

# DACA

## Undocumented Montana Man Says He Was Raped, Denied Crime Victim Visa

By [NATE HEGYI](#) • JAN 31, 2018

*Undocumented Montana Man Says He Was Raped, Denied Crime Victim Visa*

Thousands of people who are in the U.S. illegally are allowed to stay every year because they've been victims of crime. The number of people who apply for a "U visa" far outnumbers the slots made available, and that's created a backlog. And some people can't even get on the list because they lack one piece of paper from police. For one Mexican man in Montana, the lack of a U visa means he'll soon be deported.

Family photos cover the walls of this ranch house in eastern Montana.

Pictures of a dad holding a baby, a family celebrating Dia de los Muertos, a son playing high school football.

That son, Juan Orozco, is now sitting on a couch next to his mother holding back tears.

He says he misses the sound of his dad in the house:

"You could usually hear dad up at 5:30, making his coffee, making weird noises to bug us," Juan says. "Now that he's not here, it just feels weird not seeing the normal routine."

Juan's father, Audemio Orozco-Ramirez, has spent the past five months in a Colorado detention center. He's a Mexican national who crossed the border with his family undetected nearly 20 years ago. Now he's about to get deported.

But his lawyers argue he should stay here in the U.S. under a special U visa for victims of crime.

Back in 2013, Orozco-Ramirez says he was raped while in immigration custody at the Jefferson County jail in Montana.

Unlawful immigrants who can prove they were victims of serious crime like that are eligible to apply for U visas.

But Orozco-Ramirez' former attorney, Shahid Haque says some of his clients have to wait years to get their applications processed.

“And so it’s really difficult for these victims of crime to rebuild their lives and move forward and regain any sense of security when their immigration status is not secured yet.”

U visas were originally created by Congress in the year 2000.

The idea was to give legal status to people who helped police investigate crimes like human trafficking or sexual assault.

But as the Obama administration ramped up deportations and President Trump cracked down on illegal immigration, more and more people applied for U visas.

This created a massive backlog because there’s a yearly cap to grant them to 10,000 victims plus their families.

Former Republican representative Connie Morella of Maryland says when she cosponsored the U visa bill, she agreed to that cap just to get it passed.

“It was sort of guesswork in a way, Morella says. "Ten thousand sounded like it might be a good number to start with. Let’s just see how many applications we get and then we can always increase it."

And that’s exactly what House Democrats tried to do in 2012. But Republicans balked, arguing the cap was a safeguard against fraud.

Morella, who left Congress in 2003, says that safeguard is baked into the application process. But she also says there needs to be more uniform guidelines.

For instance, law enforcement has the power to decide whether or not someone actually stays in the United States under a U visa. They are the ones that sign a form saying the crime actually happened and the victim was helpful in the investigation.

Immigration attorney Shahid Haque says getting police to sign those forms can be really tough. He says law enforcement — especially in Montana — aren't familiar with U visas.

"It isn't about saving someone from deportation or getting involved in the intricacies of immigration law. Really, it's simply about signing a form attesting the two things that are required. That the person cooperated with law enforcement and that they were the victim of a crime."

And that's where things get murky for Audemio Orozco-Ramirez.

Authorities say they can't prove he was sexually assaulted. Some of the evidence, including the rape exam, was inconclusive. But there's also missing surveillance video footage. His lawyers say it was deleted.

Orozco Ramirez eventually settled a lawsuit with Jefferson County in 2016. But his lawyer says authorities never signed the form saying Orozco-Ramirez was a victim of a crime.

So now he's getting deported.

His son, Juan, says he believes his father.

"I mean, it's not something anyone would joke about. Especially to his family and everyone involved. Of course we believe my dad."

But that belief isn't enough to keep his dad in the U.S.

## Montana DACA Recipient 'Upset' With Tester's Support of Funding Bill

By NATE HEGYI • FEB 8, 2018

Taking a break from her hospital job in Missoula, Nereyda Calero says she's disappointed the senate agreed to a budget bill without a DACA extension

"I feel like they just left us," she says. "They put us on the side and they think that we can wait. And we can't."

Calero was eight years old when she and her parents entered the country undetected from Mexico. Now she's a DACA recipient. The program gives young undocumented immigrants a chance to stay in the country. But it's supposed to end next month.

