

WILD AT HEART

THE WORD FROM WILDEARTH GUARDIANS

No. 3, Spring 2009

Secrets of the Sagebrush Sea

page 8





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WILDEARTH GUARDIANS protects and restores the wildlife, wild places, and wild rivers of the American West.

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RESTORING THE VISION

John Horning

There are moments in the life of every self-identified westerner when you become not just a citizen of a nation, or a state, but also of a particular landscape. For me, one of those moments occurred when I was visiting Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge in eastern Oregon in the early 1990s.

On that visit I was filled with the sights and smells of the Sagebrush Sea. I remember hundreds of gangly-legged pronghorns bouncing across the horizon, a horizon filled with the unbroken olive-green of sagebrush. I had never known a place so naked, so wild, so big and seemingly so resilient. My sense of citizenship was renewed and expanded by that experience.

Though I left with a lasting impression of fertility, abundance and intactness, the reality on the ground was just the opposite. New and mounting threats continue to tear at the tapestry of life that enriches the Sagebrush Sea.

One of the most endangered and iconic residents of the Sagebrush Sea is the beautiful greater sage grouse. Under the leadership of Mark Salvo, our Sagebrush Sea Campaign has a bold vision, not only to secure federal protection for the species, but also to create a large system of reserves that would protect millions of acres for sage-grouse and other wildlife. We are also working to pass legislation to retire grazing permits since grazing poses a major threat to the landscape.

Realizing our vision will not be easy given the political challenges of protecting the millions of acres of Sagebrush Sea and its iconic species. Fortunately, because Mark is a trusted coalition builder, conservationists are counting on WILDEARTH GUARDIANS to provide the cohesive leadership required to meet these challenges. This means WILDEARTH is leading the way to protect and restore the West's expansive Sagebrush Sea.

GUARDIAN GIVER

Roxy Hills

“My relationship with WILDEARTH GUARDIANS is rewarding because of the warmth and determination we share in protecting the wild,” says Roxy Hills, who joined WILDEARTH GUARDIANS last year, but has been involved in the conservation movement for a long time. Roxy, who lives in Oregon, credits her grandmother’s understanding of nature to

helping form her own values with regard to the wild. “She had a great respect for wildlife,” she says.

Roxy is now an active member of WILDEARTH GUARDIANS, and notes, “the personal attention of this group gives me inspiration to keep going. It has to be a symbiotic relationship,” she continues.

Roxy has taken many extra steps to guarantee the ongoing financial stability of WILDEARTH GUARDIANS, including joining the organization’s Diversity of Life Society, a planned giving program. Planned giving ensures that the West’s wildlife and wild places are protected for generations to come. Roxy took another step by starting a new business called Canopy Ceramics. All proceeds from her sales, after expenses, will support conservation advocacy.



Pictured above is a jar from Roxy’s ceramic business, Canopy Ceramics. Proceeds from her sales benefit WILDEARTH GUARDIANS.

STUMP AN ENVIRO!

Duncan North

Dear Duncan,
I support renewable energy, but I'm worried that wind farms have a negative impact on wildlife. Are wind farms bad for the environment?

Thanks,
Blowing in the Wind

Dear Blowing in the Wind,
Wind farms are good for the environment because they are renewable energy and they don't create greenhouse gasses – which lead to global warming and the potential destruction of all life on the planet. On the other hand, wind farms can fragment wildlife habitat and frighten little birds, like the lesser prairie-chicken. These birds avoid tall structures because they think big birds, which like to eat little birds, hang out in everything tall (like wind turbines, basketball players and trees).

The simple solution, according to many environmentalists, is the responsible placement of wind farms. However, that's like saying the simple solution to teen pregnancies

is the responsible placement of genitals – wind farms are like horny teenagers – there are not a lot of places where they can get it on.

Some people think you can move wind farms around like a lamp in your living room, but (like a lamp) they require access to existing power lines. Unfortunately, high voltage power lines are like cops and condoms – they are seldom around when you need them. Building new power lines raises the cost of wind farms, which increases the economic attractiveness of gas, oil, and coal – which are definitely bad for the environment. The best solution is for environmentalists to work with wind farm people to help identify locations that combine economic viability with limited impact on wildlife habitat.



