



WYOMING OUTDOOR COUNCIL FALL 2003

FRONTLINE

R E P O R T

WHITE HOUSE TASK FORCE COMMANDEERS THE COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY



Anne Austin

by Tom Darin

In an administration so closely linked to the oil and gas industry, it's no surprise that the Interior Department's drill-at-all-cost energy policies pose serious environmental threats to millions of acres of public lands in Wyoming. After all, big oil helped put this administration in power, and it's no secret that this industry dominated closed-door meetings on — and even helped write — Vice-President Cheney's National Energy Policy.

It's quite another matter, however, when these pro-drilling, anti-multiple-use mandates permeate the Executive Branch's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), whose sole responsibility is to safeguard our nation's environment.

In 1970, Congress passed landmark legislation entitled the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA's goals are "to declare a national policy which will encourage productive and enjoyable harmony between man and his environment; to promote efforts which will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment and biosphere and stimulate the

health and welfare of man; to enrich the understanding of the ecological systems and natural resources important to the Nation; and to establish a Council on Environmental Quality." These words, 33 years later, are still awe-inspiring.

The charter of the CEQ, rooted within the Office of the President, is "to be conscious of and responsive to the scientific, economic, social, aesthetic, and cultural needs and interests of the Nation; and to formulate and recommend national policies to promote the improvement of the quality of the environment."

CEQ Now Promotes Destructive Development

With the stroke of a pen, the administration has virtually rewritten the CEQ's charter and purpose. First, President Bush signed an executive order creating an interagency task force to "accelerate the completion of *continued on page 3*

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Wyoming's Future is Up For Grabs

Quietly, and largely behind closed doors, top Bush Administration officials and executives from the oil and gas industry are mapping out Wyoming's future. And our state's political leadership seems to be in complete agreement or, lacking an alternative vision, is content to go along for the ride.

Policies and plans crafted in Washington, D.C. envision doubling, or perhaps tripling, natural gas production from the Rocky Mountain West, under streamlined procedures and fewer environmental safeguards. The ultimate consequence will be the conversion of vast expanses of Wyoming's landscape into industrial sacrifice zones.

In addition to the 51,000 oil and gas wells recently approved for the Powder River Basin, tens of thousands of new gas and oil wells and associated roads, power lines, pipelines and the usual maze of industrial facilities, are on the drawing boards. No area of the state is spared, with the possible exception of Teton County, vacation home of Dick Cheney who, ironically, is leading the charge for the industrialization of Wyoming.

Whether you embrace this future for Wyoming or, conversely, have reservations about it, depends largely on your perspective. If you believe that our state's greatest value is serving as the nation's energy colony (industry officials use the phrase, "the Saudi Arabia of North America," or sometimes "the BTU capital of America"), you will naturally support the administration's plans. On the other hand, if your connection to Wyoming is rooted in unspoiled open space, clean water, clear skies and abundant wildlife, or if your livelihood depends on the health and productivity of the land for agriculture and livestock production, you should be alarmed.

Consider, for example, the Upper Green River Valley, a once-bucolic area now experiencing significant new growth. Internal Bureau of Land Management email correspondence leaked to WOC reveals that the agency is planning to evaluate the effects of adding up to 3,100 new "infill" wells to the Jonah Field's 500 existing wells. According to the email, this level of development could necessitate closing the 30,000-acre field to public

access, including hunting, due to air quality and other public health and safety concerns. The same email suggests that in Sublette County's first coalbed methane (CBM) project, called South Piney, the number of wells originally proposed may double, to 420.

The Pinedale Anticline Project, west of Pinedale, is on track to grow to 1,000 or more wells by 2015. While these projects go forward, the BLM is revising its Pinedale Resource Management Plan to allow for 10,000 new oil and gas wells. To top it off, the BLM has already leased 90% of the planning area to oil and gas companies, thereby ensuring that energy development will become the dominant use of the public lands in the Upper Green River Valley, multiple-use requirements notwithstanding.

In the starkly beautiful Red Desert, the BLM is moving ahead with proposals to drill thousands of new oil, conventional gas and CBM wells, with little understanding of, or concern about, the environmental consequences. An outpouring of public support for protecting the Red Desert – more than 65,000 individual comments from across America – appears to have fallen on deaf ears. Revisions to the BLM's Resource Management Plans covering this area (being fast-tracked by the Bush Administration) call for significant increases in both conventional gas and CBM drilling. Thousands of miles of new roads, pipelines and power lines will be constructed to support this level of development.

It's time for Wyoming to make some tough choices: the Saudi Arabia of America or open space, clear skies, abundant wildlife and sustainable economies. Those presently in control have already decided Wyoming's future. Fortunately, if this is not your vision, there's still time to act. Voice your concerns to Vice-President Cheney, Senators Enzi and Thomas and Representative Cubin, the governor and state and local officials, and vote for candidates who share your vision of a healthy, sustainable future for Wyoming.



Established in 1967, the Wyoming Outdoor Council (WOC) is the state's oldest and largest independent statewide conservation organization. Our mission is to protect and enhance Wyoming's environment by educating and involving citizens and advocating environmentally sound public policies and decisions.

Frontline Report is the quarterly newsletter of WOC and is provided as a benefit of membership. Letters to the editor and articles by members are welcome. For more information contact: WOC, 262 Lincoln, Lander, WY 82520; (307) 332-7031 (phone), (307) 332-6899 (fax), woc@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

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Environmental Quality *continued from page 1*

energy related projects" and to "increase energy production." Revealing the administration's true colors, the task force, called the White House Task Force on Energy

WOC was part of a broad coalition that challenged the RMEC's secret meetings and the administration's calculated misuse of the CEQ to champion increased energy production on our public lands.

Project Streamlining, is chaired by the CEQ and, further, housed within the Department of Energy. Given its mission and purpose, charging the CEQ with "streamlining" already rampant and environmentally destructive oil and gas projects in the West, especially in Wyoming, is akin to taking medical supplies away from Peace Corps workers and replacing them with AK-47s.

The Rocky Mountain Energy Council

The latest move by the Task Force is the creation of the Rocky Mountain Energy Council (RMEC). The group has one primary goal: to "reduce the conflict, uncertainty, and time involved in making decisions" related to energy projects and further, to "streamline" the permitting system to make oil and gas drilling "more predictable." Of course, the RMEC is careful to state other goals that promise public involvement and conservation, but if the administration's actions over the past two years provide any clues, these statements merely pay lip service to the public's interest and our nation's environment. The RMEC is clearly the administration's latest effort to rubber-stamp approval of oil and gas projects in the Rockies by reducing public scrutiny and involvement and eliminating or severely eroding environmental protections.

A Halt to Secret Meetings

The RMEC held its first meeting, behind closed doors, in early July. WOC was part of a broad coalition that challenged the secret nature of these meetings and the administration's calculated misuse of the CEQ to champion increased energy production on our public lands.

