

DUST DEVILS

CYNICAL POLITICS IS THE HOT WIND THAT POWERS ENVIRONMENTAL RADICALS.

BY TIM FINDLEY

Thumping along a lonely but familiar road, my eye is drawn to the rearview mirror and the image of a dust devil whirling across my path perhaps half a mile behind me. These wild minitornadoes seem to have personalities of their own—

sometimes playful, sometimes angrily trying to grow bigger than they can be, and sometimes just seeming to cruise along the prairie, maybe dipping into some gulch or coulee and disappearing in a light, indifferent cloud of dust.

With the warm days just beginning, it makes me think of how far we must go just to get back to where we were. Twelve years ago, that twisting canyon highway led the way to the remote south-central region of Utah where the Grand Staircase-Escalante still holds an estimated 60 billion tons of the best, most environmentally compatible coal in the world. Unfortunately, it's locked there forever as a monument created by President William Clinton as he campaigned for his second term. Clinton never saw it. In 1996 he made the unprecedented grab of an area the size of Rhode Island and Delaware combined—1.7 million acres. He did it in a carefully staged announcement hundreds of miles away on the south rim of the Grand Canyon in Ari-

zona, with Interior secretary and former Arizona Gov. Bruce Babbitt safely by his side.

The ghosts that spin in dust devils along the Grand Staircase now should belong to people like Katy McGinty, former aide to Sen. Al Gore. Gore, as vice president, rewarded her with a tacked-up office as environmental advisor to the White House. When that seemed just too shabby, Gore put her in charge of the Counsel on Environmental Quality (CEQ), an equally flimsy bureaucratic tree house created in 1969 as a political adjunct to the National Environmental Policy Act. The CEQ still works at the whim of the president in power. Sometimes it protects favored interests in industry and other times, as in McGinty's realm, it shepherds policy for political advan-

tage. It's a cynical position owing more to political stance than social ideals.

McGinty was young and impressive in her style. She had been Gore's surrogate at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro that first set the path for "sustainable" world order as a keystone to the United Nations' Agenda 21. McGinty provided a warm link to American environmentalists suspicious of Clinton/Gore leadership, especially since the administration's support of the Timber Salvage Act. The greens considered it a sellout that endangered still more spotted owls in the harvest of dead timber, but unemployed loggers hated it even more for the bureaucratic obstacles thrown up that left 60 percent of dead and scorched trees standing. It would

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Vice President Al Gore applauds after President Clinton signs a bill designating 1.7 million acres of land in southern Utah's red-rock cliffs as the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, Sept. 18, 1996, at the Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona. Bill Clinton didn't want to save the Staircase. He wanted to sell it. OPPOSITE: A small piece of the Utah land taken under the 1906 Antiquities Act.

eventually lead to catastrophic forest fires. McGinty was only 29 in '94 when she became ostensibly the top executive on national environmental policy.

Bill Clinton was never in the Grand Staircase-Escalante. But Katy McGinty was, supposedly on vacation, where she met with leaders of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA) who supported legislation to create 12 million acres of wilderness in Utah. McGinty could not deliver that from her limited congressional influence, but she knew her political bosses wanted some offering to the restless environmentalists before the next election. She found a way for a quick payoff by using executive authority to declare especially sensitive areas national monuments under the 1906 Antiquities Act. McGinty, true to her job, was one purposeful dust devil racing straight on with a certain self-righteous sense of mission.

But there was another. A rogue, skipping and dodging on a parallel path, picking up rocks and debris and whatever it could add to its power, Bill Clinton didn't want to save the Staircase. He wanted to sell it. And the one principal buyer represented an Indonesian company holding the only other source of

such low-sulfur coal in the world. The Lippo Group worked for China in supplying such fuel to what was becoming the greatest communist-capitalist nation in history. If the United States took its low-sulfur reserves out of competition, Lippo and the Chinese would be the beneficiaries.

