

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Follow the Money: A Spatial History of In-Lieu Programs for Western Federal Lands* by Joseph E. Taylor

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wonderful book—a book that was a dead language to the uneducated passenger, but which told its mind to me without reserve, delivering its most cherished secrets as clearly as if it uttered them with a voice. And it was not a book to be read once and thrown aside, for it had a new story to tell every day.

Ken Yocom
University of Washington

Follow the Money

A Spatial History of In-Lieu Programs for Western Federal Lands

JOSEPH E. TAYLOR III ET AL.

(*Spatial History Project, CESTA, Stanford University, June 1, 2016. URL: <http://followthemoney.stanford.edu>*)

One of the American Far West's distinctive characteristics is the long-standing presence of the federal government. The National Park Service, the National Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management are just a handful of the federal bodies that own large swaths of land. This federal presence, for better or worse, has been the subject of debate among residents, environmentalists, politicians, and extraction-based businesses for more than a century. Gas, oil, and lumber companies seek access to the West's rich resources. Environmentalists, on the other hand, argue that federal ownership is the only bulwark that prevents complete environmental and aesthetic destruction. Politicians are left to navigate competing voices and opinions. As a result, legislatures often institute controversial in-lieu federal programs, which offset the potential financial losses to state and county governments. The tension between federal oversight and local autonomy has been the subject of ongoing debate since the late 19th century. Amid this political and financial milieu, the web-

site *Follow the Money* provides a much-welcomed tool to track the financial payments distributed to states and counties to compensate for tax-free lands across the West.

Led by the principal investigator Joseph E. Taylor III, and created by the Spatial History Project and the Center for Spatial and Textual Analysis at Stanford University, *Follow the Money* condenses more than a century's worth of financial information into a dynamic digital tool. The stated intent of the project is to "to provide baseline information for scholars and the public." This modest vision understates the hours the project's team spent corraling such large data sets. More impressive, *Follow the Money* spatially compiles the data so it is accessible to a wide range of users across a wide spectrum of digital literacy. The homepage for *Follow the Money* starts the user at an interactive map. Across the top of the homepage, visitors can select from a myriad of federal programs listed on a horizontal navigation bar. Once a program is selected, a brief description of the program appears on the left side of the screen. Beneath the navigation bar listing the federal programs, a slider allows researchers to track the fluctuating payments of a particular program over the course of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. By cross-referencing the shade of the county with the key on the right side of the map, researchers can quickly gauge the ebb and flow of federal payments across time. This clean and straightforward interface also encourages exploratory learning. Users can visit the website with their own questions, select counties, track financial fluctuations, and home in on particular programs. From there, they can find the historical background information for a particular program as well as extensive lists of bibliographic materials.

In addition to presenting the data in a compelling manner, the project's team made its efforts transparent for visi-

tors. Both methods and technologies are neatly documented, in keeping with best practices. For those researchers seeking the hard data behind the visuals, *Follow the Money* offers spreadsheets with all recorded counties, programs, and financial exchanges. By making raw data accessible, the team enables outside researchers to critique, capture, and even connect the information in new and interesting ways. The data is not buried in an obscure hyperlink or hidden on a webpage. Instead, the data notes are prominently featured, encouraging viewers to thoroughly investigate and interrogate the techniques underlying the construction of this digital tool.

To judge *Follow the Money* against any existing literature would miss the significance of the project. This tool is valuable to scholars, educators, and the public because of its clean interface and rich source information. As a result, *Follow the Money* should be used in conjunction with research and teaching as a means to add depth and clarity to traditional narrative-based histories. The project's strength is its ability to contextualize historic and modern debates with reliable statistics. For those intrigued, or lost, by competing claims of environmentalists, politicians, and corporations, *Follow the Money* provides a stable buoy for a country wading through a pool of political rhetoric and "alternative facts."

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