We succeeded in our demand that the RMEC's next meeting, in August, be open to the public and include personal invitations to interested stakeholders like WOC to attend and speak. You can be sure that we'll continue to insist on public participation in future meetings of the RMEC and press the CEQ to live up to its 33-year-old charter: promoting the improvement of our environment. ▶

WOC Appeals Powder River Basin CBM Decision

Wyoming Federal Court Reverses Interior Dept. Ruling

by Tom Darin

In June, Wyoming Federal District Judge Clarence Brimmer handed down a decision that poses a potentially significant setback to our fight for responsible coalbed methane (CBM) development. Judge Brimmer's decision reverses a WOC victory secured after a two-year battle and two favorable decisions by the Department of Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA).

At issue in the case are three lease parcels in the Powder River Basin that Pennaco Energy purchased in 2000 to use for CBM extraction. In an extensive legal proceeding before IBLA, WOC proved what we had been contending for some time: the Bureau of Land Management's environmental study for oil and gas leasing in the basin, completed in 1985, failed to consider CBM or any of its unique water or air impacts. IBLA agreed with WOC, ruling in April 2002 that leases to be used for CBM extraction were sold illegally without the proper environmental studies in place to justify their sale.

In June 2002, Pennaco challenged IBLA's final ruling in Wyoming federal court. In March 2003, after filing comprehensive legal briefs, we argued our case before Judge Brimmer. In June, the judge reversed IBLA's decision, ruling that the BLM could splice together studies from different environmental analyses to allow lease sales for CBM extraction.

The BLM's 1985 study considered a no-leasing alternative and stipulations to protect wildlife and clean air and water from the effects of conventional oil and gas drilling, but failed to consider any of CBM's unique environmental impacts. The one BLM study that did consider CBM impacts – a 1999 document for the Basin's Wyodak oil and gas development project – failed to address whether or not CBM leases should be sold and, if so, whether they should contain stipulations to protect other natural resources.

Nevertheless, Judge Brimmer ruled that these studies could be used together, even though they are separate documents, addressed fundamentally different issues and were completed 14 years apart.

Because of its environmental significance and the national precedent this case will set for the BLM's oil and gas leasing program, WOC and co-counsel Earthjustice have filed an appeal with the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals, seeking to overturn the Wyoming court's decision. ▶

Judge Brimmer's decision poses a potentially significant setback to our fight for responsible coalbed methane development.

Citizens Support Protecting Great Divide Basin

94% of Public Comments Favor Conservation over Development

by Tova Woyciechowicz

The Great Divide Basin within the Red Desert contains special jewels like Adobe Town, the Haystacks, Powder Rim, Wild Cow Creek and the Ferris, Pedro and Bennett Mountains. It also harbors large reserves of oil, conventional natural gas and coalbed methane gas.

The Bureau of Land Management is now revising its outdated management plan for the basin. The agency received an impressive 10,496 public comments during the scoping process for its Rawlins Resource Management Plan, which is expected to allow the development of approximately 5,000 coalbed methane wells and 5,000 oil and gas wells in the basin.

An overwhelming majority of comments to the BLM voiced a desire for conservation of the area's natural values. Fully 94% of respondents supported adoption of the citizens' Western Heritage Alternative, which envisions a landscape where well-planned energy development is compatible with wildlife and public recreation. The proposal was developed by WOC, Biodiversity Conservation Alliance, the National Wildlife Federation, the Wyoming Wildlife Federation, the Wilderness Society, the Wyoming Wilderness

Association, the Center for Native Ecosystems and the Sierra Club.

More than 10,000 public comments favored protection of wildlife and their habitat and expansion of the basin's Wilderness Study Areas, and nearly 6,000 comments advocated the use of directional drilling techniques for oil and gas development. Only 43 comments, most of which came from energy companies that stand to profit from drilling activities, pressed for extensive oil and gas development.

The BLM's Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Resource Management Plan, which will incorporate the public comments it received, should be released this winter.

In the meantime, WOC is working to mobilize concerned citizens into a grassroots campaign to protect the basin, presenting slide shows and distributing educational materials at public events around Wyoming, leading outings to the basin's special places and working with Biodiversity Conservation Alliance to prevent drilling threats to Adobe Town. ▶

Interested in getting involved? Contact tova@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org or (307) 332-7031, ext. 15.

Freudenthal Weighs in on the Red Desert

Governor Urges Greater Protection for Natural & Cultural Resources

By Tova Woyciechowicz

Governor Freudenthal's recent comments on the Jack Morrow Hills Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement present a strong case for changing the Bureau of Land Management's development plans for the Red Desert.

In his letter to the BLM, the governor wrote that he favors a "greater emphasis on conservation than what lies in the current plan." Specifically, he advocated enhanced protection of Native American holy sites, stressing the importance of consulting tribal elders regarding management decisions and reflecting a greater sensitivity to tribal concerns than that exhibited in the BLM's draft plan.

Governor Freudenthal also recommended that the agency investigate the feasibility of oil and gas lease buy-outs in cases where leases should be suspended in culturally or environmentally sensitive areas. WOC has long advocated this solution to the challenge of dealing with existing leases in sensitive areas, but until the governor weighed in on this issue, our proposal had been ignored by government and industry officials.

In addition, the governor urged the BLM to better address development's cumulative impacts, noting that "consideration must be given to the relative values of the resources and not necessarily the combination of uses that will give the greatest economic return."

Finally, Governor Freudenthal urged the BLM to focus greater emphasis on the Red Desert's wildlife, particularly sensitive species like the mountain plover. He expressed his support for the agency's "Alternative Three," which recommends the expansion of three "areas of critical environmental concern" (ACECs), the creation of one new ACEC and the designation of a new Wildlife Study Area.

While the governor stopped short of endorsing the Citizens' Wildlife and Wildlands Alternative, which bars additional oil and gas development in the Jack Morrow Hills, we commend him for advocating more protections for the Red Desert's unique natural and cultural values. ▶

Tribal Members Run to Honor Red Desert Sacred Sites

Photos: Tova Woyciechowicz

by Tova Woyciechowicz

On September 28, about 25 Eagle Staff Runners Association members ran more than 100 collective miles to pay respect to their ancestral heritage in the Red Desert, threatened by unprecedented levels of oil and gas development. The Eagle Staff Runners is a group of Shoshone and Arapaho youths that regularly takes part in a tradition of spiritual runs and camps to honor their ancestors.

According to group member Jason Baldes, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has failed to properly consider the tribes' cultural sites in the agency's proposal to permit thousands of new oil, conventional gas and coalbed methane wells in the desert.

"Many tribal members feel that proper respect and consultation should be given to these interests in the BLM's pending resource management plans," said Martin Blackburn, a coordinator for the group. "The run covered old ground, respecting our ancestors and the spirits that are there now."

The runners' primary focus is spirituality and humility, according to the group's founding elders, Harrison Shoyo Sr. and Anthony Sitting Eagle.

