

High Country News

2023-24
annual
report





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The content and manner of your reporting is in alignment with nature and our universal humanness. This inspires me and strengthens my connection to all that is good. My gratitude to all who make HCN possible and serve humanity in this noble way.

— Caroline Hamlet (Mount Shasta, CA)

dear readers,

What a year it's been! 2024 was an absolute whirlwind, and I am so proud of what this team has accomplished. In addition to what you'll find in this report, here are a few more highlights:

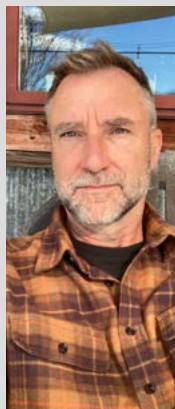
- *HCN's* reporting continues to drive key conversations about land and wildlife conservation in a fragmented, warming West; issues of critical importance to Indigenous communities; and much more. We're publishing as many stories online each month as we are in the print magazine (and you can find those magazine stories on the website as well). If you haven't set up your online account yet, check it out! hcn.org/claim
- We've been connecting with readers online through social media discussions, webinars and roundtable gatherings that give you direct access to *HCN* journalists and our sources. In February, for example, we hosted former *HCN* Editor Rebecca Clarren and Brett Lee Shelton (Oglala Lakota), an attorney for the Native American Rights Fund (NARF). Some 200 people tuned in for a fascinating conversation about Rebecca's book, *The Cost of Free Land: Jews, Lakota and an American Inheritance*.
- We visited with readers in person this year, too. On a September evening in Paonia, Colorado, close to 100 people turned out for a panel discussion about how Westerners can come together to create conservation solutions that can survive the changing winds of Washington, D.C. *HCN* Contributing Editor Michelle Nijhuis led the discussion, which included a regenerative cattle rancher, a member of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and the leader of the local conservation center.

None of this would be possible without you. As you'll see elsewhere in this report, *HCN's* readers provide three quarters of the revenue that keeps this place humming — and many of the great ideas that drive our reporting, too.

We're damned lucky! And grateful.
Thanks for another remarkable year.

Greg Hanscom

Greg Hanscom
Executive Director & Publisher



hello readers,

I recently received a handwritten letter from a *High Country News* subscriber, thanking me for my monthly editor's notes as well as for the work of the entire *HCN* team, and pointing out that while our magazine may be about the West, its sphere of influence is much wider. I know this to be true, from the reach of our stories, the impact they have, and the recognition we receive from our peers in the industry. We are reporting at the forefront of crucial issues like water rights, the changing climate, preserving open space and expanding Indigenous sovereignty — issues with ramifications far beyond the West.

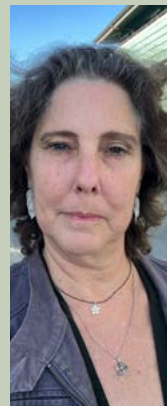
At the same time, we are modeling how journalism should be done. We do community-based reporting and hire contributors who are members of the communities they seek to cover. We ensure that the people affected by a story have a voice in that story. We question long-held assumptions and consider alternative perspectives on the issues we cover. We aim to not only report on a diversity of communities but to produce stories for those communities. When we say we cover the West in all its diversity and complexity, we truly mean it. We walk the talk.

This past year, I restructured the editorial team to better serve our five main coverage areas: Indigenous Affairs; Land, Water & Wildlife; Climate Change; Western Life, Culture & Politics; and Justice & Equity. We began the year with a special issue on **How to Build a Better Climate Future**, and ended with a cover story about **the role of land in reparations for Black communities**. In between, we covered a **turbulent election season**, the largest **dam removal project** in history, a precedent-breaking **Supreme Court** session, and we published investigations into the **Border Patrol's** migrant rescue efforts, **state trust lands** held within tribal reservations, and **renewable energy development on culturally and ecologically significant lands**. We also launched an audio dispatch and bilingual column in English and Spanish and hosted the first cohort of fellows in our new yearlong Fellowship Program.

