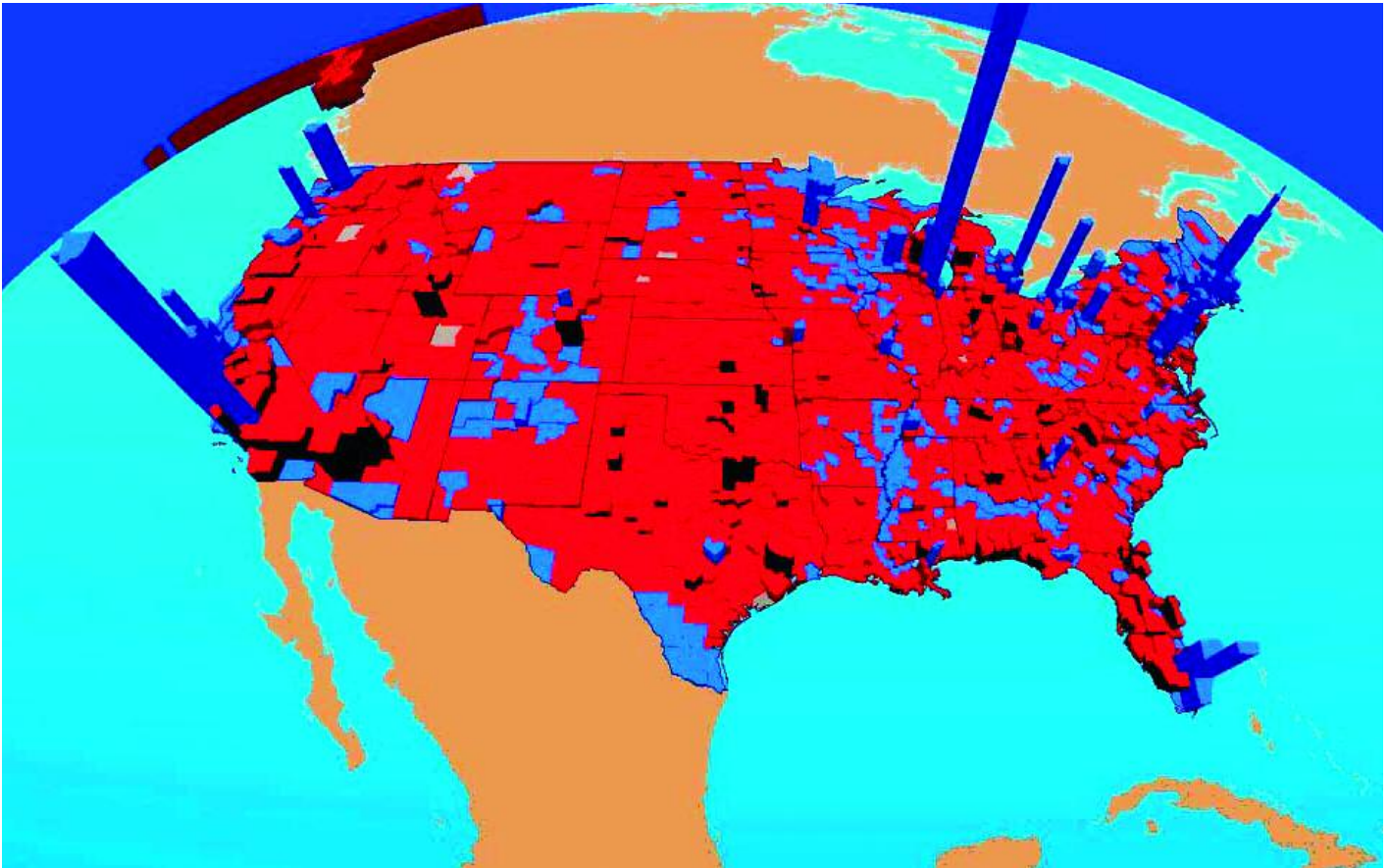


SPECIAL REPORT

THE WEST 2005

The bad guys are still after the ranch.

By Tim Findley



Computer-generated graphic shows votes in the 2004 general election. Red for Republican (George W. Bush); blue for Democrat (John Kerry). Height represents vote density in major cities and along the coasts. © Ray Carnes, ESRI.

Western American culture may never slip free of the basic cliché that binds it like an old B-movie. Somebody always wants the family ranch. It's the bankers or the railroad, the slimy little chiselers or the bullying neighbor. Later, it's the rich "nonprofit" envi-

ronmentalists or the rapacious developers, the creepy little swindlers or some other bullying neighbors. Sure as the Saturday matinee used to be, they always rely on corrupt politicians and unsure local lawmen to help them get their way.

Next to Romeo and Juliet it endures as one of the common themes in fact or fiction. Somebody is always after the family ranch. Yet contrary to the genre, opposite to better advice in commercial journalism, and reluctant as all Westerners are to put a jinx on something by hoping for too much, we must admit that at least for now, things do seem a good deal better than they were just 10 years ago.

Cattle and livestock prices are up and tensely still holding. Forest jobs ravaged in the Northwest are making a slow comeback in salvage. Despite some local problems, fish runs on our rivers have reached record highs in recent years. And even the weather has adjusted its melancholy background theme a mite, breaking the Southwest drought and shining up a good growing season for parts of

but just by knowing how very close we came to losing it has made us stronger and more aware. We know for sure those other fellas are still out there. They still want the ranch. Don't leave us now, Shane.

