Reflecting and looking forward—a message from our Board President

What a year it’s been for HCCA! We’re seeing our 47 years of advocacy for Red Lady finally coming to their inevitable conclusion—a mine-free Red Lady! Did we think it possible back in 1977, when we first formed to fight off a mine threat from a large multi-national mining corporation? You bet we did! And that “can-do” belief system has paid off in so many arenas over nearly a half-decade. Still, it humbles us to see it actually happening at this moment in time.

Saving Red Lady has been our rallying cry all along, but we couldn’t have come this far without the collaboration and support from the residents, part-time folks, and Town of Crested Butte, Gunnison County, numerous individuals, attorneys, organizations, and even Mt. Emmons Mining Company (MEMC). We owe a debt of gratitude to all who participated in achieving what otherwise might have been the impossible dream.

It’s also been a transitional year for our organization. Preparing to carry on long after Red Lady is saved, we have brought onto our team someone who is particularly suited to continuing our public lands work. Jon Hare, our new Advocacy Director, is at the helm of a HCCA that will work to protect our public lands from further industrial threats, while contributing toward equitable, conservation-centered management plans for our public lands. Climate change is a prime motivator for ensuring conscious actions are taken. Jon’s previous career with the US Forest Service has prepared him well for this role, and we are very fortunate to have his expertise and enthusiasm.

As you read this newsletter, please take note of the newest additions to our board, who represent the next generation of conservationists in our valley. Our working relationship with Western Colorado University is growing, bringing new dimensions and insights that will keep HCCA an active, progressive force in our community.

Thank you for all you have contributed to HCCA thus far. Please continue to support our locally-focused conservation work so that we can remain right here, working for future generations of wildlife and people in the Gunnison Country.

For Red Lady and beyond,

Sue Navy

HCCA – The Next Generation

As we approach the 50-year mark, we recognize the need to engage a younger contingent of advocates, as our public lands will need protection for generations to come. To this end, we are proud to introduce our new board members, along with our administrator, two of whom are recent graduates of Western Colorado University’s undergrad and Master in Environmental Management programs. We appreciate their dedication to public lands conservation, and we believe you will too.

Isabel Lucas, Administrator and Outreach Coordinator, first arrived at HCCA to serve an AmeriCorps term in the summer of 2023. She recently joined our staff and is excited to use her skills toward advocacy, stewardship and sustainability. She was born and raised in Gunnison and in 2020, received her bachelor degree in Environment and Sustainability at Western Colorado University.

Erika Brownlee moved to the valley in 2020 and has been in awe of the natural beauty of the public lands of the Elk Mountains every day since. She had been a teacher for fifteen years and has fundraising experience. Erika is excited to be a member of the HCCA board to support the essential work of conserving and protecting our precious public lands.

Courtney King believes that being on HCCA’s board will allow her to play a role in tackling regional issues alongside an engaged team. With an M.S. in Ecology from WCU, she is excited about HCCA’s work to conserve wildlife habitat and natural resources on the local scale that simultaneously promotes carbon storage and broader environmental action.

Daniel Kreykes first became interested in HCCA’s mission because of his connection and love for the pristine headwaters of the Gunnison River basin. His passion for public lands advocacy and clean water, along with his marketing background and degree in Outdoor Education and Experiential Education, make him a natural fit for the HCCA team.
It was a historic day in April when the US Department of Interior signed the Mt. Emmons - Thompson Divide Mineral Withdrawal to remove the opportunity for new Mining or Oil & Gas operations on over 220,000 acres of Federal land in Western Colorado managed by the US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

This is definitely a great reason for all of us who love public lands to celebrate, yet at High Country Conservation Advocates (HCCA) we are focused on the next project in the Gunnison basin that is several years in formulation and moving toward completion in 2024.

Right now, at our doorstep, the Mt. Emmons Land Exchange is the best chance this community has ever had to save the mountain known as Red Lady and the best opportunity to protect Gunnison Country from the impacts of a large-scale industrial mining operation.

Mt. Emmons, affectionately known as Red Lady, is the mountain just three miles west of Crested Butte, which contains a large deposit of molybdenum ore. Molybdenum is a steel hardening agent which is an essential ingredient to make metals thinner and lighter. HCCA formed in 1977 to protect Red Lady and our community from the impacts of large-scale industrial mining.

So what does this Mineral Withdrawal (MW) mean for public lands in Gunnison County? Of the over 220,000 acres of Federal lands included in the Withdrawn area, approximately 100,000 of those acres are in Gunnison County. The MW area enters Gunnison County for the next 20 years that formalizes the lean toward agriculture, ranching, wildlife, air quality, recreation, ecological, and scenic values for public lands decisions in Western Colorado.

The Mt. Emmons Land Exchange between MEMC and the US Forest Service (USFS) is the next real opportunity for this community to save Red Lady and avoid the impacts of a large-scale industrial mine in the upper Gunnison River Valley.

