

# High Country News



# Staying on the Ground

## Executive Letter

**A**s the noise and chaos surrounding the dissemination and consumption of information in the digital age continue to amplify, *High Country News* has quietly doubled down on what it does best: reporting deeply and authentically on the issues confronting the American West and the nation.

We've accomplished this by staying connected to the ground, even as we keep an eye on the broader political and social storms washing over our world. In 2019, we dispersed more of *HCN's* editorial staff across our vast, 12-state beat. While the organization's headquarters remain in the rural town of Paonia, Colorado, we placed full-time editors and writers in Gunnison and Durango, Colorado; Tucson, Arizona; Davis, California; Portland, Oregon; Spokane, Washington; Moscow, Idaho; and Fort Worth, Texas.

The editorial staff is now working as three teams — North, South and Indigenous — to ensure that we cover stories across a broad geography, both physical and cultural. We have filled out our teams with internally developed talent, hiring five of the journalists that have come through our Intern and Fellow program in the last several years. More than 250 aspiring writers and editors have now come through this unique journalism

“bootcamp,” and they are doing great things in the world.

In the middle of 2019, we hired two Native American journalists as an intern and a fellow to help us deepen our coverage of the Indigenous West. Our



Photo by Marta Sanchez

work in this area has blossomed under the guidance of Associate Editor Tristan Ahtone, a citizen of the Kiowa Tribe. *HCN* won an astonishing 19 awards from the Native American Journalists Association this summer.

Telling the stories of the West through the diverse lenses of the people who live here has become a staple of the magazine, even as we continue to be a go-to source for coverage of the environment and natural resources. Our goal is to make *HCN* an inclusive gathering space for all, and to ultimately serve a broader swath of people who can effect needed change in the region.

Toward this end, the board and staff have embarked on a major fundraising campaign in anticipation of our 50th anniversary in 2020. Its goal is to catapult *HCN* to the next level as a magazine, increasing both the quality and quantity of our work and effectively marketing it to millions across the country. In the summer of 2019, *HCN* contracted with consultants at Atlantic 57 to take a fresh look at our brand and consider how to market it effectively in the digital age. We also began preparing for the first major redesign of the magazine in 17 years, which will debut in January 2020.

What makes *HCN* unique, we rediscovered, is our community of readers, who have sustained us during good times and bad. As you can see from our financials, your subscriptions and donations make up the bulk of our income.

And these dollars are not just cold cash. They are symbols of a warm relationship: We provide you with thought-provoking, inspiring journalism, and you engage with us in the ongoing, often difficult conversation about the complex place we all love.

Thank you for being part of our community.



Paul Larmer  
Executive Director  
and Publisher



Photo by Paul Larmer

# Shining Light on a Complex West

## The Year's Important Stories

### Reporting from Indian Country

In 2017, *High Country News* became one of the few non-Native news organizations to commit significant resources to reporting on tribal affairs for a primarily Indigenous audience. Since then, the desk has written more than 200 articles. More than half of these have been produced by Native journalists and writers, a quarter by Native women.

The Indigenous Affairs Desk has entered quickly into the national debates over elections, both how elections are run and the values determined by them. Before the mid-term elections in 2018, Tristan Ahtone wrote an op-ed for *The New York Times* reproaching North Dakota Democrats for not fighting back against voter suppression. As presidential candidates entered the 2020 race, Kim TallBear, associate professor of Native Studies at the University of Alberta and leading expert on genetics, characterized Elizabeth Warren's claims to Cherokee ancestry as "a form of violence," advancing an important conversation with national implications.

As the world grappled with the biodiversity crisis and sought tools to slow the sixth extinction, our Indigenous Affairs Desk analyzed the Yurok Tribe's declaration of rights of personhood for the Klamath River, likely the first

Congratulations on that basket of awards you recently won. For years, *HCN* couldn't get a handle on Indian affairs. Nobody could. But you have kept at it, to the honor and benefit of the newspaper, the tribes, the West, and the reading public. Basically everything you are putting out on the tribes is of top quality. ... There were unanswered questions, of course, but great journalism leaves them



Photo by Don White/Alamy

such designation for a non-human, non-corporation entity in North America. Associate Editor Anna V. Smith brought national attention to the Yuroks' advocacy on behalf of the river with her feature "How the Yurok Tribe is reclaiming the Klamath River" in 2018.