Stump
an Enviro!



To "Stump an Enviro," contact Duncan North at dnorth@wildearthguardians.org.

SAVE THE DATES
Help Us Celebrate
20 Years of Protecting
the Wild

Saturday, June 20th
3rd annual Treehugger
Bash in Albuquerque
Grove Cafe & Market

Thursday, July 16th
3rd annual Office Open
House in Santa Fe
WildEarth Guardians'
Main Office

Friday, September 25
6th annual Guardians
Gala in Santa Fe
Bishops Lodge

**Thursday,
November 12**
1st annual Guardians
Gala in Denver
Magnolia Hotel

TEAMING UP FOR TREES

Join WILDEARTH GUARDIANS' Team

Plant trees. Gather pledges. Restore habitat.



Rio Puerco, June 2005



Rio Puerco, July 2008

2009 SCHEDULE

La Jencia Tree Planting Day
Saturday, March 7, 10am-3pm,
near Socorro

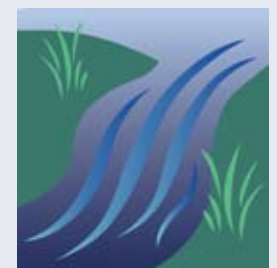
Rio Puerco Tree Planting Days
Friday and Saturday, March 27-28,
10am-3pm, near Cuba

San Marcos Tree Planting Day
Saturday, April 4, 10am-3pm
near Santa Fe

Santa Fe River Tree Planting Day
Saturday, April 18, 10am-3pm, Santa Fe

Bluewater Creek Tree Planting Days
Friday and Saturday, May 1-2,
10am-3pm, near Grants

**For details and directions,
505-988-9126 x1151 or
wildearthguardians.org.**



Stream Team

FLICKR.COM/ZYRCSTER



Obama's pick for Secretary of the Interior, former Senator Ken Salazar (D-CO), came as a shock and disappointment to WILDEARTH GUARDIANS.

While we hope Obama will bring the winds of change our nation needs in the wake of the Bush administration, the new president overlooked more environmentally friendly candidates.

Salazar's challenge will be, in contrast to his record, to reform a federal agency destabilized by one political controversy after another.

After spending the last four days in Washington, D.C. at the inauguration of Barack Obama—our nation's first African-American president—it is impossible for me not to be caught up in the euphoria of this moment in history.

But just as the nation is facing a sobering economic crisis, so too are we facing inextricably linked ecological, climate and energy crises. Addressing each of these crises requires bold and swift action and entails taking some calculated risk. Risks that are minor compared to the consequences of inaction and delay.

In one of his significant rebuttals of the long, dark years of policy under the Bush administration, President Obama promised in his inaugural address "to restore science to its rightful place." Of course we must begin to heed the wisdom of science. But science alone cannot solve environmental problems, much less steady a nation with a seemingly endless list of them. Science, though essential to governing well, is only one piece of the puzzle. Difficult decisions still need to be made that require a wisdom that is informed by science but also guided by a sense for what is necessary and possible.

That's why bold leadership is so critical. And it's why we need leaders who recognize that we cannot separate our economic well-being from our environmental well-being.

WILDEARTH's initial assessment of President Obama's key environmental leaders indicates that he may not have

chosen those who are bold enough to reform agencies destabilized during Bush's rein. Obama's choice to make Ken Salazar, the former Senator from Colorado, the Secretary of Interior is particularly disappointing.

As manager of our public lands and our chief wildlife management agency, both through its role in enforcing the Endangered Species Act and by virtue of managing our wildlife refuge system, the Interior Department is critical to protecting our natural heritage.

In the past, as both a Senator and a Colorado state official, Salazar did not exhibit the type of vision necessary to chart a new direction at Interior. In fact he actually worked aggressively to oppose the listing the black-tailed prairie dog under the Endangered Species Act. He also rarely sought to hold the oil and gas industry accountable. Yet energy and endangered species are two of the biggest challenges the new Interior Secretary will face.

Much as we are concerned, so too are we open to the possibility that change will come. WILDEARTH GUARDIANS will not only work to ensure that science is upheld. But we will push the Department of Interior and the Obama administration to embrace the bold changes that the West, our country and our planet so desperately need.

