



Western Watersheds Project **MESSENGER**

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WWP Fights for Wolves

**WWP Acquires Grazing Lease
in the Sawtooth Valley of Idaho**

Indigenous Peoples and Conservation

**Working to protect and restore western watersheds and wildlife
through education, public policy initiatives, and legal advocacy.**

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Western Watersheds Project Staff

Erik Molvar Executive Director
 Greta Anderson Deputy Director
 Adam Bronstein Oregon & Nevada Director
 Talasi Brooks..... Staff Attorney
 Melissa Cain Bighorn Conservation Director
 Laura Cunningham California Director
 Kelly Fuller..... Energy & Mining Campaign Director
 Patrick Kelly..... Idaho Director
 Nancy Linscott Operations Director
 Jocelyn Leroux Washington & Montana Director
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Western Watersheds Project State and Regional Offices

Idaho Headquarters.....P.O. Box 1770 • Hailey, ID 83333
 (208) 788-2290 • wwp@westernwatersheds.org
 New Mexico & Arizona.. 738 N. 5th Ave., Suite 206 • Tucson, AZ 85705
 (520) 623-1878 • cyndi@westernwatersheds.org
 California.....P.O. Box 70 • Beatty, NV 89003
 (775) 513-1280 • lcunningham@westernwatersheds.org
 Wyoming, Utah & ColoradoP.O. Box 1160 • Pinedale, WY 82941
 (877) 746-3628 • jonathan@westernwatersheds.org
 Montana & Washington P.O. Box 8837 • Missoula, MT 59807
 (406) 960-4164 • jocelyn@westernwatersheds.org
 Nevada & OregonP.O. Box 1855 • Sisters, OR 97759
 (541) 595-8034 • adam@westernwatersheds.org

WWP's Fax Number is (208) 475-4702



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Of Indigenous Peoples, Environmentalism, and Atonement



By Erik Molvar and Marsha Small

As America struggles with its history of systemic racism, the environmental movement faces questions of its own over the extent to which policies that were racist, genocidal, or entailed ethnic cleansing played a role in early American conservation. Much of the western United States is federal public land, but all of the United States was once Indigenous land, much of it continuously occupied for as much as 24,000 years. The lands that became our nation – public and private alike – were cleared of their Native inhabitants through warfare, genocide, and removal.

Early conservation figures often reflected the racist views of their times. In most cases, lands protected for environmental conservation gained official designation long after their Indigenous inhabitants were exterminated or deported to reservations. Nonetheless, all of these lands were occupied at one time or another, sometimes continuously, by Indigenous cultures.

Today's environmentalists are wisest when we approach this issue with humility, recognizing the original inhabitants' relationship with the land as so much more mutualistic and environmentally sustainable than our own. Certainly, Indigenous peoples set fires to improve hunting and habitat for game species, and in some North American regions even engaged in intensive crop farming and (here I include present-day Mexico) built complex cities. Overall, the native ecosystems and the biodiversity of native life that existed, for example, when the Lewis and Clark expedition crossed

the Northern Plains, was far more diverse and abundant than anything we have seen since. With EuroAmerican settlers came market hunting, single-crop farming on a vast scale, deforestation, fires far beyond what the land had heretofore seen, predator extermination programs, fencing of open lands, acid mine drainage, invasive weeds, wagon roads, railroads and ultimately highways, and later powerlines and oilfields and strip mines. It was environmental devastation and extinction on a continent-wide scale, and the best efforts of environmentalists over the past two centuries have thus far succeeded in protecting or restoring only a tiny fraction in a relatively natural state.

The treaties emplaced, typically during the late stages of these campaigns against Indigenous peoples, to relegate them to reservations and cede the best and most productive lands to white settlers, were systematically violated by the federal government. Reserved lands were encroached upon, further invaded, or taken away. Promised annuities of foodstuffs were often of inferior (even worthless) quality, or purloined by unscrupulous Indian Agents. Reservation lands were forcibly allotted to impoverished tribal individuals so they could be sold to whites, and tribal mineral interests were mismanaged such that immense sums of royalty payments were withheld. Tribes lacking treaties were deprived of both lands and rights, and sometimes "terminated," losing federal recognition. These widespread violations of treaty agreements by the dominant culture reduced the legal process of cession of Indigenous lands to a swindle.

"Genocide" officially means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group: Killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberate-

ly inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and/or forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. There can be no doubt that Indigenous peoples in North America were subjected to genocide by the United States government and its citizens, with repeated appalling incidents including the following:

- **The 1856-1859 Round Valley Massacres in California**, in which white settlers staged unprovoked attacks against the Yuki inhabitants of Round Valley in present-day Mendocino County, including abductions into slavery, extirpating the entire tribe of 16,000-20,000 people. The attacks came after the California Governor called in 1851 for a "war of extermination" until "the Indian race becomes extinct." The State of California recently officially recognized these events as genocide, and offered apologies.