The Indigenous Affairs Desk has entered squarely into the national conversation on cultural preservation and reconciliation. As the nation reeled from the current zero-tolerance policy aimed at immigrants, we examined the historical abuses perpetrated by the United States against Indigenous children at 18th- and 19th-century "boarding schools." In counterpoint, we profiled many of the people — including Gerald Cournoyer, the new art director at Bacone College in Muskogee, Oklahoma — who are working to make this history more broadly understood and to restore Native cultures through art, activism and language preservation.

When high school students shouted slurs at an Omaha tribal elder in early 2019, Ahtone and Graham Brewer, contributing editor, took the national media to task, in both the *Washington Post*

unanswered if, after all the hard work, the data just isn't there. Please pass on my thanks and high regard to your many staff people who have brought so much quality understanding to an area that richly deserves it.

— Charles Wilkinson, Moses Lasky  
Professor of Law Emeritus, University of Colorado,  
July 15, 2019

and on hcn.org, for failing to categorize the students' behavior as racist as well as for the lack of diversity in the national media's workforce. Ahtone and Brewer's critiques didn't stop with the media and U.S. government. The desk also gave an authoritative account of the allegations of sexual, racial and workplace harassment at the National Congress of American Indians.

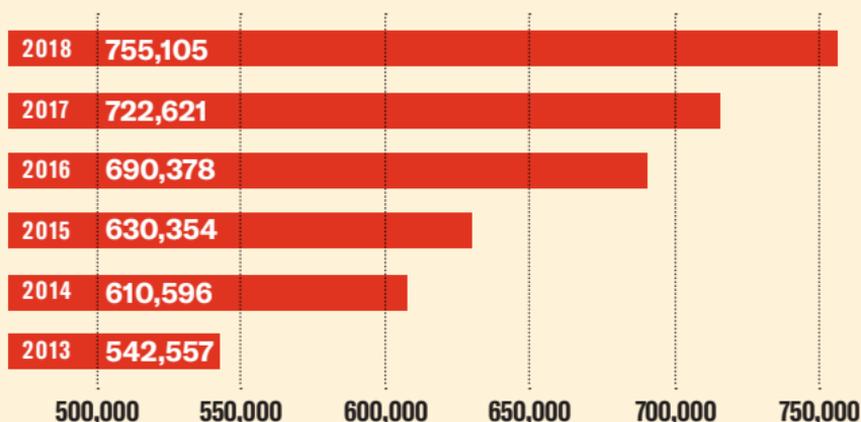
For its efforts this year, the Indigenous Affairs Desk won eight first-place awards, nine second-place awards and two third-place awards from the Native American Journalists Association. "A tale of two housing crises, rural and urban," a feature by Julian Brave NoiseCat, was nominated for the 2019 Livingston Award for excellence in local reporting.

All of these stories had reach well beyond HCN's print and website readership. They and others appeared in news outlets across the United States, including the *Colorado Independent*, the *Albuquerque Journal North*, *Buzzfeed*, Santa Fe Public Schools, *Jackson Hole Daily*, *Crosscut*, *HuntingFishing.com* and *HuffPost*, as well as those focused on Native news, including *The Intercept*, *Indians.com*, *Navajo-Hopi Observer*, *Indian Country Today*, *Yakama Nation Review*, *The First Nations Canada*, *Confederated Umatilla Journal*, *Native News Online* and *First Nation's Focus*.

## Air, Water, Land

*High Country News* kept a close eye on the third year of the Trump administration's rollbacks to environmental rules, covering many breaking

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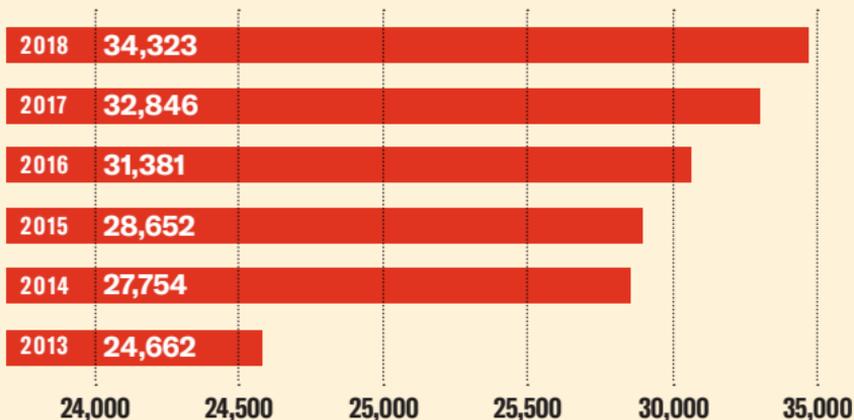
Courtesy of Grand Canyon National Park