Montana's Democratic Senator, Jon Tester, voiced his support for a budget agreement that doesn't include a DACA extension or path to citizenship. Calero says that upsets her.

"I expected more," she says. "Way, way more support from him and from many others. And it just feels like they are giving up on us."

She met with the senator in D.C. two months ago.

"He said he would try and support us," she says. "And he said you are an American and you belong here."

During an interview with CNN on Thursday, Tester said a funding bill needs to move forward regardless of DACA. That issue, he says, will be dealt with separately and in a "responsible way."

Calero says she'll lose her DACA status next year if the program isn't fixed or extended. Her children are U.S. citizens.

"It's not only me being taken back it's them too," she says. "Getting forced to go out of the country."

Montana's Republican senator, Steve Daines, says the budget deal is a "giant step backwards" because it grows spending and increases the deficit.

## **Coal/Oil & Gas**

### **Coal Lease Rates Hit New Low In Powder River Basin**

By [NATE HEGYI](#) • FEB 16, 2018

*Coal Lease Rates Hit New Low In Montana, Wyoming*

Cloud Peak Energy will pay the federal government less than 20 cents per ton for the right to mine coal in a new expansion project.

"It is the lowest amount that Powder River Basin coal has gone for in at least a decade," says Shannon Anderson with the environmental watchdog Powder River Basin Resource Council.

She says in the past, it cost companies around a dollar per ton to mine coal on federal land there. This coal, she says, is being dug up at fraction of that price.

"And so that means there's very little revenue coming back to the American taxpayer for this coal resource," she says.

Anderson says she doesn't know why this lease is so cheap. For his part, BLM spokesperson Brad Purdy says the way his agency appraises coal is confidential.

Either way, the money from coal leases help pay for school repairs and road projects across the Mountain West.

Last year, the Trump administration lifted an Obama-era moratorium on new coal leases.

**TAGS:**

### **Oil And Gas Cleanup Could Cost Taxpayers Billions, Says New Report**

By [NATE HEGYI](#) • FEB 26, 2018

*Oil And Gas Cleanup Could Cost Taxpayers Billions, Says New Report*

“This is a huge red flag,” says Aaron Weiss with the Center for Western Priorities.

The conservation group says it would cost taxpayers more than six billion dollars to clean up all the wells on federal land.

That's because, according to the report, the cost of clean up has risen over the past six decades.

But at the same time, the price the U.S. government charges companies to pay for that clean up has remained the same.

“It creates an incentive for these oil and gas companies to just be irresponsible knowing that taxpayers will have to clean up their mess,” Weiss says.

“Well, I think they’re just out to generate a little bit of fear,” says Alan Olson, executive director of the Montana Petroleum Association. “You probably could say that to plug every well in the United States we’re looking at billions of dollars but that’s not the case because we’re not going to plug every well in the United States.”

Olson adds there are also other revenue sources, such as state funds, to help pay for clean-up.

But the Center for Western Priorities says state funds don’t always pony up for federal wells.

If wells aren’t cleaned up they can poison groundwater or even leech gas, leading to explosions.

### **Interior Advisory Panel Proposes Changes In Energy Royalties**

By NATE HEGYI • FEB 27, 2018

*Interior Advisory Panel Proposes Changes In Energy Royalties*

The Royalty Policy Committee wants to make it easier and cheaper for companies to get coal, oil and gas from federal lands and U.S. waters.

According to a meeting [agenda](#), the committee will propose changing how companies pay royalties on coal.

Dan Bucks ran Montana’s budget for a number of years and says the committee’s recommendations will benefit the industry and not taxpayers.

“It will allow companies more power to pay less and it will also give the companies more ability to fail to meet their environmental responsibilities,” Bucks says.

Kathleen Sgamma is an energy lobbyist and a member of the Royalty Policy Committee. She says reducing regulatory barriers will bring more business and thus more money to the federal government.

“The more we can produce, the more we can return royalties to the federal government,” she says. “So it's a financial benefit to both parties.”

The Mountain West contains some of the nation's top energy producing states.

