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#IOwnIt

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#IOWNIT

By

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B.F.A, Northern Michigan University, Marquette, MI, 2016

Thesis

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Journalism

#IOwnIt

Chairperson: Elizabeth Dove

Abstract Content:

Throughout the United States and particularly the West, public lands make up a large portion of land area and are a vital, reusable, renewable resource that anyone can use. This body of work provides a visual representation of public land users. I'm looking at different user groups representing different activities, ages, genders, and geographic locations. My goal for this work is to make a visual impact on the public's perspective of how these lands are use, and the people who use them.

All of these public land users have one thing in common: a sense of responsibility for the land, for the benefit of current *and* future generations. This sense of responsibility creates a broad community I'm tapping into with this project. Including the hashtag "I own it" in this photo campaign indicates that the person using this hashtag on social media fully recognizes and embraces the responsibilities that come with these lands. Additionally, instead of strictly using more traditional ways to publicize my work, I am using Instagram to broadcast this project out to a much larger audience than traditional distribution permits.

Congratulations, you own 640 million acres of prairies, mountains, deserts, plains, rivers, and lakes. You might be thinking: I don't know what you're talking about, I don't even own a home let alone land. But that's where you are wrong. If you live in the United States, you and everyone in the country owns this land. You are a public land owner. So, own it.

Throughout the United States and particularly the West, public lands make up a large portion of land area and are a vital, reusable, renewable resource that anyone can use. This body of work provides a visual representation of public land users. I'm looking at different user groups representing different activities, ages, genders, and geographic locations. My goal for this work is to make a visual impact on the public's perspective of how these lands are use, and the people who use them.

All of these public land users have one thing in common: a sense of responsibility for the land, for the benefit of current *and* future generations. This sense of responsibility creates a broad community I'm tapping into with this project. Including the hashtag "I own it" in this photo campaign indicates that the person using this hashtag on social media fully recognizes and embraces the responsibilities that come with these lands. Additionally, instead of strictly using more traditional ways to publicize my work, I am using Instagram to broadcast this project out to a much larger audience than traditional distribution permits.

Most people don't understand that we have a vast amount of public land that is open to public to use in a variety of forms. The first public lands were established in 1781 when New York agreed to surrender to the federal government unsettled territory west of the Mississippi River. The other colonies followed New York's example and everything from the Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi river became public land controlled by the federal government. The United States was the first country to have protected public lands. A few of the Commonwealth

countries such as New Zealand, Australia, and Canada have the equivalent of public lands called “Crown Lands”.

Over time, two-third of the original 1.8 billion acres of public land was transferred to state control or sold to individuals and corporations for a variety of reasons. The majority of the public lands were transferred out of the public domain through land grants to states and to military veterans. The military granted over 61 million acres west of the Appalachian Mountains to veterans of the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. To encourage settlement, federal lands were given as incentives to move West and develop. Land grants were given to new states as they came to be states and were based on the size of the state.

At the beginning of the 1900’s public land disposal policy changed and shifted to protecting the remaining public land. That same mindset lingers in today's society, we are even trying to add more lands when possible, but most importantly protecting what we have for all users to enjoy, and for all of the future public land users that aren’t even born yet. One of the largest risks currently to public lands is the development and selling of state lands, or switching federally controlled lands to state-controlled lands, which carries risks. This switching of federal lands to state means that they can be sold-off by the state, or more easily opened to development. State rules revert to what the state trust land originally specified at the time of conception of public lands. State trust lands that were for-profit often historically had schools or other state-sanctioned buildings on them. Now these states with budgetary constraints can view public lands as an easy and quick way to sell to private companies to raise capital. Another reason to oppose transfer to state control are the inconsistent regulations between how states manage their lands. For example, in Colorado you can't: hike, fish, hunt, or camp on state trust lands, essentially eliminating all use of the public lands. In New Mexico, you can hunt, fish, and hike on them, but

you can't camp, thereby eliminating user groups. These are just a small portion of the large issues that we are facing currently with public lands.

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My hope for this project is to help raise awareness and knowledge about these lands through photographing many different and diverse people using their lands all across the country. These photographs show these lands as having a different value than just monetary, and are worth protecting. Rather than chase the quick dollar, protect and cherish these lands for future generations. As Teddy Roosevelt once said, "These lands belong to those yet in the womb of time."

