

Wyoming Outdoor Council

Summer 2024

FRONTLINE



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

INSIDE: A NEW ERA FOR PUBLIC LANDS MANAGEMENT

plus

- A homeowner's guide to electrification rebates, p. 8
- Historical lessons from Wyoming tribes, p. 10



Founded in 1967, we are a statewide 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 close-to-home excursion on public lands?

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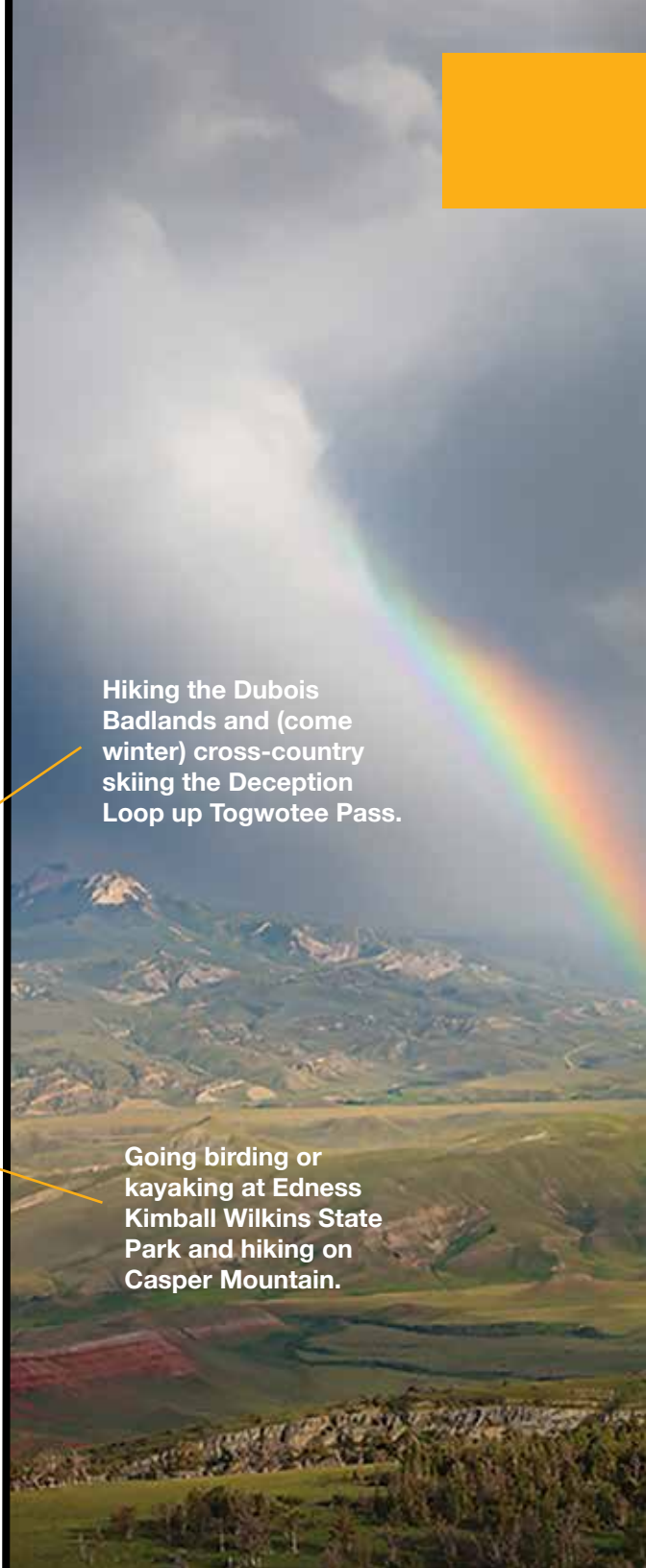
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Hiking the Dubois Badlands and (come winter) cross-country skiing the Deception Loop up Togwotee Pass.