*We need leaders
who recognize
that we cannot separate
our economic well-being
from our
environmental well-being.*

But we also need you to do your part as citizens in this new administration. Participate in WILDEARTH GUARDIANS events and respond to our action alerts. Send us your email address if we don't already have it to make sure you stay up to date (see the back page). And talk to your family and friends about the importance of protecting wildlife and wild lands.

Visit *Take Action* at wildearthguardians.org

EVERY DOG HAS HIS DAY

Lauren McCain

RUSSELL GRAVES



Each year, WILDEARTH GUARDIANS celebrates February 2nd as Prairie Dog Day, the Groundhog Day for the West. While prairie dogs do not predict the weather, they do predict the health of entire ecosystems. This Prairie Dog Day, we take time to reflect on the actions in 2008 that distinguished WILDEARTH as one of the most effective prairie dog advocates in the country.

In response to our petition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decided that some Gunnison's prairie dog populations deserve protection under the Endangered Species Act last February.

Last October, WILDEARTH GUARDIANS was honored to host a reading and book signing by renowned author, Terry Tempest Williams. The GUARDIANS' own Dr. Nicole Rosmarino edited Williams' new book, *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*, which discusses the connection between the violence suffered by Utah prairie dogs and human suffering around the world. The plight of prairie dogs, Williams warns, is an indication of the capacity to inflict torture on other humans. Williams included a large excerpt from our 2008 *Report from the Burrow: Forecast of the Prairie Dog* in her book to illustrate this point.

In December, WILDEARTH GUARDIANS and our partner Defenders of Wildlife warned the U.S. Forest Service that we will sue the agency if it goes forward with plans to poison prairie dogs in the Oglala, Fort Pierre, and Buffalo Gap National Grasslands. Sadly, the Forest Service has already killed prairie dogs on these public lands.

To educate the public this Prairie Dog Day, we released our second annual Report from the *Burrow: Forecast of the Prairie Dog*. The report grades the federal and state agencies responsible for managing prairie dogs and ensuring their protection. Sadly, these agencies are performing poorly. Arizona got the highest grade, a B, because of its efforts to reintroduce black-tailed prairie dogs into the state where the species had previously been extinct. Most states received Ds and Fs. We hope that by highlighting poor agency management of such a critical species, decision-makers will be pressured by the public to do better in the future.

WILDEARTH GUARDIANS also had fun on Prairie Dog Day. We collaborated with the Prairie Dog Coalition to give a field trip for a Denver elementary school. The fourth-graders learned about prairie dogs as they watched the animals in the wild at the Plains Conservation Center. Con Slobodchikoff, a leading expert on the complex language of prairie dogs came from Northern Arizona University to give several fascinating talks about prairie dog vocabulary and syntax. We partnered with the Denver Zoo, which hosted an event that included student art contests, presentations by prairie dog conservation groups, Native American dancers, and prairie dog ecosystem demonstrations. Hundreds of children and adults left the event more connected to prairie dogs and the ecosystems the animals support.

On the heels of Prairie Dog Day 2009, we're already gearing up for another year full of progress for prairie dogs. We hope to see black-tailed prairie dogs protected under the Endangered Species Act soon (see page 11). And in between pushing for policy reforms, we will continue our public awareness campaign.

Visit *Prairie Dog Project* at wildearthguardians.org

WILDEARTH GUARDIANS celebrates Prairie Dog Day, Groundhog Day for the West, with Denver school children.



LINDSEY STERLING KRANK

WHY ARE YOU A GUARDIAN?



My decision to take a more active role in defending the fidelity of the Endangered Species Act was inspired by my daughter's passion for endangered animals, especially the black-footed ferret. My daughter, Hannah, was assigned a fourth grade math project on how to spend a hypothetical million dollars; she chose to spend it on an existing black-footed ferret sanctuary. She connected with the ferrets and learned their species depend on our commitment to stewardship and insisting that federal environmental protection laws be respected.