So maybe Katy McGinty wanted to favor her environmentalist friends with a gift of Utah lands. Maybe the Clinton administration wanted only to encourage more environmentally conscious development in China. But in the collision of the self-righteous and the self-serving devils of the Grand Staircase was a cloud of corruption and deceit.

Worried that the use of a National Heritage monument declaration without any congressional approval might even expose the hypocrisy behind it, McGinty had directed fabricated memos to Babbitt's office about the value of the region as a wilderness area. It was a façade, a lie, and secretly she and her staff agonized over how it might be seen.

In a memo uncovered by author Ron Arnold, McGinty told her staff, "I'm increasingly of the view that we should drop these Utah ideas. We do not really know how the enviros will react and I do think there is dan-

ger of 'abuse' of the withdraw/antiquities' authorities, especially because these lands are not really endangered."

That wasn't what Clinton and Babbitt wanted to hear. Within days another memo was drafted giving the Interior Department dramatic words heard on the edge of the Grand Canyon to support executive action preserving this "unique" and "pristine" region long beyond range of the cameras.

With shocking suddenness, the Grand Staircase-Escalante was set aside in what one Utah congressman called, "The mother of all land grabs."

Clinton took the checks from Lippo and even appointed the company's lobbyist, a shill for Chinese espionage, to a White House post. Katy went on to represent the United States at the Kyoto Conference in 1997 that would set terms for carbon emissions by developed countries, not including China. China and Indonesia both began building huge new coal-fired power plants, utilizing the low-sulfur coal supplied by Lippo.

The politicians, special interests, and foreign agents got what they wanted. The common people of Utah and the United States got nothing they didn't already have, and even

less access to its resources in the future.

Oh, I know, you think you have read this story before. But this was only the beginning, a spectacular robbery funding a rampage orchestrated by powers none of us are meant to see except as they might be churning dust and disappearing in vacant land.

I tear my eyes away from the mirror and watch the road where it is happening all over again just ahead of us.

ONE BATTLE AT A TIME

You come up over a hill and down into a surprise valley and there he is again—Dave Foreman, the 1980s' extremist who founded EarthFirst! and advocated tree spiking along with other potentially deadly methods of what Edward Abbey called "monkey wrenching" as an aggressive saboteur stance of the environmental movement.

But Foreman, threatened with prison at the beginning of the '90s, is a shape-shifter who has morphed himself many times to maintain a glamorous self-image as underground criminal to sublime radical celebrity. He's responsible, along with Reed Noss, for the creation of the proposed "Wildlands Project." That proposed web of veins and arteries of open space in a vast area free of human presence had been called impossible by most, but now it nears description in Foreman's own term as "audacious."

His 2008 emulation is even more peacefully adorned with what he calls a "campfire" message from his Web site on "anti-intellectualism" in America. "We can't begin to understand 'anticonservationists' without knowing how anti-intellectualism marbles through their skull meat," he writes. In simpler terms, most of us who question Foreman are just plain stupid, unevolved into the global reality of Foreman's mind.

Foreman still counts the beginning of doomsday from the extinction of the dodo bird in the 17th century, and equates the future to the 19th-century introduction of rabbits, a nonnative species, which soon multiplied and swarmed across the Australian continent in a devastating epic that threatened the balance of all nature. The only solution was to eliminate the rabbits. It runs like a metaphor in Foreman's mind. And we are the rabbits.

"Earth is in the throes of a mass extinction event that is caused solely by the population of six-and-a-half billion human beings," he writes in introducing his "Rewilding Institute." He might never admit that some millions of that human population would have



It was Bruce Babbitt who brought back wolves to the American West and who ushered in what one Utah congressman called, "the mother" of all land grabs. Babbitt always believed in "heritage" meaning separate families owing their existence to one Big Daddy behind it all.

to be done away with sooner or later, but Foreman stresses the "need for large carnivores and a permeable landscape for their movement." Send in the wolves, he is saying, and have done with "the anti-intellectualism that powerfully pumps through our foes' arteries like crank..."