- **The 1863 Bear River Massacre**, in which a militia staged a January attack against a starving camp of Shoshone in Idaho's Cache Valley, killing as many as 493 people.

- **The 1864 Sand Creek Massacre**, in which a Colorado militia led by John Chivington surprised at dawn a peaceful camp of Cheyenne and Arapaho, attacking them in their tipis and slaughtering most of the entire group. They were flying a white flag of truce, showing they were there by executive agreement. The militia gutted pregnant women and smashed the baby's heads, cut the testicles off some of the men and the breasts off of women, and used them as saddle decorations.

- **The 1868 "Battle of the Washita,"** in which the U.S. 7th Cavalry attacked the camp of Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Lakota led by Black Kettle, while they traveled to a reservation.

Continued on page 4

Indigenous Peoples *Continued from page 3*

•**The 1870 Marias Massacre**, in which the U.S. 2nd Cavalry attacked a camp of Piegans led by Heavy Runner, who was considered peaceful and carrying an official letter of safe conduct from the U.S. government. The Indigenous camp on Montana's Marias River was attacked while asleep, and an estimated 200 men, women, and children were killed.

•**The 1890 "Battle" of Wounded Knee** (more properly termed the Wounded Knee Massacre), in which U.S. 7th Cavalry attacked, without provocation, a band of peaceful Lakotahs as they traveled across their own Pine Ridge Reservation. The Cavalry surrounded and annihilated the band, killing at least 250 men, women, and children.

Don't doubt it, genocide took place right here on American soil, and our federal and state governments were the prime perpetrators. Under today's international law, many - if not all - of these events would properly be recognized as war crimes. They are representative of a deeply shameful period of American history, the legacy of which still haunts our nation.

In addition to genocide, the United States government pursued a policy of ethnic cleansing, featuring the removal of Indigenous peoples from their native lands, relegating them to reservations (which in early years they were not permitted to leave), removing their children by force from families and transporting them to boarding schools to be re-educated in white cultural norms (forcibly stripped of their long hair and native dress, and punished, often savagely, for using their native language), but most important, removing them from their lands which identified them, on which their very language is based. President Ulysses S Grant engaged in a purposeful campaign to eradicate bison from the West, to subdue Indigenous peoples by destroying their main supply of food, hides, and other lifeways. As Henry

Kissinger would put it a century later, "Who controls the food supply controls the people."

During this period of American history, racism and discrimination was not just tolerated, but an officially sanctioned policy, and a pervasive and socially dominant element of American culture. Indigenous peoples were treated as subhuman, and official correspondence of the period by politicians and military leaders of the time refers to the original Americans in these terms. Racism against Indigenous peoples continues to this day, and is disturbingly pervasive across the American West. Western Watersheds Project condemns racism in all its forms, and in particular against the peoples who have the only legitimate claim to being "Natives."

Racism, including against Indigenous peoples, was sometimes openly expressed by early icons of the conservation movement. Offenders now recognized to be racist include John Muir, John James Audubon, Madison Grant, and William Temple Hornaday. In fact, it is difficult to find a prominent 19th Century conservation figure without some overt link to racism. It is hard to learn that the heroes of your movement had major character flaws. Whether or not environmentalism is inherently racist, however, is a choice to be decided today - and each day - by the ever-evolving environmental movement. And that movement is increasingly moving toward admission and reparations.

Apologists for the American policy of "Manifest Destiny," the conquest of the North American continent by peoples of European descent, typically ignore the fact that Indigenous peoples had thriving subsistence economies and rich cultures and civilizations long before the first Anglo-American set foot on this continent. Environmentalism was more than a credo to the Original Peoples, it was a sacred imperative, and sustainability was a way

of life. Today, Natives retain environmental leanings, and in a January 2021 poll, Indigenous respondents scored higher than whites on environmental values for practically every environmental issue.

Indigenous peoples are natural allies to environmental conservationists, and they prove it every day. Indigenous leaders are at the forefront of many of today's biggest environmental fights: Standing Rock and the Dakota Access Pipeline, Arctic drilling, the Pebble Mine, Oak Flat, and Bears Ears National Monument, to name a few. And with the nation's first Indigenous Secretary of Interior, Native leadership in environmental issues is poised to vault to center stage.

Western Watersheds Project is an environmental conservation group. Founded in 1993, our organization was not there to witness the early years of EuroAmerican colonization of the West. Like EuroAmericans in general, we're latecomers, even though we've been here a while. It makes sense for us to reach out to potential allies among Indigenous communities, to advance our common interests when our goals align with each other. We'd like to be on our best behavior, to not only atone for the racism that came before, but to find cohesive and correlative remedies, a horizon of equity. Through our work, we aim to honor the cultural heritage of the Original Peoples, respect the sovereignty and treaty rights of Tribes, and work together with Indigenous peoples for a more environmentally sustainable future. ■

Erik Molvar is Executive Director of Western Watersheds Project.

