

When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it
hitched to everything else in the Universe.

John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra*, 1911

Reflecting on the intricacies of place and the records made by time, both geologic and human, and on the interconnectedness of things—natural, political, personal—have been the driving forces of my work. Photographs, though they record the present moment, harbor visual clues to the past and intimations of the future.

Roads old and new transect a landscape. The old dirt road might well have been traveled by my great-grandmother—a single mother and roving schoolteacher—and her two daughters as they passed from Montana westward to Idaho. They could have been riding horses, or walking, or in a coach or car, depending on the year and the economic situation in which they found themselves. They may have stopped in the mining town of Crystal before crossing a bridge over the Salmon River. If they arrived before the Depression, the bridge was made of wood. Replaced in the 1930s, it is now a trestle bridge of steel. It will not be replaced again. Downstream a concrete bridge now spans the Salmon, and Crystal, which the old bridge served, was almost perfectly erased from the land half a century ago.

The new road runs along the Salmon River, bisecting Custer County, a mountainous terrain almost half the size of Massachusetts with a sinking population of just over 4,000 people. The only traffic light graces the facade of a small town bar and indicates whether liquor is available on the other side of the door. The Salmon River itself remains apparently unchanged, but the salmon that once turned up annually in multitudes have dwindled to the point of near-extinction, due to the combined effects of water diversions for ranching and mining, downstream dams, and climate change.

With little pressure from humans, wilderness of the highest quality nearly embraces both sides of this road. Moose, deer, elk, American pronghorn, wolves, coyotes, bears, sage grouse, salmon, chukar, owls, rattlesnakes, rubber boas, pygmy rabbits, cottontails, snowshoe hares, black-tailed and white-tailed jackrabbits, yellow-bellied marmots, bald and golden eagles, bobcats, and mountain lions all live in this sagebrush-steppe habitat, vastly outnumbering the humans who come in summer hoping to see them. As for citizens of Custer County, there is one per square mile. The night skies are among the darkest anywhere on Earth.