Take, for example, Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV): "Pinky," as his own campaign ads proudly proclaim to have been his nickname growing up in the mining camp of Searchlight, Nev. Beady-eyed, known to be downright mean at times, the boy from Searchlight has made himself the richest of Nevada politicians through some wheeling and dealing in real estate. More than that, his table polishing over three terms in the Senate has taken him all the way up to minority leader of the Democrats with hands-on authority over whatever the Blue Staters can do to recover their scattered forces and self-splattered morale.

Reid proudly announced himself to be "the devil in Churchill County" after he teamed up in a highly suspicious collusion with The Nature Conservancy and Del Webb Corporation at the beginning of the 1990s to rape his state's most productive agricultural region of irrigation water. The water had come with a promise from Teddy Roosevelt in 1906 to "let the desert bloom," but Reid said it was wasted on alfalfa.

Del Webb built Bugsy Siegel's first casino on the Vegas strip, and until racketeering investigations focused on the company in the 1970s, it was the largest holder of big-time gaming operations in the state. Among Del Webb's advisors and attorneys as a reorganized housing developer were Harry Reid and later-to-be Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt.

"It's just too bad if you don't like me," Reid virtually spat at the northern Nevada farmers he gathered in a sham of a hearing in Fallon. "You'll find out someday that I did you a favor."

Reid couldn't get elected to the mosquito-abatement committee in most Nevada counties, but he doesn't care. His promises are made to the 1.5 million and steadily growing population of Las Vegas and Clark County where he is regarded as the powerhouse to get them more water and, maybe, eliminate the use of the nearby Yucca Mountain nuclear waste facility. Even at that, Reid only slipped back into office in 1996 with a margin of less than 600 votes covered by newcomers moving into Nevada's rural towns without a real clue to their representation. He tried harder in 2002, but he didn't fool anybody in the outback with his "poor boy from Searchlight" campaign. There just wasn't enough cash or candidates to confront his rising steam in Washington, D.C. Keep on building Nevada vertically from Las Vegas, and Pinky might find new ambitions beyond minority leader, even if his own rural constituents wouldn't give him directions to the rest

FACTS ON THE WEST

Total lands in 17 Western states: 1,832,214 square miles. Owned by government: approximately one million square miles (including roads, reservations and military bases). Set aside as wilderness or monument areas by the Clinton administration: in excess of 12 million acres, 18,750 square miles.

In 1996, the U.S. Department of Interior expanded control over 141 million acres in addition to 269 million acres already administered by the Bureau of Land Management and the 191 million by the U.S. Forest Service.

The Clinton land legacy was unprecedented. Grazing on public lands was reduced by at least 20 percent; timber production was slashed from 12 billion board feet annually to barely 2.5 billion in 2000.

Clinton left behind unfinished legislation that would have required more than \$1 billion in additional appropriations to manage his "legacy," including half a billion to urban areas to encourage "smart growth."

"We're now cleaning up after the fact and doing things that should have been done before the monuments were designated," says U.S. Interior Secretary Gale Norton. "The monument designations were more show than substance. Now we have to provide the substance."

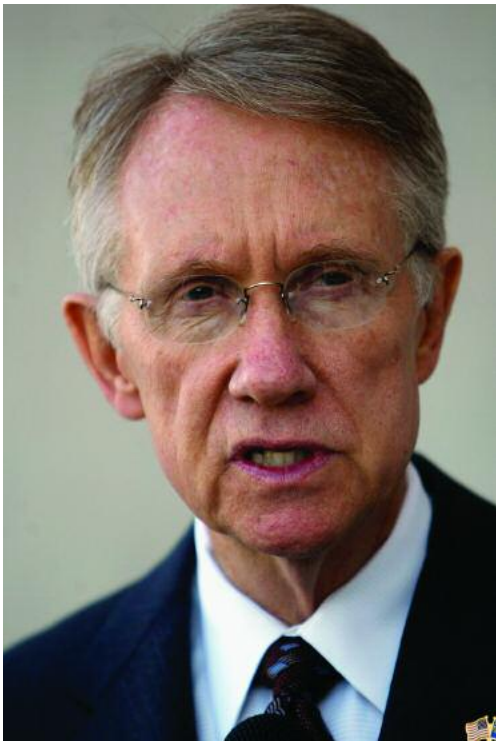
LET IT BURN

In 1999, U.S. Forest Service Deputy Chief Jim Furnish asked and answered the question: "If the issue is, do we allow harvesting [in overgrown forests] or do we let it burn, then the answer is we let it burn."

And burn it did in some of the most devastating fires in U.S. history, costing more than half a billion dollars to fight.

Yet in answer to screeching hysteria and hypocrisy from the activists over what Bush might do to the environment, the new president simply picked up on Clinton's own 1995 timber salvage bill to permit new fire-prevention harvesting to go on in the burned

AP PHOTO / JOE CABARETTA



Beady-eyed senator, Harry Reid, minority leader in the U.S. Senate, is popular and known as "Pinky" in Las Vegas. In rural Nevada it's another story. "It's just too bad if you don't like me," Reid virtually spat at the northern Nevada farmers as he took their water for Las Vegas. "You'll find out someday that I did you a favor."

the West that need it, while threatening drought in the Northwest.

