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1. 2006 REVIEW: Drilling, waterways, fires and invasive species top the *Land Letter* news agenda

As we make way for a new year, the editors of *Land Letter* offer this sampling of some of our best and most important stories from 2006.

Land Letter puts a spotlight on original reporting of stories about wildlife protections and how our public lands are used and managed -- whether for recreation or commercial applications such as mining, timber harvesting or oil and gas drilling. While the vast majority of federally held or managed lands are in the western United States, we seek out stories from all parts of the country and look for state and local angles to issues of national importance.

Longtime readers already understand two factors that influence our coverage of the issues related to public lands and natural resources: that stories tend to develop over time, over the course of months, if not years; and that there is an interplay among all of E&E Publishing's news services.



Land Letter puts a spotlight on stories about natural resources and land management. Photo by Arthur O'Donnell.

Often a story initially reported on deadline for *Greenwire*, *E&E Daily* or *E&ENews PM* may be repeated or further developed in *Land Letter*. We consider it a tremendous benefit to be able to draw upon the collective resources of all our related information services and especially our staff of terrifically talented reporters and editors.

Even so, we strive to give each weekly issue its own distinct personality and exclusive news focus, as illustrated by several of the stories we have chosen to highlight from the past year.

As this new year unfolds, we look forward to continuing *Land Letter's* more than 20-year tradition of providing engaging and meaningful articles on natural resource issues.

With its reputation for comprehensive and nonpartisan reporting, *Land Letter* draws readers from all sides of the issues, including the White House, members of Congress, academic and media outlets, industry and environmental groups, and local, state and federal agencies.

As always, we are open to your comments and suggestions for stories that help our readers understand the crucial aspects involved in balancing management priorities for public lands and natural resources, while bringing complex issues of policy and litigation to life with on-the-scene reports, illustrations and informed analysis.

And we hope you will continue to share stories of interest with your colleagues and clients, so that they, too, will become part of the E&E community. -- **AO'D**

1. Plan to drill near contested lands in N.M. provokes backlash

This story appeared in the Feb. 16 edition of [Land Letter](#).

The continuing story of El Paso Corp.'s attempt to drill dozens of new oil wells near the Valle Vidal in the Carson National Forest of northern New Mexico was first reported by Southwestern correspondent April Reese in early 2004. In the past year, though, protests from environmental groups and local officials accelerated. The issue eventually reached the halls of Congress and resulted in the enactment of a new law prohibiting drilling within the Valle Vidal area, a 100,000-acre swath of the Carson National Forest prized for its abundant elk, Rio Grande cutthroat trout and scenic vistas.

Related stories:

- Critics urge Forest Service to include 'no drilling' option in Valle Vidal plan ([Land Letter](#), July 20)
- Drilling restrictions for N.M.'s Valle Vidal become law ([Land Letter](#), Dec. 14)

2. As agencies bicker, a national park dies of thirst

This story appeared in the May 25 edition of [Land Letter](#).

An invaluable, shared resource is Dan Cusick, E&E's Southeastern reporter, who frequently does double-duty for *Land Letter* and

Greenwire. Cusick's close attention to federal projects affecting critical waterways and national parks always benefits from his on-the-scene reporting, as in this story about how conflicts between the Army Corps of Engineers and the National Park Service adversely affected decisionmaking for the vulnerable Everglades. Several of Cusick's stories carried by *Land Letter* last year followed up on the efforts to clean up the devastation of the 2005 hurricane season, as well as more positive stories on Army Corps' river restoration efforts on Florida's Kissimmee River.

Related stories:

- Hurricane-tossed toxic materials threaten La. refuge ([Land Letter](#), Feb. 23)
- Fla. river's rebirth lifts spirits of beleaguered agency ([Land Letter](#), Nov. 2)

3. Pinedale Anticline drilling plans stir contentious debates

There is no doubt that having the ability to send a reporter to the scene of an important, developing story adds both color and depth to *Land Letter's* news coverage. In this case, a midsummer visit by April Reese to a hotly contested drilling area in Wyoming not only gave readers better insights and a visual understanding of the issues surrounding the expansion of oil and gas drilling areas in the West but also helped inform her continuing coverage as this story unfolds.

Related stories:

- 'Mitigation office' aims to offset harm from Wyo. drilling ([Land Letter](#), Aug. 3)
- Pinedale working group struggles to apply 'adaptive management' to Wyo. field ([Land Letter](#), Aug. 10)
- BLM's plan for winter drilling on Wyo. anticline bad news for wildlife, critics say ([Land Letter](#), Dec. 21)

4. Record fire season still not over, officials warn

This story appeared in the Nov. 2 edition of [Land Letter](#).

Each year, it seems, a massively destructive wildfire captures media attention. This past year, it was the Esperanza Fire near Los Angeles, which -- while relatively modest in terms of acreage and property burned in an arson-caused incident -- resulted in the deaths of five Forest Service firefighters. In this case, *Land Letter* took a deeper look at the extent and range of conflagrations and post-fire restoration efforts during what many observers consider the worst decade for wildfires in modern times.

Related story:

- After the blazes are out, restoration efforts continue ([Land Letter](#), Nov. 16)

5. Closing the door to exotic hitchhikers

This story appeared in the Nov. 30 edition of [Land Letter](#).

In what we consider our finest example of team reporting on a complex issue during 2006, *Land Letter* closed out the year with a multi-part series examining some of the major issues related to exotic, invasive animals and plants. Following this introductory article, reporters April Reese, Debra Kahn, Russell J. Dinnage and Eric Bontrager each contributed in-depth articles on an aspect of the issue. It is fair to say that the invasive species series generated some of the most spirited response from *Land Letter* readers and was cited on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's own Web site, allowing the story to circulate widely beyond our base of subscribers.



The zebra mussel illustrates the difficulties of controlling some invasive species. Photo courtesy of USGS.

Related stories:

- Federal, state agencies struggle with best programs to protect forest health ([Land Letter](#), Dec. 7)
- Great Lakes, Mississippi River are front lines for efforts against aquatic invaders ([Land Letter](#), Dec. 14)
- Tamarisk, cheatgrass worsen Southwest's biggest resource problems ([Land Letter](#), Dec. 14)
- Many bills introduced to address problems, but few make it through Congress ([Land Letter](#), Dec. 21)

Other stories of note:

Among the hundreds of articles carried by *Land Letter* during 2006 were scores of stories about public lands, endangered species and actions by federal and state agencies charged with managing our natural resources. Often triggered by the release of a study, the introduction or passage of legislation, or the filing of a lawsuit or a judge's ruling (and inevitable appeal), these stories represent the core of our brand of accurate and objective reporting.

Occasionally, we are able to also provide a glimpse of the people behind the stories -- offering a reminder that policies and decisions are made by individuals, and that understanding their personalities and motivations helps illuminate sometimes complex issues. We cannot list all of what we consider the best of these stories, but here are a few that stand out:

- More congressional help needed to weather drought, N.M. farmers, officials tell senators (April Reese, [Land Letter](#), April 20)
- Battle over wolf protections in Wyoming headed for court (Eryn Gable, [Land Letter](#), July 27)
- Judge Laporte reinstates Clinton-era roadless rule (Dan Berman, [Land Letter](#), Sept. 21)
- Group stages protest run on Utah's San Rafael Swell (April Reese, [Land Letter](#), Oct. 19)
- As habitats shrink, conflicts between protections grow (Eric Bontrager, [Land Letter](#), Nov. 16)
- Former NPS director Bill Whalen is remembered for great achievements and spirited advocacy (Arthur O'Donnell, [Land Letter](#), Nov. 9)