stories. Among these were plans to transfer or open 28.3 million acres of federal lands in Alaska for development, including the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and vast tracts of the Tongass National Forest; plans to make 20 million acres across six BLM field offices available to oil and gas leasing; and the administration’s attempts to roll back the 2015 sage grouse plans, drill for oil and gas on the Pacific Coast and rescind regulations to limit methane emissions. The use and misuse of public land remains a core beat at *HCN*.

## Climate

Indeed, these stories are of deep relevance to the world as society comes to terms with our rapidly warming climate. *HCN* kept this topic at the fore, shining a light on the myriad and complex ways voters and decision-makers are responding to the effects of warming conditions on all aspects of life

### HCN AVERAGE DISTRIBUTION PER ISSUE



as we know it in the West: wildlife, water, farming, disease, sea level, fire, family relationships, taxes and finance.

## **Energy & Industry**

*HCN* focused this past year on the ways in which the nation continues to argue over environmental protection. Note especially our coverage of the ongoing industrialization of public lands and neighborhoods in Colorado and New Mexico's hot spots for natural gas development, along with these states' debates over how to regulate the industry and address the resulting impacts on public health. And, with the nuance and thoroughness typical of *High Country News*, we also shed light on the ways in which the business community and local and regional governments are attempting to solve the defining problem of our age — to lessen the effects of the climate crisis. One important story explains the “energy imbalance market.” In what is considered a first step toward unifying the Western grid, the market is expected to accommodate utilities as they share wind and solar power with each other, thereby reducing the need to burn gas and coal to meet spikes in demand. Another — from our Climate Desk partnership — explains how auto manufacturers and states are aligning themselves with the fuel-mileage standards promulgated by the Obama administration.

## **Borderlands**

The politics behind immigration and border policies have roiled the nation for two years. Our South Desk, with Associate Editor Paige Blankenbuehler in Durango and Assistant Editor Jessica Kutz in Tucson, has kept its eyes on the true costs of family separations, ICE raids, industrial detention centers, the border wall and deferred infrastructure maintenance in border towns. They have also given all of us hope by reporting on the communities, nonprofit organizations and leaders of all stripes working to defeat the militias and their vigilante “patrols” of the border.



**Eight first-place awards,  
nine second-place awards and  
two third-place awards for our coverage  
of tribal affairs at the Native American  
Journalists Association 2019 National  
Native Media Awards**



**2019 Thomas L. Stokes Award for  
Best Energy and Environment Writing for  
“The rising risks of the West’s latest gas  
boom” by Daniel Glick and Jason Plautz**



**2019 American Society of Journalists and  
Authors Outstanding Reported Essay for  
“In this rapaciously dry year, a quiet  
question grows louder: What are we  
doing here?” by Cally Carswell**



**Six first-place awards and one  
third-place award for our coverage of  
tribal affairs for the Native American  
Journalists Association 2018 National  
Native Media Awards**



**2018 Walter Sullivan Award for  
“Inside the Firestorm” by Douglas Fox**

# HCNU

## Students Relish Our Stories

**T**his popular program delivers free classroom subscriptions to classrooms across the West — and beyond — thanks to the support of generous donors. In 2018-2019, we served more than 275 university and high school educators and almost 15,000 students with free print subscriptions as well as full online access to our website content and archives. Recently, Assistant Editor Anna V. Smith was invited to her alma mater, the University of Oregon in Eugene — an HCNU participant — to speak with journalism students about the profession, what a magazine looks for in a pitch, and how to improve their stories. The class was well acquainted with *HCN*, and several would-be future interns were eager to apply.



Courtesy Skidmore College, New York

“As a professor of U.S. public lands and oceans policy at Skidmore College, our semester-long subscription to *High Country News* has been a valuable asset for my students to stay engaged with the people and issues west of the Mississippi. We’ve read and discussed numerous *HCN* in-depth articles in class, and multiple students have had their letters to the editor published in *HCN* (and elsewhere!). We look forward to every issue we receive. ... Such a meaningful teaching tool!”

