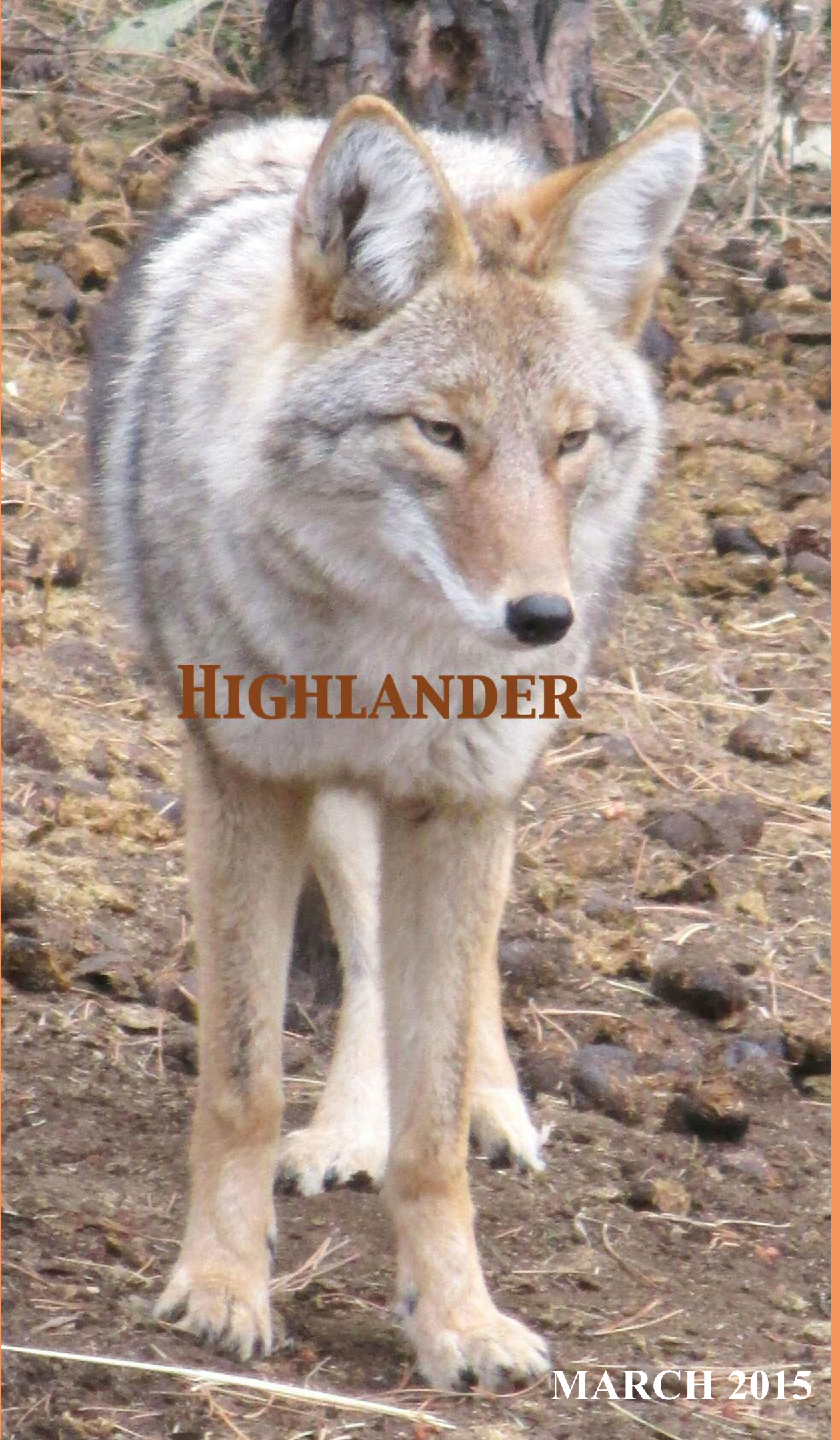


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## CONTENTS

## Pages

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**Anita M. Wilks**  
 CONTRIBUTING WRITERS  
*Omayra Acevedo - brandnewdayphoto.com*  
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*Michelle Nijhuis - High Country News*  
*Jim Plane - State Farm Insurance*  
*PredatorDefense.org*  
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*Dr. Heather Weir - CSU*  
*Frosty Wooldridge*  
*Joshua Zaffos - High Country News*  
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*Omayra Acevedo - brandnewdayphoto.com*  
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*Kim Kaiser-Buffalo Field Campaign*  
*Deanna Meyer*  
*www.DreamTimes.com*  
**Anita Wilks**

<b>Wildlife</b> - Coyotes at Risk -PredatorDefense.org	5
	Thank You To The Coyote 6, 7
<b>Animals</b> -	When to Spay & Neuter? 8, 9
<b>Wildlife</b> - Buffalo Field Campaign - <b>Take Action</b>	10
<b>Update</b> -	RMNP Centennial March Activities 11, 12
<b>Wildlife</b> -	Castle Rock Approves Prairie Dog Destruction 14, 15
<b>Environmental</b> -Nature have standing to sue?	16, 17
<b>Finance</b> - Do your finances need a check up?	20
<b>Issues</b> -	Amended Lawsuit to fix BoCo Roads 22
<b>Observation</b> - Explorations - Urban Wilderness	23, 24
<b>Issues</b> - Rocky Flats Prescribed Burn- Called Off	25, 26
<b>Worldview</b> -	Part 5 - Overpopulation 27,28,29
<b>Conservation</b> - Nature Protected/For or From	32, 33

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### REGULAR FEATURES

<b>Animals &amp; Their Companions</b>	18, 19
<b>Movie Review</b>	30, 31
<b>Ad Index &amp; Telephone #'s</b>	34

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# Coyotes At Risk - PredatorDefense.Org

Courtesy of PredatorDefense.org (Excerpt of article here.)

Dog-like in appearance and nature, stunning, intelligent, playful, affectionate, and devoted caregivers. Coyotes are magnificent animals that are tragically persecuted and historically maligned. **Coyote Control: Is It Effective or Necessary?** One of the country's foremost wildlife ecologists, Dr. Robert L. Crabtree, has conducted decades of extensive research on predator ecology and coyotes. His findings demonstrate that indiscriminate killing of adult coyotes, like that done by USDA Wildlife Services, actually increases the coyote population. For example, lethal control drives coyotes to target unnatural prey sources, such as sheep, in order to feed larger litters of pups.

**She's One Cool Dog: Overview of the American Coyote** - Throughout the world, there are many wild dog species, but North America is home to a very special dog—the coyote! Highly respected by Native Americans, coyotes have held a special place in our history. The Navaho's sheep and goat herders greatly revered coyotes, and referred to them as "God's dog."

Coyotes (*canis latrans*, which means talking dog) are wild dogs that appear much larger than they really are. They resemble a grizzled German Shepherd, with large, pointed ears and a narrow muzzle. Color varies from grays to red, depending on geographical location, but they uniformly have a black-tipped tail. Typically, western coyotes weigh 25-35 pounds, and coyotes in the northeast weigh up to 45 pounds.

The extreme adaptability of this animal enables them to fill the void left open by the elimination of other larger, more specialized predators such as grizzlies, wolves and mountain lions. Omnivorous by nature, coyotes eat both meat and vegetable matter, although they primarily subsist on rodents and carrion.

Coyotes are pack animals with a social structure similar to wolves. Packs consist of a dominant male and female (alpha pair), and extended family members (betas and omegas). Typically, only the alpha pair breeds, and produces one litter a year. They breed in the months of January through early March, and the gestation period is 62 days. Pups are born with their eyes closed, and like domestic dogs, open in 10 to 14 days. Litter size varies from 4 to 9 pups, with an average of two pups surviving the first year in unexploited

populations. Pups succumb to predation, disease, weather, and other natural causes.

Coyote territories are best described as circular areas. Den sites are usually found in the core area or middle of the circle. This area is fiercely defended against other coyotes and predators, especially during the spring and early summer months when pups are present. Unless they are habituated to humans, coyotes are generally shy and wary of people. Coyotes sometimes succumb to wolves, mountain lions, and bears. Average life spans in the wild is five years of age, although they can live into their teens.

**The Importance of Coyotes** - Like other top predators, coyotes play a critical role in keeping natural areas healthy. In fact, coyotes are a keystone species, meaning that their presence or absence has a significant impact on the surrounding biological community.

When coyotes are absent or even just greatly reduced in a natural area, the relationships between species below them in the web are altered, putting many small species at risk.

