

A N N U A L R E P O R T  
High Country News



## From the Publisher

# The Story Behind the Story

For 48 years, *High Country News* has covered the stories that define the diverse and ever-changing American West. As a nonprofit, independent news organization, primarily funded by its readers, *HCN* retains an editorial freedom that allows our writers and editors to dig into the most pressing issues of the day, providing critical long-view perspectives for citizens and decision-makers both here in the region and across the country.



2018 was vividly defined by an astounding series of storms across the region's physical, social and political landscapes. One storm in particular was very personal: the unexpected passing on Aug. 31 of *HCN's* former publisher, Ed Marston, who, along with his incomparable partner, Betsy, did so much to shape *High Country News* into the institution it is today, from 1983 until his retirement in 2002. Hundreds of people, including many past and present staffers and writers for *HCN*, flocked to a "Celebration of Ed" in our hometown of Paonia, Colorado, paying heartfelt and eloquent tribute to an extraordinary man who was an intellectual force not only in his local community, but in the West and across the nation. In October, we published a special section of the magazine honoring Ed's legacy.

On the physical side, the West was slammed time and again by the gathering might of a changing climate. Long-term drought and record heat fueled immense wildfires and drained many reservoirs to near record-low levels; intense storms flooded towns along rivers and swept oceans into coastline communities. Our writers and editors provided

on-the-ground climate reporting from places as far-flung as Imperial Beach, California; Santa Fe, New Mexico; and Alaska's North Slope.

Meanwhile, we continued to cover issues that have long been in our wheelhouse — stories about public lands, wildlife, growth and the long list of environmental policies and regulations the Trump administration continues to target for rollbacks and repeal. But it was the larger social and political storms swirling around this president, and consuming the attention of the country and the world, that distinguished our work this year. Though we didn't cover the daily blow-by-blow, tweet-by-tweet upheavals over race, sexual harassment, immigration and the like, we found ways into those stories through longer investigations and more thoughtful perspective pieces.

And we even managed to have some fun along the way, with Betsy Marston's humorous *Heard Around the West* column gracing the back page of all 22 print issues, and an eclectic collection of quirky opinion and feature pieces on everything from a young woman's struggle to live in the ghost town of Cisco, Utah, to a search for the elusive Deer 255, a doe that migrated a record 242 miles from west-central Wyoming to her summer pasture near Island Park, Idaho.

The West remains a place full of marvels, calamities and perplexing dilemmas, and we are honored to cover it all for our growing readership. With their support, this organization is not only surviving, but thriving at a time when deep, trustworthy journalism is needed more than ever.



Paul Larmer

*Publisher*

# Government, Tribes, Communities, People A West Worth Watching

## Washington

*High Country News* kept a close eye on the Trump administration's contentious rollbacks to public-land and environmental policies, monitoring aggressive oil and gas leasing on public lands, the shrinking national monuments in Utah, the removal of protections for wildlife, and the abrupt canceling of efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions. We also watched the controversial appointments to key federal agencies and kept tabs on Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and former EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's controversial actions and ethics violations, as well as the attempts of Congress to manage them. Our reporters followed Zinke as he traveled in Utah, Montana and Colorado, meeting with friendly politicians and industry leaders while doing his best to avoid angry activists.

## Anti-Federal Government, Anti-Public Land

Associate Editor Tay Wiles continued her in-depth coverage of Cliven Bundy and his associates, including the failure of federal prosecutors to hold them to account for armed standoffs in Nevada and Oregon. Meanwhile, she reported on the collaborations among ranchers, environmentalists and federal agencies in Harney County, Oregon, that continue to thrive in spite of the Malheur occupation. Tay also examined the stubborn



fringe movement to create an independent state of Jefferson in Northern California.

## #MeToo in the West

Two years ago, Editorial Fellow Lyndsey Gilpin revealed the long-standing pattern of sexual abuse in the National Park Service. Last spring, Assistant Editor Anna V. Smith gave voice to stories of sexual abuse in the Bureau of Indian Affairs. (BIA Director Bryan Rice has since resigned.) In May, we covered sex trafficking and the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation's move to outlaw it after the disappearance of several women. In September, we looked at what a group of concerned truckers are doing to fight the trafficking of women and girls at truck stops.

## New Perspectives on Immigration Policies

The roiling, divisive national conflicts surrounding race, immigration and economic inequities engulfed the West.

Associate Editor Maya L. Kapoor explored the connections between communities on both sides of the Arizona-Mexico border, and how they are being strained by an expanding U.S. Border Patrol presence and the border wall.



Contributing Editor Sarah Tory reported on how immigrants, both documented and undocumented, have carved out vibrant but insecure lives in Alamosa, Colorado.