Those industrial mining impacts, just to remind you, go far beyond Red Lady and Mt. Emmons. To include powerlines, conveyor belts, truck hauling, tailings piles, emissions, and an influx of people to our valley which would instantly change the nature of this place and have negative impacts on the reason why most of us are here — the natural environment and vast acres of unspoiled public lands. Most importantly, a molybdenum mine on Mt. Emmons would crush the water source for the Town of Crested Butte, limiting water supplies in an area where water supply is already a big concern.

After collaborating with the Town of Crested Butte, Gunnison County, and HCCA, the land exchange was proposed by MEMC to the USFS in 2021 with the goal of trading mine-impacted National Forest land on Mt. Emmons in exchange for four rural ranch properties in Gunnison and Saguache Counties.

Ownership of the land with the mining infrastructure and impacts on Mt. Emmons will give MEMC the ability to operate, repair, and replace the water treatment plant, as well as reclaim areas without having to work through the US Forest Service. Their activities will still be permitted by the State of Colorado for water quality controls with additional oversight by the Town of Crested Butte and Gunnison County. In exchange, the American people own properties that include wetlands and wildlife habitat while inclusion as part of the National Forest protects these holdings from private development.

Second, the pending Land Exchange includes Conservation Easements through the Crested Butte Land Trust (CBLT) which will prohibit any industrial or residential development on the private land on Mt. Emmons, while simultaneously providing legal public recreational access to traditional ski and hiking routes that cross the mine-owned private lands.

The third part of the Mt. Emmons Land Exchange is that MEMC will sign a Mineral Extinguishment with CBLT for the permanent relinquishment and extinguishment of mineral rights on their private land on Mt. Emmons, as well as, separately, relinquish over 1200 unpatented mining claims on Federal lands in Gunnison County.

It can’t be stressed enough, especially considering the time and funds invested into the project by MEMC, the USFS and BLU, US Senator Michael Bennet, Gunnison County, the Town of Crested Butte, Crested Butte Land Trust, High Country Conservation Advocates, and on down the line — there are many people who have worked to queue up this project, and ensure it has fully considered the practical details of its implications on the ground and deliver to this community an end result that provides confidence in a mine-free future.

The Forest Supervisor for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forest (GMUG NF) has the authority and should sign the Decision Memo to authorize the Mt. Emmons Land Exchange as soon as possible. Once the GMUG NF Forest Supervisor signs the Land Exchange Decision, a cascade of work is in place to adjust the boundaries and execute the Conservation Easements and Mineral Extinguishments with CBLT.

Once the ink is dried, this community will finally see the end to the threat of a large-scale industrial mine on Red Lady.
State and Federal legislation also have a big impact on the management of our public lands, and once again – HCCA is there to support or oppose legislative proposals that could impact our public lands. HCCA is actively pressing for the introduction of the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act and the Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection (GORP) Act in the U.S. Congress, while simultaneously opposing Senate Bill 24-213 in the Colorado State legislature that would have drastic negative impacts on public lands by removing county regulations on remote backcountry private properties.

Another part of HCCA’s mission that I will be emphasizing moving forward is outreach to the local community, especially the Gunnison Watershed School District and Western Colorado University. I am an avid student of understanding the history our community, and HCCA will engage the youth in our community to encourage them to value how special it is to live in a place surrounded by millions of acres of public lands, the local ecology and geography, as well as our own local culture of appreciation and protection for our public lands.

I am honored to represent HCCA moving forward as the Advocacy Director. I hope that through continued grassroots local participation and Conservation advocacy, we can continue to enjoy and rely on public lands in the Gunnison River country forever.

Jon Hare became the Advocacy Director for HCCA in February 2024.

“It’s incumbent on those who are there to inculcate those who are coming or just recently involved. If you turn your back on them, they don’t know. If they don’t know, it’s because you didn’t tell them. And therefore, those who are there have to take the time and the effort and set up the institutions to make sure they transfer that perspective.”

Myles Rademan from the film, “High Country.”

It’s remarkable to consider the legacy of High Country Conservation Advocates. HCCA originally formed in 1977 to fight against a large-scale industrial mine proposal just outside of Crested Butte. It’s an amazing accomplishment that a community, led by HCCA, could hold back the world’s biggest mining corporations for so long and now, maybe, forever.

In our 47-year history, HCCA has employed the same tool box from the Save Red Lady campaign to advocate for the conservation of more than two million acres of public lands and waters in Gunnison County. HCCA has evolved into a grassroots Conservation organization that is engaged at all levels of the community (local, state, federal) to advance the protection and improvement of public lands across all of Colorado’s Gunnison River country.

As HCCA’s newest employee, I ride the legacy of the many HCCA employees and supporters who established the reputation and credibility of the organization in our community over the years. Through long-standing relationships and work in the trenches, the HCCA Advocacy Director is able to work at the grassroots level to be aware of what’s happening on public lands, have relationships with local decision makers, and participate in local stakeholder meetings to advocate for Conservation in all decisions associated with public lands.