**Frequently Asked Questions** - Do coyotes kill for fun? No. Coyotes only kill enough to feed themselves and their pups, usually killing only one animal for their needs. What is lethal predator control? Lethal predator control is the killing of coyotes and other predators using methods such as the setting of traps and snares, the use of poisons, aerial gunning, and denning. The largest ongoing predator control program is sponsored by the U.S. government and is called Wildlife Services.

Won't coyote populations explode if we don't control them? When left alone, coyotes regulate their own numbers.

**Living with Urban Coyotes** - Most coyote problems are caused when people feed coyotes or otherwise habituate them to people.

**PredatorDefense.org mission is to protect native predators and create alternatives for people to coexist with wildlife. In their latest film *Exposed* (available on YouTube) you'll see three former federal agents and a Congressman blow the whistle on Wildlife Services, the barbaric wasteful agency within the USDA that wages war on wildlife with taxpayer's money. You can help by going to their website for action steps and to donate to their/our cause.**

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PAGE 5

# Thank You To The Coyote

By Omayra Acevedo - Nature/Wildlife Photographer & blogger  
brandnewdayphoto.com

I will admit that I was hesitant to write an article about Coyotes. Why, you ask? For the same reasons I fear writing any article about wildlife. I've been verbally attacked by people who have not had good experiences with wildlife, criticized for supporting only wildlife conservation efforts, and ignored for only focusing my photographic talents on nature. Whether people have had good or challenging encounters with nature, they tend to think I'm a bit of a hippie when it comes to Colorado's wildlife. They are right to do so. I believe in a world where you can make the choice to live among the wild things and comfortably coexist with them. Everyone is entitled to his or her opinion, and this one is just mine.

My least favorite fact about living with coyotes is when they are hunted and killed because of misconceptions or misunderstandings. I don't speak of hunters or landowners, but people who have yet to learn the facts of why coyotes

are so important to our environment. Yes, I understand that having your livestock or domestic pet killed is never an issue to be taken lightly, but should our answer always be to kill first? In this day and age with so many studies and options, there are ways to repel coyotes from attacking while allowing them the same right we have. To live! The




options are endless and as easy as searching online for coyote repellents such as, Coyote Deterrent, noisemakers, decoys, or putting up a fence. You just have to be willing to do your part and help protect the environment we all call home.



In my opinion, what better way to coexist with coyotes than to take advantage of the help they offer us? Allow me

to share an example. Coyotes are fascinating animals. They prey upon fowl, carrion and small rodents. Rodents you would not want inside your homes, like mice and other destructive mammals. If you live among the coyotes, you will never have to purchase poison or traps for those rodents. No need to experience the foul smell of a dead critter rotting away in a trap, nor the hassle of having to touch it to get rid of it. Even if your issues are not with mice, the coyote can still help, free-of-charge. Coyotes have the ability to adjust their diet depending on what is available. This adaptability, and the decline of wolves in Colorado, is part of the Coyote's success.

If you are of the generation that believes there are too many coyotes running loose, consider the generation that has destroyed their habitat and the options the coyotes have been left with. When we struggle to survive, we relocate or work more than one job to get the money that pays for our food. Coyotes only have one choice...whatever is available at the moment of hunger and desperation. Who could blame them? Would we not do whatever it took to survive and take care of our families? Surviving is simply all they



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are doing. Please remember, they too need food and a place to call home. Coyotes, like all creatures of this earth, do not lack intelligence. If you show respect, compassion and appreciation that is exactly what you will get in return. The only reason Coyotes have a bad rap, is because we gave them one. Wayne Dyer once said, "If you change



the way you look at things, the things you look at will start to change." This is true, even of the Coyote.

My most favorite stories about coyotes come from the Native American culture. Coyotes have been used in Native American folklore for years to teach lessons of survival and to inspire creativity. Legend has it that Native Americans consider coyotes to be the smartest animal on earth. I couldn't agree more. I'm not Native American, but you don't have to be to find inspiration or appreciation for something that is as majestic as the Coyote. It too has feelings, struggles and difficult choices to make. I understand this more than most people might. Like the Native Americans, I pride myself in respecting and appreciating the natural world around me.

My mother taught me a lot about nature and why all of it was beautiful and needed. She always told me that nature favored me. Though I was never entirely sure of what she meant by that, I always smiled and kept my thoughts to myself. It wasn't until one random experience in Colorado that I began to see what she meant. One day, as many days often go, I drove around with a friend looking for wildlife. Considering they are wild I couldn't exactly send out a memo to let them know I was interested in some photo-ops. We drove for an entire eight hours waiting for that one opportunity. Out of the blue I heard myself say, "I wish we could at least see a Coyote eating something." I kid you not, less than a minute later; we turned a switch-back and saw a Coyote hunting for food. It was incredible! I could not believe it and I was there. Thank you mom! I get it now.

The coyote, like all things of this earth, are needed for many reasons. They offer all of us something we can't always offer ourselves. Peace, help, beauty, lessons and inspiration.

<http://cpw.state.co.us/learn/Pages/Living-withWildlifeCoyote.aspx> <http://www.indians.org/articles/coyote-facts.html> <http://www.drwaynedyer.com/>

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# When To Spay & Neuter?

By Dr. Heather Weir-CSU

For most pet owners in the United States, spaying and neutering dogs and cats is an important way to benefit animals, their households and society. For female pets, spaying provides important health benefits, while castrating male pets can help reduce their anxiety and aggression. For pet owners, it's helpful to eliminate the dilemma of unwanted litters.

Society benefits from decreased pet overpopulation and the public-health problems that arise with feral animals; society further benefits as we limit the number of animal-control, shelter and euthanasia programs needed for unwanted, neglected, stray and feral pets. In fact, spaying and neutering has so many advantages that veterinarians at Colorado State University consider sterilization surgery a cornerstone of preventive care for pets.

Recently, veterinarians have discussed the age at which

pets should be spayed and neutered. Many interesting studies – especially so-called “lifetime studies” that follow pets through their lives – seek to answer this question. So far, there’s no definitive answer; timing for spay and neuter surgeries should take into account research-based information and the needs of an individual pet and its owner. The most recent research has shown that spaying and neutering pets as puppies and kittens can affect their growth. Early spaying and neutering increases the length of time that the bones grow, which results in a taller pet. The concern is that increased growth may affect how joints align. Therefore, spaying and neutering early may not be in a pet’s best interest, especially if the animal is prone to breed-related orthopedic problems.

Unfortunately, we don’t yet know the age at which this growth effect ceases. So many orthopedic surgeons recommend waiting until skeletal maturity to spay and neuter pets, especially those predisposed to orthopedic disease, such as large dog breeds. That seems easy enough: Let’s wait until skeletal maturity to spay and neuter our pets, right? Well, it’s not that simple.

An important health benefit of spaying female pets is reduction in the incidence of mammary cancer. If we spay a female dog before her first estrus, or “heat,” we essentially eliminate her chances of developing mammary cancer. This benefit holds true for any female dog spayed before the age of 2, yet incidence of mammary cancer increases with each estrus period. As we wait for a dog to reach skeletal maturity, she may go through her first estrus cycle. Then her risk for mammary cancer rises, and she must be kept

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away from intact male dogs so she isn't accidentally bred. Waiting to spay also means the hassle of cleaning up after a dog in heat.

Spaying and neutering mature pets can pose increased risk of surgical complications. And in older males, the hormone testosterone may lead to unwanted behaviors. When making the decision about the timing of spay and neuter procedures, it is best to consult your veterinarian and to discuss your circumstances and your individual pet.

Here are some topics to cover with your vet during the decision-making process: What are the risks of orthopedic disease and other health problems for your pet, and how might these be influenced by the timing of spay or neuter? Are you willing and able to manage the hassles that come with a cycling female pet or an intact male? This includes, for females in heat, limiting interaction with other animals in order to avoid unwanted litters. Is your pet fully vaccinated? We prefer to wait at least two weeks after the pet's last vaccine. Can the operation be performed laparoscopically? Minimally invasive sterilization is an option at some veterinary practices, and at the CSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital.

Talking through the pros and cons of timing for spay and neuter will help you arrive at a decision that's best for you and your pet.

