

# Flames of Dissent

## The local spark that ignited an eco-sabotage boom — and bust

STORY BY KERA ABRAHAM. PHOTOS BY KURT JENSEN. Eugene Weekly, Nov & December, 2006

*In a high-profile sweep that began on Dec. 7, 2005 and continues into the present, the federal government indicted 18 people for a spate of environmentally motivated sabotage crimes committed in the West between 1996 and 2001. No one was physically hurt in the actions, mainly arsons against corporate and government targets perceived to be destroying the planet. Yet the FBI is calling the defendants "eco-terrorists" and seeking particularly stiff sentences for the five remaining non-cooperators, whose trials are pending. Eight defendants have pled guilty, four are fugitives and one committed suicide in jail.*

*Segments of the American public have glanced at the mug shots inked into newspapers and seen dangerous eco-fanatics who belong behind bars. But here in Eugene, where most of the alleged saboteurs have lived, those faces are familiar to hundreds and dear to many. In recent months, EW spoke with more than a dozen local people who described the accused as compassionate, Earth-loving people, influenced by a time that also shaped Eugene.*

*Five years after the last act of arson, the so-called Operation Backfire arrests have sparked the national media's curiosity. That attention, beaming like a headlight through a fog of paranoia, tends to obscure the other regrowth that sprouted from the ashes of Eugene's eco-radical era.*

*This five-part series attempts to tell that story.*

## Part I

### In Defense of Cascadia: The Warner Creek campaign

Mick Garvin lay calmly on his side while three tons of steel heaved toward him. It was the morning of Sept. 10, 1995, and the sun hadn't yet hit the north face of the mountain. The air was chilly on Garvin's face, his right hand cold against a steel chain. He was locked into the gravel road.

Jake Ferguson and two others sat stoically in front of Garvin, forming a soft barrier between the human lock-down and the machine, while another dozen forest activists rubbed the sleep out of their eyes and gathered around. Independent filmmaker Tim Lewis circled the scene with his video camera, and resident pikas, tiny bunny-like mammals with long whiskers, scurried under boulders and squeaked. The Forest Service road grader heaved closer, knocking away a large rock and rising up with a moan. The blade stopped about 10 feet from Ferguson's military boots.

Garvin looked at the backs of the heads protecting him, gazed up at a snaggy old Doug fir and felt a warm wave of gratefulness. The 37-year-old had been doing forest defense work for years, but never before had he seen activists hold their ground like this. A state trooper summarily informed them that they could be arrested, and a Forest Service officer turned to Garvin. "Are you going to leave?"

"No." And she couldn't make him. He was locked into a "Sleeping Dragon," a concrete-reinforced 55-gallon drum buried in the road and covered with a metal fire door. Garvin's arm ran through a hole in the door and down a pipe into the drum; his chained wrist was clipped to a pin at the bottom. The road grader couldn't proceed without rolling over him, and he wasn't about to budge.

Secretly, Garvin hoped the standoff wouldn't last much longer. Fluid was collecting in his hand, making it swell, and if his fingers fell asleep he wouldn't be able to open the clip to get out. But if the grader got past him it would roll toward Bunchgrass Ridge, where ancient trees were slated for sawing; he was willing to risk his life to prevent that. Garvin settled against the cold metal door and rolled a cigarette.

Finally, the road grader made a clumsy retreat down the mountain. And in the seasons that passed before Forest Service vehicles again tried to cross that line, the rag-tag road blockade became one of the longest-running acts of civil disobedience in U.S. environmental history. It also brought together a small crew of eco-anarchists who would later develop bigger, more explosive plans.

One autumn afternoon four years earlier, humans had crept into this corner of Willamette National



KEVIN TUBBS IN HIS BIPOD



JAKE FERGUSON  
TIM INGALSBEE, CATIA JULIANA AND THEIR



THE END OF TIM REAM'S HUNGRY STRIKE AT THE FEDERAL BUILDING

KEVIN TUBBS WITH HIS DOG

Forest. They slipped past towering fir trees dry from a long summer drought, placing incendiary devices at the border of a roadless area set aside as endangered spotted owl habitat. The flame grew into a torrent of fire that swept through 9,200 acres— a third the area of Eugene — over the next two weeks. The Forest Service spent \$10 million battling the blaze before snow finally put it out.

Forest Service investigators never caught the arsonists who sparked the Warner Creek Fire, but to environmentalists the motive was obvious. They strongly suspected timber industry insiders hungry for access to protected old-growth or even Forest Service firefighters looking for work. Such arsons had become a pattern in the West, in keeping with the Forest Service adage: "The blacker the forest, the greener the paycheck."

In Eugene, UO doctoral student Tim Ingalsbee was itching to help. He'd fought fire with the Forest Service every summer for years, but had hung up his hard hat in 1990 after concluding that fire suppression throws forest ecosystems off their natural rhythms. Now, as the agency batted about plans to cut down old-growth trees in the name of fire safety, the 30-year-old environmentalist saw a chance to redeem himself. "All those years fighting fire — I could pay back that bad karma with good works defending this place from salvage logging," he reasoned.

In November 1991, Ingalsbee hopped on a Forest Service tour bus to check out the still-smoldering forest. There he met Catia Juliana, a bright-eyed woman who was monitoring logging projects for Southern Willamette Earth First!, an eco-radical group with a bent toward monkeywrenching. By the next spring Ingalsbee and Juliana had formed a sister group, Cascadia Earth First!, and walked every foot of the burn. Their masterpiece, Alternative EF in the Forest Service's draft environmental analysis, supposedly stood for "ecology of fire" — but secretly represented Earth First!. "The symbolism went right by them," Ingalsbee said. "I took the pleasure of seeing 'EF' 400 times in the final document. We fantasized about hacking into their computer and adding the exclamation points."

Willamette National Forest Supervisor Darrell Kenops didn't go for it, instead deciding in October 1992 to "salvage" log 40 million board feet of timber from the burn. Outraged Earth First!ers performed a Halloween skit in front of Kenops' office, depicting the salvage proponents as monsters on trial before Mother Nature. Local media ate it up, and an unprecedented 2,300 citizens sent comments to the Forest Service opposing the Warner Creek logging plans. When that didn't work, Ingalsbee tried a new line of defense, founding the Cascadia Fire Ecology Project to educate the public on the science of burned forests. As the instructor of a popular UO class called Envisioning Ecotopian Communities, he also quietly inspired dozens of students to join the cause.

For a moment in the summer of 1995, Ingalsbee's fight appeared to be over. U.S. Magistrate Thomas Coffin had struck down the Forest Service's salvage plan on the grounds that it illegally rewarded arson; the ruling just needed a signature from Judge Michael Hogan. But Hogan stalled long enough for Congress to pass a salvage rider that opened the Warner Creek burn and thousands of other forests to expanded logging.

On Sept. 6, when Hogan declared Coffin's ruling moot, Cascadia Earth First!ers were ready to execute Plan EF!. "They left the courtroom and went straight up the mountain," Ingalsbee said. "They sat in the widest, levellest part, which was the logging road, and they kept vigil 24-7."

The buzz spread quickly in eco-radical circles, attracting a core group of activists to Eugene. Among the first was Tim Ream, who'd heard about the Warner Creek campaign at an Earth First! gathering outside Arcata, Calif. When he hiked into the charred Cascadian forest, where spotted owl pairs had returned to fledge their young, he made a personal vow to defend it.

Ream linked up with Tim Lewis, a lanky 40-year-old filmmaker who'd joined a 33-mile march into the Warner Creek Fire area. When Lewis saw the passion on Forest Service Road 2408 — activists pickaxing the dirt, their hands blistered, standing firm against the "freddies," as they called law enforcement — he knew he had his next film project. His footage of the blockade, narrated by Ream, would become the documentary *Pickaxe*.

UO student Jeff Hogg, an Earth First! activist who had taken Ingalsbee's class, began supporting the campaign through the Survival Center, a campus organization dedicated to social and environmental activism. So did Lacey Phillabaum, an art history major who reported for the radical campus newspaper *The Insurgent*. Fellow *Insurgent* reporter James Johnston, who she was dating, also lined up for the cause. Cecilia Story, a graphic designer from Colorado, joined a march into the forest and was hooked the moment she saw the ancient, lichen-draped trees slated for cutting. "My heart just broke," she said. All four were in their early twenties.

Meanwhile, the four co-editors of the *Earth First! Journal* unapologetically trumpeted the blockade. One of those editors, Jim Flynn, had moved with the magazine to Eugene in 1993, establishing its headquarters in a tucked-away green ranch in Glenwood. Journal volunteers Stella-Lee Anderson and her boyfriend Kevin Tubbs, both in their mid-twenties, helped set up the first camp.

A hardass drifter with a criminal past, Jake Ferguson, tattooed and camo-clad, with long brown dreadlocks whose natty ends looked like they'd been dipped in peroxide, showed up ready to do something meaningful. Guarded, somber and glassy-eyed, he seemed to be either on hard drugs or in the first stages of recovery. Not the type to talk about hippie shit like magic and rainbows, Ferguson wanted a revolution and stuck at the camp longer than anyone else. "He was committed to something for awhile," Anderson reflected. "Warner Creek was healing for him. A time to start anew."

Today, some Warner Creek veterans reserve the worst kind of nouns for Ferguson: snitch, sociopath, loser, pyromaniac, junkie. They're disgusted with him for ratting out fellow forest defenders for crimes committed in later years. But others, especially the

staunchly nonviolent Ingalsbee, would be most appalled by what the defendants had allegedly done.

Glasses askew and dark curls wet with sweat, Tubbs grappled with a boulder the size of a small child. He'd been working Road 2408 with the activists for days, pickaxing a 10-foot-wide, 15-foot-deep trench — big enough to fit a school bus in. The boulder would be another obstacle to keep out vehicle-bound loggers and freddies.

Behind the trench line and out of police reach, a new kind of freedom took root. The eco-rads erected two tarp-covered teepees, one for sleeping and the other for cooking. They rigged a fort complete with a drawbridge using downed logs left by loggers and built two video platforms in trees, from which they could survey the freddies and scope the surrounding clearcut-scarred hills.

The activists began to lose their identities as Americans and pledge their allegiance to Cascadia — their bioregion, home of the ancient pines and dizzying stars, wherein all people could become wild again. They dubbed the blockade Cascadia Free State and themselves Cascadia Forest Defenders, adopting nature-inspired aliases like Lupine, the Dog and Madrone.

And they made love, as free wild creatures do. The couples let the fecundity of the forest sluice into their relationships, while the single activists flirted and hooked up. Juliana realized she was pregnant while hiking near Kelsey Creek, a bubbling blue salve in the Warner Creek burn.

"Love in the barricades — how can you get more romantic?" Ingalsbee recalled with a grin, sitting in a Eugene café while the rain drizzled outside. His and Juliana's daughter, Kelsey, is now 10.

Of course, some moments of the blockade sucked: the weeks of nonstop rain, the blizzards, the days when stale bagels were dinner. "It was just like any summer camp, where there were long periods of boredom," remembered Johnston, now a clean-cut policy analyst for Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics.

But even in those soggy times, a sense of common purpose kept the forest defenders going. They agreed by consensus not to do anything to scare off public support, like hurt a freddy or blow something up. The unspoken line was somewhere near petty vandalism: picking the trench in the road, even throwing buckets of shit at the Oakridge ranger station under cover of night. "Violence would take away from what we were doing," Anderson explained, "and property destruction was distracting from the goal in mind."

So the activists got creative, making a perilous wager that loggers and Forest Service agents would value human lives more than those of trees and animals. They pinned themselves under parked cars, locked their arms into concrete-filled barrels, fastened

their necks to the backs of logging trucks. Tubbs helped build a "bipod," a platform propped on two poles as tall as a ranch-size house and counterbalanced by cables anchored to the road. If a freddy even nudged the structure, the activist on the platform could come crashing down.

"At the time, yeah, I was scared," Johnston said. "The stuff that we were doing was not safe." But in the course of the blockade, no one was seriously hurt.