Sincerely,
JANET HARM
ESA Guardian

Sign up to be an ESA Guardian:
wildearthguardians.org

CLIMATE WATCH

Jeremy Nichols

It was a busy end of 2008 for the Climate and Energy Program, and WILDEARTH GUARDIANS – with your support – emerged as a leader in promoting the development of clean, renewable energy and confronting the harmful development of dirty fossil fuels.

WHY ARE YOU A GUARDIAN?



The climate crisis needs solving, and WILDEARTH GUARDIANS is taking the initiative in the West. We all must do something! That's why I've signed up to be a Climate Guardian. It feels good to stay on top of the latest Climate and Energy news and to learn about ways I can reduce my impact.

Sincerely
DEENA KANSAGRA
Climate Guardian

Sign up to be a
Climate Guardian:
wildearthguardians.org



FLICKR.COM/SEWBURKINA

In early 2009, we kicked off a project with Los Alamos and Sandia Labs to develop a 100% renewable energy blueprint for the City of Santa Fe. This collaboration is an important opportunity to develop a strong technical basis for a clean energy strategy that we can use throughout the West. We also hope this opportunity helps clean energy become a priority of the Labs.



FLICKR.COM/POGGIS

On December 24th, we filed hard-hitting comments against the Bureau of Land Management over a proposal to allow expanded coal mining on nearly 10,000 acres in northeastern Wyoming's Powder River Basin. The region produces more than 40% of the coal burned in the United States, contributing to 14% of the nation's greenhouse gases. We're gearing up to pressure the BLM to shift away from dirty coal.



USFWS

On December 23rd, we filed a groundbreaking petition with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to slash smog in the American West. Coal-fired power plants, oil and gas drilling, and more cars and trucks are fueling an air pollution crisis. A recent report commented that "broad regions" of the West are expected to violate basic health standards by 2018. Our petition promotes clean energy solutions to prevent this mess from happening.



BLM

On December 18th, we filed a lawsuit to force the BLM to address the global warming impacts of oil and gas drilling in Montana. Drilling is one of the largest human-made sources of methane, a greenhouse gas 21 times more potent than carbon dioxide. Yet methane—otherwise known as natural gas—is a valuable product, meaning this pollution can be cleaned up with a payback.



FLICKR.COM/THECAREYFAM

On December 12th, we secured stronger clean air safeguards for the Front Range of Colorado. To reduce the region's smog, we pressured the State of Colorado to adopt the strongest reductions in volatile air pollution from oil and gas drilling operations in the West. The plan still has some kinks—it lets the region's five coal-fired power plants off the hook—but we expect to fix this soon.



ISTOCK

In November, we confronted oil and gas drilling in northwestern New Mexico to protect clean air and the region's health. We challenged two Forest Service decisions to expand drilling on the Carson and Santa Fe National Forests and the BLM's decision to move forward with more oil and gas leasing in the Farmington area. The region is suffering from big-city air pollution, largely the result of dirty drilling.

Visit *Climate & Energy* at wildearthguardians.org

CAMPAIGN UPDATES

TIM SPRINGER



CLEAN WATER, WILD FORESTS

WILDEARTH GUARDIANS' campaign to protect everyone's right to clean water and wild forests is gaining steam. With support from Governor Richardson and his cabinet, New Mexico is poised to permanently protect its cleanest waters and its most pristine forests in perpetuity by designating them as "outstanding" under the Clean Water Act. We've been rigorously working to recruit support and over the past few months have collected more than 2,500

petition signatures for this campaign. We're also busy lining up people like you to testify at the Water Quality Control Commission hearings this summer. By bringing together a panel of experts and diverse stakeholders, we're showing the Commission that protecting clean water is in the best interest of our health, the environment and the economy. We've been working with mapping specialists to illustrate which New Mexican waterways warrant protection. And, in partnership with ecological experts, we've been compiling the scientific data necessary to justify the protection under the Clean Water Act.

Building upon our success in New Mexico, WILDEARTH is expanding the Clean Water, Wild Forests campaign to Colorado. Soon, we will be gathering petition signatures and compiling data on similar waterways in Colorado that meet the criteria for protection. We hope to use this strategy as a model to ensure everyone across the West has clean water and wild forests forever.

