



Western Watersheds MESSENGER

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*Bighorn Sheep
photo ©Tom Kelley*

More Wrangling Over Bighorn Sheep

by Ken Cole

Bighorn sheep have seen a lot of ups and downs in 2012 but, fortunately, mostly ups. Bighorn are reclaiming their habitats on public lands and recent court victories are helping to ensure their success by pushing domestic sheep operations off the lands that native wildlife need to survive.

Domestic sheep on public lands come with a whole host of problems ranging from ecological impacts to predator removal. But, they also threaten to expose our native bighorn sheep to deadly pneumonia strains that can kill 90% of a herd and cause poor lamb survival for a decade or more after initial exposure.

There have been many instances where bighorn sheep have suffered massive losses due to contact with domestic sheep. For example, in the winter of 2009/2010 nearly 1000 bighorn sheep died of pneumonia in five states across the west. Domestic sheep were the confirmed cause of the biggest outbreak in Montana and were the likely cause of the other bighorn deaths. This is one reason that Western Watersheds Project has maintained its consistent advocacy that domestic sheep must go.

In 2012, the tug-of-war between livestock operators, federal agencies and conservation interests started with a bad decision by Payette National Forest allowing domestic sheep grazing to continue on several allotments that had been closed under the "Payette Decision" in order to protect bighorn sheep. The Decision was finalized in 2010 and permittees agreed to the closures in April 2011, which were to be phased in over a three-year period, and affected bighorn habitat in

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Western Watersheds Project: Working to protect and restore western watersheds and wildlife through education, public policy initiatives and litigation.

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Hells Canyon and the Salmon River Canyon of Idaho, Oregon and Washington. The Forest Service reneged on the plan in 2012 because of language added by Representative Mike Simpson to the 2012 federal appropriations bill that would prevent the application of additional management restrictions that the agency retroactively applied for the benefit of a single rancher.

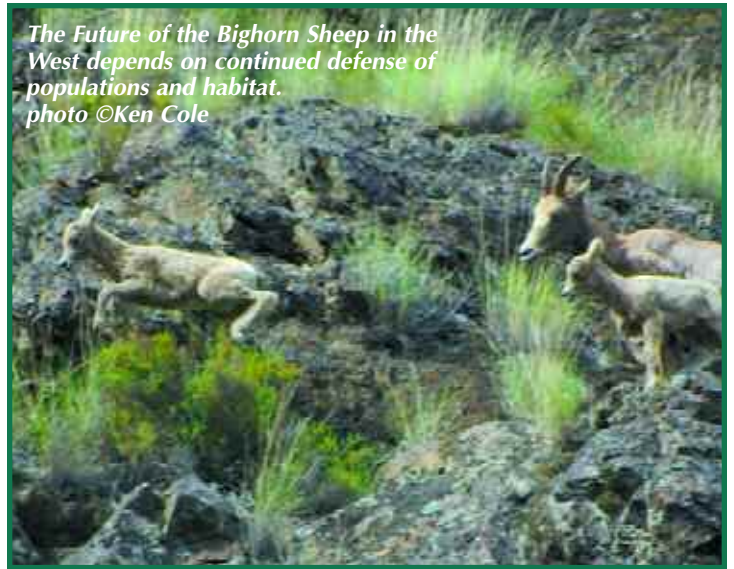
Fortunately for the bighorn, the agency's decision wouldn't last. After WWP took the Payette National Forest to court and a hearing was held, Judge B. Lynn Winmill made a rare ruling from the bench saying that the Forest Service's interpretation of the appropriations rider was not reasonable. The Forest must proceed to implement the Payette Decision as it was written, which means excluding sheep under the original schedule and affording bighorn the protection they deserve.

Not to be hindered, Rep. Mike Simpson and the woolgrowers quickly added another rider to a proposed budget bill that explicitly halted any further reductions of domestic sheep grazing on the Payette National Forest or any other federal public lands. Coincidentally WWP was in Washington, D.C. at the same time and was able to speak to Senate and Congressional staff about the new rider language. Our staff pointed out how bad the language was for the nation's bighorn sheep and that the sole direct beneficiary of the legislation was one sheep producer who happens to be family of Idaho's Lieutenant Governor! This didn't appear to go over well with other policymakers and suddenly, two days later, Mike Simpson withdrew the proposal from further consideration.

But, back in Idaho, the fight over bighorn habitat continued. One of the affected Payette NF permittees took the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to state court saying that they failed to live up to an agreement signed in 1997 that woolgrowers say indemnified them against any reductions to their grazing permit on behalf of bighorn sheep. The permittees alleged that IDFG failed to protect them from losing their permit on the Payette NF. After wending its way through the lower courts, the Idaho Supreme Court ruled that they had absolutely no basis to bring the case in the first place and that the IDFG had no authority to overrule a National Forest decision. Score another one for bighorn protection!

Not to be discouraged or convinced that protecting native wildlife is important, the woolgrowers have now filed litigation hoping to overturn the Payette Decision in federal court. In that litigation, they claim that science doesn't prove that domestic sheep can transmit deadly

*The Future of the Bighorn Sheep in the West depends on continued defense of populations and habitat.
photo ©Ken Cole*



pneumonia to bighorn sheep even though it has been unequivocally shown that, under controlled circumstances, they clearly do. It seems as though they filed this frivolous litigation in hopes that, if elected, Mitt Romney would strong-arm a settlement in their favor. It's a waste of taxpayer resources to have to defend a plan based on science and law but the woolgrowers are running out of options to maintain their livestock operations in bighorn habitats. Western Watersheds Project intends to intervene and help defend the forest against the selfish interests of a small number of ranchers.

In another bit of good news, the 2012 Appropriations Act also carried some unexpected legislation directing waived sheep grazing permits to be permanently retired where there is conflict with native bighorn. This provides a new solution to the issue which we hope to see spread throughout the west. Western Watersheds Project has identified eligible allotments and hopes to start seeking permanent solutions for bighorn protection on these lands.

In a sure sign that all of these struggles are worth it, the first bighorn sheep ewe in many decades was seen in early October on the Grassy Mountain allotment on the Payette NF closed to domestic sheep in 2012 under the Payette Decision for the first time in over one hundred years. For the first time in over a century, bighorn are free to roam on these public lands without the risk of disease transmission or competition with private livestock. This is exactly the type of restoration of native wildlife communities WWP hopes for every time it goes to court or to Congress.