### **Feds Can't Ignore Climate Change When Considering New Fossil Fuel Leases, Says Judge**

By [NATE HEGYI](#) • MAR 27, 2018

*Feds Can't Ignore Climate Change When Considering New Fossil Fuel Leases, Says Judge*

In what is being called a ‘monumental decision,’ the court rejected a plan to keep 15 million acres of public land in the Powder River Basin open to new drilling and mining citing climate change.

“So it’s certainly a win for our public lands and a win for our future generations,” said Kyle Tisdell, an attorney with the Western Environmental Law Center.

The Powder River Basin produces nearly half of all the coal in the United States. It’s also a big oil and gas region.



But Judge Brian Morris of the District of Montana said the Bureau of Land Management needs to look at how new fossil fuel leases could affect rising global temperatures.

So he ordered the agency to go back to the drawing board.

“It’s really disappointing,” said Chuck Denowh, a spokesperson for the industry coalition Count on Coal Montana.

He said the ruling could hurt both jobs and state budgets.

“It’s part of the way we pay for resources,” Denowh said. “So the less development we have over time that means we’re going to shift that burden on to other taxpayers.”

The decision only effects new leases or those that were sold during the lawsuit.

### **Under Trump Administration, Big Banks Are Investing More Money Into Coal**

By [NATE HEGYI](#) • MAR 28, 2018

Over the past decade, the market for Mountain West coal has cooled. Renewables and natural gas in the U.S. are cheaper, stocks are tumbling and some coal companies are even teetering on the edge of bankruptcy.

But according to a [new report](#) authored by a coalition of environmental groups, big banks are investing more heavily in U.S. coal companies under the Trump administration.

“They look like good deals,” said Jason Disterhoft of the Rainforest Action Network.

The banks, he said, are offering short-term loans to coal companies in part because they are struggling.

“Banks are going to be able to charge a higher interest rate to a company that has demonstrated financial vulnerability,” he said.

The Trump administration has also been really friendly to the industry. Officials have relaxed environmental regulations and the U.S. pulled out of the Paris Climate Change accords.

Europe and Asia are also demanding more U.S. coal, and, as a result, production has [risen](#) for the first time since 2014.

And all of this means – at least short-term – that coal might be having a rebound and banks such as JP Morgan Chase and Goldman Sachs are hopping on board.

Residents sue Stillwater County over possible oil drilling near Beartooths – Feb 27, 2018

Group working on aftermath of Colstrip plant closures to meet – Jan 25, 2018

## **Conservation**

**'A Sense Of Loss': Search For Missing Yellowstone Bison Continues**

By [NATE HEGYI](#) • JAN 23, 2018

*'A Sense Of Loss': Search For Missing Yellowstone Bison Continues*

It's a windy and unseasonably warm winter day in Yellowstone National Park in Montana. Spokesperson Morgan Warthin is standing in the middle of a massive, empty valley.

“Yellowstone is like, so big,” she says. “Where do you begin to look?”

Warthin is searching for bison that were set free last week. That’s when they discovered the holding pens had been sabotaged by an unidentified person or group of people.

Now the bison are scattered across an area larger than Delaware and park officials have launched a criminal investigation to find out what happened.

“I didn’t believe it when I was first told,” says park bison biologist Rick Wallen.

Finding these animals won't be easy, he says, because there are thousands of bison in Yellowstone.

The only thing that sets the escaped animals apart is a tiny ear tag which can be hard to spot from long distances.

"Bison, in the winter time, are incredibly furry animals," says Warthin. "And so the fur, being so thick, covers up those tags. So it can be difficult to see the tag”

Before the bison went missing, Yellowstone park officials hoped to send them to nearby Fort Peck Indian reservation in Montana.

It was part of an effort to help the animals avoid what’s become an annual and controversial slaughter of bison in Yellowstone.

This slaughter is driven by fear.

Some ranchers in Montana worry if bison leave the park, they’ll infect cattle with a deadly disease called brucellosis. It can cause pregnant cows to abort their young.

While there’s never been a confirmed case of bison infecting cattle in the wild, ranching is big business in Big Sky country.

“There was a great deal of fear that brucellosis infection in wild bison would create an epidemic infection in the cattle of Montana,” Wallen says.

