



Digging Deeper

America's "Deep State" exists far beyond the Beltway. Words by Dave Skinner. Photos © M. Scott Mahaskey/Politico.

It wasn't so long ago that maps of the United States showed a vast region called "the Great American Desert"—basically everything between the Mississippi River west to the Coast Range and Cascades. Since then, much of the desert has "bloomed," but there's still plenty of pretty great American desert, matched by those who live and work there.

Now, deserts are misunderstood and underappreciated. Why else would we read about such terrible things as health-care deserts, human-rights deserts, food deserts, cultural deserts, intellectual deserts? About the only time the adjective is correctly applied to reality is in "news desert." Even with Al Gore's Internet and the so-called "Information Age," when it comes to news that matters to rural Americans—not just westerners, not just desert denizens—it seems that rural stories are always the last to be told, if at all, by anyone.

If news that matters to rural interests ever

leaks out beyond the county line or the circulation area of the local weekly, it is usually for one or both of two reasons: First, the story somehow "fits" with whatever narrative urban media are currently obsessing over. Second, someone somewhere is grinding an axe.

If one of these two conditions (sometimes both) is met, what usually happens is, the interested major-league publication will parachute in talent, which of course can't wait to escape back to civilization. Once in the wilds, the national talent never, ever approaches local, bush-league journalists (if there are any) for help with context or background.

The Story Told

Well, in February, a classic case of news-desert reporting flashed across the national screens. Just days after the Trump impeachment circus petered out—all premised upon a "whistle-blower complaint"—the popular Washington, D.C., news website *Politico* published yet another whistleblower story, "This Is The Wild

West Out Here," with a teaser blurb reading, "How Washington is bending over backward for mining companies in Nevada at the expense of environmental rules."

The story, which you can (and should) find by typing the headline between quote marks on Google, was "produced in partnership with Type Investigations" (see "When Straight News Isn't," p. 15) and is an increasing rarity for today's 24-7 viral journalism: A "long-form," 3,600-word "investigative" article, well written and lavishly illustrated by talent flown expensively into Tonopah, Nev., in late October (hey, good writing, even atrocious journalism, takes time).

The writer's general narrative "pits a foreign mining corporation against a handful of environmentalists defending a rare, ankle-high wildflower [and] epitomizes how vulnerable the regulatory apparatus has become to pressure from the Trump administration."

More specifically, Australian mining company Ioneer is exploring for lithium, a critical

defense element, on Bureau of Land Management lands in the Silver Peak range. The trouble is, above the mineral body (lithium and boron) lies the only 21 acres of Tiehm's buckwheat (discovered in 1983 by Arnold Tiehm) on earth (see "Weed of the Week" on p. 16).

Don't worry, no local reporters were ignored. The *Tonopah Times-Bonanza* (established in 1901) has no website, just a Facebook page with 224 followers. The nearest local news seems to be the *Pahrump Valley Times*, a local biweekly owned by the *Las Vegas Review Journal*. Prior to *Politico*'s report, it seems only Nevada Public Radio and an unknown "progressive" website had touched the subject matter. So, with the first condition not met, what about the second?



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These two excellent images by national-caliber shooter M. Scott Mahaskey—of Daniel Patterson (page 14) and Patrick Donnelly (above)—and a Tiehm's buckwheat plant by photographer Gary A. Monroe, are wonderful examples of how careful selection of images, just like words, help tell a story.

In spades. The reporter's second paragraph reveals, "standing with me on the ridgeline overlooking the [exploration] work-site was Patrick Donnelly, the state director of the Center for Biological Diversity." That's apparently the reporter's "handful of environmentalists"—which in actuality claims 1.6 million members (but no membership dues income), with 172 employees paid \$12 million out of a \$21 million 2017 budget. Quite a handful.

The fourth paragraph gets to the hero of this story, who had filed "a sweeping whistleblower complaint" on Oct. 4, 2019: "five-year BLM employee" Dan Patterson. The complaint had been "obtained by *Politico* and Type Investigations" and written by an "attorney with Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility," otherwise known as PEER.

Yep, you guessed it. Two environmental

groups pitched this narrative to a sympathetic (or at least gullible) outlet willing to give "free media."