Now in the second term of a federal administration closer to our ideals than were the eight years of despotic rule that preceded it, we have found new friends who bring science to our side for a change. We even found a name for ourselves that seems ironically acceptable in defining those who resist the expansion of federal authority. The Red States.

We can't say we've won what Sen. Malcolm Wallop (R-WY) first called the "War on the West,"

forests.

Under provisions of that Clinton bill, President George W. Bush could have taken 1.1 billion board feet every year. Yet by the beginning of his second term, Bush had authorized the harvest of only about 200 million board feet a year—2.7 billion board feet less than were expected to be authorized by Gore.

Interestingly enough, that Clinton salvage rider was authored by Mark Rey, the timber industry lobbyist whom Bush later named as Under Secretary of Agriculture.

TIMBER REVENUES DOWN

Restriction of agricultural use of federal land contributed to dramatic reductions in the revenue earned by the BLM, which dropped by 55.5 percent between 1988 and 1997, and by the U.S. Forest Service, with a loss of 35.5 percent, including a more-than-72-percent reduction in revenue from timber sales. The losses are also reflected in federal contributions to roads and schools. Proposals in Congress recommend additional fees for visitor use of public lands to make up for the shortfall.

PERMIT RESTRICTIONS = INCOME LOSS

Approximately 28,000 allotment permits are issued to some 23,600 livestock producers in the Western states. The federal government says this represents only six percent of livestock production in the West and only one percent of production nationwide. They acknowledge that 40 percent of Western livestock (8 percent nationwide) spends some time grazing on "public" land. In 1988 grazing fees produced \$41 million to the Forest Service and \$27 million to the BLM. By 1997 those revenues were reduced to \$24 and \$12 million respectively. This was not a factor of the livestock market, but of restrictions on permits.

stop.

True to his hypocritical oath as a Democratic leader, Reid told party followers that John Kerry lost the election by failing to campaign in the red states. Sen. Reid said even he was surprised to find Vice President Dick Cheney making a campaign stop in little-noticed Elko, Nev., let alone in Reno.

What does Reid want? Power. How can he get it? With water. The Nevada senator continues to finagle behind the scenes, relying primarily on environmental issues to shift water away from rural uses into the continued expansion of Las Vegas, supplanted to some extent from the mob-rumored Del Webb Corporation to lobbying firms where Reid's son and son-in-law are employed as executives.

And Yucca Mountain? Does Reid really oppose the nuclear waste depository, or is it just a coincidence that he owns a remote intersection in the southern Nevada desert that seems just likely to be on the way for trucks headed into the vault with their spent fuel cylinders?

Pinky still thinks he deserves what he can take, and he still has pals to help him with a "new approach" to the same old stick-'em-up. Back in the "flickers," that would always be those scruffy guys in big hats and boots who shuffle in the back door and stand awkwardly around the banker's desk waiting to be told "the plan." One can imagine Nature Conservancy operative Graham Chisholm and his partner David Yardas from the Environmental Defense Fund wriggling their toes in their sandals as they wait on the high nap of Reid's senate office carpet. Not altogether a fair description maybe, but it helps the plot to recognize the bad guys right away. Reid made it possible for Chisholm and Yardas to serve as sort of federal gunsels for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, offering payoffs to any farmers ready to become "willing sellers." They were to make it plain that it would be better to deal now rather than wait for later. Del Webb backed the play in return for swapping the farms for federal land they wanted around Las Vegas.

After the Civil War, as we all remember, the government made a lot of railroad men rich with lands for easements to lay rails across the continent. Those lands that evolved into vast timber holdings and later oil reserves created another rich oligarchy that avoided taxes. And, cutting to the chase, that led the timber companies eventually to confront the tree huggers, who were just sort of leftovers from the Indians they pretended to be.



Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel came to Las Vegas in 1945 as front-man for the mob. He invented the Vegas Strip and began to turn a dusty town into a serious place to play and be played. He was gunned down in his girlfriend's bungalow in Hollywood, Calif., June 20, 1947, because his Flamingo Hotel hadn't paid back mob investors.

Actually, as any of us ever dazed by the endless cartoons and the double feature knew well to expect, there was always somebody with a lot more sinister motives who was pulling the strings. Just follow the money.

When the pressure was applied to the big timber and oil interests by an orchestrated campaign of environmentalists in the 1970s and '80s, The Nature Conservancy played deep back, quietly funding a lot of the trouble, but waiting for their best move. As the big corporations began giving up some of their holdings, TNC was like a lone receiver watching a high punt in his direction. That's how Nature's Landlord, formed in the 1950s to save the "last best places," soon found itself in the oil business and even ready to proclaim a new "partnership" with Plum Creek Inc., the nation's largest timber company.

All along, TNC had continued its carefully practiced methods outlined in its own manual: pick off smaller and weaker landholdings and either add them to other properties owned by the nonprofit, or sell them back to the government. Formed on a wild idea laid out on a table in a public library, TNC by the 1990s had amassed assets well in excess of \$3 billion and land holdings in the United States of some 15 million acres, with



ABOVE: Las Vegas, 1999. In February 2005, \$6 billion in new construction was under way. LEFT: In 1931, Hoover Dam was being built on the Colorado River. Nearby Vegas housed a few prospectors, Indians and Mormon pioneers.

another 90 million acres worldwide.