— *Andrew J. Schneller, Ph.D.*

*Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies and Sciences, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York*

“The *High Country News* classroom program has been a wonderful addition to my graduate course “Science of Environmental Management,” as the stories help students learn the important connection between scientists and policy on public lands.”

— *Dr. Jessica Young, Global Coordinator,  
Master in Environmental Management,  
Western Colorado University*



Courtesy Western Colorado University

# Smart, Courageous Journalism When It Matters Most

**A**s *High Country News* enters our 50th year, we are eager to serve a society hungry for authentic, intelligent journalism. In order to meet the growing environmental and social challenges the West faces — and continue to be a news leader — *High Country News* must become a fully resourced news organization with the power to inspire millions of citizens to make a difference in their communities.

**Beginning in 2020, we plan to raise \$10 million for ...**

## **DEEPER AND MORE COMPREHENSIVE COVERAGE OF THE WEST**

Hire more — and more highly qualified — writers and editors to do deep-dive journalism focused on the West's mounting environmental, political and social challenges.

## **A LARGER AND BROADER AUDIENCE**

Expand our marketing efforts to ensure that our work reaches 100,000 subscribers and inspires them to act on behalf of the West.

## **STABILIZE AND SUSTAIN HIGH COUNTRY NEWS' BUSINESS MODEL**

Bolster our fundraising capacity to ensure the magazine's quality and independence for generations to come.

## **TECHNOLOGY THAT SUPPORTS A MODERN NEWS OPERATION**

Deploy 21st-century technology to reach new audiences, safeguard our journalists and better serve and engage readers.

## **ESTABLISH AN ENDOWMENT FOR OUR INTERN AND FELLOW PROGRAM**

Train the next generations of ethical, highly skilled media professionals.

# Thank You For Your Support

**F**or 49 years, reader contributions to *High Country News* have fueled our journalism. We are grateful to every single donor whose generosity has kept us running.

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Marc Haverland  
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cleaning & maintenance  
staff at HCN for the  
excellent work that you do.  
And photographers!  
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     Kathy Taylor Yokel  
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 Paquita Zuidema

# High Country News

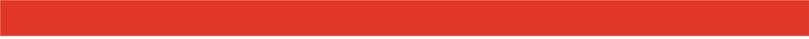
## Profit & Loss

October 1, 2018 – September 30, 2019

October 1, 2017 – September 30, 2018

ANNUAL SUPPORT AND REVENUE	2018-'19	2017-'18
Donations	<b>\$ 1,697,691</b>	1,581,625
Subscriptions	<b>921,644</b>	919,196
Grants and Other Contributions	<b>688,719</b>	516,320
Advertising/Sponsorships/ Events	<b>150,303</b>	108,918
Miscellaneous (single issue sales, syndication sales, royalties, investment income, etc.)	<b>53,501</b>	41,009
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 3,511,858</b>	3,167,068

**48.3%** Donations



49.9%

**26.2%** Subscriptions



29.0%

**19.6%** Grants and Other Contributions



16.3%

**4.3%** Advertising/Sponsorships/Events



3.4%

**1.5%** Miscellaneous

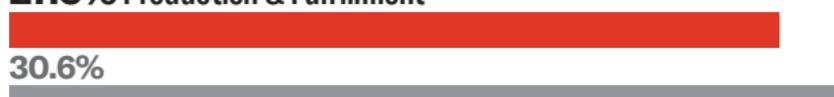


1.3%

Note: These numbers are unaudited estimates.

EXPENSES	2018-'19	2017-'18
Production & Fulfillment	<b>\$ 997,529</b>	985,507
Editorial Content	<b>1,062,312</b>	1,016,039
Subscription Sales & Outreach	<b>324,456</b>	293,628
Administration & IT	<b>478,170</b>	339,555
Development & Fundraising	<b>467,327</b>	336,343
Overhead	<b>212,300</b>	171,889
Advertising/Sponsor Sales	<b>88,736</b>	82,744
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 3,630,830</b>	<b>3,225,705</b>
Net Income/(Expense)	\$ (118,972)	(58,637)

**27.5% Production & Fulfillment**



**29.3% Editorial Content**



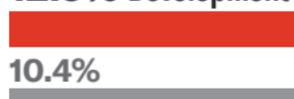
**8.9% Subscription Sales & Outreach**



**13.2% Administration & IT**



**12.9% Development & Fundraising**



**5.8% Overhead**



**2.4% Advertising/Sponsor Sales**



# High Country News

## 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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# High Country News

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