***Ken Cole is WWP's NEPA Coordinator.
He lives in Boise.***



Good News for the Gray Wolf in California

by Dr. Michael J. Connor

On October 3, 2012, despite the expected opposition of ranchers, the California Fish and Game Commission voted to make the gray wolf a

candidate species under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). This means that the gray wolf is immediately protected by state law from unauthorized killing and harassment. The Commission has twelve months to make a final decision to list the species.

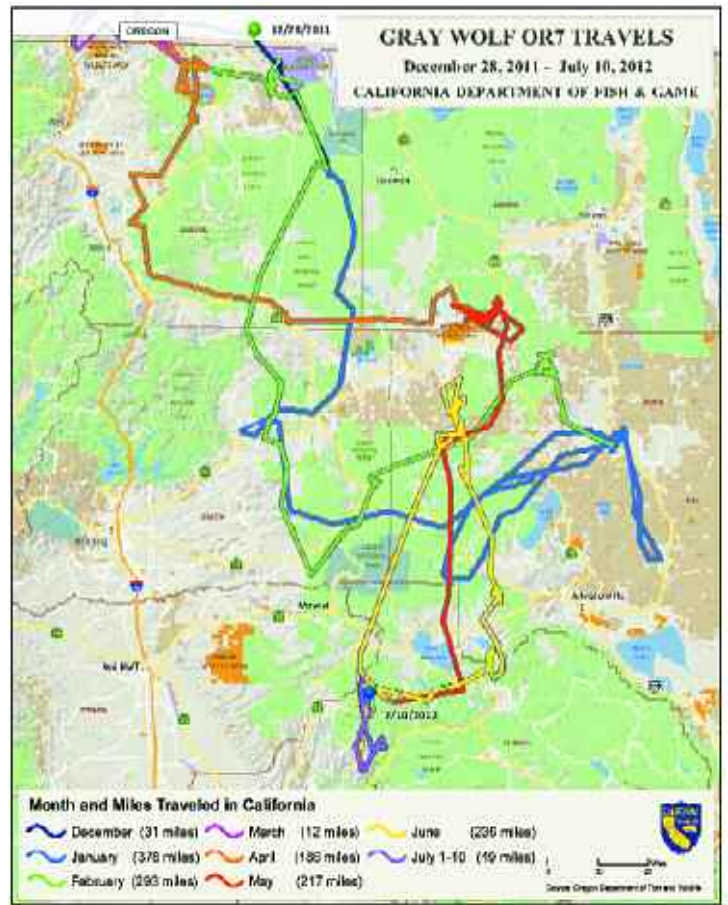
The Commission's decision was precipitated by the celebrated arrival of wolf "OR-7," in the Golden State at the end of 2011. OR-7 is a young male, born in Oregon in 2009, who dispersed from the Imnaha pack traveling through the southern Cascade Mountains and across the Klamath River into northern California. His arrival marked the reappearance of this key predator in California after an eighty-year absence. Whether or not he chooses to remain in California, the state is now clearly established to be within the gray wolf's current range.

The restoration of gray wolves is an important step in restoring ecological balance to California's vast public lands. There is extensive habitat that is suitable for gray wolves across northeastern California and the Sierra Nevada. Protecting the wolf will facilitate its recovery in those areas and will help restore ecological balance to these key California regions.

The latest update of the California Natural Diversity Database now includes OR-7's movements as tracked by his radio collar. Knowing which habitat OR-7 has been using makes it much harder for federal agencies to ignore him when making grazing decisions.



Automated game-trail image of a wolf in California purported to be OR7. Image was taken November of 2011. photo ©CDFW



The database shows that he has used forty-five Forest Service grazing allotments as well as Bureau of Land Management and National Wildlife Refuge lands. Not that OR-7 had much choice but to use allotments since so much of that area of California is grazed! We will continue to look out for OR-7 on Shasta, Modoc, Lassen and Plumas National Forests where several dozen cattle allotments are now recognized wolf habitat and we will ensure proper management ensures firm safeguards for the species. In California's northeast "cow country," OR-7 definitely needs a bit of extra protection!

Providing CESA protection is a crucial step in re-establishing wolves in California. Though wolves in the Pacific states are still protected under the federal Endangered Species Act, as we have witnessed in the last year in other areas there is a serious risk that this protection could be withdrawn. With CESA protection, wolves will be free to enter California and reestablish a permanent population. Listing under CESA will also give the state a more prominent role in the management of the species, providing state agencies the opportunity to develop conservation and management plans that are in the interests of both the wolf and the people of California.

**Dr. Michael J. Connor is
WWP's California Director.
He lives in Reseda, CA.**

Wolves Throughout the West

The gray wolves in California gained protections at the same time the wolves of Wyoming are losing theirs. In September the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service stripped protections from wolves in 80 percent of Wyoming allowing unregulated killing outside of Yellowstone National Park and the Wind River Reservation. Wyoming's plan won't protect wolves, and WWP was proud to join our grassroots colleagues in a lawsuit over the delisting rule.

In Washington, the state Department of Fish and Wildlife went after the "Wedge Pack" of wolves, killing these animals in retribution for livestock depredations. Public outcry was intense and an editorial in the Seattle Times proposed requiring public lands ranchers to accept wolf predations on "wolf turf." WWP wholeheartedly agrees.

In October the small Mexican gray wolf of Arizona and New Mexico was denied appropriate protection under the Endangered Species Act. The subspecies is currently lumped in with other gray wolves which denies the genetic, morphologic and geographic distinctions of El Lobo. The agency's latest decision means the Mexican gray wolf will continue to be treated as an "experimental population," a category that has hindered its recovery in the southwest. WWP will continue to press for proper management.

background art ©/www.furaffinity.net/user/anisis/

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Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Grazing Allotments by Doyle McClure

The following report was written by WWP member Doyle McClure following fieldwork in August 2012 on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. WWP will be urging the Forest to use this information to implement proper management on the allotments and reminding the agency of its legal requirements under various federal agreements.

This note summarizes results of a preliminary field survey of riparian damage and degradation on grazing allotments in the Wallowa Valley Ranger District (WVRD) of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest (WWNF).