*Dr. Heather Weir is a veterinarian with the Community Practice service at Colorado State University's James L. Voss Veterinary Teaching Hospital. Community Practice provides general care, wellness services, and treatment of minor injuries and illnesses for pets. This Pet Health column is the fourth in a series, called Cornerstones of Preventive Care. Earlier columns addressed pet vaccinations, health insurance and exercise. Find them at <http://source.colostate.edu/pet-health-exercise-helps-avoid-fat-cat-pudgy-pooch>.*



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# Buffalo Field Campaign ~ [www.buffalofieldcampaign.org](http://www.buffalofieldcampaign.org)

More than 600 of America's last wild buffalo, through hunting and slaughter, have been destroyed this year. Yellowstone National Park has facilitated the slaughter of hundreds of the animals that are a national treasure, that we had entrusted them with protecting, and that they use as their symbol. As we have been reporting, Yellowstone has been extremely secretive about capture and slaughter operations this year. BFC has pressed them repeatedly for media tours and timely information, with little success. Independent journalists and mainstream media have also been applying pressure, also with little success.



The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has stepped in and things are changing. The Wyoming ACLU is representing BFC and independent journalist Christopher Ketcham, who is currently with us doing another story for the buffalo. The ACLU sent a letter of demand to Yellowstone National Park, seeking full and unfettered access to the Stephens Creek bison trap. The day after this letter was sent, Yellowstone announced that they would conduct a guided media tour of the trap. This tour took place in February. It was brutal. Two days prior to the tour, BFC vigilantly watched the trap from our usual far away distance. Buffalo were being tortured, run through the squeeze chutes in preparation for being shipped to slaughter the following day.

BFC was able to document buffalo in the long, skinny chute, and to our horror, we got footage of 67 buffalo being left in this hall of terror over night! Park Rangers left the facility while they were left crammed in this space, to be convenient for the next morning's loading.

During the media tour, BFC volunteer Sam Estrada asked Park Ranger Brian Helms, who works at the trap, if they ever keep buffalo in the squeeze chute over night. Helms said no. Sam informed him that this was not true, that they did it the night before and that we have video footage to prove it. Helms was silenced.

One thing that will haunt us for the rest of our lives was hearing the sounds, the grunting, of yearling buffalo in a small square pen, calling out for their moms. And there was no call back, for their mothers were no longer there. The buffalo in other pens were going around and around in circles, slamming into each other, unnaturally harming one another in their terror and confusion. The Park Service employees who were "guiding" us on this tour are disturbingly comfortable with - even defending - their participation in the maltreatment of the buffalo. They have essentially become the Montana Department of Livestock.

Buffalo harassment, abuse and slaughter have become business as usual for them and they attempt to justify their actions as if it is what the Park Service was born to do. Proof via video is on our website. The buffalo's horrific treatment is sanctioned by MCA 81-2-120, a Montana law that puts the Montana Department of Livestock in charge of wild bison, and led to the creation of the Interagency Bison Management Plan.

While Yellowstone National Park is responsible for their own actions, the IBMP would not exist were it not for MCA 81-2-120, and this law must be repealed.

**WILD IS THE WAY!**

**Go to our website for ACTION Steps you may take to help our fight to end the maltreatment and continuing torture with your tax dollars to this last wild herd.**

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# RMNP Centennial March Activities

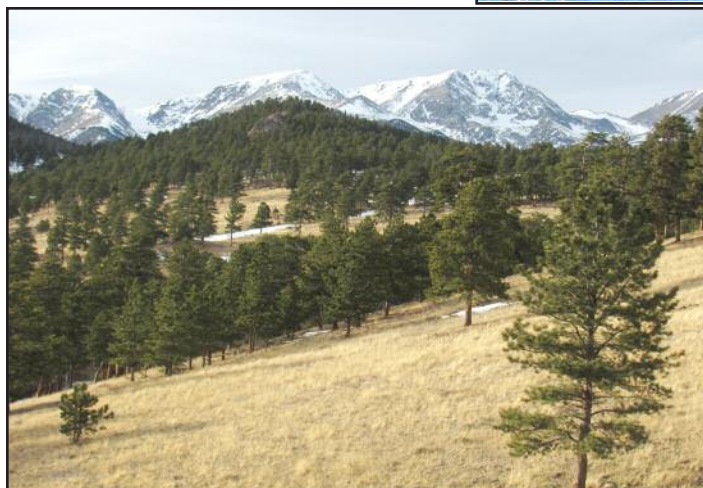
*Photos and Update by Diane Bergstrom*

To follow up my article in last month's edition (*view at highlander.com, Archives*), I will submit a monthly list of centennial activities so readers can easily plan their participation in the park's activities! To check the ongoing list of centennial events, follow [nps.gov/romo](http://nps.gov/romo). **A full moon walk is scheduled for Mar. 5.** The walk lasts 1 to 1.5 hours, with time and location to be determined. Reservations can be made no earlier than 7 days in advance by calling 970-586-1223 between 8 am and 4 pm. Every Saturday night, the east side of the park offers Centennial Saturday Night presentations, celebrating wilderness and wildlife.



RMNP's first naturalist who was also an author. He created Ranger Bob, using his own adventures in his stories. **The March 14th program is, *Call of the Coyote***, and presents information on this divisive wild animal and how living with wildlife will change in the next 100 years. **The March 21st program is, *Wilderness, Wildlife and Wonder***, covering what can be found in the park year round. **The March 28th program** should be lively with Interpretive Ranger Jean presenting, ***Keepers of the Treasure: Inspirational Ranger Stories***. She will tell tales of the rangers and volunteers who help visitors while protecting the park, from bear encounters to rescues.

Additional events outside the park include a presentation at the **University of Colorado at Boulder (CU) on March 5th, *One Park, Many Perspectives***, and covers an exploration of Rocky Mountain National Park. *(Continued next page.)*



The free programs are 45 minutes long, begin at 7 pm, and are held at the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center. **The program for March 5th is, *Bob Flame: Rocky Mountain Ranger***, and depicts fictitious Ranger Bob, created by



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CU researchers from a variety of departments including history, geological sciences, environmental studies, etc. will present information on the park's history, environments and ecology. It will be held at Norlin Library; a reception at 4:00 followed by the panel discussion from 4:30-6:30. **On March 24th, Colorado photographer and author John Fielder will present at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science**, at 2001 Colorado Blvd. in Denver, from 7:00-8:30. Tickets are \$15 and limited to 300. Buy now, as they will sell out! Purchase them online at [NPS.gov/romo](http://NPS.gov/romo), click on **Come Celebrate!**,

then **Schedule of Events** and go to the **Monthly Calendar** and choose **March**. Buy tickets through the event listing. John, an entertaining storyteller, spent 50 nights camping in RMNP photographing sunrises and sunsets. This should be a great show! **On March 30th, a program, *Pioneers of the Peaks: Local Climbers Who Made History***, will be presented at the Estes Park Museum, 200 Fourth Street, Estes Park, at 7 pm.

The YMCA is offering centennial hikes and their schedule can be found at <http://www.y-hikes.com>. The Colorado Mountain Club, which helped form RMNP, is offering trail hikes, snowshoe hikes, and wildflower hikes. Find their schedule at [www.cmc.org](http://www.cmc.org). The Rocky Mountain Conservancy, a non-profit that supports projects, research, and educational programs of RMNP, including the Junior Ranger Headquarters/Moraine Park Discovery Center, is offering a Centennial Seminar Series depicting the wilderness, wildlife and wonder of the park. Seminars are interactive and involve some hiking with instructors. Fees apply. Call 970-586-1206 for details or pick up a catalog at one of the Park Visitor Centers.

So pick your park plan, engage and enjoy! For further information on any park event, call the Information Office at 970-586-1206, and visit [nps.gov/romo](http://nps.gov/romo).

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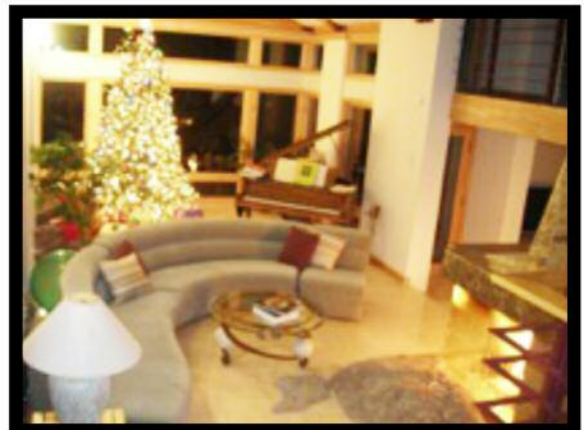
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# Castle Rock Approves Prairie Dog Destruction

Dear Prairie Dog Supporters,  
Join Us In Stopping This Annihilation - The prairie dogs are in immediate danger: The town meeting recently in Castle Rock was heartbreaking. We packed the room with concerned residents, with standing room only. Several of us spoke very powerful, articulate and emotional speeches requesting that the council delay development and save the thousands of prairie dogs and countless other lives that are living in the area of the proposed Promenade at Castle Rock Mall.