Marsha Small (Tsistsistah (Northern Cheyenne)) has taught as the Teppola Distinguished Professor at Willamette University and as an Adjunct Professor of Native American Studies at Montana State University, and she believes in a just horizon where is there equity for all beings.

Blowing Past Carrying Capacity: Propping Up Livestock in Nevada



By Adam Bronstein

The current 20-year drought across the American West is thought to be the most severe in at least the last 1,200 years. As of this August, 99% of the West was under some level of

drought according to the US Drought Monitor. A drought of this magnitude is thought to have been responsible for the displacement of the Pueblo people, who abandoned their settlements and systems of agriculture around the year 1300 AD. In contrast, contemporary systems of irrigation, dams and groundwater pumping have so far been able to maintain business as usual (for the most part) keeping the alfalfa fields green and, at least in Nevada, the cows watered.

The Bureau of Land Management in Nevada has been on a water hauling spree over the summer months authorizing projects across the state. Many traditional water sources for livestock are drying up and nearby forage is being depleted, so the Bureau is taking desperate measures to keep cattle on the range much longer than they otherwise would on their own. These water haul projects are advertised as being “temporary” but, by all indications, we could be in an emergency situation for a long time to come. When water hauling is “needed,” this should be a clear indication that carrying capacity has long been surpassed.

By bringing water onto allotments, permittees are now able to use parts of allotments that don’t normally see domestic grazers, and has major implications for wildlife. These areas have until now been de facto sanctuaries for species like the sage grouse, pygmy rabbit, antelope and mule deer. Since livestock historically congregated around areas with streams and natural springs (now dried up), these upland



Above: Water troughs on the Mountain Springs BLM grazing allotment in Idaho. Right: A sage grouse skeleton lies beneath the murky water of this livestock trough on Utah's Duck Creek allotment.

areas will now experience impacts that have thus far been absent. The Bureau has not given enough consideration to displacement and other wildlife impacts of these water-hauling activities.

The Bureau also argues that providing water to cattle will help wild horses and other wildlife to survive these drought conditions. While technically true that wildlife may take advantage of hauled water, this obscures the contributing role of livestock to the current water scarcity. By congregating around riparian areas and springs, livestock have compacted the soil, decimated the vegetation and sheared the banks, all of which contributes to springs becoming separated from their groundwater sources. The Bureau also pumps water out of the naturally occurring surface waters and diverts it to wasteful troughs and tanks that are less accessible to small species.

The “need” to haul water is a pathetic attempt at saving a system and culture of abuse that never should have existed in the first place. Instead of further subsidizing this unsustainable land use, the agency should end livestock operations and give ecosystems and the species that depend on them a fighting chance in the face of so many stressors. Riparian areas can and often do regain function once cattle are removed.



The West has experienced megadroughts in the past and native species have been able to adapt and survive. Today, with habitats now in dire straits from the negative impacts of past and present cattle grazing, there is little room to adapt and the walls are closing in fast. The extremely arid environment in Nevada has never been a place that could sustain any level of livestock grazing, long before the current drought. The industry that undermines the integrity of natural systems is long overdue to be hauled away. ■

Adam Bronstein is the State Director of Nevada and Oregon for Western Watersheds Project.



Photo by Talasi Brooks.

Trout Springs allotment.

WWP Successfully Defends Decision to End Grazing Privileges for Bad Actor Ranchers



By Talasi Brooks

In early September, the Ninth Circuit ruled in favor of WWP and the Bureau of Land Management, definitively terminating grazing privileges for Idaho's

Hanley Ranch Partnership (HRP), after decades of permit violations and resource damage. The Circuit court upheld the Bureau's decision terminating HRP's grazing privileges, rejecting HRP's theory that it retained a "grazing preference" to the Trout Springs and Hanley FFR allotments even after its grazing permit expired.

The victory has been a long time coming. WWP first filed a successful lawsuit to protect this allotment and others in the Owyhee region in the late 1990s. In 2000, the U.S. District Court for the District of Idaho ordered the Bureau to do National

Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis for the grazing permits at issue and imposed interim management standards to protect riparian and upland ecosystems until the analysis was complete. However, HRP did not comply with the interim standards and because HRP continued to flout the permit terms and conditions, causing serious degradation of the area, WWP filed a supplemental complaint regarding the allotment in 2007.