"Running long distances and sleeping under the stars on Mother Earth will humble any human being," the elders said. However, in this case, the political significance of the runners' choice to venerate the Red Desert is unavoidable.

The Red Desert contains a number of features sacred to many tribes, including petroglyphs, the Boar's Tusk, Steamboat Mountain, the Honeycombs, Indian Gap Trail, numerous medicinal plants, rock formations and ancient hunting and camping sites. The ancient heritage of Shoshone, Arapaho, Ute, Comanche and other tribes is being sacrificed in favor of oil and gas development in the BLM's draft resource management plans.

All of the affected tribes weighed in with comments to the BLM advocating protection of sacred cultural and spiritual sites within the 622,000-acre Jack Morrow Hills Study Area, and the Arapaho

and Shoshone Business Councils passed resolutions on the issue.

During the Eagle Staff Run from Fort Washakie to Steamboat Mountain, runners sent prayers for people in hardship and for more protection of the tribes' respected places. We hope their prayers are heard. ▶



Top of page: The Eagle Staff Runners finish the last leg of their Red Desert Run to the foot of Steamboat Mountain as a group. Above: Alison Long Time Sleeping, Don Belile and Colin Amos

Wilderness Study Area Designation for Steamboat Mountain?

by Mac Blewer

Last May, I watched a full lunar eclipse over Steamboat Mountain, as lightning flared over the Red Desert and shooting stars fell. As the eclipse waned, the moon took on the appearance of a crocodile eye — orange, black and yellow — with a watchful crescent-shaped iris.

The usual poor-wills, coyotes and great horned owls called, as we conversed in front of our sage fire, perhaps in the same aspen groves that Ferdinand Hayden and Gustavus Doane had camped in during Hayden's 1877 expedition to Yellowstone. It felt good to be back in Dustin Springs for the first time since Fall 2002. Winter was fading, but not quite ready to relinquish its grip, judging by the chilly May air and the towering snow banks on north-facing slopes. Sleep came early.

I was accompanied by local naturalist Marian Doane, co-founder of Friends of the Red Desert and a relative of Gustavus Doane, on a weekend trek to conduct a wilderness survey to see if Steamboat Mountain could qualify as a designated wilderness study area.

If an area is proven to have wilderness characteristics — outstanding landscape qualities and opportunities for solitude — and thus qualifies as a wilderness study area (i.e. a potential wilderness area that requires further study before being designated as wilderness by Congress), the area is afforded increased protections from oil and gas development, mining and ATV use. Existing, valid grazing leases are still honored, and responsible hunting and other recreation activities are still allowed.

Although I believe that any fool can see that Steamboat Mountain proper, with its vast open tracks of sage and gnarled limber pines, its strange, undulating volcanic geological formations and its abundant wildlife and desert vistas, clearly qualified as wilderness, we had to conduct our survey by the book. Because the most important qualifying absence of buildings, two-tracks and roads, our survey concentrated on documenting these human activities on and around Steamboat.

After being roused early by love-struck flickers, black-birds, yellow warblers and towhees, we hoisted our packs, cameras and binoculars and started up Steamboat. Over the course of three days, we

photographed and documented all two-tracks and other human signs — a rusty barbed-wire fence tangled in the aspens here, a shot-up 20-gallon oil drum there, some old Coors cans from the era before flip-tops.

We stopped at the old buffalo wallows and long-abandoned wolf dens that WOC founder Tom Bell had shown us on our last trek here. And we photographed the mountain's vast prairie, in sunlight one day, and in rain, wind and mist the next. Although we found ample evidence of the desert elk that live here and use Steamboat's aspen groves and big sage as cover during calving, we only saw two elk on Steamboat over three days, a pregnant cow and a wary yearling, which peeked at us from their hiding place in the aspens nearly a mile away. We gave them a wide berth and hiked in the opposite direction.

What we found after hiking the periphery of the mountain and tromping around several of the mountain's drainages was that Steamboat Mountain proper indeed has wilderness characteristics. At the end of our research, we recommended to the BLM that 5,000 acres of Steamboat be designated as a wilderness study area.

Keeping in mind the importance of recreational access to Wyoming's public lands, we proposed that the mountain's surrounding camp sites and roads be left open, and that two two-tracks on top of the mountain be included in the wilderness proposal. However, we suggested closing four miles of the main, rocky two-track that cuts over the mountaintop and an illegal two-track jutting straight up the mountain above Jack Morrow Creek's headwaters.

We also recommended that other areas around Steamboat, including Blind Valley and Monument Ridge, be surveyed for wilderness characteristics. These areas contain many classic and unique wilderness qualities that exemplify the values that Congress, and the public, intended to protect for future generations with the passage of the Wilderness Act. I hope we will protect them. ▶

*We stopped at the old buffalo wallows
and long-abandoned wolf dens
that WOC founder Tom Bell had shown us on our last trek here.*

Steamboat Mountain • Michael A. Evans



Tracy Brooks — Mission Wolf/USFWS

Gray Wolf

by Patricia Dowd

As gray wolf populations reach sustainable levels in Wyoming, Idaho and Montana, the states are now challenged to develop management plans ensuring the wolves' continuing viability. This will enable the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to de-list the wolves from Endangered Species Act protections and grant the states the authority to manage wolves within their borders.

During the 2003 session of the Wyoming State Legislature, Wyoming passed a controversial wolf-management bill into law. Although Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) biologists recommended that wolves be managed as trophy animals statewide, their expertise and advice were pushed aside by politics.

House Bill 229 classifies wolves as trophy game animals in the northwestern part of the state, specifically Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, the John D. Rockefeller Memorial Parkway and contiguous wilderness areas in the Shoshone and Bridger-Teton National Forests. In the rest of the state, wolves are classified as predators, allowing them to be killed for any reason.

HB 229 manages for 15 wolf packs in Wyoming, seven packs outside Yellowstone and the state's northwestern boundary and eight packs in the rest of the state. (See WOC's 2003 *Legislative Report* for more information on HB 229.)

After HB 229 was passed, the WGFD was handed the task of creating a wolf-management plan that reflected state statute — not an easy assignment.

During a Wyoming Game and Fish Commission meeting in July, commissioners adopted a state wolf-management plan that parrots HB 229's guidelines and fails to ensure viable wolf populations in Wyoming. Despite overwhelming public comments calling for the protection of wolves, the commission moved forward with a plan that has a number of troubling provisions. For example, the plan contains no funding mechanism to cover the WGFD's estimated \$615,900 annual price tag for managing wolves; establishes arbitrary boundaries outside of which wolves are not protected; and manages wolves for *minimum* numbers, which sets a bad precedent for managing other wildlife species in Wyoming.

Before wolf management can be turned over to the states, the USFWS must approve Wyoming's, Idaho's and Montana's wolf plans. As we went to press, all three state plans had been sent out to independent wildlife managers and scientists for peer review. The peer review process must be completed by November 1. All three plans will then be sent to the USFWS for consideration.