This brand of forest defense, aka "Warnerization," was catching on. Eco-radicals learned to climb trees, tie knots and generally piss off authorities at "action camps" across the West. Oregon activists confronted logging operations in the coast range and southwest Siskiyou while interstate eco-rads set up blockades in Idaho, Colorado and Montana. Their commitment to peaceful civil disobedience drew supporters of diverse ages and backgrounds, even inspiring one former Indiana congressman to get himself arrested.

But the escalation of forest activism also produced a backlash, particularly among people dependent on timber money. One logger threatened to fell a tree on the forest defenders while they begged him to spare the old growth. Forest staff allegedly cut the cable on Tubbs' bipod one night while it was unmanned, and drunken men from the nearby town of Oakridge drove up to the trench line to talk belligerent smack.

Forest Service officials generally left Cascadia Free State alone, but they were uneasy. "It's more difficult for officers than people think," said Forest Service Special Agent Sher Jennings, who was assigned to monitor the Warner Creek campaign in its last season. "They're trying to do what they think is right, and they don't want anyone to get hurt. It can get pretty trying."

Although one reporter suggested that the Cascadia Forest Defenders may be domestic terrorists, the notion didn't stick. Front-page stories in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* depicted peaceful eco-radicals taking a stand for the forest, and Cascadia Free State attracted hundreds of visitors, including a bus full of Vermont schoolchildren and the president of The Audubon Society.

The campaign pressed on in the city as in the forest. Supporters in Eugene's bohemian Whiteaker neighborhood collected food and supplies for the camp, while mainstream environmentalists kept up pressure on the Clinton administration. The four *EF!J* co-editors, who later included Phillabaum, cranked out copy in Glenwood, spreading Warner Creek news to eco-radicals across the nation.

Tim Ream staged a hunger strike on the cold concrete plaza of the downtown Federal Building, consuming nothing but juice and vegetable broth throughout the cold and rainy autumn. "Frat boys and angry timber people" would sometimes threaten him, Ream said, but others brought talismans and prayers. On the 70th day he flew to Washington D.C. to lobby Congress, returning to Eugene to break his fast five days later. On the last night of the strike Ream's supporters fasted with him, pitching more than 20 tents on the Federal Building plaza.

Winter came upon Cascadia Free State fast and cold, sinking the teepees deep in snow. But even as their numbers dropped, the activists kept vigil, gnawing on stale bread and making music around a wood stove. Supporters lugged food and supplies five miles uphill in snowshoes, scanning for the Earth-emblazoned flag that flew above the fort. Sometimes they heard coyote-like yet distinctly human howls floating out of the woods: *Aw-oooooo!*

In July 1996, on the one-year anniversary of the salvage rider's passage, Portland musician Casey Neil sang "Dancing on the Ruins of Multinational Corporations" while eco-radicals danced barefoot on the Federal Building lawn. Then Phillabaum, ponytailed and hairy-pitted in a blue sundress, took the mike.

She told the crowd about the "magic" she'd discovered at Warner Creek: cotton-cloud sunrises and mesmerizing moons, wild irises and cold mists blowing off waterfalls, a balmy June night when she hiked naked with other women and heard a spotted owl hoot for the first time. "It feels right," she said.

Ten years later, many in that crowd would see her as a traitor.

About 100 eco-rads, clad in camos and muddy dresses, made a wide circle in a sunny forest clearing. Ingalsbee and Juliana grinned as they stepped down the grassy aisle, newborn Kelsey in the bride's arms, while the wedding guests sang "Give Yourself to Love."

The couple wore green garlands: Ingalsbee's atop two long, sandy braids, Juliana's on a cascade of wavy brown. The officiator, a maternal-looking woman in a flowy dress, clipped together the chains encircling the bride and groom's wrists, locking them in an Earth First! handfast — "so the freddies won't rip us apart," Ingalsbee said. Then newlyweds and guests made a vow together: "From this day forward, I will commit myself to respect and defend all things wild and freeeeee!"

They'd barely finished when a short woman with brown dreadlocks stepped forward. People were still needed at the blockade, she announced rather sternly. The fight to save Warner Creek wasn't over yet.

Two weeks later, on Aug. 16, 1996, Anderson was ambling in the woods when an urgent message crackled through her walkie-talkie: A bulldozer was headed down Road 2408. She made a dash for the blockade, scrambling up hills strewn with rhododendrons and laurels, and thrust her hand into a pile of rocks in the road, a faux lockdown. Three other women were already secured EF! style, their arms stuck into concrete-filled barrels.

The officers told the activists that their year-long vigil was over: The Clinton administration had bowed to public pressure and backed away from hundreds of

controversial logging projects, including Warner Creek. But without proof on paper, the women wouldn't budge. They thought it was a trick.

Forest Service agent Jennings, for one, was worried: She claimed that there was a fire in another part of the forest, and firefighters could only reach it via Road 2408. "We had a pretty high sense of urgency," she recalled by phone from her current office in Seattle. "However long they wanted to lie there, we had to get around them. And we couldn't get around them without taking out an old growth tree."

While a bulldozer tore down Cascadia Free State, Forest Service officials removed the activists from their lockdowns and arrested them. Jennings also arrested two *Register-Guard* reporters who had come to cover the raid, seizing their film and notes.

Three days later, an elfin man dressed like a tree hyped up a crowd of supporters in downtown Eugene. The activists were thrilled about the logging project's cancellation but pissed about the raid; they wanted to show solidarity with the four arrested activists. "Free the Warner women!" they chanted, marching en masse to the jail, which shared walls with the court. When they arrived at the security checkpoint and an officer informed Ream that only one person would be allowed in for the arraignment, Ream turned to the crowd. "How many of you think that you are the one?" he shouted.

Hoots all around. The eco-rads erupted into a chant of "No justice, no peace," Phillabaum straining so hard that a blue vein popped out in her neck. Some of the protesters started banging on the metal detector and then walked right through.

It was on. Someone pulled out a harmonica; others started drumming, jumping and chanting "Cascadia Free State!" as if they were still in the woods instead of a jailhouse lobby. An officer stepped into the fray and swayed around like a buoy in rough waves. Some protesters, sensing the danger here, started up a new plea: "No violence!" It wasn't clear whether they were addressing the officials or their fellow protesters.

And then, as quickly as it had churned up, the protest calmed. The activists sat on the ground and locked elbows. Police began the arduous task of detaching them one by one, dragging limp bodies into the jail, sometimes by the hair. A new chant rose: "Arrest them; don't beat them up!" Protesters grabbed at the heels of their detached comrades and reached for last-minute kisses, shrieking and crying. A single tear ran down the cheek of a young male officer standing guard.

Inside the jail, the activists refused to identify themselves or their friends. They dead-weighted when jail staff tried to move them; they wouldn't eat or sign papers. Eventually the guards threw them into big holding cells, one for the men and one for the women. The women out-sang the men, having a broader repertoire, but the men wrote a new song and smuggled it out on paper plates.

Within five days all of the activists were released. The "Warner women" were convicted of misdemeanors, later downgraded to violations, and the jailhouse protesters for criminal



trespass. A year of rough forest living, perilous protests, heavy campaigning, mass arrests and constant vigilance had frayed many nerves, but they'd done it: They'd saved Warner Creek.

The forest defenders rode that wave of euphoria into urban Eugene, where many would rent cheap warehouses and keep the activist flame burning. "When people came down from Warner Creek as victors, there was a lot of power there," Lewis said. "And that power came down on Whiteaker."

The fire would only burn hotter.

*(end part i)*

## Part II: Eco-Anarchy Rising

White powder exploded onto Randy Shadowalker's chest and face. He couldn't breathe; his throat and lungs felt like they'd been set on fire from the inside. The 31-year-old eco-activist fell to the ground, clutching a maple branch in his hand, only to be roughly ordered back up by the policeman who had shot him with tear gas powder. Coughing and drooling and dripping snot, he struggled to his feet and staggered through a cloud of tear gas, the cop shoving his bony body from behind.

It was the morning of June 1, 1997, and hundreds of Eugene citizens had gathered downtown to witness the cutting of 40 large trees to make way for a parking garage. Inside the fenced-off lot, Earth First!ers and Cascadia Forest Defenders perched in doomed trees: sweet gum, bigleaf maple, black walnut, redwood. While the cops outside the fence pushed back the crowd, those inside plucked the protesters out of the trees with a fire truck lift, blinding them with pepper spray. Down came Lacey Phillabaum, Jeff Hogg, Mick Garvin, Josh Laughlin and others. A logger followed the fire truck, cutting each tree after its occupant descended.

Jim Flynn, about 30 feet high in an old sweet gum, was the last one left. A fireman and two police officers emptied about a dozen canisters of pepper spray on him in roughly an hour, twisting his foot, pulling his hair, cutting his pants to spray his bare leg. When he finally came down, Flynn peeled off his chemical-drenched clothes and stood with his arms outstretched as the cops blasted his body with a fire hose. The water just spread the burning oil; every inch of his skin was on fire.

Tim Lewis peered at the scene through a video camera, digging Flynn's Jesus Christ-like pose. He would air this footage on *Cascadia Alive!*, a public access TV show that he and fellow activist Tim Ream had started up 10 months ago, in the last weeks of the Warner Creek road blockade. The eco-radicals would gain some major public sympathy points from the protest — and the city would think twice before taking out a swath of



TRANSVERSING A LINE AS STAY-UP, FALL CREEK 1996



ONE OF THE MAPLE TREES CUT AT THE BROADWAY AND LINCOLN SITE, JUNE 1, 1997

old trees again.

Cascadia had brought its act to town.

Whiteaker in late 1997 was a hot hash of radicals. There were the forest defenders, mostly twenty- and thirtysomething hippies high on the victory of Warner Creek; the gutter punk anarchists, who rocked out on loud music and white drugs; and the resident artists, who'd been coloring up the neighborhood for years. Icky's Teahouse, a grimy free-for-all joint on Third and Blair, was a hangout of choice for all three.

It was a time of intense community-building for the eco-anarchists, who roved between neighborhood hot spots like Tiny Tavern, Out of the Fog café, Scobert Park and a crop of housing co-ops. Warner Creek vet Stella-Lee Anderson launched the Jawbreaker gallery to showcase neighborhood creations, and artist Kari Johnson painted post-apocalyptic feminist visions on Whiteaker walls. Johnson led eco-activists to tear up a parking space and turn it into a community garden — Joni Mitchell's dystopic vision in reverse — while Critical Mass bikers, empowered by their numbers, reclaimed the streets from cars. Activists shared knowledge at "Free Schools" and guerrilla info shops, neighbors swapped clothes at a community free space and Food Not Bombs brought free vegetarian meals to local parks daily.

"I think everybody had their own vision of what was going on," Johnson said, "but what I saw tying it all together was making an alternative to hierarchical, capitalist society, and trying to have a communalist ethic."

As the community knit itself tighter, independent media projects beamed Whiteaker's energy out to the world. Eco-radicals including Tim Lewis, Cindy Noblitt, Randy Shadowwalker and Robin "Rotten" Terranova produced the weekly live TV show *Cascadia Alive!*, featuring a hodgepodge of guest ranters, musical acts, indie activist footage and call-in segments. The show also aired footage from local CopWatch activists — namely Lewis, James Johnston and Kookie-Steve Heslin — who dogged Eugene police with their video cameras.

"*Cascadia Alive!* was really putting grease on the fire of the activist scene," Shadowwalker said. "People started coming to us for news. The local media feared us; the cops feared us. But every time they tried to mess with us, it just grew the army of resistance."

That surge of creative, autonomous energy attracted fresh new blood to town, eco-anarchists ready for action. They'd heat up not only the streets of Eugene but also the surrounding forests, staging direct actions and road blockades that would make Warner Creek seem vanilla by comparison.