Meanwhile, HRP's 10-year grazing permit was slated to expire. When HRP applied to renew its expiring grazing permit in 2009, the Bureau denied its application because of HRP's extensive record of permit violations. HRP appealed the Bureau's 2009 decision in the agency's administrative tribunal, the Office of Hearings and Appeals, which affirmed the agency's decision, officially ending HRP's grazing privileges in 2013.

That same year, HRP leased some of its base property to the Hanleys' daughter and son-in-law, the Corriganes. The Corriganes then applied for a permit to graze the same allotments HRP had abused for decades, seeking to assert HRP's grazing "preference"—the right of an existing grazing permittee to stand first in line to receive a new permit. The Bureau denied the application, stating that the Corriganes could not exercise HRP's grazing preference because the preference terminated along with HRP's other grazing privileges when its grazing permit was not renewed. HRP and the Corriganes appealed this decision and two administrative courts in the Office of Hearings and Appeals affirmed the Bureau's decision.

Pressing on, HRP and the Corriganes filed a lawsuit in federal court seeking to overturn the decision. WWP intervened in the lawsuit to help defend the Bureau's decision from the ranchers'



Photo by Talasi Brooks.

A worn cattle path bisects the desiccated landscape of the Trout Springs allotment.



Photo by Talasi Brooks.

Livestock grazing has robbed the Trout Springs allotment of important cover and food for native species.



Photo by Talasi Brooks.

Trout Springs condition close-up.

attack. The District of Idaho again affirmed that the Corrigan's could not assert HRP's grazing preference because HRP's preference terminated along with the permit. HRP and the Corrigan's appealed the district court's decision to the Ninth Circuit.

After holding a short oral argument in May 2021, the Ninth Circuit also affirmed the Bureau's decision. The court's opinion quoted WWP's brief:

...
As WWP points out, "[a]ccepting Ranchers' theory would mean that a rancher whose record of performance disqualifies it from holding a grazing permit nevertheless could hold a transferable, non-expiring privilege to stand first in line for a new permit."

We agree; this interpretation makes no sense.

...

The court added, "it strains credulity that a former permittee such as HRP – whose permit the [Bureau] declined to renew after "numerous and continuous instances of non-compliance" – should retain a preference right that it can transfer to a party of its choosing."

This victory follows over 20 years of advocacy efforts by WWP aimed at protecting the starkly beautiful Owyhee region. The arid sagebrush steppe has been treated for years like a sacrifice zone and we hope that the Ninth Circuit's decision will empower Bureau to reverse that trend. As Brock Evans once wrote, winning conservation fights takes "endless pressure, endlessly applied." WWP is in it for the long haul. ■

Talasi Brooks is a staff attorney for Western Watersheds Project. She resides in Boise, Idaho.



Photo by Doug Smith - NPS Courtesy of Flickr Creative Commons.

A gray wolf appears to be tagging along behind a grizzly. Wolves and grizzlies have been observed competing for opportunities to scavenge from the same kill.

WWP Is Fighting For Wolves



By Erik Molvar

Majestic in its wild mien, the wolf has become a symbol of all that is untamed and self-willed in nature. As such, it has become a particular target of the livestock

industry with its bent to tame the wilderness and make all lands productive – for beef and wool production, that is, not native biodiversity. Livestock losses to wolves have always been negligible, but the industry nonetheless strives to demonize and vilify these wild creatures. In reality, the real wolf is a key player in the web of life, restoring balance and acting as an indicator of healthy natural systems.

Western Watersheds Project is

fighting for restoring wolves rightful role in wild nature. We're challenging anti-wolf policies and programs in court, and seeking long-term protections through an ESA petition, all while working to shed light on scientific realities to dispel the myths and fairytales propagated with intent to subjugate nature to the will of agricultural production.

Idaho has become ground zero in the livestock industry's war on wolves, with new laws designed to kill off 85% of the state's wolf population to appease ranchers and misguided big-game hunters. WWP has played a leading role in publicizing Idaho's excesses, and in organizing Idaho wolf conservation groups to mount a defense of the embattled species. It's not just Idaho: Montana enacted similar changes to their fish and game regulations, and

Wyoming has had unregulated wolf killing as official policy across 85% of that state for years. Their policies go far beyond heavy-handed "management," which is unnecessary for an apex predator that self-limits its populations through territoriality. They go well past the lines of "fair chase" and hunting ethics extolled by sportsmen's organizations. Today's anti-wolf campaigns in these states feature hunting with night-vision goggles, shooting from helicopters, trapping, snaring, bounties, and shooting without the customary guardrails of bag limits, hunting seasons, or licensing requirements. It's the opposite of wildlife management – it's a killing free-for-all without limits – and it's nothing less than a return to the 19th Century war on wildlife.

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A grizzly sow with cubs compete with a pair of wolves for dinner at Alum Creek in Yellowstone National Park.