Unfortunately, thanks to the legislature's insistence on establishing a dual-status classification for wolves, it

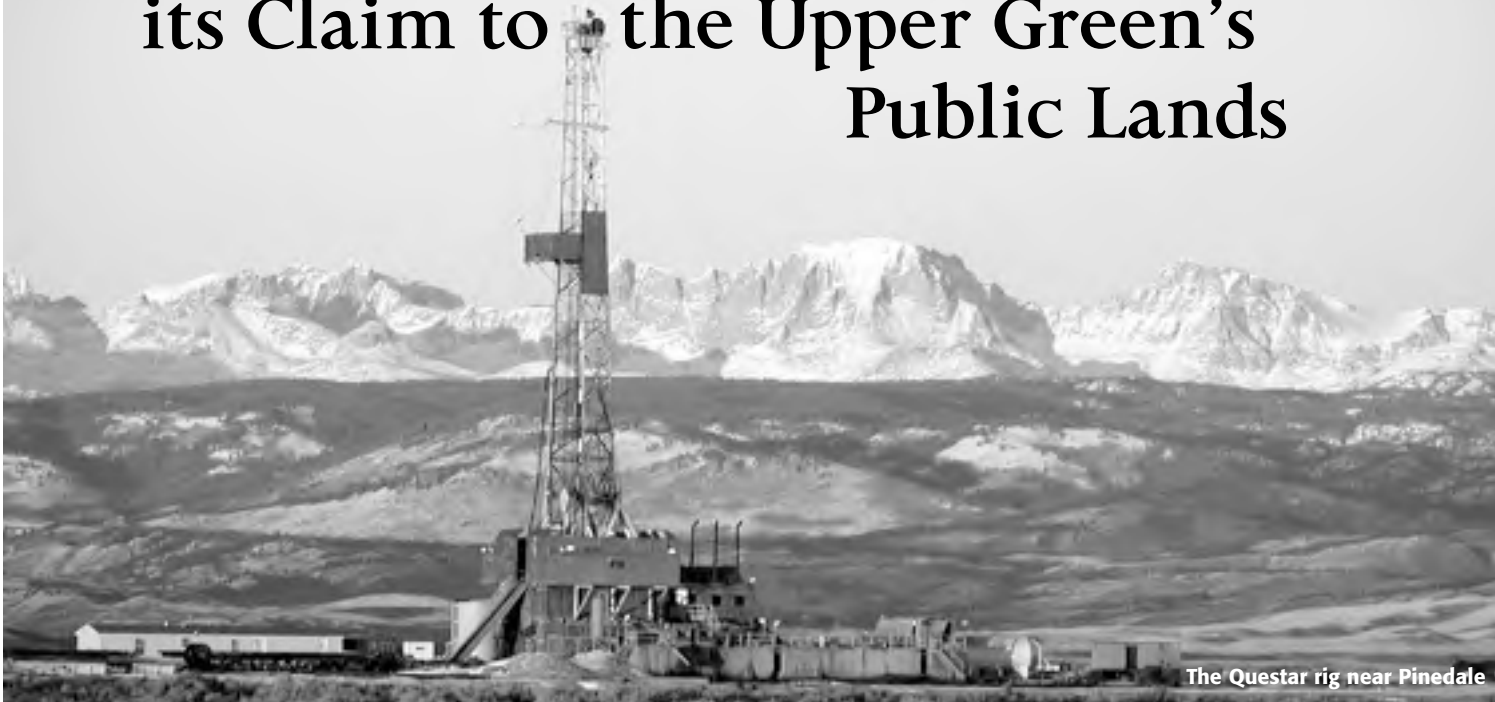
appears that Wyoming's wolf plan may well fail to meet USFWS guidelines for removing wolves from protections offered by the Endangered Species Act. USFWS officials are concerned with the ambiguity of HB 229's statutory language and have recommended that it be amended. The agency's recommendation appears to be that both the goal of fifteen packs within the state as a whole, *and* seven packs outside the parks will be required for delisting. As passed by the legislature, HB 229 called for at least seven packs of gray wolves outside of the Parks *or* at least fifteen packs within the state.

In response, the legislature's Joint Travel, Recreation, Wildlife and Cultural Resources Committee will work on amending HB 229 at its meeting in October and recommend new language to legislators during the 2004 Budget Session.

Idaho and Montana propose to manage wolves using the same science-backed methods they use to manage other big-game species, while Wyoming's politics-based plan is an insult to sound wildlife management. Thus, Wyoming could well stand in the way of wolf delisting and impede progress in passing wolf-management responsibilities to the states. ▶

Patricia Dowd is state issues coordinator for the Wyoming Sierra Club.

Industry Stakes its Claim to the Upper Green's Public Lands



The Questar rig near Pinedale

by Meredith Taylor

More than 15 years have passed since the Bureau of Land Management last revised its Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the Upper Green River Valley. RMPs are used to guide the agency's management of multiple — and often competing — uses of our public lands. Updated RMPs are needed to plan wisely for the future uses of BLM-administered public lands.

Unfortunately, it appears that the revised plan for the Upper Green is being written to appease industry and follow Bush Administration orders to fast-track natural gas and CBM development. The BLM has already permitted a total of about 3,000 natural-gas wells in the Pinedale Resource Area, more than 500 of them in the area's Jonah Field.

Planning an Industrial Sacrifice Zone

At the outset of the RMP revision process, the BLM was planning to analyze a reasonably foreseeable development scenario of 5,000 total wells for the Pinedale Resource Area, a 67% increase from existing well numbers in an area that is already experiencing troublesome impacts on wildlife and air quality at existing levels of development.

Now industry has told the BLM that it wants to double the number of wells the agency will analyze in the revised RMP to 10,000, meaning the number of wells in the Pinedale Resource Area would more than triple. One reason for industry's proposal is that it intends to "infill" more wells on its existing leases.

For example, in the 30,000-acre Jonah Field portion of the Pinedale Resource Area, industry hopes to use 20-acre well spacing instead of the current 40-acre spacing. As a result, the BLM is considering permitting as many as 3,100 wells in

the Jonah Field, up from an initial proposal for 1,250 wells, a number that according to a BLM official may soon be eclipsed by industry requests for even greater numbers of wells. If permitted by the BLM, such proposals could totally sacrifice the area to the single use of gas production. As one BLM official noted in disbelief at the serious discussion of this level of development, "The level of surface disturbance at 32 pad/section [20-acre spacing] is well beyond acceptability from a wildlife perspective if we wish to retain any semblance of what habitat even remains at this point."

