# IN THE HIGH COUNTRY: CRAFTING LONG-FORM STORIES ON RECREATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

by
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# DEDICATION

This behemoth of my graduate work is dedicated with love to Michael Koboldt, who patiently lent his ears to my gripes. Further, with the encouragement from my parents, Roger and Christine, I followed a dream to pursue journalism. My passion for this craft is a fruit of their support, and I hope the completion of this project serves as a token of my appreciation.

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# Chapter One: Introduction

In late April of 2015, I was a homeless journalist. I had a project proposal with many, many words and a few redundant paragraphs, a committee at the Missouri School of Journalism with inquisitive eyes and thoughtful questions and several edits to do, but I didn't have a publication to seed my project. It was a tense time. But before too long, my telephone rang with good news — an offer from *High Country News*, a magazine headquartered in Paonia, a tiny town on Colorado's western slope — and my worried thoughts subsided. The publication is a regional-national magazine that covers the environment, natural resources, public lands, wildlife and people of the 11-state territory of the American West. As a westerner and environmental journalist myself, *HCN* was a logical place for me to land. As such, it's very fortunate that I did.

At the Missouri School of Journalism, I didn't follow any of the tracks offered by the graduate school. Instead, I cherry-picked the courses that fit my needs and goals. Although the individually structured major is how my time at the j-school will be documented in history, I took a blend of environmental, investigative and magazine journalism classes. Perhaps with the most conviction, I saw myself as an environmental reporter before all else. My investigative reporting classes opened my eye to meatier, deeper projects that I enjoyed very much, and once I made it through Jennifer Rowe's editing class, I knew that magazines were the medium I wanted to place my work. Magazines afford the luxury of time to a journalist, but in turn demand much from them, and I found I enjoyed the balance of spending more time on the research and writing to produce better *stories*. As this project will show, my personal evolution for telling stories

was front-and-center throughout my internship at *HCN* and throughout my development as a journalist at the Missouri School of Journalism and the intrepid days at daily newspapers that prepared me for this project. When I enrolled in graduate school, it was partly to have an excuse to run frantically away from the daily journalism grind (with my hands flailing in the air, a hardly legible reporter's notebook tucked into my pocket and ink all over my fingertips) to pursue more meaningful work at a renowned journalism school. Now in the twilight of this experience, I can say with pride that I indeed found myself in some very special circumstances and produced content of a higher quality.

The professional component of this work, like many of my experiences at the j-school, was a bit of a diversion from the typical master's project structure. My project was a hybrid between an individual investigation and a professional experience at a magazine. The investigation was supported by *HCN*, and between my daily work for the publication and my personal investigation, the hybrid served my career goals well. My investigation originally sought to examine ski resorts' snowmaking practices amid drought conditions, taking a strong focus on California, but as this project will show, my editors and I worked together to develop a series of articles that took a broader view of a changing ski industry amid climate and economic challenges. The evolution of the original pitch to what was eventually published in *HCN* was a great professional experience, because I went through the process of pitching my stories to the entire magazine staff and updating the coverage to fit within the magazine's purview. Professionally, this trained me to know my publication well and to do the necessary preliminary reporting to know what a story is before pitching it. The magazine's rigorous pitching process has, no doubt, put me in a better position as a freelancer when I will

eventually be pitching stories to run in different publications. *HCN* has a reputation as a publication that's extremely difficult to break into as a freelancer. That was undoubtedly true; the ratio of pitches received and pitches by freelancers that eventually get into the magazine is very, very small. Frequently, the freelancers that *did* successfully pitch the magazine were either previous interns, staff or writers specifically recruited by the magazine's editors. Each week, the staff gathers for what we call the "What's Hot" meeting, where we plan for upcoming issues and review pitches. It's a cruel process that can squash the confidence of even the most gregarious reporter, but the experience of sitting in those meetings week after week trained me to produce better pitches, bring better ideas and do my homework. To get a story past the astute jury of editors, you must be *inside the minds* of your sources, and if you're not, no doubt Senior Editor Jodi Peterson will call you out for it. "*Next!*" The past six months have been crucial to my professional development and have strengthened my reporting and writing skills by leaps and bounds.

The analytical component of this project, a case study of an environmental feature to assess industry best practices for sourcing, developing story arcs and avoiding cliché, similarly complemented my career goals and contributed to my professional development as a journalist and successful storyteller. I examined the *Boston Globe*'s Pulitzer Prize finalist "Chasing Baya" by Sarah Schweitzer because it successfully communicated an endangered species story about whales that didn't feel trite or overdone. I took a thorough look at the article through a deep reading of the piece and in-depth interviews with the writer, the editor, the primary source of the feature and an outside media expert who has written extensively about crafting narratives and the dangers of cliché. The four

interviews took several hours to complete but offered a complete picture of how this story came to be. It was particularly interesting to hear about the process from the perspective of the main source, a biologist named Michael Moore. As journalists, we can sometimes be insensitive to the time a source invests helping with a story and how *very strange* it must be to have another person inside your mind, picking away and filling in the gaps — for the sake of *story*. Through my interviews, I gained a lot of insight on the journalistic process. The blended perspectives of writer, editor, source and expert layered the foundation of my understanding of crafting narratives and began to change the way I would approach my own interviews and stories. In journalism, there's no One Way to write a narrative feature, and in talking with more professionals, I cherry-picked my favorite strategies. The analysis, in that regard, complemented my professional component in perfect pitch.

In November, *HCN*'s managing editor, Brian Calvert, offered me the senior fellowship that extends my contract by one year. It's a full-time position and requires more front-of-book and feature story pitching and writing, and lobs on a mentorship role for incoming interns. It's a prestigious position that the magazine began offering in 2009, and previous fellows have gone on to forge successful careers as freelancers, work as editors for the magazine or produce content for national, environmental publications. I accepted the offer and will take the opportunity to finish many projects that I've been researching over the past few months. Staying with the magazine will continue to help me develop as a journalist, as I still have much to learn about *HCN*'s coverage. The magazine is going through a transition in trying to better serve a western audience by covering more minorities and environmental justice issues, and I hope to help turn the

ship toward this new direction. Additionally, Calvert has been a great mentor, and I’ve only just begun to glean his lessons.

## Chapter Two: Field notes

### General dates

I began a full-time six-month internship with *High Country News* magazine on July 7, and the position extended through December 11, 2015. The internship has given me several opportunities to cover stories that I had genuine interest in. The pace of the magazine allowed for ample time to report stories that were more investigative in nature in addition to my ski industry project. The original proposal grew from one story that focused on drought and the ski industry into a broader three-part series that examined the various ways the ski industry is changing in response to climate and industry challenges. I contributed both to the online and print editorial departments and participated in magazine planning meetings. A large focus of the internship is pitching stories for the print magazine during our weekly feature planning. Along with my personal ski industry project, my coverage focused on natural resource, land management, environmental and energy issues of the American West.

For my weekly correspondence reports, I used a service called Mail Chimp that sends out newsletters. This program provided me with insight on my weekly reports, because I could access metrics about when the reports were read, how long each committee member spent on the page and if they clicked any links I included in my correspondence. The newsletter service will be useful to me as a freelance journalist because it's a great forum to keep and hone an audience. However, the system did somewhat inhibit a reply-all function for easy discussion among my members. But, I received only a few comments throughout the 14-week project, that a reply function was

more or less moot. It would be interesting to see if the committee would have been more involved in the weekly correspondence had it been a typical email, but I think Mail Chimp is a tool that all journalists should get become acquainted with — in that regard, it was worth doing.

Since a newsletter format was used, certain sections were redundant from week to week. In each of the memos, important dates were included as well as permanent links to project materials including the original proposal, my *HCN* author page so the committee could keep up with published work. Those redundancies have been edited out in the overview of the field notes.

**August 6, 2015:**

WEEK 1 - So, hey there. I began working at *High Country News* magazine July 6, and I've settled into this quirky town well. As far as the publication goes, the coverage is expansive, my colleagues are astute and my editors are fantastic. As far as the community goes, strange characters are the norm. Paonia: Population 1,400. Office: Two-minute walk. Nearest Mountain: Lamborn (close enough to climb before work). Nearest Walmart: Delta (too far for a weekend trip; good riddance).

About the job: I write weekly features for the web site (three weeks on; one week off), and one longer story for the print magazine. Intermittently, I'll also write book reviews, "Latest" columns and help with data crunching and data visualization — I'm one of the only ones in the home office with experience producing infographics.

My editors are on board with the ski industry/drought idea that I pitched as part of my project; however, its scope has widened significantly. You'll remember the investigation I presented in May consisted of snowmaking practices of the ski industry in

periods of prolonged drought. That idea has morphed into one article that will run as part of a five-part series. The five articles fall under the broader umbrella of shifting strategies of the industry to keep up with changing landscapes and will publish as an online exclusive series with infographics and photographs. One or two of the articles may also run in the print magazine. I have done significant background reporting and have already conducted numerous interviews to cleave these pitches (p.s. *HCN* has a very high standard for pitching. This has already been great experience). See below for series details, or view from your web browser: http://bit.ly/1gbG21p. The following five pitches were tentatively approved by my editors at *HCN* for a web exclusive series but are subject to change slightly — or greatly, depending on the magazine's needs —throughout the reporting process.

1.) The ski industry's new rule book in the era of climate change.

Mounting challenges of low snowpack, drought and climate change is shifting the strategies of the ski industry, and in this new the industry is governed by these trends:

- "Here comes the Sun King." When snow doesn't deliver, ski areas need to offset bad seasons, and many resorts are moving toward year-round business models. Executives are getting more creative and offering more products and services geared toward warmer-weather fun: Summer tubing hills, mountain-side roller coasters, indoor ski slopes, zip lines and summer music and art festivals.
- "The race to higher ground." At a National Ski Areas Association Trade Conference last year, Bill Jenson, former Intrawest CEO and industry analyst, said 31 percent of ski areas in the country are "in the sunset of their existence," and in the distant future, anything below 11,000 feet is toast. Since that prognosis,

deals have been emerging. Larger corporations are absorbing small, privately owned ski areas above 11,000 feet, but moving to higher ground presents a new set of concerns ski quality will be vastly different, and so will the industry. Michael Berry, president of the National Ski Areas Association says "when that happens, saving the ski industry will be of global significance, but the conversation should shift to saving California's water and agriculture."

- "California Dreamin.'" Buyer's remorse. Vail Resorts, KSL Capitol Partners, Intrawest and other corporations invested in Tahoe properties leading up to last year's drought when the writing was already on the wall, but those investments have been difficult to turn a profit. Andy Wirth, new CEO of Squaw Valley in North Tahoe, said it's been difficult to be profitable since KSL Incorporated purchased the ski area in 2012.
- "Rise of the mega resort." In March, Vail Resorts' $187 million acquisition of Park City and Canyonlands Ski Area was a surprising outcome of a lawsuit between the Vail and Intrawest (who owned Park City — but not Canyonlands — at the time). This season, those two resorts, now under the umbrella of Vail Resorts, will be the largest ski area in the country. But there are even bigger changes brewing in Utah. The One Wasatch Master Plan, released last year by Vail Resorts and Park City commissioners, would connect the area's seven resorts into a sort of ski Pangaea – 18,000 acres, in a European-inspired mega resort.
- "Vertical integration." Vail is the pioneer of vertical integration, but most corporations and smaller resorts are adopting the strategy, too. The resorts own the restaurants, the hotels and the equipment rental shops. Last year, Vail

purchased the Colorado Mountain Express shuttle company. In that case, the corporation picks you up, houses you, feeds you and outfits your gear. Once you're suited up and ready to go, you dispense your bills to the nice attendant behind a ski resort window and serenely schuss resort terrain. From the time you arrive, to the moment you leave, the resort takes care of you. Berry says vertical integration has improved the user experience. "Everyone is nostalgic for a time they don't understand," Berry says. "Back in the 1970s, the ski industry only sold the tickets and conditions weren't regular, the food wasn't what it is now. People wanted a more sophisticated experience." Community members, local business owners and online commenters say vertical integration is just a fancy phrase for mountain monopolies.

- "A Small Shop Renaissance." Despite conventional wisdom, small ski areas have more value now in the era of consolidation than ever before. Corporations are increasingly investing in "breeder-feeder" areas — ski hills that lower the barrier to entry for less affluent, more rural populations. Vail Resorts has purchased a handful of ski areas in the Midwest and has added those areas to their larger Season Pass products with the hope of becoming destinations for Midwestern tourists who desire big mountain skiing. Small ski areas, like Diamond Peak in the Tahoe area, have been approached by larger corporations, that lure the smaller areas with multi-million dollar offers for infrastructure improvements. Antelope Ski Area, a defunct ski hill in Sheridan, Wyoming, is a stunning example of large-corporation benevolence. Antelope Ski Area closed in 2004 and has since adopted a nonprofit business model – a strategy adopted by other small areas including

Bridger Bowl ski area near Bozeman, Montana. Although Antelope still needs millions to re-open the small ski area, as a nonprofit, they've had offers from larger resorts for donated equipment and received a free membership from the National Ski Areas Association, an industry trade group that represents 90 percent of the down-hill ski areas in the country. "Michael Berry basically adopted us and we've seen so much passion and support from other ski resorts in the NSAA," says Mark Weitz, president of the Antelope Butte Foundation. "It's like resuscitating a patient – we have a heart beat, but we're a long way from being able to run around again." Weitz has a touching story: He is not a business man and by no means a ski industry executive, but he's been trying to re-open Antelope Hill for more than a decade, still chasing the memories of his neighborhood ski area when he was a child, and he wants to give that lifestyle to his young children, who have since grown into teenagers. "They really missed out on that life experience," Weitz says. "I kept them skiing … taking trips to Steamboat … but that's still just skiing with your dad on the weekend. They didn't have the experience of skiing after school with their friends."

*See Moguls of the moguls graphic that will run with this story.

*11,000 feet & under graphic could also run with this story.

2.) Changing industry and communities - gentrification. The Winter Recreation Opportunities Act that passed in 2011 has cleared the way for resorts to pursue year-round models, and Park City, Utah, has become an interesting example of what year-round models and consolidation can do in a ski centric community. Earlier this year, Vail purchased Park City and Canyonlands Ski Area in Utah and released plans earlier this

month to combine the two resorts. Once that happens, the new Park City will be the largest resort in America.

In Utah, the face of the ski industry is changing quickly. Later this year, the U.S. Forest Service will receive a proposal for "One Wasatch" that would combine seven of Utah's Park City area resorts with seven interconnecting ski lifts. The 18,000-acre "mega resort" would be a year-round "international destination," says Rob Katz, Vail Resorts chief operating executive. Locally, some Park City officials have been starkly opposed to the large consolidation, and the ski areas are split, with some in favor and others opposed. "People don't like it, people don't want it," says Nathan Rafferty, president and CEO of Ski Utah, a Utah ski industry marketing group. "One Wasatch is about ski area connectivity with lifts, and that comes at a significant cost to the many, many other uses. It will bisect some of the most popular mountain bike trails in the area. It will fragment wildlife habitat. It will displace backcountry skiers." Rafferty is leading an effort for a different proposal, the Mountain Accord that would connect some of the Park City areas by a unified transportation system, which has been gaining traction and "is now moving really quickly," says Michael Berry, president of National Ski Areas Association. Park City Mayor Jack Thomas says he is "adamantly opposed" to the connection. "Park City is a rugged and ragged ski community, and people come here for that unpolished charm," Thomas says.

Meanwhile, some smaller outfits haven't been able to play ball in this new, year-round game. Hogadon Ski Area near Casper, Wyoming, barely has enough money to keep pace for the winter season. Last year, the family-owned ski area managers spent a

whole summer repairing trails, and didn't have the money to invest in two new snow guns, as proposed in their 2013 Master Plan.

All of this maneuvering has implications in the West. Gentrification of small ski towns has affected the character of towns and the real estate values there. Jamie Schectman, Mountain Rider Alliance CEO and co-founder (a grassroots association of riders and skiers, says he worries the prevalence of mega resorts will turn small mountain towns, once with their own character and identity, into industry monopolies. In Tahoe, KSL Capitol Partners purchased Squaw Valley ski area in 2012. Since then, lift ticket prices have climbed from $76 for to $119.

3.) Weatherly whims and without work. This will be a profile that follows the missteps, gambles, failures and successes during one snowbird's crazy winter. This story will depend on a strong character — I have a lot of lines out for this, but here's my strongest option as of now: Sean Duggan, has worked for the ski industry for the last seven years, and over the past four years, he's been on the payroll of: Durango Mountain Resort (Purgatory), Breckenridge, Diamond Peak (family owned ski hill in Tahoe), Kirkwood Mountain Resort (Vail-owned in Tahoe) and now he's back in Summit County working in a bar after a few rough years in the Tahoe area.

In the 2012-13 season, Duggan was hired on as a ski race and competition coordinator at Kirkwood Mountain Resort. That year, the snow was so insignificant that all of the races were moved to Breckenridge without so much as two days notice of the first race. Duggan was out of work and his supervisor told him "good luck." So, he went to Breckenridge trying to fill a similar position. When he got there, he got employment but it was temporary: only 10 days of minimum wage work assisting with the

Breckenridge competition. After that, he went back to Tahoe and got a job at a smaller, family owned ski area called Diamond Peak where he was hired as a ski instructor. The work there was so sporadic that sometimes Duggan would only have two or three lessons per week. He made ends meet by working as a busser at a high-end restaurant on South Lake Tahoe.

Perhaps more striking than the challenges is how aggressively the skier/rider community overcomes them. As the industry changes and adapts to climate change, the conditions will also shift to harsher conditions above 11,000 feet making the pursuit for snow the feat of the most extreme characters.

*See Against the elements graphic that could run with this story to show how the changing landscape of the industry is not for the light of heart.

4.) Every last drop.  In dry years, ski areas grow more dependent on their snowmaking operations, and in the West, resorts have been pushing the limits on water rights for snowmaking, and they're trying to get more. As more ski resorts are vying for more water, the industry's role in future water fights is coming into focus. The ski industry has used legal mechanisms in its favor, but as priorities shift in an increasingly dry world, what happens when the industry can't get the water it needs?

The Old West, the New West and water. As the mining era faded, old towns found ways to revive their economies with ski hills. Breckenridge, Telluride, Silverton — ski towns with mining histories — have been able to leverage water rights in their favor. The ski industry as a whole has fairly junior water rights, but Telluride Ski Resort's rights have a mining legacy. The ski area has a relatively senior claim on its water in the San Miguel watershed, which the resort fortuitously secured when the rights traded hands

from the mining industry to the ski area. Even with its water rights, the resort executives have filed for increased diversion for the upcoming ski season. In a town with only 2,319 people, the resort already uses more water than 90 percent of the town's population in one year.

Often, water policies are not keeping up with the changing lands. In Breckenridge, the Blue River, ran dry in some areas through town in 2012. This happened, coincidentally, in the days leading up to a major snowboarding and skiing event, the Dew Tour, held at the area resort. The ski resort had come up against its water rights and pulled water out of the system for snowmaking (to build a 35-foot half-pipe for the competition). The resort was legally within its easement on the water, but it was a remarkably dry year in Colorado. Jon Ewert, a fisheries biologist for Colorado Parks and Wildlife, said the water was too low to sustain trout habitat.

Water is for fighting over. Currently, Aspen Resorts is at odds with environmental groups over a new water bill that would secure more senior rights for the ski industry (a similar political move died after a House vote a couple years ago). In 2012, the National Ski Areas Association, which represents 90 percent of the nation's ski industry, including the 121 areas that operate on National Forest Service land, sued the USFS over water rights when the agency revised the water clause in ski-area permitting that required ski areas to transfer some water rights to the government. The ski industry likened the move to "taking of personal property." The NSAA scored a huge win for the industry when it prevailed in the litigation. The decision removed the water transfer requirement and precluded the Forest Service from including transfers in future ski area permits.

*See the water explainer graphic that will run with this story

5.) The ski areas and towns left behind. In December 2012, the rounded mounds of Mount Shasta, a family owned ski area in McCloud, California, didn't have even a patch of snow. That year, temperatures had been too warm to blow man-made snow, and at a time when the small mountain would have opened in a normal year, the single ski lift of the mountain sat still. Later that month there was a storm that squeezed out a few hours of decent skiing in the morning — then Jason Young, the general manager, had to shut down operations again. February yielded the conditions to squeeze out another three days, but the skiers were few.

The following year was a little better: Mount Shasta was open for one month. Bill Jensen, and industry analyst said once a ski area closes, public perception and employee retention make it very difficult for those areas to open the following year. As we move into the 2014-2015 season, there's an opportunity to see if that assumption rings true. At Mount Shasta, Young said he had to layoff more than half of his staff and the following season, most of the remaining employees didn't return. This year, only members of his family remain and in the coming months, he'll start recruiting new employees for the 2015-16 season. But his promises are thin: "I just hope El Nino will give me enough snow to keep them." Young is staying positive for this season and says he is working on getting approval for a summer project that would include a ropes course, zip line and alpine coaster. "We are operating in one of the most depressed counties in California," Young says. "But, El Nino. It's supposed to be the best one is 50 years!"

For some, the exceptionally dry year is a dawning of realizations, and those tough truths have shifted attitudes in some areas. Ethan Linck, a Seattle resident who has skied at Summit at Snoqualmie ski area that had to close early last year, says the prevailing

wisdom in Washington has been “to let go of the idea that Washington has a ski economy.”

The University of Montana conducted a long-term prognosis for winter recreation, and the study’s authors highlighted sobering statistics about how most ski areas won’t survive, and snowpack levels in California and Utah will diminish as the planet warms. Greg Hanscom’s 2013 HCN feature on climate change and the ski industry left readers worried about the tenuous future for Mammoth Ski Area in Eastern California, but recent news sheds a glimmer of hope. The ski area’s skier visitation numbers are "a couple percent above" last year's total, Mammoth Mountain spokeswoman Lauren Burke told the LA Times In May, and the Mammoth executives added a new zipline route this summer.

*Graphic 11,000ft and under could run with this story (or with shifting strategies story)

Extras - will publish as data visualizations/infographics:

1.) 11,000 feet & Under. This would be a mountain-shaped graphic with lists of all of the mom-and-pop ski resorts located above and below 11,000 feet. Big corporations are after the ones at high elevations and industry/climatologists analysts say anything below 11,000 isn’t going to survive for the long-term.

2.) Against the elements. If skiing is confined to elevations above11,000 feet, it’s not going to be the sort of luxurious terrain or Bluebird days you think of. Vegetation is less resilient. Winds are less forgiving, both to skiers and for keeping snow on the mountains. Increased altitude sickness - fewer people are able to do sports at higher altitudes. How does the cold affect the season length? This could be depicted by an illustration/icon/list

of the different conditions at higher elevations. These conditions aren't for the light of heart; skiers and riders will have to be more willing to tough the elements.

3.) Moguls of the moguls. A graphic that shows who the major players are, which ski area they own and where they're represented. This would probably be a map with colors representing the big players — would also be cool to see a photo of the CEO/COO of the corporations on a hover. Some of the giants: Vail resorts, Intrawest, Powdr Corp., KSL Capitol Partners, JMA Ventures, Aspen Skiing Co., and CNL Lifestyle Properties.

4. Water explainer. This info-graphic will include a list of the large resorts and the breakdown of water right ownership. This will show which companies and ski areas are operating under US Forest Service owned water rights, or whether they've acquired their own and how senior or junior those water rights are. Included in this graphic, or perhaps in another one: How much snow is needed (visual of snowpack and average base that ski areas need to open and stay open). How much water for snowmaking? Where is the water held – in reservoir, pulled from streams?

**August 13, 2015:**

WEEK 2 - Thanks for opening the email, cuz ya know, how many of your other students stuff your inboxes with idyll mountain snapshots? It's been another glorious week in Paonia, Colorado, and I made my deadline for my story this afternoon. It's been a busy week for web, and I've spent most of my time this week keeping up with my assignments for the website, though I have done more reporting on the Wasatch One proposal brewing in Park City, Utah. That project — a proposed 18,000-acre "mega resort" — is spurring outcry from local businesses and community members that fear gentrification of their "ruff [sic] and rugged" ski town. Interesting stuff that will likely

turn into story fodder for my ski industry five-part series. See that coverage plan here: http://bit.ly/1gbG21p. I have a radio show this Saturday (dandy bluegrass slot) from noon until 2 p.m. (Mountain time). Live stream at KVNF.org, and drink a beer when you hear something you like.

New stories this week: Publishing online tomorrow is a story about the gold mining industry in Nevada. When gold prices continue to drop internationally, how insulated from market forces can a rural gold mining town remain? Elko, Nevada, has so far been immune to the notoriously fickle gold market and local officials say the conventional wisdom of the "boom or bust" is not true. But not is all as it appears. Two prominent international gold corporations have invested millions into mining operations there, and as the commodity's value increased steadily over the past decade, the industry has insulated the community and sparked new housing and retail projects. On the other side of the coin, there's an extreme housing shortage and an alarming rise in homelessness. While the gold industry helps the community stay afloat, economical comfort comes at a price. Read that story here: http://bit.ly/1Pm10H2

Appearing in the print magazine: This week I wrote a "Latest" column about the Elwha Dam in Washington State. When that structure was removed in 2011 — marking the largest such removal in the country to date — Elwha emerged as an opportune testing ground for river restoration. Biologists jumped on the opportunity to document what happens to a river and its fish populations when waters can flow freely. My story answered that question: Salmon populations responded quickly to improved conditions, and sediment long trapped behind the dam has made its way to the mouth of the Elwha and restored beaches that had corroded. This story will cross-publish online when the

print edition is distributed August 24.

**August 20, 2015:**

WEEK 3 - A tad late with the memo this morning, but that's alright. Not much has developed since last week; I'm off for web this week, so I don't have a deadline for a story. Next up: First article in the ski series is due to my editors August 31, so I'm diving into that very deeply. A few days ago, I was having a sort of existential crisis about the series and its relevance. But, I think I've gotten over that. A changing ski area is another wrinkle in the climate change story — which will continue to be the story of our time — but the shifting strategies of the ski executives and the diminishing conditions of the ski hills is one of the only ways that the rich and privileged class are going to feel the effects of climate change. It's eerie to think about wealthy ski towns and its behemoth mansions sitting empty in an era with less and less skiing.

**August 27, 2015:**

WEEK 4 - Deep into the investigation. Doubting every choice I've ever made in my life. Just kidding. My editor has given me a few weeks off of my other deadlines to get the ski industry series off the ground. My first deadline is at the end of the day tomorrow (Friday, August 28). That story will focus on small ski areas and the trend toward nonprofit models as a way to stay more resilient to climate uncertainties. I'm looking forward to this -- I've done a ton of reporting, maybe too much, but I have two very interesting character arcs that I'm going to weave together. As you know, information moves fast, so the series continues to evolve. It's exciting to see the process unfold, and I had a major breakthrough with my editors early in the week. I was feeling confined by the pitches I submitted; trying to fit my reporting into the narrow scope I defined was proving to be far too restrictive, and I was running into more interesting

things I wanted to investigate further.

One example: I stumbled across an interesting ski hill yesterday in Mt. Hood, Oregon, that has had the longest ski season in the country. The area has been able to sustain summer skiing through Labor Day most years because of a permafrost snowfield. But this year, they had to shut down summer skiing August 4 (the earliest in their 45-year summer skiing history). The Palmer Snowfield is exposed and for the first time that my source has seen, the green permafrost under-layer is retreating. Climate science says gaseous releases from melting permafrost perpetuates accelerated heating, and the fact that this permafrost field is retreating now indicates very serious long-term change there. I think this is a fascinating story with an interesting geological background -- the Palmer Snowfield wouldn't exist if there hadn't been a volcanic eruption that caved in the southern side of the mountain some 1,200 years ago (Mt. Hood is considered a dormant volcano), and there is a ton of research out of the Portland State University about glaciers, climate change and Mt. Hood.

Fortunately, my editors are going to allow me to approach this with more flexibility, so the Palmer glacier is now also part of the series (will likely publish as the second installment sometime not long after Labor Day, since the summer skiing would have extended until about that time). I'm also preparing to set up travel plans for a story that will center around big happenings in Park City, Utah. That will happen late September or October.

Analysis component: No movement yet, besides complaining about it to my significant other, family, friends, and my journal (which has listened with the most decency). As you all know, I am working full-time here at the magazine. This means I

need to work on the analysis component after work hours or on the weekend, and I just simply haven't bothered with this dull chore yet. I'm not a big fan of Mizzou's professional project requirement; it does not accommodate those of us who want to be practitioners -- particularly those of us who want to be investigative reporters. The research that goes into my investigation is extremely immersive, and parsing through documents, filing and processing FOIA requests, interviews, research, clip searches and everything else I do on a daily basis is extraordinarily time consuming. This is not even taking into account the other responsibilities I have at HCN outside of my robust professional project that they've been so kind to host and advise.

HOWEVER, I will conform to this incredibly tedious requirement. Soon. I need to set up interview with environmental journalists to understand their sourcing process and how they avoid clichés. I will also follow up with Mark Horvit to get the contact information of a journalist who did not avoid a cliché. When I interview her, I will assess what went wrong in her process.

Housekeeping: Bill recommended I share challenges and how I overcame them week-to-week. Frankly, there are many successes and failures in a given day — so many in fact, that a book could be written comprising the daily gripes of a journalist (not a bad idea, actually). But to surmise: Things come up. I get over them. I move on, and I don't dwell on "what's hard." It's all hard. Per Bill's request for a "reply all" function: If you even get as far as reading, let alone feeling a sudden inclination to provide feedback, regretfully, you will have to copy the following email addresses (you all do know how to email, right?): allenwi@missouri.edu, hiless@missouri.edu, swaffords@missouri.edu, horvitm@missouri.edu

**September 3, 2015:**

WEEK 5 – I made deadline Number One for the ski series. Now I'm trudging on to the next in the series. Our plan is to get the first few articles of the series written and the rest secured before we begin publishing them. I'll also have to write an editor's note that will introduce the series and give readers the preemptive WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN!? introduction. That brief prologue will also help promote the series. The stories have evolved and shifted as I've gotten deeper in the reporting and peeled back more layers. Briefly, here's a run-down of what I'm covering:

>(DEADLINE MADE) The first story will address the trend of many small "mom-n-pop" areas closing over the past decade as the small operations face financial strain and climate uncertainties. One way some have dealt with the challenges is switching to a nonprofit model. That switch has been successful for many small ski areas and highlights a special relationship within the communities they operate; there's pride and ownership over the hills and a strong desire to preserve the areas. The article asks: Could the nonprofit model be a way for smaller areas to stay alive?

>I'll be traveling to Park City to cover industry consolidation and how that affects communities. There's also a lot of interesting maneuvering going on with the One Wasatch proposal and the final Mountain Accord that was finally signed recently. There's a good story here on policy and collaboration — and how the large corporations are trying to leverage the policies to move in their favor. In the end, the national industry could change forever if Ski Utah and the resorts in Park City are able to pull of this historic, 18,000-acre "mega resort" connectivity project.

>In Mt. Hood, Oregon, Timberline Lodge is facing severe climate impacts, and those

effects are taking a toll on their summer skiing program. The public resort has the longest ski season in North America and has been able to sustain summer skiing through Labor Day on a permafrost area, called the Palmer Snowfield. This year, operators had to shut down summer skiing August 3, the earliest in the history of the area. Now, the green permafrost layer is exposed and retreating, but there's nothing the are can do to slow down the retreating, says Jon Tullis, spokesman of the ski area. Portland State University geology professor Andrew Fountain has long studied the effects of climate change on Mt. Hood's glaciers, but the Palmer Snowfield's resilience to climate effects so far has puzzled him; it hasn't retreated as quickly as other glaciers there. Fountain says the grooming and snow farming efforts by the ski area has unintentionally aided its preservation.

>As ski resorts are vying for more water, the industry's role in future water fights in coming into focus, and I think it's time for a story that looks at the scrappy efforts of the ski industry to secure more water for their snowmaking operations, which would help them stay viable during drier years. Currently, Aspen Skiing Co. and the American Rivers organization are in opposition over the Water Rights Protection Act that would affect water rights through public lands. American Rivers is trying to get the industry to drop support for the bill, which would surely cause harm to river health if it goes through. Back in 2012, the National Ski Areas Association sued the U.S. Forest Service when the agency tried to get ski areas to transfer water rights as part of their permit renewals. The ski industry likened the move to "taking of personal property," and scored a huge win for the industry when it won the litigation.

Also (this particularly pertains to Mark Horvit): At a coffee meeting with the

*HCN* publisher, Paul Larmer, this morning, I discussed my investigative journalism project on the US Forest Service's cozy relationship with the ski industry in Colorado and the Laissez-faire regulation on carrying capacity limits for the resorts. Even though this falls outside of the climate change scope, he's really interested in running this as part of the package. So there's a possibility that could also be folded in at this point. The weight of this project is heavy, but I've never felt more excited about anything. It's like an unruly and ever expanding blob tossing about like an undisciplined child in my hands.

Exciting update: During my coffee meeting with Paul Larmer, we discussed the ski industry project and how we can influence the impact of the series. He wants me to work with our community outreach and social media director, Gretchen King, to publicize the series before we start publishing. He also wants me to work with her to work out some exciting cross-publishing opportunities with *Outside* magazine, *Powder*, *Transworld Snowboarding* and other outlets. Does anyone have any input on this? Gretchen King will work with the collaborating publications and offer the series as part of our syndication (so they wouldn't have any editorial control necessarily, but could run the series -- or part of it -- for a small fee). We've already done similar collaborations in the past. It seems this is my editors' attempts at getting more exposure for *HCN* content. I'm excited about the prospect of appearing to a broader audience and don't see any drawback. Anyone have insight to share?

Analysis component: I sent a note to Mark Horvit asking for a possible source's contact information. I've begun crafting questions for my sources and will send those along in an upcoming memo. I'll plan on scheduling interviews before the end of September, conduct them through October and then craft the trade publication article by

the first week of November.

And next up in the sprawling epic of master's correspondence is a little housekeeping, and your weekly Ripe Gripes Report of how your beloved, intrepid journalist overcame challenges over the past week. I thought to myself several times, '"just shut up and conform to the tedium and busy work that graduate school still begs of you." Communicate with editors.

**September 10, 2015:**

WEEK 6 - Today I'll be in Grand Junction, Colorado, for the Annual Water Seminar. This year's discussion is: "Will What's Happening in California Stay in California?: From California to Colorado: dealing with drought today and planning for it tomorrow." Link: http://bit.ly/1IIf8tf. I don't have an assignment, but this will be a good experience to soak up knowledge and develop story ideas. Eric Kuhn, a water policy maker that helped draft the Colorado Water Plan, invited me to this seminar. He recently paid a visit to the *HCN* office, and I asked him questions about recreational vs. riparian waters rights and how the drought has effected junior allocation of rights (ie for snowmaking). He's a great source and very helpful.

