

DEAR FRIENDS

Dear Friends

Ed Marston**June 18, 2001**

BY FOOT, CANOE AND SUBARU:
Karen Nichols and Ben Long
(Greg Hanscom photo)

The board comes to Paonia

Meetings of the board of the High Country Foundation are always interesting. But the June 3 meeting in Paonia was almost too interesting.

It opened with longtime board member **Andy Wiessner** objecting to a column *High Country News* distributed through its Writers on the Range syndication service in early May. The column, by Frank Carroll, Potlatch Industries' communications director, attacked the Clinton administration's initiative banning roads in 60 million acres of national forest land.

Wiessner saw the Writers on the Range column in the May 3 *Denver Post* and said it ruined his day. The column was "environmental treachery ... Our mission is to foster a caretaking policy in the West. I don't think we should be putting out trash under our name."

Wiessner said he understood that most of the columns are pro-environment. But even a few like this one, he said, might be too many. "For a while I thought we should drop Writers on the Range, if that was the price we

had to pay.”

Writers on the Range started in 1997 with two newspapers; it now sends three original op-ed essays a week to more than 60 subscribing Western newspapers with a combined circulation of 1.8 million. Papers range from dominant dailies in Denver, Phoenix, Seattle, Boise and Casper to small weeklies in Rexburg, Idaho, Glendive, Mont., Rock Springs, Wyo., and Raton, N.M. The purpose was to engage a broader audience than *HCN* alone could reach. But, staff said during the discussion, “It’s also a devil’s bargain. Editors aren’t going to pay for our columns if they follow a party line.”

Board member **Rick Swanson** agreed that the question revolved around mission: “Is Writers on the Range about getting our message out, or about fostering a discussion?” Swanson said it wasn’t only purely political columns, like Carroll’s, that illustrated the problem. He said a recent column in his local Flagstaff daily by writer Stephen Lyons, criticizing “no-growthers,” probably angered some of those interested in controlling sprawl.

Other board members worried that subscribers to *High Country News* would think that columns such as Carroll’s or Lyons’ represent *HCN*’s editorial policy, since each column states that Writers on the Range is a service of *High Country News*.

But **Emily Stonington**, a Montana state senator, thought the column and others like it were in bounds. “From a conservative point of view, this article (Carroll’s) speaks to land stewardship. Having lived for nine years in a political environment where I’m in the minority, the only way you get to the table is to listen. It’s also why we have diversity on this board. I think we will err if we go on the side of environmental activism.”

Board member **Michael Fischer** said, “This paper is about building Western community. We have the confidence to give voice to many interests. It’s about civic dialogue. Knowing what the Potlatch dude is saying informs us. It’s good stuff.” **Andy Hays**, an executive with the Chicago Tribune Co., said it is important that the board not dictate editorial policy. He suggested that the editorial staff consider putting a statement in the paper’s masthead, distinguishing between *HCN* and Writers on the Range.

Boise-area rancher **Brad Little** said he would object if such a statement came over as a disclaimer. Some of his fellow board members, he said, “sound like my right-wing friends in the state Legislature,” who insisted on putting a disclaimer on the local public television station, stating that its programming did not necessarily reflect the opinion of the State of Idaho.

The meeting was a lively introduction for three new board members. **Michele Barlow** is director of Environmental Quality and Justice for the Wyoming Outdoor Council. She grew up outside Gillette on her family’s 18,000-acre ranch. Her parents, Bill and Bernie Barlow, helped found the Powder River Basin

Resource Council in the 1970s to control coal development in Wyoming. “I was raised in the trenches,” she said.

She drove down from Wyoming with **Mark Gordon**, who ranches near Buffalo, Wyo., when he is not fighting coal-bed methane development in the Powder River Basin. The former treasurer of the national Sierra Club said he has been deeply involved in public education in his community for the past few years. “It’s good to be back in the environmental movement, where things are easier.”

The third new board member is **Pamela Kingfisher**, executive director of the Indigenous Women’s Network, in Austin, Texas, which brings together indigenous women from around the world to work for social change and an improved environment. She is a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma and was a consultant to foundations in Santa Fe, N.M., before moving to Austin.

The board also ...

Although the other issues weren’t easy, they were easier than Writers on the Range. *HCN* has discovered that it has outgrown its accounting software. The signal came when business manager **Val Mundy** learned that some data had been corrupted by our QuickBooks Pro 2001 program. The board gave staff a timetable for finding new software and making the transition.

The board also discussed the new media, spent time on financial reports and fund raising, and made story suggestions to the staff. **Tom Huerkamp** of Delta, Colo., said that a lawsuit he helped bring against the Colorado Department of Corrections over building a prison in a state wildlife area is close to resolution (*HCN*, 6/26/95: Colorado’s prison slayer: One man’s quest to unshackle a rural economy). **John McBride** urged staff to focus lead stories on issues “of general interest from Canada to Mexico.” **Luis Torres** suggested a story on the community board that will run the 90,000-acre Baca Ranch in New Mexico, recently purchased by the federal government.

Emily Stonington described Montana Rail Link’s plan to generate electricity by “ganging” locomotives in various parts of the state. Michele Barlow and Mark Gordon talked about the impacts coal-bed methane and the water-pumping it requires are having on the Powder River Basin. **Bill Mitchell** suggested more scrutiny of Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth and Interior Secretary Gale Norton. **Maggie Coon**, who is based in Washington, D.C., said President George Bush’s \$1 billion initiative for national park maintenance may be far less weighty than it appears. She also suggested covering the reauthorized Farm Bill, which will spend \$30 billion on conservation and grassland reserves.

In other business, the board elected Maggie Coon as president to replace Emily Stonington, Rick Swanson as vice president, **Terry Janis** as secretary, and Bill Mitchell as treasurer.

The potluck, held Saturday evening in the Paonia Town Park, drew about 100 people. The food and conversation, as always, were excellent. The evening was helped along by beer donated by the New Belgium Brewery of Fort Collins, Colo., while Stoney Mesa Winery in nearby Cedaredge was good enough to donate wine.

Putting visitors to work

The day before the board meeting, Kalispell, Montana-based writer **Ben Long** and his wife, photographer **Karen Nichols**, dropped by en route to a writers' conference in southern Utah. Staff immediately put Ben to work recording a couple of his Writers on the Range columns for Radio High Country News. Host **Betsy Marston** and producer **Adam Burke** also interviewed Ben about his book, *Backtracking: By Foot, Canoe and Subaru on the Lewis and Clark Trail*, recently published by Sasquatch books (HCN, 12/4/00: Backtracking). Ben's essay on this winter's snowmobile frenzy in Yellowstone National Park appeared in our March 12 issue.

Get well, Gloria Flora

We were sorry to hear that Gloria Flora, who ended oil and gas leasing on the Rocky Mountain Front in Montana while supervisor of the Lewis and Clark National Forest, was seriously injured in a head-on collision on Sunday, June 3. She was hospitalized at St. Peter's Hospital in Helena with broken ribs, a broken leg and other injuries.

Flora went from Montana to become supervisor of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest in Nevada, eventually resigning in 1999 to protest attacks on Forest Service personnel by wise-users and elected officials.

We wish her a speedy recovery.

This article appeared in the [print edition of the magazine](#) with the headline "Dear Friends".

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