

Vision of 2000

HCCA leader gives a futuristic tour of the 2015's

(Editor's note: Gary Sprung has looked a little further ahead than the year 2000, in what he wants to see in the future.)

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• Though gasoline prices are approaching \$15 per gallon, directors of the Gunnison/Crested Butte Chamber of Commerce are not worried. The county bus system runs on hydrogen derived from our sewer plants, and the airlines, too, are converting to hydrogen fueled aircraft. Most homeowners in America now have solar processors to extract hydrogen from water to fuel their cars.

• Gunnison County Stockgrowers Association is celebrating its 120th anniversary with a tour of the new beef packing plant, now ten years old and thriving. Financed by a loan from Colorado Cattlemen's Association and a stock offering (shares purchased mostly by local residents), the new slaughterhouse and processing factory is producing very high quality beef. The absence of growth hormones and biocides in the meat are fetching prices as high as \$30 per pound and the product is gaining an international reputation. High oil prices have hard hit the Great Plains producers and "High Country Heffers" are taking up the slack. They remain a mainstay of the local economy, and an important source of diversification.

• The Gunnison County Commissioners proclaim their "affordable

ranching" program a success and eliminate the subsidies which had encouraged purchases of ranches by young people. Various land trusts bought conservation easements on 90 percent of the ranch lands and the owners used the cash to pay off their debts and improve their businesses. Land prices run about \$450 per acre for prime agricultural properties.

• Sage grouse populations have increased 20 percent since 2005, and 65 percent since 1995. The Upper Gunnison Basin Land Use Commission is considering removing the birds from the endangered species list.

• Proposals for a ski area on Snodgrass Mountain are again surfacing. Owners of affordable housing at the mountain's base object to the idea of skiers whizzing through their neighborhoods. The Upper Gunnison Basin Land Use Commission will study the proposal's effects on environment and society. The election for directors of Crested Butte Mountain Resort will be held in August and candidates are lining up for and against the expansion. "This community abandoned physical growth as our route to prosperity and this is not time to change the course. I stand for the status quo," remarks Brendan Starr, who represents a large block of locally owned stock. "The Japanese are killing us," retorts Ski Director Sally Watt. "We've got to abandon this small town thing and get in with the industry leaders. Cross country skiing is the recreation trend of the future

and we need that economic boost."

• The Alley Loop has just celebrated its 29th anniversary. Because the town took care of the car problem, setting the track is now a breeze. Residents and businesses along the race course turn out in droves with signs along the track and shouts of encouragement for the racers. Nordic Council Director Andy Shoppard beams at the awards ceremony: "Still the most community-oriented race in America."

• Plans are already underway for the annual homecoming game which will again pit the mountain bike teams of Gunnison High School against Crested Butte High School. Events scheduled include bike polo at the Gunnison field, a criterium around Crested Butte, a technical trial on the Upper Loop, and a grueling 40-mile race on the Interconnect Trail from Crested Butte to Gunnison.

• Former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt attends a meeting of the Land Use Commission and remarks, "I'm sure glad I instituted this community ecosystem management scheme. Look at the progress we've made in species recovery and economic development." But in the audience, old-timers Ken Spann and Gary Sprung snicker to one another, "He didn't get that going. We did. But we'll just let him have his fun."

• The High Country Citizens' Alliance February meeting features a debate on energy: "Nuclear Fusion: Citizen of the Hydrogen Revolution or Conspiracy for

Centralization?" Now in its 38th year, the local group still focuses on this local community, despite increasing calls from communities around the nation for HCCA's special brand of leadership. HCCA leaders debate the idea of holding a conference on "Economic prosperity under a declining world population." HCCA President Taylor Dale takes the conspiracy viewpoint. "The human race is not ready for that kind of power," she implores.

• Students at Gunnison High School hold a video-teleconference with students in Smirovska, Russia, Gunnison's sister city under the United Nations' International Partnerships Program. The Russian kids want to know why the United States still allows people in designated wilderness areas. "Parks are for people," replies Bruce Phelps. "When are you folks going to figure out the ecosystem preservation idea?" (Phelps later graduates as valedictorian and delivers a stirring speech, "How to profit in the no-growth society.")

• Western State College adds "Masters of Environmental Management" to its growing list of graduate degrees. The school's bi-monthly Gunnison Country Forum usually attracts over 200 participants who gather to discuss arts, economy, politics and sports in the Upper Gunnison Basin. Amy Carter serves as WSC president.