Going birding or kayaking at Edness Kimball Wilkins State Park and hiking on Casper Mountain.

A MESSAGE from the DIRECTOR

CARL FISHER
Executive Director

Hard to believe it's only been six months since I joined the Wyoming Outdoor Council. In that short time, I've traveled to eight different communities to hear the stories of our members and partners. We represented our community at the legislature's 2024 Budget Session. We worked on policy changes for mining operations, dug into the Department of Environmental Quality's triennial review of water quality standards, and drafted comments for the Western Solar Plan, Greater sage-grouse management planning, and Bridger-Teton forest planning.

Like I said: Hard to believe it's only been six months. While we can't delve into every detail of the projects we're tackling in this publication, I encourage you to browse our website or reach out to our engaged staff, who have their fingers on the pulse of Wyoming's environment and quality of life.

Through this time, it's become clear to me that WOC is on the cusp of transformational change — change that will benefit Wyomingites, and our mission, for decades to come. The stories in this Frontline illustrate the transformational energy of this moment best: There's a piece about strengthening our future by sharing in historical lessons from Indigenous voices. There's a practical (and inspirational!) guide to the federal Home Energy Rebates' role in the fight against climate change. There's a story

about the exciting Bureau of Land Management rules that were finalized this past April. Of the latter, many of these rules bear the fruits of our collective comments, despite drawing challenges from Wyoming leaders, and it's encouraging to see responsiveness to people — not just politics.

Which brings me to my final point. In part because of some incredible gifts, we are making investments to ensure our organization is more accessible, more responsive and more present in communities across the state. Whether helping communities take action and invest in clean energy opportunities through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law or the Inflation Reduction Act, or advancing proactive policies to push back against proposals that jeopardize our land, water, air, or wildlife — WOC will be a partner in service and community with you. It isn't that we have all the answers; rather, our commitment is to finding the answers *with* you.

Please stay tuned for opportunities to join our team as we work to ensure Wyoming's land, air, water, climate and wildlife have expert coverage and attention for generations to come. If you or someone you know might be interested in getting more involved, don't hesitate to get in touch.

See you out there,



A New Era For **PUBLIC LANDS** **MANAGEMENT**

Common-sense reforms that protect wildlife and other Wyoming values are on the way

ALEC UNDERWOOD
Program Director

IN WYOMING, where public lands cover more than half the state, how we manage our public lands is of enormous consequence to just about everyone: recreationists, tribes, industry, ranchers, sporting groups, conservationists ... The list goes on. To have such a wide spectrum of people that gain enjoyment from, earn a living on, or otherwise have an interest in our public lands is a beautiful thing. It's also what a prominent conservation figure was alluding to when she told me that being a conservationist in the West is one of the toughest jobs there is.