If TNC wasn't quite like Rockefeller and the oil barons, it was the nearest thing to them in the 20th century and even included some of the same names on its board of directors. Best of all, in its charity-posing tax-exempt status, TNC didn't have to build a thing or lay an inch of track to hold onto what it was accumulating.

Other land conservation groups and "trust" organizations popped up at the same time but curiously enough, as maps proclaiming what they were saving began emerging, they all seemed to be taking credit for the same land. Even the bizarre proposal of the Wildlands Project to extend a wilderness corridor from the Yucatan to the Yukon revealed large swatches of color on its map that seemed to be part of those best places already "rescued" by TNC.

With some journalists asking questions about

the secretive and unaccountable environmental behemoth, Congress also began an inquiry looking toward still-pending hearings of TNC dealings.

In February, the affable ever-young-appearing chief executive officer of TNC, Steve McCormick, reincarnated himself with yet another set of insights convenient to TNC's aims.

"Moving into the 21st century, we [are] becoming more convinced that conservation must embrace people living in—deriving their livelihoods from—natural landscapes, if we [are] to accomplish conservation at the necessary scale," wrote McCormick in the organization's magazine.

What did that mean for Nature's Landlord? Well, pointed out McCormick, look how TNC has helped out "local indigenous communities" in furthering the "sustainable use" of their natural resources. In New Guinea, for example, "where economic and political instability have hampered past conservation efforts, The Nature Conservancy has helped sow the seeds of lasting change."

Elsewhere, he said, TNC has helped establish "covenants" with local villages to prevent commercial operations from moving in. "In fact," said

✓ CONTEST OF CULTURES

The population of the United States is shifting to the West and the South and options of newcomers with movable incomes appear to favor rural areas over metropolitan regions. Migration into nonmetro areas in the West in the 1990s was three times that into nonmetro areas elsewhere. That perhaps implies a contest over future cultural values in the West, but the shift into metro areas implies an even more rapid and wrenching change in the political and social order of Western states.

The fastest growing city in the nation for the last decade has been Las Vegas, Nev. In 1964, when the population of the entire state was still less than 300,000, Las Vegas had 127,000 citizens. By 1972, it had 273,000. By 1992, it had swarmed to 863,000, and in 1997, the still-growing Las Vegas metro area exceeded 1.1 million people in a concentration that on its own made Nevada statistically the "most urbanized" state in America.

✓ CHEAP FOOD

Despite their still-dwindling numbers and the relentless pressures against them, American farmers represent a heroic success story. Americans spend only 11 percent of their income on food compared to 30 percent common elsewhere in the world. U.S. exports of essential commodity foods still feed the world. But the balance of trade is showing signs of changing, not only because of newer exotic foods imported—15,000 new grocery items on the market shelves in 1998 alone—but because of political commitments to "global" economies and the growing dominance of integrated agribusiness.

The University of Georgia reported last year that 75 percent of the meat-packing industry is controlled by only four companies. Three companies are reported to control 50 percent of the fertilizer supply. Four firms—McDonald's, Pepsico (KFC and Pizza Hut), Burger King and Wendy's—control half the sales of restaurants.

Significant numbers of farms have begun producing organic food for limited markets, but economists estimate that the ever-more concentrated influence of corporate food industries will have an unpredictable influence on farm prices.

AN UNCOMFORTABLE LIAISON

All sides seem to agree that, especially in a second term, President Bush has moved slowly and carefully with any new initiatives on land-use policies. His Interior Secretary Gale Norton has stressed communications and cooperation as a new theme. But her deputy, Lynn Scarlett, and Agriculture undersecretary for Natural Resources & the Environment, Mark Rey, have both drawn attention for quietly establishing new relationships with environmentalists.

There is an old democratic theory that says keep your allies close, and your enemies closer. There is also an old Indian tale about the scorpion begging the turtle for a ride across the river. When the scorpion fatally stings him anyway, the turtle is perplexed. "Why do you wonder?" asks the scorpion. "You knew who I was when I got on your back."

WATER COPS

Wouldn't it be ironic if in 2025, the same year some economists say the United States will become a net food importing nation, a century of conflict over Western water could be proclaimed to have ended?

The Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service that evolved into NRCS in the 1990s was never meant to be the "water cop" of the West. Yet this year NRCS has assumed the authority for annual water-supply-outlook reports covering storage, stream flows and forecasts that give the federal agency recently allied with The Nature Conservancy a deceptively powerful position in the unending conflict over water rights in the West.

the grinning McCormick, "I would argue that needs of local people, beyond being merely 'accommodated' can, in many cases, be the true agents for conservation."

Is this a totally unaccountable U.S. "charity" dabbling in international politics and even a sort of "green imperialism"? Is it managing the environment, or manipulating the people?

When banks began gobbling up Oklahoma ranches in the Depression Dust Bowl, the Roosevelt administration introduced the Soil Conservation Service as a means of helping farmers save their land. The SCS, in fact, became among the most trusted government agencies by farmers because of its knees-in-the-dirt willingness to help them stay on the land and prosper, no questions asked.