Visit Protecting Public Lands at wildearthguardians.org

ALL ABOARD THE WESTERN ARK

In January, WILDEARTH GUARDIANS filed notices of our intent to sue the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service over its failure to issue findings on our October 2008 Endangered Species Act listing petitions requesting protection for 13 diverse species. We filed eight petitions on behalf of these species whose ranges sprawl across 18 U.S. states. Representing the varied life forms at risk of extinction, our petitions included the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse, white-sided jackrabbit, Sonoran desert tortoise, Jemez Mountains salamander, Sprague's pipit, six mussels, Chihuahuan scurfpea, and the Wright's marsh thistle. We will continue to fight so that all of these species are allowed to board the legal ark the Endangered Species Act provides before it's too late.

Visit Western Ark at wildearthguardians.org



DOUG BACKLUND

TIM SPRINGER



WOLVES IN THE WEST

As 2009 dawns, WILDEARTH GUARDIANS is fighting to give wolves the freedom to roam in the American West. In the Southern Rockies, we anticipate success in our case against Rocky Mountain National Park's plan to cull an overpopulation of elk by using sharpshooters to kill the animals instead of restoring wolves, their natural predators. Also in the Southern Rockies, our petition to jumpstart a wolf recovery plan for the region awaits the new Obama administration. Further south, we've petitioned the federal government to update its nearly 30 year-old Mexican Wolf Recovery Plan so that the struggling population of lobos can be brought back from the brink of extinction using modern science rather than political favoritism.

Visit Carnivore Project at wildearthguardians.org

WHY ARE YOU A GUARDIAN?



Astrophysicists, when looking for the possibility of life on another planet, seek to find water. So basic are the functions it provides to our lives, our greatest folly would be to abuse this dwindling resource in favor of any other potential commodity. For this, and other cogent reasons, I continually choose to be a Watershed Guardian.

Sincerely,
STEPHEN BOHANNON
Watershed Guardian

Sign up to be a Watershed Guardian:
wildearthguardians.org

SECRETS OF THE SAGEBRUSH SEA

Mark Salvo

In the sagebrush lands of the West . . . the natural landscape is eloquent of the interplay of forces that have created it. It is spread before us like the pages of an open book in which we can read why the land is what it is and why we should preserve its integrity. But the pages lie unread.

— RACHEL CARSON, *SILENT SPRING*, 1962

The Sagebrush Sea, scientifically known as “sagebrush steppe,” is a vast, beautiful and diverse landscape. The Sagebrush Sea is expansive country—“open space” prized by so many Americans. The landscape features lakes, rivers, streams, springs, wetlands, hot springs, salt flats, dunes, volcanic rock formations and mountain ranges. Sadly, many Americans are unaware of the Sagebrush Sea and the rich tapestry of life it supports.

The Sagebrush Sea is an ecologically vibrant ecosystem. While sagebrush dominates the landscape visually, it grows in delicate balance with trees, grasses, wildflowers and other shrubs. Healthy sagebrush steppe is teeming with birds, large and small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, crustaceans, insects and fish. Among these are a suite of species that depend on sagebrush for their survival, including greater sage-grouse,

Forest Service manages eight percent and western states own five percent of the Sagebrush Sea. The rest of sagebrush habitat exists on private lands.

There is no system as vast as this one in such free fall.

— AMERICAN BIRD CONSERVANCY, 2007

Historically, the Sagebrush Sea covered more than 150 million acres in western North America, and was perhaps as large as 243 million acres, spanning parts of what became sixteen states and three Canadian provinces. Despite its size, sagebrush steppe is one of the most endangered landscapes in North America. The Sagebrush Sea has been reduced in area by as much as 50 percent since European settlement. According to one noted researcher, in only 150-300 years European inhabitants “have brought about more profound changes” to sagebrush steppe “than all those of the previous 13,000 years.”

Unfortunately, livestock grazing, gas and oil development, agricultural conversion, roads, fences, powerlines and pipelines, off-road vehicles, urban sprawl, mining, unnatural fire, and invasive weeds continue to destroy or degrade much of what remains of the Sagebrush Sea.

Past and current mismanagement of the Sagebrush Sea has exacted a heavy toll on resident flora and fauna. More than 350 species (and as many as 630 species) in the Sagebrush Sea may be threatened by human activities and related effects. Approximately 20 percent of native flora and fauna in the Sagebrush Sea are imperiled.