A big year, and there's plenty more in store! Thank you for your support, which enables us to keep doing this important work.

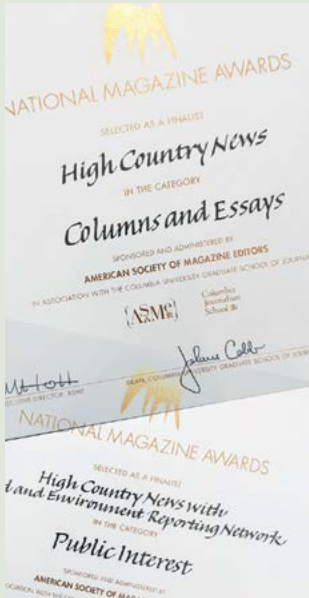


Jennifer Sahn
Editor in Chief



awards & recognition

The Magazine Media Division of The Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication recognized *HCN* as its **Outstanding Magazine of the Year**.



HCN was a **finalist for two National Magazine Awards**, in Columns & Essays and Public Interest, and a **finalist for ASME awards** for Design, Photography and Illustration.

Laureli Ivanoff received a **2024 James Beard award** in Columns & Newsletters for “What the Tundra Provides.”

Jaclyn Moyer won a **Best of the West award** for “The Many Legacies of Letitia Carson” in Feature Writing – Longform.

“The Sentinel” by Leah Sottile won one of the **American Academy of Religion's journalism awards**.

The **Society of Publication Designers** named *HCN* a **Merit Winner** for the photos in “Glen Canyon Revealed,” in the Feature: News/Documentary/Essay photos category.

Kylie Mohr’s feature “Chased by Flames” and Craig Child’s “Glen Canyon Revealed” feature received **recognition in the 2024 edition of Best American Science and Nature Writing**.

HCN received the following Indigenous Journalists Association awards:

- **First Place** – Best Health Coverage, Alastair Lee Bitsoi: “Native mental health providers seek to heal boarding school scars with informed and appropriate treatment”
- **Third Place** – Best Column, Laureli Ivanoff: “The Seasons of Uḡalaqliq”
- **Third Place**, Print/Online – Best Coverage of Indigenous Communities, Anna V. Smith, Mark Olalde, Umar Farooq: “How Arizona squeezes tribes for water”
- **Honorable Mention**, Print/Online – Best Feature Story, Mark Olalde, Anna V. Smith, Umar Farooq: “How Arizona stands between tribes and their water”



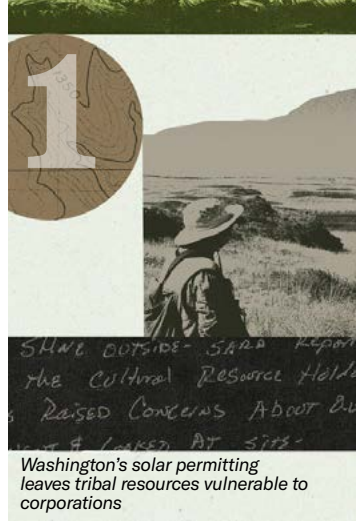
stories *with impact*

12 stories that made a difference —
one from each month.

“

*I do believe that HCN is one of
the best publications today.
Y'all are doing a great job.
The earth not only needs good
lawyers, it needs open and
honest reporting on what is
going on. Thank you.*

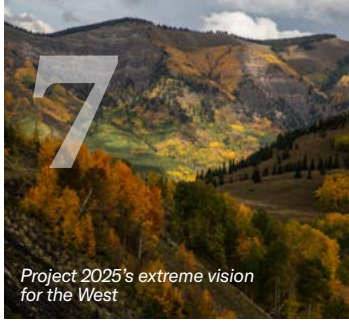
— Beverly Kolkman (Austin, CO)





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The untold history of Japanese American bird pins