The activists worked busily in the rosy light of a May 1997 dawn, stringing two ropes across a highway near Detroit, Ore. — one roughly 3 feet off the road and the other about 75 feet high. The structure was designed so that if a vehicle hit the low rope, two women dangling in harnesses from the high rope would fall. They were protesting the Sphinx logging project in the Santiam watershed.

Right before they finished setting up, the lookouts down the road started screaming. A truck was rolling down the highway, and it didn't show signs of stopping. When it came within 70 feet of the rope, Shannon Wilson — a determined forest defender who had been a core part of the Warner Creek blockade — stood in its path. The truck slowed to about 5 miles per hour and swerved around him, coming so close that he was able to smack its headlight, and finally stopped. The shaken activists lowered the women to safety, gathered their gear and split.

"I didn't see a lot of those people after that," Wilson said. "They were too scared to do anything. It basically killed the campaign."

Lacey Phillabaum would remember that near-fatal moment in a Nov.-Dec. 1998 *Earth First! Journal* editorial: "I have seen an activist come nose to grill with a Mack truck at a protest and believed for an endless moment that the trucker would not stop." An activist had recently been killed by a logger in California, and Phillabaum was beginning to question the "cultural promise" of civil disobedience: that if eco-activists nonviolently laid their bodies on the line, no one would willingly harm them.

Fear of injury hadn't slowed the Cascadia Forest Defenders, who harnessed the Warner Creek energy to protest a string of timber sales in the late '90s, their names Oregonian poetry: First and Last, Horse Byars, Red 90, Olalla Wildcat, China Left, Winberry, Growl & Howl. They'd saved some trees and mourned the rest.

But none of those campaigns stand out like the Fall Creek blockade, launched in spring 1998 to stop the Clark timber sale in Willamette National Forest. The dominant crew at the camp was a group of crusty, itinerant punks in their teens and early twenties, some of them happy just to have a free crash-pad and food. Others, however, were experienced activists out to save trees by any means necessary.

The Fall Creek tree-sitters generally rejected the unspoken code of nonviolence that had guided the Warner Creek campaign just a few years earlier. They fought with Forest Service officers (or "freddies," as they called them), pissed on them from the trees, even staged a fake hanging to freak them out. Some of the punks trashed the camp, letting their dogs fight and hump and tear up the forest understory. Tree-dwelling flying squirrels burrowed into their sleeping bags, ransacked their food and fell into their compost buckets. At times the activists got dangerously drunk hundreds of feet off the ground, and once a propane tank blew up in a tree-sit.

Earth First!ers and Cascadia Forest Defenders, sensing the hard edge, generally distanced themselves from the campaign while still supporting it with food and supplies. The tree-

sitters were, after all, braving freddies and foul weather to keep chainsaws out of the forest. Dubbing their camp Red Cloud Thunder Free State, the Fall Creek tree-sitters embraced their role as the outcasts of the Earth First! movement, viewing themselves as the *real* revolutionaries — the ones who were ready to push beyond civil disobedience.

As punks defended the forest and eco-anarchists rollicked in Whiteaker, the Eugene-based *Earth First! Journal* editors — including Jim Flynn and Lacey Phillabaum — put the local movement into a larger context. They gathered news of civil disobedience and eco-sabotage actions in Europe, South America, Asia and all over the U.S., examining the intersections of labor, civil rights and anti-consumerism movements. Earth First! was growing, if painfully.

The *EF!J* ran a feature called "Earth Night News," which announced sabotage actions claimed by the Earth Liberation Front and other covert actors. ELF had been conceived in England in 1992, when eco-activists decided to sever controversial sabotage actions from the civil disobedience-oriented Earth First!. The Sept.-Oct. 1993 *EF!J* introduced ELF as "a movement of independently operating eco-saboteurs."

Earth Night actions spanned the globe, but in the late 90's an especially methodical cluster struck the Pacific Northwest. It began on Oct. 28, 1996, when arsonists torched a Forest Service pickup truck in Detroit, Ore. They also attempted to burn down the ranger station, but the fuel-filled plastic jug on the roof didn't ignite. Spray-painted on the building was a tag American police hadn't seen before: "ELF."

Only two days later, arson struck the Forest Service ranger station in Oakridge, Ore. The building burned from the four corners into the middle — seemingly a professional job. The father of the Warner Creek campaign, Tim Ingalsbee, was crushed: years of his documentation of the Warner Creek Fire had been in that building.

Arsons followed at several BLM wild horse corrals, a slaughterhouse, a wildlife research station, a Vail ski resort, a forestry office in Medford, a meat company in Eugene. No one was hurt in any of the actions, but communiqués condemned the targets as "Earth-rapers" who deserved what they got.

The *EF!J* also ran "Dear Ned Ludd" columns, which offered detailed tips for carrying out sabotage actions like tree-spiking, electrical tower blow-outs and arsons with time-delayed fire-starters. A disclaimer noted that EF! didn't necessarily endorse such enterprises, but the journal's overall tone was supportive.

Ingalsbee argued with the *EF!J* editors about celebrating arson. "Fire is a mystical force that you release; you better be prepared to deal with the consequences," he said. "You set up other humans to come attack you." But many of the journal's contributors defended ecotage, viewing property destruction as a wake-up call to the self-obliterating masses.

Phyllabaum grew weary of so much debate and so little action, and after three years she left the journal, publishing her official sign-off in the March-April 1999 issue. "I've found and discarded all sorts of different visions of this movement, seeing us as everything from nonviolent revolutionaries to disgruntled, dysfunctional outcasts ... [but] I think the depth of our passion and the sincerity of our commitment is what distinguishes Earth First!," she wrote. "I look forward to seeing you again soon — on the frontlines."

The concept of righteous sabotage was blowing up among Eugene's most hard-core eco-anarchists and their out-of-town allies, who staged increasingly bolder riots: throwing bricks through banks and McDonald's joints, trashing the Nike store on 5th Avenue, lighting fires in Dumpsters and setting up confrontations with police.

Disrupting traffic and smashing property were sure-fire ways to bring the cops; the media would invariably follow, providing the anarchists with free press. Some of the rioters would wear Zapatista-inspired bandanas which, besides obscuring their identities in front of police cameras, told the world that at least *some* Americans were ready for revolution. "Global capitalism is everybody's problem, and nobody's doing anything about it," reasoned activist Chris Calef. "If it's violence and mayhem [that bring attention to the issues], then fuck it."

EPD Detective Bob Holland remembered those days as tense. "We saw a huge influx of out-of-town anarchist types: real scary, hard-core, punk-lookin' people who were clearly not from Eugene," he said. "There was all this tension going on in the Northwest, and here in Eugene we seemed to be at the epicenter."

The police weren't the only ones to take on the punks. Whiteaker vigilante Dennis Ramsey, a self-described ex-anarchist then in his mid-40s, viewed the eco-anarchists as "organized mayhem in the guise of liberty" who were trashing the neighborhood. He and others convinced the landlord of Icky's Teahouse not to renew its lease, shutting it down in the summer of 1997. Ramsey then turned to the task of cleaning up Scobert Park, which he saw as a drug-infested "crime magnet," and joined a successful neighborhood push to temporarily close it. Eco-anarchists responded by setting up tents and occupying the park.

Vandals targeted the Red Barn, a local natural food store then owned by Ramsey's former girlfriend. "I let [the anarchists] know, eye to eye, that if they pulled that shit on me I would murder them in the streets," Ramsey said. "For the first time in my life, I had to carry a concealed weapon."

As riots became more regular in Whiteaker, black-clad badasses began to bait law enforcement. "People were very empowered," activist James Johnston explained. "We were gonna fight the police." And the CopWatch activists would videotape it.

"We kept on seeing night after night the Tim Lewis stuff [on *Cascadia Alive!*]," EPD Detective Holland said. "The way it was cut and edited, we were like 'Wait a minute. It didn't happen that way.' So we started our own video unit." Holland and Lewis had a few silent confrontations at protests, each man videotaping the other.

The cat-and-mouse game would take a grave turn on June 18, 1999, during what started out as an anti-globalization event. The leaders of the industrialized world were meeting in Cologne, Germany, and activists planned protests in 160 cities. Local organizers had notified the EPD ahead of time, promising to be peaceful; in response, police scaled back their planned presence and closed off Willamette Street.

Hundreds of people showed up, reveling in the joy of smashing VCRs and computers in the street. Soon the protesters began roving, looking for nefarious corporations to target. Some rioters started jumping on cars and breaking windows of businesses they deemed evil — a bank, a furniture store, Taco Bell. A few looted 7-Eleven and brought out beer for the hot and hungry crowd. "People felt like the energy was there to crack the system, find the break in the dam, start a revolution," Lewis said.

About four hours into the riot police confronted the protesters at Washington-Jefferson Park, shooting tear gas powder at them — but the wind blew back toward the police. "After a few minutes the cops were just wandering around in a cloud of tear gas," said Rob Thaxton, an anarchist who was at the scene. "People started throwing rocks and other things at them."

A group of more than 100 rioters ditched the police and roved on for several more hours, looping between downtown and Whiteaker. They figured that as long as they stayed together the cops couldn't mess with them, but if they split up they'd be arrested. When they reached 7th Avenue and Jefferson Street, police made their move, throwing the rioters to the ground, pepper-spraying and arresting them.

Thaxton stood there and watched, furious, then picked up a big landscaping rock with plans to smash it through a squad car window. When a cop came running toward him, Thaxton threw the rock at the cop "to try to deter him." He was arrested and sentenced to seven years in prison for assault with a deadly weapon.

The police, for their part, had learned a lesson: to increase their "stand-by" presence at all rallies, even the ones that were supposed to be peaceful. "We met people halfway on this one and got burned really badly," EPD's Holland said. "That really influenced the way things happened later on. It just seemed like the anarchist community was ready to go to war with the cops."

In a sense, they *were*. The eco-anarchist community had built up its power like tinder in the streets of Whiteaker, with the ambitious goal of snapping Americans out of their destructive, consumptive, self-imprisoning cycles. They wanted to ignite a revolution.

Soon, the world would notice.      (*end part ii*)

*This is the third piece in a five-part series providing local context for a surge of environmentally motivated sabotage crimes that flared across the West from 1996 to 2001. Since December 2005 the federal government has indicted 18 people for the crimes, mainly arsons, in a sweep known as Operation Backfire. Of those indicted, 12 have now pleaded guilty, four are fugitives and one committed suicide in jail. One has pleaded not guilty and is awaiting trial.*



Randy Shadowalker salutes the camera, while kari johnson shows what she's made of



Tim Lewis with Blair, 2000. Photo: Cheryl Reinhart

*None of those indicted have agreed to speak with EW as they await sentencing, but most were connected to Eugene's eco-activist scene in its peak years. Except in cases where they have left a record, we minimize their mention here.*

*In an effort to include more voices in this part of the story, EW has agreed to protect some sources' identities by using their activist names, or in one case, changing a name altogether.*

*Finally, we use terms such as "eco-radicals," "Eugene anarchists" and "anarcho-feminists" loosely throughout this text. While generally referring to the shifting community of people who concentrated in the Whiteaker neighborhood, resisted authority and fought for environmental and social causes, the terms are imprecise. Anarchy by definition is autonomous and unorganized; statements about the community in general do not necessarily apply to every individual associated with it.*

## Part. III: Eco-Anarchy Imploding

**K**ari Johnson surveyed the chaos through a pair of swim goggles, a bandana over her nose and mouth to filter the tear gas, and steered her partner, Randy Shadowalker, through the teeming streets of downtown Seattle. He peered through the lens of a small hand-held video camera, recording the Nov. 30, 1999 protests against the World Trade Organization.

An estimated 50,000 people had descended on the city to resist a global economy that, from their perspective, treated workers, nature and consumers as mere cogs in a money-making machine. A small group of those protesters, mostly darkly clad young anarchists known as

"the black bloc," destroyed the property of corporations that they felt represented the evils of globalized capitalism.

