whistler’s Pique Newsmagazine*.



“Black cowboys reclaim their history in the West” by Daja E. Henry was republished by the *Moab Sun* and *Arizona Informant* and made the Center for Western Priorities list of Best Reads for October 2020.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS DESK

Five years ago, *HCN* assembled a new team of journalists, dedicated to reporting on Indian Country. We wanted to share stories from Indigenous writers for Indigenous communities, and create a desk that would build upon that vision. We hired Tristan Ahtone and Graham Lee Brewer and worked with the Native American Journalists Association to come up with criteria for teaching reporters how to authentically report stories focused on Indigenous communities and nations. These voices are a critical part of the story of the West — the Indigenous Affairs desk ensures they are heard. *HCN* values Indigenous voices and is committed to hiring Indigenous staff members, interns, freelance writers and artists.



Nick Martin
Associate Editor



Graham Lee Brewer
Associate Editor (through April 2021)



Christine Trudeau
Contributing Editor



Anna V. Smith
Assistant Editor



Brian Oaster
Intern



Jessica Douglas
Staff Writer

Some notable stories from our Indigenous Affairs Desk this past year include:

Anna Smith's article "**A helpline connects Indigenous immigrants to crucial COVID-19 information**" prompted a letter from the Community Services Consortium, a nationwide network of more than 1,000 anti-poverty agencies.

An incisive reflection by Brook Thompson on **how dams and drought have impacted her family** and community's relationship to the waters and salmon of the Klamath River.

Graham Lee Brewer and Jessica Douglas forecasted President Joe Biden's actions in **Bears Ears is just the beginning**, digging into how tribal nations expect it to be just the start of the conversation.

Nick Estes' feature **investigating the legacy of the stolen Black Hills**, and the modern-day Indigenous citizens working to protect He Sapa and spark the #LandBack movement.

Nick Martin's commentary on the **White Sands footprints discovery** begs us to consider why Indigenous truths have been — and continue to be — disregarded by mainstream science.



INTERNS & FELLOWS

One of *HCN*'s finest achievements is not actually our own. It is, rather, the legacy that is being created by the many interns and fellows who have, since 1985, worked as journalists alongside our staff members and then moved on to do other work in the world. Many of the 229 interns and fellows who spent six to 12 months at *HCN* are still connected with us, and most still work in journalism. Here are just a few of them, with a note on what they're up to now:

Auden Schendler, intern in 1991, is now V.P. of sustainability at Aspen Ski Co., author of *Getting Green Done*, and a popular speaker.

Ernie Atencio, intern in 1993, is now Southwest regional director of the National Parks Conservation Association and author.

Pete McBride, intern in 1994, became a documentary filmmaker, photographer, speaker, and author.

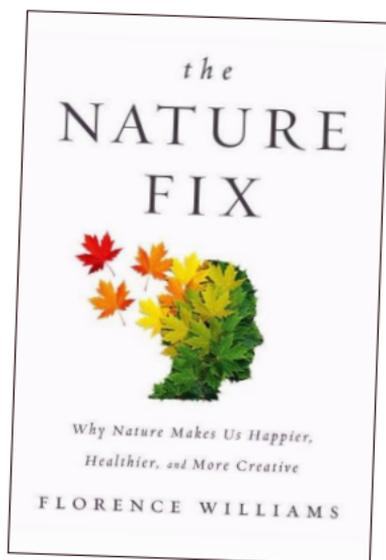
Chip Giller, intern in 1994, was an editor of *Greenwire* before founding *Grist.org* in 1999.

Florence Williams, intern in 1994, was an *HCN* staffer, contributor and board member. She

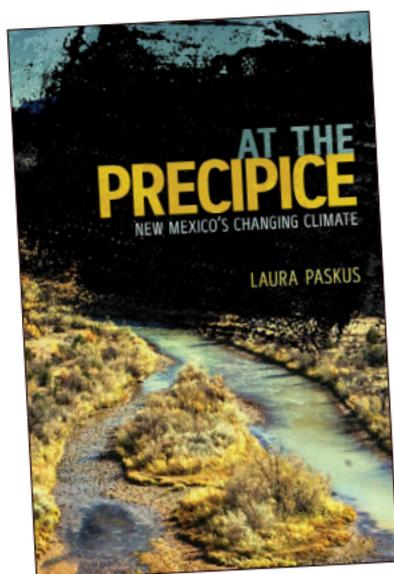
is a contributing editor at *Outside Magazine*, author, popular public speaker and podcast host.