Photo by Jim Peaco -NPS Courtesy of Flickr Creative Commons.



Gray wolf pups gather on a large rock.

Photo by Dan Stahler -NPS Courtesy of Flickr Creative Commons.



Photo by Jeremy Weber, Courtesy of Flickr Creative Commons.



Three wolves make their way along a river bank.

Photo by Larry Lamsa Courtesy of Flickr Creative Commons.

Fighting For Wolves *Continued from page 8*

Restoring federal protections

In 2020, the Trump administration de-listed gray wolves nationwide, removing the protections of the Endangered Species Act from Maine to California (except, of course for the three states already de-listed under President Obama: Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming). Western Watersheds Project struck back, joining a coalition of western conservation groups ably represented by Western Environmental Law Center, suing to overturn the de-listing decision. After all, Oregon and Washington remain below minimum viable population numbers, California has three breeding pairs and Colorado only one, and in Nevada and Utah and northern Arizona there is only an occasional lone wolf passing through. From a scientific perspective, this species remains far from recovered. We fully expect to win this case in court, returning ESA protections in most U.S. States.

A legal victory in the Trump delisting case won't protect wolves in Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana, the states with the most draconian wolf eradication policies, so Western Watersheds Project drafted a new formal petition to list gray wolves under the Endangered Species Act in all western states, including Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming. Seventy conservation and wildlife groups joined us. In these states, wolves were de-listed by a congressional rider authored by Senators Tester and Simpson, who were unhappy that the best available science was keeping wolves under federal protection. Their legislation only demanded that the decision not to delist wolves in these states be reversed (and shielded this decision from being questioned in court as to its legality), and did not block future listing. Thus, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is free to determine that protections are now warranted, and apply them. The changed circumstances of wolf-killing policies in Idaho and Montana, and the low



A gray wolf works to keep a flock of birds at bay in Yellowstone National Park.

populations in Wyoming, along with the inadequate regulatory mechanisms to keep wolves at viable population levels in all three states, indicate that listing is now warranted based on the best available science. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recognized these threats and inadequate protections, and issued a positive 90-day finding in response to our petition, putting the wolf on the path to Endangered Species Act protections.

WWP also joined a petition that requested the National Forest Service block wolf killing in Wilderness. This petition targets commercial enterprises permitted in wilderness by the Forest Service. If wolves cannot live unmolested in wilderness areas, by law “undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence,” what safe haven can they possibly find?

State-by-State Strategies

These latest efforts build upon years of successful advocacy. In 2020, we settled our lawsuit challenging Wildlife Services’ wolf-killing program. We got a statewide ban on M-44 ‘cyanide bombs,’ blocked USDA wolf killing in the Sawtooth Valley, the Wood River Valley, and in wilderness areas

statewide; and stopped the pre-emptive killing of wolves on private land (before livestock had been lost). These and other restrictions will remain in place at least until the agency completes a new statewide Environmental Impact Statement.

In both Idaho and Montana, WWP is on its way to taking recent wolf-killing rules to court for their violations of the Endangered Species Act as it relates to non-target listed species.





Photo by Larry Lamsa Courtesy of Flickr Creative Commons.

Wolf pack on the move.

Neither of the states properly considered the effects of their new anti-wolf programs and methods on rare and imperiled species like lynx and wolverine, and so we're working with Earthjustice to set up a legal challenge on those grounds.

WWP has been active in exposing the excesses of state wolf killing in Washington state, perpetrated in reprisal for livestock losses on public lands incurred by negligent cattle producers. Our efforts helped convince Governor Inslee to publicly reprimand his Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife for their eagerness to kill wolves to solve problems caused by ranchers refusing to implement commonsense nonlethal coexistence strategies to protect their livestock. On the legal front, WWP joined two lawsuits to challenge the Colville Forest Plan's authorization of cattle grazing in wolf habitats. One lawsuit suffered an initial defeat, but the legal battle is far from over.

In addition, WWP has been an integral member of the Rocky Mountain Wolf Project, supporting a ballot measure to reintroduce wolves to Colorado. Others did the heavy lifting gathering signatures to get this measure on the ballot; WWP's role was to counter the anti-wolf hysteria of the livestock industry and anti-wolf hunting groups with science on the op-ed pages of

Colorado newspapers, and to organize a conservation letter to Governor Polis supporting the reintroduction, signed by scores of groups representing more than 16 million members. The ballot initiative passed, and as a result, returning wolves to Colorado must by law occur by 2023.