What Johnson witnessed remains etched in her memory seven years later: A mainstream news van with its tires slashed, its metal body covered with graffiti. The smashed-in window of a jewelry store, its alarm blaring, its diamonds exposed. A man splayed spider-like on the wall of a corporate shoe store, bear-hugging the letters one at a time — N, I, K, E — then ripping them off and tossing them down to a cheering crowd.





jeff "free" luers and carol berg



heather coburn saving seeds. Photo sascha dubrul



lacey phyllabaum defends the black bloc. Photo *breaking the spell*



warcry at the battle of seattle. Photo *breaking the spell*



stella lee anderson at zip-o-log mill protest

Johnson periodically shuttled Shadowwalker's tapes to Tim Lewis and Tim Ream, charismatic activists who'd been stirring up the anarchist scene in Eugene. The two Tims spent the night of Nov. 30 in a Seattle editing studio, jacked up on adrenaline as they cobbled together a 35-minute video called *RIP WTO N30*. By 2 pm the next day they were selling the film, a choppy but intense sampling of the heaviest day of WTO protests — most of it recorded by Lewis himself — at five bucks each in the streets. From there, it would make its way to news outlets throughout the world.

Maybe media took their cue from Seattle Police Chief Norm Stamper, who publicly blamed the property destruction on Eugene anarchists just days before resigning, or from Eugene Mayor Jim Torrey, who lamented to reporters that Eugene was "the anarchist capital of the United States."

Whatever the reason, it seemed that national media had made their collective decision: Eugene anarchists were responsible for vandalizing downtown Seattle, provoking police to assault nonviolent protesters and paralyzing the WTO convention. Reporters for *60 Minutes*, *Harper's* and *Rolling Stone* swooped on this small city, inviting the notorious anarchists to explain their behavior at the Battle of Seattle.

And while a few loud-mouthed, hard-talking men stepped up to the task — most dominantly Tim Lewis, Tim Ream, John Zerzan, Robin Terranova and Marshall Kirkpatrick — many others within the local eco-radical community rolled their eyes. Hundreds of WTO protesters from Eugene were peaceful, they noted, and

people from all over the country had joined the black bloc. Of the 570 protesters arrested at the WTO protests, Seattle police identified only four from Eugene.

"I don't think five or six Eugene hoodies went up there and shut down the city of Seattle," Shadowwalker said. "Media attention after the WTO gave birth to what I call the Anarchy Rock Star, and all these other people got tuned out."

Those other people were the feeders and the feminists of the movement, the planters of gardens, the militant vegans, the artists and techno-geeks, animal lovers, labor advocates and zine-writers.

They had come together in the late '90s to oppose the government, corporations and cops — all the institutions they saw destroying free spirits and wild places. And after the WTO protests, they were finally getting international attention for it. "Then it came down to what we wanted to do with that," eco-radical Chris Calef later reflected by email, "but it turned out we had very little agreement amongst ourselves on the specifics."

That discord manifested in internal debates about gender roles within the movement, violence versus nonviolence, anarchists versus green hippies and the typical dramas of a cliquish community. "All the while we're dealing with police informants and infiltrators and state oppression that served to exacerbate the distrust," Calef added, "and basically just pour gas on the fire."

From the end of the Warner Creek forest blockade in 1996 to the sentencing of Jeff "Free" Luers in June 2001, Heather Coburn saw eco-radical women doing the work that was most critical to the movement but drew the least media attention: housing, feeding, educating and entertaining the growing masses of activists. "During the heyday of anarchism, even though it was the camo-clad men doing most of the talking, almost all of those projects were being bottom-lined logistically by women," she said.

Coburn was among those unsung heroines. In 1998 she and two others took on the lease for Ant Farm, one of several communal pads where hundreds of scrappy activists crashed over the next three years. She ran an all-women's show called "Vaginal Discharge" on the pirate radio station Radio Free Cascadia and co-organized the "Free Skool" classes that spread activism skills throughout Whiteaker. As a volunteer with Food Not Bombs, she scavenged surplus food from local businesses and served it to hungry people in neighborhood parks. In 1999 she and a friend dug a garden into Scobert Park and launched an urban gardening movement called Food Not Lawns.

Another caretaker of the movement was Shelley Cater, a friendly single mother then in her 30s who managed Out of the Fog, an organic coffee house by the Amtrak station. Cater invited Fall Creek forest defenders to hold meetings in the café, opened her 5th Ave. home as a campaign headquarters, shuttled donated food and supplies to the aerial village and relieved tree-sitters between rotations. The Fall Creek activists, mostly males under 25, started calling her "Mom."

A few stalwart women also hung up in the trees — including a woman called Warcry, a smart and fiery activist who'd come to Oregon after sitting in the redwoods of California's Headwaters Forest. She relished the Fall Creek activists' fuck-y'all, flag-burning attitude, so different from the peacenik vibe at Headwaters. "In Northern California you couldn't burn an American flag," she said with a laugh. "Right up the road in Eugene, it was kind of expected of you."

But not all Fall Creek women felt safe in the forest. According to an article in *Earth First! Journal* ("Confronting Oppression, Aug.-Sept. 2001), men were doing most of the

cool engineering work — hoisting platforms into the trees, stringing rope bridges between the tree-sits, teaching one another to use the climbing gear — without passing that knowledge onto their female counterparts. Worse, some creepy dudes were allegedly harassing and sexually assaulting women, but male activists weren't willing to kick out offenders who had valuable skills. "We became pessimistic and depressed with the situation," wrote the article's anonymous authors.

In early 2001 the women took a stand and asked four men to leave Fall Creek, two of them for good. During a "gender-bender" month, only women occupied the tree village, teaching each other forest survival skills while men in town organized funds, gathered donations and brought them food — albeit reluctantly. "The men were totally against that," Cater said.

In Eugene, the gender divide was only getting worse. One woman, who asked not to be identified for fear of retaliation — we'll call her "S." — became alarmed around 2000 when an eco-anarchist allegedly commented that he would rape a woman for the revolution. S. launched what she called an anarcho-feminist counter-movement, criticizing and publicly shunning the activists who she felt were fostering abuse — a list that started small, but widened to include even well-known feminists such as Heather Coburn and Kari Johnson. "There was a lack of analysis of white, male, able-bodied, hetero privilege," S. said. "There's no way a movement can sustain itself if it's not built from the bottom up and if all of us haven't addressed our cultural oppression."

The anarcho-feminists' work did prompt some people within the movement to make changes. Most media and activist groups adopted anti-oppression policies, and the question of privilege became one that every activist confronted. But not everyone appreciated it — least of all Tim Lewis, who was perhaps the biggest target of the anti-patriarchy movement. "There was a major attack on men by women who felt like men had too much power in the community," he said. "Some men left town because they were literally threatened with murder or having their balls cut off."

**T**he turmoil fueled debates that blazed across a growing number of home-grown independent media forums: on the public-access TV show *Cascadia Alive!*, which aired weekly from 1996 to 2004; on anarchist philosopher John Zerzan's show, Radio Anarchy, which began on Radio Free Cascadia and continues today on KWVA; in the pages of *Earth First! Journal*, which was based in Eugene from 1993 to 2001, as well as in *Green Anarchy* magazine; and in the films and reports produced by Cascadia Media Collective, which Randy Shadowalker launched in summer 2000.

The media surge stoked more discontent from behind-the-scenes activists who felt that the movement's largely hard-edged spokespeople didn't accurately represent them. Shadowalker saw a cliquish, badder-than-thou attitude begin to dominate the eco-

anarchist scene, alienating its natural allies on the left — people who sympathized with the movement but lived within the mainstream. "When that [alliance] was gone, the spell was broken," he said. "It almost went *poof*."

Other eco-anarchists saw liberals as unnecessary allies, hopelessly trying to reform a political system whose very existence they opposed. "People were tired of being told what to do or how to act by these PC motherfuckers," Lewis said.

Compounding the internal strife, federal investigations made Eugene anarchists edgy, paranoid and suspicious of infiltrators. An ongoing string of incendiary crimes in the Pacific Northwest brought the FBI magnifying glass ever-closer to Eugene, directing a hot beam of surveillance onto the scene.

On Dec. 25, 1999, arsonists placed gift-wrapped buckets of fuel rigged with kitchen timers around the Monmouth, Ore. offices of lumber company Boise Cascade, burning the place to ashes. Days later the arsonists explained why in a communiqué sent to ELF spokesman Craig Rosebraugh: "Boise Cascade has been very naughty. After ravaging the forests of the Pacific Northwest, Boise Cascade now looks toward the virgin forests of Chile. Early Christmas morning, elves left coal in Boise Cascade's stocking."

Five days after the Boise arson, saboteurs toppled a BPA tower near Bend.

Activists report that police closed in on the scene — tailing them after demonstrations, snooping outside their punk parties, snapping photos of them in the streets. Tim Ream, convinced that the feds were preparing to raid his house, nailed legal statutes pertaining to searches on his front door. "What does it mean to hang out with your lover in your house when you feel like you're being bugged?" he asked. "It's a weird space to live in."

Lacey Phillabaum sat somberly in front of a bed of poppies in Whiteaker, her face darkened by night shadows, and justified the black bloc's behavior at the Battle of Seattle. "There's nothing in the world like running with a group of 200 people all wearing black," she said, blue eyes fixed on a point beyond Tim Lewis' camera, "and realizing each of you is anonymous, each of you can liberate your desires, each of you can make a difference right there."

It was mid-June 2000, just days before the premiere of Lewis' documentary about the combustible trinity: Eugene, anarchy and the WTO — then called *Smash!*; now titled *Breaking the Spell*. Anarcho-feminists had been calling Lewis an attention-hogging sexist for months, and now he figured he better get a woman to host his film. Phillabaum, an articulate and bold activist who had been an *EF!J* editor from 1996-1999, was an obvious choice. She would later regret agreeing to it.

It had been a heavy couple of months. Phillabaum and others, under the banner Eugene Active Existence, had organized the Seven Weeks Revolt!, a roster of community education, street theater and resistance rallies that actually spanned about eight weeks. It kicked off around April 24, when more than 100 people gathered in front of the Lane County Jail to hold a candlelight vigil for jailed Philadelphia journalist and convicted cop-killer Mumia Abu-Jamal. Police alleged that protesters blocked traffic, ignored orders to disperse and, in one instance, kicked a burning can at them. Protesters, in turn, accused the cops of showing up in excessive "robo-gear," intimidating and assaulting them. Police fired rubber bullets at one demonstrator and arrested eight.

Eugene anarchists became the boogeymen of the Northwest, repeatedly blamed for police overreactions at protests. When a group of Eugene radicals joined more than 300 demonstrators in Portland during a May Day march, some 100 cops fired beanbag shots and slammed horses and ATVs into the mass, injuring at least 20 people. Portland's police chief blamed Eugene anarchists for the excessive police presence, just as cops in Tacoma, Wash., cited rumors of Eugene anarchist mischief when explaining why 350 cops showed up at a canceled steelworkers' union protest in March.

In the wee hours of June 16, 2000, activists Jeff "Free" Luers and Craig "Critter" Marshall drove from a northwest Eugene warehouse to the Joe Romania Chevrolet dealership on Franklin Boulevard, where they set fire to three pickup trucks in protest of gas-guzzling culture. After they drove away, Springfield police pulled them over for a busted headlight at the request of undercover Eugene police who had been following the pair. That day, Eugene police raided the warehouse where Luers lived and Chris Calef was leaseholder.

The next night, after Lewis' documentary *Smash!* premiered on the UO campus, masked activists in black marched toward the Lane County jail to rally for Luers and Marshall. Police again showed up in riot gear, arresting about 40 protesters who linked arms in resistance. Police broke them up with pain holds and pepper spray; one officer allegedly hit a professional videographer in the head with a flashlight.

The following day marked the one-year anniversary of the June 18, 1999 protest, and activists held another protest rally downtown. Police arrested 37 demonstrators, and an officer struck a KLCC reporter with a baton on the head, the blow landing on her headphone band.

In August 2000, the Eugene police released a report absolving themselves of all wrongdoing during the Seven-Weeks Revolt! protests.

