

BACKCOUNTRY JOURNAL



The Magazine of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

Spring 2017

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AND SCENIC MISSOURI RIVER
BREAKS, A CONVERSATION WITH
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IN THE ARENA

ONE OF MY FAVORITE QUOTES comes from Theodore Roosevelt. The year was 1910, and Roosevelt was contemplating coming out of retirement and running for president again. He was disappointed in how his hand-picked successor, William Howard Taft, was dismantling his legacy. Not one to sit idle, he re-entered the fray and formed the Bull Moose Party.

Roosevelt's willingness to think altruistically and actually do, rather than just talk, mirrors our ethos here at BHA. For those who don't know that quote:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

Every time I read these words I can hear his voice and see him shake his fists as he issues his greatest call to arms. What I would do to have another politician like T.R.! Alas, I'm not holding my breath. Instead, just like T.R., we here at BHA are charging forward. Our ranks are swelling. Membership numbers have almost quadrupled from a year ago. Chapters continue to increase in number, leadership and clout. Our growing staff is providing expertise to help amplify the voices of our boots on the ground, all across North America.

I couldn't be more proud of our members. In particular, the work you all did to convince Rep. Jason Chaffetz to pull his support of H.R. 621, the Disposal of Excess Federal Lands Act of 2017, was nothing short of phenomenal.

In 17 years working on sportsmen's policy issues, I have never seen a member of Congress abandon a bill he or she had

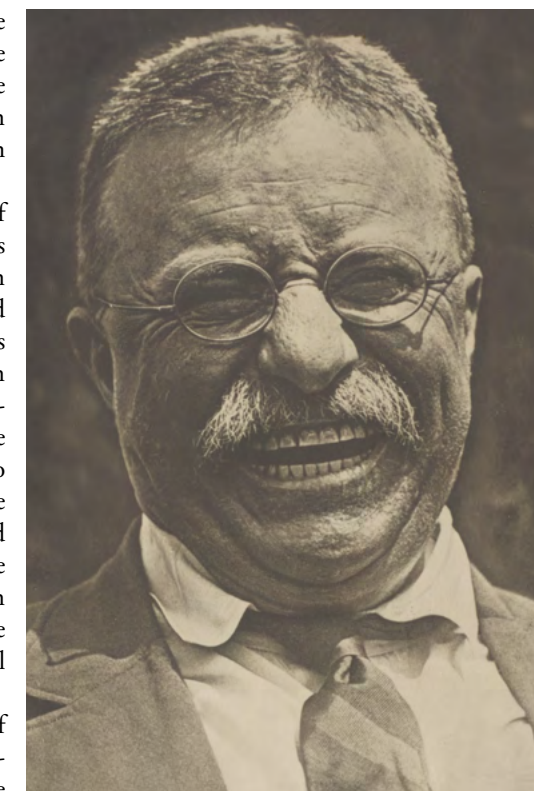
introduced a week before. Never. Our ire was swift and unapologetic. We the people made it clear that we would not tolerate the wholesale disposal of our public lands, in this case, 3 million-plus acres in 11 Western states.

Our opposition came in the form of phone calls, emails, social media posts and appearances at the congressman's own town hall meeting. It was unrelenting. And it achieved results. Just like democracy is supposed to work, our voices made him listen. Rep. Chaffetz shouldn't have introduced H.R. 621 in the first place, but he did, and this exercise should give notice to any other politicians foolish enough to take us on. Public lands are our second Second Amendment, and we won't be silent as the modern-day robber barons try to steal them from us. From above, Roosevelt has to be flashing that big ol' Cheshire Cat grin – all the while urging us forward.

While we should revel in the demise of the Chaffetz bill, that was just one skirmish. The war is far from over. On the horizon emerge new attempts to wrest away our public lands and waters, as well as attacks on clean water, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, conservation of wild-life-rich landscapes like the Western sagebrush steppe, and funding for the agencies that hold the key to the future of our fish and wildlife and hunting and fishing traditions.

Our backs are strong, we are determined, and we are ready to fight. Rest assured, BHA will be in the arena for each and every battle for our lands and waters, our public access opportunities, and our invaluable outdoors heritage. Victory might be hard won, but I have faith in our members, volunteers and partners to give it everything we've got. To do otherwise just ain't in our nature.

For those of you traveling to Missoula for BHA's North American Rendezvous in April, I can't wait to give you a high five, swap some stories, and plot and scheme into the wee hours how we can protect our great legacy. For those who can't make it, we know you will be there in spirit and we will raise our glasses in your honor. Our army is building, and we will not be denied. 🐾



Land derives much of his inspiration — and humor — from Theodore Roosevelt, our greatest conservationist president. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Onward and Upward,

Land Tawney
President & CEO

WHAT IS BHA?

BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS & ANGLERS is a North American conservation nonprofit 501(c)(3) dedicated to the conservation of backcountry fish and wildlife habitat, sustaining and expanding access to important lands and waters, and upholding the principles of fair chase. This is our quarterly magazine. We fight to maintain and enhance the backcountry values that define our passions: challenge, solitude and beauty. Join us. Become part of the sportsmen's voice for our wild public lands, waters and wildlife. Sign up at www.backcountryhunters.org.

STATE CHAPTERS

BHA HAS MEMBERS across the continent, with chapters representing 25 states and provinces. Grassroots public lands sportsmen and women are the driving force behind BHA. Learn more about what BHA is doing in your state on page 26. If you are looking for ways to get involved, email your state chapter chair at the following addresses:

- alaska@backcountryhunters.org
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President & CEO Land Tawney, tawney@backcountryhunters.org	Donor and Corporate Relations Manager Grant Alban, grant@backcountryhunters.org
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Office Manager Caitlin Frisbie, frisbie@backcountryhunters.org	Montana Chapter Coordinator Jeff Lukas, jeff@bakcountryhunters.org
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JOURNAL CONTRIBUTORS

Jesse Alston, Edward Anderson, Bendrix Bailey, Matt Breton, Sawyer Connelly, Allie D'Andrea, Michael Furtman, T.J. Hauge, Bryan Huskey, Michael Lein, Mike McConnell, Kris Millgate, Jeff Mishler, Katie Morrison, Eric Nuse, Nicole Qualtieri, Tim Romano, Dale Spartas, E. Donnal Thomas Jr., Lori Thomas, Alec Underwood, Louis S. Warren, J.R. Young, Isaac Zarecki

Cover photo: Sam Lungren, Washington Steelhead

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Published Spring 2017. Volume XII, Issue II

BHA HEADQUARTERS

P.O. Box 9257, Missoula, MT 59807
www.backcountryhunters.org
admin@backcountryhunters.org
(406) 926-1908

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BIGHORN WILDLAND PROVINCIAL PARK, ALBERTA

BY KATIE MORRISON

IN MY EARLY 20S, I WENT PADDLING with my dad on the North Saskatchewan River just east of the Bighorn Wildland of Alberta. Dad introduced me to fishing at a young age, and time on the water with him helped keep us close even as I grew up and spent more time away from home. Unfortunately, this trip was one of the last we would take together. He passed away a couple of years later, but in that moment I remember feeling as far away from civilization as one could get – just two of us alone with the river and the fish.

A few years ago a friend and I paddled the same section of the river, expecting to feel the same quiet connection to place. But this time it was a completely different experience. Hardly an hour went by that we did not hear the thrum of motorized vehicles or the splash of trucks driving into the river or see the light of flare stacks on the horizon. The wild place I had escaped to 15 years earlier was gone. These are the changes pushing farther into Alberta's foothills, chasing backcountry users into fewer and smaller quiet places.

Last year I went farther west and deeper into the Bighorn, searching out this missing solitude. The sun broke through the clouds just as we reached our alpine destination. Our little group had spent the day carting packs and gear under drizzling skies to reach Lake of the Falls in the heart of the Bighorn backcountry. At first glance it looked like we had the turquoise lake to ourselves, but as we drew near a couple of other anglers appeared on the far side of the lake, their lures hitting the water with light splashes. The sun was now warm on our faces, and the clear, trout-filled water sparkled against the scree slopes before diving downstream to gurgle its way through a series of braided creeks.

As we found our spot on the lake, I realized that something was missing that made this Alberta experience different from exploring so many other areas on the front range of the Northern Rocky Mountains. The constant drone of off-highway vehicles and industrial activity was conspicuously absent. It is this absence as much as the abundance of trout, birds, elk, grizzly bears, cougars and bighorn sheep, that make the Bighorn such a draw for backcountry enthusiasts.

The Bighorn Wildland is among Alberta's last wild places. Like the missing piece of a jigsaw puzzle between Banff and Jasper National Parks and nestled against the White Goat and Siffleur Wilderness Areas, the 1.25-million-acre Bighorn area is one of the few relatively intact, roadless areas that remain in Alberta.

Its forests, rivers and streams are the headwaters for the North Saskatchewan River, supplying the vast majority of clean water to central Alberta communities, including the capital city of Ed-

monton. But it is the escape from the city and from the constant noise and scars on so many other public lands that makes this place so special. Just mentioning the Bighorn to Albertan hunters will often invoke stories of elk hunts and the trophy rams to which the Bighorn owes its name.