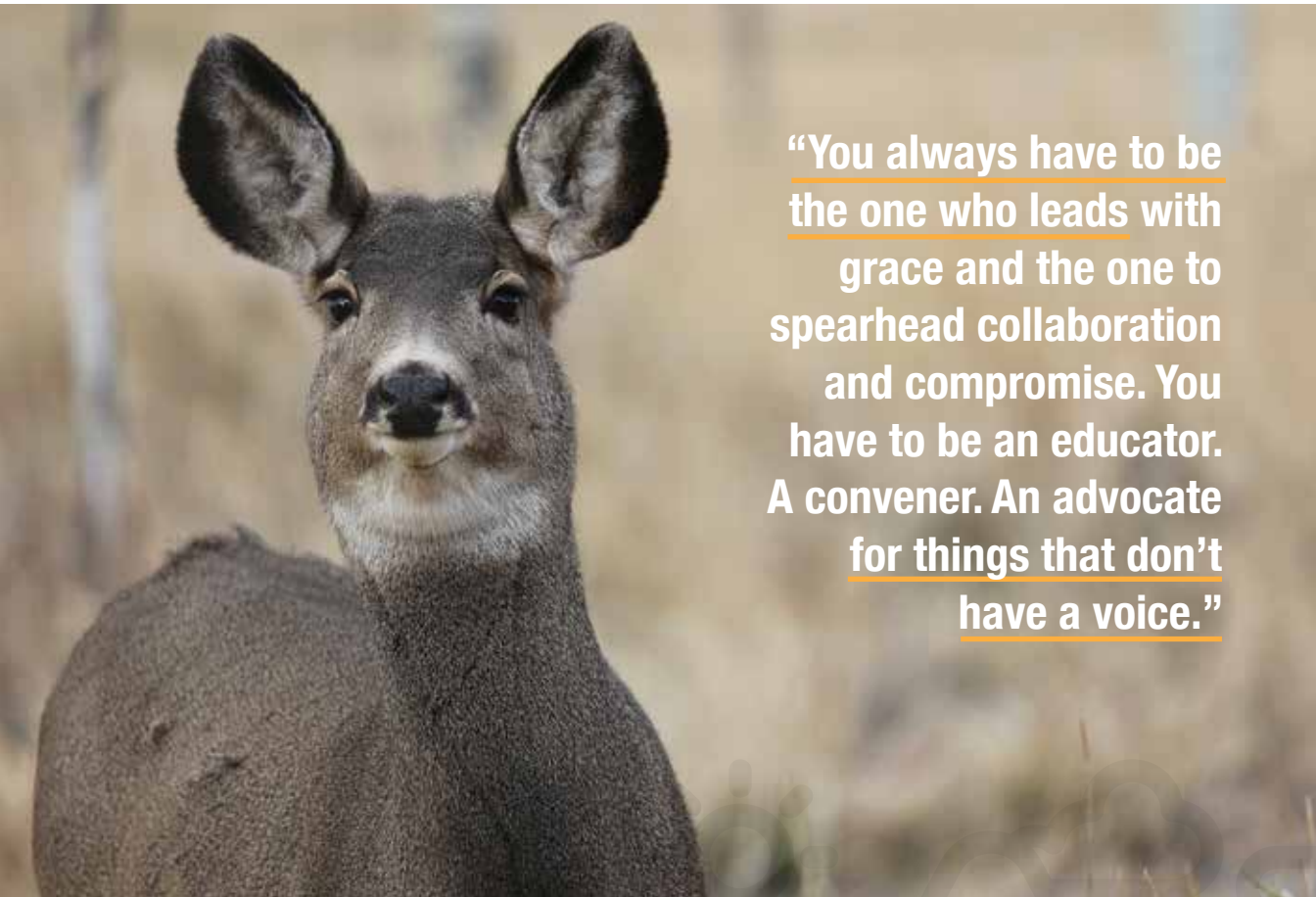
I still remember her words. "You have to be strategic," she said. "You always have to be the one who leads with grace and the one to spearhead collaboration and compromise. You have to be an educator. A convener. An advocate for things that don't have a voice."

Over the past few years, we've welcomed a shift from our federal agencies towards land management policies that increasingly emphasize

the importance of wildlife, habitat, recreation, and even restoration potential. The Bureau of Land Management's recently proposed swath of rules and plans, which will guide management actions for more than 18 million acres across Wyoming, are a case in point. In many ways, these proposals indicate an entirely new era for public lands management in the U.S. — one that considers landscape health in all decisions, provides common-sense reforms for responsible industrial development, and protects landscapes with high ecological or cultural values.

WOC advocates have worked tooth and nail to support these policy changes. But, recalling the words of my colleague, our jobs involve so much more than showing support for good policy. Perhaps most prominent of all, we work in service to you — educating, informing, and making sure the many people invested in the future of Wyoming's public lands, air, water, and wildlife hold all the tools they need to support conservation.

In exactly that spirit, here's a handy breakdown of some of the BLM's recent rulemakings and policy changes.