A spate of federal laws stiffened the penalties for eco-sabotage during those volatile years. As the FBI's counter-terrorism budget grew, Joint Terrorism Task Forces

increasingly looped local cops into the surveillance of radical environmentalists. A 1999 juvenile justice bill (HR 1501) would have made it a federal crime to share information on bomb-making and created a central database called the "Animal Terrorism and Ecoterrorism Incident Clearinghouse." Although the bill passed in the House and Senate, it was never enacted as law. In March 2001 the Oregon House passed two bills expanding the definition of organized crime to include sabotage against animal enterprises and the timber industry, punishable by up to 20 years in prison. Warcry noted these developments in an article in the *Earth First! Journal* ("The Criminalization of Ecology," Aug.-Sept. 2001).

Still, eco-sabotage burned hotter across the Pacific Northwest. In September 2000 arsonists singed the EPD's West University Public Safety Station, and four months later the Superior Lumber offices in Glendale, Ore., burned to the ground. On March 30, just as Luers was about to go to trial — "Critter" Marshall had already pleaded guilty and received five and a half years — eco-anarchists attacked Joe Romania Chevrolet a second time, damaging more than 30 SUVs. ELF claimed responsibility in a March 31 communiqué, noting that although Luers and Marshall had been charged with torching the same lot a year earlier, "The techno-industrial state ... cannot jail the spirit of those who know another world is possible."

Less than two months later came the double whammy, the biggest arson the anarchists had seen since the 1998 blaze at the Vail Mountain ski resort. On May 21, 2001 activists burned an office and 13 trucks at Jefferson Poplar Farm in Clatskanie, Ore. On the same day, they torched the office of a biochemist who was doing research on genetically engineered poplar trees at the University of Washington. ELF claimed responsibility in a June 1 communiqué, linking the two arsons and denouncing GE tree research.

**O**n June 11, 2001, Judge Lyle Velure sentenced Luers to 22 years and eight months in Oregon State Penitentiary for arson at the Romania dealership and attempted arson at Tyree Oil Inc. in Whiteaker — a penalty stiffer than that handed to some rapists and murderers. More than a slap on the wrist or even a rap on the knuckles, it was as if Velure had chopped off the hand of Eugene's eco-anarchist community.

More blows followed in quick succession: In July 2001, Italian military police shot and killed a masked protester at the G8 trade summit in Genoa. Then came the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, followed by the free-speech-chilling PATRIOT Act. Eugene anarchists would help light one more arson in mid-October, burning down a hay barn and releasing 200 horses and burros from the BLM Wild Horse Facility in northeast California.

Eugene's eco-radicals may have been aware of the arsons, and some even impressed, but few say they suspected that the saboteurs were members of their own community. "Half

of the arsonists were good friends of mine at one point or another while the actions were going on," Heather Coburn said, "and I had no idea."

She still has a hard time accepting that that one of her own housemates was involved in just about all of the sabotage.

**I**t wasn't just the sabotage crimes and their consequences that squelched eco-anarchy in Eugene. Most involved activists agree that by mid-2001, Eugene's eco-anarchist scene had imploded on its own.

One exception was the Fall Creek activists, who hung tough in the trees even after an environmentalist lawsuit forced the Forest Service to dramatically reduce the size of the planned logging in order to protect the red tree vole. They hung on until Zip-O-Log Mills finally gave up its plans to log the remaining 24 acres. In 2003 they finally came down from the tree village, having spared 96 acres of forest from chainsaws since "Free" Luers made the first tree-sit in 1998.

Meanwhile, Eugene's eco-radicals moved on to other endeavors. Some moved away and kept up their activism elsewhere. Some stayed and pushed forward with above-ground environmental projects based out of Eugene. A few ended up in prison; still others moved on to college, families, mortgages, 9-to-5s. And although the movement's dissipation saddened some activists, it also sparked new endeavors. "For me, the most radical things we did were in the process of falling apart and then getting back together as individuals," Coburn said.

But four years after the movement deflated, it would return to haunt everyone involved — dragging 10 activists who thought they'd moved on with their lives before federal courts in Eugene. The feds hadn't closed the books on the eco-anarchists yet.

*(end part iii)*



## PT. IV: THE BUST

The dog's barking punctuated a steady *bang bang bang* on the front door. It was 7 am, and Heather Coburn was not in the mood for this. She swung open the door to encounter dark-suited federal agents, who stoically informed her that they wanted to talk to her about her housemate, Jake Ferguson. When she refused, they flashed a search warrant and said they were going to tow her truck.

It was spring 2001, a peak time in Eugene's eco-radical scene. The vandalism at the fall 1999 WTO protests, summarily blamed on "Eugene anarchists," and the rowdy anti-establishment protests that followed — confrontations between black-clad anarchists and cops, broadcast by a pulse of locally based radical green media — had catapulted this damp little city to international infamy. Some of the more extreme activists were calling for revolution against "Earth-raping" corporations and the government by any means necessary, and a surge of arsons claimed by the Earth and Animal Liberation Fronts told the world that they were serious.

The obsessively secretive eco-saboteurs had eluded federal agents for years, but the mystery of Coburn's truck presented a crack in the case. Over the next five years, through grand jury subpoenas, informants and the threat of life sentences, federal agents would wrestle that crack ever-wider. Eventually 12 environmentalists would plead guilty to conspiracy and arson, their faces, for so long masked, exposed to the world in the unforgiving grays of newspaper ink.

About a week before her FBI wake-up call, Coburn had discovered that her truck was missing from its usual spot outside her North Grand Street house. She'd had a nasty fight with Ferguson the night before, accusing him of pitting his multiple lovers against one another. "He was hostile and belligerent and trashed my house and moved out," she said. "I woke up the next morning and my car was gone."

Assuming Ferguson had ganked her truck, Coburn called the police and reported the truck stolen. By the time an EPD officer arrived, she had found her truck parked a block away and told him to forget about it. That same day, upon advice from her friends, she filed a restraining order against Ferguson. What she didn't realize was that on the night before, eco-radicals had torched more than 30 SUVs at Romania Chevrolet, the same dealership that Jeff "Free" Luers and Craig "Critter" Marshall had burned the year before. That morning also happened to mark the start of Luers' trial.

Some of Coburn's friends were furious with her for going to the cops, suspicious that she'd told them too much. One woman, an activist called Sparrow, went to the police station and asked for both the report and the restraining order. According to statements made by retired EPD Chief Thad Buchanan to *Rolling Stone*, Sparrow's inquiry helped police connect Coburn's truck to Ferguson, and Ferguson to the arsons. Buchanan did not return *EW's* calls.

When Coburn and her boyfriend, Tobias Policha, went to pick up the truck in the Gateway Mall area, FBI agents handed them both grand jury subpoenas. Coburn didn't like the idea of grand juries, which force people to testify in secret proceedings without a lawyer in order to indict a suspect. But she had just gotten a big grant from the city to do permaculture projects in Whiteaker, and she knew that if she refused to testify she could end up incarcerated for contempt. She wasn't willing to make that sacrifice.

The grand jury testimony wasn't so bad, or even so revealing, Coburn said. But many of her friends — who hated nothing so much as law enforcement — would never forgive her for it. "I felt really persecuted by the community," she said. "People I don't even know labeled me a snitch because I wouldn't go to jail rather than go to the grand jury."

In an effort to be open, Coburn went to the Shamrock House Infoshop and offered Tim Lewis, an eco-anarchist filmmaker, a "play-by-play" of her grand jury experience. She told him that there had been questions about Ferguson, SUVs and "relationships with certain people." But she really didn't think anything would come of it. Sure, her friends were radicals, and they could act stupid at times — but not so stupid as to commit arson, she figured.

She was wrong.

More subpoenas followed Coburn and Policha's. Ferguson was ordered to appear before the grand jury, but he consulted with a court-appointed lawyer and skipped out to New Orleans for a few months. Another activist, Carla Martinez, was served a subpoena in fall 2001 and announced that she would not testify. About three years later, the grand jury re-subpoenaed Martinez — and this time she complied.

Around May 2004, FBI Special Agent John Ferreira showed up at the home of eco-activist Jennifer Woodruff, who has a son with Ferguson, and served her a grand jury subpoena. "Arson's wrong and we think you can help us," she remembers him saying. Woodruff, then 31 years old, with tattoos on her hands and long, dark hair, told Ferreira that she wouldn't testify.

But internally she was scared of jail, of being taken away from her son. When the feds offered to interview her and two other activist women with their lawyers present, rather than alone before the grand jury, Woodruff initially agreed. Still, a sense of impending betrayal kept her awake at night, and on the day she was scheduled to testify she told her lawyer she'd changed her mind. *I can't give in to those bastards*, she thought.

She remembers federal prosecutor Kirk Engdall getting upset and threatening to have her jailed for contempt. "I never heard from them again," she said.

But her son's dad, Jake Ferguson, did. By 2003 he was strung out on heroin, playing heavy metal guitar (his bands: Eat Shit Fuckface and Caricature of Hate) and living in Saginaw with his girlfriend, also an addict. The feds were on to him.

Ferguson wouldn't speak with *EW*, but his court-appointed lawyer, Ed Spinney, offered this version of events: The arsonists who torched the Romania lot in 2001 used Ferguson's truck without his permission, implicating him in a crime he didn't commit. "He was subpoenaed to testify before a grand jury but instead spoke voluntarily to the government and told them that he had nothing to do with it," Spinney wrote by email. "For the next couple of years he was almost constantly under the surveillance of the government."

In 2003, feds contacted Ferguson again and told him that people within the community had linked him to the Romania fire and other arsons. And that, ostensibly, is when Ferguson agreed to cooperate. Court records indicate that by spring 2004, Ferguson was wearing a hidden recording device in an effort to bait other saboteurs, his friends, into incriminating themselves.

The terms of the government's deal with Ferguson are confidential, Spinney said. Federal prosecutors have declined to comment, and Eugene police involved in the investigation have been barred from discussing it with the press. Although the *Rolling Stone* article suggests that Ferguson may receive \$50,000 and a get-out-of-jail-free card for his cooperation, Spinney denies that Ferguson has received either financial compensation or total immunity from the government (yet). But the fact remains that Ferguson, who has admitted to at least 15 acts of sabotage — more than any of the defendants now before the courts — has not been indicted.

According to the *Rolling Stone* article, Ferguson wore the hidden recorder to an annual Earth First! gathering, to the Public Interest Environmental Law Conference at the UO, and to meetings with six of his partners in crime, by then scattered across the country. In December 2005 the feds swooped in for the bust, arresting William Rodgers, Kevin Tubbs, Stanislas Meyerhoff, Chelsea Gerlach, Kendall Tankersley and Daniel McGowan. They also jailed Gerlach's Canadian boyfriend, Darren Thurston, on immigration charges; he would later be indicted for arson.

In January 2006 they arrested southern Oregon residents Suzanne Savoie and Jonathan Paul; in February and March, Joyanna Zacher, Nathan Block and Briana Waters, all from Olympia, Wash. By April they had also indicted Josephine Sunshine Overaker, Rebecca Rubin, Joseph Dibee and Justin Solondz, who are still at large. At some point during the sweep Spokane natives Jennifer Kolar and Lacey Phillabaum came forward to cooperate, according to the FBI.

Federal prosecutors minced no words, calling the defendants "eco-terrorists" and threatening them with staggering, post-9/11-style sentences. Faced with that terrible

decision — rat out your friends or sit in jail until you die — each defendant, it seems, reacted differently. Meyerhoff reportedly started cooperating immediately; Tubbs, Savoie, Gerlach, Thurston and Tankersley had made the same decision by the time they pleaded guilty in July. So did Kolar and Phillabaum, who pleaded guilty in October. While "snitch" provisions have not been made public, virtually all such deals require cooperating defendants to name names, according to Civil Liberties Defense Center attorney Lauren Regan, who lived with Phillabaum for a year.

