

# Crazy Is the New Mainstream

*Tracy Stone-Manning has been confirmed as director of the Bureau of Land Management, the highest political position ever reached by a former EarthFirst! acolyte.*

*Words by Dave Skinner. Illustration by John Bardwell.*

**F**ive long months after President Joe Biden nominated Montana environmentalist Tracy Stone-Manning as director of the Bureau of Land Management, she's in. It's the first time since the Obama administration that BLM has had more than an "interim" director.

When nominated, Stone-Manning was vice president and senior advisor focusing on western public lands policy for the National Wildlife Federation. That followed shortly after her prior position as chief of staff to Montana governor Steve Bullock (D) ended when he left office.

All incoming presidential administrations have a right to nominate "their" people for certain political appointments. Democratic presidents tend to pick establishment environmentalists for "environmental" agency positions. Republicans don't. Historically, most nominees get some grilling, but then are duly confirmed.

But Ms. Stone-Manning's nomination was unusually controversial, subject to a contentious April hearing and completely partisan tie vote in the evenly split U.S. Senate and Natural Resources Committee. Four months of silence later, in a quickly scheduled Senate floor vote, she was confirmed on yet another party-line 50-45 vote on September 30, with five Republicans conveniently absent.

Why such partisanship? Well, it's never been a secret in Montana, but Tracy Stone-Manning was a for-real EarthFirst!er, publicly out and proud during EarthFirst!'s greatest (or worst) days. She got in big trouble, needed a lawyer to get out, then cleaned up her act. But did she really?

Without rehashing EarthFirst!'s tawdry

evolution from "street theater" into vandalism, then into deliberately dangerous, felonious environmental sabotage, the sort of "tree spiking" episodes Ms. Stone-Manning would rather everyone forget about that were "justified" in 1984 by then-leader Mike Roselle's media claims: "There are no innocent bystanders" and "This is jihad, pal," almost a decade before the first World Trade Center act of jihad.

From 1988 to 1992, EarthFirst! enjoyed a peak of violent infamy before law enforcement came down hard and basically "broke

ies master's program. Some of her fellow students were EarthFirst! members, and EarthFirst! was the "in" extracurricular activity. She, daughter of a U.S. Navy submarine commander now buried at Arlington, chose to join the cool kids.

How cool Tracy was, for how long, and with whom is part of public record, common knowledge among "players" in Montana ecopolitics. Montana news media reported how she and several close "academic" associates were given an epic grilling by federal investigators shortly after the spring 1989 Idaho tree



up the band." Stone-Manning was probably an eager insider during those same years, happily singing backup and writing "music."

In fall 1988—four years into Roselle's "jihad," with "monkey wrenching" morphed into flat-out ecoterrorism—fresh off a National Wildlife Federation internship, Maryland film-and-TV graduate Tracy Stone (not-yet-hyphenated Manning) came to the University of Montana's environmental stud-

spiking, and also reported her open defiance of government investigators.

Undeterred, Stone-Manning went on to serve in EarthFirst!'s leadership. She is listed variously and proudly on *EarthFirst! Journal's* "editorial collective" mastheads. Further, she used EarthFirst! allied sources in her 1992 master's thesis, "Into the Heart of the Beast," which in turn lays out how "the tool of advertising can foil our corporate-

consuming culture.”

Stone-Manning’s thesis, clumsy and crude as it is, remains relevant today because senior and graduate theses written in the academic environment of inquiry often reflect candidates’ purest, deepest interests and most focused thinking—free from “real world” contamination. As such, “Into the Heart of the Beast” includes ad copy referring to children as an “environmental hazard,” actress dialogue such as “Smart people like Bob and me should be the people having kids,” and the declaration “The earth can’t afford Americans.” Stone-Manning’s thesis topics also directly pertain to her nomination: her ad mockups attack at least three aspects of the Bureau of Land Management’s multiple-use mission—mining, forestry and livestock grazing—calling for major reductions and eventual elimination of all three.

Only in 1993, after an ex-girlfriend of one of the actual Idaho spikers named names to

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the feds, did Stone-Manning agree to turn state witness, avoiding federal charges and prison for her accessory actions (and knowledge) prior to and after the Idaho spikings.

Scared straight, Stone-Manning lowered her profile, landing and succeeding in increasingly important jobs for “mainstream” environmental groups and politicians, none of whom cared about her radicalism as much as they needed her first-rate (for Montana, anyway) skills at spinning issues to produce political results.

First with a land trust, she joined the anti-mining Clark Fork Coalition and rose to director. In no small part due to Stone-Manning’s disciplined handling of the “tool of advertising,” the coalition was a politically effective, well-networked group enjoying substantial “nonpartisan” political influence in Missoula County. That influence, especially in terms of registering and “messaging” University of Montana student voters, is regarded as decisive in helping Jon Tester (D) narrowly win election to the U.S. Senate in 2006 over incumbent Conrad Burns (R).

A grateful Tester rewarded Stone-Man-

ning with increasingly senior staff jobs. Then she was recruited by Montana Gov. Steve Bullock to run a state environmental agency, before becoming his chief of staff, ending in 2017. From public service, Stone-Manning came “home” to the National Wildlife Federation (her first college internship) as a senior conservation policy director and vice president.

Now confirmed, Stone-Manning isn’t the first flaming anti-everything radical chosen by a Democratic president to run the BLM. Who can forget Jim Baca of New Mexico, a Clinton appointee so against BLM’s multiple-use mandate that some Greens hoped “Cattle Free by 93” might be implemented? Baca was sacked after only nine months by Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt. Then there’s Patrick Shea, BLM director from 1997 to 1998. A long-term, low-key Beltway and Utah Democratic political insider, Shea’s true colors showed when he represented environmentalist Tim DeChristopher, convicted of crashing a federal oil-and-gas auction by successfully fake bidding \$1.8 million with no intent of paying.

Is BLM the only agency environmentalists want Biden to radicalize? Heck no. A still-small coalition of environmental groups is now calling on President Biden to nominate Mike Phillips to head the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS). Unsurprisingly, endorsing groups include Project Coyote, WildEarth (formerly Forest) Guardians, Western Watersheds Project, and Great Old Broads for Wilderness—hardly bastions of moderation and fair-mindedness. Interesting individual endorsees include at least two of Mike’s subordinates at the Turner (Ted and Jane) Endangered Species Fund and Michigan animal rights attorney Beatrice Friedlander.

The most amusing endorsees, from a small-world perspective, are Dave Parsons and John Davis of none other than the Rewilding Institute (founded by none other than Dave Foreman after he was scared away from EarthFirst! by the feds). Parsons ran FWS’s Mexican wolf reintroduction all through the 1990s, while Davis edited the *EarthFirst! Journal* all through the exciting 1980s. There’s more, but you get the idea.

Tracy Stone-Manning’s confirmation signals that EarthFirst! experience is a plus on your resume if you want a political appointment in Joe Biden’s administration.

Who’s next? ■

*Wandering Scout Dave Skinner is temporarily locked in the “health care” barn and looking for ways to get the heck out.*