

Wyoming Outdoor Council

Summer 2022

FRONTLINE



Working to protect Wyoming's environment and quality of life since 1967

INSIDE: **TWO WAYS TO REDUCE METHANE EMISSIONS NOW**

Migration Corridor Update
WOC's First Stewardship Day

AND MORE!

Image: Josh Milek

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

LISA McGEE
Executive Director

AS YOU'RE READING THIS, I'm getting settled back into home and work life after a cross-country road trip with my son, Dylan.

The goal was straightforward: Enjoy a two-month sabbatical to reconnect with loved ones and the outdoors while exploring some bucket-list destinations in the eastern part of the country. But as I sat down to plan the itinerary, I knew making this trip a meaningful experience was not as simple as choosing the shortest, fastest route to Maine and barreling down the interstate.

How could I reach the final destination without skipping other, equally important stops along the way? And how could I balance my own vision for the trip with the priorities of my traveling companion (who really wanted to visit the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland) and the schedules of the friends and family who were generously offering to host us for a night or two?

In the end our road was a winding one. There were unexpected challenges and a few wrong turns along the way. But, because we were willing to adapt to changing circumstances, we had an experience we'll always remember.

There is no clear blueprint for success when it comes to protecting public lands, wildlife, clean air and

Camping with my family in the Red Desert, and enjoying evenings with friends in my Casper backyard.

Rock climbing. 100% of the time I would rather be up on a rock somewhere. Luckily, nearly everywhere in Wyoming has at least one big rock to climb.



Wyoming Outdoor Council

Founded in 1967, we are a statewide citizen advocacy group, working to protect public lands, wildlife, and clean air and water in Wyoming. We believe conservation is not a partisan issue, and that informed and engaged citizens matter.

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**What's your favorite thing
about summer in Wyoming?**

clean water in Wyoming, either. Much like a road trip, adaptability is key. A willingness to consider alternative solutions or shift our tactics in response to changing circumstances is what allows a small group like the Wyoming Outdoor Council to be successful while fostering relationships with the many Wyoming citizens, policy makers, and partner groups we collaborate with.

In this issue of Frontline, you'll read about two federal policy changes WOC supports that — working in tandem — could dramatically reduce the amount of methane gas that is leaked or vented into our air from oil and gas wells and other infrastructure. You'll also see how, in our work to secure permanent protections for the Northern Red Desert, we're taking a broad-based approach that offers multiple paths to success.

We owe it to our members, our Wyoming communities, and future generations to use every tool at our disposal to steward our lands, wildlife, and natural resources. Thank you for making this essential work possible.

Thank you for traveling this winding road with us.

With gratitude,



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THE TALE OF TWO METHANE RULES

... and why Wyoming needs them both.

JOHN BURROWS

Conservation Advocate

MOST POLICY EXPERTS AGREE that, along the long road to combating climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, reducing wasted methane from oil and gas operations is “low-hanging fruit.”

In 2020 alone, wasted methane gas from oil and gas operations made up roughly one-third of all methane emissions from human activity. The obvious need to address this problem is why there are two proposed regulatory changes involving methane that could have major impacts on lowering greenhouse gas emissions from our country’s oil and gas sector. The rules — one from the Environmental Protection Agency and the other from the Bureau of Land Management — would seek to reduce methane waste, and their success is important to Wyoming’s environment and taxpayers alike.

Methane is the second-most significant greenhouse gas in terms of impact on global warming. It is responsible for approximately a quarter of the Earth’s warming since the Industrial Revolution and, when compared to carbon dioxide, it has roughly 80 times the

global warming potential over a 20-year period. However, despite methane’s potency, it cycles out of the atmosphere more quickly than carbon dioxide: This means methane emission reductions now can help lower greenhouse gas concentrations and buy time to make the necessary societal changes we need to achieve net zero emissions over the coming decades.

But putting aside the many climate and environmental benefits of reducing wasted methane, it also just makes sense as a cost-effective policy solution.

But putting aside the many climate and environmental benefits of reducing wasted methane, it also just makes sense as a cost-effective policy solution. Wasted methane, after all, is essentially natural gas that can be captured and brought to market. As a quick comparison, in 2019 alone, oil and gas operators

wasted enough methane from venting and flaring (common ways operators manage methane waste) to power 2.1 million U.S. homes.

In fact, the International Energy Agency estimates nearly 50 percent of wasted methane can be captured with no net cost to producers. This is because investments made in reducing methane emissions pay for themselves over the long term by keeping more natural gas

in route to energy consumers and out of the atmosphere.