So under court order, Yellowstone is forced to ship bison to slaughter if herds get too big. But by creating a new herd on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, the park service hoped they could save some of those animals.

They quarantined 52 bulls in big fenced paddock for more a year to insure they were disease free.

But the state of Montana wasn't convinced the paddock could serve as an approved quarantine facility. So, the bison languished there until someone cut 'em loose.

Now they're back in the Park, hanging out with other wild buffalo. Yellowstone officials have to start from scratch.

“I think there's a sense of loss," Warthin says. "I mean, a lot of hard work was put into testing these animals and all that work, all that effort is gone.”

Now the question is who allowed these animals to escape. There are different theories, but park biologist Rick Wallen says he suspects animal rights activists could be involved.

“Folks that hate seeing wild bison contained in fenced facilities,” he says.

Folks like Chris Hurley, a coordinator with the Buffalo Field Campaign.

Hurley's got stringy, black hair, a beard and buffalo patch on his jacket with e. pluribus unum written underneath.

I meet him at the north entrance of Yellowstone. He claims his group had nothing to do with the animals' escape.

“Something like that from the campaign would be kind of detrimental to anything we’re trying to achieve,” he says. “We don’t... it would fall back on us in a hard way and we might lose a lot. So it’s not condoned. We don’t agree to those kind of things.”

That being said, he’s kind of happy someone cut the animals loose.

Hurley says all Yellowstone bison should roam free. Even if it means they could be taken by hunters along the park’s boundaries.

“If they were be shot at a firing line in Beatty Gulch as a wild animal that seems better than spending their lives in captivity,” he says, “Once their in that facility they will never be wild animals again. After years of domestication and being fed and being watered just to be shipped to end up on lands somewhere is just insulting to this... which is our national mammal.”

Park officials say they’ve spotted some of the missing bison more than five miles away from the holding pens. But, they don’t plan to round them up like cattle because they’re still wild animals.

They hope the bison return on their own.

### **Bison Activists Arrested After Incident At Yellowstone National Park**

By [NATE HEGYI](#) • MAR 7, 2018

The activists were arrested after trying to chain themselves to a corral where the bison are held.

They’re affiliated with the advocacy group Wild Buffalo Defense.

“They locked themselves to the equipment and they did it to stop the park from continuing the slaughter of the wild bison,” spokesperson Monty Greene says.

Hundreds of bison are rounded up outside the park every year. Many are slaughtered over concerns they could spread disease to cattle.

Saboteurs have released bison from the corrals twice in the past two months.

Both incidents are still under investigation.

Wild Buffalo Defense says they weren’t responsible for those earlier acts of vandalism.

The two bison activists who tried to chain themselves to the corrals were cited for interfering with agency functions. That’s a misdemeanor offense.

The activists will remain in jail until a hearing early next week.

### **USFWS Says Canada Lynx Are Ready To Be Delisted**

By [NATE HEGYI](#) • JAN 11, 2018

[The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service says](#) the Canada lynx may have recovered to the point where it could be delisted as a threatened species.

The elusive cat was listed as threatened nearly 20 years ago. But since then, Jennifer Strickland with the Fish and Wildlife Service says the federal government has done a good job of protecting and expanding Lynx-friendly habitat.

“A lot of the lynx’s population, especially here in the West, it’s all on public lands. So when our federal partners like the Forest Service and the BLM undertake conservation actions that benefit the lynx, that’s what we were looking at. And so that’s a big part of the good news today.”

Until final approval, the Canada lynx will remain on the threatened species list. It lives in northwestern Montana, northeastern Idaho, Wyoming and other states.

Some conservation organizations say it’s too soon to delist the lynx.

“I don’t think the threats to lynx have been taken care of,” says Arlene Montgomery, the program director for Friends of the Wild Swan in northwestern Montana. "In fact, I believe there are more threats since the lynx were listed in 2000.”

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service experts say climate change remains an important factor for the conservation of lynx, but it’s not enough to make the animals extinct.

### **Wilderness Advocates Plan To Fight Daines WSA Bill**

By [NATE HEGYI](#) • FEB 6, 2018

Montana Wilderness advocates are launching a campaign in opposition to a bill introduced by the state’s Republican Senator Steve Daines. If passed, that bill would eliminate protections for some federal lands in Montana.