But in the 1990s, the Clinton administration decided that SCS had outlived its name. They retitled it the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and gave it new regulatory authority that the old SCS never had, nor wanted. In February this year, under the guidance of U.S. Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Mark Rey, NRCS signed a memorandum of understanding with The Nature Conservancy, promising to share "practices, strategies and scientific expertise."

Rey is a former timber industry spokesman. Thus you have an appointed political functionary ganging up with a completely unaccountable nonprofit real-estate cartel whose board members include directors of investment banking and corporate agriculture to take control of what was once the most farmer-friendly agency in the government. No votes, no hearings, not even a press conference—like a shadowy deal made in the back of a sleazy saloon.

"Together, the Conservancy and the NRCS have set a new standard, one that will influence conservation nationwide," said Rey. "Indigenous" Westerners might want to think that over. The good neighbors from SCS may have changed more than just their brand.

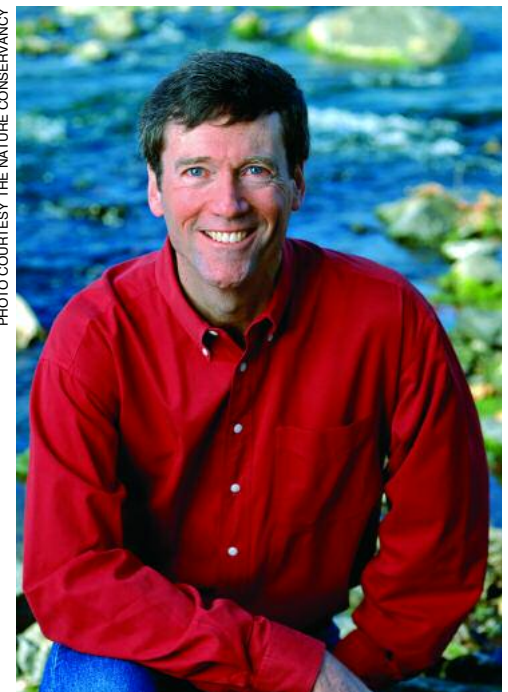
MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE RANCH

As the turn of the century neared, Sen. Reid's conniving plot with developers, environmentalists, and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) to rip off northern Nevada irrigation supplies began unraveling in a familiar scheme repeated all over the West.

The idea was essentially to revise history by denying promises made to farmers who were lured to federal reclamation projects in the 20th century with guarantees of enduring irrigation supplies. Cynically using nearby Indian tribes in many cases, the feds claimed that water for crops was now threatening fish "sacred" to the Indians. It wouldn't work to admit that they were double-crossing the farmers to take their water for

Las Vegas or Reno or even Los Angeles. Sneaky little guys like Reid preferred to be pretending to arm the Indians. Commonly, the sacred fish were bottom-feeding suckers nobody really wanted, but which the tribes readily wept over in return for a cut of the action. It was about as bad a B movie as it could get and had to include some paid-off university "scientists" who would oblige with false reports that the fish were endangered by irrigation.

Probably the greatest treasure up for grabs in this caper was the Klamath Basin, Oregon's largest natural body of water. It served a myriad of uses from ranching and farming to river-joined downstream supplies that could be hooked up all the way to the Mexican border. Get rid of the BOR and its old federal promises to the farmers, and the big cigars left in charge could screw the Indians and take what they wanted from the real

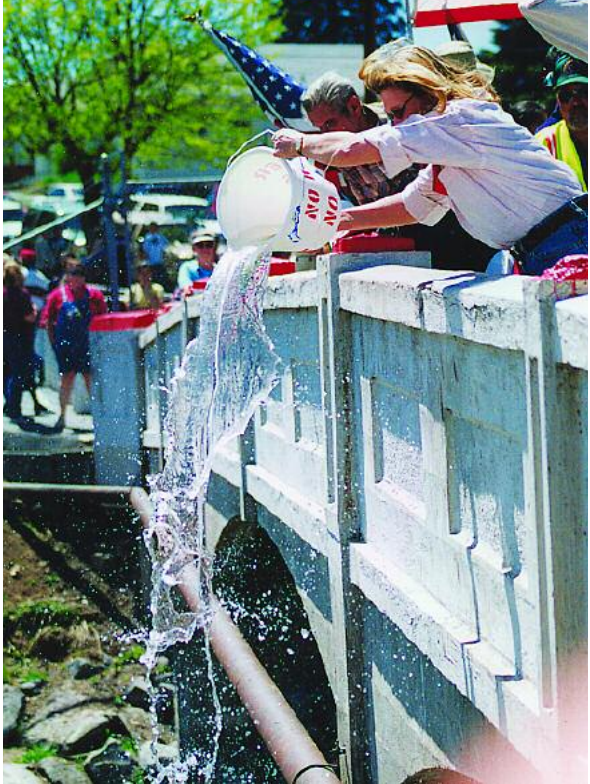


Affable Steve McCormick, CEO of the arrogant "nonprofit" multi-billion-dollar Nature Conservancy, is telling "local indigenous communities" throughout the world how to use their resources.

suckers downstream.