Lessons in rejection: I submitted the following pitch to our magazine planning meeting this week. I got turned down, but only because the science is so nascent and my editors weren't sure what the broad implications are. "Will it matter if we never know?" "What will happen if we find out?" Before I can move on this, I need to add another layer of reporting and interview the geologist Andrew Fountain again. Big question: What's at stake here? I also need to cross-check with another scientist about whether it truly is unusual that a snowfield with centuries of built-up permafrost is melting more slowly

than glaciers at Mt. Hood. Please take a look at the following pitch (as it appeared in the weekly pitch/feature planning meeting) and let me know what opportunities you see for an angle into this story. If I can't land this in the magazine, I'm going to pursue it for a web story regardless.

Pitch – Paige Blankenbuehler, HCN intern

--An unexpected preservation success could melt before its lessons are gleaned

Every afternoon, when the sun is most unforgiving, Jon Tullis, manager of Timberline Lodge ski resort at Mt. Hood, takes a long ride up a chair lift to the Palmer Snowfield at 8,500 feet — mostly to see if it's still there. The area, a layer cake of centuries of snow, has retreated dramatically over the past year. This year, Tullis had to shut down public summer skiing operations August 3, the earliest in the nearly 80 years that the ski area has been running (typically, people ski there through Labor Day). Now, the Palmer is a disparate patch of dusty white amid a brown mountainside.

Timberline Lodge sits in the heart of the North Cascades in Washington State, which has more mountain ice than most states (second only to Alaska). The retreat of glaciers this year has "accelerated at an eye-popping pace," and the area could lose a record amount of its glacier mass this year, Mauri Pelto, director of the North Cascades Glacier Climate Project, told Circle of Blue last week.

The Palmer Snowfield, though, is melting significantly slower than the glaciers on Mt. Hood, even though it sits on a south-facing slope, and because Palmer isn't a glacier, there's less mass to insulate it, which would typically afford for a faster retreat. Andrew Fountain, a Portland State University climatologist and professor

of geology that has studied glaciers on Mt. Hood for 30 years, says it's puzzling Palmer exists at all.

The snowfield's existence has nagged at Fountain since 1997, when he began glacial research in the American West. Now, Fountain has a theory about how the field has been so resistant to climate change effects. Timberline Lodge's daily grooming efforts push dirt and rock debris off of the field, which he thinks may slow down melting. Last year Fountain and two graduate students at Portland State University conducted a study at the nearby Eliot Glacier to see if a thin layer of dust, ash, dirt and rock could accelerate melting. They found that the glacier melted more quickly when debris was present. But that's not the whole story, and Fountain's perplexing little field continues to taunt him. The Palmer Snowfield is an area of high variability and contradiction: How can it stay so preserved after skier traffic and erosion? Mt. Hood is considered an active volcano, even though the last eruption was 1866. Thermal radiation documented near the Palmer Snowfield, Fountain says, should accelerate melting. But despite its resistance to melting, climate change takes a heavier toll every year. The Palmer Snowfield could disappear before science can make sense of it, but now, Fountain and Tullis are coordinating efforts to research the area for the first time.

This is a story about happenstance preservation by a ski resort in a place where success is a scientific conundrum — and the race to document ski management practices and the impact on permafrost areas before the snowfield melts completely. This specific case of preservation could have broad significance if the area's resiliency is used as a model for maintaining snow and ice at other places,

too. Even if there are no ski operations in areas with extreme glacial retreat, similar grooming and snowfarming practices (moving snow from one place to insulate another) used by the ski industry could be adopted by conservationists who want to protect alpine ecosystems and sustain glacial mass.

HCN has covered recreation at the Mt. Hood area before ("Mt. Hood Recreation May Go Big Time," 06/24/02), but never from a geological perspective or about the intersection of a ski area unwittingly preserving glacial ice and permafrost. National media has recently covered the quick retreat of glaciers at Mt. Hood, but no one has written a story about the Palmer Snowfield at Timberline Lodge or the research at Portland State University. This could run as a one or two-page FOB story with photos that Fountain sent to me of the Palmer Snowfield that compare its mass from 1901 to last month. Another way to approach this could be as an Uncommon Westerner with more of a focus on Fountain's fascination with the field, which likens a bit to Captain Ahab's monomaniacal pursuit of the white whale.

Since the narrative focuses on the retreating permafrost, there are special time considerations. This story would be timely through the beginning of the ski season (mid-October) as Fountain and Tullis begin to make plans for research on the Palmer Snowfield, but it will have less impact if there is a lot of snowfall at Timberline, so it would be best to get in front of winter. The brewing El Niño, an irregular weather pattern marked by warmer temperatures in the Pacific, causes above average snowfall for parts of the West, but the most recent forecasts presented by Michael Anderson, California's state climatologist for the

Department of Water Resources, says the extreme event is likely to rain out much of California and the Pacific Northwest. Tullis says previous El Ninos resulted in more mild winters at Mt. Hood. Though unfortunate for thirsty drought communities, if El Nino flops in the PNW, we'll have more time to run the story.

-Paige Blankenbuehler

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Ski series cross-publishing update: I have a meeting Friday with my closest editors and our community outreach and social media director, Gretchen King, to publicize the series before we start publishing. We're planning to partner with *Outside* magazine, *Powder* magazine, *Transworld Snowboarding* and other outlets — however, I found out that "partnering" means that these outlets will post stories on their social media feeds, not their websites or in their print publications. So, the glamour of exposure and an idyllic writer's whimsical life has dissipated as if a floating cloud, raining only for a moment.

Analysis component: Trying to find a source that can be an example of what not to do in sourcing processes, but am currently a little stalled out on that. I've had a brief exchange with Mark Horvit and will follow up on that in the coming days. I've begun crafting questions for my sources and will send those along in an upcoming memo. I'll plan on scheduling interviews before the end of September, conduct them through October and then craft the trade publication article by the first week of November.

Your weekly Ripe Gripes: Travel often to get perspective. Sleep is important.

Don't compare yourself to others. If a pitch gets repudiated, don't give up on the story (so long as you feel there is a story).

**September 17, 2015:**

WEEK 7 - Latest story was a Q&A with a historian about white-washing history. This story jumped off from the changes in the Advanced Placement US History curriculum that removed the racial connotation from Manifest Destiny. Read that here: http://bit.ly/1Lju5n8. It's been really busy at work. The ski series is going well. Trying to stay on top of everything. I'm preparing for a reporting trip to Park City, Utah, next month. This story is going to be put into a sort of "defeating the monster" plot line. Here's how it goes: I need to figure out how my band of backcountry skiers is pushing the beast away. I'm stepping into this story after one devastating defeat has already been delivered: Vail buys up Park City and the Canyons and consolidates. But another, larger threat is looming. If Ski Utah moves forward with One Wasatch -- which it fully intends to do -- everything the community has fought to preserve will be changed; Salt Lake City and the resorts of Park City will be the latest, greatest marketing ploy to bring in international tourism. My narrative might begin at the beginning, before Vail came to town. I'll describe how the backcountry skiers and the Wasatch Backcountry Alliance came together to fight Vail. Was their effort strong enough? Why did it fail? Then, I'll leave the reader with an understanding of the new threat and if it's even possible for an underdog to prevail against such corporate forces. Is this underdog story a tragedy? Sadly, it very well could be.

Analysis component: Trying to find a source that can be an example of what not to do in sourcing processes, but am currently a little stalled out on that. I've had a brief exchange with Mark Horvit and will follow up on that. Really just need to dive in.

**October 1, 2015:**

DOUBLE ISSUE — WEEKS 8 and 9 - I had to take last week off, because of a hefty, investigative assignment from my editor. The story centers around the University of Colorado Leeds School of Business and economic research that had heavy-handed pro-fracking industry influence. My investigation and article, which came off the heels of a Colorado Open Records Act request by Greenpeace and the *Boulder Weekly*, is ahead of any main-stream coverage. I'm the first to get on-the-record comment from the university and its researchers in the middle of this crazy collaboration between university research and a public relations firm working on behalf of the fracking industry to orchestrate a campaign during a political storm last year. The Leeds school's research found that fracking had a positive impact on the state's economy, and prevented a ballot initiative — that would have given communities the power to ban fracking in their areas — from going to the polls.

As part of my reporting, I interviewed the researcher, Brian Lewandowski, who is at the center of this contention. I went through more than 2,000 pages of documents and emails that showed a very close relationship between Lewandowski and his clients. He even allowed the American Petroleum Institute to write media-ready quotes for him. In another instance, Lewandowski worked closed with API and the Common Sense Policy Roundtable, an association that's become well known as a pro-fracking and oil and gas industry lobbying front group, to time the release of the studies to coincide with an industry campaign.

For the story I also interviewed Cary Nelson, former president of the American Association of University Professors and author of academia-industry guidelines for these

types of collaborations. Nelson was a great source that provided a deeper perspective on the implications that these sorts of entanglements have on public perception of university research and how the public trust of energy research has eroded. I received this assignment last Wednesday (the same day I was wrapping up my Palmer Snowfield story) and have been really pushing hard on this ever since. My story will publish today — I'll send along a link.

Ski series update: My story about summer skiing dwindling at Mt. Hood published last week. The story was also picked up by *Outside* magazine and had the highest traffic on the site earlier this week. I was really happy with the way this story turned out, and I really wanted to publish a climate change story. Here it is: What Mt. Hood’s fading summer ski season means for the region: As year-round skiing in the Pacific Northwest diminishes, what else will be lost? So, there's one goal accomplished. That article is the second in my series, and in just a few short weeks, I'm traveling to Park City, Utah, for my story on consolidation in the ski industry there and how backcountry skiing will be affected.

Analysis component: The objective here is to write a trade publication-worthy article on sourcing for environmental feature stories. I found a striking example in the recent *SEJournal* that I want to focus on. I'm planning on interviewing the writer to assess and analyze her process. The article will analyze the Pulitzer Prize finalist story "Chasing Bayla," by *Boston Globe* feature writer, Sarah Schweitzer.

The 2014 story tells the tale of the North Atlantic right whale, one of the world's most endangered whale species, and one scientist's effort to save it. The narrative follows the framework of a quest -- one that in some ways echoes the desperate notes of Ahab's

monomaniacal pursuit of the white whale. There's danger of a cliché any time your story rings too closely to this, arguably overused metaphor. Schweitzer's idea was admittedly cliché, but it received widespread praise and was a finalist for the 2015 Pulitzer Prize in feature writing. How did she pull it off? That's going to be the crux of my article. As I'm interviewing sourcing for the analysis, I'll have to keep an number of overarching themes and Big Picture questions in mind. What can this tell us about story arcs, narratives and avoiding cliché? Schweitzer obviously pulled it off in her story, but did she ever fear that she was running the risk of cliché? How did she keep this story unique? How did familiarity help this story resonate with readers? Did her main character, the scientist Michael Moore, ever divert from the logical narrative? How did she handle those deviations if he did? How did she develop the arc?

Schweitzer will serve as my primary interview for this story. I will also conduct interviews with journalists familiar with the piece, and if possible the editor that gave the assignment. Schweitzer found her source by placing a random call to the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and a public relations person connected her directly to Michael Moore. This story in a basic sense, was not deeply sourced. I would ask Schweitzer why she called the Woods Hole center, how she ensured that the story was worth telling (how deeply did she vet Moore?) and if she feels she was lucky in finding such a complete and compelling story.

Other important themes to touch on in my article will be:

*Source v. character: a process and analysis. How did Schweitzer develop her characters? How did she make readers care about one more endangered animal? How did she turn a whale into a character, Bayla? Why was that the headline? How did she arrive at that? In

developing Bayla's character, Schweitzer used multimedia that served as a parallel visual story to the narrative about Moore's quest. Did she ever consider weaving the two narrative together in text? Why or why not? How would she have done the story if she had to approach it without the visual component?

*Sourcing involved figuring out the character and then developing it. How did Schweitzer get normally private people to share their lives with the public? How did she get the buy-in? Who were these people, hoe did she find them? Another important part of sourcing is who just spoke with her on background. Were there any sources she left out of the story? How did she make those decisions -- how did she determine who was essential and who wasn't? How would the story have changed with a different cast of characters?

When she's not in the office, Schweitzer talks about allowing her sources "to take over her mind." She does this by imagining how her characters would react in certain situations and how they might look when they grow older. I would like to ask her when she began doing this and how's it's helped her process. How does this process bring a richness to the story? Why does it help? If there a risk in making assumptions that might not be true? How do those thoughts come into play during the interviewing process? What about the writing process? How might those preconceptions leak into the fabric of the story?

I will also need to make it explicitly clear why there was a risk of cliché for this story in particular. 1. Ahab and the white whale = an overused metaphor -- I'll need research or some backing for that. 2. Plot structure of 'the quest." Why is it over done?

*Journalists default to already established narrative plots and frameworks. This practice

has risks and benefits. Benefit: Familiarity that resonates with the reader. Risk: Cliché. At what point does a journalist step over the fine line between familiarity and cliché? To address this, I will need to interview scholars with a specialty in media research. I will need scholarly definitions of familiar and cliché in the journalistic context.

This analysis will begin with a deep inventory of Schweitzer's sourcing (similar to an assignment in Mark Horvit's investigative reporting class): How was this story sources? How many sources were there, primary and otherwise? Once an inventory of the sourcing is taken, I'll begin with an analysis of "Chasing Bayla" and how it fits with research on sourcing and familiarity. Next step: set up an interview with Schweitzer.

**October 8, 2015:**

WEEK 10 - Top item of importance: I'm shooting for a November 30 defense date. Does this work for everyone? That's the day after Thanksgiving Break, and I'll need to know as soon as possible so I can make arrangements and give my editor notice. Please get back to me by the end of the day tomorrow. I'll send a follow-up email after this memo to nudge.

Latest: The University of Colorado responded to my article by submitting a Letter to the Editor. A bit of back-peddling on their part. See the link for that response at the end of my article: http://bit.ly/1Mgdm04. More on that story: KGNU Community Radio based near Boulder, Colorado, interviewed me about the story. Please listen to the audio; I think I did a decent job, but I've never done anything like that before, so I certainly welcome feedback. As a journalist, it's a little bizarre to be on the other side of the interview. Eeek! That radio spot aired yesterday: http://bit.ly/1OnKFED.

So, the Leeds/fracking story made some waves. It has been an exciting week, and I learned a lot from reporting, writing and dealing with that story post-pub. When you get

close to the truth, the more likely University officials will try to bully you into submission. I held my own. I'm also fascinated by the industry-funded research beat. We're treading dangerous waters as a society because partnerships like the Leeds School of Business and the American Petroleum Institute are more common than not. The oil and gas industry is also one of the wealthiest industries in the history of our country. It's really important to hold this industry and our researchers accountable. Can everyone be bought? The cynic in me doesn't have a very nice answer to that question.

Upcoming travel: It's beginning to come together! I'll be traveling down to Park City, Utah, October 20 through October 23, to report my feature on how consolidation of Park City's ski industry has changed the face of backcountry skiing there. I'm pursuing a few interesting characters to help me tell this story. Through several preliminary interviews that I've done in preparation for the trip, some of my sources have told me about this man known as the Wizard of the Wasatch. He's an older gentleman that's very renown in the backcountry skiing community for being a curmudgeon, renegade skier and overall resister of corporate-induced change. He keeps away form people. My quest, however, is to find him. His name is Bob Athey. I've discovered that this community is unexpectedly complex. It will be interesting to spend a few days on the ground reporting about these folks and telling their story. There's a big sense of rage but also helplessness across the board. Vail has come to town, no one likes it, but there's no changing it now. But there's another looming threat: further expansion and a behemoth connection project that would merge the six ski resorts in the Wasatch into one, European-inspired mega resort - 18,000 acres smack in the middle of the modest Wasatch Range. As the industry consolidates and pass prices are too expansive to be within the reach of the average

family, more people are being pushed into the backcountry. But as those resorts grow, the space for turns outside of the ski area cornucopia continues to shrink, and over the past five years, crowding in the backcountry has become very noticeable. This story is the main thing on my plate currently, but I'm also working on a few shorter stories that will go in the print magazine.

I'm traveling to Santa Cruz, New Mexico, November 9-11, to visit a few smaller ski areas that have experienced drought and ethical conundrums with snowmaking. While I'm here, I'm also meeting with an important contact from the California ski scene that's going to discuss what it's like to have a ski area in the sore spot of the state's four-year drought. This story will be the fourth in my series. I'm working with my editors about re-jiggering my investigative reporting project to do another story about the Forest Service's laissez faire management of the ski resorts that operate on special leases on public lands. It's crazy to think, but I might actually run out of time in the internship before we can wrap up a fifth story. Right now, our (my editors and myself) realistic goal is to finish four stories and write an editor's note that will high some of the common threads between my coverage and assess how the industry has changed in response to climate change, economic forces and skier habits.

Analysis component: Last week, I sent you all a plan of my analysis component. Surely you noticed the diversion from the original proposal. This is why I think this deeper analysis of one feature — a thorough case study and recommendation for industry best practice — is the way to go:

*Quality over quantity. By taking a deep look at a successful environmental feature story, I will better synthesize what the author did right, how she went about that process and

what other journalists can learn from this case study.

*I will still conduct very thorough and thoughtful interviews with sources that were involved in each step of this reporter's process including: her main source and character (how did he feel throughout the process? How did Schweitzer get buy-in? Why did he trust her? What did she do well from the source's perspective? What could she have done better?), her editor (how did they decide on which sources to leave in the story? which ones didn't make the cut and why? From the editor's perspective, what did Schweitzer do especially well? What was difficult to iron out?) and an outside media theorist that can comment on successful sourcing practices and assess what Schweitzer did particularly well. Can I get a hold of all these people within ONLY FOUR WEEKS!? You betcha! I already completed my anchor interview with Sarah Schweitzer (the reporter and writer of the story). Through Schweitzer, I've also made connected with her editor. I feel confident I can also get her main source, Michael Moore on the line, too. Perhaps the challenge here will be getting a good authority on sourcing. Any recommendations? I'm looking. So there's that. Please send along feedback about this big change to the proposal. I'd like to make necessary changes now as opposed to after my defense date.

Interesting opportunities: I may get offered a job. I'm fairly far along in the interviewing process for a climate change/science reporter position at *Upworthy*, a digital media start-up. More details about that next week if I get offered the position, but as of right now, it's something I'm quite intrigued by and interested in. If I am offered the job, I think I will accept, but I do have some trepidation about the company. PLEASE, COMMITTEE: FEEDBACK/ADVICE/ETC. So, I suppose that's all for this week.

**October 15, 2015:**

WEEK 11 - I had the opportunity to escape the ball and chain that is the office and get out into the San Luis Valley in south-central Colorado to report on a water dispute. The story here is very interesting but extraordinarily convoluted. Essentially, there is a group of ranchers in the Glen Meadow Ditch in the San Luis Valley that is facing a dilemma that would affect their water supply.

The ranchers are on the Western side of this valley and largely have senior rights to water — some dating back to 1890. On the other side of the valley, potato farmers have significant clout, money and political power. A recent development, River Island Ranch, purchased senior water from the San Luis Water Conservancy. That's not the problem, because the developers got a bid on the consumptive use water. The water association though, anticipating conditional uses of water for future development, has also put a claim on nonconsumptive use water and will divert seepage to directly back into the Rio Grande River instead of allowing the flows to recharge the Anaconda and Meadow Glen ditches. In doing this, the ranchers on the other side of the valley will not see their water. There's a litigation on this and a 5-day trial set to begin on December 7. Ranchers in the Meadow Glen Ditch are in a difficult position, because many of them didn't know about the diversion until the Anaconda dried up last year. When they filed a motion to intervene in the case against the San Luis Water Conservancy, the judge denied it. Their last hope lays with Jim Warner, a man with an 1890 senior water right and a shiny blonde, grey pony-tail that rests under his large, white cowboy hat. Warner filed his case against the water association in 2009.

Back in 1985, Warner was dried up and it's been "a burr in his saddle ever since." Warner says that the San Luis Valley is run by a small group of people based in the

Denver area and calls it a "water cartel" that sways in the direction of money and power. Here, senior water rights are mere pieces of paper and Colorado Water Law has enough stipulations and exceptions that junior water can impede on senior water. This however, is different. If the Meadow Glen Ditch ranchers and Warner lose this case, it will be an unprecedented claim on nonconsumptive water that alters the Colorado Water Doctrine.

The San Luis Valley has a long and intrepid history of water wrangling and wars. My sources say its the Wild West and the sorts of things that the water associations get away with here, could never happen elsewhere. It's a story that's spun my head in a swirl. I'm trying to peel back the layers here, while I'm trying to get a handle on what's going on and how Colorado water law can allow for such disregard of senior rights downstream from a development. In so many ways, this still doesn't make sense. But even my fieldwork down there is a story in itself.

[A section of this memo has been removed due to confidentiality concerns].

Ski series update: I leave for Park City, Utah, on Tuesday and will be reporting there for all of next week. My next memo will be transmitted from the field, and I'm looking forward to updating all of you on the project. It's been somewhat difficult to balance this project with my other stories because it doesn't fit quite so neatly into *HCN's* typical purview. They have agreed to support it, but there's the challenge of our readers not really caring about a poor, elitist industry changing because of climate change. The biggest battle has been answering the ever-present question: "Who cares?" Sometimes, I don't know why I care, but ultimately, it's because I think the ski industry is a corporate monster that has many interesting layers and it beckons to a much bigger idea: All of this

is an underdog story and the picturesque industry of little western coal towns turning into ski towns have evaporated into a homogenous corporate experience.

Park City is a city on the edge of this and the backcountry users are so disorganized that corporate power will likely succeed into transforming the rugged Wasatch into a 18,000 "mega resort" modeled after the likes of the European Alps. But we're not Europe. How much should we allow our identity to be stripped away from us? While I'm in Park City, I've set up numerous interviews with backcountry users, the Wasatch Backcountry Alliance, local businesses, Ski Utah and the leaders of the ONE Wasatch proposal.

Analysis component: The ball is (finally) really moving on this. I've interviewed Sarah Schweitzer and her main source, Michael Moore. I'm in the process of transcribing those transcripts and I've reached out to Schweitzer's editor for an interview, as well. He said he would be delighted to speak with me. So, there's three interviews. Now, I need to find a media authority to weigh in on sourcing and story arcs. I'll find that person and reach out for an interview within a week. I am taking tomorrow off from work so I can really dive in and work on this project and putting everything together. Do I need to re-do the original proposal since this analysis is a diversion from the original plan?

**October 22, 2015:**

*ANNOUNCEMENT! I will defend my Master's Professional Project at 1p.m. in RJI 011 in the Journalism Library on Tuesday, December 1. Please add to your calendars.

WEEK 12 - I departed Paonia on Tuesday morning to head out to Park City, Utah, for a reporting trip. This story will run as part of my series on the changing face of the ski industry. I'll be on assignment and on the road through Friday and will report back to the office on Monday. The story here is an underdog story that's turning more and more into

a tragedy with each interview I do. The consolidation of the ski industry in Park City has drove up lift ticket prices which in turn has inspired more people to forego the season pass/daily lift tickets and go to the backcountry. Park City is a unique place because the access to the Wasatch Range is very good. However, backcountry user has increased significantly over the past five years and several users complain about crowding; some of my sources say it's getting to a point that it's become dangerous. Now, the ski areas all have plans to expand further into the backcountry. There are a few groups that represent backcountry users - Wasatch Backcountry Alliance and Save Our Canyons — but within them, relationships are fractured. Basically, the backcountry users haven't been able to organize themselves to stand up to the corporate forces that continue to gobble up terrain.

My itinerary has been really packed since I began reporting Tuesday night, so it's going to take some time to sort through all of my notes. Honestly, I'm exhausted and trying to reboot my brain with a cup of coffee in Salt Lake City. I have a half hour until my next interviewee arrives, and I'll be in and out of other interviews through 8:30 this evening. Tomorrow is much of the same. Field reporting is so joyous and exhausting. But in a good way. It all becomes a blur until you sit down with your notebook and computer.

This morning I had two interviews that came from different sides of the fence. The first - at 8 this morning - is a backcountry skier and pilot for Delta. He lives in a very large home nestled in a prestigious neighborhood at the heart of Park City. He's very much in favor of the ONE Wasatch plan for a six resort connectivity and mega resort. After that, I met with a longtime backcountry skier who is passionate about keeping corporate forces at bay in the Wasatch. He's been touring in the Wasatch for more than 40 years, and talking about changes in attitudes between the backcountry community and the

ski resorts in PC made him cry during our interview. He's an open socialist, skis in jeans, 20-year-old vintage Solomon boots and on a pair of old, wood-cored Dynastar skis he bought for $20. Last season, he had an altercation with patrollers from Alta when he was out snowshoeing with his wife in the backcountry. They rerouted him onto avalanche debris path away from the touring trial he was on. He was separated from his wife and got in an argument about how the ski resort has no right to prevent a public citizen from accessing public lands, and ended up vandalizing an Alta sign that proclaimed USFS areas as "their runs."

Tonight I am attending the annual member meeting for the Wasatch Backcountry Alliance, a new group (formed two years ago in response to the Ski Link proposal) that's been fighting the ONE Wasatch plan. Should be interesting.

Ski series update: My deadline for the Park City story in November 9. After that, I'm going to pursue the last story in the series that will look at California ski resorts and the ethical questions they face for snowmaking when their communities have been affected by the four-year exceptional drought. It will be difficult (possibly) to turn around this story given how much traveling I'm doing in November. The internship ends December 11. But that story, and the water war in the San Luis Valley, will likely be the sum of what I'll be able to complete before the job ends and I return to defend my project.

When I come and defend December 1, these stories may still be awaiting publication. But I'll have a better idea by then, and more detailed updates leading up to that time. Regardless, I have completed more than the required 14 weeks of professional work and will have a very nice and varied portfolio to show you from my time at *HCN*.

Analysis component: This week I completed one more interview with Steve

Wilmsen from the Boston Globe who was the editor on the feature. I'm currently working with Profnet to find a media expert that can serve as an outside source and comment on sourcing/ avoiding cliché best practices. On my day-off last week, I completed transcribing the three interviews that I have already done and also began drafting an outline for the structure of the trade article.

**October 29, 2015:**
*ANNOUNCEMENTS* Next week will be the LAST MEMO correspondence.

*November 18 - The chair (Bill) will receive a copy of the completed project for review.

*November 25 - According to university policies, the committee must receive a copy of the finished project five days prior to the defense.

*December 1 - DEFENSE at 1p.m. in RJI 011 in the Journalism Library on Tuesday. Please add to your calendars.

WEEK 13 - After this memo, there will be only one left. Wow! How quickly time goes. It's been a very busy week at *HCN*, most of which I've spent catching up from my reporting trip in Utah and unpacking notes. There are so. many. notes. In three days, I interviewed more than a dozen people and filled up two large notebooks. Obviously I won't use all of the sources directly, but it's been a heavy job to unload all of the information I have floating around in my brain right now. It's an interesting story with a long history and a special place. the vector in my story will be the backcountry user group and how the land battles and their defense of the lifestyle has changed throughout the decades. The Wasatch has changed, but it is a microcosm of a battle people are fighting everywhere: fighting for the few remaining wild places and carving out a personal paradise. The biggest challenge will be fitting the story into the 1,200-word budget that my editor is giving me.

Also this week, I'm setting up a story that will publish mid-next week in collaboration with KVNF Community Radio (where I also volunteer). It's an audio story about how climate change will affect food security and how communities in the West are emerging as leaders as we face more uncertainties. This package will cross-publish at *HCN* and also on KVNF's website. I'm bringing the regional significance to the issue through interviews with my sources in New Mexico and California, while my partner, Jake Ryan, will tackle interviews locally at a climate change expert panel we have coming to Paonia on Monday, November 2. We're using the even as a way into this bigger issue: As climate change alters our seasons and disrupts food security, local communities will need to prepare by building more resiliency into food systems — and the American West, an arid region, will face even larger challenges. Still, the region is a leader for sustainable farming and could help lead the way for similar practices on a global scale.

I'm trying to hammer out these two things, and get the ski story in a good position for my November 9 deadline, so I can take a half-day on Friday to work on my professional project write-up. I'm to the point now where I need to go through my interviews for the analysis and start writing (more on that in the analysis section below). On November 9-12 I'm traveling to Santa Cruz, New Mexico, for a source building reporting trip. I'm going along with my fellow intern and our editorial fellow, but will take advantage of the trip to make moves on my final ski industry story on snowmaking in drought-affected communities. New Mexico - particularly Taos and Flagstaff have been struggling with drought conditions and face ethical dilemmas in their snowmaking practices.

I'm out of office (as is everyone else) from November 25-27 for Thanksgiving, and then I fly out to Saint Louis on November 28 and will then make my way over to Columbia to defend my project December 2. Holidays and travel give me very little time to turn around the Meadow Glen Ditch rancher story that I went to the San Luis Valley to report on a few weeks ago. It will be very tight buttoning up my final projects before the internship is over December 11. What I see as the most viable option for me at the moment is to work with my editor, Brian, to work on the rancher-water-war story as a freelancer to run on web/magazine after my tenure is over. I'm very interested in continuing reporting on the story, but there's just too much to wrap my head around to turn out something of quality while also buttoning up the ski series, completing my other assignments for the magazine and web + finishing the analysis and final professional project update before my defense/end of internship. Phew! Lots of work ahead of me!

Ski series update: My deadline for the Park City story is November 9, and then I'll be working with my editor Tay Wiles to position the final ski story on snowmaking and the ethical questions ski areas face in communities that have been affected by the drought. I've already completed a few interviews for this story, but will need to circle back to the sources I've already spoken to over the phone and also interview a few operation managers from California ski areas. China Peak mountain is located in Tulare County, California, which has widely bee reported as "Ground Zero" of the drought. As the ski season approaches (most areas typically try to open by Christmas -- in California, that has become more and more difficult over the past four years, a struggle that I will illustrate in my story), many areas are dusting off their snowmaking equipment to supplement natural snow with man-made flurries. Now is the time for any of those

operations to begin. I'm hoping my editor will support this final story.

It's going to be tight, no doubt, and I'm a bit nervous that my editor may prioritize some other projects I have going right now. I will update the committee on the final update realistic expectations for the project. The five-part series was a very ambitious undertaking, especially considering how much work I'm required to so beyond the scope of that project. To punctuate this point, some projects (the last ski story and my MGD rancher-water-war story) will be up in the air at the point of my defense, but certainly, I'll include research and story drafts for these particular projects in my documentation for the professional project.

Analysis component: On Thursday, I'm speaking with my final source for the analysis, David Leach, a professor of environmental journalism at the University of Victoria. He has written about clichés in journalism, and his teaching specialty is the use of narrative in environmental features. I'm also in contact with Merrill Perlman, who was recently at the University of Missouri for the Journalism Honors Banquet. She, too, has written about clichés in journalism for the Columbia Journalism Review and after a long tenure at the *New York Times*, is working as a media analyst and consultant. I think Perlman will make a better source for my analysis, though I need to confirm an interview on Friday for the week of November 2. I'll plan on completing both interviews, and perhaps I'll use a few nuggets from each. So there, committee, now that it's almost all said-and-done, I will have completed five interviews for this (tedious) analysis!

Next steps: I need to write up a treatment for the analysis, figure out a structure for the story and start writing. I've already transcribed all of my interviews, and I plan on including those transcripts in the final write-up of the professional project. As I put it all

together, I'm sticking to this plan and addressing many large questions that evolve around a journalist's sourcing habits and the resulting story. The objective here is to write a trade publication-worthy article on sourcing for environmental feature stories.

**November 5, 2015:**

Good afternoon, my most excellent mentors! This is your weekly MA project correspondence from Paige Blankenbuehler — the last one, in fact. Can you believe it?

Big announcement: I'm happy to report that *High Country News* has offered me the editorial fellowship that will extend my contract until December 2016. I accepted. The position comes with more freedom, opportunity to work on more complex magazine stories and I'll get to mentor incoming interns (and the fellowship carries quite the pay increase, too). Honestly, I didn't expect this, but I'm feeling *very* happy and *very* proud that this amazing publication is keeping me on.

... and some reminders: Bill is the chair, so he gets a copy of the completed project for review on November 18. The rest of the committee gets the project November 25.

*December 1 - DEFENSE at 1p.m. in RJI 011 in the Journalism Library on Tuesday. Please add to your calendars.

WEEK 14 - This is the last memo, and it feels very strange writing it. It's been a great experience working on this project while hammering out 40 hours a week at *HCN*. It's been amazing but not without its particular challenges, of course. During my project defense, I'll spend a great deal of time explaining deviations in both the analysis and the practical component of the ski series, which in particular, went through many, many changes. When I first conceived the "Water into Snow" investigation, I didn't know where I would complete the project -- whether it would be on my own, at *HCN* or at

*Mother Jones*. I was just a diffident drifter in the Midwest, missing my home in the West, and looking for a place to land.

Of those three options, I think I ended up at the best possible place. Still, one of my biggest struggles was fitting the project idea into the magazine's purview. My editors and I struggled especially with the water component of this project. It's really up-for-debate how much of an impact snowmaking has on water use and supply for the communities in which operations take place. The consensus in the West is that the water use is negligible compared to other agricultural, recreational and riparian uses. That's true, but with a huge caveat: The need for man-made snow is growing, and ski areas are vying for a slice of the pie that's continuing to shrink. The use of water -- recycled into the snowpack -- makes the water rights held by ski areas a contingency to normal beneficial use of water. I worked with a lawyer to clear up how recreational use, primarily by ski areas, play into water management practices and he told me that water managers don't even factor in non-beneficial use into ski area water audits. That checked out when I talked to Eric Kuhn, of the Colorado River Water Conservancy District. No one beside myself, that I spoke with (and remember, the ski areas are going to be the last to ring their own alarm bell), seem to think that snowmaking makes a meaningful difference for drought-affected communities. It turns out, that the impact is extremely unclear, and much of that is playing out in California now. It's possible I'm too early on this story. Four years of exceptional drought conditions and the worst Sierra snowpack in more than 500 years, is no doubt extreme, but ski area managers aren't having to curb use yet, and people that live in these areas haven't faced water shortages because of what the ski areas are doing. It's a hard story to pin down.

My editors and I are currently discussing if it might be possible to write a story about the ethical questions that water managers and ski areas are facing when they allocate more water for snowmaking in a drought. So far, no one is facing those ethical questions. That in itself is interesting, but is it a story? It would make one hell of an essay. My series may close with a sort of essay-ish story that talks about the challenges the ski industry is facing and how it's attempting to adapt to climate change and economic forces. I would also discuss how the industry hasn't had to face any of the hardest questions yet -- like limits on snowmaking in drought -- but it's coming. From my reporting, my best guess is that in the next 25 years, Tahoe will be thirsty, and resorts below 8,000 feet are done for unless they have really good water allocation contracts. I predict that those resorts under the 8,000 mark that don't have snowmaking operations in California over the next three years will shutter. Those that do have the infrastructure for snowmaking will have a hard time allocating water for it.