Peter Cudlip, the man in charge at Alberta Development, was unfeeling, calloused and quite frankly, presented the typical psychopathic behavior of a profiteer hell bent on turning lives into cash. After hearing from us, the council took about two minutes to approve the project and gave Cudlip the green light to exterminate all the prairie dogs on sight. None of our concerns were addressed, other than a few "technicalities" that were called on, and no members of the council even deliberated for an instant to give any of our concerns the time and thought they deserved.

Our current situation is as follows: Alberta Development and Peter Cudlip, the man in charge, will exterminate all the prairie dogs as soon as they want if they are not stopped.

What you can do: For all of you that live in Castle Rock and the surrounding area, please WATCH THE SITE and keep us updated as to ANY actions that are occurring on the ground. Call Alberta Development and write Peter Cudlip at the following to express your concern and anger over this issue. Ask them to refrain from killing the prairie dogs and to relocate them in June: Alberta Development's contact is Nicole Haselden. She can be reached at 303-253-7517 Peter Cudlip's email is: [pmc@albdev.com](mailto:pmc@albdev.com)

Be ready to get on the site and stop the destruction of the prairie dogs in the form of a protest and direct action. Keep updated: Continue to fund this struggle so we can cover our legal team and the actions they are taking to stop this atrocity at the following link: <https://life.indiegogo.com/fundraisers/save-the-castle-rock-mall-prairiedogs/x/1002347>

We need to send out a strong message that we will NOT accept the loss of our nature for a shopping mall. Please get involved, and help us save the lives of this beautiful colony of prairie dogs. Continue to check email and do not hesitate to contact us with further ideas about the direction we will take this campaign. This is a community effort, and we need everyone of you with ideas and help.

We will not give up on the prairie dogs. We will fight for them and for their future. Please help us by acting in whatever capacity available to bring this issue to the foreground and illustrate that Alberta Development will NOT get away with the wholesale slaughter of these prairie dog families and let the council know that we will not be silenced. For the Love of the Prairie Dogs and Life!  
Deanna Meyer and Wildlands Defense 720-722-1691  
[deanna@wildlandsdefense.org](mailto:deanna@wildlandsdefense.org)

By Deanna Meyer

## The 'Nation's Biggest Mall' Slated to Kill One of the Largest Prairie Dog Colonies on Colorado's Front Range

Recently I heard the news that our county was getting one of the nation's biggest malls. The news simultaneously sunk my heart and angered me. Why the hell do we need another mall? To consume the world? Then my mind raced to the location of the mall, and the prairie dogs that live there. I had been worried about this colony before, about



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the strong possibility that the remaining colonies comprising hundreds of prairie dogs would be destroyed for some kind of development. After all, a Lowe's store, an outlet mall, a housing project, and a tire store had occupied their territory and had already killed thousands of these dogs in the name of "development." And this was the final solution for the 3,000 to 8,000 remaining burrows: complete annihilation of the prairie dogs for a shopping mall set to cover 170 acres in concrete.



Once the news sunk in, I called the town of Castle Rock, where the new mall is slated to be developed and spoke with the government official in charge of the construction. I was then given the contact information of the individual working with Alberta Development (the development company constructing the mall) on the prairie dog "problem." She was kind and helpful, as developers are trained to be when it comes to dealing with the "pesky environmentalists" and let me know that the current plan for the prairie dogs was to cage them, kill them, and send them off to the nearest raptor farm to feed the birds. All of them. Hundreds of prairie dog families sucked up out of their only homes, caged, killed, and fed to the raptors. She informed me that they had tried to find new places for them to be relocated, but had no success, so this was the only possibility left for the prairie dogs. She extended an invitation to help her find relocation areas with assurances that if we found a place, they would cover the costs for the relocation and support us in any way they could to make that transfer happen. All I needed to do was find private land owners within Douglas County who were willing to have prairie dogs on their land. I knew that in our county, it would not be easy to locate these land owners. Ranchers and conservatives have a long history of deep stemmed hatred for these animals as they perceive prairie dogs as a nuisance and a threat to their cash herds and crops. Landowners by and large are perfectly willing to accept prairie dog extermination as good business practice.

Grabbing my camera, my next plan of action was to go

and visit these prairie dog families and spend some time with them to witness what was happening in this area with the development of the mall. As I drove through the thousands of burrows, my heart was racing and sadness pulsed through me. I found a good spot to pull over and started to listen and watch as I walked among the dogs. The individual scouts were sitting on top of their burrows chatting away, relaying information to their families below. People studying prairie dogs have found that the colonies have their own distinct languages and dialects and have different words for coyotes, hawks, snakes and humans. They even distinguish between the different colors of shirts that people are wearing.

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# Should Nature Have Standing To Sue?

From Adam Sowards

In 1965, the Sierra Club sued to stop a ski development in Sequoia National Forest, California, arguing that Walt Disney Enterprises' proposed resort would constitute an injury to Mineral King Valley. In 1972, the Supreme Court rejected the club's reasoning, unwilling to accept that natural objects had standing to sue in court. Instead, the court urged the Sierra Club to amend its complaint to show how the club's members, rather than the valley, would be injured. The club did so, and the ski resort was stopped.

However, one justice, William O. Douglas, was persuaded by the Sierra Club's original reasoning. His passionate dissent in *Sierra Club v. Morton* marks a pivotal point in environmental legal battles, one that still shapes advocacy today and points the way toward a potentially different way of thinking about nature.

Douglas' views were inspired by his own experiences in the wild. He grew up in Yakima, Washington, hiking the foothills and peaks of the Cascade Range, and he sang the praises of nature throughout his life. "When one stands on Darling Mountain, he is not remote and apart from the wilderness; he is an intimate part of it," he wrote in a typical passage from his memoir, *Of Men and Mountains*. "Every ridge, every valley, every peak offers a solitude deeper even than that of the sea. It offers the peace that comes only from solitude."

An intellectually restless man who wrote and traveled extensively, Douglas published five environmental books between 1960 and 1967. One of them, *A Wilderness Bill of*

Rights, argued for a "Bill of Rights to protect those whose spiritual values extend to the rivers and lakes, the valleys and the ridges, and who find life in a mechanized society worth living only because those splendid resources are not despoiled."

In his dissent in the Sierra Club lawsuit, Douglas advocated for a federal rule that would allow for litigation "in the name of the inanimate object about to be despoiled, defaced, or invaded by roads and bulldozers and where injury is the subject of public outrage." The proper labeling of the case, he argued, should have been *Mineral King v. Morton*.

It wasn't a huge leap from other legal precedents. Douglas pointed out that both corporations and ships had long been parties in litigation, despite being artificial and inanimate. "So it should be as respects valleys, alpine meadows, rivers, lakes, estuaries, beaches, ridges, groves of trees, swampland, or even air that feels the destructive pressures of modern technology and modern life," he wrote. Extending standing to the real party at risk of harm — the environment — would preserve "priceless bits of Americana" before they become "forever lost or are so transformed as to be reduced to the eventual rubble of our urban environment."

Douglas recommended accepting nature's rights — allowing nature's own voice to be heard in the courtroom — as a lasting way to shield wild places and processes from the ever-accelerating threats they faced. His passionate plea didn't persuade his practical-minded judicial brethren, even if fellow dissenter Justice Harry Blackmun called it "eloquent" and insisted that Douglas read it from the bench. Yet Douglas' opinion influenced and inspired environmentalists at the time and ever since. The Wilderness Society published the "stirring" dissent, and Roderick Nash in his history of environmental ethics, *The Rights of Nature*, said that Douglas had "located the conceptual door to the rights of nature." Michael Nelson, an environmental philosopher at Oregon State University, sees Douglas' dissent as "the cornerstone of a new environmental ethic, one premised upon empathy with the human and non-human world alike."

In the years since then, environmental groups have been able to sue on behalf of nature by demonstrating group members' legitimate interest in conservation issues or in places like Mineral King, a concept called associational standing. But despite Douglas' efforts, nature still finds itself marginalized in courtrooms. Much as a Catholic's confession must go through a priest, nature needs a mediator, a conservation

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Where all this leads is unclear. The courts themselves have never fully embraced the idea of nature's standing, but they've come close in the years since Douglas' dissent. This has been particularly true for endangered species like the marbled murrelet, the northern spotted owl and the coho salmon — all of which found themselves in court cases as co-plaintiffs alongside humans. Nature has yet to stand alone in court, however. Douglas recommended accepting nature's rights — allowing nature's own voice to be heard in the courtroom — as a lasting way to shield wild places and processes from the ever-accelerating threats they faced.