In the wake of wolves' landmark election victory, there were some within Colorado Parks and Wildlife who remained opposed to wolves, and who sought to relitigate the election and throw up roadblocks to reintroduction. One such official was J.T. Romatzke, a District Manager for northwest Colorado who colluded with anti-wolf county officials to disparage Parks and Wildlife Commissioners who sought to implement the will of the voters, and sabotage the wolf reintroduction effort. With Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, WWP publicized evidence brought forward by a whistleblower within the agency, and when our Colorado Open Records Act request threatened to bring even more embarrassing documents to light, the agency relieved Romatzke of his position.

WWP's advocacy on behalf of gray wolves builds upon an even more longstanding history in supporting the restoration of Mexican wolves to the Desert Southwest. These efforts

convinced the Forest Service to revoke the grazing permit of a wolf-killing rancher. We continue to litigate the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's unreasonably constricted Recovery Plan, which blocks Mexican wolves from moving freely within available habitat. We have been the leading voice publicizing violations ranging from dishonest wolf depredation reimbursement claims by ranchers to illegal wolf killings. These efforts keep the pressure on, increasing public scrutiny of anti-wolf elements in New Mexico and Arizona.

In sum, WWP remains committed to restoring large blocks of unspoiled habitat where large predators like wolves – and the full panoply of native wildlife and plants – can survive and recover to healthy population levels. These protected areas, which one day will be livestock-free, can serve as population reservoirs for rare species, including the wolf, to recolonize surrounding lands. By protecting large blocks of habitats and connecting pathways between them, we hope to restore biodiversity and healthy native ecosystems on a West-wide scale. Returning the howl of the wolf to the mountain ranges and remote canyons of the West is a key part of that strategy. ■

Erik Molvar is the Executive Director of Western Watersheds Project.



Photo by Patrick Kelly.

Champion Creek bank.

Leasing to Restore: WWP Resumes its Tradition of State Grazing Lease Acquisitions in Idaho



By Patrick Kelly

Nearly 30 years ago, WWP made headlines by bidding on and winning the Lake Creek state grazing lease on school trust lands in Idaho. After a long and widely publicized court battle, WWP officially acquired this lease and started the passive restoration process on what was at the time a dusty, cattle-blasted patch of sagebrush and eroding stream banks. A recent visit to the area revealed a landscape transformed. A lush ripar-

ian ribbon snaked along the valley bottom, with vegetation so thick in places that the waters of Lake Creek could only be caught in brief glimpses through the dense thicket of willows and grasses. The beavers have since returned, working their magic by slowing stream flows, raising the water table, and providing high quality habitat for a host of wildlife species. Remarkably, this transformation was accomplished not by complicated or expensive restoration techniques, but through one very simple act: the removal of livestock.

In August of 2021, WWP made headlines again after successfully

bidding on an Idaho state grazing lease, this time in the lovely Sawtooth Valley. The 624-acre Champion Creek parcel contains its namesake creek, as well as a stretch of Fourth of July Creek, just above their confluence with the Salmon River. Both creeks have been designated as critical habitat for bull trout and steelhead by the US Fish & Wildlife Service (these fish are currently listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act). With a winning bid of \$8,200, WWP secured a 20-year lease on Champion Creek, and can now begin healing and reversing the degradation caused by decades of livestock grazing.



Photo by Patrick Kelly.

Lower Champion Creek.

Much like Lake Creek 30 years ago, Champion Creek is in bad shape. Current conditions include extensive erosion, collapsing banks, a near complete absence of stream side willows, and largely grassless uplands of damaged sagebrush and pulverized soil. A heavily-trafficked domestic sheep trail parallels the creek, a dust choked ribbon of denuded and severely compacted ground running along the water's edge.

Despite the overall bleakness of conditions observed on Champion Creek, minute indicators of landscape resilience and recovery potential were also noted on a recent visit. Though clearly over-browsed and struggling, small willow shoots were seen sprouting up in the few places where the soil was still moist and relatively intact. Additionally, several large bull trout were seen making their way upstream to spawn. These fish have only recently recolonized Champion Creek after years of it being completely dewatered by irrigation diversion in its lower reaches. Now, with the grazing pressure alleviated, the struggling willow shoots can expand and repopulate, and the bull



Photo by Patrick Kelly.

Sheep pathway along Champion Creek.

trout will gain improved spawning habitat through stabilized, revegetated banks and reduced sedimentation. Of course, all of this will take time, but the process has begun, and WWP will be closely documenting this recovery as it unfolds in the years to come.

Though relatively small in terms of acreage, and in terms of the broader problem of overgrazing on public lands, recovery stories like the Lake Creek lease and the newly-acquired Champion Creek lease provide tremendously powerful conservation tools. They are real-life examples of landscape restoration following the cessation of livestock grazing. They are living, breathing, tangible proof of a very simple concept, a concept that can be easily and inexpensively applied to the countless acres of overgrazed and degraded public lands throughout the American West.