Like so many others who imitate and emulate him, Foreman of course regards himself as one of the superior intellectuals those of us with "marbled skull meat" can't comprehend. The truth is that Foreman, an Eagle Scout, was a mediocre college student running against the tide of his peers in the 1960s by supporting the war in Vietnam and forming a chapter of the Young Americans for Freedom to support Barry Goldwater in his desire to use nuclear weapons against North Vietnam if necessary. After a stint in the Marine Corps, he emerged in the 1970s as a kind of renegade drill instructor for his nasty platoon of EarthFirst! bombers and tree spikers. Rather than go to prison himself, he later betrayed them, but never seems to be questioned about that.

He isn't the only phony intellectual that those he calls "dumb," "pigheaded" and "populist" have tried politely to understand in the last 20 years.

Take the madly intense Idaho architect Jon Marvel. He has spent a fortune, not all of it his own, in an attempt to force grazing off federal land. Foreman has a cause, however twisted it might be. With Marvel, it's more of a compulsive grudge he says began when a neighbor allowed his cows to stray onto Marvel's property. Marvel hates the mess cows

make. He says he despises how they overgraze the West and ruin riparian areas. But in the many times he has been shown to be wrong about the damage from managed grazing, Marvel has never relented a bit in his proclaimed hatred of ranchers—and of bureaucrats who don't agree with him.

Should it not be at least mildly disturbing that both of them, Foreman and Marvel, posture as progressives but actually began their experience in American politics among the most solid hardcore conservatives like Goldwater and developers of Sun City? As much as they may say it's the environment they want to preserve, it's the livelihoods of people they want to destroy.

In those years before 2000, Wyoming rancher Pat O'Toole and I found ourselves awkwardly apart from the 50 or more "westerners" from city governments and green-club groups invited to the Center for the Rocky Mountain West conference sponsored by the former mayor of Missoula, Mont., then



Dave Foreman is founder of EarthFirst!, former lobbyist for the Wilderness Society, and author of "A Field Guide to Monkey Wrenching and Ecodefense," that details how to sabotage equipment, industrial projects, roads and vehicles in the name of environmental protection. Foreman is credited with saying: "An Ice Age is coming and I welcome it as much-needed changing. I see no solution to our ruination of earth except for a drastic reduction of the human population."

Montana University writer-professor Daniel Kemmis.

Among those attending that conference was Gloria Flora, adorned in thigh-high black boots with silver conchos and still saying she was run off her post as Forest Service supervisor in Elko, Nev., by "zealots" who threatened her and her children over the closure of a road outside the remote town of Jarbidge.

Though there was never any proof of intimidation of any kind, Flora went off on a westwide speaking tour portraying herself as a victim and saying things about the common folk that she might well have learned from Foreman and Marvel themselves.

But the zealots had more than marbled minds on their side. They had shovels by the thousands, donated in large part by sympathetic loggers in the Northwest. They had the muscle of hundreds behind the shovels who simply removed the Forest Service blockade of boulders and reestablished their county road. Dick Carver was among them, a pocket-sized copy of the U.S. Constitution sticking out of his shirt as always. We would lose Carver to cancer not long after that, but he will always be remembered for his own single-handed bulldozer reopening of another road shut down by the Forest Service in south-central Nevada.

Carver got his picture on the cover of Time in the 1970s as the magazine reported on the "Sagebrush Rebellion," and some people still think that's what it's all about. The truth was that the rebellion to capture the majority of the West's land held by the feds fell apart when President Ronald Reagan and Interior Secretary James Watt nearly did it in with an action that would have thrown open vast federal lands to the highest bidders. Reality hit hard on the ranchers with the knowledge that it would bankrupt them in a hopeless effort to buy up their leased pastures.

Nevada rancher Wayne Hage used to hold forth at Pine Creek Ranch in one of his after-dinner lecture conversations about the West having been sold already, as much as a century before, by federal bankers making deals to set aside resources in exchange for foreign investment and loans. It was a little like Bill Clinton seemed to have learned the game.