But even this is changing. I recently had a conversation with Alberta BHA member Kevin Van Tighem, who has been hunting the front range of the Rockies for decades. He told me of hunting sheep in Job Creek in the '80s and how his party got two rams one year. It was classic wilderness sheep hunting, packing in by horse over Cline Pass and camping in wall tents. "Even then, off-road-ers were just starting to sneak in from the Brazeau side," Kevin said. "I don't know what it's like now, but I suspect it's a gong show as I seem to recall the government officially allowed quad access a few years later."

Although parts of the Bighorn are quiet and wild, much of the rest of the area is open to off-highway vehicle use. It also is facing threats from industrial activities such as logging, oil and gas development, and open-pit coal mines, which are creeping into previously undisturbed lands, dirtying municipal watersheds and pushing the wild farther and farther back.

It is because of these changes and the future they foreshadow that conservation organizations, hiking groups, local community members, guides and passionate hunters and anglers are trying to protect this iconic area while working to find more appropriate places for controlled motorized use.

Thirty years ago, the Alberta government promised permanent protection for the Bighorn in its Eastern Slopes Policy, a promise which has yet to be fulfilled.

The soon to be formed Alberta Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers is the most recent group to join the call for protection of the Bighorn as a wildland provincial park, a designation that will protect nature and wilderness values while providing unparalleled hunting and fishing opportunities.

The Alberta government has committed to expanding our protected areas system, and after so many years of waiting, the Bighorn is an obvious next step. They will need the support of all Albertans, but especially those of us who know the power of these wild places to connect us to the land, to our wild heritage, and to each other.

Standing by the Lake of the Falls that day, I once again felt the power of the Bighorn backcountry. I now am more committed than ever to its protection – as a Canadian, as an Albertan and as one who loves to feel the tug of a healthy, native cutthroat trout on the end of my line. 🐾

Katie is an ecologist and backcountry enthusiast living in Calgary.

Katie Morrison photo

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A Conversation With SHANE MAHONEY

Part scientist, part historian, part philosopher, Shane Mahoney is considered one of the world's foremost authorities on wildlife conservation. His writing and speeches have motivated and inspired audiences around the world. He is a BHA member.

INTERVIEW BY SAM LUNGREN
COMPILED BY ISAAC ZARECKI

BHA: How did you start hunting and fishing?

SHANE: I grew up in rural Newfoundland. Naturally, I grew up around people who hunted and fished. A very strong motivation in my culture was food. People didn't hunt unless there was meat at the end of the tunnel. When the first American sportsmen showed up, it was considered astounding that people went there to hunt for what Newfoundlanders called "the horns."

I started fishing early in life. I spent an inordinate amount of time on my own. No one in my family hunted. Neither of my parents had the background. I started studying animals at an early age: reading, writing, hiking and watching nature behave. My first hunt came at the age of 22. By that time I had a deep hunter's knowledge of animals from observing them every season. The first animal I ever hunted was a huge bull moose. Hunting brought a more intense interaction.

I don't hunt a huge amount. My career requires more time for the animals. I've studied hunting in all forms, particularly the "how" and "why" aspects. It made us who we are. Art, religion, speech, communication, cooperation and technology all emerged as we became great hunters. I believe hunting is an intellectual pursuit. Unfortunately, that isn't discussed today.

You took a very deliberate path into hunting. Coming from a naturalist/biologist perspective, what flaws do you see in our hunting culture today?

One problem is there are fewer of us, less than 4.8 percent of the population. If there are too few of us, we will wither away. There is a rising empathy for animals worldwide. As people kill less of their own food, the part of people in love with animals has died. It isn't new. If you look at the cave art in Spain, those people who hunted out of pure necessity put all their artistic energy into the animals. There were no landscapes, trees, flowers, and people were only stick figures.

I do not believe the only avenue to increasing involvement is to attract young people to the sport. You can easily become a hunter later in life, and you can do it for many reasons. Some care deeply for wildlife. Some aren't as sentimental or emotionally attached to the animals. To some it's a business.

Another problem facing hunting is the overwhelming knowledge that animals are in trouble. Young people have a misunderstanding that everything is threatened or endangered so you shouldn't kill it.

The largest challenge comes from looking at the great writers of the past like Hemingway and others. Up until the '60s the focus of the writing was on the incredible dynamic of nature, experiences, and the amazing attributes of the animals pursued. Jack

O'Connor wrote about flooded-out tents, losing horses on the pack train and amazing animals eluding him for days. They glorified the animal and the experience.

