HIGH DESERT MUSEUM

Schnitzer Prize of the West

Legacy Issues & Subcategories

Eligible nominations for the Prize might focus on, but not be limited to, the following issues of concern:

1. Water Scarcity & Allocation

2. Tribal Rights & Sovereignty

3. Land Use, Development & Conservation

4. Wildfire, Climate & Ecological Change

5. Human Communities, Migration & Identity

1. Water Scarcity & Allocation

Definition: The American West's hydrological systems are under increasing stress. Beyond megadroughts and climate shifts, aging infrastructure, legal entanglements, and competing demands from agriculture, urban centers, and ecosystems require rethinking water governance. Equity, innovation, and resilience are central to future solutions.

- **Groundwater Depletion** (Farm irrigation, aquifer overdraft, and having to dig wells even deeper)
- **Water Justice & Access** (Disparities in water access for rural, tribal, and low-income communities; contamination and boil-water advisories)
- **Infrastructure & Innovation** (Aging dams and canals, water recycling, desalination, smart irrigation technologies)
- **Ecological Restoration** (Re-watering of dried wetlands, riparian habitat restoration, dam removal impacts)
- **Climate Impacts** (Snowpack decline, drought-driven agricultural stress, unnatural variability in stream flows)

2. Tribal Rights & Sovereignty

Definition: Tribal nations continue to assert sovereignty through legal victories, cultural resurgence, and environmental stewardship. Their leadership in climate resilience, land restoration, and intergenerational knowledge offers a vital path forward for the West.

- **Land Rights & Treaties** (Sovereignty, tribal lands, Land Back movement, fishing rights on ancestral rivers)
- **Governance & Legal Systems** (Forestry, rivers, and land use agreements; court rulings)
- **Youth Leadership & Education** (Tribal youth organizing, education reform, Indigenous curriculum development)
- **Cultural Revitalization** (Language preservation, historic food sources, traditional farming methods & harvesting, art, music, dance, and gatherings)
- **Health & Environmental Justice** (Impacts of mining, water contamination, and environmental impact on tribal health)
- **Partnerships & Collaboration** (Salmon restoration, forest co-management, watershed restoration, food sovereignty)

3. Land Use, Development & Conservation

Definition: Land in the West is a site of layered histories, contested futures, and ecological significance. Whether rural or urban, public or private, extractive or protective, the mosaic of perspectives has led to conflicts over how land is owned, used, and conserved. As pressures mount from population growth, energy development, and changing climate, new models of stewardship, equity, and sustainability are emerging Many difficult tradeoffs have altered the economic livelihoods of communities and reshaped natural landscapes.

- **Public Lands Management** (Forestry practices, grazing, BLM land, human recreation, watershed planning, national parks, and wilderness areas)
- **Ranching, Farming & Grazing** (Role of private landowners in habitat protection, carbon sequestration, soil health, and invasive plant management)
- **Conservation Projects** (Land trusts, river restoration, wildlife corridors & reintroduction, fisheries, and forest health)
- **Indigenous Land Stewardship** (Traditional ecological knowledge in land management, and co-management agreements)
- **Green Urban Planning** (Zoning reforms, green infrastructure, wildfire-resilient development)

4. Wildfire, Climate & Ecological Change

Definition: The West is a climate hotspot and is experiencing rapid changes. From collapsing fisheries to megafires, the region faces ecological tipping points. The future of forests, farms, ranchlands, and fisheries now depends upon significant reduction to fossil fuels, climate adaptation, and establishing new management practices. Many effective solutions integrate science, community resilience, and Indigenous knowledge to reimagine stewardship.

- **Wildfire** (Controlled burning practices, post-fire recovery for watersheds and communities, fire-safe building materials)
- **Climate Migration** (Displacement due to fire, drought, and flood; planning for climate refugees)
- **Biodiversity & Species Recovery** (Reintroduction of wolves, beavers, salmon; pollinator habitat restoration)
- **Community Resilience** (Fire-adapted communities, mutual aid networks, climate education and preparedness)
- **Climate Mitigation & Adaptation** (Reduction of fossil fuels, renewable energy development, electrification**,** carbon sinks, and regenerative agriculture)

5. Human Communities, Migration & Identity

Definition: The West is a tapestry of stories — of movement, reinvention, and resistance. Its identity is shaped by those who have been displaced, those who have arrived, and those who have stayed. Understanding these layered histories is essential to shaping inclusive futures. The stories of Tribes, ranchers, cowboys, loggers, gold miners, and today's remote workers are all critical in shaping the region's identity.

- **Creative Expression & Memory** (Oral histories, murals, community archives, storytelling as resistance)
- **Human Migration** (Bracero program, farmworker and railroad histories, Oregon Trail and Dust Bowl migration, Tribal displacement, rural labor force)
- **Justice & Civil Rights Struggles** (Indian boarding schools, Black homesteaders, Japanese internment camps, i.e. "Hidden Histories" not often told)
- **Housing & Displacement** (Gentrification, housing insecurity, rural homelessness, mobile home communities)
- **Tech & Tourism** (Shift from blue collar to remote tech work, changing economies, smart growth of communities that serve as tourist destinations)