A decade ago, the 9th Circuit Court faced a test when a lawyer sued the president and secretary of defense on behalf of marine mammals, without a co-plaintiff — essentially the approach that Douglas had promoted. In *Cetacean Community v. Bush* (2004), the court emphatically rejected the species' legal standing, finding no evidence that Congress intended whales or dolphins to have it. The court found nothing preventing the legislative branch from deciding to grant animals statutory standing, however. Still, the prospect of today's Congress acting along those lines seems unlikely on ideological, political and practical grounds, and it's equally unclear that others — judges or policymakers — would agree that the notion passes constitutional muster.

And so it seems unlikely, at least for now, that Douglas' vision of nature as an entity with the right to sue will manifest in our courts. But does that matter? It depends on your criteria. The aftermath of the Supreme Court's decision in *Sierra Club v. Morton* helped establish standing for environmental organizations, thus facilitating environmental litigation. The court's opinion did not extend that right to natural objects, but Douglas' dissent nudged the courts toward recognizing nature's rights. This perspective pointed the way, according to legal scholar Christopher Stone, toward a new "level of consciousness" for the courts.

Today, global climate change, biodiversity losses and habitat fragmentation are creating unprecedented social and ecological problems. Environmental crises require serious changes in governance and legal systems and, arguably, in morality. When organizations such as the Earth Law Center work to "advance legal rights for ecosystems to exist, thrive and evolve," or when Ecuador declares in its 2008 Constitution that nature "has the right to integral respect for its existence and for the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes," they are paying homage to Douglas' -vision and implementing it in governing structures where law and

morality may intersect.

"The idea that what many take to be inanimate objects (such as trees)," Nelson says, "or abstract ideas and the places we apply them to (such as wilderness) or even a 'symbol' (such as a river) can be wronged in some way, and therefore can be represented or spoken on behalf of, is brave and thoughtful. And the idea that those who know most about something and care most for it should be the spokesperson seems wise and helpful as we think about the future and what kind of people we need to be or create (a society) that can and should speak about tough natural resource issues in the uncertain future we all face."

Toward the end of his dissent, Douglas noted that well-meaning advocates often flock to the environmental issue du jour, an understandable tendency but one that cannot sustain environmental protection over the long run. "That is why these environmental issues should be tendered by the inanimate object itself," he wrote. "Then there will be assurances that all of the forms of life which it represents will stand before the court — the pileated woodpecker as well as the coyote and bear, the lemmings as well as the trout in the streams. Those inarticulate members of the ecological group cannot speak. But those people who have so frequented the place as to know its values and wonders will be able to speak for the entire ecological community." Douglas' day may still come. In the meantime, though, we humans, or at least our organizations, will have to serve as -acceptable stand-ins.

*Adam Sowards is an environmental historian at the University of Idaho. He is the author of several books and essays: The Environmental Justice: William O. Douglas and American Conservation and the editor of Idaho's Place: A New History of the Gem State.*



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From Jim Plane – State Farm Insurance

Are your finances healthy—or could they use a checkup? Start the new year with fresh resolve to achieve financial wellness. Control Debt: Enhance your financial health by keeping debt manageable. Know what you owe and make a plan to control debt using these tips: Pay off debts with the highest interest rates first, such as credit card balances. Pay as much as you can on your smallest debts and pay at least the minimum on large ones—even modest accomplishments can motivate you to continue.

Review your finances to see that you're not overextended: For example, your home typically should cost no more than 2 to 2.5 times your household income and your mortgage should be no more than 80 percent of the home's value. Don't use credit cards to get out of debt. You'll not only pay more in interest, but you could damage your financial health and credit score at the same time. Learn more about debt management with these tips.

Spend Wisely: Financial wellness is based on living within your means. Spending money carefully and wisely will greatly enhance your financial health. Write down

every expense for a month and find out exactly where your money is going. You may be able to identify “extra money” to apply to your goals. Make a realistic budget using convenient online tools such as Mint.com.

Two-income families: Try to cover monthly expenses with just one income and use as much as possible from the other paycheck for savings. Before buying, ask yourself if the item is a “need” or a “want.” If it's the latter, wait a few weeks before you buy to make sure you have the cash in hand—or to decide if you still want it. This income and expenses worksheet from the FDIC can help you review your finances.

Increase Savings: Saving for retirement, children's education, emergencies or other expenses can help protect you—plus it delivers peace of mind.

Get in the habit of paying yourself first. Give savings the same importance as paying bills, and save something from each paycheck. Participate in your company's automatic savings program, if one is available. And always contribute enough to take advantage of matching funds, if they're offered. Many experts suggest putting at least 10 percent of your income into savings—and some recommend saving as much as 25 percent.

If saving is hard for you, start by saving at least one percent of your paycheck and commit to increasing your savings level as your salary grows. Save enough in your emergency fund to cover at least six months' worth of expenses—enough for nine to twelve months is even better. If you do tap into these savings, rebuild the fund as soon as possible.

Need a few pointers? Visit [AmericaSaves.org](http://AmericaSaves.org) for a list of 54 ways to save money. Get more tips for building financial wellness with My Money Five from [MyMoney.gov](http://MyMoney.gov). And learn how to build an emergency fund with tips from State Farm®



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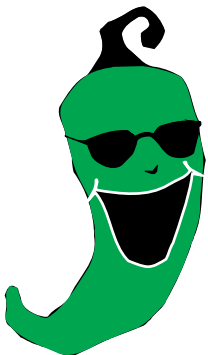
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# Amended Lawsuit To Fix Boulder County Roads

From BoCoFIRM.org

In February BoCo FIRM's attorney Madeline Meacham of Halpern Meacham filed an amended lawsuit against the Boulder County Board of Commissioners in the Colorado 20th District Court on behalf of Boulder County property owners. Go to their website and click on the link to read it. Amended Lawsuit filed: Purpose of the lawsuit - The purpose of the lawsuit is simple. The court has already decreed that the subdivision roads belong to the county, that the county has a responsibility to maintain those roads and that road maintenance includes chip sealing and overlays. But the County continues to refuse to accept its state mandated responsibility in regard to our roads. Therefore our only option is to go back to court and ask the court to order the County to fulfill this responsibility. We aren't asking for special treatment. We are simply asking that the County maintain subdivision roads just like they

currently maintain every other road in unincorporated Boulder County.

What we have to prove to win the lawsuit: In order to win the lawsuit the court has required us to demonstrate two things; 1) that the County has sufficient funding to maintain subdivision roads and that 2) the County's decision to not maintain these roads is unreasonable and arbitrary. How we intend to win the lawsuit: BoCo FIRM and our attorneys have been working overtime going through the County financial records to find examples of discretionary spending that the Commissioners have chosen to spend your tax dollars on instead of using those same dollars to maintain the roads. As outlined in our complaint, a few examples of the County's unreasonable and arbitrary decisions include:

The \$691 million Boulder County residents approved for open space taxes apparently hasn't been enough for the Commissioners. The Commissioners have arbitrarily decided to supplement these tax dollars with an additional \$79 million from the general fund.

In 2015 alone the Commissioners arbitrarily chose to give almost \$14 million to non-profit agencies and \$5 million to the recycling center, all discretionary spending not mandated by state law.

In addition, the County continues to have nearly \$60 million in unallocated and reserve funding that they simply refuse to spend to fix our roads.

What is the County's position? The County's immediate response was to state that they would ask the court to dismiss the lawsuit, as this is simply a "political dispute...that doesn't belong in the courts." This completely ignores considerable evidence in various county documents past and present, state law and court decisions.

Holding subdivision resident's hostage and denying us the same basic services provided to all other county residents is not a "political dispute." It is an arbitrary and unreasonable decision made by the Commissioners.

The Commissioners are telling us that unless we are willing to pay an additional user fee that is imposed without a vote, the roads we use every day will be allowed to deteriorate to dust. We are asking the courts to intervene and to correct this problem once and for all. The **BoCoFirm.org** website has ways to donate to the cause and for emailed updates as this process continues in the courts.

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# Explorations In An Urban Wilderness

From Kyle Boelte

The suburb we grew up in had a series of greenbelts: preserved land flowing like inlets between the thousands of tract homes that stretched ever south from Denver. Highlands Ranch had been a cattle ranch in the not-so-distant past, and cattle still grazed on some of the land in 1991 — a comfortably pastoral sight for the 17,000 inhabitants of the 10-year-old suburban outpost.

