

STEFF'S SPRING UPDATE

Dear Friends,

I hope this finds you well as we all navigate a world made more uncertain by COVID-19. The pandemic arrived on the heels of the Wyoming Legislature's 2020 budget session, which itself was chaotic. Last-minute changes to the process by which bills were introduced made it more difficult to winnow out bad bills early, and with so much going on lawmakers more frequently needed to be briefed on issues we were advocating. At times, it seemed we needed to connect with half of the legislature to explain the implications of a single bill. But they — and we — persisted. I'm happy to report we were generally successful on issues we weighed in on.

As always, we couldn't have done it without you. Thank you to each of our members who contacted legislators to express support for conservation issues. A special shout-out to our five amazing interns who immersed themselves in the legislative process: Lynne Huskinson, Jorge Moreno, Elizabeth Traver, Colleen Whalen, and Joe Slack (watch our website for an upcoming blog post about their experiences). And thanks to those who attended one of our Beers & Bills events in Green River, Cody, and Cheyenne to learn more about the issues or just say hello.

Wins for Wildlife

In February, several members of the Outdoor Council staff were pleased to look on as Gov. Mark Gordon signed his migration corridor executive order, which outlines how Wyoming will designate and manage big game corridors. We're grateful to the governor for taking this important step, and are excited to remain involved in the process as the state works toward establishing lasting protections for the migration routes that sustain our herds.

We also worked with several partner organizations to defeat three bills that would have upended the corridor designation process created by the governor's executive order. Legislators heard your message loud and clear: The public values Wyoming's wildlife and doesn't want it micromanaged by politicians.

A Sharp Eye on Public Lands

We're staying vigilant for the impending draft of the Bureau of Land Management's Rock Springs Resource Management Plan. This plan will dictate



how public lands in areas including the Northern Red Desert and Greater Little Mountain are managed, and we anticipate the BLM will attempt to eliminate most administrative designations that currently protect wildlife habitat and cultural and historic sites. Watch your email inbox: We'll let you know when the draft is released and how you can take action.

We've continued to push back on the increasing amount of sensitive wildlife habitat being included in oil and gas lease sales. In March, a federal court voided two 2018 Wyoming lease sales, totaling more than 500,000 acres, which the

Outdoor Council had protested because they included vast swaths of sage-grouse priority habitat as well as mule deer winter range and migration corridor habitat. The court found the BLM had illegally cut short the public comment period. We'll be examining the broader implications of the BLM's roughshod approach in an upcoming oil and gas leasing report. Stay tuned for its release.

Working for responsible solar development

In March, we submitted comments to the BLM as part of the public scoping process for a new development, Raven Solar, which would be the second utility scale solar energy project on public lands in the state and adjacent to the first, Sweetwater Solar. We asked the BLM to consider a variety of factors — including wildlife-friendly fencing, alternatives for siting, and the cumulative impacts of future development in the area — to avoid further impacts on a pronghorn herd that winters near the site and has already been disturbed by the existing solar project.

We're encouraging the BLM to undertake a statewide planning effort to identify designated areas for renewable energy that would minimize impacts on wildlife and the landscape, and have asked the legislature to study the same topic during the interim.

Putting the Northern Red Desert on the map

Our driving tour map of the Northern Red Desert is hot off the press and we'll keep you posted about when and where you can find a copy. The desert is truly unique but relatively unknown, and we hope the map will help residents and visitors alike see why it's worth saving while enjoying an off-the-beaten-path road trip.

Progress on Water Quality Concerns

As you know, we previously spoke out against the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality's proposal to allow Aethon Energy to drastically increase the amount of contaminated oil and gas wastewater it discharges into creeks which flow to Boysen Reservoir and the Wind and Bighorn rivers. Hundreds of citizens spoke out, and in January that work paid off when the DEQ reversed its position. Although this represents a significant step in the right direction,

the revised draft permit still allows unlawful and environmentally damaging amounts of salts and other pollutants to enter Boysen and its tributaries. We've submitted our analysis to the DEQ and asked them to require Aethon to comply with state water quality standards and take immediate action to repair the damage caused by years of neglect.



Image: Claire Cella

Senior Conservation Advocate Dan Heilig is closely involved with water quality issues in Teton County, where troubling levels of nitrates are building in groundwater. The Outdoor Council has been working to raise awareness of this issue and encouraging local government action, including engaging on revisions to county regulations and advocating for a comprehensive wastewater management plan.

Let's keep in touch!

Our staff will be rolling out some new ways to engage online, particularly in this difficult time when COVID-19 is posing a roadblock to in-person events. I hope you'll join our email list (www.wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/signup) and follow us on Facebook to keep up to date on what we're up to and how you can make a difference. We're stronger together.

Take care of yourself and those around you, and try to enjoy some socially distanced time in our great outdoors!

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