Local Residents Alarmed

Many local residents are alarmed at the increasing industrialization of their once-sleepy valley. A recent *Pinedale Round-Up* editorial argued:

Now is the time to offer some sort of rebellion against industry...[T]he County certainly reaps the rewards from gas development. Industry provides us with a lot and for that we're thankful. But now is the time for the County to make some sort of effort to at least have a life preserver handy when it is overwhelmed and to make some sort of effort to stake a claim to our 'reasonably foreseeable future.' Industry should not stake that claim for us.

As Linda Baker of the Upper Green River Valley Coalition says, "Few places on Earth harbor the wildlife herds we take for granted in the Upper Green. How many can boast over 100,000 mule deer, elk, moose and pronghorn? The longest big-game migrations in North America outside of the Arctic? The largest population of sage grouse? We cannot allow their habitat to be wiped away."

Taking a Stand

The BLM must not be permitted to rubber-stamp industry's proposal to more than triple the number of permitted gas wells in this wildlife-rich valley. We must take a stand against this short-sighted onslaught by industry, the BLM and the Bush/Cheney National Energy Plan on the Upper Green's matchless wildlife habitat, treasured recreation destinations and rural lifestyle.

WOC, our conservation partners and concerned citizens are calling on the BLM to prohibit leasing in crucial wildlife habitat, migration corridors and critical winter range. In addition, WOC advocates the designation of a National Migration Corridor to keep the pronghorn's Upper Green winter range linked to summer range in Grand Teton National Park. Only with such visionary planning can we succeed in safeguarding Greater Yellowstone's biological integrity and its residents' quality of life. ▶

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Please write to the BLM outlining your concerns. Ask the agency to prohibit gas wells in important wildlife corridors and critical habitat areas in its revised Resource Management Plan for the Pinedale Resource Area.

CONTACT:

Kellie Roadifer
Pinedale RMP Coordinator
PO Box 768
Pinedale, WY 82941
Email: pinedale_wymail@blm.gov
Fax: (307) 367-5329

BLM CONSIDERS BARRING PUBLIC ACCESS TO JONAH FIELD

Air quality so bad in the Jonah Field that public access must be forbidden — that's what the BLM is currently considering. With new industry proposals to increase six-fold the number of permitted natural-gas wells in the Jonah Field (from about 500 to more than 3,000), it's likely that air quality for the entire area will fail both national and Wyoming ambient air-quality standards. Consequently, in order to protect public health and safety, BLM officials are actually discussing closing all public roads into the Jonah Field and forbidding any hunting or discharge of firearms in the 30,000-acre area.

This shocking proposal that our public lands be closed to public access to accommodate private-industry activities proves, sadly, the magnitude of the threat our public lands face of being sacrificed to a single use — energy production.

As one official, shocked himself, stated in response to the closure proposal: "If we're looking at the need to exclude the public from the area because of bad air...we've really missed the boat on what is acceptable. We shouldn't be coming close to this threshold." ▶

WOC Protest Prompts BLM to Pull 14 Oil and Gas Leases

by Christine Lichtenfels

In late July, the Bureau of Land Management agreed with WOC that 14 oil and gas lease parcels, encompassing more than 14,000 acres, in the Cody area should not have been offered for sale in December 2002. The agency's decision, which was prompted by a WOC protest, means that the parcels will not be offered for sale until after the BLM consults with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) concerning protections for grizzly bears, as mandated by the Endangered Species Act.

Public lands managed by the BLM's Cody Field Office, on the eastern edge of the central Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, contain grizzly bear habitat. Consequently, when the BLM undertakes an action that "may affect" a threatened or endangered species, it is

It's unfortunate that a formal WOC protest was needed to admonish the BLM about the law under which it is required to operate.

required by law to formally consult with the USFWS, whose scientists evaluate whether the BLM's action will jeopardize the species and recommend steps that should be taken to limit impacts on the animal's habitat and well-being.

Nonetheless, the BLM admitted that "no threatened and endangered (T&E) species inventory has been conducted for the grizzly bear in the [Cody Field Office] area. Also, no programmatic grizzly bear consultation has been performed on these parcels." That is, the BLM failed to comply with the basic mandates of the Endangered Species Act.

This is no legal "technicality." The USFWS has previously determined that "oil and gas exploration and development is generally detrimental to grizzly bears." The industrial activity associated with oil and gas development — including construction of well pads, pipelines and buildings and operation of heavy machinery in previously undeveloped areas — destroys grizzly bear habitat and drives bears away. Of particular concern is the often extensive road-building that accompanies oil and gas exploration.

While we're pleased that grizzly bears in the Cody area should now receive the protections that the Endangered Species Act demands, it's unfortunate that a formal WOC protest was needed to admonish the BLM about the law under which it is required to operate. ▶

Roadless Protections Stopped in their Tracks



Roadless area in Wyoming Range

John Sherman

by Steve Jones

On July 14th, Wyoming Federal District Judge Clarence Brimmer blocked national implementation of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. The rule, adopted during the Clinton Administration, would have protected more than 58 million acres of roadless public lands in the U.S. — including 3.24 million acres in Wyoming — from road-building.

This ruling disagreed on nearly every point with a previous Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals decision in *Kootenai Tribe of Idaho v. Veneman*, a case originating in Idaho. Most notably, where Judge Brimmer held that the roadless rule was the result of a “rush to give President Clinton lasting notoriety in the annals of environmentalism,” the Ninth Circuit had found that a 69-day public comment period, which was more than 30% longer than the legally mandated length, clearly met requirements for public comment. The roadless rule was promulgated after years of development, during which citizens were given numerous opportunities

for public comment. More than 400 public meetings were held nationwide, including 16 in Wyoming, at which thousands of citizens provided detailed comments to administration officials.

Roadless areas in Wyoming’s national forests play an important role in protecting wildlife habitat, watersheds and fisheries. Since 1978, when roadless areas were identified in the Forest Service’s Roadless Area Review and Evaluation II, we have lost more than 680,000 acres of roadless areas to roading. The roadless rule would have

stopped further losses of precious roadless areas, but with Judge Brimmer’s ruling, the fate of the roadless rule is in doubt.

Judge Brimmer concluded that the rule violated the National Environmental Policy Act and the Wilderness Act of 1964. He ruled that the U.S. Forest Service failed to analyze an adequate range of alternatives, failed to conduct an adequate cumulative effects analysis and failed to prepare a supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, among other things.

Furthermore, Judge Brimmer took the view that there is no distinction between roadless areas administratively protected by the roadless rule and wilderness areas protected under the Wilderness Act. He argued that since the Wilderness Act states that wilderness areas shall not be created except as provided for in the Wilderness Act, and that roadless areas were de facto wildernesses, the Wilderness Act therefore barred implementation of the roadless rule.

But this is erroneous. For example, oil and gas exploration and logging are allowed in roadless areas, as are snowmobiles, motorcycles and mountain bikes. The only activity uniformly prohibited in a roadless area is road building. While preserving an area’s roadless character is a major protective measure, it falls far short of the protections afforded designated wilderness areas, which include a ban on all motorized vehicles, mountain bikes and other mechanized transportation.