I earned my Bachelors of Fine Arts in Photography from Northern Michigan University in Marquette, MI, concentrating on commercial photography.

At Northern Michigan University, we took yearlong courses on studio lighting in both portrait and product. The most influential class that I took was simply called Studio Lighting. This class taught me how to properly use studio lighting kits to illuminate people and products to create a commercial quality image. I used travel kits for on-location shoots, and we had a state-of-the-art studio on campus with everything needed for commercial photography. This course developed my love for commercial photography. Simultaneously I started working with a wedding photographer which sparked my interest in portraits capturing emotions in a photo for a lifetime.

¹ America's Public Lands: Origin, History, Future." Public Lands Foundation. December 2014. Accessed May 30, 2018. https://publicland.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/150359_Public_Lands_Document_web.pdf.

Being trained to utilize lighting equipment, staging, and working in a lighting studio to photograph products for commercial use was extremely helpful for this project.

As an undergrad, I created a series of images for my senior show called "Overwhelmed." The premise behind this series was to convey how the feeling of being overwhelmed can seem like you are drowning. To communicate this, I built a giant shadow box that was 3 feet by 5 feet and painted all black. A viewer had to look down into a box to see the photo. When you looked into the box you saw a person laying lifeless and nude in dark water. I was thinking a lot about how you view people in caskets and how uncomfortable it makes one feel to look down on person in a box. I played off that so people could truly get the perspective of being overwhelmed.



Overwhelmed - Small boxes, Maggie Hamilton, Marquette, MI. Fall 2015.



Overwhelmed, Maggie Hamilton, Marquette, MI. Spring 2016.

Another series that I worked on in my undergraduate career was called “Scars”, a portrait of individuals revealing their unique scars. Scars are like fingerprints, no two are the same, and everyone’s skin reacts differently. This was a project of portraits of people without showing their faces, using their bodies as unique to their experiences instead.



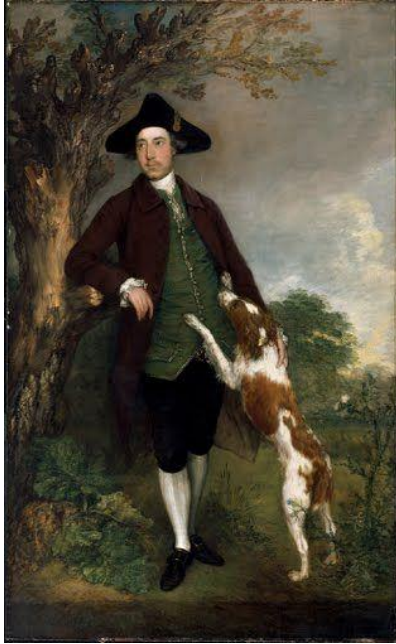
Scars, Maggie Hamilton, Marquette, MI. Spring 2015.

Attending University of Montana for grad school pushed me as an artist. I looked at my art differently and tried new techniques. I struggled my first year, making a lot of experimental art to try and figure for what I was yearning to do. To extend my undergraduate work I continued with water, and the idea of water being cleansing and baptismal. I filled a fish tank with water and added bath products, such as bath bombs, foaming soap, and shaving cream. I photographed the reaction of the water and the cleansing product. I lit the tank on each end with a softbox as a way to include studio lighting.

Over time I realized that I missed the commercial aspect of my work, and more specifically studio lighting. Once I figured this out I also realized that it may be time to switch goals, and I decided to pursue to my Masters of Arts rather than a Master of Fine Arts. Once I came to the conclusion that this was the right decision for me in school and for my career path the ideas started to flow again. I again felt comfortable in what I was shooting, and I developed the #IOwnIt project.

My influences include master photographers as well as pre-photographic portrait paintings. In the 18th century Thomas Gainsborough painted wealthy private landowners in the countryside in Europe. This work was made to document the people and families at that time, much like having a photograph would today. This work is very interesting because of the similarities between my work and Gainsborough's. I knew of Gainsborough's work only because both of my grandparents had copies of portraits like "The Blue Boy" hanging on the walls of their homes, but otherwise I never studied his paintings until the similarities were brought to my attention. Gainsborough and I both scaled our sitters to take up most of the composition, standing frontal to the viewer, while also keeping in mind the rule of thirds, and keeping the subjects in the middle third. The sitter in his paintings seems to be brighter than the background.