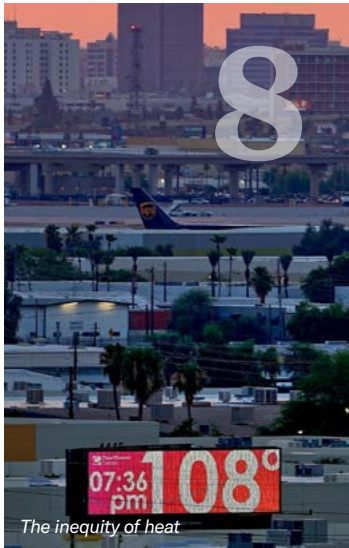
Project 2025's extreme vision for the West



The Forest Service is cutting its seasonal workforce and public lands will suffer



Federal grazing lands fail their checkup



The inequity of heat



Fish camp in Alaska - without the fish



Learning how to live and die with long COVID



What Denali's road closure means for its wildlife



The aftermath of the Hermit's Peak and Calf Canyon Fires

legislator

Our elected officials need trustworthy information about the West so that they can pass laws that benefit and protect our communities and natural spaces. **Each year, HCN sends subscriptions directly to lawmakers, giving them access to our detailed analysis of the West's unique landscapes and how our natural and human communities are impacted by and adapting to climate change and population growth.** It's an unparalleled resource for our nation's lawmakers as they consider issues specific to the West and debate laws and policies that prove more knowledgeable and equitable for our communities.

Real Impact: HCN's investigation into labor abuses in the sheepherder industry was cited several times by the Department of Labor as it finalized a rule that significantly strengthens protections for H-2A workers.



Eric E. Johnson

Cost to serve U.S. Congress and key White House staff:

\$15,000

Cost to serve Western state legislators:

\$35,970

subscriptions

Readers from across the country have told us that they first picked up an issue of HCN as a college student, or that an impassioned professor insisted that they read it. **These stories inspired us to start HCNU, a program that provides free print and digital classroom subscriptions to high school and college students nationwide.** Since the program's inception in 2013, at least 1,000 professors nationwide have used HCN in their curricula to help students understand the unique and complex issues of the West.

Cost to fund access for 20,000 students:

\$109,800 (\$5.49 per student)

“HCNU enables students in my Environmental Ethics course to connect what they learn about philosophy and ethics to real-world issues here in the West and to discover the power of in-depth investigative journalism. I am immensely grateful for the ability to share HCN with my students, and it is always my hope that they become lifelong readers of HCN too.”

HCNU

Our Fellowship Program provides early-career journalists and up-and-coming investigative reporters with the opportunity to develop their skills alongside seasoned editors. **The program provides an unparalleled opportunity to dive deeply into critical Western issues, and each fellow emerges with a body of work that will serve as an essential stepping stone in their career.** Our Fellowship Program is designed to prepare the next generation of reporters to cover the complex environmental and community issues unique to the West.

fellowship program

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The HCN fellowship gave me a deeper understanding of the laws and agencies that create our system of environmental governance and protect our land, air and water. It opened my eyes to the wide array of researchers and activists at the heart of the environmental movement. I will never forget working with such a sharp, conscientious and compassionate set of thinkers. I know that I will look back on this year as one of the most foundational to my career in journalism.

Cost per Fellow: \$85,976 (includes, salary, benefits, remote work stipend, travel & conferences, training & mentoring)

– Erin X. Wong

Nick Morris



Kylie Mohr,
Summer 2022-23
Virginia Spencer
Davis Fellow



Erin X. Wong, 2024
Editorial Fellow



Brooke Larsen, 2023-
24 Editorial Fellow



Susan Shain, 2023-24
New York Times
Headway Fellow



Natalia Mesa,
2024 Fellow

In 2024, close to 100 other news outlets – ranging from *The Salt Lake Tribune* and the *Bozeman Chronicle* to the *Kiowa County Press* and the tiny *Coyote Gulch* blog – published **HCN** stories at no charge.