WOC and seven other environmental groups have appealed Judge Brimmer’s ruling to the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals, which will decide whether it agrees with its colleagues in the Ninth Circuit, or with Judge Brimmer. ▶

Wyoming National Forests	Existing Roadless Area Acreage	Roadless Acreage Lost Since 1978
Bighorn	650,731	39,039
Black Hills	14,000	-1,040 (gain)
Bridger-Teton	1,357,403	392,443
Medicine Bow	374,812	64,388
Shoshone	713,730	62,400
Targhee	135,044	123,451
	3,245,720	680,681

Source: Wyoming Wilderness Association

Transbasin Diversion for the Green River?

\$300 Million Project Would Pipe Water From the Green to the North Platte

by Steve Jones

It’s time to start talking about transbasin water diversion. At least, that’s what Wyoming Water Development Office Director Mike Besson says. He figures the way to cure the North Platte River Basin’s continuing water shortage is to grab some water from another basin. He’s got his eye on the Green River Basin.

Wyoming has never failed to deliver water from the Green River Basin to downstream states, as required under the Colorado River Compact. But the same cannot be said for the North Platte River Basin, under the Missouri River Basin Compact.

The Wyoming Water Development Commission is conducting an analysis of possible solutions to the North Platte’s water-shortage problems. Two alternatives would divert

Governor Freudenthal calls transbasin diversions “risky propositions.”

water from either the Little Sandy River or the East Fork of the New Fork River to the Sweetwater River (a tributary of the North Platte). Other alternatives include piping water from Fontenelle

Reservoir to the Sweetwater River or from the Green River below the city of Green River all the way to the North Platte near Rawlins.

The transbasin diversion analysis appears to be driven by concerns about the State of Utah’s interest in acquiring approximately 60,000 acre feet of water from Wyoming. But these concerns ignore one important factor. The Colorado River Compact has granted Wyoming a certain percentage of acre feet of water from the Green River Basin. Wyoming’s right to that water cannot be taken away unless a new compact is drawn up and signed by all involved states.

Whatever the alternative, Besson says that a transbasin diversion project might cost a cool \$300 million. Geology professor Charles Love of Western Wyoming Community College derides the scheme. “If this is going to go for agriculture,” he says, “then tell me how the state coffers are ever going to pay back the cost of the pipeline from the profits ... and pay for any future [water] development in southwest Wyoming.”

Governor Freudenthal has said in no uncertain terms that he opposes transbasin diversions, characterizing them as “risky propositions.” While he is willing to allow an in-house analysis to proceed, he doubts that the Wyoming Legislature will approve any of the proposed alternatives. Stay tuned. ▶

Citizens’ Petition Prompts State to Enforce Hog-Odor Rule

by Michele Barlow

In late June, Wyoming’s Environmental Quality Council denied a citizens’ petition calling for stronger odor regulations to deal with the stench emanating from Wyoming Premium Farms’ hog operation near Wheatland.

However, the state’s Department of Environmental Quality promised to step up monitoring of odors from hog farms in both Wheatland and Albin. DEQ employees are now making unannounced visits twice a month between March and October, including one overnight trip to conduct a comprehensive odor survey outside of normal working hours.

During a July 31 odor survey near Wheatland, DEQ inspectors Glenn Spangler and Kristi Tarantola discovered that the stench from Wyoming Premium Farms exceeded Wyoming’s hog-farm odor standard. In response, the DEQ issued a “notice of violation” ordering the company to correct the problem.

Wyoming’s odor-control problems are certainly not unique. Across the U.S. and around the globe, odor nuisance has become a major environmental and health issue, accompanied by a growing awareness of the need for better ways to evaluate and control unpleasant odors and volatile organic compounds.

Over the next year, the DEQ will draft a comprehensive regulatory package addressing air and water quality issues associated with confined livestock feeding operations. We’ll keep you posted. ▶

WHAT IS ODOR?

Of the five human senses, our sense of smell is the most complex. During normal nose breathing, approximately 10% of inhaled air passes across the olfactory receptors — 10 to 25 million cells per nostril — located in the top of the nasal cavity. Chemicals in inhaled air may create an electrical signal that moves along olfactory nerves to the brain. The entire trip, from nostril to brain signal, takes as little as 500 milliseconds.

The olfactory system serves as a defense mechanism, generating an aversion response to malodors and irritants. Victims of foul odors often experience headaches, nausea, itchy eyes, sleep disturbances, an inability to concentrate and increased stress levels.

Thankfully, Wyoming law embraces the notion that citizens have the right to be protected from excessive odors. ▶



Roping the *Wind*, Hitching up the *Sun*

RENEWABLE ENERGY RESOURCES

For more information about renewable energy, check out the following websites:

Database of State Incentives for Renewable Energy: www.dsireusa.org

Grants and Loans for Rural Development: www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs

Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy: www.eere.energy.gov

Energy-Efficient Products: www.energystar.gov

National Renewable Energy Laboratory: www.nrel.gov

Center for Renewable Energy and Sustainable Technologies: solstice.crest.org

Interstate Renewable Energy Council: www.irecusa.org

WY Renewable Energy Resources: www.energyatlas.org

WY Renewable Energy Businesses: energy.sourceguides.com

WY Energy Conservation Network: www.wyoenergy.com

American Solar Energy Society: www.ases.org

Northern CO Renewable Energy Society: www.ncres.org

Solar Energy International: www.solarenergy.org

National Wind Coordinating Committee: www.nationalwind.org

American Wind Energy Association: www.awea.org

Utility Wind Interest Group: www.uwig.org

Union of Concerned Scientists: www.ucsusa.org

Co-op America's Green Business Directory: www.greenpages.org

Renewable Energy Conference Provides Bright Ideas

by Michele Barlow

With a mere 4.6% of the world's population, the U.S. consumes about 25% of the world's oil and natural gas. Relying on ramped-up oil and gas drilling in unspoiled areas of Alaska, Wyoming and elsewhere in the West cannot satisfy our nation's insatiable appetite for energy. The key to meeting our future energy needs is using energy more efficiently and developing renewable energy resources. Increasing renewable energy use to 20 percent by 2020 can save as much as 3.8 trillion cubic feet of natural gas — enough to meet the current needs of 75% of U.S. households.

Harnessing Wind & Solar Power

In August, the Converse Area New Development Organization (CANDO) in Douglas hosted Wyoming's first statewide renewable energy conference, titled Roping the Wind and Hitching Up the Sun.

More than 120 landowners, entrepreneurs, developers, conservationists and state and federal representatives attended the two-day event. Speakers discussed the history of renewable energy in Wyoming and worldwide, advancements in power storage and motor technologies, legislative policies like net metering and tax breaks, rural community and economic development and project design and financing.