A new coalition called “Our Land, Our Legacy” says it plans to fight against Daines’ bill with social media messages and an advertising campaign. It hopes to keep more than half-million acres in Montana designated as "Wilderness Study Areas," also

known as WSAs. That means the land is currently protected -- its closed to mining, logging and certain bicycle and motorized vehicle use.

John Todd, director of the Montana Wilderness Association, is a coalition member.

"This would represent the biggest rollback in protected public lands in Montana history," Todd says.

Senator Daines says its time to remove the protection status for the land because the federal government has taken more than 30 years to determine what to do with the wilderness areas. Daines says the future of the land has been in limbo for too long and it's time for Congress to act.

But members of Our Land, Our Legacy say that's the wrong approach.

Coalition member Dave Byerly is a Lewistown city commissioner.

"I like Steve Daines and I voted for him. But this WSA bill was a complete surprise and a real disappointment," Byerly says.

Lewistown sits at the foot of the Big Snowy Mountains, one of the Wilderness Study Areas targeted by Daines bill. □ The measure could also impact other WSA's including Blue Joint and Sapphire south and east of Hamilton, the Middle Fork Judith south of Stanford and the West Pioneer east of Wisdom.

"I'm pretty plugged into the community, and there has been no public issue with the Snowies being managed as a Wilderness. No public concerns have been expressed."

Byerly says Daines hasn't held any public meetings in the state to explain his legislation and to accept comment from his constituents.

The □ bill has received support from some county commissioners, hunting groups, and trail bike enthusiasts.



Daines is scheduled to promote his bill during its first hearing in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on Wednesday.

### **Bills Would Ease Protections For Some Public Lands In Montana**

By NATE HEGYI • MAR 2, 2018

*Bill Would Ease Protections For Some Public Lands In Montana*

Life's been tough on Chris Marchion. There was the high school football injury and the knee replacement.

“Unfortunately I got a hip that's wore out,” he says.

We're standing alongside a gravel road near a cow pasture. Nowadays, this is about as close as Marchion can get to the Sapphire Wilderness Study Area. It's a clump of rolling, grey mountains in the distance.

Marchion grew up in a nearby mining town. He says back then the Sapphires were an escape.

“If you think about being confined in a mine or in a smelter, on your day off to be out somewhere where there's blue sky, and trees, and clean water, it meant a lot,” he says.

But nowadays, Marchion believes the Sapphire Wilderness Study Area is in trouble.

There's legislation moving through Congress that would strip away protections for it and some other Wilderness Study Areas in Montana.

These are vast tracts of federal land that are protected that are under review by Congress for potential wilderness designation. It's the ultimate protection for public lands. No logging, mining or motorized vehicles.

There are hundreds of Wilderness Study Areas scattered across the Mountain West.

If passed, this bill would open some of those lands in Montana to more motorized vehicles and even potential mining.

U.S. Senator Steve Daines, a Republican from Montana, introduced the legislation and says it's long overdue. Reviews of these lands happened decades ago, according to Daines, but Congress never took action.

"What we're doing here is pretty common sense," he says. "We're just looking at those areas that were deemed not suitable for wilderness and releasing those."

At an ATV store in Phillipsburg, Montana, I meet up with Stan Spencer. He's a snowmobiler.

"I've been riding in the backcountry since the early '80s," he says. "I hate to admit it but I am 74 years old and I still enjoy getting back out there. That's my thing."

But he says he can't snowmobile in many Wilderness Study Areas because many are managed like de facto wilderness. So he's really happy about Daines' legislation.

"I feel he took the bull by the horns and said we need to make a decision," he says.

Still, conservationists are frustrated Senator Daines never held public meetings before introducing his legislation. Plus, it eliminates study areas without creating new wilderness.

Paul Spitler is with the Wilderness Society, a conservation group.

He says one-sided legislation like this has never passed Congress.

“They generally receive a lot of public opposition,” he says.

There’s some history to back that up. A similar Wyoming bill never made it to the president’s desk, while Idaho took a more balanced approach that did.

“It was a collaborative effort between ranchers, conservation interests, county commissioners, and others,” Spitler says. “They sat down and ultimately reached an agreement. Some of these areas would be designated as Wilderness, some of these areas would be removed from Wilderness Study Area status and everyone came out ahead.”