When I was 9, I spent hours exploring our greenbelt with a tall redheaded kid from the neighborhood. We spent most of our time down by the creek, protected from the hot summer sun by towering cottonwood trees. We would pack provisions and wander the great expanse just as Stephen Harriman Long had in July of 1820. His namesake peak (14,259 feet tall) looms over the Front Range, and under its watchful gaze we delighted in finding quicksand and frogs and the occasional owl. We dreamed of finding swimming holes and stringing up rope swings that would propel us through the air and into the cool water below.

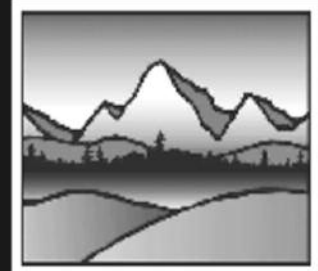
On summer afternoons in Colorado, storm clouds formed near Longs Peak and neighboring mountains, where we could see them building, their strength growing. Then, as if

given permission, they advanced across the plains, a torrent of rain and thunder and lightning. In the cities and suburbs, water gathered in the streets, the contours of the -concrete forcing it through gutters to storm drains, where it disappeared into the underworld.

Once, just down from the greenbelt entrance, we found a storm drain outlet hidden behind the cottonwoods, around a bend in the creek. It was a large concrete block with a stream of water flowing from an opening at its base. We scaled the exterior wall above the opening and looked down into a room. After scoping out the obstacles inside, we decided to jump down. We waded five feet through ankle-deep water and climbed over a giant interior concrete wall to reach the farthest chamber, where a large drainpipe emerged. It was like nothing we had seen before. Deep inside, the drainpipe was utterly dark, an emptiness from which a cool breeze blew.

“Because it’s there,” George Mallory said, when he was asked why he climbed Everest. Our answer, at 9, to the question, “Why do you want to enter the drainpipe?” would have been the same. Mallory was last seen a couple hundred meters from the summit of Everest in 1924. He was 37. His well-preserved body (Continued next page.)

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was found in 1999 on the North Face, at 26,760 feet. His partner's body was never found. We hadn't heard of either of them.

We went home to plan. We did not know what the pipe was exactly or why it was there. We did not know how long it was or if in fact it ever ended. We did know that we needed more provisions for this expedition, our most daring to date. We loaded up on flashlights, candles, matches and Hostess Cup Cakes. Our load seemed heavy; never before had we carried so much. So we tied a rope to a skateboard and pulled our gear behind us.

When we got to the drainpipe, past the entrance and the water and the concrete wall, the otherworldly breeze met us once more. We stared into the depth of the darkness. And then, taking a deep breath, we stepped inside. We could walk inside the drainpipe as long as we kept our heads down and knees bent. After about 10 feet, the light of day faded behind us. We turned on our flashlights and crept forward, spelunkers encountering a corrugated-steel cave. We were followed by the sound of the skateboard's wheels drumming out a steady rhythm against the corrugation.

After what felt like an hour, we stopped and talked briefly, reassuring each other. Outside, the thunderclouds were building in the distance, the winds were picking up. Inside, with the storm out of sight, we felt only the cool breeze flowing through the tunnel. We continued.

Then, on our left, in the glow of a flashlight, we saw another pipe, much smaller and jutting out like a tributary. It opened about halfway up the wall of the main pipe. We would be able to fit as long as we crawled on our hands and knees. There would not be enough room to turn around. We would need to make it to the end, or, if retreat became necessary, we would need to methodically inch backward all the way to the main pipe.

We had not checked the weather report. We had no idea if there might be a thunderstorm that afternoon. The weather was not on our minds. It was darkness, not rain that scared us. We deliberated. We ate our cupcakes. Then we followed the tributary to see where it would lead.

*Kyle Boelte is the author of **The Beautiful Unseen** (Soft Skull/Counterpoint, February 2015), from which this essay is adapted.*



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# Prescribed Burn At Rocky Flats Called Off

**Editor's Note:** On February 6th the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Dept. decided to call off the prescribed burn at the wildlife refuge citing concerns from nearby cities and activists. A test burn in 2000 created large scale smoke and ash that tested far above background radiation levels.

**From Joshua Zaffos**

It takes a little more than 24,000 years for plutonium-239 to lose half of its radioactive energy. People's memories don't last as long, but can have their own burning energy when it comes to risks from nuclear-weapons plants. Plans for a prescribed fire this spring in a corner of the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge – formerly the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons plant – have run into resistance from activists, former workers and new homeowners concerned about the health effects of burning potentially contaminated grasslands. But those worries are outdated and oversized, according to state and federal government managers, and ignore natural wildfire risks that could pose more severe problems.

Located between Denver and Boulder, the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons plant produced plutonium triggers for nuclear bombs beginning in 1952. An FBI raid in 1989 halted operations after finding evidence of illegal radioactive waste dumping, burning and storage across the

6,200-acre site.

Since then, government managers and contractors have spent \$7.5 billion cleaning up Rocky Flats: razing buildings, removing radioactive materials and soils, and restoring other areas. The open and rolling landscape now encompasses a National Wildlife Refuge; it remains off-limits to people, and the hottest spots are still monitored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.


As part of efforts to manage the lands today, the Fish and Wildlife Service announced plans for a prescribed burn on 701 acres in the southwest corner of the site last fall. The planned burn will help thin out invasive weeds and overgrown vegetation – before a natural wildfire occurs and scorches the area more severely.

“If we have a wildfire, it will be devastating,” says David Lucas, Fish and Wildlife refuge manager. Erosion caused by a wildfire could move soil and materials from more contaminated areas and release airborne radiation.


Speaking to the Rocky Flats Stewardship Council, a panel of local government and other representatives, and a public audience on Jan. 26, Lucas said the construction of a major new housing and shopping development, Candelas, along the Flats' southern boundary has “induced” the burn plans. He added that the planned burn area has been tested and contamination is no higher than *(Continued next page.)*

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## Highlander Issues

“background levels” found elsewhere. Managers and technicians who will carry out the work will take no extra precautions compared with other prescribed burns. The state of Colorado approved a smoke permit for the project.

But all that has done little to alleviate scrutiny and fears of locals. Long-time activists and former plant workers say the burn plans are reckless and the action could release plutonium locked in the soil and vegetation.

Alternatives, such as using goats to graze overgrown areas (and then probably killing the potentially radioactive livestock), should have gotten more consideration, they say. Opponents also argue that a test burn in 2000 released

much higher levels of airborne radiation and toxic smoke than the government has acknowledged. “Is it appropriate to have a burn on a radionuclide-contaminated site?” asks Mickey Harlow, a retired water-quality analyst for the nearby town of Westminster. That’s a national question for former nuclear sites across the West that are now being managed as wildlife areas and being surrounded by new development. “We have to err on the side of safety,” says Harlow, who along with others are meeting with attorneys to consider actions to prevent the burn.

Following the past coverups and negligence at Rocky Flats – and considering the ongoing health problems of former workers – the enduring skepticism of government actions at Rocky Flats is no surprise. Harlow and many

others contend the site’s toxic legacy and the extent of contamination remains unknown or underestimated.

Many residents in nearby newly built developments in the towns of Superior, Broomfield and Arvada have now



moved in, unaware of Rocky Flats’ past. Homeowners and activists have organized to ensure that other potential residents are better informed of the fading history – and the uncertainty surrounding the former weapons facility.

In response to the heightened suspicions of residents, the Rocky Flats Stewardship Council has asked Fish and Wildlife to reconsider its plans, scheduled for the spring when conditions permit. But David Abelson, himself an energy-policy consultant for local governments, emphasizes that the council’s opposition is rooted in citizens’ concerns, not any specific health risks.

Containing radiation – and people’s fears – is tricky business. Lucas, the refuge manager, understands the worries, but he says that while Fish and Wildlife also recognizes that prescribed fire wouldn’t be appropriate across all of Rocky Flats, residents should understand that radioactive contamination isn’t a ubiquitous threat – and choosing not to manage the expansive site brings its own dangerous consequences, including a possible wildfire spreading to more contaminated areas. “We have to get past that,” Lucas says. “We know the Flats will burn.”