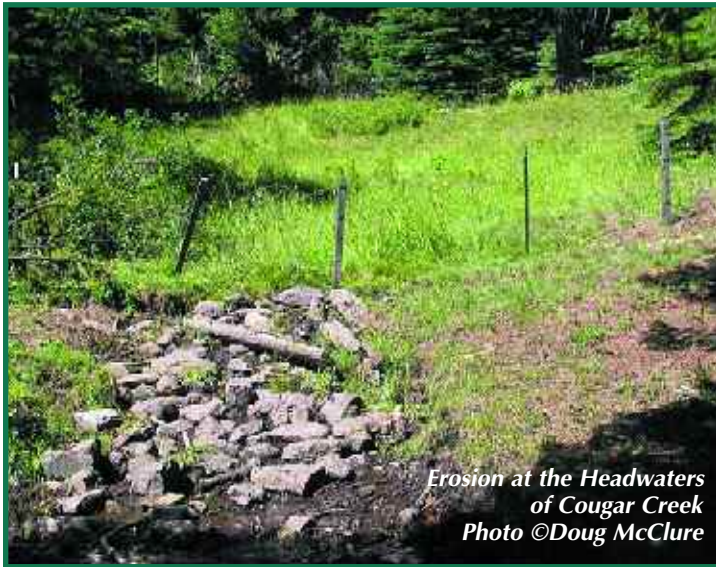
I used USFS data in my initial survey including a master map of the allotments and their composite pastures in the WVRD as well as the allowed number of cattle and scheduled grazing periods for each of the pastures. I obtained this information through a comprehensive Freedom of Information Act request and used it to "ground-truth" the management that was supposed to be in place on riparian areas of the forest. I visited and observed livestock impacts on parts of Swamp Creek, Elk and Little Elk Creeks, Cougar Creek, Peavine Creek, Doe and Billy Meadows Creeks, Chesnimnus Creek, Big Sheep, Makin and Grouse Creeks, or their tributaries within the watersheds of Joseph Creek and the Imnaha River.



Destruction on Swamp Creek
Photo ©Doug McClure

Three examples of degraded stream and stream-side conditions typical of the survey photo points are shown below. The photos for Cougar and Road/Grouse Creek illustrate comparative conditions at the fenced boundary between grazed areas and adjacent wildlife-habitat exclosures.

The FOIA data are useful in several respects for implementing stream surveys as well as for evaluation of USFS grazing policies. Although a few riparian areas are protected by exclosures, the principal USFS attempts to decrease adverse stream and other impacts are implemented through the



scheduled grazing rotations to different pastures. Unfortunately, I found plenty of evidence that those efforts are inadequate to protect the riparian habitats. In my survey stream-side conditions included significant fractions of areas that were largely bare dirt, other parts containing tall sparse vegetation and patches of dense grasses.

My review of the FOIA response also shows inadequate management. The approximate 1500 pages of materials obtained from the WWNF via the FOIA request, correspond to about 50 allotments covering over 500,000 acres, 27 allotments and 331,574 acres in the WVRD, 21+ allotments and more than 172, 950 acres in the HCNRA. The monitoring/inspection data include lists of key-area inspections for the allotments. Review of a number of field inspection reports shows that the cited stubble heights by the USFS field inspectors are frequently reported as

Thank You!

WWP benefited from Old Bill's Fun Run again in 2012! This event in Jackson Hole brings 3,600 people out to support a range of charities and is always a great fundraiser for WWP because The Community Foundation of Jackson Hole matches donations up to \$25,000. This year's support was record-breaking! Thank you to all the members and donors who give to WWP by supporting Old Bill's!



WWP was pleased to be included in the "HistoricYcle," a fundraising bicycle ride completed by Shawn Burke, owner of the Historic Y (thehistoricy.com), where WWP's Arizona office is located. Shawn rode 1962 miles over 55 days to celebrate his 50th birthday, and he solicited funds for six of his tenant organizations along the way. WWP received numerous new donations and important exposure because of his generosity! Thank you Shawn!





*Vehicle- and Hoof-devastated Headwaters of Grouse Creek
Photo ©Doug McClure*

satisfactory when they barely meet the allowable use standards and in some cases fail to do so. These and other data in the record suggest a high USFS tolerance policy for permit violations and that the criteria used for riparian protection are inadequate to maintain stream conditions essential to protect ESA-listed fish.

Extensive additional data, obtained under the FOIA by the Hells Canyon Preservation Council, document interagency coordination and results of WWNF in-house stream surveys over the past 10 to 15 years. These data will be used along with those described above to ascertain WWNF compliance with required NEPA regulations and forest management plans.

Location and documentation of riparian or other grazing damage in the deep canyons and on high ridges in the WWNF can be challenging. This preliminary survey, which involved driving and hiking over 250-300 miles of rough tracks and trails, indicates widespread riparian damage due to the authorized grazing practices in the WWNF. Along with ferreting out compromised actions via the paper trail, these results can provide the basis for significant improvements in USFS management of grazing allotments, clearly an undertaking that needs attention.

***Doyle McClure is a WWP Member.
He lives in Moscow, ID***



The Other BLM Resources: Rare plants of Utah and Arizona Deserts
by Laura Welp

When the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) talks about “resources” on public lands, they’re usually referring to economic commodities. Public lands are not just about oil and gas, mining or grazing and BLM management tends to overlook the unique botanical gems tucked away on unusual soil types throughout the southwest deserts. The variety of soil substrates is a major cause of the plant biodiversity in desert landscapes. For example plants that can’t compete well in other habitats sometimes find a niche by adapting to the difficult growing conditions on soils high in gypsum, clay or alkalinity. Many of these species are rare because they are soil-specific obligates and combined with habitat loss from human activities and climate change, many of the species are experiencing populations declines.

Here are a few rare invaluable “resources” which inform WWP’s advocacy on Arizona/Utah public lands that could use a little more management consideration and public attention:



*Gierisch's globe-mallow
photo ©Laura Welp*

Gierisch’s globe-mallow (*Sphaeralcea gierishii*) – This plant is a newly-described endemic known from only four populations within a small area on the border of Arizona and Utah. It’s a gypsum obligate, so active gypsum mining in its habitat is a major threat along with ground disturbance associated with OHV use, target practice and illegal dumping. Livestock herbivory on flowers has also been documented. In addition, it has the bad luck to be living next to the voraciously expanding urban community of St. George, Utah. This plant has been proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Western Watersheds Project submitted comments on the proposed listing rule emphasizing the inadequacies of BLM monitoring and management to protect the species and encouraging critical habitat planning that removes the threat of grazing in its habitat.