Among other important topics, the conference focused on wind project development in Wyoming's rural areas and on working ranches. Across the central Great Plains and western Rocky Mountains, rural communities have embraced wind power as a source of revenue for ranchers, tax revenues for local governments and construction and maintenance jobs for residents.

As of September, three Wyoming wind projects near Arlington and Medicine Bow generate 140 megawatts of electrical generation capacity. A new project, which will generate an additional 144 megawatts — enough

electricity to power more than 43,000 homes — is currently under construction northeast of Evanston. And the Cheyenne City Council recently signed a lease agreement to allow installation of meteorological towers to ascertain the feasibility of erecting a wind farm.

Solar electric systems are also attractive because photovoltaic panels are exceptionally durable, provide excellent power quality and require minimal maintenance. And their prices are dropping rapidly. During the past five years, solar electric systems in the U.S. enjoyed an average annual sales growth of 35%, twice the growth rate of the personal computer market. Today, global demand for photovoltaic panels outpaces supply.

Renewable Electricity Production

The amount of electricity currently produced from renewable energy sources is miniscule, but growing. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, generation from non-hydropower renewable energy sources (geothermal, solar thermal, photovoltaics, wind, biomass and municipal solid waste) may increase from about two percent of total power generation in 2001 to almost six percent of generation in 2025.

One promising development is a market-based mechanism that requires utilities to gradually increase the portion of electricity they produce from renewable sources, called a Renewable Electricity Standard or Renewable Portfolio Standard. To date, 13 states have enacted these standards and three additional states have established non-binding renewable energy goals.

Envisioning a Bright Future

One evening at the renewable energy conference, Douglas-area landowners and representatives of a wind power company engaged in a lively conversation about developing a commercial-scale wind farm in

Converse County. The next day, I visited with a rancher about the benefits of my own small-scale photovoltaic system — energy independence, predictable electricity costs and zero emissions.

We can now envision a future where rural landowners, renewable-energy companies, enlightened public officials and conservation-minded utilities can work together to help meet the nation's energy needs. ▶

WOC Participates in National Solar Energy Tour

On October 3, WOC served as the Lander site for the American Solar Energy Society's National Solar Tour, inviting the public to view our solar energy system in detail. The goals of the ASES tour, conducted during "Energy Awareness Month," included helping residents of communities around the country understand their options as informed energy consumers, stimulating interest in energy alternatives by providing a working example of a solar project and providing informative materials.

With the assistance of Scott Kane of Creative Energies, who designed and installed WOC's solar energy system, we eagerly showed off our simple grid-connected system and handed out information about grants available from the Wyoming Business Council for installing alternative energy systems.

As the ASES National Solar Tour brochure says, "The power and the choice is yours to help move to a secure, independent and sustainable energy future!" ▶

Tom Darin Moves On



Steve Jones

by Christine Lichtenfels

After three-and-a-half years as the director of WOC's Public Lands and Resources Program, Tom Darin is leaving WOC and moving to Jackson. There, he will serve as program director for our frequent

conservation partner, the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance.

During his time at WOC, Tom took the lead in our efforts to rein in runaway coalbed methane development in the Powder River Basin and elsewhere in Wyoming. He won several important decisions from the Interior Department's Board of Land Appeals, which ruled that oil and gas leases could not be sold without adequate environmental analysis of coalbed methane's unique impacts. Tom spearheaded our response to the Bureau of Land Management's Powder River Basin Oil and Gas Environmental Impact Statement, and served as co-counsel in our pending case challenging the BLM's final decision.

He also responded to frequent calls from state, regional and national print and broadcast media reporters, who appreciated his thorough knowledge of the thorny legal issues surrounding CBM development, and, no doubt, his quick wit. At the same time, Tom wrote articles that have been published in several prestigious national environmental law journals.

And, very importantly, Tom kept us laughing with his humorous accounts of virtually every event in his life, particularly Darin family gatherings, and his hilarious emails regarding the proper technique for using Tray 3 — our printer's re-used paper tray. Under Tom's careful tutelage, we all "learned" that Tray 3 does not work when re-used pages are still stapled together, already printed on both sides, previously spindled, ripped or shredded.

"Leaving WOC was a terribly difficult decision to make," says Tom. "But I'm not saying good-bye. I look forward to working with WOC on joint campaigns to protect the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and the Upper Green River Valley from industrial-scale energy development."

Thanks, Tom, for all your excellent work. We look forward to working with you at the Alliance. ▶

Editor's note: As we went to press, WOC was actively seeking an experienced attorney to fill Tom's position.

Farewell to Ray Corning, Friend and Fighter

by Mac Blewer

From our perch on Oregon Buttes, we surveyed the rolling hills of the northwestern Red Desert. A few light early summer rains had helped the land. Lupine, Indian paintbrush, and shooting stars dotted the sagebrush for miles around. The "Grand Old Fellows," as Mark Twain called the silver peaks of the Wind River Range, rose to the west, and we could see Oregon Buttes' sister sky islands, Green Mountain and Steamboat Mountain, to the east and south.

As the late afternoon sun accentuated the hills' contours and shadows, my friend Ray Corning pointed to the land and smiled, as if touched by earlier memories of another rambling in another wild place.

"These wide open spaces remind me in so many ways of the Alaskan tundra," he said, moving his long, sinewy arm through the air in a half-caress. "I love it. We better be careful what we do out here."

Stepping past a limber pine scarred by a hungry porcupine, we descended gingerly down the twisting, gravelly game trail, Ray pointing out different species of grasses along

the way. I would not know it, but that trek that we took two years ago was my last time in the desert with Ray, although I would visit him and his wife, Mary, many times before the end.

On September 13 we lost a dear friend and a brave fighter when Ray passed away after a ten-month battle with esophageal cancer. Even during his last days he would greet visitors with a firm handshake and a ready joke.

A Life-long Fight for the Environment

To his friends, Ray was best known for his dry humor, kindness and ever-present smile. To his colleagues, he was renowned for a lifetime of fighting for environmental protection and for his honesty, integrity and badger-like tenacity. He demonstrated leonine courage, both before and during his final battle.

"He was always fighting to protect public access to public lands and maintain the integrity of the waters and the land," Mary notes. "There was no personal gain for him. He would always do what he thought was right, all for the future of wild places and future generations."

Gary Hickman, a retired assistant regional director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, recalls, "Ray was a very professional, principled fisheries biologist who would stand down the politicians at great risk to his own job. He never was a 'yes man.'"

Passionate Pursuits

Ray was born in 1934 in Casper and spent much of his childhood in Wyoming and in Nebraska, where his father worked on the railroads. After earning a Bachelor's degree in Fisheries Science and a Master's in Zoology from Colorado State University, he began a career that would take him from the tidal marshes of Virginia to the tundra of Alaska and eventually the open spaces of Idaho and Wyoming.

Over three decades Ray worked for the Idaho Fish and Game Department, the Virginia Game and Inland Fisheries Department, the BLM in Washington, DC and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Anchorage.