Want to learn more? Follow this link to view a Story Map with additional photos and text:
<https://bit.ly/3Fe3TtW>. ■

Patrick Kelly is Western Watershed Project's Idaho Director



Photo by Patrick Kelly.

Passive restoration revitalizes Lake Creek once cattle were removed.



Photo by Patrick Kelly.

Beaver dam on Lake Creek.

Greta Anderson Awarded 2021 Sagebrush Sentinel Award

This year, we are awarding the Sagebrush Sentinel Award to one of our own, Deputy Director Greta Anderson. Conscientious and knowledgeable, Greta has mastered the byzantine and arcane world of federal land-use agencies. She uses that eye for detail and diligent approach to hold federal agencies accountable on livestock grazing throughout the Sagebrush Sea.

It might seem unusual that an inhabitant of Sonoran Desert cactus forest should stand sentinel over sagebrush ecosystems. Notwithstanding her geographic distance, Greta has become one of the leading conservation advocates for the greater sage-grouse and for the vast ecosystem that it inhabits. The very first comment letter that Greta ever wrote on livestock grazing – in 2004 while working for the Center for Biological Diversity – involved the Nevada Coleman allotment, right next to the Vya Ranch in northwestern Nevada. The Vya Ranch is now owned by the Sagebrush Habitat Conservation Fund and managed for ecological restoration.

Greta started with WWP in August 2007 as the Arizona Director. The Arizona Strip BLM Field Office is dominated by sagebrush (and once had sage grouse populations of its own), and Safford Field Office in southeastern Arizona has considerable sagebrush at higher elevations, so Greta was dealing with sagebrush right from the start. In September 2011, she became Deputy Director of WWP, expanding her work geographically to include participation in WWP's west-wide efforts. In this position, she became an active spokesperson for sagebrush and the myriad plant and animal species that inhabit the Sagebrush Sea.

Throughout the Obama-era sage grouse planning process, Greta was



Greta Anderson

WWP's central sage-grouse advocacy, compiling comments, reviewing draft plans, and traveling to DC to press administration officials and conservation allies for stronger science-based sage grouse protections, as well as serving as the key voice on livestock issues among the serious grouse conservation groups.

When the Trump administration decided to gut the tepid West-wide sage grouse plan amendments put into place under the Obama administration, Greta spearheaded the comments, objections, and protests for each one of the Trump administration's BLM and Forest Service Greater Sage-grouse Resource Management Plan Amendments, doing the careful work (to which bigger groups with

more staff and resources could sign on) to ensure that the greater sage-grouse had advocates who had covered their legal bases. When WWP and allies brought the Trump plans into our legal challenge against the 2015 plan amendments — and won an injunction blocking them — it was all based on Greta's groundwork and due diligence.

Behind the scenes, Greta has worked closely with agencies for years to gather state-by-state sage-grouse population data, which then could be used by the broader conservation community to point out long-term population declines and to keep the heat on federal agencies to strengthen sage-grouse protections. These data have been essential to combat agency assertions that voluntary conservation programs and lax habitat protections are sufficient to recover the bird.

Greta's coalition-building skills and sense of humor have been central to the conservation community's effectiveness on sage grouse. Greta not only was a key member in forming the sage grouse conservation coalition (known as "The Grouzers") that leads up meaningful grouse conservation advocacy nationwide, but also was central to the formation of the Gunnison sage-grouse "Vortex Resisters" group, the central strategy group for Gunnison sage-grouse listing and habitat issues. Thanks to her conservation acumen and breadth of knowledge, Greta is regarded as one of the conservation community's leading voices on sage grouse science and conservation policy in the United States (and therefore the world). She is truly a Sagebrush Sentinel. ■



Photo by Erik Molvar.

Western Watersheds Project Adds New Muscle

By Greta Anderson

We've had a few changes in WWP staff since the spring newsletter.

By far the biggest change to our team was that WWP-stalwart Jeremy Greenberg has flown the coop! Jeremy had been working for WWP since 2008, running everything from website administration to bookkeeping to (delicious) meal planning for staff retreats. With his wry wit and generally unflappable demeanor, Jeremy kept WWP's operations flowing smoothly. It was hard to even know everything that Jeremy managed to do because he did it so well. His help through the last thirteen years was critically important to our successes, and we wish him well in his now full-time position as co-owner and manager of Shorty's Diner in Hailey.

Jeremy was not easy to replace, but we're excited to have Nancy Linscott taking up the reins at the Hailey headquarters. Nancy has lived in the Wood River Valley for over 21 years, and prior to joining our ranks, she worked as an environmental geologist and an of-

fice manager for a local private school. She currently volunteers on the Blaine County Land, Water, and Wildlife Levy Board and enjoys mountain biking, skate and telemark skiing, exploring the region's geologic wonders, and being a mom of a teenager.