Welsh's milkweed
photo ©Laura Welp

Welsh's milkweed (*Asclepias welshii*) – This federally-listed Threatened milkweed grows in shifting sand dunes at just four locations in Utah and Arizona. One of those populations occurs in Coral Pink Sand Dunes State Park in Utah. The State of Utah and the BLM, with the approval of the Fish and Wildlife Service, manage this plant's habitat for heavy ATV use despite evidence that being constantly run over affects the plant's reproductive output by reducing flower and fruit production. The Arizona populations are threatened primarily by grazing.



September 11 stickleaf
photo ©Laura Welp

September 11 stickleaf (*Mentzelia memorabilis*) – Researchers first collected this plant on September 11, 2001 and named it after that tragedy. It's a gypsum obligate known only from gypsum clay outcrops, one of which is next to a road (and, incidentally, near a proposed BLM range development). The species is considered globally rare and critically imperiled. It's on the Arizona Strip BLM Sensitive Species List but has no Endangered Species Act status despite its rarity and vulnerability to extirpation. WWP protested the proposed decisions to construct new water developments on four allotments in part because BLM didn't even consider potential impacts to September 11 stickleaf when it decided to allow increased livestock activity in its habitat.

Siler pincushion cactus (*Pediocactus sileri*)- This beautiful cactus is restricted to gypsiferous, seliniferous and calcareous soils in southern Utah and northern Arizona. Poaching by collectors, heavy OHV use, mining and grazing are problems in some areas. The



Siler Pincushion Cactus
photo ©Laura Welp

cactus borer beetle, which feeds on the cactus from the inside out, is also decimating populations. The newly resurrected Warner Valley Water Project may be threatening the Utah populations. These factors all contribute to its Threatened status.



Bear Claw Poppy
photo ©Laura Welp

Bear Claw Poppy (*Arctomecon humilis*) Critically imperiled and federally-listed as Endangered, the main threat to the bear claw poppy is the loss of its habitat to the ever-expanding colossus that is St. George, UT . Compounding the problem is that the low gypsum hills where it's found is a favorite of the OHV crowd. Visits to the various population sites show the familiar looping scrawls of OHV tracks over the landscape, indented in the biological soil crust and cruising through the rare plant populations. A large segment of the population has now been fenced but recruitment of new plants is still too low. It is believed to be pollinated by a rare native bee whose habitat is being fragmented by the same development threatening the plant. This bee species has not been seen in years. No pollinator, no poppy.

Western Watersheds Project's Utah and Arizona offices are working to ensure the federal land managers consider direct, indirect and cumulative impacts to these unique taxa.