This year on the Klamath, the worst news has been a shortage of late winter snowfall, leaving the water outlook similar to what it was in 2001. That was the year when the "greenacrats" left stranded by the unexpected Democratic loss at the polls perhaps panicked a bit and moved ahead of their own time schedule. Suddenly, and without warning, they cut off all irrigation supplies with the desperate claim that two species of sucker fish were about to go extinct right before their eyes.

It was a hell of a lie, and the Bureau of Reclamation turnkeys ordered to shut the valves knew



Hundreds of volunteers from across the country helped pass buckets of water hand to hand for two miles through Klamath Falls, Ore., to add to the A-line canal. They were protesting the taking of farmers' irrigation water in Klamath Basin in 2001. It was a gesture of defiance against the Bureau of Reclamation.

it, but the BOR was meant to be sacrificed anyway, probably for some new capacity of the NRCS, and the outlaw code always says you don't snitch on your pals. The Interior Department senior bureaucrats really responsible were probably the kids who were out running around the concession stand late Saturday afternoon when the second reel inevitably revealed the farmers popping up on rooftops, leaning out windows, underneath porches, all drawing a bead on the gang in the street.

Klamath at least fought back. Even the local sheriff let it be known which side he would be on as the riot-robed feds began building a barricade to protect the headgate valves from surrounding Klamath citizens backed up by hundreds of volunteers responding to the call to join the Klamath Bucket Brigade. So far in the "War on the West," it amounted to something like second Manassas: no shots fired, but a clear line drawn. The new Bush administration appointees to the Department of Interior had to scramble to get their feet on the ground ahead of the Clinton-era gang still thinking they could win the fight. It was quiet, still-secret talks with new Interior Secretary Gale Norton and some farm leaders that headed off a confrontation.

Some Klamath farmers took a bad beating anyway from the early cutoff, but the real victory at Klamath was in drawing national attention to the cynical and sinister scheming of federal and environmental interests teaming up to steal the ranch. Just as it does in northern Nevada, the bat-

tle of the Klamath goes on, but at least under the Bush administration, the sides are made more even in the use of truth.

Cui-ui fish in Pyramid Lake, Nev., soft-nosed suckers in the upper Klamath, spotted owls and sage grouse are among dozens of species that with better peer-reviewed science have turned out not to be quite so endangered as was claimed. As a blunt-edged tool of the environmentalists and their cohorts, the Endangered Species Act is losing its clout. What has really been exposed is the propaganda of a green machine so willing to lie that it might suggest the Stone Age ended when cavemen ran out of rocks, or that the future of the silicon chip might be limited by the ultimate shortage of sand.

In one stunning reversal of fortunes, the most active and insidious gang of green lawyers from the Center for Biological Diversity in Tucson, Ariz., was this spring smacked back with a \$600,000 libel verdict in which the jury

awarded rancher Jim Chilton half a million dollars in punitive damages for the Center's attempt to portray him as ruining rangeland. Quite the opposite was shown to be the truth on Chilton's fifth-generation operation. (See page 14.)

It was the first time the usually smug Kieran Suckling's bluff had been called in the more than 170 suits his group has brought against ranchers and the government over supposedly endangered species they claim to have discovered. The trial revealed that the Center had raked in over \$990,000, mostly from the government, from "list and sue" lawsuits filed in 2003 alone. Dropping his poker face, Suckling cried after the libel ruling that, "We really feel victimized by a wealthy banker who can afford to hire a large legal team to nitpick us to death."

But there's a new dealer in town. The game seems to be changing. So easily and so long used by the greenslingers as their principle wild card, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is now being retooled by congressional elements led by Rep. Richard Pombo (R-CA) and his House Resources Committee. Whether the ESA is "gutted" by Pombo as environmentalists fear, its random use against legitimate farm and ranching operations has already been reduced by the reluctance of President Bush even to play the card. It has only been in the face of lawsuits he tried but failed to abolish that President Bush has added 29 species to the endangered list. Clinton listed 527 and even George W's father protected 228 species.

The obviously abusive use of lawsuits under

Secretary Norton, in part citing the lessons learned from Klamath and other water districts, has proposed what she calls a "collaborative" effort to find new solutions to conflicts in the drought-prone West between agriculture and urban needs, as well as environmental concerns in what she calls "Water 2025." Somewhat vaguely, but with enthusiastic promotion, the proposal suggests a series of public discussions and intergovernmental dealings over the next two decades to come up with new agreements for management of Western water.

But tell it to Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) who reportedly has set his sights on more attempts to buy out or force out water-right holders in east-central Nevada to service ever-thirsty Las Vegas. And don't forget the attempt of green-glorious politicians in Northern California to eliminate more farmland for natural habitat, or for developers all over the Rockies to suck the plains dry for the Denver suburbs.

Sometimes, 20-year plans do work, and perhaps the NRCS with its new Nature Conservancy partners, is just the agency to tell us how. Or, if you can't wait, the Mayan calendar says the world will end in 2012 anyway.

BADGE-HEAVY FEDS

You can start from the O.K. Corral or even earlier in counting up the years of contest in the West over who has law-enforcement authority in the wide-open spaces.