Greg Hanscom, intern in 1996, *HCN* editor-in-chief, editor at *Urbanite* and *Grist*, and executive director of *Crosscut*, now back at *HCN* as executive director.

Michelle Nijhuis, intern in 1998, was an *HCN* contributing editor, editor at *The Atlantic*, and is an author.



Laura Paskus, intern in 2002, has been an assistant editor at *HCN* and a managing editor for *Tribal College Journal*. She's also an independent reporter and radio producer, TV host and author.

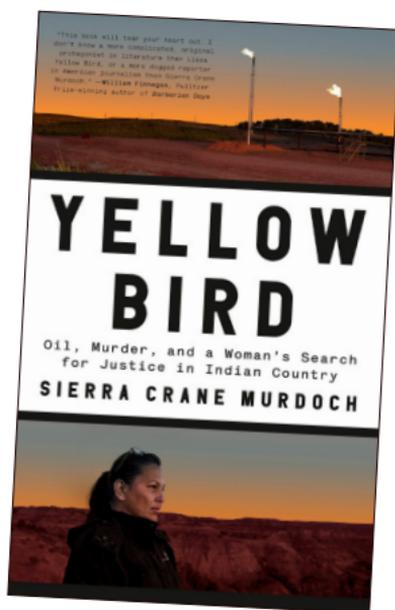


Emma Brown, intern in 2004, is now a staff reporter for the *Washington Post*.

Tony Barboza, intern in 2005, became a staff reporter for the *LA Times* and is now an editorial board member for *The Times*.

Lisa Song, intern in 2010, became an *Inside Climate News* reporter, was a 2013 Pulitzer Prize winner for national reporting and is a staff writer for *ProPublica*.

Sierra Crane-Murdock, intern in 2011, was an *HCN* contributing editor. Today, she's a freelance journalist, essayist and author.



Emily Guerin, intern in 2012, became an *Inside Energy* reporter, senior environment reporter at KPCC and a podcast host.

Krista Langlois, intern in 2013, is an independent reporter, writer, editor and photographer.

Ben Goldfarb, intern in 2014, is an environmental journalist and author.

Lindsey Gilpin, intern and fellow in 2016, is the founder and editor-in-chief of *Southerly* magazine.

Jolene Yazzie, intern 2019, is an artist, graphic designer and photojournalist.

INTERNS & FELLOWS

This past year, *High Country News* was graced by the largest class of fellows and interns we've ever had. These young journalists have collectively produced a stellar body of work for *HCN*. The intern and fellowship program is especially important now, as the need for skilled journalists grows, along with the necessity to encourage and employ early-career writers. *HCN's* transformative internships and fellowships give participants an opportunity they are unlikely to receive elsewhere, and we are all grateful for the work they do.