***Laura Welp is WWP's Ecosystems Specialist.
She lives in Kanab, UT***

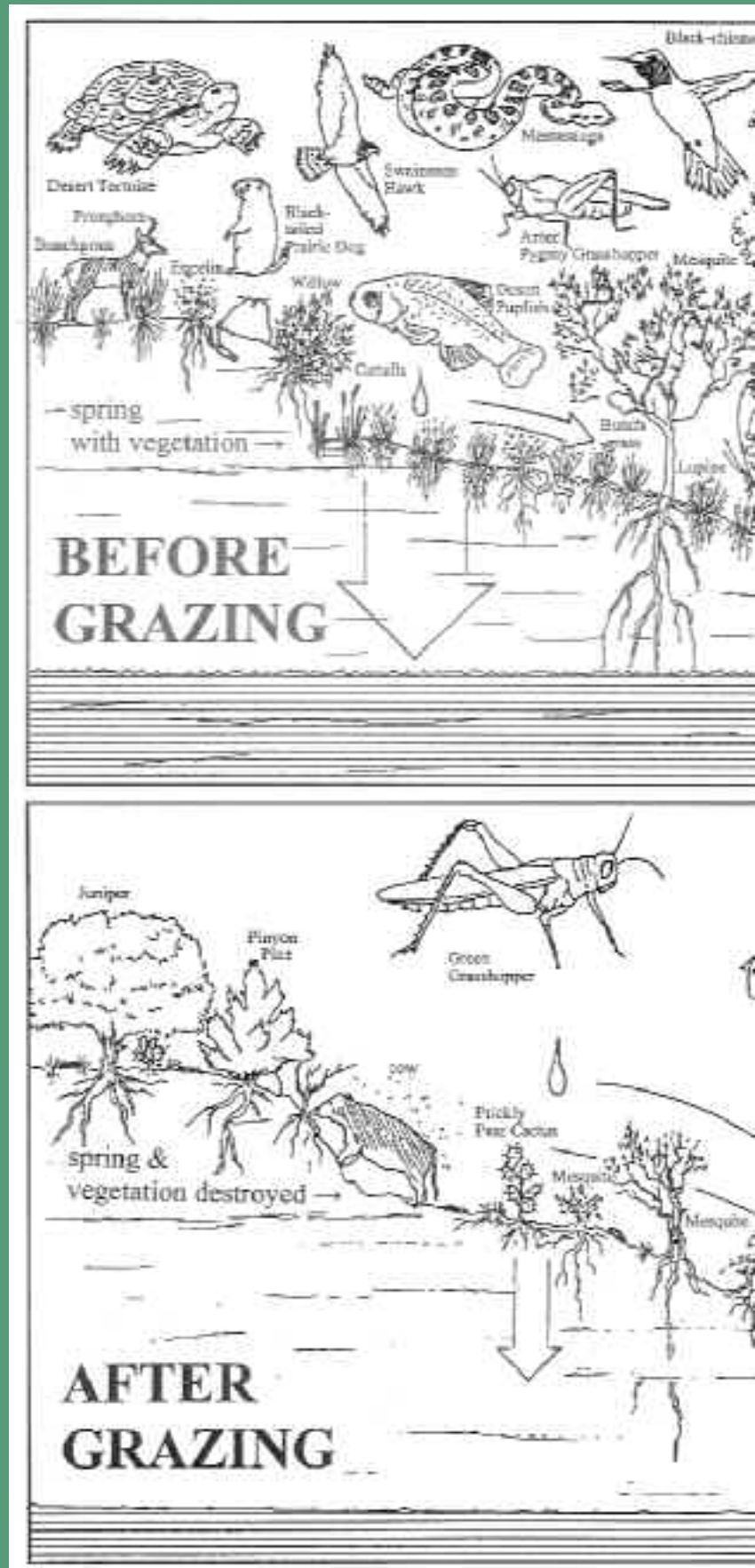
Grazing's Impact: An Illustration

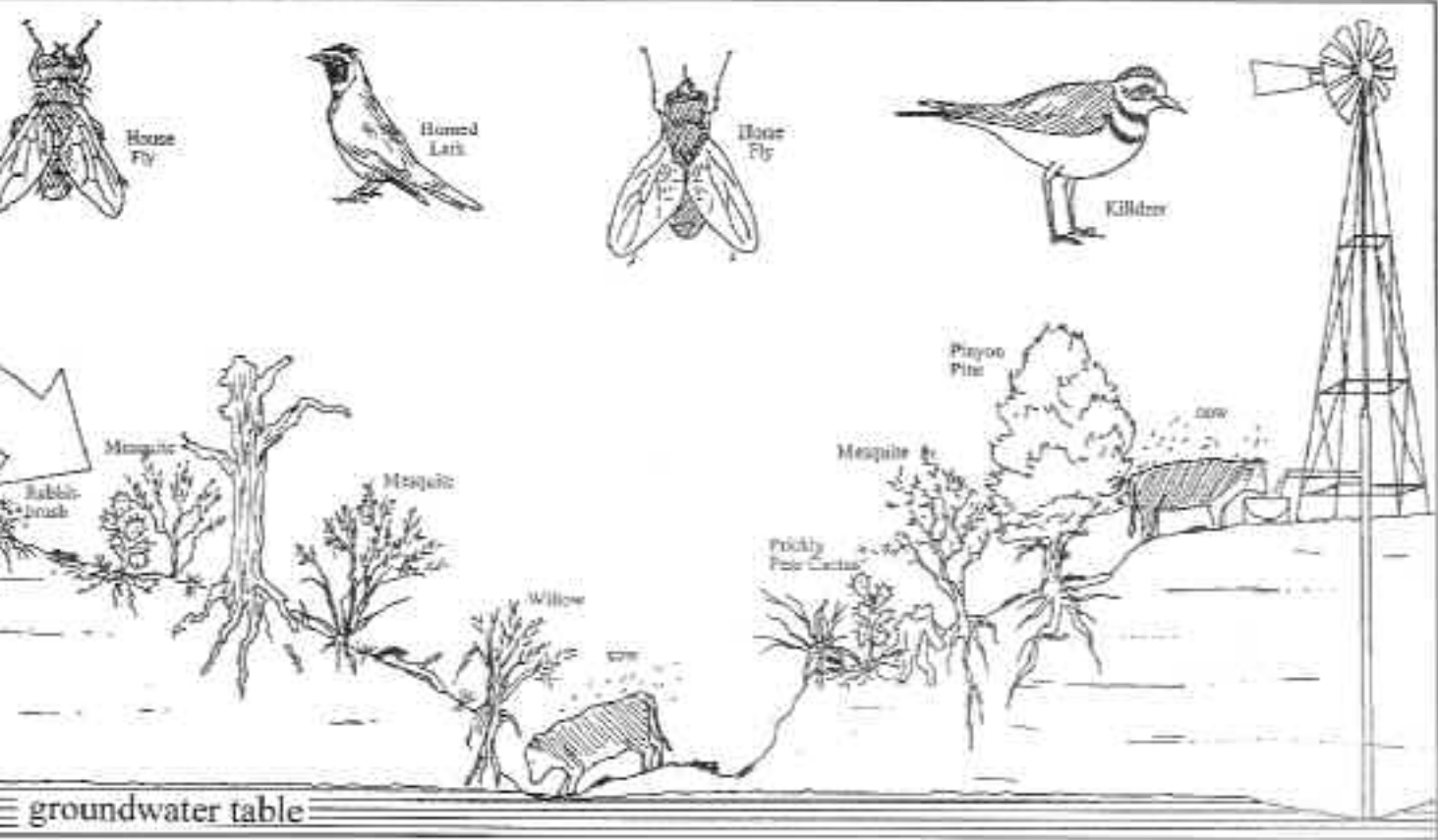
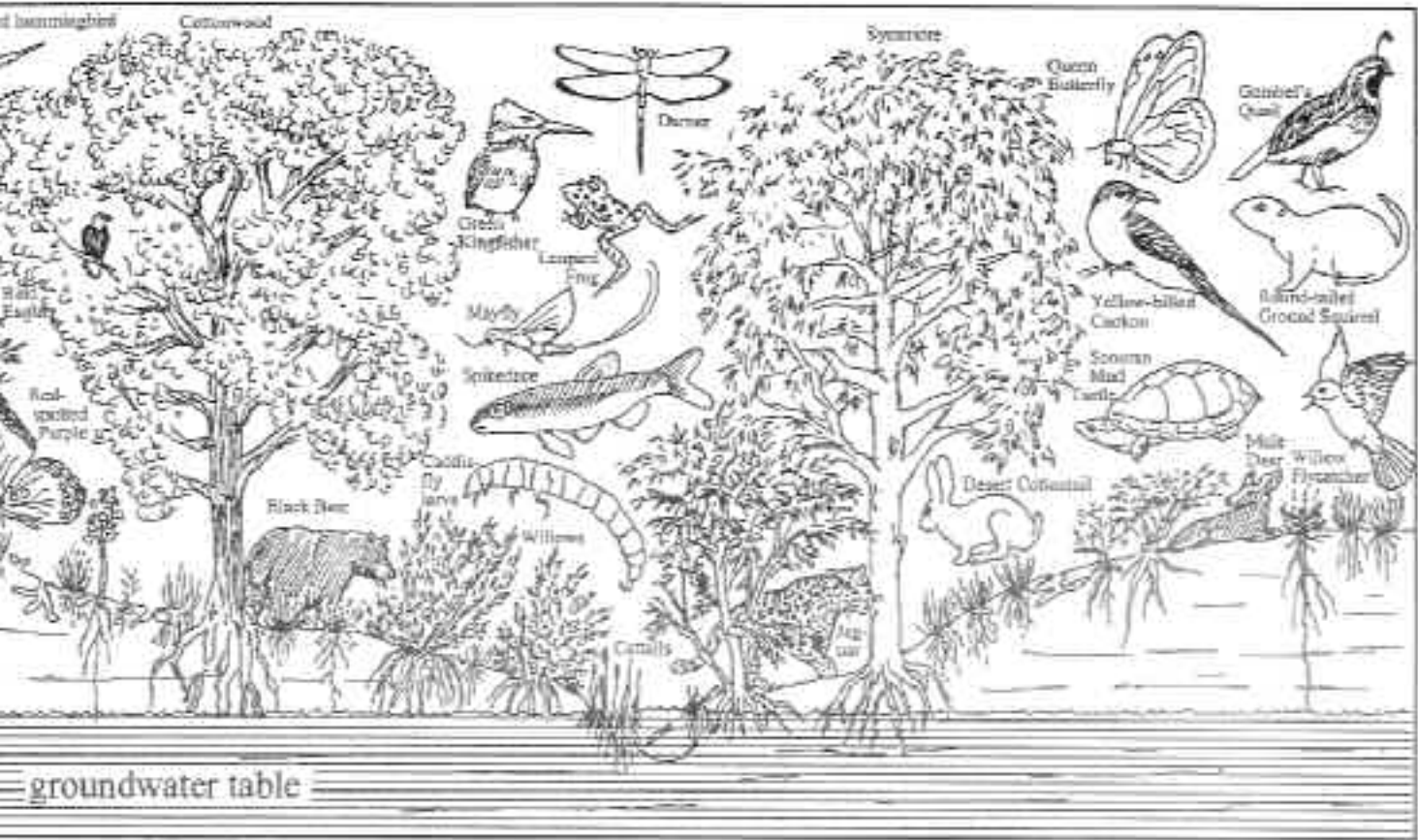
In the Spring of 2002, WWP's newest board member Karen Klitz prepared a diagram illustrating the impact grazing had on habitat in Arizona. This diagram and a companion article was printed that year in *The Cactus Wren-dition*, the newsletter of the Maricopa Audubon Society of Phoenix, Arizona. While the diagram refers specifically to habitats in Arizona, the damage illustrates the types of impacts found wherever cattle are grazed. Portions of that companion article describing the diagram are quoted below.