Gainsborough also used a similar depth of field in his works as I do, with the sitter in focus and greatly detailed, but not as much detail in the background. To a contemporary observer, “this depth of field” really give his paintings a photographic feel, even though they pre-dated the discovery of photography.



George, Lord Vernon, 1767. Gainsborough²



Upland Hunter, 2018. Hamilton

August Sanders’ documentary portrait work of German citizens: “Face of Our Time” became a catalog of the German people in the early 20th century. “Sander sought to create a record of social types, classes and the relationships between them, and recognized that the display of his portraits as a collection revealed so much more than the individual images would alone.

² "OIL PAINTING: George, Lord Vernon, 1767." All Art Classic. Accessed June 1, 2018. https://www.allartclassic.com/pictures_zoom.php?p_number=47&p=&number=GAT011.

So powerful was this record, the photographic plates were destroyed and the book was banned soon after the Nazis came into power four years later.”³

Sanders work stood out to me because of the use of photographic typology. “By definition, a typology is an assemblage based on a shared attribute. Patterns, both visual and intellectual, resonate and reveal themselves within collections. Information not apparent in isolation becomes visible in context-only through studying groupings are we able to discern similarities and contrasts. In observing collections of similar things, the beautiful variations become evident. And the closer you look, the more you see.”⁴. Photographers use typology to show similarities or differences, to compare and contrast the objects or people in the works.



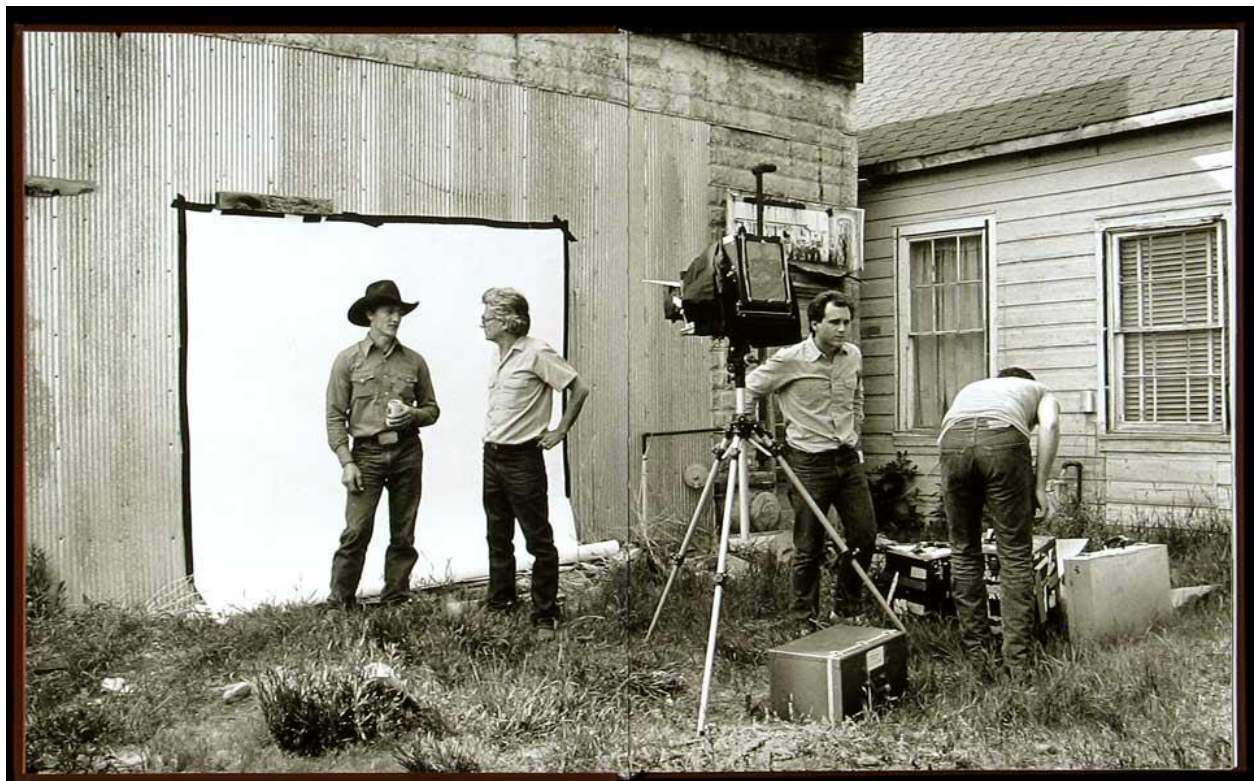
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³ Beth, Evan Chapman, Natalie Tyler, and Redbubble. "Photographic Typologies: The Study of Types » Redbubble Blog." Redbubble Blog. May 30, 2013. Accessed June 1, 2018. <https://blog.redbubble.com/2012/04/photographic-typologies-the-study-of-types/>.