LATEST: Last week I mentioned a collaboration with KVNF Community Radio (where I also volunteer) about how climate change will affect food security and how communities in the West are emerging as leaders as we face more uncertainties. That story published this afternoon: http://bit.ly/1KZZdCO. I wrote both the *HCN* audio script that we used in the radio slot and the article that posted on HCN.org. It was a great experience to team up with KVNF's Jake Ryan, who covers local and regional news for the station. I got to see into another medium's process and learned how to use Audition for audio editing. I learned a lot in a short time, and I'm happy with the way the package turned out.

UP AHEAD: I'm still looking at my Park City ski story deadline coming up on

Monday. Dreading it slightly. It's been so long since I traveled to Park City and did all of my reporting, and after this week in the office, some of the original excitement I had about the story has diminished. This makes me very nervous that I've lost my story. I have dozens of pages of notes, and careful interviews, a few good characters but when I was in the field, I had begun writing the story in my head and had this feeling of elation from the clarity. All of the pieces were fitting together in my head so easily, and my conversations with my editor over the phone were great. Now it's all a matter of shitting it out of my brain and into a document. This is the best part. Truly, the writing process has become my most treasured time, but it's difficult and I have so much information I need to nudge into coherence. I have tomorrow to make a lot of progress, and then I head to Denver over the weekend to see my folks and Grandma that's traveling in from Virginia. We lost our Grandpap in September, so the family is getting together in his remembrance. In such conditions, it will be difficult to afford much focus to the story. But I will take the time to refine and edit before Brian gets a version on Monday morning.

On Monday I head off to Santa Fe with my fellow intern, Gloria Dickie, and the editorial fellow, Sarah Tory, for a source building/reporting trip. In part the three of us will open our minds and embrace the learning experience, but we will also enjoy the western extravagances of Santa Fe and local fare in Durango. I'm actually squeezing another ski story into the trip. I'm hoping I can get out in the field with my source on Wednesday. Evidently, in Santa Fe National Forest, more than 1,000 trees — some nascent seedlings and juvenile — were slashed. Michael Gardiner, a special unit investigator with the US Forest Service, says it appears that the area was cleared, without authorization, for glade skiing. There's a ski resort located nearby, but its managers are

not responsible. Gardiner says the effort was ambitious and likely carried out by backcountry users. This is another example of more people trying to squeeze into the ever-shrinking wilderness areas in the West, but this is a particularly egregious one. I'm going to see what I might find out while I'm in the area next week. I'm also touching bases with another source that can clue me in on snowmaking ethics and snowmaking at resorts in California. I have a former Diamond Peak (Truckee - Nevada/California border) that's now in Santa Fe that could provide some insight for me.

I'm trying to hammer out these two things, and get the ski story in a good position for my November 9 deadline, so I can take a half-day on Friday to work on my professional project write-up. I'm to the point now where I need to go through my interviews for the analysis and start writing (more on that in the analysis section below). On November 9-12 I'm traveling to Santa Cruz, New Mexico, for a source building reporting trip. I'm going along with my fellow intern and our editorial fellow, but will take advantage of the trip to make moves on my final ski industry story on snowmaking in drought-affected communities. New Mexico - particularly Taos and Flagstaff have been struggling with drought conditions and face ethical dilemmas in their snowmaking practices.

Now that I know I'm extending my *HCN* contract for another year, I know I'll have time to turn around the Meadow Glen Ditch rancher story that I went to the San Luis Valley to report on a few weeks ago. My editor is an incredible mentor and is helping me get in touch with more sources that will assist in wading through the complexity of water law in the West. Prior appropriation means "first in line, first in right!" The Upper Basin and Lower Basin's 7.5 million acre feet allocations, respectfully.

The 1922 Compact. The Gila River that complicated water use in the lower half of the Colorado River Basin. Our disappearing Salton Sea. Nevada's measly allocation. I know a bit, but there's so, so, so much more.

Analysis component: Only our absolutely, most favorite thing, right??? I've started writing my final paper, and it's coming along. It will require a few hours of concentrated focus tonight. After work these days, I head straight to the Backcountry Bistro and get super high on caffeine — all natural rural pumpkin lattes, in fact. I've had several early mornings and late nights, but my project report is 112 pages now, and the analysis will be finished soon. I still need to import my physical evidence, but will conquer that over the next few days.

That's all she (I) wrote, folks! Thanks for sticking through these memos. I enjoyed writing them, and it kept me focused from week-to-week. Soon I'll see everyone back in Columbia! I hope your semesters are treating all of you kindly.

Respectfully,

Paige Blankenbuehler

Master's Candidate 2015

Missouri School of Journalism

## Chapter Three: Evaluation

What an experience. Working at *High Country News* was an opportunity that presented many tribulations and lessons. Through them all, my love for journalism and writing only strengthened. In November, my editor offered me an extension on my contract to stay with the publication for another year as the editorial fellow. It's a prestigious position and in accepting it, I'm joining the ranks of a small number of other journalists who have held the fellowship. Of that alumni, many are still working for the magazine as correspondents or editors, or they have forged successful careers as freelance journalists or contributors to far-reaching national media outlets. The fellowship is also an opportunity to finish many projects still in process while improving my ability to write for magazines.

When I started working at *HCN*, I must confess, I didn't know how to write for magazines – not a bit. That revelation didn't become clear to me until I was a few weeks into the internship. I always thought I had an understanding of *story*, but I actually hadn't ever produced that type of journalism. So, this experience has been remarkable and has trained me to approach ideas a new way. In magazine journalism, you find yourself going down many, many roads in pursuit of a story, all to find that there might not be one there. A story requires a plot, a logical structure and layered characters. Pursuing magazine stories is a new endeavor for me – but it's been addictive nonetheless.

To understand the weight of this experience, it's important to know how I ended up in a little western town, writing words for *HCN.* My background is in newspaper journalism. Hamster-wheel newspaper journalism, in fact, going around and around in the news cycle to feed the news beast. Daily deadlines. During my undergraduate studies, I

worked for a campus newspaper, and if an event happened on campus, it's a "story." Then I worked at the *Durango Herald.* It was my first internship at a publication. There, too, coverage was for the community, and it didn't take much to pitch an idea. During my time there, I wrote many "stories." Then, my journey brought me to the *Summit Daily News*, which was a very formative experience. I was hired as the environmental/ski industry reporter, but I had to keep tabs on much more than that. In reality, I was one of only three full-time journalists at this small shop and had to cover two small-town governments, write a weekly wildlife column, produce stories on the ski areas and the environment, while also covering breaking news — and sports (when that editor was gone, which, because of her apparent ambivalence for the position, she invariably was absent quite often). In that job, it was routine to write four "stories" a day. All in all, that experience was good. I learned how to produce content very quickly and report efficiently and accurately, but my writing was, as to avoid using profane language, *abysmal*.  No doubt, I had some PTSD from the stress of that job, but I never stopped loving journalism. I realized I wanted to pursue my graduate degree to make a jump from newspaper reporting to magazines, and someday, to novels. During my time at the Missouri School of Journalism, I read many wonderful stories and even attempted to write a few, but it wasn't until I landed at *HCN,* my first magazine job in July, that I realized what a *story* really was. It was powerful and humbling. *I thought I knew!* But this craft had yet another trick up its sleeves — the longform story.

Consequently, an evaluation of this experience hinges on this fact: I learned how to write a story, and what a joy that has been. So, in a comical way, my experience has been one of much evolution and many errors.

Let's begin with a post mortem of the ski industry series. You may remember an investigative pitch for a story on drought, snowmaking and the ski industry that I wanted to write back in April when I defended my proposal. Well, that original idea had to be thrown out. Why? First, back when I developed the idea and proposed it, I didn't know where I would be for the professional component of the project. I had applications out and had interviewed and completed writing tests for *HCN* and *Mother Jones*, and was also considering pursuing the project as an individual. I included the pitch for the "Water into Snow" project in my application and had discussed the idea with the editors throughout the interviewing process, and they had agreed to support it. When push came to shove in July, however, I began to gain a stronger grasp of *HCN*'s purview. It is not a recreation-focused publication, and it had run a very front-and-center feature on the ski industry in 2013 that examined the future of the sport amid climate change. My *HCN* editors wanted to expand the scope of the project to update that 2013 feature as a way to put a finger on the pulse of the industry. I met several times with my editors, Brain Calvert and Tay Wiles, to figure out how this project would take shape. We decided it would run as a web-exclusive series, about four or five articles, that would fall under a broad umbrella of "a changing ski industry." My memos reflect the evolution of the series. Ultimately, that was something my editors allowed me to figure out on my own. While I was reporting the project, I followed many leads and characters and continually found myself painted into a corner. Those dilemmas were part of the learning curve of writing for a magazine and in trying to fit a square-shaped story, if you will, into a octagon-shaped hole. The series was not a good fit for the publication — for *Outside* or *Adventure Journal*, sure, but not for *HCN.* My editors were continually supportive

nonetheless, and together we shaped a few stories that were successful on the website and cross-published on other outlets. In all, we published a three-part ski series.

In the most empirical sense, my professional component fell short of the original goal, but in a holistic sense it far exceeded it because of the lessons I learned while attempting to execute the idea. In the future, I will do more research on a story and a publication. In this case, it was difficult to do that because I had to craft the idea before I knew where it would land. Upon beginning the internship at *HCN* I should have spent more time researching the publication to realistically develop a plan that would run in the magazine. My editors wanted to look at the health of the industry — the *economics* of it all — but I found throughout my reporting that that's not the aspect of the beat that interested me, so it was difficult along the way to merge my vision with their vision, and to formulate a series that honored my master's project and the magazine. I faced many difficult questions. Why did I like this story in the first place? Why am I interested in writing about the ski industry? What do I have to say? How do I get an *HCN* audience to pay attention to these issues? I think my passion for the ski beat may have been a vestige of my transition from Breckenridge to Columbia, Missouri, for graduate school. It was like a safety net into a new and unknown place, and it's human nature to cling to one's roots during a time of transition. It was perhaps a way that I stood out as a wild westerner at a giant university in the country's midsection. I experienced a reorganization of self, as everyone does in a new city, and the ski beat was something I wanted to show my new network of peers. In Paonia, at *HCN*, I grew and changed again as I learned and absorbed the new opportunities and new stories I could write for the magazine. I felt fragmented, pulled in one direction toward the past while simultaneously dipping my toes into the

fresh pool of exciting ideas. Over the past six months, I allowed myself to immerse in those projects, and I hope my body of work will provide a complete picture of my experience at the magazine.

The analytical component similarly evolved to complement my professional work. I learned many lessons through my interviews with Sarah Schweitzer and her editor Steve Wilmsen and gained powerful insight into Schweitzer's process by interviewing her primary source, Michael Moore. Additionally, media expert David Leach provided me an outside perspective about the power of the story "Chasing Bayla" through the lens of narrative feature writing and whether the story's attempt to tell Moore's story avoided cliché. After all of the interviews, I decided that it had, and I also gleaned lessons about how to avoid cliché in my writing. It's important to recognize that each writer has a unique perspective, and narrative journalism begets a process of discovery. With due diligence, a writer will remain honest to her own viewpoint and pursue new knowledge through each conversation. This, I believe, is a fail-safe way of avoiding cliché. Don't do what everyone else has done. A story should rely not on what's already been written about it but on what is to be said about that *particular* story in its respective moment and context.

**Chapter Four: Physical Evidence**

SKI SERIES INSTALLMENTS (PUBLISHED):

# What will become of the backcountry in Utah's Wasatch?

In Park City, a decades-long battle against resort industry may be all but over.
Paige Blankenbuehler Nov. 24, 2015 Web Exclusive

On a ski tour of the backcountry in Utah's Wasatch Range in the early 1970s, a small group of skiers were at Gad Valley, near the top of Little Cottonwood Canyon, contemplating the drop onto an untouched slope, when a man at the bottom of the run waved them away. Thinking perhaps they were being warned of avalanche danger, the crew turned back and descended over a lousy, bumpy route. At the bottom, they again encountered the man, a well-known French skier named Jean-Claude Killy. They had not, in fact, been in danger at all. Rather, Killy had been cast in a promotional ad for Snowbird Ski Resort and needed a pristine slope for the day's photo shoot.

Among the backcountry crew angered that day was Gale Dick, a University of Utah professor who would go on to found Save Our Canyons, a long-standing organization that's fought for more than four decades to preserve the Wasatch Range. People like to tell that story these days in Park City because it speaks to a decades-long conflict, between backcountry boarders and skiers and their on-piste fellows. That conflict may soon be coming to a close. Vail Resorts, Inc., having purchased and consolidated two Utah ski areas over the past year, opened for its first season as the country's largest ski resort on Saturday. That has created an impetus for broader consolidation of six resorts across a wide swath of the Wasatch, and more urgency among its opponents.

The Wasatch abuts Salt Lake City and its exurbs, an abundant offering of wilderness at the doorstep of a metropolis. Such easy access to the mountains has over the years created a ski mecca—and a paradox: a wild-but-not-too-wild experience that has become its own worst enemy.

Resort skiing here has a lengthy history, beginning with the Brighton Ski Resort (1936), followed by Alta Ski Area (1938), Solitude Mountain Resort (1957), Park City Mountain Resort (1963), Canyons Resort (1968), Snowbird Ski Resort (1971), and Deer Valley Resort Company (1981). All six resorts are crowded into the Central Wasatch, over a relatively small 64,000 acres. For decades, that proximity has fueled a dream among Utah's ski executives to unify one prodigious resort, in hopes of building on an already lucrative industry, one that brought more than 4 million visitors and 18,000 jobs to the state last year.

But with gear getting cheaper and lift tickets getting pricier, more people have begun venturing into the backcountry. That has broadened a subculture here, many of whom see themselves more akin to Gale Dick than to Jean-Claude Killy—and, increasingly, squeezed out. “We need to hold onto everything that we can,” says Carl Fisher, today’s executive director of Save Our Canyons, which is leading a coalition, 7,500 members strong, to keep the Wasatch backcountry open. “We have this intrinsic value of landscapes that are in jeopardy because of the greed of a few.”

John Lemnotis drops into the Benson and Hedges Couloir in Big Cottonwood Canyon, a popular place to backcountry ski and a contentious battleground over land use for skiing. James Roh

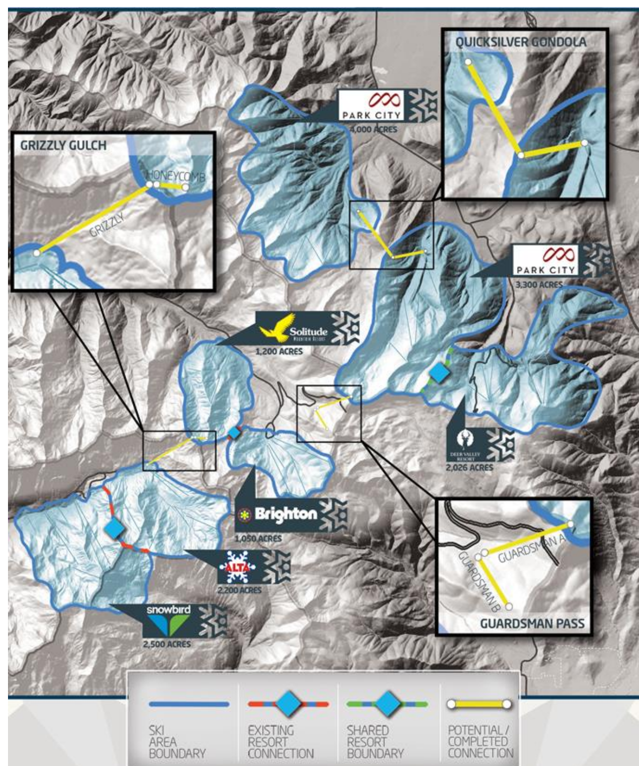
The rivalry has been around a very long time, between free-wheeling backcountry skiers and boarders, and the in-bounds/side-country crowd. Those issues usually have to do with access to the public lands wedged between the resorts or decades of development. A few times, the backcountry crew even won against the resorts. Shortly after the organization was born**,** the group fought a Snowbird Resort plan to build condos in Little Cottonwood Canyon. In 1989, Save Our Canyons worked with Salt Lake County to draft (and eventually adopt) a Canyons Master Plan that guided the permit process on both public and private lands in the Wasatch. Then, in 2002, they prevented commercial flight paths from flying over the backcountry. Since then, the group has fought to limit development in the range.

In 2013, a resort connectivity project called SkiLink emerged and a faction of more radical backcountry users, the Wasatch Backcountry Alliance, formed to join the fight and provide a unified voice for the narrow interests of the backcountry community, distinct from the broader goals of Save Our Canyons. In a short amount of time the group rallied hundreds of backcountry skiers and riders and, with the help of the Save Our Canyons, they defeated the SkiLink proposal. Jamie Kent, Wasatch Backcountry Alliance's executive director, says that because the SkiLink idea relied on resort connections via public lands, it was easy to rally support against it. "I could get anyone behind me," he says. "I had *everybody*. Everyone loves the canyons."

That was the last big victory for the backcountry supporters, and it came at a cost: It organized the industry, and now corporate interests, the state, and others are posing a new challenge.

With the merger of Park City and Canyons resorts by Vail, there's even more momentum for the unification of the Wasatch's five other resorts. In 2014, right on the heels of the SkiLink failure, Ski Utah, the state industry marketing arm, rolled out the "ONE Wasatch" proposal. Ski Utah repackaged the concept so that the necessary connections would be made over mostly private lands leased or owned by the resorts, instead of through public lands. Once Vail purchased Park City Mountain Resort and the Canyons, it automatically created the first connection of the ONE Wasatch concept. With just two more connections (and a couple cooperative drops of ski area boundary ropes), the 18,000-acre area could be interconnected.

"The ski industry has learned from their past mistakes and have come back with another, more powerful proposal," Kent says. "They have packaged ONE Wasatch very well."



ONE Wasatch would connect the area's six resorts with three aerial lifts. To those who love the backcountry, that means the clogging up of both vistas and slopes, as more people enter the backcountry via the connected resorts. But deeper than the obstruction of views, backcountry riders consider the consolidation an assault on a lifestyle and a degradation to a natural resource, making it more commercial, a flashy appeal to the well-heeled international market and a denigration of their version of wildness. Their quintessential lifestyle, they say, has been whittled away with each new development, expansion and marketing ploy to add skier days to the quota for national and international renown. "Nature is as perfect as it could be before you touch it or develop it," Kent says. "How can you enjoy skiing when everything has been developed? That takes away the whole point."

Proponents of ONE Wasatch, on the other hand, say the project will make Utah an international destination, modeled after the sprawling, European-style resorts of the Alps. A lot of other skiers would be happy to see this happen. David DuBois, an airline pilot who lives in Park City, says a ski area connection by gondolas and lifts, as proposed by ONE Wasatch, would be environmentally friendly. A ONE Wasatch connection would allow him to access resort skiing through Park City, then traverse to more varied skiing in Alta, Solitude or Snowbird. "It's a no brainer for me," DuBois says. "I'd much rather ski than be in a car."

Nathan Rafferty, president of the Ski Utah association, says this is a chance to offer an "unrivaled" product to skiers. "There's nowhere in North America that could tie so much acreage together." He sympathizes with opponents, even if they reject his vision. "I've come to understand very intimately that people aren't quick to embrace change," he says. "We have an incredible product here (already), why would you change it? Well, I thought that about my iPhone 3, too, but things improve."

Caleb Krausmann, left, and Logan Julian scope backcountry lines in Wolverine Cirque near Alta, Utah. Julian says the backcountry is getting more full, requiring people to hike a lot farther for a space to ski.
James Roh

For the moment, ONE Wasatch is stalled amid a tangle of interlocking interests, each fighting to get what they want from the mountains, slopes and canyons of the mountains. That process has been complicated by an even broader initiative called the Mountain Accord, which has put together some 40 different vested parties to figure out smarter development in the Wasatch and its watersheds. That includes proposals for transportation in the mountains, which has bearing on the gondola plans of ONE Wasatch. Once it's clear how transportation might solve the crowding and parking problem in the area, there's nothing preventing the ONE Wasatch proposal from initiating.

But Fisher, Kent and their supporters aren't really giving up. Aside from ONE Wasatch falling apart from within, they have two chances to preserve at least some of the backcountry.

One is some sort of container wilderness designation that Fisher and Save Our Canyons are currently drafting to submit to congress. Fisher is drafting a plan that could label the

Wasatch as a wilderness area, national monument or a conservation management area. Such a designation is a long shot, because ski industry executives say the package is too restrictive and should do more to promote recreation. That impasse has kept legislation from being introduced so far.

The other is negotiating with Alta Ski Area, a relatively small operation that is “ski only” and has traditionally been supportive of backcountry users. Alta owns that land that ONE Wasatch needs for a final connection across a mountain to nearby Brighton Resort. It’s not clear which way that negotiation will go. Publicly, Alta supports the ONE Wasatch connection, and if the project moves forward, Onno Wieringa, general manager of the resort, says the area would comply with a connection. “It’s a business decision,” he says. “As a ski area, I think we need to fight for our industry. One part of that is to make more people who ski come to Utah.”

Given the progress of ONE Wasatch and its support, the prognosis doesn’t look good for backcountry skiing in the area. Still, Fisher and Kent say there’s a chance of preserving some of the best spots.

To do that, they’ve adopted a grander vision of preservation of the Wasatch’s wildness by getting involved with the Mountain Accord. They see the accord as a way to leverage more protections for the area, to inhibit development and preserve the backcountry access points. But the accord is a monumentally difficult process—including participation from counties, cities, industry, the Department of Transportation, state legislators, and a host of others—and in reality, it’s a pretty blunt instrument to specifically protect the backcountry. The Mountain Accord was agreed on in July, but really what it amounts to now is an agreement among a lot of parties to protect the mountains. What that looks like remains to be seen, from transportation to public land swaps for consolidated land.

A view from Twin Lakes Pass without snow, one of the areas that may have a resort interconnection built overhead.
Paige Blankenbuehler

Nevertheless, inside that process, Fisher sees a chance to save at least one important piece of the backcountry, a 300-acre patch of land called Grizzly Gulch. Alta owns the land, but the resort has traditionally allowed backcountry riders there. The gulch itself is accessed by a parking lot not far from Alta, an easy drive from the city below. Its terrain is good for beginners, which makes it popular with a growing crowd of potential allies for the backcountry. And it remains on the table inside the Mountain Accord—even though some transportation plans in the accord would probably require development around the area.

“Grizzly Gulch was left as a big question mark in the Mountain Accord, and that little slice of 300 acres is a symbol of the opportunity to preserve another 80,000 acres,” Fisher says.

If nothing else, the area has the potential to galvanize support for the backcountry crowd. In Salt Lake last month, 70 or so backcountry skiers and riders packed inside a library meeting room for the Wasatch Backcountry Alliance’s second annual member meeting. (Save Our Canyons was simultaneously holding a happy hour meeting a five-minute drive across town.) The mood at this Wasatch Backcountry Alliance meeting was much

more somber than it had been the year before, when the group had celebrated a victory against SkiLink. Instead, worry hung heavy among the diverse crowd, many of whom wore hooded sweatshirts and pensive expressions.

Kent, who is in his early 40s and is, incongruously, a real estate developer, stood before the crowd, looking exhausted. For months, he'd been studying up on the public land management process and regulations, all to understand the Mountain Accord, a nebulous bureaucratic process, and find a way to benefit his members. Many of them oppose the Mountain Accord, because it potentially means more people in the mountains. Kent seemed to be trying to convince them it *could* work, by potentially preserving places like Grizzly Gulch. It was a tough sell, and the members weren't thrilled by the answers offered by Kent or Laynee Jones, the Mountain Accord liaison that spoke at the meeting.

"We're going to continue to fight for Grizzly," he said toward the end of the evening, as his three-year-old daughter, Ruby Jane, ran back and forth at the front of the room, tugging at the sleeve of his hoody. Then, taking a moment away from the questions, he looked at her and allowed himself a smile. "We're almost done," he said.

*Paige Blankenbuehler is an editorial intern at* High Country News. She tweets @PaigeBlank.

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# What Mt. Hood's fading summer ski season means

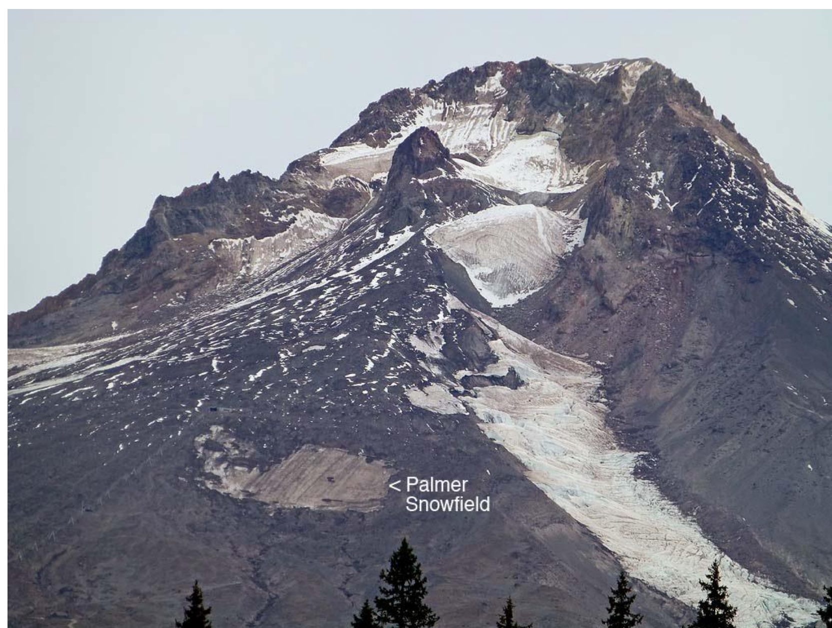
As year-round skiing in the Pacific Northwest diminishes, what else will be lost?
Paige Blankenbuehler Sept. 24, 2015 | Web Exclusive

On a cold morning in September, the clouds rolled over Oregon's Cascades. Dark grey and dimpled, they looked like overstuffed pillows snagged on the mountain summits. It's on days like this that Jon Tullis, spokesman of Timberline Lodge ski resort at Mt. Hood, watches the Palmer Snowfield at 8,500 feet — often with worried thoughts. On that day, only a thin layer of snowflakes fleeced the Palmer, a dusty white patch on a brown mountainside. September doesn't usually bring much snow, but after a mild winter last year and a hot summer, this month has so far kept up with the kind of disappointment that's been commonplace all year long. Timberline Lodge sits in the heart of the Central Cascades, which has been going through its most severe drought in decades.

"We're seeing areas of the mountain that we don't normally see," Tullis says. Palmer Snowfield is a layer cake formed by centuries of snowfall, on top of a permafrost layer of geriatric ice in a depression on Mt. Hood's southern face. Geologists have dated the Palmer's existence back to 1350, though it has probably been there for much longer. This year, a warm winter followed by an exceptionally hot summer has caused the Palmer to retreat dramatically — even exposing the green permafrost. At its best, it's a 100-acre expanse of snow. Now, its mass doesn't reach the chairlift.

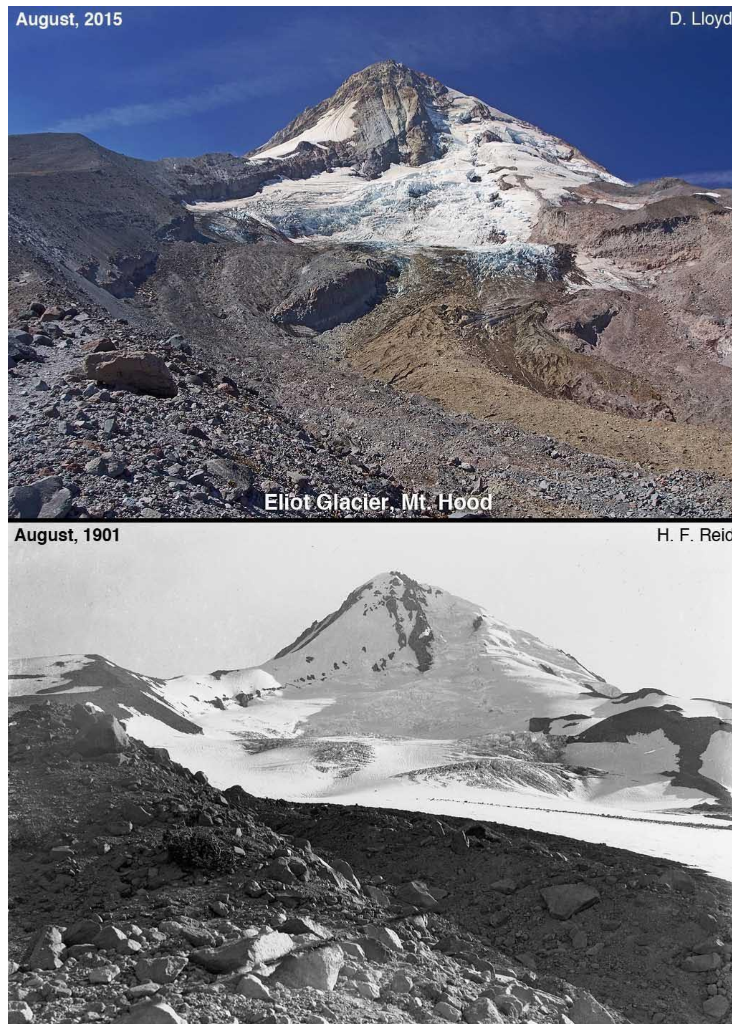
The Palmer snowfield as seen on Sept. 24, 2015. | Darvel Lloyd

Like the first domino in a series to fall, skiing is one of the immediate, and highly visible, casualties of climate change, which is making shorter seasons with less snowfall more



frequent. By the end of the century, snow depths in the West could decline by 25 to 100 percent, according to a report by the ~~National~~ Natural Resources Defense Council and Protect Our Winters, a nonprofit that mobilizes the winter sports community to fight climate change. Inevitably, ski areas at lower elevations, and even those in more favorable snow zones like the Cascades, face warmer and more uncertain and erratic futures that could look a lot more like 2015.

The cascade of consequences is long, from shifts in local economies to the depletion of local watersheds. That's particularly true on Palmer. Unlike most ski resorts in the West, Timberline often stays open through the summer, drawing international skiers thanks to Palmer's dependable snow surface that holds up even on the warmest summer days. But with the snowfield's retreat, that's changing. Timberline's public operations shut down August 3 this year, the earliest since 1979 when the first chairlift to access the area was




installed. Normally, people ski there through Labor Day.

The Palmer Snowfield is near the Eliot Glacier on Mt. Hood. Historic photos compare the glacial mass of August 1901 to August 2015. | Darryl Lloyd

As the summer skiing window gets shorter, athletes that depend on year-round turns will have fewer areas to train domestically. Ben Babbitt, 31, is the head coach of Alpine men's ski racing at Ski Club Vail. His group tries to get in between 45 and 60 training days during the off-season— mid-April through mid-November. For several years, Timberline Lodge — the Palmer Snowfield — and Mt. Bachelor, also in the Cascades, were their best, and most affordable, options. "It's really critical that we have places like Timberline and Mt. Bachelor that allow us to travel cheaply and get those days on snow that we need," he says.

This summer, however, Babbitt had to cancel summer ski camps at Timberline. Instead, Vail Ski Club ventured elsewhere, to Argentina, to New Zealand and to an indoor skiing facility in Lithuania. Those increased travel expenses fell on the skiers and their families. "The kids definitely know that what they are seeing is the start of climate change," Babbitt says.

Oregon has more mountain ice than most (it's second only to Alaska), but experts say the region's disappearing summer skiing and shrinking snowpack are leading indicators that major climate shifts are happening. "It's not just about skiing, but it is this canary in the coal mine — it's really, really visible," Anne Nolin, professor of geography and head of the mountain hydro- climatology research group at Oregon State University, says. "When things go from bright white, glittering snowpack to brown dirt and flaming forests, everyone sees it."

With the smaller snowpack, Nolin and a team of OSU researchers took streamflow measurements this summer that were the lowest they've ever seen. That has a ripple effect beyond the ski area. When less meltwater flows into the streams, economies that depend on summer recreation suffer, too. This season, rafting companies experienced some of the fewest viable days for kayaking and rafting on the nearby Deschutes River. "Our society tends to ignore the fact that rural communities depend on what others might consider an elitist sport," Nolin says. "I'm concerned about the loss of income to rural communities that depend on summer and winter recreation — everyone hurt financially this year."

All things considered, Timberline Lodge is in a fortuitous place high in the Cascade Range. The area gets 450 inches of snowfall a year on average. Tullis doesn't hesitate to proclaim that Timberline Lodge has the longest season in North America — for several seasons, that *has* been true. Even with the shortened season this year provides, the ski area has a buffer. That gives Tullis and his colleagues a chance to respond — one they intend to take advantage of. This fall Timberline is mapping the Palmer Snowfield using LIDAR —infrared sensing that measures distance by reflected light. That will help them make snowfarming — moving snow from other areas of the mountain and stockpiling it on the Palmer — more effective. With insight into the snowfield's natural topography, Timberline's management will know which areas of the Palmer will sustain the most snow to preserve as much of the Palmer as possible.

*Paige Blankenbuehler is an editorial intern at* High Country News. She tweets @PaigeBlank.

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# Are nonprofit models an answer for small ski areas?

As climate and economic challenges mount, some community ski hills find a new path.

Paige Blankenbuehler Sept. 10, 2015 | Web Exclusive

In the 1960s, the Rogue Snowmen, a ragtag crew of alpine skiers in southern Oregon, fell in love with a mountain they thought would be perfect for a developed ski area. The group worked tirelessly to raise the seed money. In 1964 they did, and Mt. Ashland, "a mountain for the people by the people," was incorporated. The little ski hill weathered three decades of financial ups and downs, trading hands from one group of owners to the next, until Dorothy Bullitt, the owner in 1991, couldn't find another buyer — she even laughed one potential buyer out of her office when she was offered only $800,000.

The beginner lift at Mt. Ashland, a nonprofit ski area in southern Oregon. The area has been resilient to economic challenges and shorter seasons because of their nonprofit structure. | Ben Rogers.

Robert Matthews, a local who'd grown up skiing there and had worked at a gear shop nearby since he was a teen, decided to step in. But he didn't have the $1.3 million needed to buy the ski area. So Matthews decided to take an entirely new approach — one that few ski resorts have done to this day: Go nonprofit. First, he gathered a group of about 35 ski enthusiasts to help him. Second, he developed a pyramid fundraising structure: each

person had to find two more people to donate $1,000 each and so on. Matthews asked residents in the town of Ashland, population 17,000, and nearby Medford to "vote with their checkbooks. Do you want a ski hill here or not?" The campaign caught on. The local Rotary clubs helped raise money for the ski area, then-governor Barbara Roberts set aside state lottery funds and agreed to contribute $500,000 to "Save Mt. Ashland."