Legions of leagues (the expression is by no means too strong) are covered with a wild growth of sage, that seems designed by Nature than for nothing else that to feed a certain variety of the feathered family known as “sagecocks.”

— MATTHEW FIELD, 1843,
Prairie and Mountain Sketches, 1957



IDAHO FISH & GAME



WASHINGTON DEPT. FISH & WILDLIFE

Animals such as pronghorn and pygmy rabbits depend on the Sagebrush Sea for survival.



PHOTOS.COM

Gunnison sage-grouse, sage sparrow, Brewer’s sparrow, sage thrasher, pygmy rabbit, sagebrush vole, sagebrush lizard, and pronghorn.

Most of the Sagebrush Sea is publicly owned in the United States. The Bureau of Land Management controls approximately half of remaining sagebrush steppe. The U.S.



Despite its size, the vast Sagebrush Sea of the American West is one of North America's most endangered landscapes.

“Sagecocks,” now called sage-grouse, are the most charismatic of all Sagebrush Sea denizens. First described by Lewis and Clark in 1805, nineteenth century travelers and settlers reported huge flocks of sage-grouse that darkened the sky as they lifted from valley floors. As many as 16 million sage-grouse may have occurred in sagebrush steppe prior to the arrival of Europeans.

The sage-grouse mating ritual is fascinating to observe, and often described as among the most stirring and colorful natural history pageants in the West. In early spring, at dawn and often at dusk, males congregate on “leks”—ancestral strutting grounds to which the birds return year after year. To attract a hen, males prance, fan their tail feathers and swell their breasts to reveal bright yellow air sacs. The combination of wing movements and inflating and deflating air sacs make an utterly unique sound: “swish-swish-coo-oopink!”

Sage-grouse use every part of the Sagebrush Sea. In the spring, wildflowers provide essential

nutrition to egg-carrying hens. Newly hatched chicks feed on insects found in the grasses, and later feed on wildflowers. Sage-grouse summer range is a combination of sagebrush and wildflower-rich areas, including wet meadows and streamsides. Sage-grouse eat only sagebrush during the winter.

Sage-grouse and pristine sagebrush habitat are inseparable. Sage-grouse need expanses of healthy sagebrush habitat – perhaps hundreds of square miles – with a mosaic of native vegetation and meandering waterways to survive and flourish.

The physics of beauty is one department of natural science still in the Dark Ages. Not even the manipulators of bent space have tried to solve its equations. Everybody knows, for example, that the autumn landscape in the north woods is the land, plus a red maple, plus a ruffed grouse. In terms of conventional physics, the grouse represents only a millionth of either the mass or the energy of an acre. Yet subtract the grouse and the whole thing is dead.

— ALDO LEOPOLD, 1937

Unfortunately, the loss of sagebrush steppe over the last 150 years has precipitated steep declines in sage-grouse populations. Greater sage-grouse populations have declined by as much as 93 percent from historic levels.

Gunnison sage-grouse, distinct from greater sage-grouse, now occupy less than ten percent of their original distribution in the Southwest. These birds have experienced significant declines and only about 4,000 breeding individuals remain. Gunnison sage-grouse may be on the brink of extinction.

New research predicts further loss of sagebrush steppe and sage-grouse. Livestock grazing, gas and oil development, the spread of weeds and resultant wildfire will continue to threaten sagebrush habitat and species. New challenges posed by climate change, wind energy

WHY ARE YOU A GUARDIAN?



The Sagebrush Sea reveals Earth's naked splendor as nowhere else. To the geologists' eye, these seemingly-barren vistas dance with life and the vastness of time.

Today, the Sagebrush Sea's vanishing natives are a telling reminder of nature's fragility and resilience, and of the planet's vulnerability to unceasing disturbance by humans. If we cannot save this extraordinary, wild landscape, what hope is there for us?

Sincerely,
ELLEN MORRIS BISHOP
Oregon Paleo Lands Institute

Sign up to be a Sagebrush Sea Guardian:
wildearthguardians.org

Left to right:
greater sage-grouse,
Gunnison sage-grouse





development, and increasing off-road vehicle use will further threaten the landscape.