⁴ Ziatanovski, Diana. "Typology Photography." *Typology*, 2018, thetypology.com/ABOUT-THE-TYOLOGY.

⁵ "Face of Our Time." Sander, August. Redbubble Blog. May 30, 2013. Accessed June 1, 2018. <https://blog.redbubble.com/2012/04/photographic-typologies-the-study-of-types/>.

Richard Avedon was an American commercial fashion photographer who used his commercial skills to take portraits in the West and create his famous work “In The American West”. This work was of the people, the “locals” who lived in the areas he visited. Unlike my approach to working in the field, Avedon shot his sitters in a controlled environment on a white background that he brought with him. All of his images were shot in black and white. His work utilized the strategy of a typology, and was printed large. This really inspired my work, as seeing a photo of a person printed almost life-sized makes such an impact. You can see Avedon’s commercial background emerge in this portrait series in many ways through his used of light, the clean, controlled backdrop, and his posing.



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⁶ "Richard Avedon At Work." TMI Photography. 2017. Accessed June 1, 2018. <https://www.tmi-photo.com/class-blog/richard-avedon-at-work>.

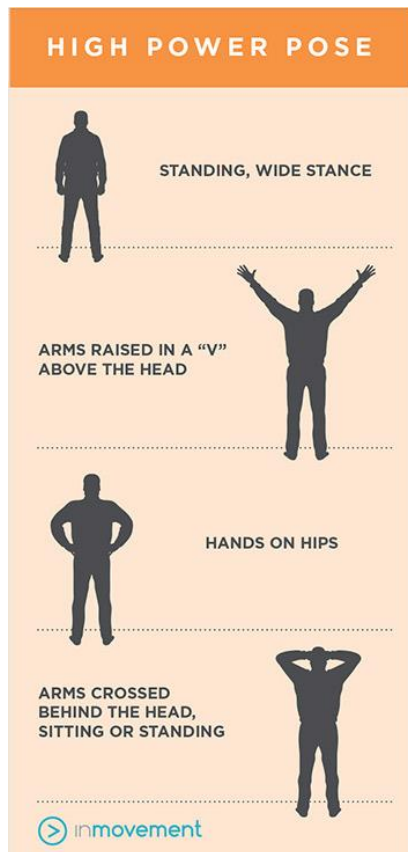


“#IOwnIt” installation at OnX Maps, Missoula, MT. April 2018.



Installed pieces are 30”x50” directly printed on aluminum.

I shot in California, Montana, Michigan, and Florida. The sitters are people from every walk of life who use public lands. I chose to photograph my sitters on the public lands they loved and use for their favorite activities. I asked the model to bring whatever gear that they would need to use the public land in the way they typically do, whether it is a wetsuit and a surfboard or a crossbow and camo. When talking to the model before the shoot I started to plan poses in my head. If I did not know much about the sport I did research on the activity and the poses other photographers use with models, but I always made sure that every pose was within the ‘power pose’ category. A power pose is a stance that says “I’m confident”. They are frontal, tall, and open.



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Bow Hunter, 2018. Hamilton

⁷ Beckstedt, Lauren. "MOVEMENT INCREASES CONFIDENCE." In Movement. August 26, 2017. Accessed June 1, 2018. <https://www.inmovement.com/en/inmovement-blog/2015/august/power-poses>.

A lot of outdoor magazines only show men using our public lands, and primarily youthful Caucasian men. For this campaign, I wanted to really show the broader truth, I wanted to show that everyone uses public lands. I included women, children, and senior citizens. Additionally, the surfer's father immigrated from Lebanon, the sledder's father was adopted from Korea, and the outdoorsman is Hispanic, and half of my subjects are woman.