In 1992, contributions from community members and tenacious fundraising efforts came together, and the Mount Ashland Association was born. The nonprofit ski hill is still financially stable today with more than $2.5 million in valued assets, according to the association's financial statement.

Not only was the business makeover what saved Ashland in 1992; it's also keeping the mountain alive today, amidst a tough economic environment and climate change. Each year, budgeting is a "moving target" that depends on revenues (historically linked to the amount of snow) of the previous season. But as a nonprofit, Ashland can campaign for donations and apply for state tourism and economic development grants. The majority of its revenue now comes from contributions, grants and revenue from selling season passes and lift tickets. "The nonprofit model is keeping us afloat, frankly," says Hiram Towle, manager of operations.

Today, small ski areas like Mt. Ashland are increasingly vulnerable as larger companies buy them up and consolidate the industry. There are 470 ski areas in the country today — down from the more than 720 open 30 years ago. In addition to the tough economic landscape, climate change has resulted in more precipitation falling not as snow but as rain, which makes for fewer operational days at ski resorts. If warming trends continue, there could be bare slopes for entire seasons in the Rocky Mountains within the century. Earlier this year, William Jensen, a high-profile industry analyst, said 150 U.S. ski areas are likely to fail in the next 10 to 20 years because of climate change and industry economics. At the time, Jensen's presentation garnered criticism from the ski industry and widespread media coverage. It's a formidable forecast, but some ski areas have found that nonprofit models are a way to keep open.

In Sheridan, Wyoming, the Antelope Butte Foundation, a nonprofit established in 2011, is trying to raise millions of dollars to bring back a community hill that closed more than a decade ago. "It's sort of like resuscitating a dead patient," says Mark Weitz, president of the association. "We have a heartbeat, but we're not up and running around yet."

Antelope Ski Area originally opened in 1960, and it had a record number of visitations in 1998. The area closed in 2004 because "lack of snow and an aging population resulted in fewer skiers," the Associated Press reported at the time. Weitz saw a nonprofit model as the only way to bring the community ski hill back.

For nearly a decade, Weitz has been interested in reopening the mountain. The Antelope Butte Foundation has been able to raise more than $200,000 in donations since 2011, but it's an example of how difficult the nonprofit track can be. The foundation still needs to pay $305,000 to secure the right to make improvements on the property and an additional

$3 million to make infrastructure improvements that will pass safety benchmarks. “There is a risk that there could be a loss of momentum,” Weitz says about his campaign to raise funds. “There are kids now that never had that experience (of skiing at Antelope), and there’s going to be a little less resonance as time goes on.” The foundation aims to re-open by December 2016.

Part of what makes small communities a good place for the nonprofit models is that locals often have a strong sense of ownership to their ski hills. Many kids who learn to ski at these places grow up feeling indebted to the areas; the ski hill is their alma mater. The majority of the patrons are not far-flung tourists, as they are at many world-class ski resorts. As a result, community members feel compelled to donate to keep the ski area alive for generations. “We’re in a great, relevant place in the community,” says Chris St Germaine, president of Bald Mountain’s nonprofit organization in Pierce, Idaho. “We know we’re not the kind of place you go to take a two-week vacation — we’re not trying to be that.”

One particularly striking example of a community coming to the rescue of a beloved ski area happened at Ashland last year. Exactly 50 years after the Rogue Snowmen had opened the business, drought was hitting the area hard. Because of the unseasonably warm temperatures and lack of snow during that season, Mt. Ashland couldn’t open a single day. The managers and members of the board turned to the community for help. If Mt. Ashland were a private ski hill, they would have had to refund the season passes they had already sold. But as a nonprofit, operators could ask skiers if they would donate the cost of their passes for a tax deduction. Most did. “I gladly donated the cost of the pass,” says Linda Davis, 59, a Medford resident that has skied at the area since she was nine years old. “Our community is forever hopeful it will be cold enough to have snow. Our little mountain has struggled, but whatever it takes to keep running for as long as possible is worth the effort.”

The nonprofit model isn’t a free pass for every struggling small ski area. Lincoln Kauffman, director of operations at Donner Ski Ranch in California, says the small, corporate structure works well for them, despite having to shut down in bad snow years. “We’re in it to make a profit,” he says. “We are so small, and employ fewer people, but that allows us to operate with lower overhead.” Plus, nonprofits have certain responsibilities that privately owned businesses don’t. Nonprofits must always be aiming to meet their organization’s mission. That often means keeping lift tickets cheap, so the slopes are accessible to everyone. They also face limited revenue streams; grants can be difficult to find, and donations can be sporadic. So is snowfall.

“The hardest part of the nonprofit model is meeting the mission,” says Towle from Mt. Ashland. “We strive for a higher sense of purpose, but it can be volatile when the uncertainties of weather have to be factored in.”

On an August afternoon, Matthews stands around boxed merchandise and new gear strewn haphazardly around the Rogue Ski Shop near Mt. Ashland, where he’s worked for more than 40 years. He methodically places skis and jackets around his shop and hopes

they will soon be slathered with snow and spotted with snowflakes. “If it doesn’t snow, you can still enjoy the company of friends and hike at Mt. Ashland,” Matthews says. “Sometimes you need to let go of your first love.”

*Paige Blankenbuehler is an editorial intern at* High Country News. She tweets @PaigeBlank.

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ADDITIONAL IN-DEPTH ARTICLES (PUBLISHED):

# Can small communities tackle global food security?

## Climate change has profound impacts on growing seasons and crop yields, but local solutions have promise.

Paige Blankenbuehler | Nov. 5, 2015 Web Exclusive

[Audio component of this story is included in the media folder]

*This story was produced in partnership with* KVNF Radio *in Paonia, Colorado.*

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, this year is on course to be the hottest year in recorded history. And with greenhouse gas emissions increasing, we're closing in on a global temperature rise of more than two degrees Celsius — what many scientists agree is a point of no return in avoiding the most dangerous impacts of climate change.

Those impacts are felt more acutely in the West. Because it's mostly arid, mountainous, and largely rural, the West sits in the crosshairs of the most profound impacts from climate change. Substantial changes have already affected growing cycles and yields for agriculture, a huge part of the Western economy and culture. Many small communities are rising up to address the challenge of food security. During a panel discussion on climate change impacts to agriculture in Paonia, Colorado, one expert talked about the drastic change he's personally studied in these mountains.

David Inuoye, of the Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory, has researched western Colorado wildflowers for 37 years, and when he started, he had no idea the high alpine blooms would be such a harbinger for what's happening in the area. "Some of the changes (of high alpine flowers), like longer growing seasons and earlier growing seasons and changes in the flowering and abundance of some species are similar to the kinds of things that seem to be going on here in the North Fork Valley."

In the West, potato crops can withstand more erratic shifts in the climate, but rural growers worry big shifts will threaten even the hardiest agriculture. | Josh Schwartzman

As the climate shifts, some farmers might benefit from longer growing seasons, but others may face early blooms and late frosts. But adapting to a fast-changing environment becomes a question of scale. While 'pulling up the stakes to go' may be more feasible for some small-scale growers, vast orchards and vineyards can't relocate so easily. “If you're worried about the tomatoes in your backyard, it's pretty easy to" build a little plastic greenhouse and protect those. If you're talking about a 25 to 30-acre orchard, then it's a completely different scale in terms of trying to protect those plants,” Inuoye says.

Biologists and rural growers aren't the first to recognize the difficulty of transitioning large operations. Further west, California communities have faced extreme and prolonged drought and because the state has a variety of climates, farmers have had to adapt in a number of ways. Renata Brillinger, the executive director of the California Climate & Agriculture Network, which is helping large-scale commercial farmers face new realities, says revamping infrastructure, though, has its own unique challenges.

“This movement toward more awareness of the importance of local foods, and supporting your local farmers and these local markets are really exciting developments,” Brillinger says. “I think they'll remain somewhat at the edges, though, until we really address the bigger policy questions and the economic questions that make it challenging to stay in business.”

Local eating seems like a great idea, but in practice, overhauling policies is restricted by global agricultural trade networks, and it's an issue faced by farmers not just in California. In the coming weeks, world leaders will gather in Paris for the United Nations Climate Talks. Just this week, Hilal Elver, an expert on global climate change based at the University of California, Santa Barbara, said another 600 million people could

suffer malnutrition by 2080. Meanwhile, global population continues to rise, and is expected to hit 8 and a half billion in just 15 years.

Pete Kolbenschlag, the organizer of the Paonia panel discussion, knows that food security affects everyone. “If you care about what's on your plate, and you care about feeding other people and the planet, then we need to care about climate change, because climate change is going to affect our food supply,” he says.

In that small room on a Tuesday night, local farmers gathered in circle and talked about establishing a food sharing network, a local agricultural currency, and social media strategies. Panel experts even talked about technology that monitors soil moisture to prevent overwatering. These are specific solutions. They haven’t solved the big problem, by any means, but at least they’re not tackling the challenge alone.

*Paige Blankenbuehler is an editorial intern at* High Country News. She tweets @PaigeBlank.

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# University research controversy exposes the perils of industry influence

How close should academics let industry get to fracking research?

Paige Blankenbuehler Oct. 1, 2015 | Web Exclusive

In September, documents obtained by a Boulder publication found troubling ties between university research and the fracking industry. The University of Colorado Leeds Business School completed a number of studies funded by industry groups that concluded that if policy inhibited oil and gas production, it would have a negative impact on the state's economy.

The controversy centers around three reports: one completed for the American Petroleum Institute, and two commissioned on behalf of a partnership that included the Common Sense Policy Roundtable — a policy research association that's become known as a pro-fracking industry front group. The reports concluded that fracking has a positive impact on Colorado's economy, and they were published between March and September 2014, during a period of political grappling over a proposed ballot initiative that would have allowed communities to ban hydraulic fracturing. That initiative did not make it to the November ballot, but the timing and conclusions of the reports raised the suspicions of

the *Boulder Weekly* and Greenpeace.

The Leeds School of Business at the University of Colorado-Boulder has been at the center of allegations of pro-fracking industry ties from the Boulder Weekly and Greenpeace. | Sushant Jadhav

According to documents and emails obtained by the two organizations, the researcher in charge of the studies, Brian Lewandowski, associate director of the Leeds School of Business research division, corresponded with his clients throughout the process and allowed them to have at least some degree of control over the release and process of the research. The correspondence also suggests the Leeds School of Business coordinated a public campaign with their clients to promote the fracking industry.

Industry-funded research presents a tough paradox for universities. In general, it's not unusual for industries like oil and gas to pick up the tab for some studies and research. Without that outside funding, many of the studies wouldn't otherwise get done. But Cary Nelson, former president of the American Association of University Professors who has written extensively on "frackedemia," says "the oil and gas industry has become much more interested in adding a university brand to its claim." The transparency of the Leeds studies was inadequate, Nelson says, and the university may need to reform its disclosure policies: "This is an example of complete collusion between the industry and academy that completely eliminates any sense of a university doing independent research. Unless the University of Colorado has a really lousy policy that basically says, 'there ain't no such thing as a conflict of interest,' this is egregious."

The Leeds school's current entanglement is indicative of a broader problem in academia. In 2010, the Center for American Progress, a nonprofit research organization, released a report that identified more than 50 contributions from energy companies to universities from $1 million to $500 million from 2000 through 2010. That sort of funding "can have a powerful distorting influence on the quality, topics, and credibility of academic research when it is not properly managed," the report stated. The University of Texas, for example, withdrew a fracking study and strengthened its conflict of interest policies after the research erupted in controversy in 2012. "There are faculty members that would ordinarily be doing fracking research at this point who don't want to go anywhere near it because they feel it's become so suspect that publishing on that subject could put the image of their integrity at risk," Nelson says. "That's very dangerous because we need fracking research that's reliable."

Similarly, the allegations raised by the *Boulder Weekly* have created a public perception problem for the Leeds studies. Although the researchers disclosed their funding sources, what the business school left out — whether they did so purposefully or not — was the Common Sense Policy Roundtable's financial ties to the fracking industry. Lewandowski also did not disclose funding information when presenting one of his studies at the Energy and Environment Symposium. Joe Rosse, University of Colorado associate vice chancellor for research integrity and compliance, says a preliminary review didn't find any indication that results were manipulated, though. "At the moment, it is not apparent

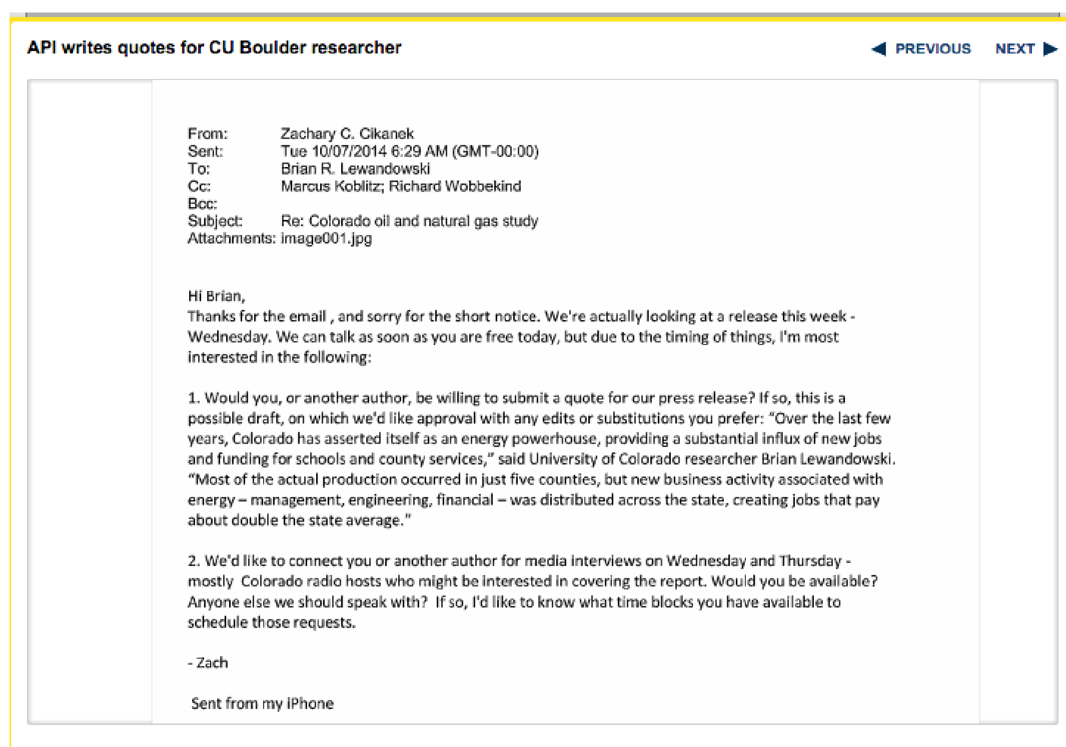
that an investigation is called for," Rosse said in an email. "There is also no basis for believing there is any violation of university conflict of interest policies."

Documents obtained in the *Boulder Weekly*'s investigation indicate that the American Petroleum Institute and the Common Sense Policy Roundtable were allowed to review the proposal and research findings before release. "These are clients paying us to complete the study," Lewandowski says. "We do, as a courtesy, allow them to read the report and provide comments or feedback." Emails show Kristin Strohm, managing partner of the Starboard Group, a conservative public relations firm that works for pro-fracking interests, submitted "suggested changes" numerous times.

According to university policies, clients can't alter research findings or data, and there's no evidence that clients did so in the Leeds reports. But emails indicate Strohm called the shots about when the study would be released. Lewandowski says there was no coordination, just correspondence that adhered to their typical process. A request to Strohm for comment was not answered in time for publication.

Emails also show that industry interests apparently had a heavy hand in preparing media-ready quotes for researchers. In October 2014, Zachary Cikanek, a spokesman for the American Petroleum Institute, sent an email to Lewandowski suggesting a quote for an API press release promoting the 2014 fracking ban study. The quote eventually used in the release was strikingly similar to what the API suggested, with minor edits in word choice. Lewandowski says the quote originated from a phone call presenting the findings, not from the API. Yet, "if the quotes are being prepared and used by the sponsor as part of their public relations efforts, the university does not have control over that," Rosse says. A request for comment from API was not answered in time for the deadline.

An email from the American Petroleum Institute indicated that the Leeds School of Business worked closely to coordinate press releases to promote economic impact studies


API writes quotes for CU Boulder researcher

◀ PREVIOUS NEXT ▶

From: Zachary C. Cikanek
Sent: Tue 10/07/2014 6:29 AM (GMT-00:00)
To: Brian R. Lewandowski
Cc: Marcus Koblitz; Richard Wobbekind
Bcc:
Subject: Re: Colorado oil and natural gas study
Attachments: image001.jpg

Hi Brian,
Thanks for the email , and sorry for the short notice. We're actually looking at a release this week - Wednesday. We can talk as soon as you are free today, but due to the timing of things, I'm most interested in the following:

1. Would you, or another author, be willing to submit a quote for our press release? If so, this is a possible draft, on which we'd like approval with any edits or substitutions you prefer: "Over the last few years, Colorado has asserted itself as an energy powerhouse, providing a substantial influx of new jobs and funding for schools and county services," said University of Colorado researcher Brian Lewandowski. "Most of the actual production occurred in just five counties, but new business activity associated with energy – management, engineering, financial – was distributed across the state, creating jobs that pay about double the state average."

2. We'd like to connect you or another author for media interviews on Wednesday and Thursday - mostly Colorado radio hosts who might be interested in covering the report. Would you be available? Anyone else we should speak with? If so, I'd like to know what time blocks you have available to schedule those requests.

- Zach

Sent from my iPhone

on fracking.

So far, no one is questioning the veracity of the Leeds Business School research. John Loomis, Colorado State University professor of agricultural and resource economics, says the research was sound but generous; it cast a wide net when considering overall economic benefits and employment in the hydraulic fracturing industry. “We review all of their studies and I’d say about three-quarters of it is very useful information,” Loomis says, “but (our department) would have drawn the line in a different place.”

This controversy raises larger questions about public perception of credibility of other University of Colorado fracking studies and about academia and industry collaboration broadly. Even projects with non-partisan funding can be jeopardized by a growing public mistrust. Perhaps the most vulnerable to changes in public perception in the wake of this recent controversy is the Air Water Gas project, a $12 million CU study funded by the National Science Foundation that brings together nearly 30 researchers from nine institutions to study wide-ranging trade-offs in natural gas development. “Let’s just say we're really glad we got our funding from the National Science Foundation,” says Joseph Ryan, the project’s director. “We have the opportunity to go about our work without any questions attached to who is funding it.”

Nelson, who wrote recommendations for universities involved in such collaborations, says industry-funded research is far more likely to reach pro-industry conclusions than peer-reviewed studies. “The worst thing that a society learns from situations like this is that universities are not trustworthy,” Nelson says. “Incorrect narratives can take decades to correct.”

*The University of Colorado submitted a letter to* High Country News *in response to this article.*

*Paige Blankenbuehler is an editorial intern at* High Country News. She tweets @PaigeBlank.

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# Advanced Placement history nixes 'racial superiority' from Manifest Destiny

Q&A: Historian Amy Greenberg says curriculum revisions miss a major part of the story.

Paige Blankenbuehler Interview | Sept. 17, 2015 | Web Exclusive

Right now, Advanced Placement United States History teachers are preparing about a half million high school students for an exam that could give them college credit and a leg up in university applications. But that test won't be the same their predecessors took last year, or even the same as the one the year before. The College Board, which administers the course framework and exam, has changed the parameters for many important concepts and themes.

"Lost in the American Dream." |Colin Poellot

The course, widely adopted by high schools and taken by college-bound students, hasn't been updated since 2006. The 2014 update, all things considered, didn't go so well. The

specific changes — to Manifest Destiny, World War II, Ronald Reagan and European settlement — inspired so much backlash that the College Board's committee in charge of rewriting it, went back to the drawing board. In July, they released the final change that is a more "conceptual approach as opposed to specificity required for memorization," says Maria Montoya, a New York University history professor that helped rewrite the framework.

Here's how that change looks:

2014 version: "The idea of Manifest Destiny, which asserted U.S. power in the Western Hemisphere and supported U.S. expansion westward, was built on a belief in white racial superiority and a sense of American cultural superiority, and helped to shape the era's political debates."

2015 version: The movement west was due to "the desire for access to natural and mineral resources and the hope of many settlers for economic opportunities or religious refuge." Advocates of annexing lands "argued that Manifest Destiny and the superiority of American institutions compelled the United States to expand its borders westward to the Pacific Ocean."

But now a new set of critics are decrying the change. The College Board says A.P. history teachers widely accept the change, but the changes have become a political issue, especially the Manifest Destiny portion. Conservatives called the 2014 edition not patriotic enough; critics, however, say the 2015 definition of Manifest Destiny ignores important racial connotations. Amy Greenberg, a historian at Penn State and the author of *Manifest Destiny and American Territorial Expansion*, worries the new definition will skew the understanding of a dangerous concept. Greenberg explains why these battles matter.

***High Country News*: How did Manifest Destiny play out in the American West?**

*Amy Greenberg*: Manifest Destiny presented a certain vision of the American West of this so-called "virgin land." It was an idea of the American West as open, free, unsettled territory that was *waiting* for U.S. citizens to conquer and properly make use of. The whole idea of the American West — and the way we think about it today — emerges out of a vision of Manifest Destiny.

***HCN*: How has the perception of this concept evolved?**

AG: The first uses of manifest destiny (in the 1830s) were propaganda from a very particular perspective: We need to go take these territories from the other nations because it's our *manifest destiny.* God has basically proclaimed that it's our destiny to take over because the United States had a lot to offer people in these areas. So, it's not *just* our manifest destiny to take that land, but it's also our manifest destiny to bring the blessings of American civilization to areas that it doesn't exist. It justifies land acquisition by asserting that America is *exceptional*, and we're actually doing a favor to the people who

live in these places. In the 1840s and '50s, the concept becomes very popular. You can see ordinary people writing letters talking about manifest destiny. In the 1950s and '60s, — this was during the Cold War — you had a whole strain of historians that were very invested in proving that the United States was essentially different from the Soviet Union. One way to do that is to say that because of Manifest Destiny, we naturally moved into contiguous territory, brought the blessing of democracy to the residents there. A lot of

violence and war that was involved in this was completely obscured.

"American Progress," 1872, by John Gast. America's westward movement portrayed as bison herds and Indians retreat from manifest destiny embodied by a woman that strings telegraph wire in her wake. | pittigliani2005.

***HCN*: Did "American exceptionalism" impact how Native Americans were treated?**

AG: There's a great image by John Gast called "American Progress" from 1873 that really sums it up. If you look in the corner, you see Indians running away in fear because they're afraid of this fantastic, scantily clad, flying white woman. She's carrying the telegraph line, she has a book that is likely the Bible or a book or learning and you have all of the settlers just following her. This photo represents a justification of what I would argue for basically a series of wars against Indians. It's not like anybody is even *attacking* these Indians. They are just running away. Even the dog is running away. But if you look

at what *actually* happened during settlement of the West, those guys would be killing the Indians.

***HCN*: Some opponents say the new framework is a "watered down version of history." Is that fair?**

AG: It doesn't strike me as watered down, so much as just totally different. There's nothing *factually* wrong in the new version, but it's really beside the point. The racial superiority and cultural superiority are more important and certainly helped shaped the era's political beliefs and debates. Everyone wants economic opportunities and everyone wants natural resources, but that's not essentially what [Manifest Destiny] is about.

***HCN*: What does it mean to have a more sterilized version at this moment in time?**

AG: It seems like a step backwards in recognizing the role of race in American history. It makes Indians invisible. It's really odd. This is the difference between what people say, and *why* they're saying it. And I think the original definition gets more into why people were saying it, and the new framework of manifest destiny is staying more on the surface.

***HCN*: Why is an accurate understanding of Manifest Destiny important?**

AG: The importance of understanding what Manifest Destiny was really about is realizing what roles things like racism have played in the past. What's at stake is people's ability to logically and realistically critique political discourse today. In other words, at the time of the Iraq war, people were using Manifest Destiny a lot, and mostly in a positive way. They were saying our manifest destiny is to bring democracy to these places. It's very interesting and also troubling, because you see a slippage between the way in which the discourse of Manifest Destiny is justified and [the way it] allowed people to forget about things like killing all of the Indians. If you actually know what Manifest Destiny was and what it did, one would hope that you are more able to see the problems with that discourse today. Manifest Destiny is not this benign force. It's an ideology that's been mobilized in order to justify a lot of bad stuff.

***HCN*: How does a valorization of Manifest Destiny shape students' understanding of history?**

AG: I think this new framework is doing the students a disservice. It's providing them with what I would say is a historically inaccurate view of what Manifest Destiny is. I wonder what those students are going to deal with when they get to college and take more advanced history classes that have a totally different framework. You're going to have to look really hard to find a college professor who focuses on western expansion and manifest destiny that is going to agree with this framework.

*Paige Blankenbuehler is an editorial intern at* High Country News. She tweets @PaigeBlank.

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# Nevada's gold mining industry is hanging on — for now

Gold producers in Elko see job growth, despite an international price drop.
Paige Blankenbuehler Aug. 13, 2015 | Web Exclusive

When the price of gold dropped to a five-year low last week, many economists sounded alarm bells, but one gold industry-dependent community in Nevada gave the headlines a dismissive shrug.

Despite the drop in gold prices and stagnation of the industry globally, the gold mining business in Elko, a small town in the northeastern part of the state, seems to be doing fine. Elko has so far been immune to the downturns of a historically volatile industry.

Refinery technician Vincente Sandoval pours liquid gold to form gold dore bars at Newmont Mining's Carlin gold mine operation near Elko. The dore bars contain approximately 90 percent gold, 8 percent silver and 2 percent trace material. | Rick Wilking, Reuters

"Elko is in its own economic bubble," says Jennifer Sprout, head of the Elko Chamber of Commerce. "Elko as a whole has stayed pretty steady and weathered the ups and downs

of the market." Scott Wilkinson, assistant town manager, says the local economy tends to fluctuate slightly when gold prices go down, but the town has avoided any significant effects — the workforce has grown, local mines haven't faced layoffs and gold production is still high.

Over the past decade, the number of mining jobs in Nevada has grown 78 percent; the state mines 79 percent of all U.S.-produced gold. In 2013, Elko County alone produced nearly 670,000 ounces of gold, worth — in today's prices — more than $670 million.

International company Newmont Mining Corporation plans to hire 260 employees for its new Long Canyon open-pit gold mine set to open early next year in Elko.

One reason Elko's gold industry seems unfazed is that corporations tend to lay claim to gold deposits soon after they're found, even if it's during a dip in the commodity's price. Elko's companies are preparing for tougher times by extracting hard-to-reach deposits now, while the price is relatively strong. (Though the price has dipped in recent years, it's still above market value). That way, if the value of the commodity plummets, more easily accessible, less expensive deposits are still available to mine.

Other local experts say the economy's resilience is also helped by the sheer size of Barrick Gold and Newmont Mining Corp., which combined accounted for nearly 70 percent of the total gold extraction in Elko in 2013. They're insulated from price roller coasters that might bankrupt smaller companies, says Pam Borda, executive director of the Northeastern Nevada Regional Development Authority.

The town of Elko itself has been resilient in the face of the latest downturn because the gold industry has elicited growth and diversification of the local economy, says Sprout. A strong outdoor recreation industry has also added jobs and increased spending in the tourism sector, adds Wilkinson; more housing developments are being built, and the number of retail stores and restaurants and bars has grown, too.

The bigger picture may be changing, though. The price of gold has risen steadily for the past decade; as of Aug. 12, the price per ounce was $1,108, compared to only $433 in August 2005. But a growing number of investors say the golden days are over, pointing to the fact that in the past three months, global gold prices have dropped 17 percent. They predict that prices could plunge to as low as $350 an ounce. Claude Erb, a gold forecaster and former commodities trader for an investment management company, told CNN, "Gold is no more or less volatile than stocks or anything else. It can be wildly overvalued, and it's very overvalued right now."

Even Barrick Gold's overall stocks are down 60 percent for the past two years. Another large gold company internationally, Goldcorp, saw its stock fall more than 30 percent this year.

If gold dropped as low as $350, Elko's economy would be in serious trouble. Even with other sectors going strong, the town does still rely largely on the gold industry, and

there's a chorus of investors that say it's only a matter of time until the price drop catches up.

"We would pretty much be a ghost town if prices plunged that low. There would be dramatic shut-downs and lay offs," Borda says. "But I believe the chances of that ever happening are slim — very, very slim."

*Paige Blankenbuehler is an editorial intern at* High Country News. She tweets @PaigeBlank.

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# California drought renews push for water storage projects

A long-standing proposal to enlarge Shasta Dam gets a boost from the Bureau of Reclamation.

Paige Blankenbuehler Aug. 6, 2015 | Web Exclusive

The drought that's been desiccating California for the past four years has added new urgency to a decades-old debate about the best way to secure reliable water supplies for a growing population: new dams or efficiency measures.

While the debate about how to better manage water continues, the drought is triggering more political momentum for several water storage projects in California's agriculture-rich Central Valley. An enlargement of Shasta Dam, 10 miles from the town of Redding, has been discussed for over three decades, and it passed a major hurdle last week when the Bureau of Reclamation released its final feasibility study.

The agency says that the most practical option would increase the dam's height by 18.5 feet, adding capacity to store 634,000 more acre-feet of water for agricultural, municipal and industrial use. It would also increase the survival of struggling salmon populations in the upper Sacramento River by releasing more cold water stored behind the dam to improve temperatures in the Sacramento River during exceptionally critical years. Since 1980, the Shasta project has been stuck in a sort of feasibility-study-feedback loop,

ebbing and flowing with shifting politics and environmental changes, but the new report declared the project both technologically and economically feasible.

The Shasta Dam is located in the northern tip of California's Central Valley, one of the most productive regions for agriculture in the country. | Ron Lute

“People want to see action, not studies,” says Leigh McDaniel, who grows wine grapes, almonds, alfalfa, wheat and barley in the northern Central Valley. “Now that the drought has persisted as long as it has, the people of California want to see construction of these projects.” Last year, the state’s voters passed Proposition 1, a bond that set aside $2.7 billion for water storage projects, amid opposition from environmentalists.

The Bureau of Reclamation’s Shasta report gave no indication of where the funding for the $1.2 billion project would come from — only that the federal government would not foot the bill. The project isn’t eligible for Prop 1 dollars because the higher reservoir levels would flood upper stretches of the McCloud River, which is protected under the state’s Scenic River Protection Act.

But the California Emergency Drought Relief Act, introduced last week by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Cali., emerged as a possible answer to the funding problem. The law would provide funding for various drought responses across the state, including for new water storage.

Proponents of the Shasta project include farmers in the region who say they haven’t been able to get their full appropriation of water for years. Nadine Bailey, head of the Central Valley based Family Water Alliance, which represents landowners and rural communities, says that raising Shasta Dam would give the Bureau of Reclamation more flexibility for water-release decisions. “We live in a feast or famine region,” she says. “The state’s water system just needs more storage so we can capture rainwater in those heavy periods.”

McDaniel, who depends on Shasta water diversions for his 1,900-acre ranch, is on the board of a similar water storage project in Northern California that would divert storm runoff to the Sites Reservoir, and says California can’t afford to delay such projects. The Sites Reservoir and Shasta are both part of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program, an ambitious state, federally and locally funded effort that promised to ensure reliable water supplies for 23 million Californians and farms, passed in 2000.

“In my perfect mad scientist world, I would like to see all of these storage projects and enlargements go through,” he says. “There’s no way to go forward without addressing the problem, and you can’t address it unless there is more storage.”

Opponents to the Shasta project say that raising the dam doesn’t get at the heart of the drought problem: water scarcity. For the past 15 years, the reservoir’s average level for this time of year has been 2.8 million acre-feet, a far cry from the 4.5 million acre-feet

capacity. On Wednesday the reservoir level was 1.9 million acre-feet, according to the California Data Exchange Center of the Department of Water Resources – about two-thirds percent of the normal level for this time of year.

The Shasta project experienced a major setback last November when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released a draft report in coordination with the Bureau of Reclamation that found the project would not, in fact, significantly improve water temperatures enough to benefit salmon. The service has since backpedaled on that statement and says it's still in the "drafting phases" of the final environmental impact report.

If Feinstein's bill is approved and the Shasta project secures federal funding, the enlargement would be up for approval by the Secretary of the Interior. Congress could authorize the project for construction this year or next.

*Paige Blankenbuehler is an editorial intern at* High Country News. She tweets @PaigeBlank.

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# Whitewater parks: an unlikely drought bailout

Expensive artificial wave features can ease dry times for river economies.
Paige Blankenbuehler July 23, 2015 | Web Exclusive

River economies rely on the flow of water. Healthy fish populations live at around 65 cubic feet per second. Tubers thrive at around 100 cfs. And experienced kayakers need about 200 cfs to bother showing up. Big tour raft guides need somewhere around 300 cfs. All of this adds up to a kind of water currency for river towns that booms and busts. But when river flows are too low to float big rafts, some towns are finding they can still attract visitors through creative engineering — by building whitewater play parks.

A kayaker in the Truckee Whitewater Park during the 2009 Reno River Festival. The river was flowing at 1160 cfs during this event, according to USGS stream flow data.| Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority

Whitewater parks have been popping up all over the West since the 1980s, engineered with low water levels in mind. The projects typically involve a redesign of riverbeds, often with the help of concrete, boulders, sand and rocks to create bottlenecks, which

create rushes of water, and “plunge pools,” which add depth. All of these additions, strategically placed to encourage recreation, make not only for more exciting whitewater but also for stabilized flows, which can squeeze a little more use out of water when levels are low.

In Reno, Nevada, the river recreation economy has suffered this year. The flow of the Truckee River through downtown in mid-July was 26 cubic feet per second, which is just a step up from stagnant, thanks to this year’s abysmal snowpack in the Sierra Nevadas. Private rafting companies haven’t toured that section of the river, which features a whitewater park built in 2004, for more than six weeks. James Bell, owner and operator of a private rafting company, Wild Sierra Adventures, says he will likely need to cancel trips on other stretches of the Truckee soon. “This has been the worst year ever,” Bell says; normally raft trips account for 60 percent of his business.

But surprisingly, people are still drawn to the slow waters downtown around the whitewater park — mostly families and children wading and swimming in the river. As drought conditions linger, “a modest splash from a man-made wave gives the river an extended life,” says Bethany Drysdale, director of public relations for the Nevada Commission on Tourism. And even though raft trips are waning, the park attracts tubers who rent gear from him, says Bell, which helps his business.

On the surface, the parks might not seem like wise investments when the water gets lower. Whitewater parks are expensive to build and, though free to use, are almost always city-managed and publicly funded. Their economic impact is largely indirect.