Which brings us to the new EPA and BLM methane rules — federal efforts the Wyoming Outdoor Council supports to help curb this wasteful practice. Last November, the EPA released new draft rules that would regulate wasted methane emissions for both new and existing sources for the first time. (Historically, in most cases, methane has only been regulated from “new and modified” emissions sources, and older “existing sources” of wasted methane have largely been left alone). The EPA rules would apply under the authority of the Clean Air Act, treating methane as an air pollutant. Importantly, the rules would regulate methane emissions from oil and gas facilities across all jurisdictions and land ownerships (including private, federal, and Tribal lands) and, if they go into effect, could dramatically cut emissions and uniformly raise the bar for responsible energy development. The EPA’s rules are widely supported by both environmental and industry groups alike, because they are good for the environment, create an equal playing field for businesses by setting uniform standards, and establish regulatory certainty under which companies can predictably operate and plan.

Separately, the Department of the Interior is also considering a BLM methane waste rule that would apply more narrowly to oil and gas production on federal and Tribal lands. The BLM’s rules take their authority from the waste prevention mandate in the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920. This mandate allows the Secretary of the Interior to “use all reasonable precautions to prevent waste of oil or gas developed on the land.” In states like Wyoming, where the majority of oil and gas development occurs on public lands, the application of this rule could help the public realize higher returns on the

development of natural resources by charging royalties for wasted natural gas.

In 2018, the Outdoor Council estimated that Wyoming lost as much as \$96 million worth of natural gas in a single year due to intentional flaring, venting, and careless leaks. This translates into roughly \$16.1 million lost in annual royalty payments to the state. These are critical revenue streams that taxpayers and budget-strapped Wyoming communities deserve to see for the depletion of natural resources. And of course, the rule would provide further incentive for producers to keep methane in the pipeline and out of the atmosphere.

Both the BLM's authority under its waste prevention mandate and the EPA's authority under the Clean Air Act to regulate air pollutants are needed to address climate concerns and ensure that Americans and Wyomingites receive a fair value for the one-time use of our

non-renewable resources. While some leading companies like Jonah Energy, Occidental, and Devon Energy are taking action to cut methane and support federal methane regulation, that simply isn't enough. Most oil and gas operators

are not doing frequent, thorough inspections for leaks and we need stronger state leadership to support these common sense federal rules that will benefit our environment and our pocketbooks.

Looking forward, both the EPA and BLM rules

have procedural and administrative hurdles to clear before they go into effect, hopefully later this year. Our commitment is to continue tracking and advocating strong methane rules as well as keeping you informed of the opportunities to get these policies over the finish line in 2022. The long-term outlook of Wyoming's climate, budget, and residents depends on it. ■

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The Long Path to Protection



KRISTEN GUNTHER
Program Director

What's new in the world of big game migration?

After the delays posed by the pandemic in 2020, Wyoming conservation advocates were eager to re-engage in big game migration issues. Last year, small working groups kicked off around the state, discussing the management of three state-designated mule deer migration corridors — the Platte Valley, Baggs, and Sublette (also known as Red Desert to Hoback) corridors. And now that we're halfway through 2022, it's time to look forward.

This year, the Wyoming Outdoor Council is focused both on ensuring strong protections for already-designated migration corridors, and seeking state designations for new corridors — including designating the first pronghorn corridor. And we need your help!

Since we last connected with you in person, a suite of policy changes and emerging science has offered new possibilities and directions for managing the long-distance migrations that support Wyoming's most iconic big game

herds. We'd love to gather with you again soon to chat about all the ways you can show up for deer and pronghorn.

This fall in Pinedale, we'll gather local WOC members and wildlife advocates for a fun, migration-themed event to discuss supporting the designation of the Sublette pronghorn corridor and other strong, on-the-ground conservation management of migrating herds. If you live in this part of the state, watch your mailbox for an invitation.

For our other members: Stay tuned, and make sure you sign up to receive WOC email updates by visiting www.wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org. We'll provide tailored information to you in the coming months with details about how to reach out to our state's decision makers to advocate for strong protections for Wyoming's big game. ■

RED DESERT ROUNDUP

*Southwest Wyoming
and Tribal communities
continue to unite around
the Red Desert*

KYLE ELMQUIST
Engagement Coordinator

The wide open, undeveloped Northern Red Desert remains a Wyoming icon — a rugged expanse that deserves lasting protections that safeguard the desert’s ancestral lands and cultural significance, wildlife habitat, recreation opportunities, and ecological abundance. Throughout 2022 and alongside many local groups, citizens, and stakeholders, the Wyoming Outdoor Council has remained focused on the future of the Red Desert. And, through our partnerships with Citizens for the Red Desert and the newly-formed Indigenous Land Alliance of Wyoming, we’ve continued to collaboratively chart a path toward Wyoming-grown solutions.