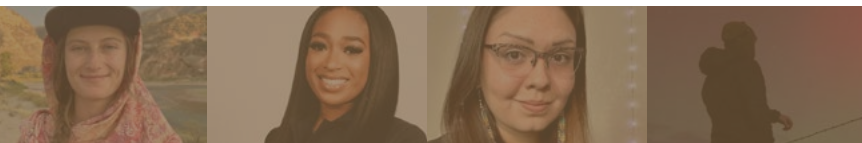
86 Unique sources that have syndicated our stories

168 Number of stories shared

83,938 Number of unique viewers

HCN struck agreements with social media influencers from broadly varied backgrounds to put our content in front of a larger, younger and more diverse audience.

- **Teal Lehto (@westernwatergirl)** creates highly engaging and broadly shared content exposing environmental inequities in the West.
- **Kelsey Russell (@kelscruss)** is a Black, Gen Z “media literacy influencer” whose work has been on the *Drew Barrymore Show* and the *Today Show*.
- **Birdie Sam (@showme_yourmask)**, a self-described “Indigenous biracial nonbinary bisexual,” advocates for environmental and Indigenous rights with a highly engaged following.
- **Trent Pearce (@LeftCoastNaturalist)** is a former Forest Service ranger naturalist and environmental advocate.



HCN often collaborates with other newsrooms, sharing both editorial and funding resources so that we can extend our reach and delve deeply into complex issues. We partnered with a number of outstanding newsrooms:

APTN, Boise State Public Radio, *Capital B*, *Grist*, *The Guardian*, *ICT*, *InvestigateWest*, *Native News Online*, *The Nation*, *Nevada Independent*, PBS/Quiet Pictures, *ProPublica*, *Type Investigations* and *Underscore*.

collabs

how our stories are shared



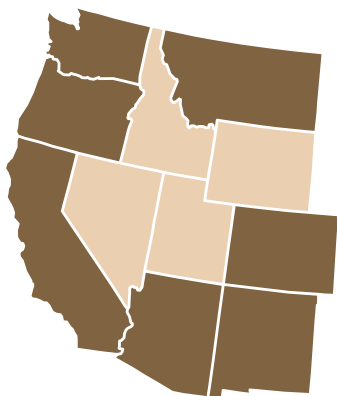
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*I like all the directions of your
moral compass: How you
cover the West and how you
encourage us to see the world.*

— Steve & Gayle Lamy (San Gabriel, CA)

HCN's audience

We pay attention to who's reading *HCN* and how they are accessing our stories so that we can meet our readers where they are and continue to grow our audience.



Where are they from?

HCN has subscribers in all 50 states and about 16 international subscribers as well. Most of our paid readers reside in Colorado, California, Washington, Oregon, Arizona, New Mexico and Montana.

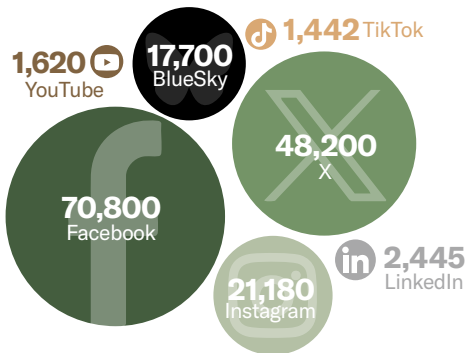


How many subscribe to *HCN*?

*These folks receive our online newsletters. About 22% of them are paid subscribers, 6% have made a donation in the past and 75% haven't subscribed or donated yet.

What about social media?

Thanks to targeted efforts by our Marketing team and exciting new partnerships with influencers, channel engagement continues to grow, putting our stories in front of younger and more diverse audiences.



In February 2024, *HCN* completed a key piece of our 3-year "future proofing" Strategic Plan.