Still, the Truckee Whitewater Park in Reno, which cost a relatively cheap $1.5 million, has become a draw for both businesses and tourists. Prior to its construction, the city’s downtown section of the river had no access point, and few businesses flourished in that part of town. But the “beautification” of the river, says Ben McDonald, communications manager for the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority, drew in new enterprises and created the new River Walk District. He says that area has provided a boost for Reno. “There wasn’t much down there before that, but now the downtown river park is a tourist destination.” According to a visitor profile study commissioned by the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority in 2007, whitewater recreation attracted 13 percent of the approximately 4.3 million people who visit Reno each year. Those visitors spend an average of $680 each. “Even though the drought has been bad this year, people have been able to get closer to the waters than they were able to before,” says Peggy Nelson-Aguilar, recreation supervisor for the City of Reno.

Reno was one of the few cities in the West whose whitewater suffered from the drought this year. The “May miracle” brought a lot of rain that boosted flows in Colorado, New Mexico and much of the Midwest. (In fact, a section of the South Platte, in Colorado, was closed for part of the summer because its flows were dangerously high.) Either way, though, many cities see parks as worth the cost, one that will help out on the off-miracle years. "When it’s a drought year, the park still provides a good wave,” says Cathy Metz,

parks and recreation director of the City of Durango. "Without a whitewater park, we would see a downfall in users."

When the Reno project was accepted in 2002, projections of the return on investment ranged from $1.9 million to $4.1 million in the first year, according to the Truckee River Recreation Plan. For comparison, Durango, Colorado, commissioned an economic impact study of its whitewater park in 2006 and found that the park and the Lower Animas River generated $18 million per year.

Beyond dollars and cents, whitewater parks offer other incentives in dry years. Around the West, engineered parks extend the paddling season, says Nathan Fey, the Colorado River stewardship director for American Whitewater. "With low flows, whitewater parks begin to address some of the demand of the varied users attracted to rivers," Fey says. The natural peaks provide recreation opportunities for seasoned paddlers, but whitewater parks keep the water exciting even as the levels dwindle. The features also attract new people to water sports. The big question, though, is how far into the future water parks can be beneficial? As of yet, there's no such thing as a drought-proof river. And, as Gary Lacy, engineer of the Truckee Whitewater Park, says: "You can't make water out of nothing."

*Paige Blankenbuehler is an editorial intern at* High Country News. She tweets @PaigeBlank.

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# Illegal flights persist despite national park drone ban

Early season drone reports are outpacing the number of incidents last year.
Paige Blankenbuehler July 16, 2015 | Web Exclusive

In Wyoming's Grand Teton National Park, the Gros Ventre Campground is a peaceful place with abundant solitude; it hardly fills up, even during peak season. On June 22 last year, that normal silence broke as the plastic wings of an unmanned aircraft system, known colloquially as a drone, spastically chopped at the leaves of a cottonwood as it tangled in the branches. A cow moose was grazing nearby, and though there was no evidence that the operator was trying to get a closer look at the unsuspecting ungulate, "it does seem a likely scenario," says Andrew White, the park's spokesman.

National parks temporarily banned drones in June 2014, when park officials began to worry that the devices could crash into sensitive landmarks, disturb wildlife, and present safety risks and general disturbance to visitors. Yet despite the ban, the number of drone incidents, like that one at Gros Ventre Campground, has increased. Park officials around the West say the ban has been difficult to enforce and in many parks, the early season

drone reports are outpacing the number of incidents last year.

Even with a drone ban in place, hobbyists are still flying in some Western parks. |Paige Blankenbuehler

In Grand Teton, there have been 11 reports of drones flying within park boundaries, so far (up from six last year), and rangers have issued four citations. Almost all of Grand Teton's 2014 incidents happened between July and September, and White says as visitor numbers continue to grow, he expects more reports this summer.

In Yellowstone National Park, it's been harder for rangers to patrol for illegal drone flights because there's more ground to cover; it has 90 percent more acreage than Grand Teton. So far this year, Yellowstone has issued two citations, compared to five last year. But most of those were in July, "and we're only half-way through the month," says Traci Weaver, a spokeswoman for Yellowstone.

Beyond the national parks ban, the Federal Aviation Administration is trying to get a handle on drone usage. It proposed rules in February for hobbyists, including: no flights more than 400 feet high, after dark, or within dangerous proximity to people; pilots must keep drones within their line of sight. Airspace in most national parks is designated FAA territory, so a person could theoretically stand outside of park boundaries and fly over or into the park — if they keep the drone within sight.

Final FAA regulations are still in the works. For now, if park officials want to use the devices for park purposes, such as wildlife tracking and topographic mapping, they have to get explicit FAA permission. That's because they would be piloting them from within the park boundaries, whereas a visitor standing outside and flying in isn't breaking any rules.

Part of the reason incidents are increasing is that many people just don't know about the ban in national parks, White says. They're simply trying to get cool videos or photographs, or are avid model-aircraft builders, says Rich Hanson, director of public relations for the Academy of Model Aeronautics, a group for model plane and hobby drone enthusiasts. In most parks, rangers have adopted a solicitous approach. They respond to sightings (usually called in by other visitors or park employees), then try to find the pilots once the machine is on the ground, and gently inform them of the ban. Most hobbyists have been receptive to it. Citations range from $1,500 to $5,000 and are only issued when drone operators have "noncompliant attitudes," or if the incident is especially egregious — like the drone that crashed in Yellowstone's iconic, technicolored Grand Prismatic hot spring last August. In waters as deep as 120 feet, the drone was never recovered.

The 2014 ban has some drone supporters crying foul. "We think it's a bit of a knee-jerk reaction," Hanson says. "National parks should allow — in a limited capacity — people to use this new technology."

That technology — affordable (as cheap as $300 for the basics), usually with a high-definition camera attached — is flying off the shelves. The Consumer Electronics Sales and Forecast report predicted as many as 400,000 hobby drones will sell across the country this year, and total sales could reach $130 million. Hanson says he thinks the upward trend will continue only if there are more flyer-friendly rules. “If people are buying this technology and finding that they can't fly them anywhere," he says, "they are going to put them back on the shelves."

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SHORT PIECES FOR THE PRINT MAGAZINE:

# The Latest: Coos Bay natural gas terminal moves ahead

The Oregon terminal got the go-ahead from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

Paige Blankenbuehler Oct. 26, 2015 | From the print edition

**BACKSTORY**

The proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership, a free-trade agreement between the U.S. and 12 countries that include many of the nation's largest export markets, has provoked stiff opposition from labor unions, environmental groups and small farmers. It would likely increase exports of liquefied natural gas — LNG — encouraging more gas drilling, fracking and pipeline construction. The West's first LNG terminal in Astoria, Oregon, was green-lighted in 2014, leaving critics focused on blocking another proposed project in Coos Bay ("How an international trade deal will impact Western states," *HCN*, 04/24/15).

**FOLLOWUP**

In early October, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission gave the Coos Bay LNG terminal the go-ahead despite the Environmental Protection Agency's conclusion that the gas terminal and pipeline would "cause some environmental damage." The $7.5 billion project would be linked to existing pipelines across southwestern Oregon. Now, opponents want Gov. Kate Brown and state agencies to block the project before FERC submits final approval, expected at the end of this year.

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# Latest: Salmon, coast recovers after Elwha dams come down

Despite recovery, warm temperatures still threaten salmon spawning.

Paige Blankenbuehler Aug. 31, 2015 From the print edition

**BACKSTORY**

In September 2011, two dams on the Elwha River in northern Washington, which between them supplied power for a single paper mill, were taken down to help struggling salmon runs. One of them — Glines Dam — was the largest ever removed in the country. Federal and tribal biologists were thrilled: Because most of the Elwha is on national park land, development and pollution were not a factor in river restoration ("Rebuilding a river as Washington's Elwha dams come down," *HCN*, 9/19/11).

**FOLLOWUP**
Now, new studies show that the dam removal is not only helping salmon populations recover; it's also rebuilding beaches. Long-trapped sediment has washed downstream to the mouth of the Elwha, allowing diminished beaches to return and slowing coastal erosion. Salmon have returned to stretches of the river that hadn't supported spawning for more than a century. Unfortunately, the fish are still under stress: The same unusually warm waters that have been killing salmon around the Northwest are affecting them as well.

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# The Latest: San Carlos Apache lobbies to protect lands threatened by copper mining

Resolution Copper company engineered a land swap with the feds, but locals oppose it.

Paige Blankenbuehler Aug. 17, 2015 | From the print edition

- Apache Stronghold Rally in Washington, D.C., July 2015. | Robert Meyers, Greenpeace.

**BACKSTORY**
Resolution Copper has long had its eye on a huge copper deposit underneath Oak Flat, near Superior, Arizona, which had been protected by a 1955 executive order from President Dwight D. Eisenhower. In order to mine the deposit, the company engineered a land swap with the federal government, which stalled in Congress, due in part to opposition from local activists and the nearby San Carlos Apache Tribe, for whom Oak Flat is holy ground ("Reluctant Boomtown," *HCN*, 2/18/08).

**FOLLOWUP**
In December, the land exchange was smuggled through Congress as part of the National Defense Authorization Act. In June, Rep. Raúl Grijalva, D-Ariz, introduced a bill that would repeal the land-exchange legislation. And in July, he joined members of the San Carlos Apache Tribe in a 2,000-mile protest journey to Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. Grijalva's bill has little chance of passing, so members of the tribe are now circulating a petition to get Oak Flat designated — and protected — as a national monument.

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# Photographs of the sagebrush sea

## Review of 'Sage Spirit: The American West at a Crossroads' by Dave Showalter.

Paige Blankenbuehler Aug. 17, 2015 From the print edition

**Sage Spirit: The American West at a Crossroads**
By Dave Showalter
173 pages,
Paperback: $24.95.
Mountaineers Books, 2015.

Photographer and writer Dave Showalter has spent a quarter century wandering the sagebrush of Montana, Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico. In *Sage Spirit: The American West at a Crossroads*, he takes the reader on a journey across the "Sagebrush Sea," one of America's most imperiled landscapes. The book's impassioned essays and evocative photographs focus on the competing conservation policies for the ecosystem and its diverse wildlife, particularly the sage grouse, known for its puffed-out chest and flamboyant courtship dance. Showalter employs the bird as a guide to the complicated tangos between public and private lands, and between threatened wildlife and human history. Photographs capture the bird's intricate dance, while immersive essays by biologists, ornithologists and others trace the complex, not always successful, maneuvers of land managers. Together they create a somewhat mismatched and yet melodious duet that yearns for more collaborative conservation in the West.

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# Tracing the Yampa River where it flows free

## Review of "Colorado's Yampa River" by John Fielder.

Paige Blankenbuehler Aug. 3, 2015 From the print edition

**Colorado's Yampa River: Free Flowing and Wild from the Flat Tops to the Green**
Photography by John Fielder, text by Patrick Tierney
172 pages,
hardcover: $45.
John Fielder Publishing, 2015.

Legendary photographer John Fielder joined forces with writer Patrick Tierney to produce *Colorado's Yampa River: Free Flowing and Wild from the Flat Tops to the Green*, a passionate call to preserve one of the West's last untouched waterways. Fielder and Tierney, a whitewater raft guide and head of the Yampa River Awareness Project, follow the river as it flows past sunlit wildflowers and rushes through echoing canyons. In words and images, they tell the Yampa's story, from the Fremont Indian culture that flourished a thousand years ago to contemporary battles over water use. So far, dam proposals for Echo Park and Cross Mountain have failed. Yet a new threat looms: a $5 billion project to divert water to Colorado's Front Range. The story resonates like an epic

novel, as the protagonist — the Yampa itself — and its human allies fight to keep these waters “free flowing and wild.”

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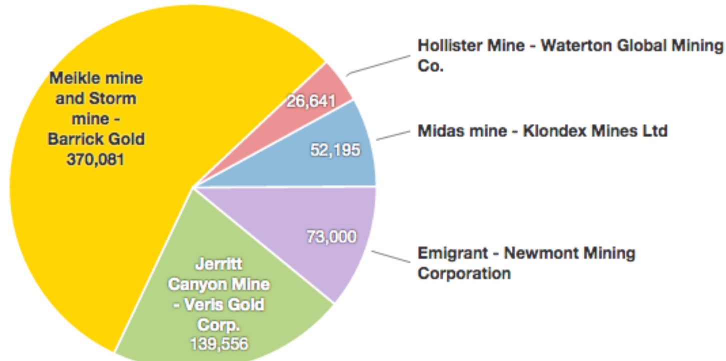
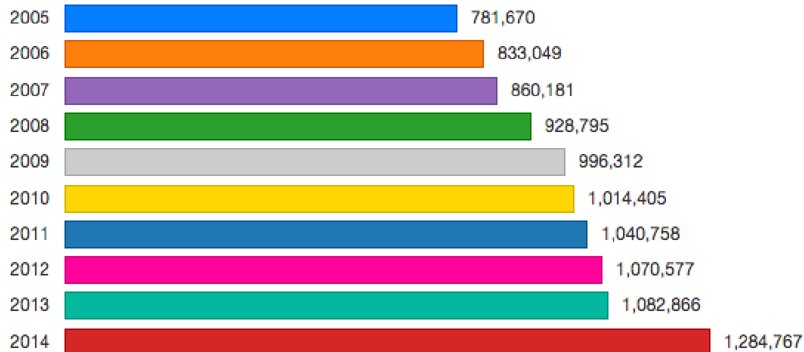
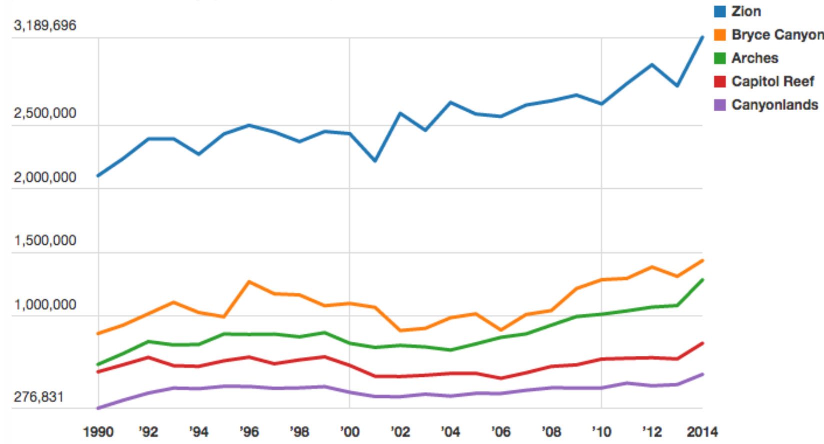
INTERACTIVE INFOGRAPHICS:




Utah "Mighty 5" visitation 1990-2014
Visitation to Zion, Bryce Canyon, Arches, Capitol Reef and Canyonlands National Parks has steadily climbed over the past 25 years. The parks, considered Utah's "Mighty 5," all shared a spike from 2013 to 2014.
Zion
Bryce Canyon
Arches
Capitol Reef
Canyonlands
3,189,696
2,500,000
2,000,000
1,500,000
1,000,000
276,831
1990
'92
'94
'96
'98
'00
'02
'04
'06
'08
'10
'12
2014
Source: National Park Service, compiled by High Country News Get the data

Man-made whitewater parks in the West
Seattle
WASHINGTON
MONTANA
OREGON
IDAHO
WYOMING
Salt Lake City
NEVADA
UTAH
Sacramento
San Francisco
San Jose
Las Vegas
Albuquerque
ARIZONA
United Stat
Map data ©2015 Google, INEGI
Terms
100 mi

AUDIO PIECES AND RADIO INTERVIEWS (FILES ARE INCLUDED IN THE MEDIA FOLDER):

# KGNU Radio and HCN reporter Paige Blankenbuehler talk 'frackedemia'

The University of Colorado's business school is at the center of a controversy over oil and gas industry-funded research.

Paige Blankenbuehler Oct. 8, 2015 | Web Exclusive

[Audio component of this story is included in the media folder.]

*Industry-funded research presents a tough paradox for universities. In general, it's not unusual for industries like oil and gas to pick up the tab for some studies and research. Without that outside funding, many of the studies wouldn't otherwise get done.* KGNU*'s Maeve Conran recently talked to* High Country News *reporter Paige Blankenbuehler about her article that highlighted the peril of industry-funded research and public perception of oil and gas studies. Read her web-exclusive story here.*

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## Chapter Five: Analysis

### STRIKING A BALANCE BETWEEN THE RESONANCE OF FAMILIARITY AND CLICHÉ: A CASE STUDY OF "CHASING BAYLA"

In the late 1960s, Marshall McLuhan and Wilfred Watson collaborated on a now very famous book called "From Cliché to Archetype." The work is a mosaic of sharp reflections that examined media messages and how humans have engaged with the world has changed through an evolving level of importance placed on messages. I like to imagine McLuhan and Watson, smoke pouring from the cigarettes teetering between their fingers in a dark room with static television noise piercing the atmosphere in the jarring medium-is-the-massage style, arguing about the most difficult questions besieged on message-makers today. What is a cliché? Is it negligent if a journalist uses one? Why do the media avoid them so aggressively and regard clichés so pejoratively? Is it possible that a writer can use pre-established and familiar frames and structures effectively to resonate with readers? McLuhan defines a cliché as a word or phrase that becomes so often used that readers of the message are numbed by its effects, but he also theorizes about their value as a "perceptual probe" into understanding our culture that have the power to awake our cognition by recognizing the familiar, the safe. The cliché.

As McLuhan alludes, journalists are successful when narratives strike a balance between cliché and familiarity that resonates with a reader. "Chasing Bayla," a 2015 Pulitzer Prize finalist for feature writing published in the *Boston Globe*, serves as an interesting case study for how to achieve that balance. Because the story uses a traditional "quest" plot structure and relies heavily on parallels to Hermann Melville's "Moby

Dick," it was more vulnerable to coming off as contrived. Whether the writer and editor achieved that balance is a matter of perspective.

"Chasing Bayla" is a 6,835-word magazine-narrative feature that appeared on the front page of the *Boston Globe* on October 24, 2014. It's a story about a man's quest to save a species written by Sarah Schweitzer and edited by Steve Wilmsen. Its central character, Michael Moore, a biologist at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, vowed as a young man to keep the endangered North Atlantic right whale from going extinct. The species' biggest foe is the commercial fishing industry that extracts lobster using large cages and thick, metal fishing lines that scrap the ocean floor for crustaceans that congregate within right whale migration zones. After Moore saw a beached right whale entangled in the fishing wire on a New England shore – a scene that Schweitzer described as a whale "cut by cheese wire" – he sought to prevent such blatant abuse of an endangered species. The rest of Schweitzer's feature tells us how Moore dedicated much of his career to saving the right whale and his ultimate failure, epitomized by the death of a right whale that Moore has followed since its birth. Moore serves as a vector through the action as Schweitzer uses a chronological narrative structure that follows Moore's career and incorporates a parallel narrative of a right whale named Bayla. Schweitzer worked with scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and obtained thorough documentation of the whale's life, from its infancy until its death. The completeness of that story juxtaposed upon Moore's ardent ambition to save the whales creates an emotional story about failure and death. This particular endangered species story stands apart from other stories like it because of the complete plot lines of two powerful characters, Moore and Bayla, that Schweitzer weaved together. Schweitzer's

timing for the story was also fortuitous. Had she come into this story before Moore's moment of failure to save a species from the looming threats of extinction, a pinnacle scene and resolution of the story arc would have been absent.

Before any calls were made, Wilmsen said he wanted a story about a whale. "It may sound a bit odd, but I was intrigued generally by questions about the human relationship with the natural world," Wilmsen said. Schweitzer and Wilmsen discussed the possibilities, and then she called around to research institutes. Although *luck* itself is impossible for another journalist to model, invariably successful stories are hinged on inputting the right number into your telephone at the right time. Essentially, that's what happened with Schweitzer and ultimately began her journey of reporting and writing "Chasing Bayla."

Her luck began when she called the media relations woman at the Woods Hole Center to see if they had any research on whales. In Schweitzer's case, she had long been reporting in the Boston area, and her reputation with the center, had built trust with the spokesperson. Schweitzer says that call lead to a "completely unusual chain of events." She said she wanted to write a story about whales and the spokesperson passed her immediately to Moore. It was her first call, and luckily, it lead her directly to the man who would become her main source. "Often (media relations specialists) don't grab onto this idea of narratives, and they have their different ideas of what might work," Schweitzer said. "I don't know that she knew where Michael Moore was at emotionally. She just knew that he does this whale work, so there was that piece of luck." The second piece of luck was Schweizter's timing. "He was at a point that was an emotional journey point for him. I was just the person who called. When I asked that question, he was ready

to talk," Schweitzer said. Throughout her initial conversation with Moore, she learned, broadly, about his work, but it wasn't until the end of her conversation with him— when she was about to thank him and move on, that he said something that really struck a chord. "I think I said as a wrap-up, 'gosh you've had a great career it must be wonderful to accomplish so much.' He said, 'oh no, no. I have totally failed.' I was like, 'What!?' I just completely jerked out of my seat … I knew exactly what the story was."

As she gathered information during her reporting, Schweitzer and Wilmsen worked closely to narrow the focus and develop the story arc. As the reporter on the story, Schweitzer placed a lot of value on Moore's admission that he had failed. At that point, she based her entire structure, plot and frame on a slice of her initial interview. Moore's cue to Schweizter about his failure was all she and Wilmsen needed to know that they were working on a story with a hero's quest plot structure. David Leach, a professor of narrative magazine writing at the University of Victoria, said the quest plot structure is one of the most common used in fiction and literary nonfiction. Because it's a common structure, he says, the reader can easily identify with it and is invested in finding out whether or not the hero succeeds in their quest. Wilmsen said that at the beginning of this process, it was clear that the essential ingredients of story were there. "We knew fairly quickly that Dr. Moore on this particular mission was not only trying to save a particular whale, but that the stakes were really high for him. … So once we knew that sort of framework, then the basic arc was there, the rest was understanding how Dr. Moore got to that place," Wilmsen said.

Throughout that process, Wilmsen said he and Schweitzer worked tirelessly to avoid cliché because the arc in of itself was not innovative and any story about whales

runs the risk of adopting a bit of an "Ahab quality," which Wilmsen describes as the tendency to echo themes from Herman Melville's "Moby Dick." Moore, as the story central character, had a bit of that quality of a man's tireless pursuit of a whale. In Moore's case, it was a bit of an "Ahab in reverse," Schweitzer said. Wilmsen said that in avoiding cliché, he and Schweitzer worked together to determine the next steps for the reporting. "My role is as a collaborator and someone who can maintain a little bit of distance from the story," Wilmsen said. But regardless of the style of an editor, Wilmsen says the key to avoiding cliché is maintaining a process of discovery. That process, he says, was Schweitzer's strength. Cliché, he explains, is something *once* powerful that's become used too frequently. "You have to discover something again, and Sarah is very gifted at keeping both her language and her understanding of a situation extremely fresh and extremely new, and both of us worked at that to make sure that you don't fall into … the overly familiar." Schweitzer says trusted her own instinct and reported true to her individual lens to prevent the story of Moore and the right whales from feeling too reminiscent of other narratives on whales and of the quest plot structure. Those instincts began with her knowledge of the general topic; she knew her editor wanted a story on whales, but Schweitzer wasn't a science writer and wasn't approaching the story from that perspective. She also hadn't written about whales in a general sense previously, either. In Schweitzer's case, it allowed her to react to the story in the way her audience would. "You can't avoid redoing what's already been done out there to some level, but everyone brings to the story your own viewpoint and your own experience … you're just telling a reader what you saw in the best way you can. By doing that honestly, you avoid a cliché because doing a cliché would be what everybody said before," Schweitzer said.

However objectively Schweitzer maintained a diligent process of discovery in her reporting of "Chasing Bayla," she was searching for the information and imagery that fit onto her established frame of the scientist's quest that she was building. The ultimate message is the journalist's and her editor's decision, and in the case of Schweitzer and Wilmsen's collaboration on the *Boston Globe* feature, their process was very deliberate in fitting the narrative onto the quest plot structure. Clichés are the products of the frames in which they exist, and in this example, some of the most evocative imagery echoed scenes from Melville's Moby Dick. Take, for example, the scene that Schweitzer recreates the Moore's dart with the sedative-filled syringe. "*Don't miss.* Moore thought as he gave the command to shoot. The report was a sharp crack. A splash erupted at the waterline next to Bayla's torso. An orange buoy tied to the syringe for tracking fell to the water. The buoy jerked, then began moving. The dart was traveling with Bayla," Schweitzer writes in the feature. The climax of this story nods to the scene in Moby Dick when Captain Ahab, after days of pursuit, at last reaches the White Whale and strikes it with a harpoon.

But in deliberately avoiding another rendition of the Moby Dick cliché, as Schweitzer reported "Chasing Bayla," she intentionally left out pieces of Moore's story to fit onto her pre-established notion of the plot and frame she and Wilmsen selected. From Moore's perspective, Schweitzer's portrayal of him in her article was narrow. "The story she wanted to tell was much more limited than what I though was coming down the pipe," Moore said. "(Right whale research) is a very small part of what I do." As a journalist structures a story, inevitably, some aspects of that character's life will be dropped onto the cutting room floor, never making it out to the public. Schweitzer says the character development stages of reporting is the most difficult for her. "It's just a

messy process. It doesn't always feel right in the moment, but if you do keep on the arc, it is going to come out better than if you stray," Schweitzer said. She says her first drafts always include more of the big picture and complexity of a nuanced character. "That's why I have an editor to come along and say 'Sarah, you just have to tell the story.' … It's a brutal process, right?" she said. "You're losing all this stuff that you saw and that matters to that person and they said it was important and you have to decide that it's not important to the story."

In the end, though, cliché is a matter of perspective. Orin Hargraves, media theorist and author of "It's Been Said Before: A Guide to the Use and Abuse of Clichés," writes, "the difficulty that arises in the very definition of cliché is that its principle characteristics — overuse and ineffectiveness — are not objectively measurable." Both Schweitzer and Wilmsen say "Chasing Bayla" was successful in avoiding cliché, but that opinion contrasts Moore's reaction to the story. Leach also said Moore's character came off as unbelievable, but it resonated with the readers nonetheless. "Certainly a newspaper feature article is going to be two dimensional compared to the real Michael Moore. That said, because it's so focused just on him, he becomes compelling in that way," Leach said. "It's got this intensity of focus, but obviously, she's highlighted certain qualities and there's a vast amount of other things about his character that we will never know." Leach said there were points that the character came off as contrived. "I know a lot of scientists and they kind of like, plug away at their little things, and they don't have an all-or-nothing mentality. I've never meant a scientist like that. So, that was the note that didn't ring true for me. It was obviously just raising the stakes for the reader more than anything else."

As Leach describes, “Chasing Bayla” was contrived — both in its development of the main character and in its emphasized imagery of the quest after the whale — but that familiarity resonated with readers. And, if the story’s readers’ reactions serve as a measure of success, then “Chasing Bayla,” has done quite well. One commenter wrote: “Tears are streaming down my face. Michael Moore - you restore my faith in humanity. People are not the only creatures on Earth that deserve to live a safe and fruitful life. I never knew why they were called the right whale until I read this - so sad. How can I help?”

The feature has also had a lasting impact on the people inside the process. Even though Moore said the story focused on a small part of his work, he says the experience was “a gift” because the *Globe* put a front-and-center photograph of an entangled right whale above the fold on the Sunday paper. “It was huge,” Moore said. “The fact that we're having this conversation today is testament to the fact that she wrote a pretty powerful piece.” The story was submitted to the Pulitzer prize judges by Brian McGrory, an editor and 23-year veteran of the *Boston Globe*, who called the story a “parable of a man trying to live up to a youthful vow and a moving examination of a species struggling to survive just outside our view.” The story ultimately fell short to Pulitzer winner Diana Marcum of the *Los Angeles Times*, whose stories of the California Central Valley offered “nuanced portraits of lives affected by the state’s drought,” according to a press release from the Pulitzer Prize committee.

Merrill Perlman, a contributor to the *Columbia Journalism Review* who has written frequently about the use of clichés in media, defines the term as “an expression or idea that has become trite,” adding, “that doesn’t mean a cliché has no value: An

appetizer of beets and goat cheese is a restaurant ‘cliché,’ but that doesn’t mean it’s not delicious. It’s just not very original.” Perlman’s point punctuates the importance that a cliché should not be used in a pejorative way, but should be approached with great caution by journalists. In equal weight, though, McLuhan also explains that one generation’s cliché can evolve into a comforting and familiar frame to the next generation. “There’s a paradoxical shift from cliché to frame as 'past time are pastimes.' The dominant technologies of one age become the games and pastimes of a later age,” he wrote. Although Schweitzer modeled her story on a well established structure and emphasized drama in the feature through a clichéd narrative that echoed “Moby Dick,” she told the story through a fresh lens, Moore’s personal quest. As Perlman advises in an article in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, we shouldn’t give clichés the boot — we should enliven them with new souls.

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**Appendix:**

DESCRIPTION OF CHANGES TO THE PROPOSAL:

As this report alludes in its earlier pages, there were many changes to the project from the original proposal. The professional component was originally structured as an individual investigation into ski area snowmaking practices in communities affected by the drought, called "Water into Snow." After the proposal defense in April 2015, I was offered a position at *High Country News*. Upon this significant change to the proposal from an individually structured project into a six-month internship at an environmental magazine, the original story evolved into a broader look at a changing ski area under climate and economic challenges. This focus was recommended by my editors, and after several meetings and pitches back-and-forth, we decided to do a three-part series that would be published digitally as a web exclusive project. Those three articles are included in Chapter Four of this project report, "Physical Evidence." The internship was full-time for six months and included much more editorial work for the print and online editions of the magazine. In all, 90 percent of my time at the internship was spent on reporting and writing. Approximately eight hours per week were also spent on the analysis.

The analytical component also changed in order to produce an analysis with a single-story focus, to take a deeper look at one process through interviews of equally complex subject-matter. The end result aligned better with my current career goals in producing a trade-publication article. Instead of focusing on five environmental features on the drought beat and interviewing five professional journalists about their processes, I worked with the project chair, Bill Allen, to refocus the the analysis on a single, long-form story through four interviews and one deep case study of an environmental feature.

The analysis focused on the *Boston Globe* story “Chasing Bayla,” and the writer, editor, primary source and an outside media expert were interviewed to assess the how the story came to be and if it was successful in avoiding cliché. The goal of the analysis — to recommend an industry best practice for avoiding clichéd characters and plots — was achieved and did not change from the original proposal.

ORIGINAL PROPOSAL: WATER INTO SNOW
Proposal defense: APRIL 2015
Anticipated graduation: DECEMBER 2015

I. Introduction

When I came to the Missouri School of Journalism in January 2014, I sought to bring my skills as an environmental beat reporter to pursue more in-depth work in magazine writing and investigative reporting. Since enrolling, I've had many colorful and varied opportunities that have strengthened my belief in the importance of these issues. My master's professional project will comprise two elements — a practical journalistic project and an industry analysis — that will dive deeply into the very specific topics of climate change, drought, prioritization of resources and how environmental journalists approach the formidable challenge of presenting these macro-issues with the use of central characters.

I've found a passion for investigative reporting through Investigative Reporters and Editors Director Mark Horvit's class, and I desire to cover social and political issues within environmental reporting particularly at the cross-section of an increasing population, environmental resources and recreation. At this point in my career, an investigative project and framing analysis will help me reach my goal to become a watchdog for the environment by producing thoughtful, in-depth reporting that informs readers in the West.

My professional analysis will examine the process of framing environmental stories with the use of a powerful, central character. These two elements will help me gain a deeper understanding of the merit, successes and shortcomings of environmental coverage. This professional project will help me build a network of contacts that will

better position me in an eventual career as a freelance journalist based in the western slope of Colorado.

## II. The professional skills component

For my professional skills component, I propose an in-depth investigative reporting project that I will pursue as an individual or while employed at a publication interested in providing editorial support for the idea. I'm interested in knowing how the ski industry has adjusted snowmaking practices in periods of extreme drought and what ethical, legal, economic and social dilemmas have manifested both regionally and in small, mountain communities. I envision this project as "Water into snow: Snowmaking continues as water resources dwindle," published either as a series of articles or as a long-form article.

To help defray reporting expenses for the project, I have been awarded a grant from the Larry J. Waller Fellowship for Investigative Reporting. This project will be completed over the summer and fall, with a final defense in December 2015, and the final product will be pitched as a freelancer or published during an internship or fellowship at a publication.

## Summary

In February, researchers from NASA and Columbia and Cornell universities published a study cautioning the United States to prepare for a “mega drought” that could bring “unprecedented drought conditions,” (Cook, et.al. 2015, p. 254). A perpetual state of drought should bring water prioritization under close scrutiny, particularly when

economic drivers and corporate powers siphon natural resources away from communities that will need the precious resource to survive.

In a typical year, one southwestern Colorado resort will consume about 75 million gallons of water for snowmaking, according to the Master Development Plan of Telluride Resort. In the same year, an average family of four will consume approximately 146,000 gallons, according to water data from the U.S. Geological Survey and Water Sense, an Environmental Protection Agency partnership program. Telluride Resort, in Southwestern Colorado, is more efficient than many ski resorts, but in a town with only 2,319 people, the resort uses the same amount of water as 90 percent of the town's population in one year[1].

Northstar Ski Resort in North Tahoe, California, touts more efficient snowmaking technology, but the impact on water exists there, too. According to the Northstar Mountain Master Plan in November 2013, the resort had proposed to increase its water use under the already established Truckee River Operating Agreement. If a resort were using more efficient equipment, why would its executives need to increase its consumption of water? The report also addresses how the increase in water use will cause changes in runoff, flooding and water quality.

I spoke with Robert Broz, a professor in the University of Missouri College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, who told me that snowmaking — even if diversions are being "recycled" in and out of the same reservoir — is a consumptive use

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[1] 2,319/4=579.75 (families of four in Telluride, Colorado). 579.75*146,000=84,643,500 gallons of water consumed, per year by residents. Ski area annual snow making consumption=75,000,000. 75,000,000/84,643,500=x/100; x=88.61. The ski area, as a single business, uses nearly 90 percent water as the community consumes in a year; nearly mirroring the usage

of water. He put it like this: The water is being stockpiled, and even if it does melt in the spring, there is no other use for the snowpack melts allocated for recreation.

In my preliminary reporting over the last eight weeks, I've spoken with a water resource engineer from the Colorado Division of Water Resources, water lawyers in Colorado and a representative of Denver Water, which is based in Dillon, Colorado, where many of the state's prominent ski resorts exist. So far in Colorado, resorts have been pushing the limits on water rights for snowmaking. From my nascent conversations on the topic, I think there's a strong story here. My sources say they worry that winter recreation and snowmaking practices will be under harsh scrutiny if drought conditions persist.