Four defendants before the federal court in Oregon — McGowan, Paul, Block and Zacher — pleaded not guilty. On behalf of all four, the team of defense attorneys filed discovery motions asking the feds to hand over any information that had been obtained through National Security Administration surveillance or warrantless wiretaps, which a judge had recently ruled illegal.

The federal prosecutors stalled, pushing back their court-ordered deadline three times while maintaining that no illegal surveillance had occurred. But eventually they struck a plea deal with the defendants: In exchange for withdrawing the discovery motion and confessing to their own crimes, all four defendants would get dramatically reduced sentences and would not have to implicate anyone else. They took the deal, pleading guilty in November.

Only one defendant, Briana Waters, continues to plead not guilty before the federal court in Washington. Her attorney is pursuing a discovery motion similar to that filed by the Oregon defense team.

Hanging like a pall over the community is the knowledge that Rodgers had made an entirely different decision. Alone in his jail cell in Flagstaff, Ariz., in December 2005, he had scrawled two notes, one bemoaning his betrayal, and the other addressed to his friends and family. "I chose to fight on the side of the bears, mountain lions, skunks, bats, saguaros, cliff roses and all things wild," he wrote. "I am just the most recent casualty in this war. But tonight I have made a jailbreak — I am returning home, to the Earth, the place of my origins." With that, he placed a plastic bag over his head and suffocated. Reportedly, he died with his right fist clenched in the Earth First! gesture of defiance.

It may have signaled a call to action — or the death of a movement.

*(end part iv main text)*

### **Sidebar to part IV (1 of 3)**

In March 2006, an FBI agent and Eugene policeman surprised nursing student Jeff Hogg by his car in the parking lot of LCC. "You're not in trouble or anything; we just want you to testify against the arsonists," he remembers them saying. "I was pretty freaked out, but I wasn't surprised they wanted to talk to me."

Hogg, an Earth First!er who had been active with the local scene from the 1995 Warner Creek blockade to the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle, speculated that his grand jury subpoena may have had something to do with his alleged participation in "Book Club" meetings, which prosecutors describe as secret, conspiratorial eco-radical gatherings that took place in four cities, including Eugene, around 2000-2001. And, of course, his ex-girlfriend was former *Earth First! Journal* co-editor Lacey Phillabaum, who was in a relationship with hard-talking radical Stan Meyerhoff. Both Phillabaum and Meyerhoff, by then, had been fingered in the arsons and were apparently cooperating with the feds.

But Hogg wouldn't testify, and in May 2006 he was incarcerated for contempt, leaving his studies on hold and his partner, Cecilia Story, to pay the mortgage on their home. "It would be different if I'd been somebody who stole a car or something and knew my charges," he told *EW* through the Plexiglas at Josephine County Jail. "For me, it's a bunch of unknowns."

He would remain in jail without charge, refusing to cooperate with the grand jury, until November. During those six months on the inside his life had been thrown off-track, his studies put on hold, his parents upset with him for missing his grandfather's funeral. But in eco-radical circles, media-shy Hogg became a hero. — *Kera Abraham*

## Sidebar 2 with part IV

# The Actions

**Oct. 28, 1996:** Attempted arson of USFS's Detroit Ranger District station in Willamette National Forest; arson of USFS vehicle in parking lot. "Earth Liberation Front" (ELF) spray-painted on the side of the building. **LINKED TO:** Ferguson, Overaker

**October 30, 1996:** Arson of USFS's Oakridge Ranger District station in WNF, Ore. **LINKED TO:** Ferguson, Overaker, Tubbs

**July 21, 1997:** Arson at Cavel West horse slaughterhouse in Redmond, Ore. Communiqué attributed arson to Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and "Equine and Zebra Liberation Front." **LINKED TO:** Ferguson, Tubbs, Dibee, Paul, Kolar

**Nov. 30, 1997:** Arson at BLM Wild Horse and Burro Facility in Burns, Ore.; about 400 horses and burros freed. ELF/ALF claimed arson via communiqué. **LINKED TO:** Ferguson, Overaker, Tubbs, Rubin, Rodgers

**June 21, 1998:** Arson at the USDA's Animal, Plant and Health Inspection Service in Olympia, Wash. Claimed by ELF/ALF via communiqué. **LINKED TO:** Ferguson, Overaker\*, Tubbs, Rodgers, Dibee.

**September 1998:** Preparations for arson at BLM Wild Horse facility in Rock Springs, Wyo. Suspects heard on scanner that police were coming and buried materials. **LINKED TO:** Ferguson, Tubbs, Rubin, Rodgers

**Oct. 4, 1998:** Attempted arson at Wray Gun Club, Wray, Colo. **LINKED TO:** Kolar

**Oct. 11, 1998:** Attempted arson at BLM Wild Horse Holding Facility in Rock Springs, Wyo; 40-100 wild horses freed. ALF claimed responsibility via communiqué. **LINKED TO:** Ferguson, Overaker, Tubbs, Rubin, Rodgers, Meyerhoff, Gerlach

**Oct. 19, 1998:** Arson at the Vail Mountain ski resort in Vail, Colo. ELF claimed responsibility via communiqué. **LINKED TO:** Ferguson, Overaker, Tubbs, Meyerhoff, Rubin, Gerlach, Rodgers

**Dec. 22, 1998:** Attempted arson at U.S. Forest Industries headquarters in Medford. **LINKED TO:** Ferguson, Tankersley, Tubbs, Rubin

**Dec. 27, 1998:** Arson at U.S. Forest Industries headquarters in Medford. ELF claimed responsibility via communiqué. **LINKED TO:** Ferguson, Tankersley

**May 9, 1999:** Arson at Childers Meat Company in Eugene. ALF claimed responsibility via communiqué. **LINKED TO:** Ferguson, Overaker, Tubbs, Meyerhoff, Gerlach and "others"

**Dec. 25, 1999:** Arson at Boise Cascade logging company regional headquarters in Monmouth, Ore. ELF claimed responsibility via communiqué. **LINKED TO:** Ferguson, Overaker, Meyerhoff, Gerlach

**Dec. 30, 1999:** BPA high-tension line toppled near Bend. **LINKED TO:** Ferguson, Overaker, Meyerhoff, Gerlach

**Sept. 6, 2000:** Arson at EPD West University Public Safety Station in Eugene. **LINKED TO:** Meyerhoff, Gerlach, Tubbs

**Jan. 2, 2001:** Arson at Superior Lumber offices in Glendale, Ore. ELF claimed responsibility via communiqué. **LINKED TO:** Ferguson, Meyerhoff, Tubbs, McGowan, Savoie

**March 30, 2001:** Arson at Joe Romania Chevrolet dealership in Eugene. Communiqué sent to ELF press office did not explicitly attribute the action to ELF or ALF. **LINKED TO:** Meyerhoff, Tubbs, Block, Zacher, Rodgers

**May 21, 2001:** Arson at Jefferson Poplar Farm in Clatskanie, Ore. ELF claimed responsibility via communiqué. **LINKED TO:** Meyerhoff, McGowan, Savoie, Block, Zacher, Ferguson\*, Gerlach\*, Tubbs\*, Rodgers\*

**May 21, 2001:** Arson at the University of Washington's Urban Horticulture Center in Seattle. ELF claimed responsibility via communiqué. **LINKED TO:** Meyerhoff, Gerlach, Rodgers, Waters, Kolar, Phillabaum, Solondz

**Oct. 15, 2001:** Arson at BLM wild horse and burro corrals in Litchfield, Calif.; 200 horses and burros freed. ELF claimed responsibility via communiqué. **LINKED TO:** Dibee, Rubin, Thurston, Solondz, Meyerhoff, Tubbs, Gerlach, Rodgers

\*Implicated in preparations for arson, not arson itself

*Source: Federal prosecutors' indictments and information. Actions that have been confessed to in court but have not resulted in indictments are not included here.*

### **Sidebar 3 to part IV – the accused**

## **The Accused**

**Jake Ferguson** Age: 34

**Bio:** Came to Eugene around 1994 with then-girlfriend; son born in 1995. Core activist at Warner Creek blockade. Lived in Eugene area on an off into the present. Dated\* defendant Overaker around 1996 and Tankersley around late 1998. Recently studied diesel mechanics at LCC.

**Legal status:** Unindicted informant; implicated in 15 actions

*\* Note: The term "dated" is used loosely throughout this piece and indicates a spectrum of relationships: friends with benefits, polyamorous affairs, long-term monogamous partnerships. We note only known relationships among the accused and subpoenaed.*



**Stanislas Meyerhoff** aka "Country Boy" Age: 29

**Bio:** Graduated from South Eugene High School in 1995. Dated defendant Gerlach from 1994–2000, and Phillabaum from 2001 until recently. Around 2001 moved to Bend, and about four years later moved to Charlottesville, Va. FBI agents arrested him in December 2005 at Piedmont Community College, where he studied engineering.

**Legal status:** Pleaded guilty to eight actions, spanning 1998-2001, in July and September 2006.  
Recommended sentence: 15 years



**Chelsea Gerlach** aka "Country Girl" Age: 29

**Bio:** Eco-activist from age 15; graduated from South Eugene High School in 1995. Dated defendant Meyerhoff from 1994-2000, and later Thurston. Did outreach for the Warner Creek campaign. Studied environmental issues at Evergreen State College and LCC. At time of arrest in late 2005, was a house DJ living in Portland.

**Legal status:** Pleaded guilty to six actions, spanning 1998-2001, in July and September 2006. Recommended sentence: 10 years



**Sarah Kendall Tankersley Harvey** Age: 29

**Bio:** Moved to Eugene from Ohio in fall 1995 to study history at the UO. Around 1997, became involved with the campus Survival Center. That spring, with Cascadia Forest Defenders, perched atop a metal tripod on the road into Hull-Oakes Lumber mill; peacefully confronted police at June 1 protest against tree cutting in downtown Eugene. In 1998 volunteered with Food Not Bombs; briefly dated informant Ferguson. Left Eugene around 1999, attended Humboldt State and graduated with molecular biology degree in 2004. Arrested in Flagstaff, Ariz., where she was working in support of families with disabled children, in December 2005.

**Legal status:** Pleaded guilty to two 1998 arsons in July 2006. Recommended sentence: more than four years



**Darren Thurston** aka "Goat" Age: 36

**Bio:** Canadian animal rights activist with two prior eco-sabotage convictions; served almost two years in prison in the early 1990s. Arrested with then-girlfriend Gerlach in Tacoma, Wash., on Dec. 7, 2005, on immigration charges; later indicted for arson.

**Legal status:** Pleaded guilty to participation in one 2001 arson on July 20, 2006. Recommended sentence: more than three years





**Suzanne Savoie** aka "India" Age: 29

**Bio:** Southern Oregon-based eco-activist formerly involved in forest defense campaigns in the Siskiyou Mountains and Applegate watershed. Briefly dated defendant McGowan. Later worked in a home for the developmentally disabled; turned self in to FBI agents in mid-January 2006.

**Legal status:** Pleaded guilty to two 2001 arsons on July 21, 2006. Recommended sentence: More than five years



**Kevin Tubbs** aka "The Dog" Age: 37

**Eugene connection:** Animal rights activist from age 22; studied fine arts and philosophy at the University of Nebraska. Moved to Eugene with then-girlfriend around 1995. Volunteered at *Earth First! Journal*; briefly lived in a trailer behind the journal's Glenwood-area office. Core activist at the Warner Creek blockade. Arrested on Dec. 7, 2005 at his Springfield home, where he lived with his fiancé, dogs and cats.

**Legal status:** Pleaded guilty to eight actions, spanning 1996-2001, in July 2006. Recommended sentence: more than 14 years



**Briana Waters** Age: 31

**Bio:** Grew up in Lansdale, Penn., and Berkeley, Calif; later lived in Olympia, Wash. Produced and directed *Watch*, a documentary on a 1999 forest defense campaign in southwest Washington. Graduated from Evergreen State College in 1999. At the time of arrest in March 2006, was working as a violin teacher, married, and had a baby daughter.

