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WAR AND PEACE IN THE RURAL WEST

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The West's rapidly changing economy and growing population are bringing intense pressures on leaders at all levels of governance and decision making. From city council members to state legislators to federal land managers, the region's citizens and decision makers are coping with these changes and adapting to what many people call the New West.

One window into the New West is Headwaters News, an on-line news service for the Rocky Mountain West (www.headwatersnews.org). Every weekday morning, the Headwaters editor summarizes and links to the best regional stories from about 35 on-line newspapers around the Rockies. On any given day, Headwaters includes news and commentary on community, environment, the economy, and politics. It provides a unique opportunity to watch the ebb and flow of different issues, variation between urban and rural places, and changes in opinions.

When asked to speak about policies and programs that matter most to rural Westerners, I could think of no better starting point than Headwaters News. The following is a synthesis of stories I selected from Headwaters since January 1, 2000. They are about change, conflict, and occasionally, about peace.

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Rural towns and small cities across the West are struggling with population and economic growth. Growth management, affordable housing, and farmland preservation are important policy issues for state and local policy makers.

Huge development divides Arizona town. El Mirage, Ariz., is a village near Phoenix with a current population of about 5,700 and a huge development that will soon push the number of residents to about 40,000. The conflict has prompted an attempt to recall the mayor and five of seven council members. *Arizona Daily Star*; Jan. 10

Residents, experts call Bozeman growth plans shortsighted. The Bozeman, Mont., City Council is on the verge of banning big-box stores and enacting a slate of Smart Growth initiatives, but the initial public reaction is to slow down and reconsider. *Bozeman Chronicle*; Feb. 1

Judge slaps upscale community's exclusive plan. When a judge ordered Bluffdale, Utah, to write a plan that incorporates affordable housing, city planners relegated those lesser homes to an area surrounded by gravel pits and the Utah state prison. Back in court, the judge says the plan is arbitrary, capricious and illegal, and they knew better. *Salt Lake Tribune*; Feb. 8

Utah farmland disappearing fast. The last dairy farm in Salt Lake County moved out last week, and an agricultural extension specialist says in as little as two decades, there'll be no more farms in Utah County to the south, either. *Deseret News*; Jan. 5

Behind the population growth are dramatic structural changes in the economy. While employment in the rural West's traditional industries is certainly declining, it's too simple to say these industries are dying. Instead, they are under pressure to add value, find new markets, and become more environmentally sustainable.

In agriculture:

Eastern Washington bankruptcies finally drop. The number of bankruptcies filed in eastern Washington dropped last year for the first time since 1994, though the number of filings on farms doubled. *Spokesman-Review*; Jan. 28

Giant grass seed company withers. The Nevada company AgriBioTech Inc., one of the largest grass seed companies in the world, has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, leaving Idaho growers unpaid and threatening an already weak farm economy. *Idaho Statesman*; Jan. 27

Cereal exec advises wheat farmers to find a niche. Farmers suffer from a "disconnect" between the price of their commodities and the price of retail goods, says a General Mills executive. To survive chronically depressed markets, they must grow specialized crops aimed at specific products -- ingredients rather than commodities, he said. *Billings Gazette*; Feb. 3

Irrigation poisoning Colorado streams with selenium. Irrigation on Colorado's west slope is carrying toxic selenium into the region's rivers, in some cases, raising selenium levels to five times the state's allowable threshold. Dissolved selenium is toxic to birds and fish, and state officials are talking about controls. *Denver Post*; Jan. 14

Farm groups see Santa Fe's water purchase as threatening precedent. Irrigators have filed protests against Santa Fe County's plan to buy the water rights of a farm near the Colorado border and transfer them south, saying it's the first step in siphoning off northern New Mexico's agricultural water for the state's thirsty cities. *Albuquerque Journal*; Jan. 4

In forestry:

Logging volumes still going down in Idaho. Timber harvest on national forests in Idaho continued to plummet last year: down 52 percent on the Clearwater National Forest and 37 percent on the Nez Perce. *Idaho Falls Post-Register (AP)*; Jan. 9

Idaho mills produce more. More and better technology meant that Idaho generated more income from wood products last year, though employment was down slightly. *Spokesman-Review*; Jan. 10

Plum Creek to expand Montana plant. Plum Creek Timber Co. has announced it will sink \$69 million into an expansion of its fiberboard plant in Columbia Falls, Mont. The plant presses wood shavings and sawdust into a smooth-faced board. The expansion will add about 20 jobs. *Kalispell Daily Inter Lake*; Jan. 12

Plum Creek moves toward greener forestry. Plum Creek Timber Co. will require all its contractors to use environmentally friendly techniques and will soon release an independent audit of its logging practices, both geared toward meeting market pressure for more sustainable forestry. *Missoulian*; Jan. 9

In mining:

Colorado mine lays off 110. Colorado's most modern mine and the world's largest molybdenum producer is laying off 110 workers, about 20 percent of its employees, due to falling prices and demand. *Denver Post*; Jan. 5

Wyoming coal mines break record -- again. For the second year in a row, Wyoming coal mines have set production records. Clean Air Act regulations have pushed the demand for the state's low-sulfur coal. *Billings Gazette*; Jan. 12

Groups file to block Wyoming oil leases. Seven environmental groups say they'll file suit to keep the Forest Service from issuing oil and gas leases on 2,500 acres north of Dubois, Wyo., to protect grizzly bear habitat. *Billings Gazette*; Jan. 28

Washington board jerks proposed gold mine's permits. Washington officials have overturned two permits necessary for construction of the first large, open pit gold mine in the state. The on-again, off-again project in the Okanogan Valley has been assailed by environmentalists, local irrigators, and the Clinton administration. *Spokesman-Review*; Jan. 20

State and federal policy makers are frequently asked to help mitigate the impacts of structural change in historically important rural industries, but there are no easy solutions.

Montana farmers plead for reforms. A Montana farmer led the appeals to the Democratic Policy Committee to reform crop insurance programs, create a price "safety net," curb corporate takeovers and ease farmers' prevailing "desperation and hopelessness." *Billings Gazette*; Feb. 3

"Aggie bonds" could help states help farmers. Montana and other Western states should consider so-called aggie bonds, sold by the state to generate capital to loan to young farmers. It's a popular method in the Midwest to encourage new farmers and slow the demise of family farms. *Bozeman Chronicle*; Jan. 12

Forest Service won't alter policy to save mill. National forest officials say they're sorry an innovative lumber mill in northwestern Montana will close in July for lack of logs, but they won't shift forest management away from their emphasis on restorative projects. *Kalispell Daily Inter Lake*; Jan. 13

Washington legislators push governor on gold mine. Legislators from northeast Washington want the governor's help to secure water rights for the state's first open-pit gold mine. A state board rejected water rights for Battle Mountain Gold Co.'s Crown Jewel Mine near Chesaw and lawmakers want a state agency to join the appeal. *Spokesman-Review*; Feb. 8

As ERS research has shown, population growth in the rural West is strongly related to amenities. Hence, it comes as no surprise that a big part of the new economy in the rural West depends on capturing value from amenities, primarily through markets for recreation, environmental restoration and the attraction of small town life.

Officials want more cash from pristine Idaho park. Idaho officials say Harriman State Park, the state's first and one of its most pristine, must start paying more of its costs, and they're talking about lodges, motels, a visitors' center and other development that critics call sacrilege. *Idaho Falls Post-Register*; Jan. 5

Wolves draw dollars to Yellowstone-area economy. Yellowstone wolves have become a key component of the local economy. Seventeen companies have permits for wildlife and photography tours, and each of them sees wolves as a draw. *Billings Gazette*; Jan. 17