In 2012, I was working on the environmental beat at the *Summit Daily News*, in Frisco, Colorado, and one afternoon I got a call from a local business owner who said trout were flopping on the rocky riverbank of the Blue River where water had been flowing just days before. Some sections of the Blue River that ran through nearby Breckenridge had gone dry. This happened, coincidentally, in the days leading up to a major snowboarding and skiing event called the "Dew Tour," held at the Breckenridge Resort. The ski resort had pulled water out of the watershed of the Blue River for snowmaking (to build a 35-foot half-pipe for the competition) under its water rights. The resort was legally within its easement rights for withdrawing water, but ethically it was another question. Ultimately the water rights had not adjusted to the drought. (My story: http://www.summitdaily.com/article/20121206/NEWS/121209901). This incident happened three years ago, but I'd like to follow up on the situation.

I will submit several records requests under the federal Freedom of Information Act, California Public Records Act and the Colorado Open Records Act to collect and analyze water and climate data and water easements/water rights agreements to determine how much water has been taken and by whom over time. A majority of the reporting will take place in Colorado and California, so I will make use of the respective Sunshine Laws in those states and municipalities. The data will help strengthen an investigative argument and help answer many questions that need to be addressed, including: How much water do communities need? How much water do big industries consume? When there's not enough water to keep streams viable, should water rights be reassessed? Are recreation uses frivolous? Does the ski industry have an ethical obligation to preserve rivers, streams, reservoirs, etc., and pull back on depleting these resources?

This story's argument is built primarily on the water rights and easements that allow ski resorts to divert water to their snowmaking operations. I would need to investigate and talk with sources involved in crafting legislation that details the parameters in these contracts, and I would need to compile research, especially on water rights. I know easements and water rights are complicated, and many municipalities have sold water rights to ski resorts. I would carefully detail how water rights have changed over time and produce tangible numbers showing who gets how much and what limits may exist on diversions during dry periods. Lawmakers could provide insight on recent efforts to modify existing policies to more appropriately divide the share of water, or, if no changes are pending, they might provide insight on conversations tensions in the community about the topic. I would ask these questions in Colorado and California.

Another interesting angle to explore is the exodus of skiers to other states and how those resorts are dealing with increased demand, and if they even have the resources to provide enough snow to sustain the interest of ski-tourism. The effects of drought in California and Colorado have pushed skiers and snowboarders north to resorts in Wyoming, Montana, Oregon, Washington and Idaho, so I would explore the snowpack and snowmaking operations in these places as well.

A large focus of the article will be in California, where ski resorts have been largely affected by drought conditions. I would interview locals near Mammoth and Tahoe ski areas and speak with ski industry executives about challenges of snowmaking during drought periods and what the hardest decisions have been. Small-scale or family-owned ski resorts are suffering the most from the drought. For example, Homewood Mountain Resort at Lake Tahoe suspended skiing in early February. Corporate resorts, too, have felt the effects. Mount Baldy Ski Lifts near Los Angeles also closed, according to a report by the Associated Press published in the New York Times in February.

I would speak with snowmaking operations at these resorts to find out how the practices have had to adapt to conditions this year and how much snow they were able to make versus how much snow fell naturally. I'd explore the tough decisions ski area executives had to make this year and what the effects on local economies have been. I'm really interested in the emotional, human element to the hard decisions here: How bad does it have to be to close a business? In communities that depend on the ski industry economy, what is the cascade of events when a resort closes and when the lands don't provide the key ingredient to success? I would also talk to business owners in the mountain communities that depend on the ski industry economy for their viability, to see how the

drought has affected their businesses. Snowmaking practices are bumping up against ethical questions. Policy and legislation aren't adapting to the changing landscape quickly enough to preserve rivers and streams from their outdated water easements and rights.
I will begin reporting for this project in mid-June or July 2015 when either an internship or my individual endeavor would begin, and I will send weekly progress reports for 14 weeks until the 240-hour requirement is satisfied. I would start with research on water rights, history of easements and interviews with the Denver Water Board based in Dillon, Colorado. This first stage of reporting would take two to three weeks.

In July I will begin speaking with ski area executives in Colorado. Summer is a good time to get interviews with ski area executives because it is the beginning of "mud season," and their availability is much better. I would interview chief operating officers of Arapahoe Basin, Keystone Resort, Breckenridge Ski Resort and Copper Mountain (all in Summit County, Colorado); Vail Resort and Beaver Creek (both in Eagle County, Colorado); Aspen-area resorts and Snowmass (Pitkin County, Colorado); and more southwestern resorts in Colorado that have faced harsher drought conditions, including: Durango Mountain Resort, Wolf Creek Ski Area and Telluride Ski Resort (San Juan Mountain Range). This reporting would take four to five weeks.

By September I'd like to begin interviews with California-based water boards to get a picture of the situation there. Initial reporting could be done over the phone and through open-records requests. I'm looking forward to comparing water practices between the two states since California has had much more severe drought conditions. During this time, it will be necessary to re-evaluate the thesis of the investigation. I may need to make adjustments depending on what I find.

By October I would travel to California to get a feel for the landscapes as ski areas are preparing to open. I'd like to meet with ski area chief executives, especially those from resorts that have had to close or suspend their seasons. I'd interview local residents to understand how far-reaching effects of drought on the ski industry are and what opinions local environmentalists and community members might have on snowmaking practices in this historic drought. I would be able to acquire enough interviews and materials in one week.

By early November I would like to start writing and assess logical next steps in the reporting. At this stage I will figure out what pieces of the big picture are missing and adjust the final stage of reporting to gather necessary information. By the time I defend my master's project in December, I will have either a longer finished work or a series of articles completed. Likely, I will continue reporting after the defense either as a freelancer or as an employee of an appropriate publication. By December, ski resorts are only beginning their ski seasons and snowmaking operations, and I might be missing valuable reporting on the ground if the project finishes in December. I'll follow developing stories and report as the ski season progresses. I will continue into the spring to report on snowmaking practices throughout the ski season. This is an ambitious undertaking because it has many elements to it: water rights, drought, recreation, competing values, money and lobby power, and environmental impact. But I believe it's possible to finish at least the first few articles in a series, or a nearly completed long-form narrative by the time I defend.

Professional project logistics

The Larry J. Waller Fellowship for Investigative Reporting will help defray reporting expenses. I hope to hold a fellowship at *High Country News*, a Colorado-based newsmagazine that covers environmental issues in the 11 Western states. The internship allows one reporting trip per journalist, and with that support combined with the fellowship funding, I would plan to visit Mammoth and Tahoe ski resorts in California and drought-affected ski areas around Colorado (the worst of the effects have been seen in the San Juan Mountains in the southwestern part of the state). Currently I am a finalist for the position, and a decision will be made by May 1. If selected, I would use my time in Paonia, Colorado, where the publication is headquartered, to focus on nearby ski resorts. I have already reached out to the editor of the magazine and he said the publication would support this idea.

I have applied for the *Mother Jones* fellowship based in San Francisco, and it has proved to be a promising prospect. I am a finalist for the position and have completed an interview and research test. The fellowship supervisor, senior editor Maddie Oatman, said she will make a decision by May 1. I have corresponded with Barbara Cochran about the Washington Program in the fall in the event that these other options don't pan out. I have been awarded the White House Correspondent's Scholarship, which would partially cover costs of enrolling in the program.

If I pursue the project without an internship, I will begin the investigation in Colorado. I would start by gathering information about drought conditions and work with Denver Water to obtain details on water rights and easements held by ski areas. The *HCN* internship begins July 6; Mother Jones in early June. Both positions are full-time for six months.

The final product would be primarily a written narrative but would have photographs, multimedia and information-graphics as opportunities arise. It would be disseminated through *HCN* or *Mother Jones*, or I will pitch the finished product as a freelancer to *Outside* magazine, *5280* Denver magazine, *Newsweek*, or other interested markets (likely in the Western United States). *HCN* Editor Brian Calvert or *Mother Jones* Senior Editor Maddie Oatman would supervise the project. If I pursue the project as an individual with the Larry J. Waller funding, Mark Horvit will act as supervisor.

Qualifications

My hope to be an environmental journalist comes from a very personal place. In my formative years, I fell in love with the American West. My affinity for this landscape motivates me to cover environmental, social and political issues to educate a readership that cares about the preservation of landscapes. It's my career mission to help educate and shape a society that matches the scenery.

My first work as an environmental journalist officially started when I became a reporter at the Summit Daily News in 2012, but you could really say it started quite a bit earlier in Durango, Colorado, while I was working toward a bachelor's degree at Fort Lewis College. I was the assistant editor-in-chief at the campus newsmagazine, The Independent, and the places that tugged hardest at my notebook and me were the barely visible paths to secret forest forts and the mountains that took me higher than anything humans had managed to build there (so far). My time in Durango was transformative, and I became focused on becoming a journalist. Before I graduated, I started working as a news intern for the *Durango Herald*. After three months, the position turned into a full-

time job as a general assignment reporter, and while I was employed at this newspaper, I broke a national story about a high school yearbook censorship issue that overloaded the publication's website with record-breaking traffic.

At the Summit Daily I was recognized in 2013 in the Best News Story category of the Colorado Press Awards for "Impasse in Silverthorne," a piece I wrote about a contentious recreational path in Silverthorne. It described an interesting tension between a group of landowners and the small-town government over a particular stretch of land. The dreams of the landowners and the town government collided, resulting in an impasse and unprecedented use of eminent domain. Soon, I began to notice a gap in the overall coverage of tensions between the environment and recreation, and I decided I wanted to return to school to pursue a master's degree in journalism so I could develop my skills and reach more people with my voice.

At MU I have worked as a science writer at the Bond Life Sciences Center, contributing to a publication called *Decoding Science*, which is a news blog for a general audience. In this position, I've covered the development of assays to more quickly detect anthrax; research on small molecule therapies inching the orphan disease spinal muscular atrophy ever closer to a cure; and scientific inquiries into Ebola. I am also employed as a teaching assistant and flight instructor for a drone journalism class, an experience that has me thinking about visualizing landscapes differently with the use of the technology.
I've also worked independently as a freelance journalist. This semester, I contributed a lengthy feature to *Newsweek*. I reported the story from Guanacaste, Costa Rica, and have established a working relationship with the science and technology editor at the national news magazine. (It's possible I could work with this editor as a freelancer for the

practical component of my project). I have contributed reporting, research and writing for a Washington Post investigative project; my work has been published in Illumination Magazine, a quarterly MU magazine that features long-form articles on research; and the *Columbia Missourian*, an award- winning daily in mid-Missouri. I have contributed to MUddy Boots News, an MU news blog. In an investigative journalism class, I worked closely with Mark Horvit, director of Investigative Reporters and Editors, on an in-depth report on the Colorado ski industry and the U.S. Forest Service's loose regulation on skier capacity limits. The project is unpublished, but I intend to continue the reporting at a publication that could provide more editorial oversight and support. During my graduate studies, I have been awarded a fellowship through the Association of Healthcare Journalists and had the opportunity to attend the national annual conference in Denver last year. I also became a member of IRE and an organization I now hold very close to my heart, the Society of Environmental Journalists.

III. The analysis component

Statement

I will also conduct a professional analysis of the use of central, local characters in environmental journalism. This component will satisfy the analysis/research portion of the MA professional project and will take the form of a professional analysis titled: Is Your Environmental Feature a Cliché? How to Effectively Source and Frame Drought and Climate Change Coverage. I will conduct interviews with environmental journalists to assess how journalists[they?] use central, local characters to shape narratives about drought and climate change. I will examine the journalists' perceived impact of their

stories. The research will examine cases in which the techniques were effective and cases in which they were not.

## Professional media importance

As climate change continues to affect communities, insightful and impactful coverage will be increasingly necessary. When sources are not successfully used in an article, the journalist runs the risk of either reinforcing a cliché or presenting a character that inappropriately communicates the issue to an audience. If media practitioners can gain more insight on how best to communicate issues such as drought through effective framing and sourcing processes, the work produced will be more useful to the public and will more effectively arm society with applicable knowledge to facilitate policy changes that have direct implications on the environment.

## Methodology

To execute this idea, I will speak with four professional environmental reporters who have done stories built around a central character within the past five years. I will pick one narrative for each reporter to discuss. Three of these case studies will focus on perceived successful outcomes. One will look at an example of a sourcing strategy gone wrong. For additional context, I will interview a media authority — a journalism school dean, an editor at the Poynter Institute or similar organization — to get a perspective about how, if used correctly, central characters can give a story more impact. In all, five interviews will be conducted, transcribed and assessed, culminating in a journalistic

article written for an audience of media practitioners, with a targeted focus on the environmental beat.

This analysis will evaluate how environmental journalists find sources, how they structure their stories, what impact they think their articles have, and whether they perceive local sources to be important. To add a more objective element, I will focus on stories that have won journalism awards. This outside recognition corroborates the merit of the article and the successful use of a central character.

I have constructed a list of 28 prospective subjects (see Appendix, Figure 1) who are well known environmental journalists. I will choose three subjects from the list. I included members of the Society of Environmental Journalists, people recommended by SEJ members and journalists I read often. I also included winners of SEJ annual awards, magazine writing awards and Knight Risser Prize winners in environmental reporting. I attempted to create a mix of journalists from varied backgrounds and publication size. Some of the potential subjects are freelancers, others are staff writers, and some hold a contributing editor position. I required that my subjects' majority of coverage falls within the environmental beat and that they have at least five years of experience as a professional journalist. For each interview, I will select an appropriate article that covers drought or climate change and uses a central character to help illustrate the issue. The article selected must show evidence of success through recognition or an award. I will need to identify, first, the article's premise and its central character.

For the fourth case study, I will find a journalist who was not successful in sourcing and framing a central character. Mark Horvit has a journalist in mind who fits these criteria. This case study will offer a necessary contrast to the other case studies. If journalists are

to arm themselves with the knowledge to create effective narratives, they must analyze processes that went wrong and learn from them.

Finally, the fifth interview subject will be a media authority that can provide insight on the importance of sourcing and the responsibility that environmental journalists have to get it right. I will find this source through an environmental reporting program (such as a dean or professor), or through media organizations that offer regular critiques of industry practices (such as Poynter or the Columbia Journalism Review). The interview will provide more context for the case studies and explain how to avoid clichés, inaccuracies and inadequate sourcing.

Each interview will be transcribed and evaluated using framing theory. As I analyze the interviews, I will look for similarities in the successful articles and the differences that might have contributed to errors in the unsuccessful piece. The combined interviews will be the basis of a long-form news article that would be appropriate for publication in an industry trade publication.

## Literature Review

If drought conditions in the American West persist for one more year, we will officially be in the midst of a "mega drought," according to researchers from NASA and Columbia and Cornell universities. The pairing of the analysis and professional components will dissect the process of framing in environmental journalism, specifically with the use of local sources in drought and/or climate change coverage.

The research will be built upon a framing theory foundation, which has been used widely in media research but less often in critical analysis of specific environmental issues.

Framing, according to Robert Entman, “involves selecting a few aspects of a perceived reality and connecting them together in a narrative that promotes a particular interpretation” (Entman 1993, p. 391). A theoretical frame can function in four major ways: define problems, specify causes, convey moral assessments, and endorse remedies (Entman 1993, p. 391).

Framing is an extension of agenda setting (Scheufele 1999, p. 103) and should be examined through a lens identifying the process of frame building and execution. Once the process is understood, the respective successes of environmental stories within their audiences can be extrapolated from web analytics. This theory will solicit a productive conversation about the roles of local, central characters in articles about drought and climate change in the Western United States, how those characters affect the perception of the impact of the stories in which they are featured, and how journalists arrive at featuring particular sources over others. Inherently a media bias, framing works “to shape and alter audience members’ interpretations and preferences,” to help them better digest information (Entman, 2007, p. 164). Journalists execute the reporting and writing of a specific topic according to their chosen frame, which in turn primes the reader to interpret the topic in a particular way, (Entman, 2007, p. 163). This analysis will begin to answer why journalists employ a local source affected by an issue, like drought, and if that use is effective in relating to the broader audience.

When journalists use a central character to communicate macro issues such as drought and climate change they are enforcing a framing theory. An "effect frame" is considered a powerful way to tell environmental stories, as evidenced by numerous SEJ award winners who use central characters. Poynter Institute, too, has recommended a

character-centric argument because “characters are essential in an effective narrative,” (Scanlan, 2004). It is common practice for a journalist to search for an interesting character to focus a story and create more impact, according to the American Press Institute. “Humans are the most interesting creatures on Earth. Readers, in turn, are most interested in other people,” (Dean, 2012).

Framing theory has been used before to gain insight on environmental journalism. One media researcher examined the decision to use primarily political sources in coverage of a climate summit in Peru using framing theoretical analysis to explain, and how that framing may have been influenced by the unavailability of nongovernmental voices (Takahashi, 2011). Framing was used in an analysis about an environmental controversy, later called “Climategate,” in which a string of contentious emails influenced media framing of the successive coverage. The study looked at media framing on climate change and said ideologically driven frames, “which convey messages of scientific uncertainty, economic consequences, and political conflict and strategy, are more influential on public perceptions of climate change than scientific consensus” (Bowe, et al., 2014, p. 159).

Environmental journalists have the particular challenge of communicating these hard-to-grasp macro issues such as drought and climate change and do so, often, through the construction of an “effect frame.” An effect frame shows a direct effect of a story problem (e.g., drought) by illustrating a specific case where effects manifested. A logical (and admittedly cliché) example in an environmental feature about drought using an effects frame is when a farmer’s fields have low yields as a result of the drought and a journalist illustrates the ground, crackling from dry heat under his feet. That example

shows a character that is affected by the situation, which in this case is drought conditions taking a toll on his or her livelihood. A journalist can tell this story in many ways, thus selecting a frame. In magazine journalism, often a frame is selected and then structured as a narrative. This process will be examined in this literature review. The purpose of this literature review is to establish existing research available on the use of frames in environmental journalism and use it to analyze the process journalists and their editors use to create a frame — whether they do so consciously or not— and identify central sources to enforce that frame. Framing, by its nature, affects overall public opinion (Entman 2007, p. 64), and the frames used to cover climate change have an intrinsic social importance because of the need for information with appropriate scope and coherence.

Research and analysis of framing theory is well understood and widely covered in media studies, but its analysis within environmental journalism is less established. According to the pertinent literature discussed in this review, research on effects frames and character-centric narratives within the environmental beat, and more narrowly, within drought and climate change stories, has not been examined in great depth. To better understand the uses of effect frames within this subject matter, it's essential to understand what frames exist and generally how they are used in journalism.

Framing has been described as "a scattered conceptualization" (Entman 1993, p. 51). Throughout Entman's writings, framing and agenda setting were frequently used interchangeably, and the theoretical bounds of the concepts were nebulous. Later in that decade, however, scholars began to separate the concepts and made the distinction that framing is an extension of agenda setting, (Sheufele, 1999, p. 103). With this new

definition for the framework came a more bridge term, and theorists began referring to framing as second-level agenda setting. Therefore, framing should be regarded as an evolution from agenda setting and mutually exclusive as a media theory. Agenda setting indicates a strong correlation between the emphasis that mass media place on certain issues and the importance attributed to these issues by mass audiences (Sheufele 1999, p. 105). While agenda setting research focuses on media importance, framing is a road map that helps the reader understand topics, by offering a "construction of social reality," actively set by the media to give readers a frame of reference "to interpret and discuss public events," (Sheufele 1999, p. 109). As the term evolved, Entman later theorized that framing is an active and conscious process that is subjective entirely, and uniformly unique to the constructor of a message to highlight particular "aspects of a story to allow for interpretation and context." This process encodes a message to make an event or story more understandable for the audience (Entman, 2004, p. 76). Frames are not an exclusive instrument of the media, and the same process that a message creator uses is used in reverse by the receiver of that message. Audience members use frames to make sense of information. For an individual, a frame is used as a "reference" that appeals to previously held views, experiences and ideals (Sheufele, 1999, p. 107). The scope of this literature review will only examine media frames.

Beyond an individual's personal frame used to encode communication, established frames are also used frequently. A persistent frame used in articles on climate change is one of scientific uncertainly. This is used frequently because of persisting myths of incongruity or consensus among the scientific community and when conveying new findings, a message is encoded with a degree of uncertainty to prevent overstating

statistics. When a reader is cued by language of scientific uncertainty, they regard material more critically than if the message were framed differently. In equal measure, a lack of general scientific knowledge of the audiences that receive that media causes the reporter to make an even greater effort to be fair and balanced (McCann 2010, p. 13). The scientific uncertainty frame can cause problems in public discourse when there is broad agreement in long-asserted messages. Particularly with climate-change media-messages, the incessant uncertainty frames have politicized an issue that should be interpreted as more straightforward. Furthermore, "through framing ... media coverage of anthropogenic climate change can depict an arena of great confusion and intense conflict rather than scientific consensus" (Boykoff, 2007, p. 478). To address this problem, media has recently begun using an "effect frame." Boycoff writes that using a central character in which an audience can sympathize, can encode a message to resonate with receivers of that media by pivoting the focus from scientific uncertainty to more tangible effects. This frame has been more impactful on audiences.

Effect frames convey an observable reaction to a change. In messages on climate change, effect frames focus the attention of a story on a character, not the science. A character in a story that's been framed in this way will have illustrated effects from an uncommon situation. Within these climate change stories told through an affect frame, a secondary geographic frame is often used as well. Take, for example, Elizabeth Kolbert's use of an effect frame in her coverage of climate change effects in the Alaskan village of Shishmaref. Kolbert wrote about descending shorelines caused by melting glaciers and permafrost release that forced small communities to relocate farther inland. In this story, you have an effect frame (communities relocating) that cascaded from a clear and

tangible cause (rising sea levels and toxic gasses). Her report, originally published in the *New Yorker* as a three-part series, is expanded in the book "Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change." Although Kolbert's story is geographically specific, the effect frame is more wide-reaching. The stories' primary effect frame enabled Kolbert to relate the effects in Alaska to the more nuanced and subtle effects of climate change that are beginning to manifest across the globe. During her reporting, Kolbert used many characters directly affected by climate change, which reinforced her frame. "People I spoke to in Shishmaref expressed divided emotions about the proposed move. Some worried that, by leaving the tiny island, they would give up their connection to the sea and become lost. 'It makes me feel lonely,' one woman said," (Kolbert 2006, p. 9). Her coverage has won a National Magazine Award and has been anthologized in Best Magazine Writing of 2006.

The proposed analysis will examine the work of environmental journalists who have adopted an effect frame in long-form newspaper or magazine features. The case study will assess the frame and process of establishing characters in an approach similar, though smaller in scale, to a 2010 framing study that assessed 476 articles from 1989 to 2009, in which the author's criteria encompassed climate change articles that had as little as "one sentence devoted to climate change" (McCann 2010). Her research established a worthy launch-point for a more specific critique on using a character-centered effect frame to communicate climate change stories. My assessment will strengthen the focus on framing within drought and climate change articles by ensuring that the articles contained in the case studies contain more than just a sentence or mention of the issues, but instead use drought and climate change as the driving angle of the story.

In a post-interview analysis, messages will be parsed and categorized as having used effect or scientific uncertainty frames. The analysis will also suss out a frame's usefulness by identifying successful character use and themes deviating from media best practices. These themes will be categorized borrowing the general technique recommended by Susan Spiggle, a researcher in consumer marketing. Each unit of data will "belong to, represent or be an example of some more general phenomenon (Spiggle, 1994, p. 493). The interview will contain categories, representing "concepts, constructs, themes and other types of bins in which to put items that are similar" (Spiggle, 1994, p. 496).

Publication prospects

Interviews with five environmental journalists and their editors will be conducted using a semi-structured interview. Questions will assess the conscious frame used by the journalist, the process of developing a story arc and character and if the message was successful in avoiding cliché. The analysis will be written as a trade publication article and could be published in the Society of Environmental Journalists *SEJournal*, the *Columbia Journalism Review* or *Media Bistro*. Because of the subject matter at hand, the most fitting publication is the *SEJournal*. According to the Society of Environmental Journalists, effective environmental coverage strengthens "the quality, reach and viability of journalism across all media to advance public understanding of environmental issues." My project would provide deeper knowledge about effect framing and best sourcing and character-development practices that avoid cliché and increase the impact of the story within a broad audience.

## “CHASING BAYLA,” AS PUBLISHED IN THE *BOSTON GLOBE*

Biologist Michael Moore had waited all day — really, all his life — for the whale to surface, the suffering giant he thought he could save, that science had to save. It had come down to this.

Thirty meters,” Dr. Michael Moore called out.

Moore braced himself against the steel of the Zodiac’s platform tower as the boat closed in on the whale in the heaving Florida waters. Through the rangefinder, he could see the tangled mass of ropes cinched tightly around her. It was impossible to tell where the ropes began and where they ended.

This much he knew. The ropes were carving into her. Bayla was in pain.

He was tempted to look away. It was almost too much to see.

Her V-shaped spray erupted then disappeared into a mist as she slipped beneath the surface. A spot-plane circling overhead radioed. They could still see her silhouette. She hadn’t gone deep.

“Get in close if you can,” Moore said to the boat’s driver.

Bayla would come up for air again soon.

Then he would have his chance.

For nearly three decades Moore had dedicated himself to North Atlantic right whales like Bayla. He knew every inch of their anatomy, every detail of the strange and glorious physiology that made them so astoundingly powerful and so utterly defenseless against the ropes.

They were majestic and doomed, his love and his burden. He had believed he could save them. But in those thirty years he’d watched too many succumb. Saving just two female whales a year could stabilize a population that humans had driven down to just 450 from the teeming thousands that once greeted settlers to the New World.

And so he had raced down the interstate through a driving New England snowstorm after the e-mail had come.

The details were grim. Bayla had been spotted off the coast of Florida three weeks earlier on Christmas Day, 2010. Rope anchored in her mouth. It coiled around her flippers in a skein of tangled loops. With every move, it pulled tighter.

The rope was likely polypropylene, a synthetic weave favored by Northeast fishermen and lobstermen for its brute strength against the abrading forces of a rocky-bottomed seabed. Blubber was no match for it. Bayla's body was cut open in places, as though by cheese wire.

Her back sloped alarmingly, a sign of emaciation from hauling rope more than 10 times her length, possibly for months. It was like she had been swimming with an open parachute.

Biologists from Florida and Georgia had tried to cut the ropes. But Bayla threw them off with heaves of her massive tail and stunningly quick hair-pin turns. They tried again a day later. Still they couldn't get near enough. She was a bucking bronco.

And so they summoned Moore.

Moore had engineered something that could be a breakthrough for rescuers, a way to sedate whales at sea. The man standing to his left on the Zodiac platform held the instrument Moore had conceived for the task: a pressurized rifle tipped with a dart and syringe filled with 60 cc's of a sedative so powerful that a few drops on human skin could kill.

Bayla was probably seven tons, but you can't weigh a free-swimming whale. If the estimate were wrong, an overdose could plunge Bayla into a catastrophic slumber and she would drown.

Moore scanned the horizon. Fishing charters and Disney Cruise Liners jockeyed for space at the shore. Ahead, the vast reach of the Atlantic met at every point with the prickling Florida sun.

He knew that the work of a lifetime shouldn't come down to a single moment. He was the father of four grown boys. He loved his wife. His home was an island in Marion Harbor. He had published scores of peer-reviewed papers and commanded millions in grant money.

Yet the vow he had made to himself as a young man, the thing he had dedicated his career and heart to, remained unfulfilled. For Moore, nearing retirement and running out of ideas, there might be no more chances.

Blow spouted off the port bow.

"Twenty-one meters," he called to the man with the dart rifle.

Bayla's hobbled body arced through the swells.

"Shoot."

For more than a thousand years, humans hunted the North Atlantic right whale. Big, slow, and without guile, the whales often ventured up to boats, rolled over, and eyed their pursuers with peering curiosity, making for easy marks. Endowed with abundant blubber, right whales also floated after being killed. It was a grimly convenient attribute that, legend has it, afforded them their name. They were the right whale to kill.

Basques hunted them in the Dark Ages. The rest of the European continent followed. Pilgrims on the Mayflower spied right whales as they came into Cape Cod Bay, a feeding ground for the vast animals. “Every day we saw whales playing hard by us,” one passenger wrote. The ship’s master and mate lamented they didn’t have the tools to kill the whales. They soon would. An industry quickly took root in maritime New England. On a single day in January of 1700, colonists killed 29 right whales off the Cape.

Oil from right whale blubber helped propel the Colonial economy, lighting homes and stores and creating wealth and prosperity. By the time whale oil demand faded and right whales were protected from hunting in 1935, their numbers had been reduced from the thousands to some 100 in the North Atlantic.

Today, right whales remain among the rarest animals on earth. Their pursuers are whale-watching boats and a legion of scientists who track them in the hope of figuring out why their numbers hover stubbornly in the low hundreds, a population so fragile that it could be wiped out with one algal bloom.

Researchers say the peril can be traced once again to humans — this time because right whales get in our way, or we in theirs. Dubbed the “urban whale,” North Atlantic rights live along the Eastern seaboard, one of the most developed coastal zones in the world. Migrating from southern calving grounds to northern feeding climes is an industrial obstacle course for the whales, studded with pollution, noise, ships, and most devastatingly, fishing gear — often buoy-tethered ropes leading to lobster pots and crab traps.

Among whales, rights are particularly prone to getting caught in the gear, with 83 percent of those tracked by scientists bearing scars from entanglement. Their special susceptibility, researchers say, owes to feeding with open mouths — filtering tiny prey through their long plates of baleen but also taking in the ropes so common in their domain. Once snagged, the whales frantically spin their bodies trying to get free, but their gyrations instead loop the ropes around flippers and flukes. Unlike weaker whale species that tend to drown when entangled, right whales, which run to 50 feet and 60 tons or more, often have the strength to swim with the lacerating ropes for months, sometimes years.

It’s not known how many right whales die from entanglement. Scientists have recorded an average of four such confirmed and presumed deaths per year since 2008, but they believe many more perish this way unrecorded. In a species plagued by abnormally low

reproductive rates, in some years with a single calf born in the known population, scientists worry that deaths from ropes could be right whales' ultimate undoing — Moore chief among them.

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In the summer of 1979, a grungy 28-foot sailboat with a scruffy crew docked in Newfoundland's treeless peninsula of Bay de Verde, an outcropping of houses, a fish processing plant, and a bar called the Holding Ground.

Word went around that the boat's inhabitants were long-hairs, American college students fired up by the "Save the Whales" movement who had hitchhiked to Newfoundland to study humpback whales. The students played sea shanties on concertina and guitar. They drank Dominion Ale at the Holding Ground and tried to convince fishermen that whales ensnared in cod nets were not nuisances but wonders.

Soon, a 23-year-old British veterinary student joined them.

Michael Moore was on expedition, as students' research journeys to remote spots were called at the University of Cambridge. He wasn't certain he wanted to spend his life tending to dogs and cats, as he had assumed he would. Studying whales was a year-long diversion as he wrestled with his career plans.

To the Americans, Moore projected quirky English certitude. He had graduated from Winchester College, an elite boarding school, and was now at Cambridge. He took his tea every day at 4 p.m. He read Thomas Hardy aloud. On his first night aboard the sailboat, as the Americans climbed into their berths in salted dungarees and cable-knit sweaters, Moore opened a leather satchel. He pulled out a pair of striped pajamas so crisp they might still have had Harrods tags attached.

In the mornings, Moore and his boat mates woke to the frenzy of gulls feasting on cod stomachs gutted by fishermen after pre-dawn hauls. They pulled on oilskins and ventured into the cold emerald bay with the boat's hand cranked-engine belching diesel fumes. They chugged around the peninsula for hours watching humpbacks lunge at schools of capelin.

Moore dutifully jotted observations about the whales in his journal and said little to the Americans. They ribbed him for his punctually taken Earl Grey. One afternoon, he returned the volley with dry, cordial wit. The Americans were taken aback. Moore had found his way. "Beginning to relax and feel part of the machine," he wrote in his journal. "There are some real super people around here — all fine and kind and loving."

From the time of his childhood, Moore had felt somewhat apart. He'd been 12 when his mother told him that his father was manic depressive. The news stunned him. He'd always thought of his father as a steady rock, a country doctor content with his practice. He'd had no idea that his father was undergoing a grueling course of convulsive shock

therapy or that his mother had come upon him after an attempted suicide. The family dynamic now became clear to him: his mother tended his father and his father tended his patients. Alone many afternoons, he wandered from his home, down to the railroad tracks where he kept tabs on a badger family, an experience that steered him to study the animal condition.

Now, at last, he was on the inside.

His descriptions of the whales grew animated and lively. They were grand, clever, and powerful, the sea's benign emperors, yet astonishingly vulnerable. One day the researchers came upon a humpback caught in a cod trap under the cliffs. The whale was thrashing in panic. Other humpbacks were circling helplessly. "I need to go in and cut the net," Moore said as he and the others watched in horror. It would have been reckless; the nets could readily have entangled him too. He was about to dive, when other humpbacks helped the whale break free, leaving Moore's declaration flapping like the flag of an impetuous explorer who had stumbled on something but wasn't yet sure what it was.

Moore stayed on with the researchers at summer's end and sailed with them to the humpbacks' wintering grounds in the Caribbean. As Christmas approached and carols played on Radio Antigua, he thought of his mother. She had died two years earlier. He thought about how burdened she had been by his father's illness and about the guilt he'd felt for being unable to lighten her load.

One night, Moore woke in his berth. He had been dreaming of whales swimming around the coral reef where the boat had anchored. The whales were singing in the dream. As consciousness pushed aside the dream, Moore realized the calls and whistles of the whales were not the stuff of his mind but real and coming through the hull, a chorus of longing and kinship.

Surrounded by the sounds, Moore realized he would spend his life studying, helping, and learning from these creatures.

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Bayla was Picasso's new beginning.

Bayla's mother had lost a calf in fall of 2007. It was her first, and it lived only a few months. Researchers don't know where or why the calf died, but they assumed something catastrophic had happened when Picasso appeared without it. No right whale mother would have abandoned her young before a year spent together.

For Picasso, the death of the baby had to have been wrenching. Right whale mothers are known to swim frantically for days after the death of a calf, searching for the little one no longer at their side.

Researchers spotted Bayla for the first time on Jan. 2, 2009, swimming alongside her mother and a pod of bottlenose dolphins off the coast of Georgia.

Like all right whale encounters, the sighting of Picasso with her days-old calf was a matter of luck. In an era when wild animals are routinely monitored, their every movement documented for years running, whales are the exception. Whales can't be banded like birds, or collared like a wolf, and implanted tags can fail after a short time. The legions of scientists who study them often can only guess their location in the depths.

Researchers catalog sightings in a database painstakingly maintained by the New England Aquarium since 1980. The database distinguishes the whales often by cream-colored skin patches that grow in the same spots where human hair sprouts — on heads, above eyes, chins, and jawlines.

Picasso had been named for the modernistic cross-hatch of splotches on her head, the result not of the naturally occurring callosities but of injuries from rope entanglement when she was 3 years old. The researchers weren't ready to name her daughter yet. She was still so young. The name Bayla would come years later.