We launched our brand-new website and transitioned almost every piece of software to new platforms that will encourage readers to engage with our website, drive up new and recurring subscriptions, help us track our most popular content, and so much more. We're beginning to see the impact of our efforts, and the initial results are exciting:

6%↑
digital subscriptions
over last year

30%
digital subscribers
moved to auto-renew

19%
print subscribers
moved to auto-renew

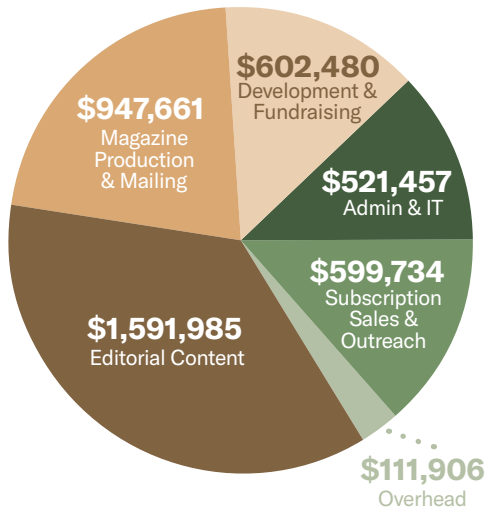
5%↑
renewal rates
over last year

profit & loss budget



Total.....\$4,555,056
Other income....\$105,274
 Change in market value of investment

We are proud that HCN is reader-supported and independent of corporate influence. The revenue figures show that 75% of our operation is funded by you, through subscription dues (13%) and donations (62%).



Total.....\$4,375,223
Net income/(Expense)....\$285,106

HCN's funding model relies on our readers. YOU are our stakeholders.

Tucked into the pie slices of our P&L percentages are some pretty great stories. Here are some donor highlights from 2023-24:

Within our **Subscription** revenue, 895 subscriptions were gifts to family and friends. You find HCN so valuable, you want to share it — without giving away your own copy!

The **Donations** line includes monthly gifts, \$3 and \$5 “round up” contributions on top of subscription purchases, annual contributions, IRA distributions, bequests and more.

\$2,934,009
 came from > 5,000 donors

576
 repeat gifts

\$560
 average donation

\$50
 median gift



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Estes Park, CO



Wendy Fisher
Salt Lake City, UT



Treasurer
Peter Schoenburg
Albuquerque, NM



Dina Gilio-Whitaker
San Clemente, CA



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Secretary
Fátima Luna
Tucson, AZ



Samaria Jaffe
San Rafael, CA



Raynelle Rino
Oakland, CA



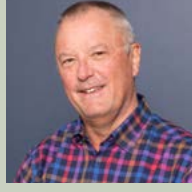
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Jim Spencer
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Andy Wiessner
Snowmass, CO

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Diane Sylvain
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Poetry Editor

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Michelle Nijhuis**
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Kylie Mohr, Leah Sottile, Jonathan Thompson**
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Proofreader

Bradon Barmann-Schwarz
Charitable Gifts Advisor

Eva Videla
Fundraising Associate

Carol Newman
Fundraising Administrator

Anna Demetriades
Fundraising Communications Specialist

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Erica Howard
Director of Business Administration

Mary Zachman
Finance & Payroll Administrator

Gina Gurreri
HR Associate

James Norris-Weyers
Customer Service Manager

KHowe
Associate Product Manager

**Barbara Harper, Tanya Henderson,
Jessica Kiernan**
Customer Service

When you donate to *HCN*, you are sharing insightful and fair-minded stories about the West with your neighbors, your region and your country. You are supporting journalism with impact.

Our deepest gratitude to:

- Everyone who has ever **purchased a subscription** for yourself or a loved one
- All who gave a **one-time gift** during a campaign or when you were inspired by a story
- Our **Sustainers' Club members** for your monthly contributions
- Each of our **Tom Bell Legacy Circle** members for naming *HCN* in your will
- Everyone who gave via an **IRA distribution or appreciated stock**
- The growing list of **foundations** that are invested in *HCN's* work and mission

thank you for being an integral part of our community

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HCN is essential to keeping up with the West especially with local stories and the increased coverage by and about Indigenous communities.

– Gene Tison, Santa Fe, NM

High Country News

P.O. Box 1090, Paonia, CO 81428 • 970-527-4898 • hcn.org

High Country News is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit media organization that covers the important issues and stories that define the American West. Its mission is to inform and inspire people to act on behalf of the West's diverse natural and human communities.

Luna Anna Archey