*Joshua Zaffos is an HCN contributing editor.*

*Above photo of the old Rocky Flats facility (DOE). The clean up process was negotiated to be done at lower levels, never disclosed completely, due to a lack of federal funds.*



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# Part 5 - Overpopulation

By Frosty Wooldridge

“The cheap oil age created an artificial bubble of plenty for a period not much longer than a human lifetime....so I hazard to assert that as oil ceases to be cheap and the world reserves move toward depletion, we will be left with an enormous population...that the ecology of the earth will not support. The journey back toward non-oil population homeostasis will not be pretty. We will discover the hard way that population hyper-growth was simply a side-effect of the oil age. It was a condition, not a problem with a solution. That is what happened and we are stuck with it.”  
 James Howard Kunstler, *The Long Emergency* www.kunstler.com

Top experts around the world understand that the energy slave called “oil” faces exhaustion within the next 40 years, if not sooner. Along the way, drilling for oil will prove more difficult, harder to extract and more costly.



Fact: everything in America and most Western civilizations runs on oil. Oil allows billions of people to eat via tractors

and harvesters of massive croplands. Without oil, 315 million Americans could not feed themselves and 7.1 billion humans around the planet would face enormous die-off. We humans cannot possibly plant and harvest enough food by hand to survive at 7.1 billion of us. We couldn't pump the aquifers to irrigate crops. We couldn't transport food fast enough by boat, donkey or oxen. That's the problem. Oil will run out sooner or later. Nothing on the technological horizon can replace it. In order to drive cars, boats, planes and fuel industry, Americans use 20 million barrels of oil daily while the rest of the world burns



62 million barrels. That equals 82 million barrels of oil every 24 hours. When you multiply 365 days by 82,000,000 barrels of oil burned daily, it equals a whopping 29.9 billion barrels of oil annually.

*(Processing crude oil creates unrelenting air pollution, carbon particulate and acid rain. Imagine millions of smokestacks pouring black soot into the air 24/7 and you breathe it. As China races toward 1.5 billion people all driving cars, you can imagine the environmental devastation of the natural world.)*  
 Photography by www.DreamsTime.com

In his book, *The Long Emergency*, Kunstler discovered that China, at its current growth rate and placing 27,000 new cars on its highways every week, will burn 98 million barrels of oil per day by 2030. That's more than the world burns daily in 2013. *(Pumping and processing crude oil wreaks havoc on the natural world. Oil pumping destroys the land for centuries with oil-soaked soil. Sickening isn't it?)* Photography by Ed Burzynsky

That means a whole lot of human beings will be screwed when oil supplies dry up. *(Continued next page.)*

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If you remember your science, it took two billion years to produce all the oil on this planet. In other words, when oil reserves decline, we exhaust the single major energy source that drives our civilization and most other societies on this planet. Alternative energy won't save humanity. To show how much energy oil provides the U.S. annually, <http://vimeo.com/search?q=Michael+Brownlee> by Michael Brownlee provides an astounding graph of one cubic mile of oil. That's how much oil humans burn around the planet each year! That's equal to the same amount of energy provided by 52 nuclear power plants built every year for 50 years or 104 operating coal-fired electrical plants built every year for 50 years or 32,000 wind turbines built every year for 50 years—and in continuous operation—or 91,250,000 solar panels built every year for 50 years.

In other words, oil produces dramatically incredible amounts of energy that we cannot and will not be able to duplicate in the coming years.

Dr. John Tanton, publisher of *The Social Contract* at ([www.thesocialcontract.com](http://www.thesocialcontract.com)), authored, *How Many is*

*Twenty Million?* "In this age of millions, billions and trillions, it's hard to understand such numbers," Dr. Tanton said. "Twenty million is the number of barrels of oil we burn in the United States each day. That's 42 gallons to each barrel (drum) at 30 inches tall and 20 inches in



diameter, or 840,000,000 gallons burned per day. It calculates, according to Dr. Tanton's figures, to three gallons of oil per day per person in the USA. (Source: *The Social Contract*, winter 2004-05, page 151)

He said, "Suppose we took 20 million barrels and stood them side-by-side. How long a line of barrels would that make? Let's do the math: 20 inches/barrel multiplied by 20 million barrels equals 400,000,000

inches. Divide that by 12 inches/foot, and you get 33,333,333 feet. Divide that by 5,280 feet per mile, and that comes out to 6,313 miles."

Dr. Tanton computed a string of barrels, "...reaching from Seattle to Los Angeles (1,157 miles), from Los Angeles to Chicago (2,134 miles), from Chicago to Miami (1,377 miles), from Miami to New York City (1,281 miles), and from New York City to Cleveland (486 miles). Total mileage, 6,435!"

"That's how much oil we burn in the USA each day," Tanton said. "The total global consumption daily rate of 82 million would be four times this amount, or 25,000 miles—

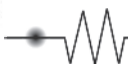


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added Americans burning all that oil and burning up all those tires.) Photography by Ed Burtynsky

“We will discover the hard way that population hyper-growth was simply a side-effect of the oil age,” said Kunstler. Instead learning a very harsh lesson bearing down on our society like a brakeless freight train, what can you do? As you become more educated and sobered to America’s population predicament, the logical question jumps up in front of your face: what can I do to help change course?

We must stop endless population growth. We must work toward stabilizing America’s growth to live within the carrying capacity of North America. We cannot keep importing millions upon millions of immigrants. We face collapse and a whole bunch of ugly scenarios.

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[www.TheSocialContract.com](http://www.TheSocialContract.com) ; [www.Fairus.org](http://www.Fairus.org)

Frosty Wooldridge has bicycled across six continents - from the Arctic to the South Pole - as well as ten times across the USA. In 2014, he bicycled coast to coast across America. He presents *The Coming Population Crisis facing America: what to do about it.* [www.frosty-wooldridge.com](http://www.frosty-wooldridge.com) . His latest book is: *How to Live a Life of Adventure: The Art of Exploring the World* by Frosty Wooldridge, copies at 1 888 280 7715



the circumference of the globe at the equator!”

Dr. Tanton asks a sobering question, “How much longer can this go on?” The simple, unadulterated answer is: not much longer! You may want to read, *Out of Gas: The End of the Age of Oil* by David Goodstein, physics professor at California Institute of Technology.

(Imagine millions upon endless millions of miles of highways loaded with cars all burning gasoline and diesel 24/7. Imagine you breathe all that polluted air. Imagine what it will be like when America adds another 100, 200 and 300 million more people and cars. Imagine how the planet will react to another three billion more people burning fossil fuels by 2050. Sick yet?) Photography by Ed Burtynsky

Another scientist, Dr. Richard C. Duncan, introduced the Olduvai Theory: The Peak of World Oil Production and the Road to the Olduvai Gorge. The decline of the industrial civilization is broken into three sections: The Olduvai slope (1979–1999)—Energy per capita declined at 0.33 percent per year. The Olduvai slide (2000–2011)—Begins in 2000 with the escalating warfare in the Middle East... marks the all-time peak of world oil production. The Olduvai cliff (2012–2030)— i.e. first there are waves of brownouts and temporary blackouts, and then finally the electric power networks themselves expire.

(Americans wear out nearly 300 million tires annually. We throw them into huge dumps or burn them into the atmosphere. Imagine another 100, 200 and 300 million



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# Pioneer Women Get The Hollywood Treatment

By Marcia Hensley

Did any Western history buffs besides me see *The Homesman*? A hot box office ticket earlier this winter, it's hard to find in theaters now, though the cast was impressive - Tommy Lee Jones, Hilary Swank, Meryl Streep - and most reviews were positive. Three pioneer wives have gone crazy in a small Nebraska community, and the task of returning them to civilized Iowa falls to a single woman homesteader, Mary Bee Cuddy. Because she needs a man to help, she enlists a claim jumper with the promise of payment at the end of the trip.

As evocative landscapes swept across the screen and the plot unfolded, I had an unexpected reaction: Increasing annoyance. The women were portrayed as victims, and the men as callous and brutish. As one reviewer put it, the movie focused on "the horrors of pioneer life."


Anecdotal stories of pioneer women going mad from loneliness, overwork, illness, loss of children and other hardships are not uncommon, of course, and pioneering men could become violent for some of the same reasons. But there is no evidence to support the idea that madness was more widespread among pioneer women than the general population.

Could something like the events in the movie have really happened? Well, yes. The movie is based on a 1988 novel of the same name by Glendon Swarthout. In the afterword



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to the 2014 reprint, Swarthout's son, Miles, explains that his father spent a lot of time researching the novel but had trouble finding much history about this harsh frontier era, the 1850s. He ended up relying largely on old memoirs, which kindled his interest in "the losers of Western history, the settlers who headed back East," having been "denied their dream of wealth and happiness in the Golden West."