In the accompanying "before" and "after" cattle grazing illustrations, note how the water table has dropped after livestock introduction. The illustration shows how the roots of the cottonwood, willows, and mesquite and other riparian vegetation are no longer able to reach the water table. Grazing with its destruction of native grasses and forbs causes rapid run-off following rainstorms. Rapid run-off prevents sufficient time for the water to percolate into the water table. In addition, groundwater pumping such as for livestock windmills and water catchments, and for irrigated fields for alfalfa and other cattle forage, are key factors in lowering water tables. Groundwater extraction adjacent to our desert watercourses causes reduction of in-stream flows, as well as lowering the water table and impacting riparian root zones (see illustrations). As a result, Arizona's once lush desert watercourses have lost much of their native fish, wildlife and esthetic values. As the graphics show, these riparian areas are needed by the majority of Arizona's birds, mammals and other wildlife at some point in their life cycles.

The "after cattle" illustration shows mesquite and prickly pear replacing grassland. Cattle feces carry mesquite seeds. These stunted mesquite are unable to support wildlife in the productive manner of riparian mesquite bosques. Riparian bosques, even though often some distance from the actual streams, can survive so long as their taproots can still reach the water table. They support an immense variety of wildlife and cavity-nesting species.

Diagram ©Karen Klitz
 Quoted text by Bob Witzeman
 Read the entire text at rangenet.org/directory/witzemanr/tool/







A Day with Semester in the West *by Kelley Weston*

In mid-September, I had the pleasure of introducing the students of the 2012 class of Whitman College's "Semester in the West" to the work of Western Watersheds Project. Jon Marvel has been involved in the program virtually from its inception. I have accompanied him for the last three sessions. This year, Jeremy Greenberg and I met with the students.

Each session we take students on a tour explaining the realities of the livestock industry and showing them the degradation of public resources on the ground. This year I chose to show the students Copper Basin, east of the Wood River Valley, Idaho.

Every two years students from Semester in the West spend the semester visiting a variety of activists, ranchers and others working on public lands issues. The 22 students accepted into the program are winnowed from a pool of about 60 applicants and are very smart, curious and engaged. This year's students were no exception. Students come from a wide geographical area and this year, unlike some other years, there were none that had grown up in small rural or agricultural communities where the ranching mystique has been inculcated since birth.

With only an hour or so to introduce the issue, and lacking Jon's encyclopedic knowledge, I focused on a general overview of the historical and current political control exercised by the livestock industry using as examples our recent experiences with Wolf delisting, Congressional and local reactions to the Ruby Pipeline agreement and the virulent reaction we have seen to

the idea of voluntary buy outs. I touched briefly on the economic realities of public land grazing using statistics to demonstrate that ranching is not the centerpiece of rural economies. In response to questions I made the point that ranchers should not receive preferential treatment using my own business experience over the last 3 years as an example. Jeremy and I spent the better part of the hour reacting to questions that ranged from the impact of grazing on global climate change to local food economics, impacts on wildlife and other ecological problems.

The tour consisted of a stop at the meadows at the mouth of Kane Creek. The cattle had just left and the riparian meadow was covered in cow shit with grasses well below their required stubble height. Cattle cross the creek there and the far bank was severely trampled. We talked about the conflicts in the Kane Lake basin with recreational use, further discussed the problems visible in the stream profile and its effects on water temperature and fish habitat, the selection through grazing of shallow rooted sod forming grass species and the problems that has on bank stability. We continued our discussion of wildlife begun at the introduction focusing on the lack of cover for ground nesting birds, rodents and other important species as well as a general discussion on the extirpation of wildlife due to disease, lack of food and destruction of habitat.

Down the road at Fox Creek, a thoroughly devastated stream system, Jeremy and I briefly read the AOI with its directions to the ranchers as to stubble height, use, movement of animals, bank trampling etc., and asked students to reflect on whether those directions were being met. Jeremy recounted his experience discussing this and other problems in meetings with agency personnel and their unwillingness to face the facts. This allowed us to get into a

WWP's Jeremy Greenberg (far left) poses with Semester in the West 2012. photo ©Kelley Weston



discussion on accountability, environmental laws and talk further on the collusion that exists between ranchers and the agencies that are charged with regulating their behavior as well as the political control they exercise. Jeremy made an excellent statement as to the violence and callous nature of the ranching “lifestyle” in response to a question. Students were engaged and I hope they were as appalled as I always am when confronted with this level of destruction. Phil Brick, Semester in the West Director and Miles C. Moore Professor of Politics at Whitman College, pointed out the difficulty we have in recognizing damaged landscapes until taught to really “see” them. We continued asking the question “is this ok with you”; “where are the animals” etc. In all I think it was an effective stop helping to further their education in learning to see damage and think critically about the issue.