Rack up one for local folk this year after the Bureau of Land Management announced it would give up its long attempt to be authorized to enforce state laws on federal lands. The BLM always said it was more important than just wanting to give its rangers the right to issue traffic tickets, but local sheriffs said they would never permit harassment of campers and other visitors in the vast BLM lands by badge-heavy feds who thought the party was too loud.

Instead of seeking open-ended jurisdiction, the BLM said it will work on establishing agreements with local sheriffs, county by county. County sheriffs in general have strongly rejected giving the BLM even temporary police powers, but have acknowledged agreement for federal authority in some heavily occupied parks or recreation areas.

MEANWHILE, BACK IN D.C.

Seems like maybe Sen. Charles Grassley (R-IA) may have been snakebit. Or maybe he and his Senate Finance Committee have just been buffaloes by herds of lobbyists from The Nature Conservancy set loose to stomp out any chances of a serious open hearing on "Nature's Landlord's" continued success at stuffing itself with all the money, power, and land it can grab in the West and in third-world countries all over the planet.

After both RANGE and The Washington Post produced a series of unanswered articles in 2003 demanding to know how and why the \$3 billion "nonprofit" can get away with its secretive collusion with the federal government, Grassley promised an investigation and open hearings.

Since then Grassley has had nothing but excuses, and word is that TNC will be allowed to slip off the hook with the same modest tax-law changes preventing the most outrageous of land deals involving TNC directors and prominent celebrity friends. But while the shadowy gang rampage continues in regions they deem vulnerable for capture by forced buyouts and smarmy "perpetual" leases, Grassley is refusing even to open a full public hearing. He invited TNC to explain its side of leases for example, but no critics were invited.

As a nonprofit, TNC is almost totally unaccountable to U.S. business and tax laws. Jesse James never did as well. Neither did Al Capone. What's wrong with Charlie Grassley? ■

the ESA was cited even by Bruce Babbitt who said his Interior Department in 2000 was "drowning in litigation." Bush has engaged in discussions with the greens but he has also made it known that he expects the environmentalists to check their lawyers when they come to his town.

Cavemen didn't run out of rocks, but they did find better ways to use them. Masked men intent on getting what they can take sometimes don't see the alternatives. That too began to be revealed in the new century as some scientists encouraged by new federal standards began speaking out on behalf of resource use and standing up to the green snake-oil sideshow of doom.

The forests are in no danger of disappearing. Forested land has diminished somewhat on the plains and east of the big river, but there is general agreement that the stand of forest in the West is roughly the same size as it was in 1600. Rivers, especially near industrial regions, did go through a period of pollution, but it's one of the best secrets of the new century that many of those rivers and bodies of water are cleaner now than at any time in recorded history.

Cattle aren't killing the range. Mining isn't gutting the mountains. Greedy madmen aren't rampaging in a rape of natural resources. Indeed, the real money, far in excess of phony claims of agricultural influence, is being spread around by environmentalist "trusts" and "charities" making tax-free dough by claiming to be saving America from itself while contributing almost nothing but their self-consuming and corporate-backed wisdom. They might better spend the money they use against rural producers to find more efficient ways of using the rocks we have for new technologies in fuel and energy. Or for that matter, in actually "saving" an endangered species.

Thing is, we all still have to eat. Everybody who wants the ranch seems to take that a little too much for granted, always asking the missus for a plate of beans before they rustle the stock.

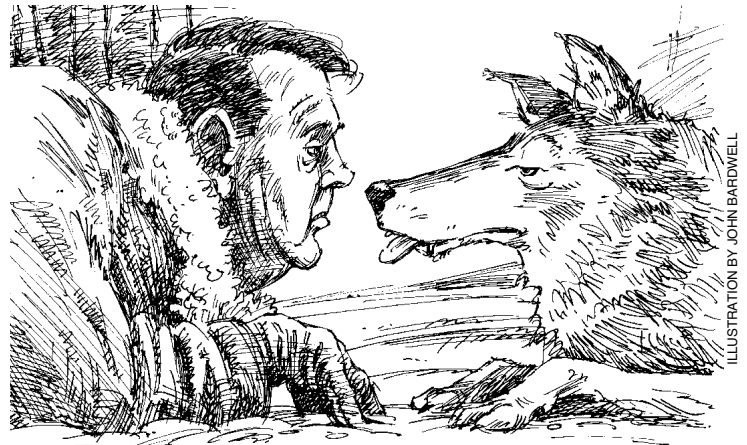
Most ranchers seem willing only to mumble about it a little, if they'll talk at all, but the seldom-spoken truth is that the years since 2002 have been very good for American cattle producers. Although everybody expects it sooner or later, the bubble has not yet burst. With profits of \$100 and more per head, you can just about make a living

again raising cows. That's good, but that's not all.

We are a country of some 260 million people, the most powerful and most productive nation in world history. We could, perhaps, literally feed the world. The United States is the largest food exporter on the planet. Millions beyond our own borders depend for survival on what we produce even from croplands that are lessened by 100 acres a day.

Even so, many scientists project that within 25 years the United States will become an overall food-importing nation. The primary reason for that, they seem to agree, is population growth that at its present rate will double the number of people in the United States within 60 years. A report for the Carrying Capacity Network in Washington, D.C., by Drs. David Pimentel of Cornell University and Mario Giampietro of Rome estimated that one acre of land is lost to urbanization and highway construction for every person added to the U.S. population. By their projection, that would mean that only 0.6 acres of land would be available to grow food for every American as opposed to 1.8 acres per capita today. Rippling through the \$40 million annual U.S. food exports, the result could be an international disaster.