But they noted a distinction: Unlike the white chins of some right whales, Bayla's was onyx black.

In her first seconds alive, Picasso would have nosed Bayla to the surface for breath — a first tenderness in a year in which she would nurse and cradle and teach Bayla the ways of the sea.

Through the winter, researchers saw Bayla and her mother swimming along the coasts of Florida and Georgia, Bayla tucked beside Picasso, safe from great white sharks. The pair began a 1,500-mile trek north as the weather warmed, their boxy bodies and oversize heads moving with unhurried calm, topping out at a pokey 6 miles an hour.

Picasso and Bayla would have crossed shipping lanes off the great ports of the East Coast and swam through the agricultural and industrial runoff of poultry and pork farms in North Carolina and factories in New Jersey and New York. The hazards, documented in accounts including "The Urban Whale," a book edited by New England Aquarium researchers Scott Kraus and Rosalind Rolland, increased as they moved north. With every mile, the risk of collisions with crab and lobster fishing gear would have grown.

Bayla and her mother likely would have stopped in Cape Cod Bay, where their favored food was plentiful in spring, and would have arrived at their destination in Canadian waters in early summer.

The Bay of Fundy, between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, has among the most dramatic tidal surges in the world. Twice daily, 100 billion tons of seawater rush in and out of the deep rift valley, a result, in native Micmac lore, of a giant whale's tail splash.

Picasso was a regular in the Bay, like many right whales, returning in summer to feast on the Bay's vast quantities of shrimp-like copepods, zooplankton rich in nutrients that scientists suspect are gathered there by the force of the tides.

Bayla's mother would have dived to feast on copepods while Bayla, initially, stayed at the surface.

With a calf's curiosity, Bayla would have taken stock of her new world with right whales' black and white vision, registering the life around her in varying shades of gray — the swimming mola-molas and basking sharks, the petrels and puffins swooping above in a sky often banked in rolling fog. Upon surfacing, her mother would summon Bayla with ascending moos, known as an upcall, until Bayla returned with a swish of her flippers.

On Aug. 27, biologists noted mud on Bayla's head, a sign of a deep dive — likely a training trip with her mother in the ways of hunting food. Bayla needed to learn well; she was about to enter the most vulnerable period for a right whale. Soon, she would be on her own.

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After graduation from Cambridge in 1983, Moore moved to Massachusetts, home of Hannah Clark, a forthright music and biology major at Williams College who had been one of his Newfoundland boat mates. The next year, they married. Hannah took a job teaching music. Moore enrolled in the MIT and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution joint PhD program in biological oceanography.

To his colleagues, Moore was cordial and persuasive. His craggy face, long and sincere and shadowed by commanding eyebrows, demanded attention when he spoke, which was often in paragraphs. He smoothly politicked through academic logjams, and a reservoir of patience allowed him to maneuver the government bureaucracy that often held the key to funding.

One of his first grants was to study why fish were developing cancer in Boston Harbor. Sewage turned out to be the cause, which led to more research on the pathogenic origin of marine disease. He began showing up at dolphin and whale strandings, looking for samples to collect.

One day, when a whale washed up dead on Cape Cod, Moore arrived with his sample kit. He asked the biologist on site why the animal had died.

"You're the veterinarian," said the biologist. "Why don't you tell me?"

Soon after, Moore began regularly arriving home with a rank smell clinging to his clothes. He had become New England's default whale coroner, climbing into carcasses up and down the coastline to determine causes of death. Many of the fatalities were right

whales. Some had died from ship strikes or disease, but time and again he found the hulking carcasses tangled in fishing rope. He was bewitched by the right whales. They were mega-ton creatures who could dive 600 feet, survive on food the size of a grain of rice and bend their enormous selves to scratch their ears with theirs flukes — and yet, they were regularly succumbing to something so prosaic as fishing rope.

In the fall of 1999, Moore got a call from a NOAA researcher. A team in Lubec, Maine, was trying to cut fishing ropes wrapped around a 10-year-old female right whale. They feared infection had set in where the ropes were cutting her. They wanted to try something new. They wanted him to deliver antibiotics to the whale.

But when Moore arrived in Lubec, he could only watch as a team zigzagged across the water trying to catch up to the distressed right whale. The team tagged her trailing ropes with keggers — buoys meant to slow a whale, similar to the kegs whalers once used to make it easier to close in for the kill. The buoys made the whale thrash harder. The water around her turned frothy white. She was bleeding and vomiting. There would be no getting close enough to deliver antibiotics or disentangle her.

The Coast Guard spotted her a month later off the coast of Cape May. She was hanging below the surface. Once in a while, she tried to breathe, until she didn't.

Moore was haunted by the encounter. He couldn't shake the memory of it. The necropsy report turned his stomach: A gill net had sliced a 4.6-foot wide laceration across her back and carved off a swath of blubber as it sawed toward her tail. The gash exposed both her shoulder blades. Each flipper was incised down to the bone; the left flipper had a 5-inch deep cut and the right flipper had one 7 inches deep. X-rays showed the ropes had deformed her bones and altered the way she swam. When examiners cut the rope, a sharp snap could be heard as the tension finally released from the whale's torso.

Moore felt certain the whale had suffered massive pain. For months, maybe years. The last sighting of the whale before entanglement had been two years earlier, in September 1997. It was beyond what he had imagined. The whale drownings in Bay de Verde cod nets that he remembered had been comparatively painless — over in a matter of minutes. This was something else. This, he thought, was torment.

He was a marine biologist. Getting exercised about animal pain was dangerous terrain; in the scientific community he could be derided as emotional and unempirical. But he was also a veterinarian. He had taken an oath to prevent and relieve animal suffering. Right whales were venturing into waters humans had claimed for fishing, and they were dying, like roadkill. There had to be a way for humans to coexist with the right whales. Surely he could harness science to find a fix.

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Bayla and her mother were seen a final time together shortly before noon on Sept. 21, 2009, in the Bay of Fundy. Bayla had scars on her left flipper and tail, evidence of ropes she somehow had given the slip. Luck had been with her.

She departed the bay sometime in the fall and was seen socializing with bottlenose dolphins and three other young right whales off the coast of Florida in February. It's not clear why Bayla made the trip south since she was too young to be calving.

Then she did another curious thing. She made no appearance in the Bay of Fundy the next summer. Researchers speculate that she went to the summer home of her grandmother — a maverick who slipped the known migratory routines and social patterns of the right whale community to live by her own code, perhaps summering off Iceland.

There's no real knowing; such is the immensity of the sea and the vastness of what remains unknown about one of the most studied animals in the world.

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Figuring out how to stop whales from dying in ropes consumed Moore. Often after dinner with Hannah and the boys, he retreated to his shop, a wood-heated former chicken coop on his island, to theorize.

He wondered if thinner rope might be less injurious, and he directed a student to rig up a machine to test rope widths on blubber. Thinner rope proved more harmful, quicker to cut.

He worked with a Canadian whale biologist to create a model tail, which they used to test a harness they designed. The idea was to wrap the powerful tail of an entangled whale and steady the animal long enough to remove the ropes. In practice, though, the harness didn't latch.

Moore returned to the idea of antibiotics. Perhaps antibiotics could slow infections from lacerations and give an entangled whale a better chance of survival. He'd had great success measuring the blubber thickness of right whales using pole-mounted ultrasonic probes. Perhaps a pole-mounted syringe and needle could work. But needles proved a different matter. If the syringe failed to release from its holder on the pole, a whale researcher holding the pole could end up attached to an angered whale.

At times, it felt like science was working against him. Chemists were creating ropes with the strength of steel. Fishermen were opting for the stronger ropes because they lasted longer on the rocky ocean floors.

Regulators were attempting to solve the problem. In some areas of Massachusetts where right whales congregated, they had banned the use of certain gear, including crab and lobster pots.

For whales, the hazard was the rope that runs from a floating buoy to a trap on the ocean floor and the underwater rope connecting traps in a long chain. Regulators at the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration ruled that ropes connecting lobster traps had to sink rather than float, making them less dangerous to swimming whales. Sinking ground rope cost three times as much as the floating rope. It also frayed more rapidly and had to be changed more often, adding up tens of thousands of dollars over a decade for a fisherman.

NOAA also ordered that so-called "weak links" be used to connect buoys and fishing ropes so that buoys would detach more easily if a whale got entangled. The regulators said the program was a success, pointing out that right whale numbers had increased from 300 to 450 since regulations were phased in starting in the 1990s.

But to Moore it wasn't clear the regulations had any impact on entanglement: Right whale deaths from entanglement were on track to double between 2000 and 2014, and the deaths from ropes were getting more gruesome as the ropes got stronger, according to New England Aquarium researchers.

The real answer was off the table. Regulators had decided it wasn't feasible to get rope out of the water column. There was no way they could prohibit lobstering, not in New England. And they had ruled that gear that could free the ocean from ropes — buoys stored on the ocean floor until released by a timer or acoustic signal — was impractical.

Moore believed the regulators could have been bolder had NOAA not also been mandated to consider the economic well-being of industries like fishing that rely on the ocean. Regulators' intentions were good. They committed generous funding to researchers studying entanglement. But Moore felt that regulators ultimately were handicapped by having to serve the conflicting interests of whales and fishermen.

Moore's options were dwindling.

Perhaps the answer lay beyond him, he thought. Maybe it would take the market. Whole Foods could take a cue from Massachusetts. Lobsters caught in state waters were sold with whale-logo-stamped green bands on their claws to show that fishermen had used sinking lines to connect their lobster traps. If fishermen adopted additional and more effective whale-safe techniques, chains like Whole Foods could market lobsters as whale-safe, a kind of fair-trade movement for whales.

But Moore didn't have a clue about where to begin with that. He was a scientist, not a consumer advocate. He had to focus on what he knew.

He had one more idea.

One day in the middle of winter 2006, Moore picked up his phone and dialed a number halfway around the world.

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On Christmas Day in 2010, a Florida Fish and Wildlife aerial team was making a regular survey of right whales. Off the coast of Jacksonville, they spotted a right whale. Visibility was low. But they could see ropes wrapped tightly around it. Rescue teams deployed. Conditions were so bad rescuers could only attach a tracking device to the end of rope trailing the whale so her location could be followed.

Four days later, when the weather cleared, rescuers found the whale thirty miles south in the St. Augustine Inlet. They tried but couldn't get good cuts on the rope. The next day they sheared a large loop of rope. But the whale was panicked and evasive and wouldn't let them get close enough to make the critical cuts to the rope in the whale's mouth that held the complex weave in place.

New Year's Day passed. The whale swam north to Fernandina Beach. Rescuers noted the whale was dangerously thin.

Word came back from the New England Aquarium. The whale's markings matched those of a whale in the right whale catalog.

It was Bayla.

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Moore liked the voice he heard on the other end of the phone line that day in 2006. Trevor Austin had a matter-of-fact Kiwi delivery. He was an engineer whose company in New Zealand made equipment for tranquilizing animals.

Moore said he had an idea. He wanted to sedate a free-swimming whale so that rescuers could get close enough, for long enough, to remove ropes entangling it. He needed a ballistic system that would send 60 milliliters of sedative flying through the air with enough force to penetrate a whale's fibrous blubber with a 12-inch needle.

Austin was silent. The largest-capacity animal syringe held a tenth of what Moore wanted.

"We'll give it a go," Austin said.

Moore sent him $25,000 that NOAA had supplied for the project. A year later, on a raw March day, Austin arrived at Logan Airport carrying a black Pelican case packed with anodized aluminum tube syringes, stainless steel needles, and a dart rifle.

Moore and Austin drove to a range on the Cape. Moore had a cooler with three squares of dolphin blubber. Tacked together, they measured the same depth as a right whale's. Moore perched the blubber against a hay bale.

Austin took a shot. A blank .22 cartridge sent the dart exploding out of the chamber. The dart bounced off the blubber.

Like a bullet-proof vest, Austin thought.

Austin fired again. This time, the dart entered the blubber but promptly bent in half. Austin and Moore huddled. The syringe's momentum had continued after the needle entered the blubber, taking the needle along and bending it. The needle needed more resilience. They retreated to Moore's lab at Woods Hole and glued a carbon fiber tube to the needle's stainless steel husk.

The next day, they drove back to the range. Austin took a shot. A perfect strike.

Moore got a live test case six months later. A mother and calf humpback had gone astray on their migration north and swam 90 miles inland in the Sacramento River Delta, through three bays and past five bridges. They had wounds, likely from a ship's propeller, and the fresh water was degrading their skin. They needed antibiotics. Moore was called out to California. He loaded the medications into the dart rifle's syringe. A colleague aimed and fired. Within a week, the whales, successfully treated, had regained enough strength to make their way back to the open ocean.

Moore had his device.

On a January day in 2011, Moore was sitting in his office at Woods Hole when the e-mail arrived. Was he available to sedate the calf of Picasso? Yes, he replied. He was on his way.

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In a hotel room in New Smyrna, Moore and the fleet of biologists from across Florida, Georgia, and Massachusetts reviewed the details of the operation. The meeting went long and sleep was short, but the next morning, Moore's mind whirred with possibility as the radio of the overhead airplane reported Bayla was surfacing.

Bayla's back glistened as it moved across the waterline on the January morning, a black sheath divided by the ropes leading out of her mouth.

The man standing next to Moore on the tower of the Zodiac cocked the dart rifle tipped with the sedative-filled syringe. "We're live," Jamison Smith said. Moore was a good shot, but Smith, who helped direct the federal effort to stop whale entanglements, was better. He'd grown up hunting ducks and other waterfowl with four brothers in Florida.

*Don't miss*, Moore thought as he gave the command to shoot.

The report was a sharp crack. A splash erupted at the waterline next to Bayla's torso. An orange buoy tied to the syringe for tracking fell to the water. The buoy jerked, then began moving. The dart was traveling with Bayla.

"The f---ing thing worked," Moore said, his voice rising and surrendering to surprised wonder.

The radio erupted with excited chatter from the other boats and the overhead plane. As they tracked Bayla diving and surfacing, then diving and surfacing again, elation bubbled. The sedative hadn't killed her. But there was work yet to do. "Back away," Moore called to the driver of his boat.

The clock was ticking. The sedation would last 90 minutes.

Soon a more nimble inflatable craft moved in.

The boat was piloted by Chris Slay, a Georgia biologist and motorcycle racer. Mark Dodd, a life-long surfer and another Georgia biologist, held a carbon-fiber pole fitted with a knife that Slay had designed for cutting tight entanglements like Bayla's. Instead of a traditional hook that slid under the rope to make a cut, a spring-loaded mechanism sent a blade plunging at the rope from above. Dodd was on his knees, scooted into the bow, like the nose gunner of a B-17.

Dodd and Slay were old hands at freeing whales from ropes. They had pursued entangled whales up and down the Georgia and Florida coasts, at times, only to have the whales disappear before they could get a single cut.

Slay motored behind Bayla, guided by two beach-ball-sized orange buoys that had been attached to her trailing fishing ropes that morning. Her pace and cadence had to be understood before the chase could begin. What Slay saw astonished him. Bayla was swimming in a straight line. None of the sharp turns he was used to with right whales dodging rescuers. Every five minutes she came up to breathe. No deep, unpredictable dives.

She was a perfect target. She was theirs to lose.

Slay gave Dodd the signal. As Bayla surfaced, Slay gunned the motor, closing the distance between Bayla and the boat. Dodd punched the ropes with the knife but the ropes didn't give. Slay backed the boat off. They tried again. Another miss.

Something was misaligned, Dodd shouted over the whine of the engine. They couldn't afford another flawed rally. "I'm not sure anything was cut. Honestly, I'm not sure."

"Focus as much as you can on exactly where you want to hit it," Slay said.

The aerial team radioed. Bayla was rising. Dodd leaned over the gunwale. He could see a shadow a few meters off the right bow. “Her bonnet’s right there! She’s coming up. See it right there, Chris?”

Slay opened the throttle. The boat clipped right. Dodd hoisted the knife. Bayla’s head emerged and water cascaded down her sides. A spangled spray of phlegmy blow blasted Dodd’s eyes and nose.

Fundamentals, Dodd thought.

He pictured the matrix of ropes, their loops and twists. As the spray cleared, the ropes appeared and were level with his face. He heaved forward with a grunt and thrust the pole.

If Bayla felt anything, she gave no indication. But before the force of the strike repelled him to the floor of the boat, Dodd glimpsed the ropes slacken.

Slay whipped his head around. Two orange balls bobbed in place behind the boat.

“The buoys are dead in the water,” Slay said.

The ropes had fallen free.

As the sun descended, the inflatables steered into harbor. Fatigue was settling. There would be time later for the team to deconstruct the day’s success, but Moore needed to know one thing. He approached Slay.

“Did the sedation make a difference?” Moore asked.

Slay smiled. “Hell yes.”

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For six days, Moore’s e-mail pinged with daily updates on Bayla’s coordinates as she swam south down the Florida coast. The information came from a temporary satellite tag that the disentangling team had attached.

Then, as planned, the tag had fallen away and Moore’s e-mail had gone dark with news of Bayla.

Her whereabouts were unknown.

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On Feb. 1, Moore leaned against the office doorway of his graduate student, Julie van der Hoop. “There’s a dead whale in Florida,” he said.

She had followed the news of Bayla like everyone in the right whale community, asking Moore each morning if another ping of her coordinates had come in. Her face darkened.

“Is it the calf?” van der Hoop asked.

“I don’t know,” Moore said. “There’s a necropsy scheduled. Do you want to come?”

Moore and van der Hoop arrived in St. Augustine the next day. The following morning, they watched as the sun rose over a young right whale beached on the sand.

She had a black chin.

A team of researchers cut away Bayla’s shark-mauled blubber with long knives and examined her internal organs. In her mouth, they discovered rope that Dodd and Slay hadn’t gotten. It was so deeply embedded, new tissue had grown over it, “like a pig in a blanket,” van der Hoop would later observe in her journal.

By day’s end, the team determined that Bayla had died from severe emaciation and lacerations caused by hundreds of feet of 7/16-inch diameter floating polypropylene rope that connected traps or pots — the sort that NOAA had attempted to restrict.

Beyond that, there wasn’t any more to be known. The rope could have come from off the coast of New England, or perhaps Canada; by the time Moore’s team had cut it away, she was too weakened to survive.

There would be no decorous burial for Bayla; her size defied it. An excavator scooped her muscle and soft tissues into a hole dug in the mucky sand. The loader then piled Bayla’s bones onto a truck destined for Atlanta, where her skeleton would be reassembled for display at the Georgia Aquarium and she would be given the Hebrew name Bayla, meaning beautiful.

When the work was done, Moore held a needle. It was the needle that researchers had fired from the rifle to deliver antibiotics to Bayla after her sedation. It was bent at an 80-degree angle. He suspected it had caused Bayla more pain. There were lessons to be learned from why it bent. He would write a paper. His peers would review it. A journal would publish it.

But that was for another day.

For now, Moore cried.

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The needle sat on his desk for a year taunting him.

The paper was hard to write. Harder than any other. When it was done, there was relief. But the relief soon was replaced by creeping doubt.

A colleague e-mailed him thanking him for his efforts to save the right whales from entanglement. Moore replied that he wasn't sure the thanks was due. He still had no solution. After all these years, he still didn't get it.

A bleak realization had settled, he wrote. "I've failed."

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The winds in the Bay of Fundy were steady and Moore hoisted the mainsail of the Rosita, the sailboat he and Hannah named for a whaling station in the South Atlantic that had been planned but never built. Moore liked to think of the Rosita as embodying the spirit of whales spared the harpoon.

Every few minutes, Moore whipped his head right or left, drawn by the chuff of spouting water. Grand Manan Island spread across the western horizon. Ahead, right whales lolled at the waterline, breathing hard after what must have been deep dives for food. There were dozens of right whales in the Bay.

Almost to a one, they had fishing rope scars.

Moore and Hannah were at the end of a summer vacation. It was August 2014, more than three years since Bayla's death. He had continued whale research but often felt he was going through the motions. He was due back in the office at Woods Hole in a few days, but not certain of what he was returning to do.

Over vacation, an idea had begun swatting at him, one his younger self would have considered heresy. Science had been superb at documenting the problem of entanglement. But science had not been good at finding a solution to end it.

How many papers had he written? How many necropsies had he performed? How many ideas had led nowhere?

Sedation had proved workable, but inevitably came too late for whales like Bayla. Moore and others had concluded prevention was the only answer in cases like hers.

There were new regulations coming online. Fishermen soon would have to attach a minimum number of traps to a buoy line and they would have to better mark their ropes. And the areas in Massachusetts where right whales congregated were to be closed to gear such as traps and pots for longer periods.

But fishermen were protesting, and NOAA was revisiting some of the new rules.

Moore always thought that if dogs walked around the city of Boston with bleeding lacerations, people would become outraged and demand that the source of injury be stopped.

Whales swam unseen with their wounds.

He was 57. Retirement was approaching. But there was time yet.

Maybe if he could communicate what he had felt all those years ago. If people could feel what he felt when he heard the whales singing in his dreams, maybe then they would come to share his heartache, and wake to the need to do more.

Mist spouted in front of the Rosita. Moore climbed onto the prow. Sun was splintering through the clouds and the slanted rays met the water in bangles of light. Somewhere out there Picasso swam. Aquarium researchers had spotted her in the Bay. Perhaps she was the right whale in front of him, dunking its head and driving its tail into the air until it was perpendicular with the surface, like a salute to the terrestrial world.

"There's something about a right whale's tail that's just gorgeous," Moore mused. "Michelangelo could have sculpted it."

Moore rested his body against the mast. The ocean spanned before him.

"We're surrounded by right whales," he said.

*About this story: Scenes of the attempt to save Bayla were based on extensive video footage taken by helmet cameras worn by Moore and other rescuers during the operations. Dialogue in other scenes was recreated from first-hand accounts.*

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## PROFESSIONAL ANALYSIS INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS:

For the professional analysis component, I conducted four interviews and have provided careful transcriptions of those conversations. Parenthetical numerals are time stamps meant for reference to the mp3 files of each interview, which are included in the media folder for this project.

1.) **Sarah Schweitzer, feature reporter and author of "Chasing Bayla."** The story was a Pulitzer finalist in feature writing in the *Boston Globe.*

Q: How did you begin this story at the Woods Hole Center?

SS: (2:10) I knew about them obviously, because I've worked in Boston for a while and the there's the aquarium right there - I'm not sure why I didn't call them first. But I just thought of Woods Hole first for whatever reason, it was kind of random. In this completely unusual chain of events, the public affairs person was – 'oh my gosh I have the person you need to talk to.' That never happens, right? Teeth pulling, they're usually very helpful, but very often they don't grab onto this idea of narratives and they have their different ideas of what might work, and it doesn't always fit with the narrative arc. I don't know that she knew where Michael Moore was at emotionally. She just knew that he does this whale work, so there was that piece of luck.

The second piece of luck came with calling Dr. Moore at the point that I called him because he was at a point that was an emotional journey point for him. I was just the person who called. When I asked that question, he was ready to talk, he was ready to let go of all of this stuff that had been building up in him. You know how they say that life is 99 percent showing up? Or whatever the phrase is? It's like that with reporting I think.

You call and call and call and ask people questions, and every once in a while you call at the right moment to the right person.

What happened was, the day I called him, the very first conversation, he's a person that talks a lot about his own work. He's very chatty when it comes to his work and he was just going on and on about he does this and this. He doesn't just do whale research, he was telling me about all of the different things that he does and I was about to get off the phone with him actually and thank him, but as a wrap-up I think I said as a wrap-up, 'gosh you've had a great career it must be wonderful to accomplish so much.' He said, 'oh no, no. I have totally failed.' I was like, 'What!?' I just completely jerked out of my seat, because who says that? he is this high-powered academic with many accolades, awards and all this stuff and he's telling me that he's failed. From that very moment, from that first conversation, I knew exactly what the story was. I didn't know how I would build it, but I knew that the entire arc of the story was about a man and whales and his failures and how he's come to terms with that.

Q: How did you vet Moore?

(5:16) One of the nice things about working with an academic, is you know that his work is peer-reviewed, it's real. So what the work that he did was absolutely real, I think that the test in whether to pursue the story was whether or not he would open up to me about his emotional life. He usually talks in third person, he would say these incredibly emotional things and then he would, you know, sometimes he would pull back from having said things, because I think he would get overwhelmed by talking so much because he's a pretty private person. So that was the challenge: seeing if he would stick

with what he told me, share enough stuff and really open up. The story wouldn't work without his openness.

Q: How did you negotiate for that?

SS: (6:28) I was really up front. I do that with people for these narrative stories, it doesn't always work, but some of it. someone is going to commit to having me spend time with them and deal with me and all of the invasions of their privacy that comes with that, I think other reporters do this too, but you just say, hey I love your story I think it's so compelling, obviously being completely genuine if you feel that way, and say if you want to go forward with this, and I hope you do, I just need to know that you want to share as much with me as you possibly came and I'm going to be in your life and I'm going to be around. If you can manage that and deal with that, I'd really love to tell your story. Just be really explicit about how it's going to feel uncomfortable maybe, there's going to be questions you may want to answer and that will probably be fine, but more often than not you need to open up. It depends on the person, but with him I think I said 'Would you be open to telling your story? It's going to be your family, your history, your parents the whole thing,' and he said yeah. All you can do is go on. The thing that I find that happens is that it inevitably at some point in the story, people pull back a little bit because they just get overwhelmingly personal or just too much, and it's totally understandable and that's always the scary period of the story. He didn't really do that, but he would pull back just a little bit like not returning an email or something, but you know, you have to be ready for people to vacillate at some point during the story. But he was awesome, he stayed with me throughout the whole thing. It was really helpful obviously because he shared a lot.

Q: Where would Moore draw the line?

SS: (8:54) He would just say things sometimes that he felt were emotionally true and then he would feel a little bit naked having said it, and then he would say 'no, no it wasn't really like that, it was more like this.' So I would say, 'well which was it?' I think that was just his way of pulling back a little bit, he never said no, I won't answer that question. It was more like he retrenched from having said things that were a little too revealing.

Q: Why use parallel Bayla multimedia?

SS: (10:08) I decided to write the story about Michael Moore. I knew Bayla had been a whale he worked with, I didn't know at the beginning that was going to be the whale I focused on. But as I was doing the reporting, I was looking into Bayla and I really that NOAA, so in talking to them it came about that they had a ton of video from the rescue and I was like 'whoa, that's amazing' it took some initiation and a lot of time to get the video. It was a process, as I got ahold of the video and talked to the people involved with the rescue, it was really evident that the visual component was amazing. We knew from the beginning that a whale had visual opportunity, but we didn't know that about the NOAA materials and also the New England aquarium had been tracking Bayla along with the other right whales they knew about, so there was a genealogy for this whale that was just beautiful and so touching. The scientists that work and study these whales, as much as they try not to anthropomorphize the animals, they really invest in their lives and track them starting just days after their born. Between the NOAA stuff, the rescue and the aquarium's photos of when Bayla was just days old with her mom, it was all just amazing. We knew we had a great visual story.  And for me, as the writer, I knew I could then use all that stuff to recreate scenes of the rescue and help me tell the story of Bayla.

The story is about Michael Moore and a man's efforts to chase his dream and what happens when he comes up against failure. The whale component of the story is incredibly compelling but that was the vehicle for Dr. Moore. At first read, you're like 'oh it's a story of a whale.' but it's not. To me, when I wrote it, I had it in my mind this is a story about Michael and his work and the whale was an incredibly compelling character that drove the plot of his career arc.

Q: How did you bring such richness to the characters?

SS: (13:59) All you need to do is look at the notes from this New England aquarium and it was so touching. the scientists painted the picture for me and I took down notes and translated it to the page. They beautifully told the story. They're scientists, so their information is fact-based so it's a lot of this happened, this happened. But when I visited them, I went to town in Maine, Lubek. It's on the coast of Maine where the New England Aquarium is housed in the summer. Scientists stay there in the summer and go to the Bay to study the right whales. I went and visited up in Lubek and hung out at the house with them. They come back from days at the ocean and put all this data in the computer; incredibly complex stuff. I was hanging out and sort of pestering them, and kind of in their way as they were trying to do stuff. But this one guy that knows a lot about right whales and their history and he was super helpful. Tell me about their family life what does the mother whale do when their baby dies? He told me they swim for days and they're frantic. I said to myself, that's just so human. We think that the divide between ourselves and the whales is so vast. It's a tricky line, you don't want to anthropomorphize animals, you shouldn't because we're people and they're animals and there's a different, but when you do find those points of intersection, it's incredibly

compelling. Cecil the Lion, one of the reasons it got so much attention is just by luck - or however you want to look at it, they had named that lion. That one particular lion that had been given a name, people were able to attach to it and mourn its loss. In writing, if you can tow the line between not creating humans out of the creatures, but finding ways that humans can relate to the creatures. When I read that, I Like it so I tired to do that with Bayla.

Q: Did characters ever divert from narrative in mind?

SS: (17:44) Bayla was more simple obviously. The whole point of her narrative was to show this beautiful life that got torn away, so her arc was going to be a natural arc. The trick with Bayla was I didn't have as much information as I would have liked, so there was a certain amount of teasing out information in certain sections so it would feel like you were following her story all the way through. With people it's more complicated. There were things that didn't quite — he would pull back a little, so that complicated things a little. He did some other research and I had to make the choice to just not mention all that stuff because it was not relevant to the story. He was such a driven guy - that's what makes him an appealing character. Because he is driven, it made my job easier. I had to show the points that he was rising and falling and pick out the right points that showed that. It was just a matter of showing his attachment to the whales, working hard and figuring things out and starting to save them and what began his feeling of not getting to do what he had set out to do.

Q: How would you approach this if you did not have the Bayla visuals?

SS: (20:01) The written story was first and then they created the visual off of the written story. There would have been no visual without the written. I chose how to write the story; I envisioned the story as whole without the visual and that's how you have to write it, you can't rely on the visual, I think. it's nice, it's awesome it's an incredible way to help people get deeper into the story but without having written the arc of the story, I don't know if the visuals would have worked as well because they tracked the arc of the story. Visual people told the story on the right hand side. If you chose not to read the written story, you could just go down and look at the pictures, read the captions and get a sense of the story. But they couldn't have created that arc without the arc that I had in the written story. There's really couldn't have been a visual without the written story.

Q: How did you overcome/avoid tired narratives about endangered species?

SS: (22:07) I set out to write a whale story because my editor said go write a whale story, but once I found Michael Moore, I decided that the story was about him. When you do that and it's about the scientist's quest, and really this human -- it's weird. He has this insatiable need for success, right? Humans have this insatiable need for seafood, and the whales just wanted to live and it was all colliding. You know, it just all -- if you try to bring out all of those things and make sure that everyone's interest is represented, it's much stronger than just an assumption that the endangered animal has the right to live, because that's very one-sided, it's so much more complicated. There's all these fishermen with interest, and Moore was our stand-in for all the complicated feelings we have as humans about what we should and shouldn't do and the limits we should put on ourselves to keep these beautiful creatures around even though people's livelihoods depend on, sometimes, getting in their way. He was sort of the voice and he was saying 'ok, fine we

can have endangered animals, but we can't torture them. We just cannot do that.' And that was his line in the sand, and that was a reasonable line to draw for most people, and I think that that became something that people could attach to and say ' yeah, that's right. that's where we should draw the line. let's just do that, because we can't save the spotted owl and everything else but we cannot torture these whales.' And then you can cheer for it, so he came up with that, and I just tracked his thought. Looking back, I think that was what helped in terms of telling your endangered animal story. It wasn't just a 'save the animals.' It was more about Moore's position - which was a reasonable one to many people. And even that couldn't work.

Q: How did you avoid to Ahab quality?

SS: (24:31) It has the Ahab quality in reverse I guess. Yeah, I mean I don't know that I ever totally. I was very aware of there were lots of whales stories out there. I'm not a science writer, and in some ways I think that benefited m because especially when I started the story, of course googled all the stuff, but it wasn't like I wasn't pelted with it all the time, o I didn't approach the story like 'oh my gosh this has been written about a million times, I can't do this.' Instead, I just came in like 'oh, this is a great story. Oh wait, it's been written about, but how can I do it different. I was already invested. It's been done, but how can I do it differently.' I don't know what the trick is, like not letting yourself as a beat reporter get ... I think the answer is you can do every story differently. Every story on Earth has already been pulled in one way or another it's a matter of finding new ways and better ways to tell a story. It totally is in some ways a story that's been told, but you know, good characters like Bayla and Moore - as long as you can find those characters, you can tell those stories anyway.

Q: How to strike a balance between familiarity and cliché?

SS: (26:37) That's a really good point. Like I said also, I hadn't read all the stories out there up until that point, so it didn't strike me initially as 'oh god, here we go again.' And with Bayla, familiarity really worked, once we realized that she was the calf and her mother cared about her - that's familiar and that feels comfortable to us, that's something we can latch onto, so you know, I guess you can't avoid redoing what's already been done out there to some level, but everyone brings to the story your own viewpoint and your own experience and your own -- I encounter the world differently than another writer. What I encounter more, I'm going to tell the story as what I see as his journey. It's through my lens. To say the world is totally impartial, we can't say that. I even had to say to Dr. Moore. Actually, let me tell you what he said, it was interesting. I was on a panel with him, and he said 'you know, I feel like I have these three personas. The me persona - the one with my family and friends. And then I have this persona that I have for my academic papers for important things and people read them, and applaud my work. And then I have this Chasing Bayla persona." And They're all different people. You can avoid cliché, you're the writer and you see the story the way you see it, and you're just telling a reader what you saw in the best way you can. By doing that honestly, you avoid a cliché because doing a cliché would be what everybody said before.

Q: How do you determine what to leave in/take out? Do you worry about being too loyal to an already established plot structure and not portraying the whole story?

SS: (29:35) Yeah, I totally do, and that's why I have an editor to come along and say 'Sarah, you just have to tell the story.' I definitely worry about that a lot. I put in my early drafts -- in fact my story I'm writing right now is getting cleared out of this right now -- I

sometimes feel the need to say 'oh wait, let me tell you the whole picture.' ... My editor sometimes says ' we don't care about that. get rid of that and just focus on.' It's a brutal process, right? You're losing all this stuff that you saw and that matters to that person and they said it was important and you have to decide that it's not important to the story. It's hard.

Q: Are people too complicated for neat structures?

SS: (31:33) There's time that sometimes the arc switches. In Moore's case, it was so straightforward for the beginning. And that's just very unusual. I don't know, if you listen to some other really great - like if you listen to Eli Saslow, he's just wonderful, he works for the Post. He explains that he goes into the story with a very defined arc, and he finds the characters that fits that arc, and they do. You don't get the sense it's forced. I don't know how he does it, but he always finds the right people to fit what he wanted to write. I don't often have that luck, I feel like I often find people that I'm interested in and talk to them for a long time and then decide how here's the arc. I think his way is far more effective; I wish I could do it more. But you know, I think it's just a messy process. It doesn't always feel right in the moment, but if you do keep on the arc, it is going to come out better than if you stray.