On his own, Hage waged a cerebral battle against federal confiscations, and won. But he and his wife, former Idaho Rep. Helen Chenoweth-Hage, were always a presence at rallies that drew thousands to the greater cause of property rights. Then, in that stunning short time, we lost both of them in 2006. The Federal Claims Court has still not ruled on the "takings" award for the illegal action it found in the attempt to ruin Hage.

Ours was a time of outrage following injustice as the century turned. The people, those poor populist hardheads who couldn't understand Foreman, fought it one battle at a time. Almost surprisingly, no one was physically wounded.

But no one had really won.



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The sudden shutdown of irrigation at the beginning of the 2001 season for Klamath Basin farmers threatened catastrophe for hundreds of families living on the margins of their crops. It was a bureaucratically manufactured crisis with no basis in fact. BELOW: Gathering of "The bucket brigade," an anti-government act of defiance in Klamath Falls, Ore., to support the farmers. As a symbol of support, shovels were sent from "The shovel brigade" in Jarbidge, Nev.

BIRD IN THE HAND

Shadows are part of the scenery in the West. They give dimension to the powerful structures of mountains and mesas. But most alluring of all are those vast regions beyond a campfire's glow. We are drawn there, perhaps trying to seek our future in the shadows of the past.

George W. Bush would never acknowledge that rural votes from mostly western states provided his first narrow margin to win the presidency. He might never recognize that many were voting their fear in hope that the Republican candidate would hold off the threats to their own values and livelihoods.

But if they hoped for much more than an uneasy period of peace from their battles with the government of Clinton/Gore, they were certain to be disappointed. At the apex of land-use policy changes in the 1990s, environmentalists in and out of government had come upon the word "paradigm" as a means of defining the new rules for the future.

That new paradigm included not only new leaders and new policies, but the foundations of an entirely new infrastructure meant to withstand political whims. Babbitt, who most recently had served as president of the League of Conservation Voters, was seen by the politician-rating group as "our Babe Ruth." Idealistic young environmentalists like Katy McGinty from Gore's office saw the possibilities of no longer regarding the federal government as part of the enemy, but as an



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opportunity to build their political beliefs into a career within the system itself.

Some of them, like Wilderness Society President George Frampton were already well established in high-profile activism of the radical green movement. The Wilderness Society, formed in 1935, made no secret of its Socialist sympathies. Frampton himself was a lawyer by trade with no formal training in ecology, but Babbitt maneuvered him through Senate approval into the post of assistant secretary of the Interior for fish, wildlife and parks. When McGinty moved on to an international job after maneuvering the Grand Staircase lockup in Utah, Frampton was named to replace her as the president's key advisor to environmental policy, director of the Council on Environmental Quality.

New Mexico Lands Commissioner Jim Baca also had links to the Wilderness Society when Babbitt appointed him as chief of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). He was handed a baton of arbitrary power over vast public lands in the West and immediately began swinging it like a club. Babbitt had to replace him to calm the ensuing storm. The Interior secretary chose a loyal utility



Wayne Hage, shown here with his second wife and former Rep. Helen Chenoweth-Hage, used to hold forth at Pine Creek Ranch in after-dinner lecture conversations about the West having been sold already, as much as a century before, by federal bankers making deals to set aside resources in exchange for foreign investments and loans. Bill Clinton seemed to have learned that game.

appointee, Michael Dombeck, for the interim, building on what Babbitt could see forming as his empire. Dombeck later became chief of the Forest Service. The top appointees had power to hire others, gradually filling the slots with enthused politically correct bureaucrats almost impossible to fire under civil-service rules.

The nation took little notice of subtle changes in the structure of federal land management. For example, the Soil Conservation Service, created during the Great Depression to aid drought-stricken farmers, became the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The agency reflected a new mission beyond aiding farmers with seed and soil techniques into acquiring new expanses of wetlands from willing sellers.

Nearly everywhere, western legend told of conquering the wilderness to build a national power, but the new thought of federal authorities was of reestablishing the fabled Eden they believed existed before European settlement began.