Yet the two scientists agree with other



Bruce Babbitt, secretary of Interior for President Clinton, was responsible for forcing the transplanting of Canadian wolves into Yellowstone Park, Mont., in 1996, much to the chagrin of the locals. Rural communities across the West are paying dearly for his folly, but even Babbitt knew the Endangered Species Act was out of control because his agency was drowning in frivolous litigation.

researchers—population growth in the United States is due far less to birthrate than it is to illegal immigration, which is adding 58,000 people a week to the U.S. population.

In town, the numbers may seem shocking, even doubtful, but in the deep American Southwest, the unprecedented masses of illegal aliens crossing the border in a trash-strewn trail the size of a freeway has been enough to start a cadre of armed mercenaries to confront what the Border Patrol seems unable to stop.

Many urban Americans may simply look the other way, but the Western outback bristles with

tension over the waves of new arrivals running the border, if for no other reason than opportunities for immigrants to find productive work are vanishing. In agriculture today, barely 330,000 producers provide nearly 90 percent of the nation's crops. Remarkably, farm employment made a tiny gain at the start of this century, reaching just a fraction over two percent of the population, but it is still too small to be officially counted in the U.S. census, and regarded skeptically as mostly representative of small-time "hobby farmers," who derive their main income from other sources.

The average age of farmers is 55, as it has been for decades, hinting again at most agriculture as a retirement pastime. Vertically integrated agribusiness concentrated in a relative handful of corporate enterprises leaves the small farmer even more vulnerable to an almost feudalistic system of "contract growing." Only the most daring and most experienced of producers take a chance on trying to earn a living in the old way by raising diverse crops on a single farm. On their own, they must find markets made even more elusive by federal regulations.

Exurban "sprawl" into farmlands, exaggerated to some extent by growth in regions such as Las Vegas, has led to another banker's trick of pretending to preserve farmlands from developers by offering the farmer or the rancher a conservation easement payoff in return for the owner's promise never to sell his property for any purpose other than agriculture or open space. That leaves the future options in the hands of The Nature Conservancy or other trusts which TNC may have helped form. It also suggests a certain hopeless sense about the real future of the family farm.

Like a slick conman who woos the widow into letting him manage the mine, the contemporary holder of the trust can afford to



Cows or condos? Housing developments encroach on ranch land in Oakdale, Calif. It won't be long before the wide open West is going, going, gone...

wait, using some holdings to gain federal and other funds to get more. It's the devil's fiddle that plays the tune.

Even so, the first part of the 21st century has shown that not all the West is willing to sell its soul. Although the Klamath region is cautiously not inclined to claim any victory, the success of the so-called Bucket Brigade in bringing attention to the betrayal of property rights was evident in the ill-fitting cowboy boots and tight new Stetsons that Oregon and other states' politicians showed up wearing for the mass rallies of allied townspeople, farmers and ranchers. The Klamath news media took note of the



Politics in the West is playing like an old B movie.

politically correct attire as sending a Red State message even before there were red states.

President Bush wears a cowboy hat as easy as Texas. The costume fits him better than maybe any chief executive except Ronald Reagan and Teddy Roosevelt. Yet, even if the hero seems obvious, it's best not to relax too soon while the picture is still running.

Daniel Kemmis of the University of Montana, Missoula, may be only the most scholarly of many who see in the changing West an opportunity to more carefully plan its future.

Back in the early '90s, he assembled an opulent conference at the Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs, Colo., where he invited mostly young and coming professionals from newer Western industries such as telecommunications and resorts to discuss changing Western values to be expressed and studied in Kemmis's proposed Center for the Rocky Mountain West.

Wouldn't you know that required as part of the conference was an evening showing of one of those classic B+ movies—1962's "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance." You remember of course that it centers on Jimmy Stewart, neatly attired in citified Western gear befitting his

post as a state senator who is traveling back to the little southwestern town of Shinbone where folks first sent him on his way to a great political career. Looking out the window of the train, he observes to his wife that he can't even imagine what brought people into the passing dry sage ground. "Never was any good for grazing," he says ironically; not that he knows anything about grazing.

Kemmis, in his seminar later, jumped on that vignette as revealing the irony of the West. The whole town probably shouldn't even have been there, Kemmis suggested. A young woman participant eagerly expanded on that by noting that the short epic of the Old West after the Civil War might have been nothing more than a "binge" of lawlessness—a Saturday matinee insignificant in the greater scope of American cultural history.

But the real point of the movie is that Stewart is going back to a town where most people still don't know the truth. He was just a meek young lawyer when he was finally forced to face down the bullying bad man Liberty Valance and find the courage to draw and fire. All these years later, it's only a couple of people who know that he actually missed.

Jimmy Stewart didn't shoot Liberty. John Wayne did, from across the street and in the back at that. All that has brought Stewart back to Shinbone is to bury Wayne, who died naturally, almost forgotten by everybody else.

There must be a message there somewhere that Kemmis ought to give more thought to. ■

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