Sarah Sax
SEJ Climate Justice
Fall Fellow



Wufei Yu
Spring Intern,
Virginia Davis Fall Fellow



Theo Whitcomb
Fall Intern



Brian Oaster
Fall Intern



Kylie Mohr
Fall Intern



Surya Milner
Spring Intern



Jessica Douglas
Virginia Davis Spring Fellow



Brandon Yadegari Moreno
SEJ Climate Justice
Spring Fellow

Yearly cost of *HCN's* Intern
and Fellow program

\$167,000

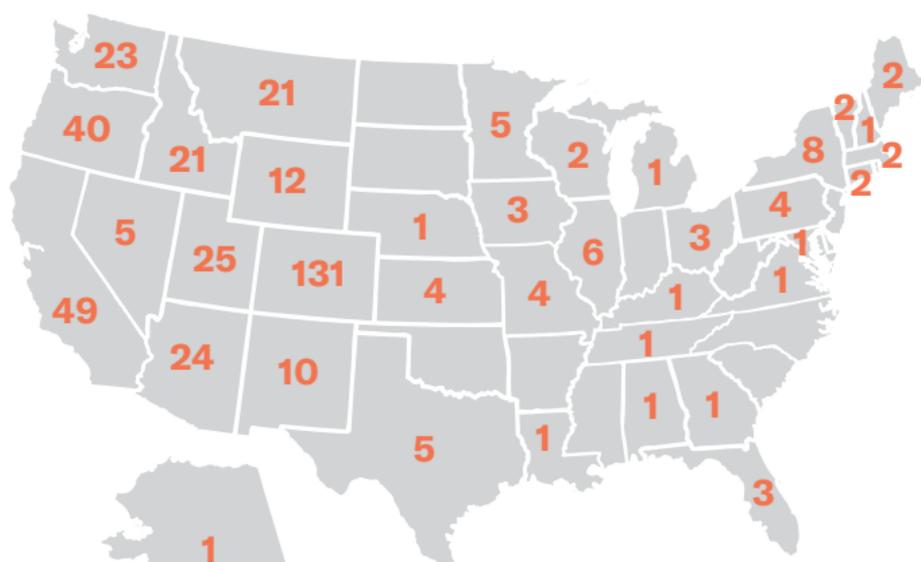
HCNU

The HCNU Classroom Subscription Program grew organically, inspired by what educators were already doing with their personal copies of *HCN* for decades: using the resources that mattered to their curriculum to inspire their young students and bring nuanced perspectives and colorful discussion to the classroom.

For eight years, donors like you have helped us provide this free service to any educator who wanted it. The program includes print or digital copies of the magazine for every student, full access to our 51-year archive of stories, a monthly email highlighting the stories in each issue and a “librarian” to curate stories on any topic.

Even with the challenges and changes that COVID has made in classroom learning, the demand for *HCN* in the classroom continues to grow.

HCNU CLASSROOMS ACROSS THE US



Last year, this service reached **12,911** students in **37** states over **428** classrooms.

WHO WE REACH AND HOW

HCN readers are already an interesting mix of rural and urban dwellers — influential, educated, and environmentally and socially engaged individuals. As our team works to reach an even larger and more diverse audience, we'll continue to share incredible stories in order to inform and inspire new readers across the West.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Print + digital: 31,179

Digital only: 3,873

Total: 35,052

SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS

 **70,715**

 **48,807**

 **13,528**

WEBSITE

Sessions: **415,476***

Unique pageviews: **535,050***

Average time on page: **4:27***

* monthly averages for FY 2020-2021

GROWTH AND SUCCESS

Print subscribers ↑
8.7% year over year, paid
 subscribers ↑ **4.4%**.



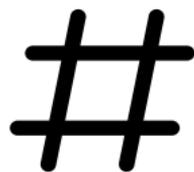
Digital users of our website
 were ↑ **13.6%** year over
 year. The number of clicks
 within our newsletters is ↑
8% year over year. Digital
 subscribership has ↑ **22%**
 from 2018.

Website users are ↑ **65%**
 from three years ago in FY17:
 3,945,337 versus 2,394,785.
 In addition, our sessions are
 ↑ **36%** over the same period.



Our **Facebook** reach went
 ↑ **113%**, and our **Instagram**
 reach went ↑ **14%** over the
 previous fiscal year.

Twitter followers went
 ↑ **24%** from 39,392 to 48,807
 over the last fiscal year. New
 visitors to our website from
 this platform are ↑ **71%** over
 the same time period.

