

Hugo Tureck Award

Hugo Tureck, now a board member emeritus for the Friends of the Missouri Breaks Monument, was one of the driving forces behind the creation of not only this organization but the monument itself. He was instrumental in getting this spectacular landscape designated as a national monument in 2001 and was president of the FMB board for many of the 21 years the organization has been in existence.

The Conservation Lands Foundation had this to say about Hugo when he was named CLF Advocate of the Year in 2012.

"During the deliberation period of monument designation, Hugo was appointed as chairman of the Central Montana Resource Advisory Council. He worked with Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, Molly McUsic and the Department of the Interior, floating the river and conducting the hearings that led to the proclamation creating the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument.

"In his role as Chairman of the RAC, he was instrumental in fighting back the first threat to the new monument – an attempt by the newly elected governor of Montana and Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton to 'undo' the Monument. Since then, he has fought back every threat to the area and embraced every opportunity to ensure its protection.

"Hugo spent more than 12 years guiding the Board of Directors of the Friends of the Missouri Breaks, working to protect the Monument from a seemingly endless array of threats. He has driven thousands of miles across Montana through all kinds of weather, talking to editorial boards, reporters, elected officials and key constituents. He has lobbied in Washington and has twice testified before Congress to oppose a bill to weaken the Monument and the Conservation System. Hugo has logged more hours defending and advocating on behalf of the Missouri Breaks National Monument than any other person on the planet. And all these things he has done while also running his ranch with his wife Judy in Coffee Creek, MT.

"Hugo was instrumental in the creation of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument and has been a fierce, untiring and inspirational advocate for the Breaks and for the National Conservation Lands."

Dave Mari, who was head of the BLM's Lewistown field office when the monument was created, said this during one of FMB's Tune in Tuesday online educational events: "I really believe that we might not have a monument were it not for the work and efforts of Hugo Tureck."

In honor of the heroic work that Hugo has done to protect the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, the Friends of the Missouri Breaks Monument has created the Hugo Tureck Award.



The Hugo Tureck Award

The Hugo Tureck Award recognizes individuals or organizations that provide outstanding service to the Friends of the Missouri Breaks Monument or the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument through advocacy, stewardship or education.

- Nominations may be submitted to the Friends Board of Directors by members of the public or by members, staff or board members of the Friends using the nomination form available at our website.
- Nominations may be submitted during the month of October.
- Nominations will be reviewed by the Friends Nomination Committee and forwarded with a recommendation to the Board of Directors for a vote at the November quarterly meeting.
- The award need not be given annually, but no more than one recipient can be approved by the board in any calendar year.
- The award will be announced on Jan. 17 of the following year in celebration of the monument designation anniversary.



Interview with Hugo Tureck March, 2022

FMB: You had quite a life even before you became a rancher and got involved with the Friends and the Breaks. Can you give us a brief history?

Hugo: Yep, I was born in Montana and raised in Montana, basically in the Gallatin Valley. I graduated from college, and I went back to Penn State. I came back and taught at MSU in Bozeman at that time, and I taught sociology. Then I transferred to Missoula at the University of Montana. Then I ended up marrying the farmer's daughter, and we ended up on this ranch. I still maintain a lot of ties with the university system, but that's the history briefly.

FMB: When did you and Judy come back to the ranch and the farm at Coffee Creek? How did that come about?

Hugo: It was in 1982 when we finally came out. It was going to be sold. Judy was the only living heir left. And if we didn't come, it would be sold. So I figured she lived in my world long enough, maybe I should live in hers because she was still a little farm girl. She never left the farm.

FMB: Tell me what compelled you to become an advocate for the creation of the monument. And how did you help that effort?

Hugo: When we came back to the ranch, I got involved. We have some [leased] BLM land. [Then-Interior Secretary Bruce] Babbitt had set up some groups. He was having ranchers who had BLM leases, if we were interested, to serve on committees. And I thought, yeah, I'll do that. So I signed up to represent us here in central Montana.

[Babbitt] came to Montana and floated the Missouri River, and it was when he was considering nominating that for a monument. And being that I was the chairman of the RAC in [central] Montana, the Resource Advisory

Council, I floated with him. And that was the beginning of my involvement.

... He nominated this as a monument, and being that I was a RAC member, I got involved and from that point I stayed involved.

After the monument was created, we knew that there were a number of people who really didn't want to see it created. So some of us got together and set up an organization called Friends of the Missouri Breaks Monument to protect it from being unmonumented, I guess you could refer to it as.

There were a handful of us that created the Friends, and we did so with the idea that we were going to create it to protect it. So we set up a small organization and we grew from there.

FMB: You had several interesting exchanges with Bruce Babbitt during that time when the monument was being created. Wasn't there something that he said to you during the float trip about why he wanted to create the monument?

Hugo: He said that the BLM has been basically nothing but a development organization. And he said there's another role that it really needed to play that it had never played, and that was the preservation of landscapes. And so he wanted to get BLM involved in preserving landscapes, not just developing it.

We visited various sites, including down in the monument and in Lewistown. He wanted to have a big meeting in Great Falls. So we set that up and I was, I guess, the emcee of it. We had approximately 500 people there. It's a really large meeting, and I can assure you, the room was full of anti-monument people and pro-monument people.

[At the start of the meeting, Hugo remembers, he read a quote from A.B. Guthrie, who had told an interviewer late in life, "The best thing about living to be 90, young man, is you get to see a lot of sons of bitches bite the dust." The room was quiet at first. Then everyone broke into laughter, lightening the mood as Hugo had intended.]

I introduced [Babbitt], and he took over the meeting. And he was a master. The local BLM was going to run the meeting for him. He said, "No, I'll take care of this," and he took the microphone and went up to the front and stood on the stage, and I sat there on the stage with him. And he went around the room and asked people questions and had them speak in this audience. He was a master at what he did.

FMB: You were a co-founder of the Friends, and you were the president for many years. You worked to protect the monument during all of that time. Tell us about some of the highlights of that effort.

Hugo: The big highlight is it's still here and it's protected. And I think we as the Friends do deserve a lot of that credit. We worked tirelessly to make sure that it would never be undone.

I think the monument has come to be more and more accepted. There's still a significant number of people who would like to see it undone. But then there's just a lot of people who would love to see the BLM no longer in existence. It would not be a small number of people that would cheer if the BLM was going to divest itself of its lands. There are those who would just love to see the land privatized. I don't happen to be one of those.

I think we're always going to have to stay aware, because there are groups that would just as soon see most of this land in private hands.

I just think we still need to be very vigilant in protecting our public landscapes. We need the public involved. Especially that public that wants to keep them public because there still are attempts to privatize.

I [also] would like to stress the importance of keeping our wildlands wild. As we age as a nation, more and more people are discovering the lure of wild places. However, we must be vigilant in keeping them as wild as possible, not loading them with off-road motor toys.