Citizens for the Red Desert has been working to build and nurture relationships throughout southwest Wyoming, discussing the values, interests, and opportunities of the desert with local leaders and business owners. Many of these stakeholders have, in turn, joined the effort, recognizing the potential benefits to the local economy and quality of



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life by ensuring the Red Desert’s natural and cultural treasures are protected. CfRD has been building these crucial partnerships through immersive day-long tours of the desert, conversations at coffee shops, educational outreach in communities, and sponsoring events — galvanizing a diverse group of allies who are committed to the landscape.

The mission of the Indigenous Land Alliance of Wyoming is to unite and bridge gaps in conservation advocacy with Traditional Ecological Knowledge while empowering support through Tribal leadership, community, and policy priorities. Within the greater effort to permanently protect the Red Desert, ILAW’s goal is to foster an approach that upholds Indigenous stewardship rights as well as the rich ecosystem.

In addition to supporting these collaborative advocacy efforts, WOC is also closely monitoring the progress of the Bureau of Land Management’s long-awaited Rock Springs Resource Management Plan, which will outline management priorities for a large swath of the Red Desert’s public lands. WOC and ILAW have worked proactively to prepare for the draft RMP’s release, and ensure that the final version of the plan contains appropriate management strategies for the region’s incredible wildlife habitat and Indigenous cultural sites. It will also be critical for the BLM to hear from you during the public comment period: Once the draft RMP is released, we’ll

let you know how you can take action to support conservation values in the Northern Red Desert and other public lands across southwest Wyoming.

To watch this collaborative and multifaceted approach to

protecting the Red Desert to life, stay tuned for the premiere of an upcoming documentary about the desert, titled “Homeland”. Set to release this winter throughout the state, “Homeland” is an inspiring story about the relationship between people and place, that explores the Red Desert’s wild character as well as the incredible bond Tribal communities and Wyomingites have formed with it throughout the years. ■



A Sweet Day on the Sweetwater

KYLE ELMQUIST
Engagement Coordinator

On a cool and cloudy morning in July, a group of 11 volunteers as well as Wyoming Outdoor Council and The Nature Conservancy staff gathered on the banks of the Sweetwater River near Lander. We were there to help restore a wet meadow habitat, which was rapidly becoming more arid due to the changing climate. The effort to bring together the local community and revitalize this critical but degraded ecosystem was part of an inaugural stewardship day, co-hosted by the Outdoor Council and TNC.

In response to the growing global climate crisis, volunteer groups around the country have stepped up to support environmental restoration efforts, much like this one.

This fun stewardship day was WOC's debut project and, we hope, an inspiration for more of this important work that needs to be done throughout Wyoming. Environmental degradation has burdened landscapes throughout Wyoming and beyond, impacting our rivers, forests, and deserts. Thankfully nature has an incredible capacity to heal itself and, with a little help, many ecosystems can and will return to a more natural state.

For this pilot project, WOC and TNC teamed up to facilitate a wet meadow restoration project in the Sweetwater River Nature Preserve. Sixteen people worked side by side, building erosion control systems called Zeedyk structures and Zuni bowls. These micro rock dams slow the flow of water, mitigate harmful erosion, and allow moisture to sink into the meadow, which encourages biodiversity and a healthy habitat. It was a lot

of manual labor but, thanks to the abundance of volunteers who showed up to help, also a lot of fun!

In addition to restoring this beautiful section of river, the day also offered a meaningful and educational opportunity for the local conservation community to come together, foster friendships, and learn about stewardship and the greater impacts of our watersheds. Stay tuned for more stewardship opportunities on the horizon. ■



“It doesn’t take that much work just to fix a problem.”
— Doug Lewis, age 9, Riverton



EVERY DAY, the Wyoming Outdoor Council fights for public lands, wildlife, clean air, and clean water.

EVERY MONTH, you can make a difference.

YOUR MONTHLY GIFT ENSURES
our conservation advocates
will have the tools they need
to face future challenges.



Learn more and complete your monthly giving pledge at
www.wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org