But the current legislation won’t create any new wilderness. Daines counters that’s because it’s about restoring balance.

He says Congress has only eliminated 150,000 acres worth of Wilderness Study Areas in Montana. At the same, he says, it’s created more than a million acres of new wilderness there.

“It seems like it’s a kind of one-sided,” he says. “It’s like we are only adding wilderness in our state. I’ve supported that. I’m just saying if you listen to the tens of thousands of Montanans who are very concerned that the state is getting out of balance.”

Back at the edge of the Sapphire Wilderness Study Area, Chris Marchion is watching a herd of elk move across a valley.

He’s 65 years old and he hopes these lands will remain protected.

“I can’t do as many things as I used to,” he says. “Some of these areas I’ll never go back and see as much as I did when I was younger. But the fact to be out there and to know they still exist and that other people can go have the experiences I had. that’s really important.”

There are hundreds of these Wilderness Study Areas scattered across the Mountain West. Daines' legislation on cutting them back in Montana is moving through the Senate.

The state's lone congressman, Republican Greg Gianforte, just introduced companion legislation in the House.

### **Some Forests Aren't Growing Back After Wildfires, Says New Study**

By [NATE HEGYI](#) • MAR 16, 2018

*Some Forests Aren't Growing Back After Wildfires, Says New Study*

I'm marching through a stand of blackened, towering pine trees with fire ecologist Philip Higuera. He stops and sniffs the air.

“We can smell the charcoal here,” he says. “You smell that?”

Higuera is a low-key guy with a trimmed beard and sporty sunglasses. But when I ask him whether the massive wildfire that raced across Lolo Peak in Montana last summer was bad, he corrects my choice of words.

“It was 'bad' if your house got burned in it. It was 'bad' if you were breathing in a lot of smoke and it inconvenienced you. But for the forest itself it just was,” he says.

According to Higuera, wildfires are a natural and needed part of the environment out West. They act as reset button, killing big old trees and allowing new ones to grow in their place.

But according to a [new study](#) published in the journal *Ecology Letters*, fewer trees are growing back after wildfires in the Mountain West. Higuera blames hotter and drier summers.

“The more we turn up temperature and turn down precipitation, the harder it’s going to be for trees,” he says.

Higuera works for the University of Montana. He co-authored the study. It looked at more than a thousand burn sites spanning three decades across Colorado, Wyoming, Montana and Idaho.

## **Politics/Government:**

Montana GOP senate candidates face off in first primary debate – March 23, 2018

Stay energized attendees to partisan events told: Biden and Clarke headline political fundraisers – March 11, 2018

Gianforte: make schools safer, “Provided it doesn’t negatively impact 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment” – March 9, 2018

Kier says on health care he won’t make promises he can’t keep – March 5, 2018

Bullock hopeful after Florida shooting, no more “There goes another one. Let’s move on” – March 1, 2018

Montana communities receive state funding for community-bases suicide detection and prevention programs – Feb 28, 2018

Billings manufacturer plans for capital improvements, cites federal tax cut – Feb 26, 2018

Campaign 2018: windshield time with Montana’s Congressional candidates – Feb 26, 2018

Political consultant says it’s time to take on corporate interests – Feb 21, 2018

Billings West High students welcome U.S. House candidate Kathleen Williams – Feb 20, 2018

Campaign consultant who helped Democratic upset in Alabama joins Heenan campaign – Feb 14, 2018

Federal judge upholds Montana ban on political robo-calls – Feb 13, 2018

Community health centers call on Congress to restore funding – Feb 6, 2018

Tester working to capture energy from Women’s March and #MeToo Movement – Feb 5, 2018

2018 Women’s March urges participants to “run for something..” – Jan 9, 2018

## **Cultural issues (discrimination, civility)**

Civil rights committee looks into allegations of bias from law enforcement and criminal justice system – March 28, 2018

Public hearing on border town racism scheduled next to Crow Reservation – March 21, 2018

Hospital cultural liason helps breaks down barriers so healing can take place – Jan 28, 2018

Civil rights strategist offers tools to defuse hate speech – Jan 12, 2018