## Reporting from Indian Country

Throughout 2017–2018, *High Country News* built its new desk for reporting on tribal affairs throughout the region,

headed by Tristan Ahtone, an award-winning journalist and member of the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma. Ahtone, Contributing Editor Graham Brewer, a member of the Cherokee Nation, and other reporters produced more than 100 articles over the course of the year, many written by Native American journalists.

As the U.S. grappled with the meaning of the administration's zero-tolerance policy, our Tribal Desk pointed to the particular challenges of Indigenous children from Central America, whose languages weren't among those spoken by Border Patrol agents or the nonprofit attorneys trying to help the children. We also set this policy in context, reminding readers that the slave industry and Native boarding schools of the 18th and 19th centuries also separated children from their parents.

These stories had reach well beyond *HCN's* print and website readership, appearing in news outlets across the U.S. that focus on Native and tribal news, including *Buzzfeed*, *The Intercept*, *Indianz.com*, *Navajo-Hopi Observer*, *Indian Country Today*, *Yakima Nation Review*, *The First Nations Canada*, *Confederated Umatilla Journal*, *Native News Online* and *First Nation's Focus*.

Our tribal team has been exploring relationships with other newsrooms to get story tips from Indian Country. This long-term project will allow whistleblowers to send us information and tips and *HCN* to ramp up our investigative reporting on tribal affairs. This will be the first time anyone has offered such a tool for use across Indian Country.

## **The West's Under-Reported Places**

These stories all fit squarely into *HCN's* mission to "inform and inspire people through in-depth reporting to act on behalf of the American West's diverse natural and human communities." Just as important as the West's spectacular public lands and

wildlife are its unique communities and cultures, and in 2018, we expanded our reporting from under-represented communities. Contributing Editor Ruxandra Guidi's monthly "Letter from California" highlighted the culturally and politically diverse Golden State and the ways in which Californians are tackling immigration, farmworker safety, climate change and many other challenges. Correspondent Sarah Tory dove into a series of stories about immigration, deportation, and incarceration. And Wayne Hare, a member of *HCN's* board of directors, began work on an ambitious series we call "A Civil Conversation," in which he reports on the experiences of African-Americans in the West.

## Media Partners and Solutions

*High Country News* worked with a number of partners to expand the reach of our coverage of nationally important Western issues. Climate Desk, a collaboration of more than a dozen national outlets covering climate change, helped push our stories onto the homepages of the *Atlantic*, *Huffington Post* and *Wired* among others; we contributed stories to *The Guardian* and its "This Land Is Your Land" series; and we worked with editors at *The Intercept* to co-publish "Where are the Indigenous children who never came home?," a story about the country's most notorious boarding school for Native American children and the tribes still seeking answers a century later. Associate Editor Kate Schimel worked closely with journalists in rural newsrooms in New Mexico and Montana through a partnership with the Solutions Journalism Network. The Montana project, called the Montana Gap, yielded a treasure trove of stories about how rural communities are finding new ways to survive and thrive economically in the modern West.

## Jolly Good Fellows (and Interns)

Underlying our work in 2018 was the presence of another great class of *HCN* editorial interns and fellows. Under the guiding hands of our editors, these talented and motivated journalists — Jessica Kutz, Carl Segerstrom, Emily Benson and Elena Saavedra Buckley — produced an astonishing number of stories for the magazine and website. And, mid-year, we continued a fine tradition of hiring from within, and brought on Emily Benson, who is now our assistant editor based in Moscow, Idaho.

## Settling in the Field

Emily was one of several editors who chose to locate outside of *HCN*'s headquarters in Paonia, Colorado, part of a broader effort to better cover the vast region and retain the best talent. Starting in September, we had editors working out of Gunnison, Colorado; Seattle,



*Jessica Kutz, fellow*



*Ruxandra Guidi, contributing editor*



*Kate Schimel, associate editor*



*Carl Segerstrom, fellow*



*Maya Kapoor, associate editor*



*Tristan Ahtone, associate editor*

Washington; Portland, Oregon; Moscow, Idaho; and Davis, California. While production of the magazine and all of *HCN's* business and administrative functions remain in Paonia, Gunnison has become the editorial hub, with Editor-in-Chief Brian Calvert overseeing three desks: West-North, led by Schimel and covering Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming; West-South, led by Kapoor and covering California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona; and Tribal Affairs, led by Ahtone and covering the archipelago of tribal nations and communities west of the Mississippi. Each team has an assistant editor assigned: Emily Benson, Paige Blankenbuehler and Anna Smith, respectively. These assistant editors help write, edit and administer the teams, and form a task force for website publication, which is led by Digital Editor Gretchen King.