*The Homesman* does, indeed, create awareness of a dark corner of the pioneer past, and I can relate to Swarthout's dilemma in researching an overlooked era of Western history. When I was looking for information for a book about women homesteaders, I, too, found that major history texts barely mentioned them. But by going to memoirs, letters and newspapers in local history archives, I was able to find many of their stories.

That's why I found the movie off-base. I found many historically accurate accounts of women who chose to go West and were not defeated. Rather, they reported being empowered by their experiences, despite the severe hardships. Single women like Mary Bee Cuddy chose to become homesteaders because they saw homesteading as an economic opportunity and an adventure. It's hard to imagine any of them so desperate that (*spoiler alert*) they would propose marriage to men ill-suited to them, then commit suicide when rejected.

Statistics show that 12 percent of all homesteaders in the early years of the 20th Century were single women. Research also indicates that about 44 percent of all homesteaders of both sexes, including family groups, were successful, suggesting that women were no more likely to be overwhelmed by the difficulties of homesteading than were men.

Some might see these statistics as evidence for the movie's thesis, since 56 percent of the homesteaders - over half of the total who went West - didn't make it, for whatever reason. *The Homesman* shows how homesteading could have ended tragically for some of them. But Cuddy's grim story is no more a complete representation of pioneer life than stories that emphasize successful homesteading experiences.

As Denver Post movie critic Lisa Kennedy pointed out in discussing the historical inaccuracies in *Selma*, a recent movie about Martin Luther King, "too many of us are fine with learning about the past solely from popular culture." That is the problem: I believe that

*The Homesman's* overwhelmingly negative depiction distorts the truth. What the movie rendition reminds us is that Hollywood often paints a one-sided picture of history.

*The Homesman* will soon be out on DVD. It's worth seeing as long as you recognize that the Hollywood hype this time is on the negative side. Many single women pioneers succeeded as homesteaders; what's more, they had a great time building a new life.

*Marcia Hensley is a contributor to Writers on the Range, a column service of High Country News (hcn.org). She lives in Westminster, Colorado, and is the author of Staking Her Claim: Women Homesteading the West.*

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# Nature Protected For or From Humans?

By Michelle Nijhuis

You may have heard that conservation biologists are arguing with each other. Some say nature should be protected for humans; others say it should be protected from humans; others say it's possible to do both. This may sound like an academic debate—and in many ways it is—but it has become a very nasty one, and over the past couple of years it has severely taxed an important field that has far too few resources to begin with.

I've written about the argument's gory details elsewhere, but here I'd like to take a longer view. For this fight was, in its broadest sense, settled more than a half-century ago, and the referee is still relevant. His name

was Aldo Leopold. Leopold—considered the father of both the American wilderness system and the science of wildlife management—is an icon in conservation circles. He was a talented and prolific writer, and he did much of his thinking in public, which means that today you can find a Leopold quote for just about any shade of green. He was educated as a utilitarian conservationist—one who protects nature for humans—but he understood the need to protect nature from humans, too. In Leopold's time, as today, this philosophical divide was fuzzy but fierce, and he spent much of his career trying to resolve it. In his final collection of essays, *A Sand County Almanac*, he did.

When Leopold finished the collection, shortly before his death in 1948, he had long argued that wilderness was vitally important to protect both for and from humans. He had argued that humans could find both aesthetic beauty and practical use in what he called "land health." And he had called for people to exercise "voluntary decency" toward the rest of nature—to accept "obligations over and above self-interest" to nature just as they accepted similar obligations to their families and communities. In the foreword to *A Sand County Almanac*, he brings these ideas together in one of his most famous passages: *We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. There is no other way for land to survive the impact of mechanized man, nor for us to reap from it the esthetic harvest it is capable, under science, of contributing to culture.*

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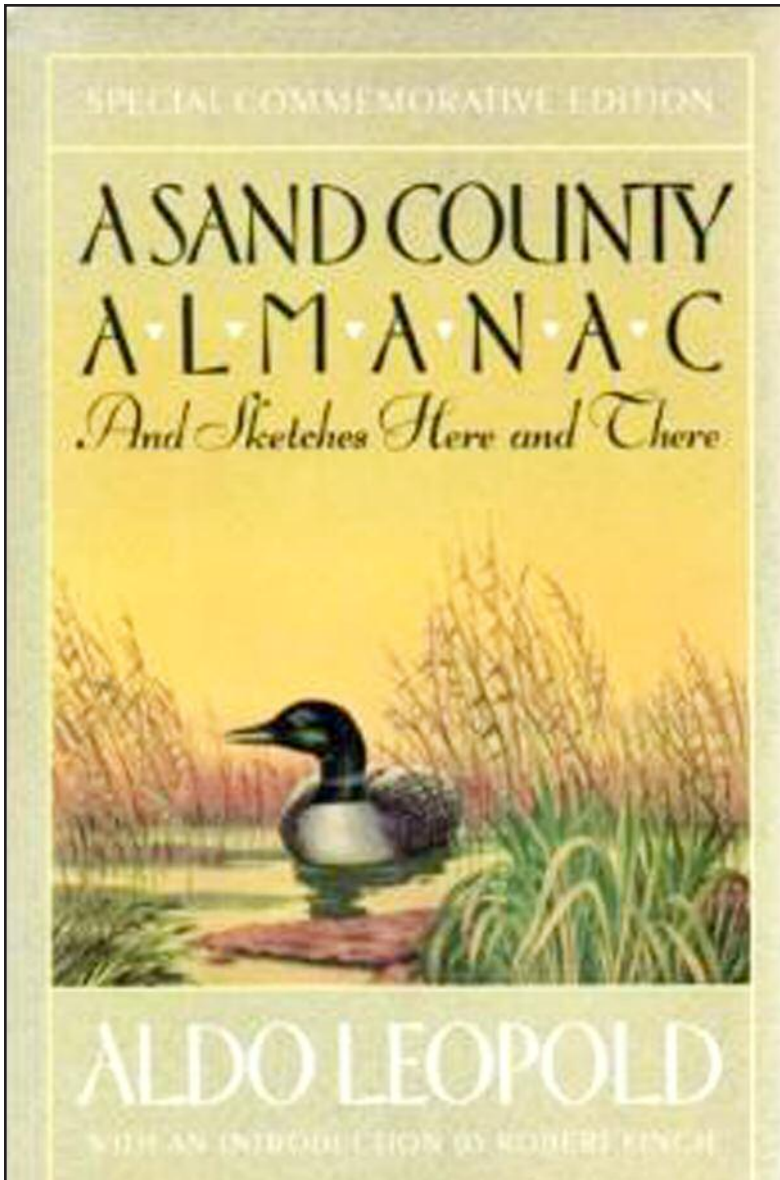


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destructive impact of humans on nature, Leopold argued, we aren't in charge of nature and shouldn't aspire to be. Neither should we air-breathing, water-drinking humans try to stand apart from it. (Leopold would have probably disliked both the extravagant utilitarianism of Stewart Brand—who opened his 1968 Whole Earth Catalog by proclaiming that “We are as gods and might as well get good at it”—and the misanthropic extremes of the environmental movement.) The proper role for humanity in nature, Leopold wrote, was neither conqueror nor exile but “plain member and citizen.”

To paraphrase another of his famous lines:

*We can tinker, but we'd damn well better save all the parts.*

Leopold came to believe that through this kind of humble citizenship, our need to use nature and our desire to preserve it could be reconciled. “Not easily, and not quickly,” his biographer Curt Meine writes. “But in the end Leopold was pragmatic enough to see that they had to be, and idealistic enough to believe that they could be.”

The world has changed dramatically since Leopold's time, and our conservation problems are more wicked than ever. Conservationists have plenty to argue about. But when it comes to the big question—why protect nature? — Aldo Leopold has already provided a very good answer.

*Michelle Nijhuis is a contributing editor to High Country News.*

**Editor's Note: Leopold's book should be REQUIRED reading for all literate folks on the planet. All others - get an audio version - and become educated!**

In 1985, nearly forty years after Leopold wrote these words, the biologist Michael Soulé founded the *crisis discipline* of conservation biology. One of its principles, he wrote, was that *biotic diversity has intrinsic value, irrespective of its instrumental or utilitarian value*. In 2012, in the paper that kicked off the current kerfuffle within the field, Nature Conservancy scientist Peter Kareiva and environmental studies professor Michelle Marvier wrote that “nature also merits conservation for very practical and more self-centered reasons concerning what nature and healthy ecosystems provide to humanity.” Both of these ideas are embedded in Leopold's passage.

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