New communication mediums brought great benefits but also great risks. Hunting became a product. The product glorified the kill and the hunter. A plethora of shows came out focusing on kill shots. In the public eye, it was harder to see hunters as conservationists. While many hunters didn't buy into it, it became the face of the sport. Now there's an effort to go back and glorify the experience and the animal.

Natural empathy towards animals is colliding head on with the glorification of the kill and hunter. Fortunately, there are people coming to hunting for different reasons: taking responsibility for the planet, varying ecological and social views, and believing it's honorable to take responsibility for an animal's death.

Because of the challenges, hunting is under scrutiny. Because of the scrutiny, hunting must take itself seriously again. Image and perspective need to change. Focus more on wildlife, conservation and animal use for a significant purpose. Hunters should be the lead spokespeople for animal welfare, but that's difficult to accomplish when only the kill is glorified.

What do you think is the most effective way to bring people into the conservation fold?

Ultimately, I believe it's our fascination and attachment to animals. It doesn't matter where you're from: Manhattan, Newfoundland or Bozeman. People have an evolutionary fascination with animals. We had to be interested in them to be good hunters. That fascination will lure people to the outdoors. Bring people to the animals first, then you can connect them in a deeper way.

Do you believe there is a relationship between our changing society and the stagnation in the number of hunters in the United States?

Hunters tend to talk about hunting as if it's a mountain, isolated from the greater societal matrix. It's not. Values, social circumstances, family matters, religious and political views change constantly. Hunting, animal usage and our relationship with animals are being pulled by any number of issues.

If there is one thing I want to do for hunting in this world, it's to make the sport normal. Hunting wildlife should mimic someone choosing to raise meat or grow produce. To do that, hunters need to see it as a part of the greater social system. Food is a valuable dialogue between the hunting community and the rest of society.

Do you think some spokespeople are being counterproductive in the messaging of hunting?

Yes, it's a complex issue. People are going to have many perspectives. I don't want hunting to be exclusionary. I want hunting to be inclusive, the way it always was for me.

In any hunting culture, there were only certain people who were good at it. Many people participated in butchering and preparing. When Native Americans talked about the hunt, it wasn't just about the man on the pony, shooting. It was about the ceremony, preparation, finding the game, the hunt, the kill, butchering, curing the meat and feasting. When they said "the hunt,"

that's what they meant. This is what I think the hunt means.

In our North American context, it's supposed to be opportunity for all. There's opportunity for specialization. For example, you could exclusively hunt high altitude as opposed to someone who prefers waterfowl hunting. There is room for all. However, we cannot let hunting become single faceted.

Polls have indicated for a long time the public generally favors hunting as long as it's for the right reasons. Hunters are a small part of the population. We need a lot of support to keep going. Just because we're passionate about the activity and its benefits doesn't mean everyone knows. Our task is to reach those who don't know. If we kept it as an elite pursuit, how long would it survive? All the benefits to wildlife conservation only come if there is strength to the movement. I don't think it is wise to make it a smaller segment of society.

What are your thoughts on the value of public lands?

One of the greatest achievements of the United States is the conservation system that was put in place. It's simply the most rigorous, mature, complex, diverse, innovative system of wildlife conservation ever seen on this scale. So many pieces are at work: farm bills, public lands, wildlife refuges and national forests. It would take a book to describe the accomplishments of the American system.

The practice of market hunting kick-started it all. The genius of Roosevelt and Grinnell made personal harvest a rescue mechanism. The situation was so dire that the logical thing would've been to stop all killing of wildlife. Instead, they came up with this brilliant approach. The product was public lands.

Almost 60 percent of the U.S. is private lands, but at the same time, the U.S. kept these reservoirs of inspiration and peace available to everyone. It's a national legacy. Anything that jeopardizes that is a huge mistake. They're long lasting and have benefited so many. What's the incentive to change that relationship? Once it's gone, especially in a country where private property rights are so strong, there's no getting it back.

Why are some people targeting public lands?

The capitalistic DNA of the U.S. isn't a tap you can turn off. Public lands and land ownership are what drove the wealth of America. It's natural that this communal item, not maximized for its economic value, will always be in contradiction to a part of the American soul.

A person with strong capitalist leanings might point to a place like South Africa as an example of private conservation succeeding, but we already have that, too. We have a mixture. I believe it's a mistake to look at the conflict as necessarily malicious. They are people with a viewpoint.

I see the fight over American public lands and conservation as inevitable and never-ending. It is clear that the motivation of recategorizing public land is to maximize its economic value.

Just because a person has never been there doesn't mean their children will be the same. You can't pick apart the North American model and assume it will be fine. Roosevelt touched something in the American soul. Despite all the political and social change in the last 100 years, this country teems with wildlife. Isn't it amazing no president has torn down what he built? 🐾