Another shift was saying mostly goodbye to Paul Ruprecht, a WWP staffer since 2012. Paul worked first as an attorney for WWP and then became the Oregon/Nevada Director, but now he's off to earn another advanced degree in natural resource management. Paul is still working part-time on WWP projects; we couldn't bear to let him leave completely. We're hoping to lure him back once he completes his Master's degree.

To replace Paul's full-time position, Adam Bronstein has shifted over to become Oregon/Nevada Director. Adam lives in Sisters, Oregon and relocating to Idaho proved more difficult during the pandemic than anyone imagined! We decided to let him stay put in Oregon and are grateful that he was willing to take on a new geography.

Read his article in this issue of the Messenger on Nevada's water hauling mania and you'll learn about just some of what is keeping him busy.

And finally, with Adam in Oregon/Nevada, WWP hired a new staff member for the Idaho Director position. We welcomed Dr. Patrick Kelly, formerly an environmental policy instructor at the University of Montana, aboard in June 2021. He's joined Nancy in working out of our Hailey office. Patrick is quickly coming up to speed on all things Idaho grazing and putting his doctorate in Forestry and Conservation from the University of Montana to use in advocating for the protection of public lands.

In all, WWP has a bigger and stronger staff than ever, making us that much more effective in fighting the adverse effects of public lands livestock grazing. ■

Greta Anderson is the Deputy Director of Western Watersheds Project

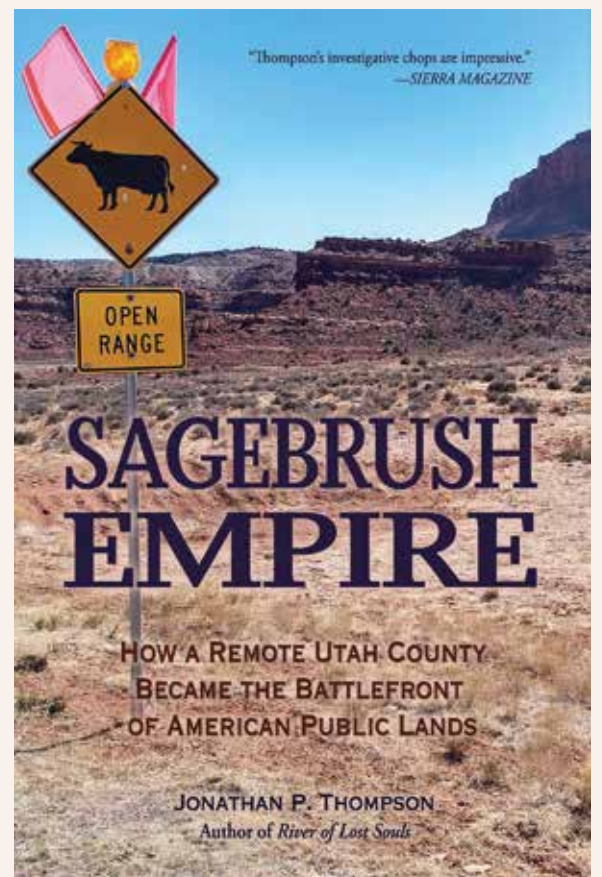
November Book Club Meeting

As we reported in our last newsletter, WWP and Torrey House Press have teamed up this year to bring an online Book Club to our broader conservation community.

Our final 2021 Book Club meeting will be on November 16th, and we'll be joined by Jonathan P. Thompson for a reading and discussion of his forthcoming book, *Sagebrush Empire: How a Remote Utah County Became the Battlefront of American Public Lands*. His deep dive into the politics of San Juan County, Utah is informative about the roots of the ongoing American public lands wars. It's also a close-to-home story involving one of WWP's newest Board members, Rose Chilcoat.

Torrey House Press is generously donating 20 percent of their proceeds to WWP when purchased with the code WESTERNWATERSHEDS at checkout.

Email greta@westernwatersheds.org for more information and to register for the November event. ■





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Every day the public lands, streams and wildlife throughout the West benefit because of the work done by the dedicated staff of Western Watersheds Project. Everything WWP does to influence the protection and restoration of public lands is based on a vision that western North America may be one of the only places on earth where enough of the native landscape and wildlife still exists to make possible the preservation of a wild natural world.

None of this work would be possible without your generosity and shared passion.



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Host an Event to Help Others Learn about Western Watersheds Project

Recently, WWP supporters hosted events to help us spread the word about our important work. You can host an event too and WWP will help. We'll supply informational materials, send out email/printed invitations combining your guest list with local WWP supporters, and even have a WWP representative attend a "meet & greet" which can be customized to your area of interest or concern.



The Western Watersheds Project Messenger is printed using vegetable-based inks on carbon neutral, 100% post-consumer waste.