And there were shadows within the shadows of this new paradigm. Those who had opted to work “within the system” still had reliable friends who traded their support in return for making the system work for them. David Foreman and Reed Noss were never really crazy, even if uninformed observers of their Wildlands Plan thought it made them seem so. Wiser people watched as, more rapidly than they had imagined, new political legacy-building federal acquisitions of wilderness and roadless lands began forming the Wildlands puzzle of human-excluded corridors reaching from Yucatan to Yukon.

It could not quite be called a conspiracy, but it was a remarkable political coalition of

interests that by 2000 seemed to share one clear thought. They all hated George W. Bush.

Bush had not really tried to grasp the depth of the problem. Environmental concerns—even the all-assuming power of the Endangered Species Act (ESA)—had been part of Republican platforms as much as Democratic. No matter what industry and resource devel-

opers promised, it would never be enough. The enemy was the consumptive need of human civilization.

It seemed to go past Bush that in the West, “deep ecology” had already stretched beyond platitudes to become a cultural conflict unfairly staged in mythical shadows. From the first moment the new president set foot there, he was walking into a trap.

The morning after Bush took office, a memo arrived on the desk of the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) director in Klamath Falls from the chief of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS). The memo warned the BOR boss that unless he shut down irrigation supplies to Klamath Basin farmers, he would be liable along with them for potential prison sentences as willful violators of the ESA.

The evidence that irrigation risked extinction of sucker fish important to tribes in the upper basin was later shown to have been trumped up by a biologist for hire who used his research to find what FWS and activist green groups wanted him to find. The BOR chief could have called the bluff, but he knew where the political clout was in the new paradigm.

The sudden shutdown of irrigation at the beginning of the season threatened catastrophe for hundreds of farm families living on the margins of their crops. It was a bureaucratically manufactured crisis that threatened to trigger rebellion.

It seemed doubtful that President Bush had taken much more time than a meeting with Vice President Dick Cheney to pick his own secretary of the Interior. His choice of Colorado attorney general and associate of the energy industry Gale Norton was no less partisan than Clinton’s pick of Babbitt, but it

was a hell of a lot less ambitious. Norton would never quite seem suited to the job, even as she finally restored desperately needed irrigation to the Klamath only days before suicide airline attacks on 9/11 established another new paradigm none had expected.

There were plenty of incidents, both outrageous and absurd, but as war with Iraq drew priority attention, an uneasy relative political peace drifted sluggishly over the West. But it is in just such a quiet-seeming time that the darkest shadows are most deceiving and dangerous.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) had called us “StRange” magazine when we produced a lengthy investigation of its manipulation and even outright extortion in the acquisition of private property to be flipped at a profit to the federal government. It was less cavalier when The Washington Post came to most of the same conclusions in a series of articles and talk was begun about a congressional investigation of the world’s best-funded nonprofit environmental organization.

The Nature Conservancy hates scrutiny of its operations. A “nonprofit” group so devoted to producing its own propaganda and so secretly run is hardly interested in publicity. But with a congressional inquiry looming, it had already established a new shelter to scurry from the light.

“Perpetuity means forever!” TNC chief executive Steve McCormick triumphantly told a Sacramento meeting of the Land Trust Alliance. TNC had tested it, run it through its lawyers and past some judges, and were now sure the new technique of conservation easements (CE) would work. Its seldom-acknowledged former New Mexico board member Dave Foreman called easements, “the key to the corridors. Once the easements are legally in place, we can impose habitat restrictions for wildlife, thus ending grazing and other agricultural practices. If the landowner refuses, the easement management loophole will allow us to sue the landowner and impose those restrictions.”