Already, I am fully engaged in month-by-month planning and implementation of Gunnison Basin community-driven task forces for public lands concerning timber harvest, drought preparedness, wildfire planning, municipal watershed protection, tourism and recreation impacts, and Gunnison Sage-Grouse preservation. With a diverse array of stakeholders participating in these task forces – it’s important that HCCA is at the table representing Conservation in all instances.
High Country Conservation Advocates (HCCA) acknowledges that the lands we are devoted to protecting and improving are the ancestral and native homes to the Nùu-agha-tu–vu–pu– (Ute), Pueblos, and Dinè Bikèyah people. HCCA is community driven, and wishes to recognize the communities of people that historically made these lands their hunting and gathering grounds, spiritual places of worship, homes to raise children, and all other uses significant to indigenous peoples.

During Euro-American colonization, the treaties were broken, forcing the Nùu-agha-tu–vu–pu– (Ute), Pueblos, and Dinè Bikèyah people out of their ancestral lands and into reservations a fraction of the size. With little to no support or resources, many lives and traditions were lost throughout this time. In modern day conservation we will collaborate with indigenous voices to right these past wrongdoings by recognizing their history. HCCA advocates that their voices will not be lost, but rather listened to and acknowledged.

Vote Your Values! Unless you’ve been spending all of your time roaming the mountains (lucky you!), you’ve probably noticed that it’s an election year. The outcomes of this year’s ballot will have profound effects on the environment, wildlife, and public lands in the Gunnison Valley, Colorado, and nationwide. We urge every HCCA supporter to educate yourself about candidates’ positions on critical conservation issues and to make sure your voice is heard.

HCCA Hike Season
Celebrate by Hiking! Our 2024 Schedule:

2024 is shaping up to be a very special year—the year that we will hopefully see the end to our decades-long battle to Save Red Lady! While we’re anticipating this momentous conclusion, let’s spend our Wednesdays hiking in our beautiful public lands. It’s the 32nd year of Don Baker Legacy Hikes, and we hope you’ll join us.

Come learn about the myriad aspects of HCCA’s work from board and staff members, while enjoying the camaraderie of old and new friends.

Visit hcca.cb.org to sign up!

June 26 – Snodgrass Preserve
July 3 – Union Park via Lottis Creek
July 10 – Ferris Creek
July 17 – Little Pass Creek
July 24 – Beckwith Pass from Lost Lake
July 31 – Carbon Creek Railroad Grade
August 7 – Horse Ranch Park Loop
August 14 – West Brush Creek
August 21 – West Maroon Valley
August 28 – Oh-Be-Joyful

Visit hccacb.org to sign up!
One of the most meaningful ways to let the Gunnison Country know how much you care is to remember HCCA in your planned giving. Your remembrance, in any amount will help us continue our decades-long dedication to the protection of our public lands, rivers, and wildlife for future generations to come.

There are three easy ways to include HCCA in your legacy gifts:

1. You can make an outright commitment to HCCA in your will or trust by consulting with your lawyer and asking to include HCCA as a beneficiary as you draft your estate plan or bring it up-to-date.

2. Declaring HCCA as a beneficiary of your IRA is simple too. And, if you’re 73 or older, you may give to HCCA as part of your annual required minimum distribution. Your tax accountant or financial advisor can easily explain how.

3. HCCA appreciates gifts of stock, and can help facilitate the transfers.

To get started, just share our legal name, address, and tax identification number with your lawyer for inclusion in your estate planning documents:

High Country Conservation Advocates, a Colorado non-profit corporation, located at:
P.O. Box 1066
Crested Butte, CO 81224
Tax ID no. 84-0772688

Your children, grandchildren and generations to come will appreciate your forethought and generosity, and your voice for conservation will carry on.

Please note that HCCA does not provide tax or legal advice. Speak with your tax or legal advisor with any questions about estate planning.

Find Red Lady Prayer Flags and other gifts at...
www.hccacb.org/store

Leave More than a Footprint... Leave a Lasting Legacy

We know you care a lot about this area we are lucky enough to be able to enjoy and steward. As it nurtures us in the present, we can plan ahead for how to continue to protect it well into the future.

HCCA Staff
Jon Hare, Advocacy Director
Isabel Lucas, Administrator & Outreach Coordinator
Julie Nania, Red Lady Consultant

HCCA Board of Directors
Sue Navy, President
Derek Pankratz, Vice-President
Natalie Ehmsen, Secretary
Susan Toepfer, Treasurer
Erika Brownlee
Courtney King
Daniel Kreykes
Aaron Peterson
Bryan Wells
Your membership protects critical habitat for our wildlife.
Visit www.hccacb.org or return the enclosed envelope to donate today!