Because of time constraints and hunger pangs we toured the Copper Basin loop road counter clockwise, viewing on the way the roundup at the cow camp, talking about the preferential treatment enjoyed by ranchers, marveling at the geology, the absolutely stunning beauty, stopping briefly at the high point to view the massive die off of White Bark Pine evident on the flanks of high peaks and its effects on the food chain.

We lunched at the Aspen clone in Charcoal Creek , occupied unfortunately by hunters but beautiful nonetheless. After lunch we talked about the importance of Aspen in the ecosystem, the evident recruitment that has ensued due to the fencing and spent a short time looking at the creek where low growing Gooseberry, sedges and other riparian vegetation is beginning to reclaim the banks and repair the stream.

Time was getting short. On our way back to town we made a brief stop at the swamps to discuss the creation of hummocks in a wetlands, the rarity of a wetlands in a dry glaciated area like copper basin and the obvious stupidity of having cows in a wetlands under any circumstance.

On our way to Fall Creek we passed the upper and lower riparian pasture which look pretty good. The East Fork of the Big Lost River as it passes through these pastures is visibly very different than anywhere else. The stream is narrow, banks heavily grassed and while willows have still not fully recovered it certainly looks better than most places in the drainage. Students commented to me later that this could be a model for recovery in cooperation with ranchers. I pointed out that considering the number of cows present on the



Kelley Weston (second from left) leads a Semester in the West discussion. Photo ©Katie Hardy SitW 2012

allotment the very short rotational use on these pastures was only really possible because they were abusing other areas like Fox Creek and that to graze an area like Copper Basin “sustainably” would require a stocking level that would never be economically viable and certainly would be unacceptable to ranchers and the agencies.

Our visit to Fall Creek was a relaxing point in the day. Everyone was tired, smoke was pouring in from the Halstead fire so after a brief lesson where we pointed out the almost 100 % plant cover that exists on the protected meadow in contrast to heavily grazed areas, the presence of cryptobiotic crusts and the uncompacted nature of the soils. Students spent a half an hour or so wandering silently enjoying the beautiful quiet of the stream.

All in all a lovely day.

***Kelley Weston is WWP’s Board President.
He lives in Hailey, ID***

Whitman College Semester in the West

An interdisciplinary field program focusing on public lands conservation and rural life in the interior American West. Our objective is to know the West in its many dimensions, including its diverse ecosystems, its social and political communities, and the many ways these ecosystems and communities find expression in regional environmental writing and public policy.

www.whitman.edu/content/semesterinthewest



Lessons of an Intern

by Alex Brott

I'm a creature of compromise. My parents work in human resources, making them the most politically correct people on the planet. From them I learned that mediation, collaboration, civility, and understanding are fundamentally important.

A Whitman education reinforces that mindset: we are always better served by compromise. Whitties prefer getting along and finding solutions agreeable to everyone to starting controversy or rocking the boat.

Accordingly, I become unable to deal in absolutes and distrusted those who did. I took pride in my openness to new ideas. Not until interning with Western Watersheds Project did I understand the power of absolute views to manifest in passionate, decisive action.

My summer shocked me into a more practical, but no less critical, way of thinking. Initially warned about WWP's radical stance, I traveled to Hailey with an open mind, ready to learn a ton about Western resource conflicts and

the inner workings of non-profit groups.

I spent many days field monitoring, where I saw first-hand the destruction livestock ranching causes. I quickly understood that Western public lands ranching is the most degrading resource use in the American West, and witnessed many of these impacts. They are obvious to those who care to look.

I was blown away by the myriad implications of ranching. It was hard to stomach the negative impacts to landscapes and wildlife, killing of wolves and other predators, spread of invasive weeds, problematic politics of pro-ranching government agencies and lawmakers, and horrible inefficiencies of Western public lands ranching.

Despite these depressing facts, my internship started off well. I was learning a ton, having a great time, and getting excited about WWP's mission. I was excited to do meaningful work with a successful organization. However, my first solo field visit presented a troubling ethical dilemma.

While monitoring the BLM Trail Creek allotment, I passed a rancher – presumably the permittee – on a narrow dirt road. As he drove



Alex Brott examines damage in the Burnt Creek WSA Rock Creek allotment, Upper Pahsimeroi Valley. photo ©Katie Fite

past, I was unable to make eye contact. I couldn't stomach the fact that I, a liberal outsider from California, had come into his home to implicitly tell him that his way of life was wrong.

Though still immersed in the same destruction I'd spent weeks exploring, I finished that excursion deeply conflicted about my role here. My entire belief system suggested a different course of action. Surely livestock degrade landscapes, but does that demand a complete moratorium on grazing – at the expense of ranchers? Ask any WWP staff-member and they'll offer a quick, confident "yes."

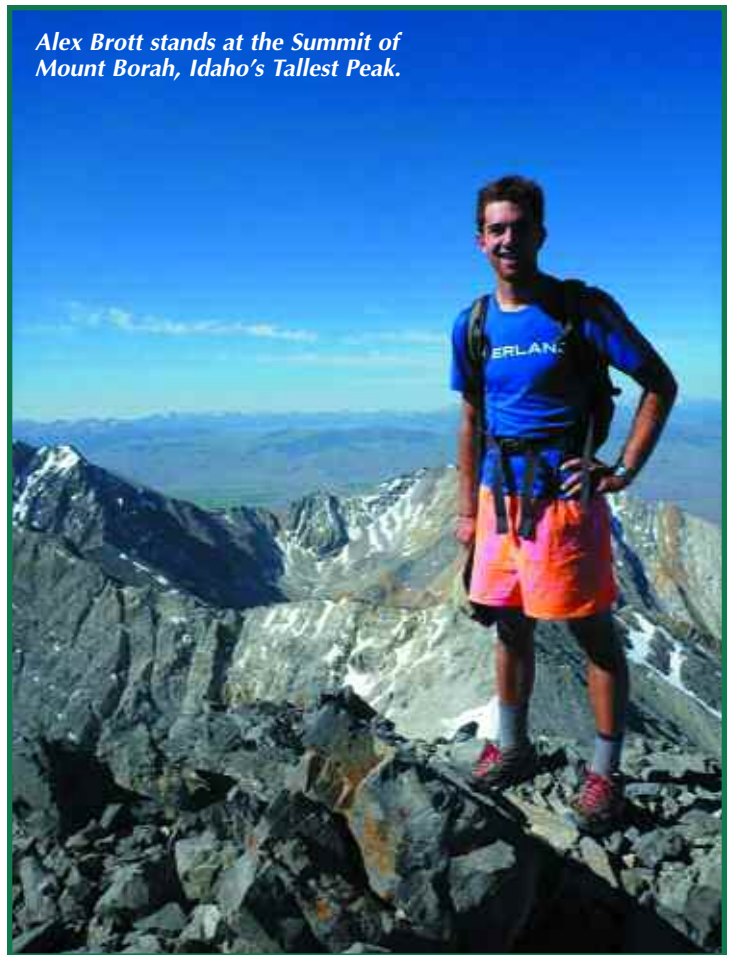
Here lay the basis of my discomfort: WWP necessarily deals in absolutes. Western public lands ranching cannot be both economically and environmentally sustainable. The industry's preservation serves only a small elite. Western public lands ranching absolutely must stop.