From fewer than 100 in the 1980s, the number of CEs on mostly western land soared beyond 1,300 in 2001, covering more than six million acres, an area bigger than the state of Connecticut. The Nature Conservancy alone controlled more than 15.3 million acres in the United States by 2006 and was gobbling more every day in new CEs ranging from square miles of open pasture to a couple of acres on a ranchette. Many new trust organizations emerged like patent medicine tinkers with federal cash that made some

ranchers rich and produced yet more links in that once fantastic wilderness idea of the Wildlands Project. In 1964, there had been 54 areas of wilderness in the United States totaling about nine million acres. Now there were more than 107 million acres of wilderness

Jon Marvel, regarded as too wild for even some of his own Western Watershed members, concentrated on what he thinks are friends in the federal court, demanding now that \$1.35 per AUM (cow-calf unit) grazing fees on federal lands be raised to as much as

Future policy was still enclosed by the paradigm of the shadows. In Utah, 12 years after the Escalante's grab, and despite the opposition of the state's entire congressional delegation, the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance has enlisted the support of New York politicians to produce legislation that would declare another nine million acres of Utah wilderness.

But that much is just an old familiar tune compared to more than 20 pieces of legislation for legacy-building wilderness that are coiled in congressional committees awaiting approval this year or next. They include the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act sponsored by a New York congresswoman and 187 cosponsors. That act alone would designate more than 20 million acres across the spine of the nation as human-excluding wilderness. Dreaming on their own, the U.S. Forest Service has on the table a conservation strategy to promote "wilderness values" on 400 million acres, including private land. Taken together or even apart, the plans have their only equivalent in the Louisiana Purchase. It is not a myth; it is not even regarded in Washington as an outrage. But it is certainly audacious.

The long campaign leading to this November's presidential election has given almost no attention at all to the West, except as it has been seen as the most obvious victim of the swarm of illegal immigration, which, ironically, is the chief source of Foreman's feared population growth. President Bush himself has made gestures to protect the border, but he has also not been clear about his secret talks with Canadian and Mexican heads of state that investigators say may lead to a sovereignty-surrendering North American Union.

Republican candidate John McCain has a Hispanic advisor on his staff, Juan Hernandez, who was previously an advisor to former Mexican President Vicente Fox. Hernandez is noted for saying: "We must not only have a free flow of goods and services, but also start working for a free flow of people."

The devils fade away in the shadows of the night. Do we know what we may be sacrificing?

Do we care? ■

Tim Findley is currently at work on a book compiling a history of rural western struggles from the pages of RANGE. "It is not pessimism, or cynicism, or doom and gloom that threatens us," he says. "If we lose, it will be because of apathy."



AP PHOTO/KENT GILBERT

Steve McCormick, left, former chief executive for The Nature Conservancy (which hates scrutiny), speaks to TNC trustees during a meeting in San Jose, Costa Rica, Oct. 3, 2003. Costa Rica, which is famous for its conservation efforts in which more than 25 percent of the country's territory is held in protected areas, was chosen to host the first annual meeting of TNC to be held outside of the United States since its foundation in 1951.

and more being designated every year. Add that to the two million acres held by the nation's largest landowner and TNC's favored "big fish," Ted Turner, and the once outrageous idea of a Wildlands corridor cutting across the middle of the continent is much closer to what Foreman described as merely audacious.

In 2006, a sweep of congressional and Senate elections restored a Democratic majority led in the House by a longtime party fund-raiser from California and in the Senate by a vindictive Nevada senator who had enriched himself in office in part through federal land swaps aided by TNC.

Rep. Richard Pombo, who ignored advice that he was too ambitious in his attempt to dismantle the ESA, was defeated in a campaign funded and directed by the nonprofit Sierra Club.

\$12.26 per AUM to match actual costs. That would eliminate nearly all small ranchers.

Bush was busy with the war. His administration managed some small success in at least stalling the progress of road closures, and his appointment of Dirk Kempthorne as Interior secretary seemed to add a new degree of confidence in managing federal lands. But while George Frampton had exercised his power over the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to control agriculture, an attempt by Bush's appointee to the same job resulted in Julie McDonald being accused in Congress of abusing her power by suggesting review of some endangered species and leaking information to private groups. Frampton, who made a career of that, was never so questioned.

In a politically frozen government, resources of fuel, food, timber and minerals remained untouched by any new initiative.