Q: Process of developing characters?

SS: (35:01) Being slightly obsessed, that's what happens I guess. When I really like a character like Dr. Moore, it's just so fascinating to try to figure them out. People don't tell you, I mean you have to keep some things together. So I just think about them during my off hours, I talk about them to my husband - I talk about my stories a lot with my husband. He's a smart guy and we have fun talking about that. I talk about it with family

and friends. You are the writer and ultimately it's what you think, but I like to sort of put it out there to other people too and gather their impressions about what I've seen and taking all that together, it seems easier to define who the person is - this is what is most important to portray from this person. This is what should rise highest and matter the most. So, I mean if someone says I'm going to write a story about you, I wouldn't know where to begin with what matters. I'm worried about if my car is working that's totally boring in terms of story. I don't think anything in my life would be interesting enough. There's no way Dr. Moore could have figured out what would be good for story. As the writer, you need to figure it out, it's nice to talk about it with other people and figure it out in your down time when you're not sitting in front of the computer.

Q: Is there a risk about making untrue assumptions?

SS: (37:22) Well, what I do when I'm done with stories, I usually check things with them. A lot of the times, it's not so much about making assumptions but that juxtaposing things and letting the reader make assumptions themselves. If things aren't juxtaposed correctly, or if Dr. Moore read something in the story that just didn't jive then I would talk it through with him. I don't let people read stories obviously, but I do go through the very closely with people and to make sure that the sense that comes through the story was true in the moment. One way to correct that is to do that with your sources. When it's this personal and it's someone's life and they've invested with you the privilege about writing about it, how could you not let them know what's coming? It's totally different than writing about politics or sophisticated actors, that's different. But just regular people I like to give them a heads-up and make sure it's all right. Every once in awhile, I will be watching something and portray something and go back to them and realize that that

wasn't write - that I just didn't understand the context sometimes, and when they explained the context, it actually helped the story and makes it clearer.

Q: What sources didn't make it into the story? Why?

SS: (39:29) No one was off the record, it just wasn't that sort of thing. But there were lots of people from Moore's early years in Newfoundland. I talked to some of the fisherman up there, their impressions of Michael, and you don't read any of that, but you do read it, because there are little lines. It took me a half hour to figure that out but talking with this fisherman that remembered them, it didn't matter that he said that, it was more like it gave me the ability to say that these guys came into this town and were total outsiders and just gave the feel. So, anything that move the action along -- any character that didn't move the action along, didn't get in. I talked to people more to get the feel of things so that I could write it with authority and not rely on them. One of his boat mates on the Newfoundland expedition, she told me lots of stuff about what he was like. Like the stuff about his pajamas came straight from her. Having too many voices, especially on background that wasn't going to be the heart of the story, it was just moving through his early life. But it felt really important to quote the boat driver in the rescue of Bayla because that was action. Chris was a fantastic story teller too I could listen to him all day. So especially a good storyteller that's telling action gets into a story like this. I feel like with narratives, only the voices of action in a scene where someone is talking or something is happening, that needs a voice, so that was kinds how it broke down

Q: How many people and how long did the story take?

SS: (43:18) It took about six months from beginning to end, but I didn't other stories too. How many people did I talk to? Probably 25 or 30 people probably, some more at length

than others. Yeah, lots and lots of people to stitch together the different scenes. Bayla scene: aquarium people and scientists and all of the people. Creating Newfoundland, required talking to lots of former pals and locals and current cohorts around him and you know, throughout his academic career to get a sense of who he was in the academic world. I talked to his family members. That's sort of the range of people I talked to.

Q: What was your favorite part of the entire story?

SS: (45:15) Probably just seeing the arc come together. It's so hard to winnow it all down. Once it finally came together and it worked, it felt nice because it felt like a good story. It was nice to tell Bayla's story; I wish she would have had a better life. Pulitzer- that was great. I was totally surprised by it.

2.) **Steve Wilmsen, editor of the *Boston Globe*'s feature team that edited Sweitzer's "Chasing Bayla."** Wilmsen originally conceived the idea about doing a story, very broadly, on whales.

Q: How did the story come about?

SW: (1:49) So let's see, Sarah and I work very closely on all the stories we do. She's one of several reporters I have on my team who work especially on that kind of story; meaning news-feature kinds of story, more particular narrative stories. This particular idea -- we were kicking around something. It was actually my sort of ridiculous brainstorm, I wanted to do something about a person and their relationship with a whale. I wanted a scientist to understand that.

Q: Where did that idea come from?

SW: (2:35) It may sound it a bit odd, but I was intrigued generally by questions about the human relationship with the natural world, and I happened to be reading a book by

another great narrative writer named Tom French who wrote something called the Zoo Story, and that was one of the questions in that book. So I had read about elephants and that made me remember my fascination with whales, and generally our culture's fascination with whales, which is somewhat local. So Sarah and I talked a lot about that stuff and we started imagining what the possibilities were and she started calling around to research institutes to find out what research they were doing on whales, and whether there was anyone who had a particular interest in whales. That's how she got to Michael Moore. And through more reporting, how she got to the story of this particular mission to save that particular whale, and its importance in his mind and also to him personally, and to how it spoke to a greater set of issues and the whales' population and the problem of entanglement in fishing gear.

Q: How involved did you get in the reporting process?

SW: (4:42) There's a process we go through on almost every story like that. We'll talk frequently. She'll talk about the reporting she's got, and what she's thinking about the story, and we'll talk together about more that she, what the next steps to take are until we start seeing a story take shape. On this particular one, most of the necessary ingredients came to view pretty quick. What you look for in a narrative story like this: you want a set of characters that are in a pursuit of something that matters a lot to them. We knew fairly quickly that Dr. Moore on this particular mission was not only trying to save a particular whale, but that the stakes were really high for him. If he didn't save it, he would feel that he had failed a lifelong mission of his to save right whales in general, a thing he had promised to himself when he was much younger. We also knew that it held a greater importance for the community of people who look after right whales and look after the

species in a greater metaphorical sense. So once we knew that sort of framework, then the basic arc was there, the rest was understanding how Dr. Moore got to that place, what his background was - how did he come around to having such a deep emotional connection to whales. It turned out that there was a very interesting story there. Sarah and I talked about that, and Sarah would interview him at length about how he came to research whales and part of the personal story, part of what mattered most, she had to dig really hard for. My role is as a collaborator and someone who can maintain a little bit of distance from the story and hear the material she's getting and together we shape where the reporting needs to go next and what the arc of the story is.

Q: There's an Ahab quality to it. How did you find the fine line between familiarity and cliché?

SW: (8:06) Sometimes that's really easy to recognize. We were aware of the Ahab-like qualities to it. Once we were aware of that, we kind of put that away because you don't want to repeat the story -- that's not what we were trying to do. We understood that there's resonance in -- one of the reasons Moby Dick is a famous book is because the figure of a whale resonates with human beings and a man in pursuit of a whale has some kind of -- like we're interested in that. But once we realized that, we put it away and we tried to avoid thinking of that as like 'we're not going to model this on, this is not a new Moby Dick, this is a very new and unique story and focused on what was unique about it and not repeat or consciously avoid things about it that reflect that story. Staying away from cliché is always a process that - you have to maintain a process of discovery all through the writing and understanding of the plot. Cliché is when you have -- cliché is once meant something really powerful, and that's why people start using them too much.

When they become used too much, that's when they become clichés. So you have to discover something again, and Sarah is very gifted at keeping both her language and her understanding of a situation extremely fresh and extremely new, and both of us worked at that to make sure that you don't fall into a trap. Even on a very small almost microscopic level of a sentence to the much larger symbolic nature of the story itself; just don't let it fall into the overly familiar.

Q: How did you decide to structure the multimedia component?

SW: (10:57) That was a long conversation that was not without controversy and it was really between the producers who put together the online presentation. And everyone was very excited to have that videotape, it's incredible stuff and its sort of a rare opportunity to do something. So, it was a valuable opportunity for online presentation and we all wanted to do something really special. We had lots of different ways about how to go about that, but through a debate and give-and-take, you know some trepidation, we ended up with something that was really new and really original. I think it worked out really well, it presented us with a way for readers to approach the story purely, almost purely through the words if they want to, or through the multimedia alone if they wanted to. But really, it gave a way to experience the story that I hadn't seen before. As you know, anytime you're doing new things, it's very difficult to know what's actually going to work. We took some chances and risks and I think they paid off.

Q: What were the biggest challenges?

SW: (13:00) As far as the word story, I didn't have big ones. Early on it seemed to me -- I had a lot of faith in the story. Pretty early on, the basic structure of it seemed like it meant that there was a really good tale to tell. You know, almost every story you write, you end

up -- this is more true usually for the reporter, and much less so for the editor -- starting the piece thinking this is going to be a great story, and then you're deep in the weeds and you're somewhere in a very dark uncharted forest and you have no idea how you're going to find your way off, but then you always do. I had a lot of comfort knowing that this story had likable characters, people that I wanted to relate to and that I believed readers would want to relate to, who were in pursuit of something that really mattered to them with really high stakes, and there was a really powerful resolution to that. And once you have those things, you can be pretty well sure that you're going to end up with something that is great.

Q: Has this story become a model for future projects?

SW: (14:59) Yes and no. I think that -- I find that every story that we do and the unique challenges it brings, prepares me a little bit better for the next one, and every new story surprises me with the challenges it has that I've never seen before. So, to a certain extent, I think that the process of doing both the words and participating in some of the decisions for online gave me a lot of faith and confidence that we could pull off difficult and meaningful stories that will really resonate with people. That confidence matters because every time you start a new story, you need to know that you're going to invest a lot of time and resources into something like that. You want to be able to gauge whether the new story you're starting on is going to end with something that was worth while. I feel like Bayla helped give us confidence to judge those kinds of things, and helped give us a little bit of a process to go to. I know certainly for the newspaper at large that that was -the ambition of the online presentation, has helped us tremendously in successive projects and how to go about it.

Q: Take me back to the moment you found out the piece was a Pulitzer finalist. How was it?

SW: (17:18) Terrible. Kidding. I mean, I was at home sick. First of all, I make it sort of a practice now, putting prizes out of my mind once -- or try my best to put that out of my mind, because it will drive you crazy. You could do incredible work and never hear a word from prize committees and that can be really dispiriting if you're hoping that something comes along. So I had more or less successfully done that this time, so I wasn't expecting anything at all. I was at home sick, and I got a call - I think from Sarah first, and then the metro editor and editor of the paper Brian McGory; I may have the order somewhat wrong, I had a low-grade fever at the time. But I was ecstatic. You always have the fleeing thought - man, I wish we have got the real thing, but any kind of recognition and particularly from as important as the Pulitzer, is really gratifying and whenever you come that close to that particular sun, it feels pretty good.

Q: Would you have done anything differently?

SW: (19:14) I don't think so. I mean, I say that with a little caveat, because similar to the prize thing, I try not to question myself too much once we've made all the hard decisions that we're going to make. I feel pretty proud of the way that story came out. I'm proud of Sarah's work, and I'm proud of the way we went about it. One thing that's always a challenge particularly in time for newspapers at least, but all publications, really is that this kind of work is expensive and taxes resources and it did take a long time to do, and we want to learn how to be more efficient and to create stories that are as moving and as powerful and as fresh as possible and do it as fast as we can. I look back with looking really for any kind of lessons I can take forward for how we can do things better, how we

can tell a story that's more moving, how we can pick a subject that matters to people and I also look at it for work process and how can we be more efficient and avoid mistakes along the way, but honestly, I can't point to anything that I would do different for that story.

3.) **Michael Moore, a biologist and Sweitzer's primary and most present source.** As Sweitzer points out, "Chasing Bayla" ended up, really, as a story about a man's pursuit. When considering sourcing best practices, it would be egregious not to speak with the source.

Q: How did Sarah approach you?

MM: (1:14) It's kind of hazy; it's been awhile. I have a very close relationship with our media folks here and there's a lady called Stephanie Murphy who manages the interface between interested media and scientists here at Woods Hole. She contacted me about the interest that Sarah had in doing a feature article about what I've been doing. It's interesting because Stephanie and I had been talking quite a lot about how to promote a paper I'd written and published just prior to that about entanglement. I had assumed that Sarah was following up on the feelers that Stephanie had put out, but in hindsight, that wasn't the case at all.

I was quite happy to talk to Sarah because I had a story to tell, but the story she wanted to tell was a much more limited perspective than what I thought was coming down the pipe. The second misconception was the depth in which Sarah was proposing to go. Really the idea of a feature in the Globe, I was figuring that would be in the Boston Globe's Sunday magazine or a couple pages in the back and there we go, and she didn't

really elaborate too much as to what she the final product was going to be and I never really asked her this, but it's conceivable that she didn't necessarily didn't know in her own mind where it was going to go, because she didn't know what I was going to tell her. I suspect it was something of an evolution that led to you know, the final product.

Q: How did you interpret her process along the way?

MM: (4:01) I'm not sure she did overtly in as much as she -- we had a number of conversations on the phone, email and met a couple time, and each time I was sort of shaking my head and thinking 'Jesus, this woman needs to get a life. She's kind of focused on this story here, doesn't she have other stories to write? Where is the story in me?' And I said to her a few times, is there really a story here? And she said 'oh, yeah there's a story here,' a little coy and I said 'ok." But the way that she asked those questions, she built my trust and I think that is an inevitable piece of the sort of subject-reporter relationship. If it doesn't work, it's all over. She built my trust very carefully and slowly and not intentionally I don't think, it was simply one of me answering her questions, and I guess trust and respect go hand-in-hand, and she was continually doing her homework. I would send her stuff to read, she read it, she thought about it and came back to me. She wasn't the typically, 'give me the sound bite and I'll move on' type of reporter who doesn't want to read the paper because they want to hear from you the quote that they get that no one else gets. Sarah was very different than that. Maybe the luxury she had was the time that she was afforded by her employer to write this story, which to this day amazes me how much time they let her, pay her to do the story she did and the support that she had from the multimedia folks. I guess that those two things go together:

trust and respect. She built both of those by due diligence and persistence and honesty and mutual respect.

By the time we got to late stage drafts, she trusted me enough that I could see more than other reporters let their subjects see, and I trusted her that there were things that I told her that were pretty personal and I opened up to her from a familial point of view, and she had been to my home a few times. I trusted her not to blow my cover - there are pieces of my family life that other reporters would like to harp on - there's some wealth there, that she just didn't go for. I live in a very nice place, small island with one house and we're very privileged. None of that came over in that, she just painted me as Joe Blow Scientist, and I have -- that wasn't the story, and she knew that, and I knew that, but it would have been very tempting and in fact some of the photographers that they sent along were very pushy to you know, use my home as a backdrop and interestingly the photographer they came down really pushed for that and didn't get a look in to what was used because it wasn't part of the story. I trusted her that that was going to stay out of it. For my wife, that was a huge thing - that her privacy wasn't invaded in the story that we were telling. She was intimate. She did publish stuff about my dad, he's dead now, and that's ok, which may have been tough for my brother, I don't know. Essentially, she was very respectful of what she was poking at and how she was going about it. The more I trusted her, the more I shared with her. Ultimately I got down into some old diaries from when I was an undergraduate and that took a fair amount of trust for me to crack open those dusty volumes. I never actually let her read them, but I did give her some quotes out of it.

Q: Did she make you aware of the process - other people she was interviewing?

MM: (9:25) Yeah, to some degree. I was fairly -- without my willingness to share people that she might want to consider interviewing, she wasn't going to get very far. So I kind of knew, well I gave her a bunch of contacts, and through my relationships with those various people, I pretty much knew who she had been talking to. A couple of folks said 'are you ok if I do speak with her?' Which was nice. It was interesting what she saw as sort of valuable information -- "gold" -- came from. It was not necessarily very predictable to me who was going to be the best sources for her, but that was her job not mine, so that was fine.

Q: What were your reactions to the story?

MM: (10:32) I saw it online, and then I went to pick up some hard copies, and I was just overwhelmed actually, because, well she put an entangled right whale above the fold on the front page of the Sunday Globe. It was huge. That had never happened before. The story was about the whale, it really wasn't about me, that was what was overwhelming about it.

Q: What did you think of the presentation online and the illustrations?

MM: (11:22) I thought the sketches were kind of hokey, and I'm sure the artist wouldn't like me to say that, but honestly, that's the way that I felt. If you wanted to make a more realistic, I could have helped it. I didn't see that any of those being published. But I think that the way the online piece sort of merged from text on the left to visual media on the right was really effective. The fact that we're having this conversation today is testament to the fact that she wrote a pretty powerful piece.

Q: What were your impressions of the Pulitzer nomination?

MM: (12:53) Well I wasn't necessarily surprised because of the readership feedback that I got from colleagues and friends. They all felt that it was unusual. I had one friend who wanted to know who I knew at the Globe to get such good coverage, which was a little obnoxious. The answer is nobody. It was overwhelming really.

Q: Do you look at this story as your legacy? Something you share as your story?

MM: (13:46) Yes and no. This may sound a little bizarre, but it's a very small piece of what I do. As she said in the article, there's a certain sense of unfinished business in regards to that story. If that is my legacy, um that's pretty disappointing because the business is unfinished and ultimately, whatever we do with regards to enabling disentanglement of these whales, which actually truth be told, the method that she's describing has not been taken up by the system as of yet. It's been interesting theoretical solution, but there are some logistical challenges that make it unlikely that it will ever be adopted. So, score zero on that one. Plus, the numbers game just doesn't work for disentanglement, because every animal you discover another 10 die without ever being seen and another 20 get entangled for a period before the get disentangled. Ultimately this whole entanglement problem isn't a mitigation problem, it's an avoidance problem and we really haven't even begun to deal with that. So I don't see it as my legacy at all, I see it as one of the things I did to try and honestly it was a glorious failure.

Q: Retrospect on the experience?

MM: (15:49) We had this panel discussion at the Woods Hole Film Festival in August and Sarah and her editor, Steve, was there. The three of us did a piece and answered questions. It was amusing that the Hole Festival is pretty parochial and people come to watch. It wasn't advertised as planned and so a number of folks in the audience showed

up to watch the documentary that was the result of Chasing Bayla. They were looking for a talking head panel type thing, so you know, it's sort of there and it's comfortable. It's still online and people periodically ask about it, and that's ok, but I've moved on. It hasn't become the sort of the pinnacle of my career - whatever that is. I'm not sure what that is, but that's not it.

Q: Happy you did it?

MM: (17:21) Oh yeah, totally. For that topic, the story, the problem, was front and center at the morning breakfast table for a significant number of the population in New England. That's a pretty good gift. I don't really care about my name being associated with that, what I care about is the problem, and the problem definitely got some air in that regard. Did it actually change anything? No, I don't think so. Not in terms of the risk to the animals getting entangled in the future.

4.) **David Leach, an associate professor and director of professional writing in the Department of Writing at the University of Victoria.** Leach provided an outside perspective.

Q: What’s your background?

DL: (paraphrase) I've been here officially as a professor for 11 years. Chair of the department of writing and formerly the director of the professional writing minor in journalism and publishing. I was the city life editor of Monday Magazine, the alternative news weekly here in town. Managing editor of Explorer: Canada's Outdoor Magazine. It meant like sitting around like in a basement in downtown Toronto editing other people's adventures. I won’t complain, I did get to do a few things. Bylines: Globe and Mail (national Canadian publication), Canadian Geographic, Financial Post, the business

magazine (contributing editor there for awhile).

Q: How was your reading experience?

DL: (1:05) Yes, I had, you sent it along to me. Interesting thing, I actually read it first on my iPad yesterday and I don't know if it was the way I was scrolling through but I thought it ended before it actually did. As I was reading through it again, looking at it on my computer I said, 'wait a minute, there's two more sections to go with it.' It was an interesting reading experience that way. Clearly chasing after the New York Times Snowfall story, like a multimedia true-life adventure story.

Q: What were your impressions?

DL: (2:14) I found it interesting. It was clearly a magazine narrative feature -- my background is in magazine writing. I think there's a different kind of tone and approach to it. I found the opening just a little bit over the top, to be honest. Partly the need to write for often a more general, newspaper audience. There is a lot of almost extra adjectives telegraphing to a reader what you were supposed to kind of feel, or what the character was feeling. Overall, I liked the article. I liked the hook of the opening scene and then the short sections and the build up toward the ending. When I read it, it definitely didn't have a happy ending. They had a bit of an unconventional ending. You were imaging that he was going to come back and save the whale and everything will be happy when in fact that doesn't happen. I liked how it really kind of follows that kind of Truman Capote philosophy of the nonfiction novel of viewing things through this character's eyes and mind, but keeping the author of the piece out of it, and not worrying about that kind of sourcing. How do you know what this person is feeling, but acknowledging the sourcing in the note after the fact? I've written similar pieces, and I've edited similar pieces, but I

guess the difference for me -- with a magazine piece, there is usually another dimension to that main character; the main character seemed, the subject of it, seemed just a little flat perhaps and focusing on this one element. My background is with doing journalism with a background of a pair of literature degrees in which you spend a lot of time studying narrative; round vs. straight characters.

Q: Was the "Ahab quality" of it overdone?

DL: (6:11) I give a talk about the hero's journey and the quest myth in storytelling. It's clearly there, and it's really effective as well, even though it's pretty specific. You begin in media res, in the middle of the action, you end -- literally -- with a hook, a dart hanging in the air. Once the author grabs you with that scene, the author scrolls back and you patiently go through the whole background and where this guy came from and get back into the quest. There's nothing kind of radically innovative in the structure of it, but it obviously -- you read the reader comments -- and it really resonated, and it resonates for a reason, because it has that mythic, quest-like quality to it. Much like the flip side of an Ahab, the guy who wants to save the whale rather than hunt one down.

Where it crossed the line occasionally for me -- obviously the point of it was to make us empathetic with the whales, and it obviously really did that for the readers. It conveys that sense. The subject has really kind of anthropomorphized whales. Deeper philosophical question: Can we really know what these whales are thinking?

Q: Were they successful in avoiding anthropomorphizing the whales?

DL: (8:43) (laughing) Do I think they were successful in not doing that? No. It's kind of hard not to have it in there. It's kind of interesting to hear that they tried to avoid it. Again, for their readership, they probably needed a little bit of it. Ultimately, I think that's

part of their goal - to make people care about these animals. In some ways the easiest way to make people care is to make them feel more human. The scientists even give them names and what not. Again, my critiques of the article come from a place of looking at literary writing, or magazine writing. For their audience, I think she struck the right note.

Q: Was there a balance between familiarity and cliché?

DL: (10:01) Obviously using this kind of formula structure, you could argue that it's cliché. But it's a powerful cliché that Hollywood uses, and it was a unique narrative use. Cliché is perhaps the wrong word for the quest structure - it's deep and mythic. I think perhaps some of the descriptive language is a bit clichéd in places, but it stands out from being less cliché than standard newspaper writing. I think it resonated with readers because you don't get this type of narrative in, even your standard newspaper feature. It's all reporting, it's a reminder of the power of storytelling, putting ourselves inside the head of another person on this kind of passionate quest for understanding and on a mission, as well. We're driven into that versus this kind of artificial clichés of just conventional newspaper reporting which is part of the reason people are not reading newspapers anymore**.** An incredible amount of work goes into a story like this. You have to get all the facts right and you have to ask all of those questions: what were you thinking, what were you feeling? What was that person saying? So you have this extra layers of narrative questions that you have to get right. For a typical news writer to make that jump and write this story in entirely, or essentially, entirely in this other person's head, is kind of radical. Magazine writers and novelists spend a lot of time in other people's heads; you kind of get used to it.

Q: Was she successful in shaping the character?

DL: (12:39) Every kind of, even the most sophisticated, literary characters like a Leopold Bloom in Ulysses is like a cardboard compared to a real human being, so certainly like a newspaper feature article is going to be two dimensional compared to the real Michael Moore. That said, because it's so focused just on him, he becomes compelling in that way. You're not distracted by anyone else, for better or worse. He doesn't seem to have any other relationship except with these whales. To that sense, it's got this intensity of focus, but I'm sure - obviously, she's highlighted certain qualities and there's a vast amount of other things about his character that we will never know. That's the nature of any kind of literary portrait. To get inside his head felt convincing. There were the moments, and now he cried', that felt a little too much like she was kind of playing the minor key in getting me to feel some way, but she probably did at that moment.
There were points I thought it was amped up too much. Like when this was the only thing, and that if he doesn't do this one thing. It's not worth it. I don't buy that. I mean, I know a lot of scientists and they kind of like, plug away at their little things, and they don't have an all or nothing mentality. I've never meant a scientist like that. So, that was the note that didn't ring true for me. It was obviously just raising the stakes for the reader more than anything else. At the same time, I think it's so weird to be written about in this way for anybody. To have someone actually inside your head and then describing what it's like; that's got to be the strangest thing.

# SUPERVISOR AGREEMENT AND EVALUATIONS

On-site Supervisor Agreement for the Missouri School of Journalism

Master's Professional Project, Paige Blankenbuehler
On-site supervisor: Brian Calvert
Missouri Committee Member responsible for coordination with on-site supervisor: Bill Allen
07/2015

Roles, responsibilities and expectations
*High Country News internship*
*July – December 2015*

Welcome to High Country News. You are now part of a magazine team. It's a great team, and not by accident. We have a streamlined shop, wherein we all rely heavily on one another for support, ideas and inspiration to produce an award-winner. You are a critical part of that process.

Your first point of contact is Managing Editor Brian Calvert. You'll also report to various editors assigned for projects. This will include Online Editor Tay Wiles, senior editors Jonathan Thompson and Jodi Peterson, and others.

**Roles, responsibilities and expectations of interns:**

- Fack-check, research as assigned
- Spend three to four hours per week updating archives
- Scan news from assigned beats for weekly news tips
- Produce one audio slide show for web
- Produce one data-based infographic for web
- File at least one FOIA request for research on one of stories above
- Write: two short web stories per month (600 words)
- one long web story per month (1,000 words)
- six front-of-book items, including three stories between 700 and 1,600 words
- Pitch weekly (either stories you want to write or think we should cover regardless)
- We encourage you to conceive a major project to undertake during your six months here, with supporting travel and field-based reporting. Final approval will be awarded to the ideas that are HCN-relevant and fresh, well thought out in pitch, and include a reporting plan, travel plan, timeline and budget.

**Roles, responsibilities and expectations of editors:**

- Ensure intern is meeting deadlines
- Edits blog posts
- Edits news stories
- Encourages pitches (at least 1 story per week)
- Pitches ideas for interns
- Helps interns develop plans for major projects
- Assigns fact-checking
- Assigns research for Snapshot, Latest and other material
- Non-editorial mentoring
- While much of the HCN internship teaches magazine journalism through the editorial process, the program also entails a mentorship component. This will include several

scheduled "off-sites" of varying length (ranging from coffee shop chats to weekend adventures and field trips).

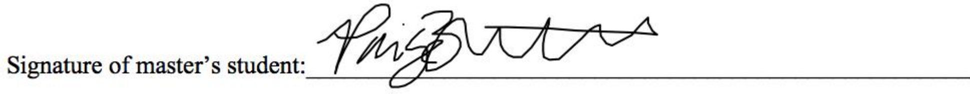
**Missouri School of Journalism professional project regulations:**

- Student will spend at least 30 hours per week for a minimum of 14 weeks engaged in professional-level journalism (minimum of 420 hours).
- Work will be intended for public dissemination.
- The quality of your work will be assessed by both your on-site supervisor and your project committee.
- William Allen, chair of the professional project, will correspond with on-site supervisor throughout the internship, if needed.
- Student will spend 8 hours/week on analytical component of master's work.

Signature of on-site supervisor:

Printed name: Brian Calvert

Signature of master's student:



Printed name: Paige Blankenbuehler

Evaluation – Paige Blankenbuehler – High Country News Editorial Intern
Supervisor: HCN Managing Editor Brian Calvert
11/25/15

To Whom It May Concern,

The *High Country News* internship is an intensive editorial effort that aims to take young journalists with already proven chops and develop them into nuanced storytellers in the realm of the American West, its people, environment and resources.

In the course of her nearly six-month internship, Paige has proven herself an adept thinker and writer and a diligent reporter. She has moved from basic story structures and forms (anecdotal lead + inverted pyramid, eg), into a mode of storytelling that encompasses meaning from reporting. That requires a level of analysis and synthesis that can be hard-won, but which Paige has achieved. She has become very good at reporting stories via telephone and rendering them lively on the page, a valuable skill. She has improved in her ability to report data-heavy stories and present them graphically. She has developed the intense focus required of self-fact-checking, a major component of our internship, which is modeled off of fact-checking processes at major magazines, such as Mother Jones. Paige has also delved deeply into a number of environmental and resource issues as an intern, reporting on wildlife management, food security and climate change, to name a few. Her understanding of these complicated policy issues and they way they impact people has improved during her internship.

In all, the quality and tone of Paige's work has consistently improved during her time here, from a level that was already quite high. As a result, we've invited her to stay on with the *High Country News* fellowship, in which we expect young journalists to quickly deploy the kind of reporting and analysis required of the internship into longer-form journalism suitable for publication in the magazine. We have great faith in Paige to tackle this next level of journalism, given her proven performance during the internship.

Warm regards,

Brian Calvert
Managing Editor

# Brian Robert Calvert

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(909) 800-5101 | brcalvert@gmail.com | www.hcn.org

## Work Experience

**Managing Editor** | *High Country News*
*May 2015 – Present*
Manage a non-profit news magazine that prints 22 times per year and has a daily website. Directly oversee a staff of senior editors, contributing editors, online editor, assistant editor, opinion editor, copy editor, as well as freelancers, contract correspondents, interns and editorial fellow. Manage a budget of nearly $750,000 to provide unique coverage of the American West's natural resources, environment and community. Direct the internship and fellowship program, as an editor and mentor. Edit features, front-of-book and web stories. Write features and other magazine content, including op-eds, essays, and online news and analysis. Member of senior management team, to determine direction and vision of the magazine. Position follows a year as associate editor, from May 2014 to May 2015.

**Ted Scripps Fellow in Environmental Journalism** | University of Colorado - Boulder
*August 2013 – May 2014*
The Ted Scripps Fellowship is a nine-month academic program for professional journalists to improve coverage of environmental issues. As one of five fellows this year, I am studying environmental science, policy, philosophy, law and economics at the University of Colorado. I am developing an audio podcast to chronicle how climate change is reshaping the American West—its culture and ecology, politics and laws, and other facets of Western life. The fellowship includes seminars and field trips with key researchers and scientists at the myriad institutions associated with the university, many of them focusing their own efforts on the West. In addition to my work as a Fellow, I volunteer as a producer at the award-winning science radio program *How on Earth,* and collaborate with CU's Committee on Environmental Thought to produce a series of educational videos focused on ethical questions and climate change in the Southwest.

**Independent producer & writer** | various publications, programs
*December 2004 − Present*
Nationally, I have produced radio for KNGU's *How on Earth,* KCRW's *UnFictional* and *Which Way LA?*, WYNC's *Studio 360* and American Public Media's *Weekend America*. I have written for *Pacific Standard, New York Times Magazine*, *Climbing* and *The Alpinist* magazines; *Grist*, an environmental online magazine; *Guernica*, a literary journal; and *Frommer's*, a travel guidebook. As a freelance foreign correspondent, I reported features and news analysis for print and radio, focused on foreign affairs and international security. Locations reported from include Afghanistan, Cambodia, China, Israel, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Southern Thailand, and the West Bank. Publications and programs reported for include CBC's *Dispatches*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Wall*

*Street Journal Asia*, *World Politics Review*, *Foreign Policy* and *The National* newspaper, Abu Dhabi.

**Media Consultant and Editor** | The Institute for War and Peace Reporting
*July 2011 − December 2011*
In Kabul, I mentored in radio journalism for more than 20 Afghan reporters, who had undertaken a series of in-depth, investigative reports. I established a program of one-on-one training and editing in the capital and various provinces to ensure quality radio production, and I created a website and social media platform to distribute their stories in the Pashto and Dari languages.

**Media Consultant and Editor** | Voice of America, Khmer service
*February 2008 − May 2011*
As a consultant in Phnom Penh, I taught radio journalism to Cambodian reporters. I managed and edited a 10-person team through coverage of national parliamentary elections, establishing a newsroom system that improved organization and efficiency for robust coverage of the process. I established a television production unit and edited enterprise and beat coverage across a wide range of subjects, including politics, economics, human rights, and the environment.

**Language Consultant** | *China Pictorial* | *August 2003 − December 2004*
I wrote and photographed for a monthly English-language magazine covering culture, art and travel throughout China, while training editors for improved story quality.

**Associate Editor** | *The Cambodia Daily* | *August 1999 − August 2003*
As an editor and reporter in Phnom Penh, I trained Cambodian journalists in fundamental print reporting, while filling a variety of roles at an English-language daily newspaper: copy/layout editor, general assignment and business reporter, and photographer. My last year was as assignments editor, directing daily coverage for a staff of 30 expatriate and Cambodian journalists. I also established a business section for the paper.

**Staff Writer** | *National Guard Magazine* | *August 1998 − August 1999*
In Washington, DC, I wrote and photographed for a monthly publication focused on the US Army and Air National Guard. Additional duties included magazine production, international travel and coverage of Pentagon press conferences.

## Affiliations and Organizations

Board Member, KVNF community radio | *October 2015 - Present*
Member, Society of Environmental Journalists | *August 2013 − Present*
Member, Listen Up Los Angeles | *December 2011 − Present*
    Local club of LA-based radio producers
Member, Association of Independents in Radio | *December 2010 − Present*
    Nationwide association of independent producers
Vice President, Overseas Press Club of Cambodia | *January 2010 − May 2011*
Acting President, Overseas Press Club of Cambodia | *January 2009 − January 2010*

Led the revival of a moribund organization, establishing networks between local and international journalists and other media professionals, hosting public forums and film discussions, and advocating for a free press and journalists' rights.

## Education

Bachelor of Arts, English Liberal Arts, with minors in writing and media studies
University of Northern Colorado (*1994 − 1998*)
Arts & Entertainment editor, *The Mirror*, university newspaper (*1997 − 1998*)
Semester abroad, University of Malta (*spring 1997*)
Editor, *The Crucible*, literary magazine (*1994 − 1995*)

Primary Leadership Development Course
US Army National Guard (*summer 1996*); promoted to sergeant (E-5)
Military occupational specialties: aircraft electrician, photojournalist

## Additional Skills

Video: HD cameras, iPhone video, sound and lighting, editing with Final Cut Pro 7, FCPX
Audio: field recording with various microphone configurations and recorders; editing with Dalet, Audacity, Hindenburg
Web: Common Spot, WordPress, Soundcloud, YouTube Direct, FTPs, Twitter
Foreign correspondent: travel, logistics, work with fixers, interviews through interpreters

## References

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