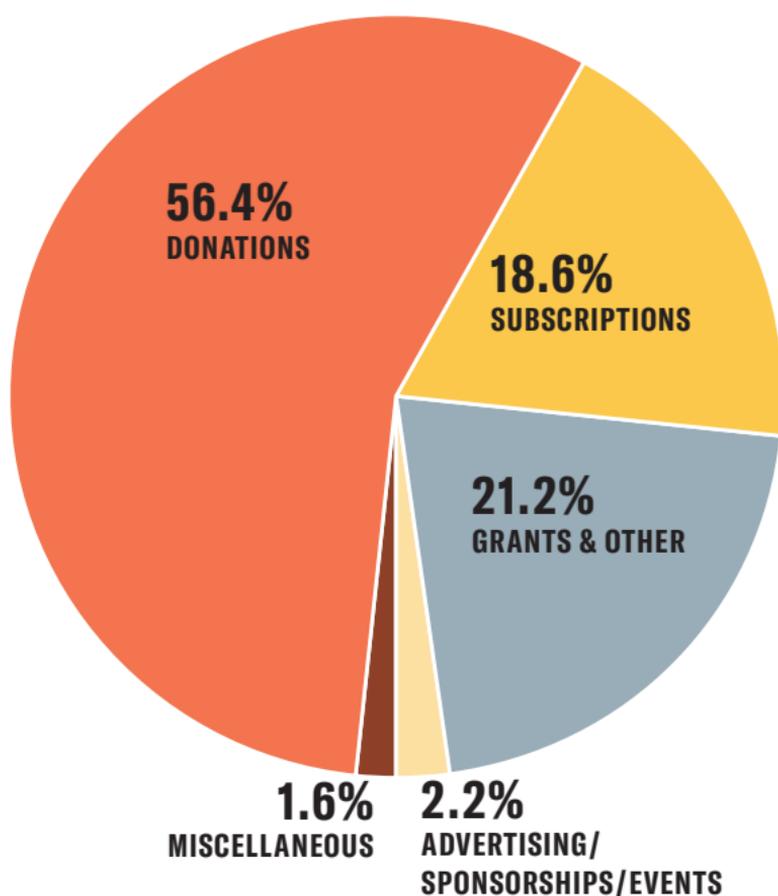


High Country News 2020-21 Profit and Loss

Note: These numbers are unaudited estimates.

Annual Support and Revenue

Donations	\$2,589,430	\$2,385,635
Grants and Other Contributions	\$973,730	\$782,818
Subscriptions	\$854,348	\$906,781
Advertising/Sponsorships/Events	\$101,064	\$184,685
Miscellaneous	\$72,368	\$30,647
(single-issue sales, syndication sales, royalties, investment income, etc.)		
TOTAL	\$4,590,940	\$4,290,566