## HCNU Classroom Program

With the support of generous donors, we delivered free *HCN* subscriptions to a record number of educators and students around the country this year. More than 300 professors and teachers provided their 15,000 students with print magazines and online access to HCN.org, using our stories for discussions and assignments. The disciplines ranged from geography, environmental science and natural resource management to law, political science and journalism. And we received accolades like this one from Oliver A. Houck, who teaches law at Tulane University:

*I have used HCN in my environmental, natural resources and related law classes for the past 20 years. The classroom subscription program keeps my students up to date and provides live-action materials for both their research and class discussions. And I must say, even for exams. The quality of the articles is very high, the information reliable, covering an enormous range of topics.*

## Awards

*High Country News* won a number of prestigious honors in Fiscal Year 2017–2018:

### AAAS Kavli Science Journalism Awards:

**Gold (magazine category):** Douglas Fox, "Inside the Firestorm"

**Silver (online category):** Nick Neely, "The West's newest bird species has a beak like a crowbar."

### 2018 James Beard Foundation Media Award

Julia O'Malley, "The Teenage Whaler's Tale"

### Native American Journalist Association:

#### Print / Online – Best Feature Story

**First Place:** Julia O'Malley, "The Teenage Whaler's Tale"

## Print / Online – Best Coverage of Native America

**First Place:** Anna V. Smith

## Online – Best News Story

**Third Place:** Debra Utacia Krol, "Northern California tribes face down massive wildfires"

## Print / Online – Best Elder Coverage

**First Place:** Debra Utacia Krol, "Paiute Tribe elders navigate a faltering health care system"

## Print – Best News Story

**First Place:** Kim Baca, "The Navajo Nation has a wild horse problem"

## Print / Online – Best Column

**First Place:** Julian Brave NoiseCat, "Take down monuments to Native American oppression"

## Print / Online – Best Environmental Coverage

**First Place:** Jacqueline Keeler, "Let them eat yellowcake"

## What Readers Are Saying

Readers often send feedback and thanks, as well as story suggestions and serious criticism, all of which we welcome.

Here's a sampling of recent commendations:

*I love the American West, yet I approached your magazine with initial skepticism; I'm so weary of the biased, divisive and manipulative reporting that I have come to associate with most publications that target conservative or rural America. How refreshing to find reporting that simply lays out the facts, explains the effects, and occasionally polices the falsehoods. (You sold me when you matter-of-factly corrected two inaccurate comments made by the subjects of the articles.) ... Your own obvious love of the West, combined with unemotional, intelligent and just plain common-sense writing has earned you a new fan. Keep it up!"*

—Jeff Colfax, California

*I (was) in a bar in D.C. talking to someone who worked for a senator from New Mexico, and he randomly (brought) up this article about climate change and New Mexico that appeared in High Country News: 'When that came out, everybody read it. People were forwarding it to me.'*

—Sean Barna, New York

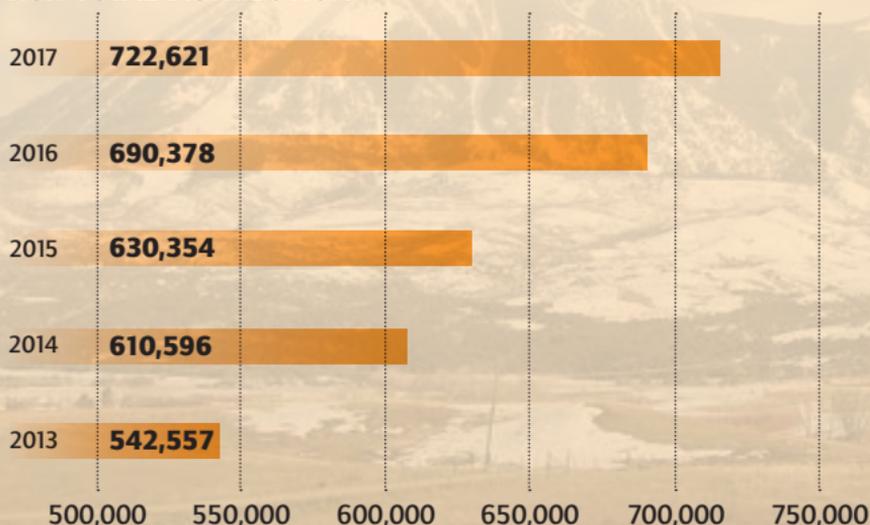
*I am a subscriber to the New York Times (online), and today, Sam Sifton (New York Times Cooking) mentioned an article about a teenage whaler that had the 'best first sentence of any article I've read in 2017.' I was intrigued and clicked the link. I concur with Sam's opinion. What a powerful piece of journalism. Julia O'Malley captured both sides of this story and brought the reality of Indigenous hunters to the mainstream.*

—a reader

*The single most-common suggestion from readers falls into the broad category of regional news: High Country News. As one newsletter reader, Suzanne, explained to me: The name is "not a reference to marijuana." Instead, "High Country' is an older term for the Western U.S." The publication covers land use, climate, wildfires and many other issues. I started reading this week and will become a regular.*