**Legal status:** Pleaded not guilty to UW arson; trial scheduled for May 2007



**Joseph Dibee** Age: 39

**Bio:** Lived in Seattle; worked at family sewing company, and later as a technician for Microsoft. Dated defendant Kolar. Reportedly "communications" specialist during Warner Creek blockade and banner-maker for other environmental actions. Indicted in January 2006 for alleged participation in one 2001 arson and one 1998 arson.

**Legal status:** Fugitive



**Jonathan Paul** Age: 40

**Eugene connection:** Grew up in the Eastern U.S.; animal rights activist. In early 1990s, jailed for almost six months for refusing to testify to federal grand jury. Dated defendant Kolar; later engaged in legal skirmish with indictee Dibee over rights to anti-whaling nonprofit, Sea Defense Alliance. In 1998 spoke at the National Animal Rights Conference at the UO, suggesting that the ALF and ELF movements be united. Arrested in southern Oregon, where he worked as a hotel employee and volunteer firefighter, in mid-January 2006.



**Legal status:** Pleaded guilty to one 1997 arson on Nov. 9, 2006. Recommended sentence: five years

**Nathan Block** aka "Exile" Age: 25

**Bio:** Worked as a carpenter and lived with defendant Zacher outside Olympia, Wash. Arrested in February 2006; detectives allegedly seized 44 pounds of pot from his and Zacher's rented house.

**Legal status:** Pleaded guilty to two 2001 arsons on Nov. 9, 2006. Recommended sentence: eight years



**Lacey Phillabaum** Age: 31

**Bio:** Grew up in Spokane, Wash.; high school debater. Came to Eugene to study art history at the UO around 1993. Worked at campus Survival Center and radical student newspaper *The Insurgent*. Supported the Warner Creek blockade; co-editor of *Earth First! Journal* from 1996-1999. Spoke at spring 2001 environmental law conference panel: "Does Property Damage Have a Place in Mass Protest?" Appeared in Tim Lewis films *Pickaxe*, *Breaking the Spell* and others. Dated subpoenaed activist Jeff Hogg from about 1996-2000 and defendant Meyerhoff from about 2001 until recently. Beginning around 2001, worked as editor of *In Good Tilt* newsletter, freelanced for Bend altweekly *The Source*. In 2005 moved to Charlottesville, Va., to take reporting position at *C-Ville Weekly*. Turned herself in to federal agents sometime around early 2006.



**Legal status:** Pleaded guilty to one 2001 arson on Oct. 4, 2006. Recommended sentence: three to five years

**Daniel McGowan** aka "Sorrell" Age: 32

**Bio:** Grew up in Queens, NY; earned degree in business administration and Asian studies from University of Buffalo in 1996. Participated in 1999 WTO protests in Seattle. Lived in Eugene from March 2000-January 2002; was short-term editor for *Earth First! Journal*, contributor to *Green Anarchy* magazine, volunteer for Shamrock House Infoshop and campaigner to support Jeff "Free" Luers. Briefly dated defendant Savoie; washed dishes at Morning Glory restaurant. Returned to New York in 2002, studied acupuncture, organized protests against the Republican National Convention and worked for WomensLaw.org. Arrested in New York City in December 2005; married in May 2006.



**Legal status:** Pleaded guilty to two 2001 arsons on Nov. 9, 2006. Recommended sentence: eight years

**Joyanna Zacher** aka "Sheba" Age: 28

**Bio:** Involved in 1999 protests against the WTO in Seattle. Worked as a nanny and lived with defendant Block outside Olympia, Wash. Arrested in February 2006.

**Legal status:** Pleaded guilty to two 2001 arsons on Nov. 9, 2006. Recommended sentence: eight years



**Jennifer Kolar** aka "Diver" Age: 33

**Bio:** Grew up in Spokane, Wash.; raced sailboats. Dated defendant Jonathan Paul, and later fugitive Joseph Dibee. Pursued doctorate degree at the University of Colorado. Turned self in to federal agents in Washington sometime around early 2006.

**Legal status:** Pleaded guilty to a 1998 arson and a 2001 arson on Oct. 4, 2006. Recommended sentence: five to seven years



**Rebecca Rubin** Age: 33

**Bio:** Canadian scientist; studied cranes. Indicted in January 2006 for alleged participation in six actions, 1997-2001.

**Legal status:** Fugitive



**Josephine Sunshine Overaker** aka "Maria" Age: Uncertain; likely 32-35

**Bio:** May have lived in Eugene in mid-1990s. Dated informant Ferguson around fall 1996. Reportedly participated in a number of forest defense actions. Indicted in January 2006 for alleged participation in nine actions, 1996-1999.

**Legal status:** Fugitive



**Justin Solondz** Age: 27

**Bio:** Born in New Jersey; part-time carpentry worker. Indicted in spring 2006 for alleged participation in two 2001 arsons.

**Legal status:** Fugitive



**William Rodgers** aka "Avalon" Age: 40 at death

**Bio:** Arizona-based eco-activist. In 1996, briefly joined the Warner Creek blockade. Allegedly co-authored a 2001 paper with Meyerhoff on how to build time-delayed incendiary devices. Before his arrest in December 2005, was living in Prescott, Ariz., with his then-girlfriend and running an activist bookstore, The Catalyst Infoshop. A member of the Arizona Indymedia collective, he apparently committed suicide by pulling a plastic bag over his head in a Flagstaff, Ariz., jail cell on Dec. 22, 2005, while awaiting extradition to Washington state.

**Legal status:** Deceased; never indicted



## Part V: The Ashes

More than a decade ago, a 21-year-old Lacey Phillabaum danced barefoot in a blue sundress on the downtown Federal Building lawn. A recent UO graduate, eco-radical writer and defender of the old-growth trees at Warner Creek, she jumped with other activists to the live lyrics of Casey Neil's "Dancing on the Ruins of Multinational Corporations."

Nine and a half years ago, an emboldened Phillabaum watched a truck roll within arm's length of a fellow activist during a forest defense protest on a highway near Detroit, Ore. Less than a month later, she and other *Earth First! Journal* editors defiantly perched in doomed downtown Eugene trees until police pepper-sprayed them down.

Seven years ago, after quitting the journal, Phillabaum joined the protests against the WTO in Seattle. As the host of Tim Lewis' documentary *Breaking the Spell*, she later defended the actions of the black-clad anarchists who looted and vandalized corporations they'd viewed as destroyers of the Earth.

Five and a half years ago, Phillabaum acted as the lookout during the arson of a University of Washington horticulture center — a crime she committed in concert with her new boyfriend, Stan Meyerhoff, and other activists. On the same night in Clatskanie, Ore., eco-radicals torched the offices and trucks of Jefferson Poplar Farm. The coordinated arsons, executed in the name of the Earth Liberation Front, were intended as a statement against genetic engineering.

But by the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, a combination of mounting paranoia and infighting had shattered Eugene's eco-radical scene like glass in storefront windows at the Battle of Seattle. Phillabaum and Meyerhoff moved first to Bend and later to Charlottesville, Va., where she wrote for an alternative newsweekly and he studied engineering. They appeared to be on a straight path, their criminal past left in ashes.

Until December of last year, when the FBI busted Meyerhoff for participating in nearly a dozen of 20 environmentally motivated sabotage acts across the West between 1996 and 2001. Phillabaum turned herself in soon after and began working as an unnamed cooperator with the feds. (The bust may explain why she called off a freelance assignment for *EW* on "sustainable" beef production last winter. "I am having some heavy family problems," she wrote in a Feb. 24 email, "and I thought they were clearing up but they are not." As recently as Autumn 2006, Phillabaum was listed as a copy editor for *Eugene Magazine*.)

Today, Phillabaum is facing three to five years in jail — or 25, if federal prosecutors can nail her as a terrorist — because she'd slipped, even briefly, from the Earth Day of above-ground activism into the Earth Night of underground sabotage.

Phillabaum is one of 12 defendants who have pleaded guilty to a flare of environmentally motivated arsons in the federal sting known as Operation Backfire. One targeted activist has pleaded not guilty, another committed suicide in jail, and four are fugitives. One more, the government's first informant, lives in Eugene and has not been indicted. The cooperators face recommended sentences of three to about 16 years (for Phillabaum and Meyerhoff, respectively), but federal prosecutors have said they will try to tack 20-year "terrorism enhancements" onto each sentence.

The 10 defendants before the Oregon courts are scheduled for sentencing in April. Washington defendant Briana Waters will face trial in May, and Phillabaum and Jennifer Kolar — whose plea deals may hinge on their testimonies against Waters — are to be sentenced in July.

The domino effect of the arrests and cooperation agreements have been surreal for local eco-radicals who knew the defendants. Generally speaking, second only to the community's disdain for the authorities is its disappointment with the cooperators. Most loathed is Jake Ferguson, the apparent ringleader of the eco-saboteurs and the feds' primary informant, who still walks free; U.S. Attorney Karin Immergut has said that prosecutors haven't yet decided "what to do with him."

Nearly as resented is Meyerhoff, apparently the feds' secondary informant, followed by Phillabaum and Kolar, who likely began working with authorities around spring 2006. Many local eco-radicals are likewise upset with Chelsea Gerlach, Kevin Tubbs, Kendall Tankersley, Darren Thurston and Suzanne Savoie, who had begun cooperating by July.

Most of the community insiders who spoke with *EW* maintain their support for Daniel McGowan, Jonathan Paul, Nathan Block and Joyanna Zacher, who struck an unusual deal with prosecutors allowing them to confess to their own crimes without incriminating others, and Olympia resident Briana Waters, who maintains her innocence.

"What's upsetting is how quickly people are folding and how namby-pamby and weak Earth First! looks when you compare it to the Black Panthers and the American Indian Movement, where people have held out for decades without talking," said former *Earth First! Journal* co-editor Jim Flynn. "It just makes our movement look weak and soft and middle-class. For people like me, who have spent years in the movement, it's embarrassing. How will we recruit new people?"

But another movement veteran, former Earth First!er James Johnston, attacks not the cooperators but the people who criticize them. "It's a bunch of dimwits who talk a big talk about arson and anarchism and a bunch of other crap," he wrote by email. "Now they don't seem to have anything better to do than make up bunch of lies about the people who actually did the arsons and ARE taking responsibility for it."

Johnston, an ex-boyfriend of Phillabaum's, sat next to her at the Dec. 11 sentencing hearing in Eugene. Other activists in the courtroom avoided them both.

Eugene's eco-radical era was a fire that blazed through town for half a decade, bringing together Earth First!ers, anarchists, artists, feminists and animal advocates who rejected authority and envisioned a freer, greener world. Their flame manifested in art projects, housing cooperatives, forest defense campaigns, anti-globalization rallies, independent media and, notoriously, the flare of environmentally motivated arsons.

By mid-2001 that eco-radical fire had consumed itself, sputtering out as activists split over dogmatic differences and personality clashes. In subsequent years federal surveillance pressed down like a fog, nearly extinguishing the remnant embers.

How did this fire, and Operation Backfire, change the local activist landscape? What grew from the ashes?

It may no longer be so radical, but Eugene's environmentalist community continues to nurture seeds sown at the peak of the movement in the late '90s. Volunteers with the Northwest Ecosystem Survey Team (NEST), a group formed out of the Fall Creek forest defense campaign, still scout for red tree vole nests in an effort to battle timber sales on public lands. Cascadia Wildlands Project, a forest advocacy group founded in 1997 by James Johnston, regularly brings legal challenges to federal logging projects; Jim Flynn is CWP board president, and another former *EF!J* co-editor, Josh Laughlin, is director.

The eco-anarchist TV show *Cascadia Alive!* ended in 2004, but Tim Lewis is currently working to archive the shows for the UO library, and his documentaries of the Warner Creek blockade and the WTO riots are now available on DVD. *Green Anarchy* magazine, launched around 2001 by Robin Terranova and other local radicals, still publishes out of Eugene, while *Earth First! Journal*, which was headquartered locally from 1993 to 2001, has moved to Tucson, Ariz. The journal struggles to stay afloat, with about one-third the subscribers it had in 1997.