Recreational trail along historic route to get a key link. Crews this summer will complete restoration of an old railroad tunnel and a key piece of a new recreational trail on the Idaho-Montana border. The Route of the Hiawatha trail follows the bed of the famous rail line, and is a draw for hikers, bikers and tourists in north Idaho and western Montana. *Spokesman-Review*; Jan. 28

Nature Conservancy buys Montana prairie ranch. The Nature Conservancy and a Billings family have bought a 60,000-acre ranch near Malta, Mont., to preserve its extensive native grassland. *Billings Gazette*; Jan. 19

The future is in fixing the past. The next chapter of the West's history will be less about conquering the wilderness and more about repairing the damage from past arrogance. The Salton Sea in California is a good example, says this essay. *High Country News*; Jan. 6

Wyoming town investing in recovery. Evanston, Wyo., has twice survived boom and bust in recent decades, once in the 1970s when the railroad drastically curtailed services, and again in the 1980s, when the bottom dropped out of the oil market. Now, store fronts are filling up, a few industries have moved in, and the town is investing \$12 million to restore an old Union Pacific roundhouse as a community center. *Salt Lake Tribune*; Jan. 17

The amenity-based economy does not come without costs, however. Local policy makers struggle over how to manage the change from old to new.

Smalltown, Wyoming, uncomfortable with attention. The International Rocky Mountain Stage Stop Sled Dog Race is the biggest this side of Alaska, and it brings racers, spectators and attention to Pinedale, Wyo. Pinedale residents have mixed feelings about that. *New York Times*; Feb. 2

Lewis and Clark buffs may inundate Montana. The Lewis and Clark bicentennial could draw as many as 18.7 million visitors a year to Montana during 2005 and 2006, according to a University of Montana institute's study, more than double last year's record number of tourists. *Billings Gazette*; Feb. 8

Luring new industry may be a risky venture. Kalispell, Mont., has been trying to lure a company's customer-support center and its 500 jobs, and some critics are raising questions that may apply to the rural communities across the region: Is the city's risk too great, and why should new business get government help that established firms don't? *Kalispell Daily Inter Lake*; Jan. 24

Native Americans, as much as any rural Westerners, are adapting to the new economy. But unacceptable, deep poverty persists on many reservations.

Destitute Arizona tribal members seek share of gambling proceeds. More than 1,500 residents of Arizona's Salt River Reservation have signed petitions urging the tribe to share its gambling profits with tribal members. For many, the checks would be like winning the lottery. *Arizona Republic*; Jan. 13

Nevada tribe must decide: cash vs. land claim. The impoverished Shoshone on Nevada's South Fork Reservation have \$116 million in the bank and a wrenching decision to make. Disbursing the account would pay each tribal member about \$20,000 -- in return for their claims on 23.6 million acres of ancestral land. *Los Angeles Times*; Feb. 9

Living conditions primitive for most Navajo. More than half of the Navajo Reservation's 56,372 homes lack plumbing and a large percentage still heat with wood. An array of cultural, financial and bureaucratic barriers mean most housing will never be more than rude shelter. *Boston Globe*; Feb. 8

The rural West is a battleground for endangered species issues. Typically the conflicts involve threats to agriculture and forestry.

Critics question leaving trees for salmon. Opposition is mounting against the federal salmon-recovery plan's requirement to leave a 200-foot corridor of trees along river banks. Loggers and farmers say that will rival spotted owl restrictions for crippling the timber industry. *Idaho Statesman*; Jan. 13

Groups sue over grizzly rules. Two environmental groups have sued the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, saying rules the agency adopted to protect grizzly bears in the Cabinet-Yaak and Selkirk recovery areas are too weak. *Spokesman-Review*; Jan. 27

Idaho wolf pack targeted for 'control action.' Federal agents will probably kill on wolf from a pack that killed a calf on a Clayton, Idaho-area ranch, then returned a second night to chase horses. *Idaho Falls Post-Register*; Jan. 26

Illegal poison used to kill Idaho wolves. Two wolves -- and a fox and a rancher's dog -- have been killed near Salmon, Idaho, by Compound 1080, a poison long banned. Wolf advocates are blaming anti-wolf groups for encouraging the killings. *Montana Standard (AP)*; Feb. 7

Conflicts about public lands management are especially intense. Ranching, forestry, and recreation on public lands are frequently in the news.