—David Leonhardt, *New York Times*,  
"What to Read Now," Nov. 24, 2017

#### HCN TOTAL DISTRIBUTION



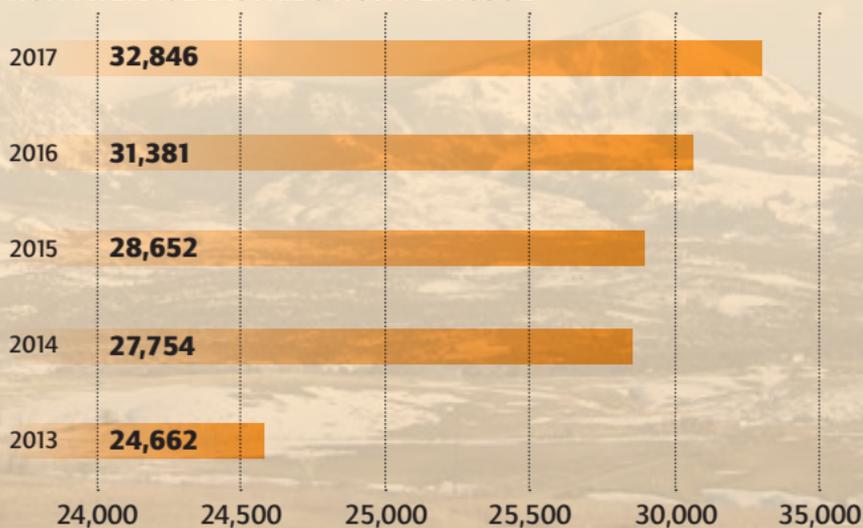
## A Rock-Solid Model

Forty-eight years ago, *High Country News* was one of only a handful of nonprofit news organizations operating in the U.S. Today, we are one of more than 200, many of which have sprung up in the last decade. As a new report from the Institute for Nonprofit News states:

*While tiny by the standards of legacy news companies, the nonprofit sector generates an outsize amount of original journalism and the types of reporting that require significant investments of time and expertise. In a troubled news environment marked by cutbacks at traditional outlets, information vacuums, and the rise of misinformation disguised as news, the nonprofits are providing original and in-depth reporting to many other media as well as directly to the public.*

HCN is proud to be part of this new wave of journalism. Unlike many of the newer news organizations, though, *HCN* has a diversified revenue stream and is not overreliant on foundations or a handful of donors. We received most of our funds in 2018 directly from our 35,000 subscribers, nearly a third of whom made donations beyond their subscription fees. And our subscriber base continues to grow. Print subscriptions are up nearly 4 percent over 2017, and digital subscriptions are up an astounding 30 percent.

### HCN AVERAGE DISTRIBUTION PER ISSUE



# Thank you for your support

For 48 years, reader contributions to *High Country News* have fueled our journalism. We are grateful to every single donor whose generosity has kept us afloat.

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# High Country News

## Profit and Loss

October 1, 2017 – September 30, 2018

### Annual Support and Revenue

Donations	\$ 1,581,625
Subscriptions	\$ 919,196
Grants and Other Contributions	\$ 516,320
Advertising/Sponsorships/ Events	\$ 108,918
Miscellaneous (single issue sales, syndication sales, royalties, investment income, etc.)	\$ 41,009
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 3,167,068</b>

**49.9%** Donations



**29.0%** Subscriptions



**16.3%** Grants and Other Contributions



**3.4%** Advertising/Sponsorships/Events



**1.3** Miscellaneous



*Note: These numbers are unaudited estimates.*

## Expenses

Production & Fulfillment	\$ 985,507
Editorial Content	\$ 1,016,039
Subscription Sales & Outreach	\$ 293,628
Administration & IT	\$ 339,555
Development & Fundraising	\$ 336,343
Overhead	\$ 171,889
Advertising/Sponsor Sales	\$ 82,744
TOTAL	\$ 3,225,705
<b>NET INCOME/(Expense)</b>	<b>\$ (58,637)</b>

### 30.6% Production & Fulfillment



### 31.5% Editorial Content



### 9.1% Subscription Sales & Outreach



### 10.5% Administration & IT



### 10.4% Development & Fundraising



### 5.3% Overhead



### 2.6% Advertising/Sponsor Sales



## 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.

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**FRONT COVER IMAGE:** From High Country News, "A tale of two housing crises, rural and urban." Fannie Sandoval tends sheep on the family homestead near Torean, New Mexico, where she's lived her whole life. Photo by Donovan Shortey.

**INSIDE BACKGROUND IMAGE:** HCN headquarters is at the foot of these mountains near Paonia, Colorado.