In the Whiteaker neighborhood, eco-anarchist hangout Icky's Teahouse is gone, but Tiny Tavern carries on. The Ant Farm, an activist crash-pad, has folded, but the Shamrock House remains, with its "Free Wall" covered in anarchist art. The Jawbreaker gallery, founded by Warner Creek activist Stella Lee Anderson, still hosts alternative art shows, and the daffodil bulbs Kari Johnson planted in the shape of an anarchy symbol on a 4th Avenue lawn more than a decade ago still appear every spring. Food Not Lawns, the urban gardening movement founded by local activists Heather Coburn and Tobias Policha in 1999, has now gone national; Coburn recently published a book about it under the name H.C. Flores.

And though the arsonists who set fire to Willamette National Forest in 1991 have yet to be caught, the trees of Warner Creek still stand. Tim Ingalsbee, the "godfather" of the mid-1990s campaign against salvage logging, perseveres in his effort to get the site permanently protected as a research area.



Much like the Warner Creek salvage controversy, Operation Backfire illuminated two very different ways of viewing a burnt landscape: as a disaster to be cleaned up and salvaged, or as a natural cleansing, providing nutrients and light for rebirth. The bust seems to have dampened local eco-radicalism, stalled ELF actions, weakened Earth First!, and possibly even chilled progressive activism of all kinds. But Eugene remains a hub of eco-activity, and as sure as wildfires will continue to blaze through forests, stoking controversies in their wake, environmentalists will keep battling the forces of planetary destruction, their tactics evolving with the shifting political landscape.

*End*

*Sidebar to part V at <http://www.eugeneweekly.com/2006/12/21/webextra1.htm> l*

## **Is eco-sabotage terrorism?**

On April 10, federal prosecutors will try to convince Judge Ann Aiken that it's appropriate for them to try to tack 20-year "terrorism enhancements" onto the sentences of the 10 Operation Backfire defendants who have pleaded guilty before the federal court in Oregon. Prosecutors have indicated that, if Aiken gives them the green light, they'll try to pin each of the defendants as a terrorist during their individual sentencing hearings. They'll likely do the same before the court in western Washington, where two more have pleaded guilty and a third awaits trial.

If prosecutors succeed, Lacey Phillabaum's recommended sentence of three to five years, the shortest proposed jail term for an Operation Backfire defendant, could become 25 years. Her boyfriend Stan Meyerhoff's sentence of almost 16 years, the longest proposed term, could become 36.

James Jarboe, chief of the domestic terrorism section of the FBI, told a House subcommittee in 2002 that "The FBI defines eco-terrorism as the use or threatened use of violence of a criminal nature against innocent victims or property by an environmentally-oriented, subnational group for environmental-political reasons, or aimed at an audience beyond the target, often of a symbolic nature."

The key word in that definition is "violence." The 20 acts of eco-sabotage in the Operation Backfire case did not physically harm anyone, and evidence suggests that the saboteurs took extreme precautions to that end. "Not hurting people is such a part of every one of those people's philosophies," said Eugene activist Stella Lee Anderson, a former girlfriend of defendant Kevin Tubbs.

Yet few within the movement are willing to assert that local eco-anarchists in the mid-'90s were nonviolent by principle. "There's a lot of ways to define the words violence and nonviolence, and people couldn't get on the same page for what that meant to them," said Eugene eco-activist Cecilia Story. "Some people thought filling up a soaker gun with urine and spraying it at cops was really violent. Other people didn't. We would talk about things like that for weeks."

Prosecutor Stephen Peifer, however, suggests that the question of violence is moot in this case. Under a federal law titled "Acts of terrorism transcending national boundaries," anyone who "creates a substantial risk of serious bodily injury to any other person" by damaging property within the U.S. may be subject to the terrorism sentencing enhancement. "That's what we're working with," Peifer said. "The word violence doesn't come into play."

Still, many people — including Rep. Peter DeFazio of Oregon — are reluctant to call the eco-saboteurs terrorists. "As we know terrorism today, mass murder on the scale of the trade towers and the Pentagon, perhaps it would deserve a more specific label," DeFazio said, adding that the eco-arsons were "a destructive, stupid, criminal thing to do." — *Kera Abraham*

Sidebar to part V at <http://www.eugeneweekly.com/2006/12/21/webextra2.html>

## Thoughts from the trenches

**Eugene eco-radicals weigh in on Operation Backfire.**

*Did the sabotage actions have their intended effect of waking up the public to environmental issues?*

**Jim Flynn** sees some actions, like the arson of the Cavel West horsemeat plant (which was never rebuilt) and the BLM wild horse releases, as valid. "I think sabotage is a perfectly good way to grab people's attention," he said. "Ethical monkeywrenching, if done thoughtfully, can be an effective tactic." But, he added, the general public might not make the link between eco-sabotage and its political motives. "I think sabotage has lost its meaning in this country and people see it as terrorism," he said. "This country has a big problem with arson for any reason. I don't know why that is."

**Chris Calef** agrees that some actions may have been somewhat effective, but he cites others as ill-conceived, such as the arsons of the Oakridge Ranger Station, which incinerated years of Tim Ingalsbee's research, and the University of Washington horticulture center. "They destroyed some endangered seeds next door," he said of the UW arson. "Nice going."

In the case of the 1998 arson of the Vail ski resort, **Stella Lee Anderson** said, "They public's looking at it and thinking, 'Oh my gosh, that poor ski resort.' They don't see the forest that was destroyed for the ski run. They public's just stupid and lazy and ignorant and for the most part, they just don't care."

But forest defender **Shannon Wilson** hangs onto the hope that the actions weren't in vain. "Maybe when people read the stories and articles about these indicted folks some of them might stop and think about why these highly educated and idealistic young people risked their freedoms and life for such things as wild lynx, wild horses, ancient forests,

wilderness, and our life giving biosphere," he wrote by email. "Perhaps they will think long enough to question their 'American dream' of building a 4,000 square foot McMansion with the 600 square foot redwood deck with two SUVs in the garage parked next to their 50 foot motor-home along side their 20 feet speedboat and their two all terrain vehicles on the edge of a once wild river. I believe that this is why these folks risked everything. They attempted to wake the people out of their 'American dream' nightmare that is destroying all life on this planet."

But **Jeff Hogg**, who spent nearly six months in jail for refusing to testify to the federal grand jury, doubts that the eco-sabotage actions woke anyone up. "They drew the attention of people who were already paying attention, and the people who aren't think they're a bunch of crazy criminals," he said. "I think [Operation Backfire] is gonna have a pretty chilling effect on a lot of activism."

### *How do you feel about the primary informant, Jacob Ferguson?*

**Tim Ream** suspects that Ferguson may have been a federal provocateur all along. "I just don't know how else you can burn millions of dollars of property and not get indicted," he said. "Especially when you're the one link that brings everything together ... I just can't understand why the guy who looks to me like the ringleader smack addict is driving around in an SUV and living free."

**Tim Lewis**, who lived across the creek from Ferguson in Saginaw, saw him as extremely self-determined: "If he needed heroin, he could get it. If he needed a woman to live with him and pay rent, he could get it." In Lewis' view, Ferguson didn't crack out of weakness or spite, but for his kid. "That's the only thing I ever saw Jake give a shit about, was his son," he said.

**Cecilia Story** is still creeped out by thoughts of Ferguson during the years he was secretly recording conversations for the FBI. "Wearing a fuckin' wire into my community? That is so not OK," she said.

But **Heather Coburn** is willing to cut Ferguson a little slack. "He's as much a victim of the system as we all are," she said. "I still have dreams about Jake where he redeems himself. He comes back the way he used to look — he was into Aikido, he was a vegan, he was really kind and funny. What a heartbreaker." But now, local activists shun him. "When he goes walking down the street, he's like a ghoul," she said. "Jake is volatile sometimes; he's a Cancer. But he's not a violent person ... I've never, ever been afraid that Jake was gonna hurt me. A lot of people try to paint him as sinister. He isn't; just maybe stupid."

*Is it fair to blame the other Operation Backfire cooperators, given that they risked their freedom in an attempt to further their cause?*

**Shelley Cater** feels upset and betrayed by the cooperators, even as she has some compassion for them. "If you can't stand by your convictions, then you shouldn't have been there in the first place," she said.

Although he's "pissed off" at some of the cooperators, **Tim Lewis** has a problem calling them snitches; they were the activists most willing to walk their radical talk. "I can look back at [the saboteurs] and what they did and say, 'Fuckin' A, man. They were kickin' ass.' These cats were out there in the middle of the night doing what they did ... I think it's noble. I think it's *very* noble. I have a lot of respect for them."

**James Johnston** is not willing to condemn anyone, short of Ferguson, for cooperating. "I'm withholding judgement because I don't know anything about it," he said. He also worries that so-called "snitches" could face violence in jail. "Inmates don't have anything better to do than learn all they can about the people they live with," he wrote by email. "And they do routinely kill and maim other inmates justly or unjustly labeled as 'rats' and 'snitches.'"

*How did the bust affect Eugene's eco-radical community?*

Fire ecologist and activist **Tim Ingalsbee** has mixed emotions. "At this point I am dangerously ignorant of all this ELF stuff," he said. "I am aggrieved that good people are going down ... I am genuinely saddened, and in deep denial." But he also feels that the saboteurs did real damage to the eco-radical movement. "This is kind of a pattern: These opportunists who think their heart is in the right place, but their brains certainly aren't," he said. "That is the danger with libertarian anarchy. It's completely unaccountable ... While we [above-ground activists] are trying to educate the larger community, you [underground saboteurs] undermine the action, and you make all of the community activists targets."

**Shelley Cater** said the shared sense of persecution may have laid to rest old beefs that now seem petty by comparison. "Operation Backfire has gelled people in this town in a way I haven't seen them gel in a long time," she said. "The evil's so huge now that people are compelled into action ... We are a battered community. Everybody's suffering some kind of grief. But it's made the strong stronger. The people who are dedicated are still in the fray... Our survival nature is coming to the fore."

**Kari Johnson** has drawn lessons from the peak and crash of Eugene's eco-radical scene. "I have learned to not accept other people's strategies if they aren't working," she wrote by email. "I won't let an individual jockey for a power position ... I've also learned that rallies and marches and such aren't so effective at changing the minds of the rulers as they are at changing the minds of the participants." She complains that media have taken

the eco-sabotage angle and made a "cowboys and [I]ndians story out of real life," leaving out the less sensational characters — the old, the young, "the weirdos and the moms," — and the positive, quirky things the local eco-radical community did, like forging art alliances and forming a Red Rover line against the riot cops. "It comes down to young white black-clad folks who destroyed property worth money," she wrote by email. "How can anyone who wasn't here make any sense of it?"

***How did the bust affect the larger environmental movement?***

"There is renewed activism and involvement, not only in EF!, but also in the National Lawyers Guild, grand jury education projects, prisoner support networks, indymedia, etc.," **Jim Flynn** wrote by email. "The movement cannot be killed simply because of the fact that the planet is being killed. Time and time again people will rise up when they realize their life support is being cut off ... At the end of the last decade many enviros became involved in the anti-globalization movement which continues to this day. With the election of Bush, many enviros are also now civil rights activists, even more so after the busts."

Humboldt State sociologist **Tony Silvaggio**, who lived in Eugene for years and knows several of the defendants, sees the bust in the context of a larger neo-conservative attack on progressive activism. "It's destroying the institutions and communities in Eugene. The government's guilt-by-association and divide-and-conquer approach has really succeeded," he said. "They're out to crush dissent, period. They've targeted this movement because it's an easy target; Al Qaeda is fuckin' hard. They need to show results. They need to show the American people that 'There are terrorists out there, and we caught them.' ... Where is the mainstream environmental movement in any of this? Where is the labor movement? If we let this go, 10, 20 years down the road, any traditional protest activity is gonna be labeled as terrorism."