After his retirement in 1994 he moved to Lander, where he pursued his environmental passions, relentlessly fighting for stronger water-quality protections and monitoring water quality and wetland health in the Popo Agie River watershed and on the Green Mountain Common Grazing Allotment.

"Ray would always approach people from a position of respect and knowledge," says Jack Kelly, field manager for the Lander BLM Office. "He never did it in a way that diminished anyone else. That's why he was so respected. It set him apart." Kelly credits Ray with helping the BLM identify 20 springs important to wildlife and recreationists on the Green Mountain Common Allotment.

"A Wonderful Asset to this Finite Earth"

But Ray was much more than a hard-driving conservationist. His warmth was felt by all who met him. During his time with the Virginia Game and Inland Fisheries Department, he fed poor families with the fish that he electrocuted during his surveys. He dressed up as Santa Claus and delivered presents to families in need. He was a dedicated father, a devoted husband and a lover of life and the land.

"Ray was a wonderful asset to this finite Earth," recalls his friend and WOC founder, Tom Bell. "He combined his knowledge and expertise with his love of the natural world to do many fine things in his principled way. More than that, he was a warm, compassionate human being."

Thane Humphrey, Ray's "adopted Alaska son," believes that "consciously or by instinct, Raymond went where he was needed...It's the type of man he was."

Wyoming still needs you, old friend. We will miss you and remember you always. ➤

Thank you, Steve Goryl!



by Christine Lichtenfels

Standing on the summit of Everest. Skydiving from 30,000 feet. Leading local cave exploration trips and sailing and S.C.U.B.A. expeditions worldwide. Spending more than 440 weeks teaching wilderness skills on National Outdoor Leadership School courses all over the world.

Spending hours fixing WOC computer systems. What do all those activities have in common? Steve Goryl!

With last year's departure of our in-house computer whiz and staff scientist, Jerry Freilich, local WOC member and friend Steve Goryl has come to the rescue, volunteering endless hours fixing our computers – and refusing all offers of remuneration except for the occasional double-latte "card" at the local coffee house.

"I think WOC does great work and I want to support it the best way I can," explains Steve. "Without its determined efforts, many wild places in Wyoming would be ruined!"

A full-time computer system administrator at our next-door neighbor NOLS, Steve has years of experience working on Apple computers like those WOC uses. He also brings endless perseverance and an unbelievable work ethic to everything he does. Although perhaps not requiring the same amount of resolve as it took to stay for five days at Everest's 26,000' high camp, alone, in order to get a summit-day weather window (which Steve did, reaching the summit on Friday the 13th of May 1994), fixing computer system problems can try the patience of most.

Thank you, Steve, for being our computer Superman, quickly coming to our rescue and keeping us up and running! Your enviable knowledge, ready advice and hours of volunteer work are a huge help. ➤

Marisa Martin Joins Staff



University of Michigan

In September, WOC welcomed Marisa Martin as our new Greater Yellowstone Program coordinator.

Marisa recently graduated from the University of Michigan with a J.D. from its Law School and an M.S. in Conservation Biology and Ecosystem Management from the university's School for Natural Resources & the Environment.

At Michigan, Marisa was a Doris Duke Conservation Fellow, a Joseph Sax Environmental Fellow and a Morris K. Udall Environmental Scholar. During her summer breaks from law school, she was a North Star Sierra Club environmental intern at a law firm in Minneapolis, a legal intern at the New Mexico Environmental Law Center in Santa Fe and a legal clerk at Earthjustice in Hawaii. Marisa's master's opus was a spatial projection of future gray wolf habitat in Michigan and Wisconsin once the states' wolves are delisted from the Endangered Species Act, a topic very relevant to Wyoming as we move toward wolf delisting.

"It's great to be in Lander," Marisa says, "and I'm excited to be part of WOC's important work protecting Greater Yellowstone's remarkable wildlife and wild country." An outdoors enthusiast, Marisa is also looking forward to hiking, backpacking and exploring Wyoming.

We're delighted that Marisa's on board, and are confident that her exceptional skills and admirable commitment will bolster our success in safeguarding the GYE's rich natural treasures. ➤



Easy Money With Your Help!

As we head into the holiday season, many of us will do some shopping on the internet. With one extra step, you can make sure that WOC gets a donation for each purchase you make, with no extra cost to you.

It's simple: log on to www.igive.com, list WOC as your "cause," buy something through the many stores listed on IGIVE.com, and not only does WOC receive a percentage of the price you paid, but also

a \$5 bonus for signing you up as a new member. If each person reading this article merely signs up and buys something, WOC will receive more than \$7,000!

More than 450 companies sell their products through IGIVE.com, including REI, Eddie Bauer, Office Depot, Dell, Barnes & Noble, PetSmart and Patagonia. By using IGIVE.com, you can ensure that a portion of the cost of your purchases — varying from .8% to as high

as 26%, depending on the company — is donated to WOC. And you can even deduct the donated amount from your taxes. ➤

Please help us take advantage of this simple way to raise funds that are so critical to maintaining WOC's effectiveness. Working together, we can do a lot. Thanks!

Second Annual Ride the Red Outing Attracts 39 Bikers



Tom Darin

Stephanie Gripne, Jill Pachell, Steve Jones and Joni Ward

by Christine Lichtenfels

On September 13, 39 energetic mountain bikers gathered for our Ride the Red outing, a 45-mile loop on two-tracks and dirt roads in the Red Desert's Jack Morrow Hills area. For the second year in a row, WOC has organized and sponsored this event as an opportunity for people to experience and appreciate the Red Desert and the unique recreational opportunities it provides.

Following a snowy, windy night, the day dawned frosty and clear. The Wind River Mountains to the northwest sparkled in the morning light with their fresh coating of snow. Surprisingly, the desert's dirt roads were in prime condition, without the dreaded gumbo we feared would come with the snow.

Riders ranged in age from an impressive 12 years to fifty-something, and came from all over the southern half of Wyoming and Fort Collins. Bikes ranged from basic to high-tech, and even included a tandem bike!

Home-baked goodies, plentiful other snacks and beverages, endless sun (and wind), beautiful views and great company abounded. A special few, including Tim Bush from Cheyenne, caught sight of a herd of desert elk, while others experienced the thrill of watching wild horses gallop across the sagebrush.

"What a fun outing!" enthused one participant. "The refreshments hit the spot and our well-earned t-shirts will be worn with pride!"

Our deepest thanks go to former WOC board member Chris Hiemstra and his wife Theresa Kay, who provided the vision, motivation and endless hours of time and effort to make this event a reality. Thanks also go to the folks at

Brown 'N Gold of Laramie, who were immensely helpful in making our Ride the Red t-shirts, and to NOLS Rocky Mountain for generously loaning us water containers and first-aid supplies.

Stay tuned for information on next year's Ride the Red. We're looking into new routes to explore more parts of the Red Desert. Hope to see you there! ➤




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