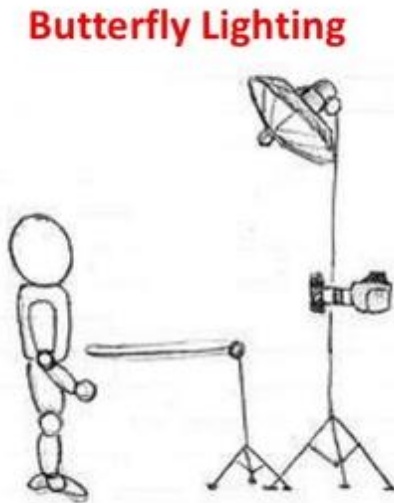
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I used strobe lights over the natural light for the control that it gave me, along with the ability to create depth within the image. The specific lighting set up I used is referred to as “butterfly lighting”. This lighting is created by using a strobe with a large softbox attachment,

⁸ "Field and Stream." Field & Stream. Accessed June 1, 2018. <https://www.fieldandstream.com/>.
 "Outdoor Life." Outdoor Life. Accessed June 1, 2018. <https://www.outdoorlife.com>.
 "Outside Online." Outside Online. Accessed June 1, 2018. <https://www.outsideonline.com/>.

that is then put onto a stand and hoisted above the model with the softbox angled down. Classically there is also a reflector under the model's face to bounce light up under the chin. This lighting setup creates a butterfly-shaped shadow under the model's nose, which is what gives the lighting the name. I altered this slightly and removed the use of the reflector to keep the shadow under the models chin to take away from the idea of a "glamor shot" that is usually associated with the use of butterfly lighting.

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Ecologist, 2018. Hamilton

⁹ "Butterfly Lighting." MVHS PHOTOGRAPHY. Accessed June 1, 2018. <https://www.mvhsphotography.com/butterfly-lighting.html>.

I added a second strobe behind the model, but facing toward the model, with just a reflector attachment. This light provides a subtle glowing outline around the model but the light fixture itself remains hidden from view.



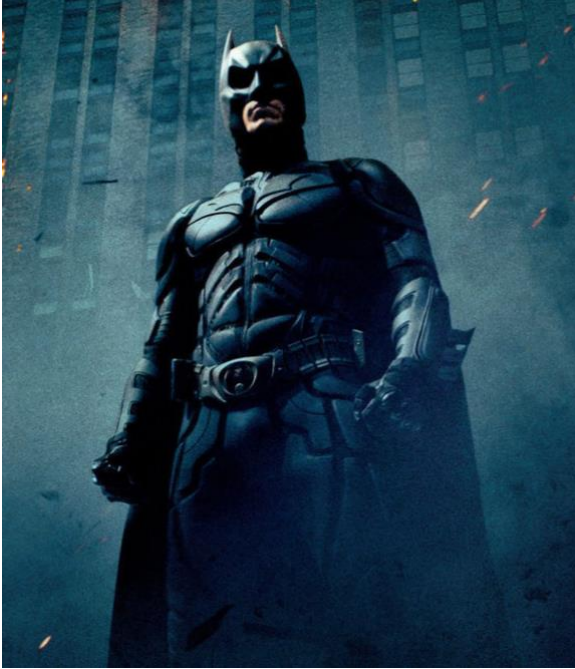
¹⁰



Science Illustrator, 2018. Hamilton

These lighting choices, along with the low angle from which I am shooting, provides a “heroic” type feeling to the image.

¹⁰ Bill, Brock. *#IOwnIt Portrait Setup*. February 3, 2018. California.