Groups sue to keep grazing permits in ranchers' hands. Several pro-ranching groups are asking the U.S. Supreme Court to ban non-ranchers from holding grazing permits on federal land. They argue that when groups such as the Nature Conservancy buy ranches to preserve wildlife habitat, they shouldn't be allowed to acquire accompanying permits. *Salt Lake Tribune*; Jan. 31

Montana lumber mill to close for lack of federal logs. A family-owned lumber mill in northwest Montana is closing after 72 years, idling 245 workers in the plant and in the woods. The mill's manager says his business could no longer get enough federal timber to operate. *Kalispell Daily Inter Lake*; Jan. 12

Snowmobilers, enviros fight over use of Utah forest. The number of snowmobiles and ORVs in Utah has doubled in the past 10 years; add the Wasatch-Cache National Forest to the list of those trying to balance motorized recreation with environmental concerns in an emerging forest plan. *Salt Lake Tribune*; Jan. 10

Colorado forest's plan would limit recreation, close roads. Colorado's White River National Forest is suffering from overuse, and before the forest's management plan becomes a national model for limiting the effects of too much recreation, officials have to deal with the impressive number and variety of groups they've alienated. *High Country News*; Jan. 18

In many parts of the rural West, anger towards the federal government runs high. At the heart of the issue is a question of sovereignty. Who should decide how resources in rural parts of the region should be used?

Salmon rules meet with anger, obscenities. A angry Spokane crowd of 400 called proposed federal rules to protect populations of salmon and steelhead an unprecedented federal grab for power over their land, water and rights. *Spokesman-Review*; Jan. 27

Sawmill owner starts shovel drive to rebuild Nevada road. The owner of a Montana sawmill is calling for rural businesses irked by federal policies to join his protest. He aims to collect 10,000 shovels to rebuild a Jarbridge River road that's been the recent focus of anti-fed controversy. *Kalispell Daily Inter Lake*; Jan. 5

Report did find anti-fed harassment in Nevada. News reports and critics' claims that a Forest Service investigation found no basis for ex-forest supervisor Gloria Flora's claims of harassment are wrong, according to the report. Investigators did find harassment, but they didn't find cases that should have resulted in criminal prosecution. *Missoulian*; Jan. 26

The wisest among us understand that the old rural West is gone forever. They urge us to avoid searching for scapegoats and they plead for healing as we create a new future for the region.

Ex-forest supervisor takes her protest on the road. Gloria Flora, the former supervisor of a national forest in Nevada who quit to protest anti-federal harassment, will speak in three

Montana cities this week, about attitudes that prompted her resignation and about civility in public discourse. *Bozeman Chronicle*; Jan. 26

Flora says critics must accept change. Gloria Flora, on a speaking tour sponsored by a Montana human rights group, said government polices are easy targets, but are only the symptoms of change across the West. *Kalispell Daily Inter Lake*; Jan. 27

Shovels only deepen the mire. Shipping shovels to Nevada is meaningless protest that further polarizes the debate. All that time and effort would be better spent working together to find ways to cut trees while preserving habitat and protecting water. *High Country News*; Feb. 8

Stewardship sales benefit loggers, improve forest. When a few Montana loggers who wanted to work sat down with a few local environmentalists who wanted to restore national forests, they came up with an idea that's turning into a regionwide project. *High Country News*; Jan. 18

Forums are key to Utah valley's planning. Residents of Utah's Ogden Valley are trying something simple but novel to keep their idyllic lifestyle. Once a month they sit down with all three planning agencies with jurisdiction and discuss the valley's future. *Salt Lake Tribune*; Jan. 17