This troubled me for several weeks. Over many critical conversations with wonderfully patient staff-members and numerous field trips, I exhausted every conceivable defense of the livestock industry. Eventually I came around. I learned to deal in an absolute, and I'm grateful.

I was swayed by the dearth of small, family-owned ranches. Between corporate, millionaire, and hobby-rancher permittees, there are few allotments left to small families. Small producers cannot make ranching economical without grossly overstocking rangelands. A complete moratorium on Western public lands ranching would not devastate rural economies.

It was still discomfiting to contemplate individual ranchers forced out of business. However, I was repeatedly assured that WWP is doing no such thing: Jon could name only one permittee, who now ranches with his brother. Even if WWP were displacing some ranchers, my summer taught me that their absolute viewpoint is okay. It's worth this small sacrifice for the benefit of Western rangelands, wildlife, watersheds, taxpayers, and more.

Alex Brott stands at the Summit of Mount Borah, Idaho's Tallest Peak.



By the end of my internship I'd subtly transformed. In recognizing WWP's mission as the only rational conclusion to a much-raged Western debate, I freed myself to get truly passionate about their work and pursue determined action. That experience has been the most important of my summer with WWP: Only after embracing an idea whole-heartedly and completely can you commit completely to it.

It's been a tremendous pleasure working with WWP. The experience has been empowering and deeply impactful. I hope that as I enter my senior year of college and life beyond I can incorporate the bitter, passionate absolutism I so admire in Western Watersheds Project into the parts of my life where it is both appropriate and necessary, and in doing so begin to leave my mark on the world.

***Alex Brott was WWP's 2012 Summer Intern.
He lives in California.***

WWP welcomes our newest additions to the Board of Directors, George Wuerthner and Karen Klitz!

WWP relies on its board members for strategic direction, financial oversight and to help recruit members and supporters to further the mission. We are very proud to have George and Karen join the board because they are both very knowledgeable about the ecological impacts of livestock grazing and have demonstrated a commitment to the mission with their own work and advocacy. Their insight will be a helpful guide in directing WWP's efforts in the coming years.



George Wuerthner

George Wuerthner is an ecologist and author. He has published 36 books including *Welfare Ranching: The Environmental Consequences of Public Lands Ranching*, *Wildfire: A century of Failed Forest Policy* and, most recently, *Energy: Overdevelopment and the Delusion of Endless Growth* (Island Press). He has previously held various positions including university instructor, high school teacher, wilderness guide and worked in various capacities for the Forest Service, BLM and Park Service in Montana, Alaska and Idaho.

George studied both wildlife biology and botany as an undergraduate at the University of Montana. Because he loved both animals and plants, he thought pursuing a range science degree might be a good way to learn more about both. After he started a graduate range science program at Montana State University, he decided range was too focused on livestock. He left MSU for other graduate work in California (UC Santa Cruz) and later the University of Oregon.

George's interest in the environment, along with the extensive travels done for various book projects, showed him that livestock production had by far and away the biggest single impact upon western landscapes. These experiences led to the production of his book, *Welfare Ranching*. This work is a valuable tool for educating the public to the issues of public lands livestock industry including the unaccounted costs of livestock production such as predator control and habitat loss.

Since WWP is one of the few groups in the West with a focus on livestock impacts to our public lands, George was naturally drawn to its work. Having been a long-term supporter and member of WWP's Advisory Board, he is now pleased to serve on its Board of Directors as well.

Thank you, George!



Karen Klitz

Karen Klitz's family roots (prospecting, not ranching) in northeast Nevada caused repeat visits to that high desert over the years. In the 1990s, she began getting involved with BLM management of several allotments in Nevada and subsequently learned the limitations of "public participation" at the individual level. She discovered the Idaho Watersheds Project in the late '90s, joined a joint tour with IWP and the Elko BLM in Nevada in 1999 and has been an active member ever since.

Karen's work to promote wildlife values ranges from the removal of fencing for pronghorn in the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge in northwest Nevada to illustrating a graphic for Arizona Audubon that shows the altered wildlife habitats before and after grazing (page 8).

Her professional background is in biology and scientific illustration. She has worked as an illustrator at the University of Michigan, and since 1987, as Principal Illustrator and later Archivist at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology (MVZ) at University of California at Berkeley. The MVZ dates from 1908 and holds a large research collection of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, and Karen's position puts her in daily contact with field biologists. She helped design and produce a website for the Museum called "Doing Natural History." She still goes in weekly to work on archival projects.

Her work at the MVZ has taught her the value of archival photo documentation through time, and she has employed this technique on various heavily grazed sites in Nevada, using the resulting images in her advocacy. WWP is very pleased to have her assistance and insight as we continue to confront the problems of grazing in the areas Karen has been working.

Thank you Karen!



All readers of the Watersheds Messenger can keep up on the activities of Western Watersheds Project by signing up for WWP's Online Messenger.

To join WWP's Online Messenger, send an email to wwp@westernwatersheds.org with the word subscribe in the subject line.

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^ “Domestic sheep on public lands come with a whole host of problems ranging from ecological impacts to predator removal. But, they also threaten to expose our native bighorn sheep to deadly pneumonia strains that can kill 90% of a herd and cause poor lamb survival for a decade or more after initial exposure..” - Page One