There is an urgent need to protect and restore the Sagebrush Sea. WILDEARTH GUARDIANS' Sagebrush Sea Campaign has developed a necessarily ambitious plan to reverse the decline of Sagebrush Sea species and conserve and restore sagebrush steppe.

The Sagebrush Sea is America's least known—and therefore least loved and protected—landscape. But that's beginning to change. WILDEARTH GUARDIANS is doing for greater sage-grouse and the Sagebrush Sea of the Interior West what Oregon Wild did for the northern spotted owl and ancient forests of the Pacific Northwest.

—ANDY KERR, Senior Counselor,
Oregon Wild, 2009

In October, WILDEARTH GUARDIANS published mapping analyses that quantify the extent of several threats facing the Sagebrush Sea. The report, *The Shrinking Sagebrush Sea*, found that gas and oil drilling, livestock grazing, cheatgrass incursion and other threats, both individually and cumulatively, affect more than 80 percent of sage-grouse current range. We also discovered that less than three percent of sage-grouse habitat benefits from some (often very minimal) level of federal protection.

• Protecting Sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act

WILDEARTH GUARDIANS is using data presented in *The Shrinking Sagebrush Sea* to buttress efforts to protect the iconic sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Conservationists' campaign to list the greater sage-grouse and Gunnison sage-grouse under the Act began ten years ago. The effort has drawn significant

interest—and opposition—since it was first announced. Former Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton feared the potential effects of listing sage-grouse under the ESA, claiming listing could have an even greater impact on land use than protecting the northern spotted owl had on logging in the Pacific Northwest: “some say the grouse could become the spotted owl of the intermountain West. But the sage grouse occupies nearly 12 times as much land as the northern spotted owl.” Statements like these are hyperbolic attempts to incite industry opposition to protecting sage-grouse from extinction.

Efforts to list greater sage-grouse under the ESA are presently in round two. Last winter, a federal court found that political appointees in the Bush administration unduly influenced a decision not to list the species in 2005. WILDEARTH GUARDIANS and our partners are also challenging the Bush administration's decision to deny protection to Gunnison sage-grouse as politically motivated and scientifically unsound.

• Voluntary Grazing Permit Retirement

WILDEARTH GUARDIANS is also pursuing legislative options to reduce livestock grazing in the Sagebrush Sea. Livestock grazing is permitted on 91 percent of sage-grouse current range on federal public land, making it the most ubiquitous use of sage-grouse habitat. Livestock grazing in sagebrush steppe can severely degrade habitat for sage-grouse and other wildlife. Conversely, sage-grouse and other species have benefited where livestock grazing has been reduced or eliminated on the landscape.

WILDEARTH GUARDIANS seeks to end public lands livestock grazing in sage-grouse range by proposing that the federal government compensate ranchers to retire their grazing operations on public land in the Sagebrush Sea. We are presently working on a pilot project to demonstrate the concept's utility to the public, ranchers and decisionmakers.



WILDEARTH GUARDIANS is working to eliminate the many threats to the Sagebrush Sea, including oil and gas drilling and livestock grazing.

• Sagebrush Sea Reserves

Despite its size, the Sagebrush Sea is among the least protected landscapes in the country. Congress and the administration must designate a system of Sagebrush Sea reserves to protect critical habitat cores and wildlife corridors and sustain Sagebrush Sea species until the current energy development boom in sagebrush steppe has subsided, livestock have been removed from federal public land, and sagebrush habitat can be restored from cheatgrass invasion and wildfire. WILDEARTH GUARDIANS is developing additional maps and analyses, and related public information and legislative campaigns to create new reserves in the Sagebrush Sea.

Remember that the yield of a hard country is a love deeper than a fat and easy land inspire, [and] that throughout the arid West Americans have found a secret treasure... a country brimming with a beauty not to be found elsewhere.
—BERNARD DeVOTO, *The Year of Decision: 1846*

Protecting the Sagebrush Sea will be neither quick nor easy. The landscape has been misunderstood and mismanaged for hundreds of years. WILDEARTH GUARDIANS will continue to tell the secrets of the Sagebrush Sea until this vast and uniquely American landscape is protected and restored.