The Story Not Told

However, there was actual news about 1,600 words in: Turns out "whistleblower" Dan Patterson, the "only environmental protection specialist in the Tonopah field office," had

"transferred to BLM in 2015" after "one of his most recent jobs...at the Center for Biological Diversity." Interesting coincidence, isn't it?

Reporter Federman relates that Mr. Patterson "hoped he could bring his environmental expertise to bear on one of the agency's busiest field offices" and "quickly earned a reputation for being a staunch defender of public lands who was willing to work closely with local environmental advocates. He was not shy about pointing out violations [he had also worked for the watchdog PEER group] and what he saw as his superiors' reluctance to stand up to the mining interests."

This is today's serious, investigative journalism, as practiced at *Politico*. Mostly urban readers will never realize that humble whistleblower "just Dan" Patterson is the one and only Daniel Patterson. From about 1998 until January 2015, he was (see "Résumé" sidebar) one of the most high-profile employees of not just one, but two of the West's most high-media-profile environmental groups. Even

When Straight News Isn't

Wild West is presented as original *Politico* work. *Politico* director of photography M. Scott Mahaskey gathered most of the images. However, writer Adam Federman actually works at Type Investigations as a "reporting fellow."

Type Investigations "incubates high-impact investigative reporting that holds the powerful accountable," powers being such entities as "climate deniers" and "white Christians." Furthermore, Type is actually "formerly The Investigative Fund" [since 1966]—which, yep, in turn used to be "at The Nation Institute," which in turn (geeze) is now the "Type Media Center."

The Nation magazine, founded in 1865, basically gestated America's progressive/socialist movement. Having lost money in all but three or four years since, *The Nation* still "speaks truth to power," almost exclusively on the right.

Consider...in winter 2016, *The Nation* editor Katrina van den Heuvel wrote that her magazine was making "only its third presidential endorsement in a primary in its 150-year history," for Bernie Sanders, as "the realist we should elect." On March 2, 2020, *The Nation* again endorsed Sanders, soon after Mr. Patterson blogged his endorsement.

Other Federman Type/*Nation* work includes London *Guardian* partner coverage of a small group of "Valve Turners" who shut off the Keystone 1 Pipeline in October 2016, one sideshow to the Dakota Access Pipeline protest fiasco* in southwest North Dakota. After what Federman termed "the action in North Dakota," which another progressive "news" source claims "helped halt 15 percent of U.S. oil consumption for the day," the Valvers were upset Homeland Security had included two group members (duly convicted, by the way) as domestic terrorists, "alongside [other duly tried and convicted] white nationalists and mass killers."

Another Federman story for Type Investigations is headlined, "The Destruction Caused by the Border Wall Is Worse Than You Think," created for partner *SIERRA* (Club) magazine. ■

* Check "Waiting for Next Time" at rangemagazine.com, Spring 2018 issue.

Weed of the Week

The aspect of Patterson's "close work" that went too far apparently was this: In June 2018, BLM's Patterson emailed CBD's Donnelly (reporter Federman's tour guide) about the Tiehm's buckwheat on the mine site, of which Donnelly was previously unaware. About a year later, Donnelly followed up with records requests and paid a visit to BLM offices, soon after which Patterson's bosses placed him on leave without pay.

What was Donnelly's mission? On Oct. 8, 2019, four days after Mr. Patterson filed his whistleblower complaint, CBD announced it had filed an emergency petition to list Tiehm's buckwheat under the Endangered Species Act. An ESA listing, of course, would halt the mine.

But what is reported by Federman's story as "a rare, ankle-high wildflower" is only one member of the "highly species-rich" genus *Erigonum*, covering over 250 species of wild buckwheats. Many are local endemics adapted to specialized habitats, i.e.: Abert (southern Oregon); Mount Diablo (California); Jaynes Canyon (Klamath Mountains); and Panamint Mountain and, of course, Tiehm's (both Nevada).