Outdoor Enthusiast, 2018. Hamilton

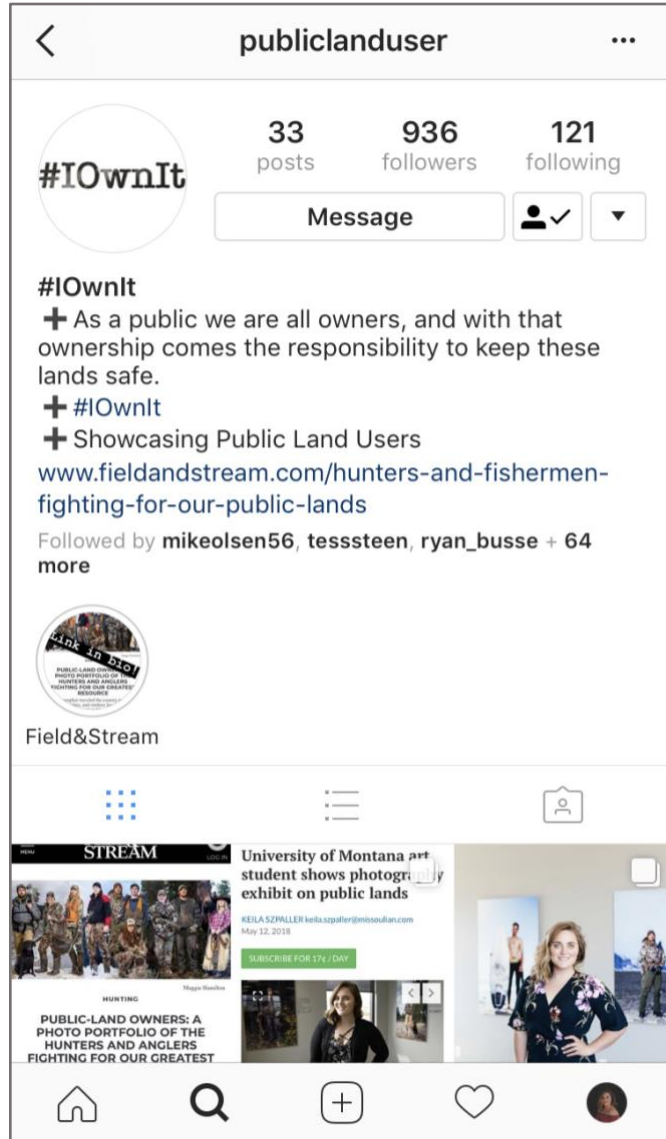
I shot all of these images with my DSLR camera and chose to keep them in color to keep the images true to the land, which is also why I chose to print the images so large. The images are not heavily adjusted in post-production.

Using the hashtag “#IOwnIt” allows people to claim their ownership of these lands and tell the world that “I am a public land owner”. We all are. Using this hashtag also suggests that they understand the responsibilities that come with the ownership. Some responsibilities are to fight to keep our lands public, to leave no trace, and to pick up after others who may not want to accept the responsibilities as an owner. These activities are advocacy and add up to keeping our lands, and the animals who call them home, healthy and there for our future generations to experience.

¹¹ "The Dark Knight (2008)." IMDb. Accessed June 1, 2018. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0468569/>.

I worked on a variety of public lands since each model selected their favorite location for our photo shoot. This was always fun and informative, allowing me to experience new public lands that I haven't seen or hadn't known about. Our public lands are important and vital to keeping our nation healthy. Individuals can participate in advocacy for public lands by researching and supporting the work of groups such as Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, Ducks Unlimited, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation who each work to keep our lands open to the public and the habitats for so many animals healthy.

I have chosen to use social media, particularly Instagram, as my exhibition and promotional space for this work as it provides me with a very large platform and audience. I've also included the "hashtag" #IOwnIt in this campaign. Hashtags work by allowing people to search that particular word or phrase just by clicking on it. When clicked on, the app redirects you to a page that contains nothing but posts that include that hashtag. This builds a community of self-selected, interested parties. I didn't initiate the hashtag #IOwnIt. In fact, when I first started this project "#IOwnIt" was nothing but very materialistic posts by people showing off and bragging about the expensive things they owned: cars, designer clothing, and homes. Now, almost 5 months into the project, when you click on this hashtag you'll find that there are more posts about using our public lands. Using social media provides more viewership than just having my work in a gallery. It combines advocacy and exhibitions, policy and aesthetics, and is participatory. It is less hierarchical than traditional gallery or museum experiences which can be elitist and often seem to require an art history education to engage.



@publiclanduser, Hamilton's thesis "#IOwnIt" Instagram page.

This expanse of viewers spreads the message that I'm trying to get out with this project. Which is, we are all owners of public lands, we use them more than you think. Everybody uses public land whether they know it or not. They vary in size and scope but they all have one thing in common. We all own them, we all should protect them, and we should all do our best to keep them here for future generations. My photographic project is a contribution to this effort to protect and preserve these vital national resources.