Visit Sagebrush Sea at wildearthguardians.org

GOOD NEWS FROM THE GUARDIANS



USFWS

BUTTERFLY FLUTTERS TOWARD PROTECTION

On December 5, 2008, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service gave the green light to a 2007 petition from WILDEARTH GUARDIANS and the Center for Biological Diversity requesting federal Endangered Species Act protection for the Sacramento Mountains checkerspot butterfly. This extremely rare butterfly has a tiny range - occurring only in New Mexico, on a total of just 2,000 acres. The Service determined that federal protection may be warranted due to climate change, pesticide spraying, and a lack of government protections. The agency will now conduct a full assessment on whether they will issue a proposal to list the butterfly under the Endangered Species Act.

Visit *Wildlife* at wildearthguardians.org

PROGRESS FOR PRAIRIE DOGS

On December 2, 2008, The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service responded to WILDEARTH GUARDIANS' August 2007 petition for federal protection of the black-tailed prairie dog under the Endangered Species Act. The Fish and Wildlife Service agreed that the petition presented ample information demonstrating that the black-tailed prairie dog may require protection as Threatened or Endangered under the Act. The Service's positive finding means the agency will conduct a full review of whether the black-tailed prairie dog should be listed under the ESA. The Service found that threats to the species include poisoning, plague, and insufficient government protection.

Visit *Prairie Dog Project* at wildearthguardians.org



RICH READING

LYNX MAY SOON BE SAFE IN NEW MEXICO

On December 18, the Fish and Wildlife Service also gave the green light to a 2007 petition from WILDEARTH GUARDIANS and other conservation groups requesting federal Endangered Species Act protection for lynx in New Mexico. When the lynx was listed as Threatened in some areas within the lower 48 U.S. states in 2000, the Service excluded New Mexico from the areas in which the large cat is protected. Our efforts aim at ensuring federal protection from logging and other threats when the cats naturally wander over the New Mexican border. The December finding came as the result of litigation brought on our behalf by the Western Environmental Law Center.

Visit *Carnivore Project* at wildearthguardians.org



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GUARDIAN PROFILE

Michelle Miano



Michelle joined WILDEARTH GUARDIANS as the Development Associate in the summer of 2008. She currently assists the organization with fundraising, writes and assembles grants and helps to increase membership.

A native of the Northeast, she graduated from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore with a degree in writing and film. In 2007, she confused an editorial job listing in New Mexico as a job in New York; she was a bit surprised, but decided to

take a chance on the Southwest anyway. She immediately liked the area – especially the mountains and brilliant sunsets – during her interview trip, and decided to move three weeks later. During her free time, Michelle began volunteering with local conservation groups to restore rivers and plant trees. Hiking and biking, she started exploring the wild places of New Mexico. Several months later, she decided to work for WILDEARTH GUARDIANS and dedicate her time to the environment.

Michelle currently lives in Santa Fe and continues to hike, bike and ski. She is also writing a screenplay, reading the newest Michael Chabon novel and addicted to French film.

Let's Clean Up This Mess WILDEARTH going paperless.



WILDEARTH GUARDIANS is proud to announce that we have a streamlined plan to dramatically reduce our paper waste in 2009. This means you can receive our annual report, newsletters, event announcements and campaign updates electronically rather than by mail. But we need your email address to make that happen.

To participate, contact Lori Colt at lcolt@wildearthguardians.org today.

Answers to WILD KNOWLEDGE

Find out how well you did in last issue's WILDEARTH challenge.

1. What species is pictured here?
Greater sage-grouse (Centrocercus urophasianus).
2. What is this animal doing?
This male sage-grouse is dancing on a "lek," an historic mating ground, to attract female sage-grouse.
3. What plant does this species need to survive?
Sage-grouse are sagebrush obligate species—they cannot survive without sagebrush. Sage-grouse also feed on grasses and wildflowers.
4. What is a major threat to this species' survival?
Sage-grouse are threatened by myriad land uses and related threats, including livestock grazing, gas and oil drilling, and invasive species.
5. How much has this species' habitat declined since the 1800s?
Sage-grouse have lost more than 50 percent of their range following European settlement of the West.



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