Department of Agriculture publications relate that wild buckwheats are common and tough, and some cause "substantial crop losses" in wheat. Similar to bindweed, wild buckwheat vines climb grain stalks to get sunlight. Upon harvest, the vines and seeds get combined into the "most common contaminants in all seed stock." Further, wild buckwheats are naturally tolerant of glyphosate (Roundup), a real problem in no-till grain operations because the live plants aren't tilled under each year. That's why, in 2013, *The Western Producer* called wild buckwheat "weed of the week." ■

more amazing, Daniel Patterson is a disgraced Arizona state legislator forced to resign in 2012 after a committee of his peers unanimously approved him for an expulsion vote as "a serious discredit and threat to the House, its [m]embers, the legislative process, his party, and his constituents." Yes, he certainly "earned a reputation," but not at BLM.

Mr. Patterson already earned quite a reputation (and then self-destructed same) not as a whistleblower, but as a known extremist, a political/media steam calliope named at the top of hundreds of CBD and PEER press releases, expressing very clear views quoted throughout hundreds of news articles in multiple states over many years.

Certainly, there have been many federal civil service employees who have become environmental-group employees upon retirement, even upon dismissal (for example, former U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service director Jamie Rappaport Clark now runs Defenders of Wildlife), but those who come into government from the "activist side" are normally political appointees (Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt came from the League of Conservation Voters).

Would it have been too much for reporter Federman (or his editors) to ask how someone with Mr. Patterson's extensive résumé could possibly be hired into federal civil ser-

vice at any position other than janitor, much less in a responsible position to apply his "environmental expertise" to policy outcomes?

RANGE asked a few people who might know how the heck, but none were aware Mr. Patterson had become a civil servant. Jim and Sue Chilton, who are famed throughout the western news desert for litigating against CBD and winning a nice bit of cash compensation, were incredulous upon learning Daniel Patterson had become a Bureau of Land Management employee. "I wondered what happened to him," Jim says. "Somehow, I'm not surprised, but certainly disappointed."

There were others who wouldn't identify themselves. A range consultant who has directly faced the CBD's agenda says, "I would expect a federal agency to do some kind of a background check hiring any person, especially for a position of trust." One grazer, who had plenty of salty things to say, "totally off the record," warned, "I can't afford to be targeted by CBD next time I renew." This opinion was affirmed by our consultant: "CBD has a demonstrated track record of specifically targeting its litigation at individual ranchers and others critical of CBD. So I don't want my clients exposed in any way."

Civil service hiring and firing procedures are kept very confidential. It is probably impossible, even with litigation, to ever determine how Patterson was hired, by whom, and if other interesting Bureau of Land Management civil service hires are still on the payroll.

As things are, other news outlets aren't picking up *Politico's* whistleblower narrative. Furthermore, Daniel Patterson's government career seems to be over. His "Nevada Vindicator" blog (please, don't ask) was dormant from August 2015 until January 2020, with the first post declaring that Donald Trump has "always been an illegitimate [p]resident" and "Bernie Sanders offers Democrats the best chance to beat Trump in 2020." On February 25, the *Reno Gazette-Journal* published his op-ed, "Outlaw Administration Sacrificing Lands to Modern-Day Robber Barons," with the tagline stating, "[Patterson] has worked for BLM in Nevada as an environmental protection specialist since 2015." Thankfully, no longer, unless Bernie Sanders perhaps wins in November. ■

Dave Skinner looks for trouble from his bunker in Montana. Sometimes, he doesn't have to look very hard.

Daniel Patterson's Résumé

Aggregated from Facebook/blog/LinkedIn postings, not all jobs are listed consistently:

- Natural Resources degree, Michigan State University, 1994
- Natural Resources Specialist, BLM, 1995-1997 "in the Mojave Desert, desert tortoise."
- Center for Biological Diversity, public lands campaigner 1996-2006, "again for 2014." U.S. endangered species and habitat conservation. Science, media, litigation, etc.
- Arizona House of Representatives 2009-2012 (resigned under duress)
- United States Postal Service letter carrier, 2013
- Southwest Director for PEER from 2006 until September 2014
- CBD "again for 2014" fracking protests in Nevada, December
- Solar City (Tesla) Interconnections Coordinator (sales, four months in 2015)
- Bureau of Land Management, Tonopah, 2015-2020 ■