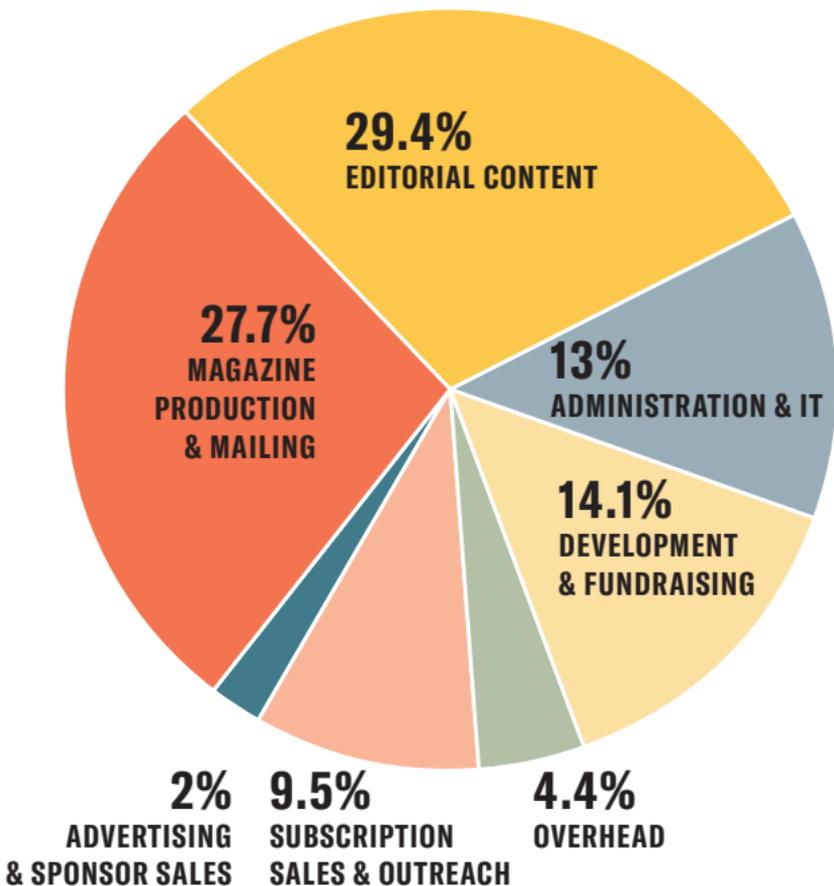


October 1, 2020 – September 30, 2021

October 1, 2019 – September 30, 2020

Expenses

Editorial Content	\$1,188,577	\$1,190,760
Magazine Production	\$1,119,052	\$1,118,083
& Mailing		
Development & Fundraising ..	\$568,596	\$498,985
Administration & IT	\$527,587	\$565,978
Subscription Sales.....	\$382,446	\$306,771
& Outreach		
Overhead	\$177,979	\$332,802
Advertising Sales	\$79,270	\$83,170
TOTAL	\$4,043,507	\$4,096,549
Net Income	\$547,433	\$194,017



THANK YOU, friends!

Every donation is meaningful to *HCN*. Thank you for investing in independent journalism and for sharing your love of the West. Your support gives our staff the critical resources and editorial freedom we need to uncover the kind of stories that can make a difference, inspiring and informing readers across the country.

The following pages show how reader donations and subscription dollars comprise 75% of *High Country News*' revenue. *You* are literally our stakeholders. You are the people we report to and the reason we are able to do this important work: sending subscriptions to students and legislators, training the next generation of journalists, and delivering a beautiful, powerful body of writing to your mailbox or inbox every month.

LAST YEAR, HIGH COUNTRY NEWS RECEIVED:

\$2.5 million from **11,139** donors

35,052 total subscribers



Additional Donation:

6,205 donations (\$123,896) came from contributions you made while renewing your subscription.

The median add-on donation:

\$3 \$8 \$13 \$18 \$23

The most common add-on donation: \$ 5.05



4,369 donations were first-time gifts

1,065 readers (\$196,026) are monthly givers



(186 joined just last year!
418 have been Sustainers' Club members for five or more years)

\$15 | Most popular donation amount last year

Some of the ways you support *HCN*

As you can see from the pie chart on page 18, 18.6% of *HCN*'s revenue comes from **subscription dues**. Growing *HCN*'s paid readership is essential to the organization's sustainability.

Sustainers' Club members give a donation each month, through an automatic bank withdrawal or a credit card, providing stable, regular funding. These wonderful folks are some of our most loyal fans.

**A heartfelt “thank you” to each of our
1,065 Sustainers' Club members!**

The **Tom Bell Legacy Circle** was created by our amazing founder before he passed away in 2016. It's comprised of a stalwart group of donors who have named *High Country News* in their wills.

**To each of our 29 Legacy Circle
members, we thank you for creating a
legacy of your own and investing in
the future of independent journalism!**

Grant support from **Foundations** helps *HCN* build and grow programs like our Intern and Fellowship program, our Indigenous Affairs Desk, and even our state and local news coverage.

**Thank you, grantors, for your
generous support of our work and
for trusting *HCN* and believing in the
power and value of a free press.**

The HCN family of board and staff extend our heartfelt thanks to you for your generosity of spirit and your curious minds. We're so grateful to be a part of a community that cares so deeply about the West — its complexities and contradictions, its beauty and burdens, and its extraordinary diversity of land, animals and people.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Brian Beitner
Through June 2021

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President

Seth Cothrun
Treasurer

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Bob Fulkerson

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Through Jan. 2021

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Fátima Luna

**Estee Rivera
Murdock**
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Andrea Otáñez

Marla Painter

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Raynelle Rino

Kara Teising

Andy Wiessner

Florence Williams

Luis Torres
Emeritus



Our Mission

High Country News is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit media organization that covers the important issues and stories that define the American West. Its mission is to inform and inspire people — through in-depth journalism — to act on behalf of the West's diverse natural and human communities.

H C N

Know the West.

hcn.org • 970-527-4898
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Cover Photos: Cassidy Araiza,
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