“You always have to be the one who leads with grace and the one to spearhead collaboration and compromise. You have to be an educator. A convener. An advocate for things that don’t have a voice.”

PUBLIC LANDS RULE



Since its establishment, the BLM has primarily managed public lands for commercial uses including oil and gas, grazing, and mining. Now, the recently finalized Public Lands Rule places conservation on equal footing with other uses. The rule does *not* prevent drilling, mining, or grazing on public lands — but it *does* consider protection and restoration as necessary components of

responsible management. In doing so, our wildlife habitat, areas of cultural importance, water quality, and landscape intactness all stand to benefit.

With drought, wildfires, and decreasing land health threatening Western lands, the Public Lands Rule provides a framework for implementing conservation measures to address these threats and slow negative climate change impacts — while continuing to manage for the many uses of these lands that allow Wyoming communities to thrive.

ROCK SPRINGS RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN



The Rock Springs RMP outlines how much of the northern Red Desert — including the Big Sandy Foothills, Adobe Town, and more — will be managed for the next 15–20 years. The draft plan favors conservation of the Red Desert’s extraordinary habitat, cultural resources, and wide-open spaces while protecting opportunities for recreation. In December, WOC represented conservation interests on a task force convened by Gov. Mark Gordon to form consensus recommendations for the BLM alongside livestock, oil and gas, sporting groups, and other interests. Much common ground was found while we defended key landscapes from potentially damaging proposals. The agency will release a final plan in the coming months.

OIL AND GAS RULE



The most significant update to oil and gas leasing on federal lands in decades, this rule directs development away from lands with little to no potential for oil and gas, allowing better management of places with important habitat, recreational values, and cultural resources. It also ensures that companies set aside more money to plug wells after drilling. (Previously, required clean-up money would have covered the cost of fewer than one out of 100 wells.) These common-sense reforms, which follow in the footsteps of existing state policy, are a win for Wyoming’s landscape health and taxpayers, since increased oil and gas royalty rates will result in better returns for Wyomingites and fund vital public services.

WONDERING HOW CONSERVATION FARED AT THE LEGISLATURE THIS YEAR?

The 2024 Conservation Vote Report is here!

Each year in the wake of the state legislative session, WOC publishes an analysis of conservation-related bills and how legislators voted on them. It’s your one-stop-shop to learn how the budget and other legislation will impact Wyoming’s environment and quality of life. It’s also a great resource for the interim and lead-up to the 2025 General Session. Get the report by visiting qrco.de/2024VoteReport or scanning the QR code.



UPDATED WESTERN SOLAR PLAN



This region-wide plan strives to identify the best locations across 11 Western states for future utility-scale solar development, while also identifying areas that should be closed to solar.

By proactively screening for wildlife, sensitive habitats, cultural sites, and other values and resources, the plan aims to reduce foreseeable land use conflicts, saving agencies and industry from expending time and money in pursuit of projects in inappropriate locations. Our climate future depends on the addition of renewables to our energy portfolio — and the Western Solar Plan is an opportunity to ensure solar doesn't come at the cost of our wildlife and Wyoming values. The plan is currently in draft form, and the comment period concluded in April.

UPDATED GREATER SAGE-GROUSE MANAGEMENT PLAN



Building off the BLM's 2015 and 2019 plans for Greater sage-grouse, the latest draft plan aims to enhance protections for this most-loved of Western birds — a symbol of the threatened sagebrush biome.

Drawing on ample new data and research, the update covers 77 resource management plans across 11 Western states. Wyoming is the beating heart of the sagebrush ecosystem and what happens here has outsized implications for the bird's future. The fact of the matter is, the 2015 and 2019 plans have never been fully implemented. It's imperative the BLM get things right this time to reverse sagebrush habitat losses. The BLM has since wrapped up comment on the draft plan and will release its final plan in the coming months.



OUR ROLES TO PLAY

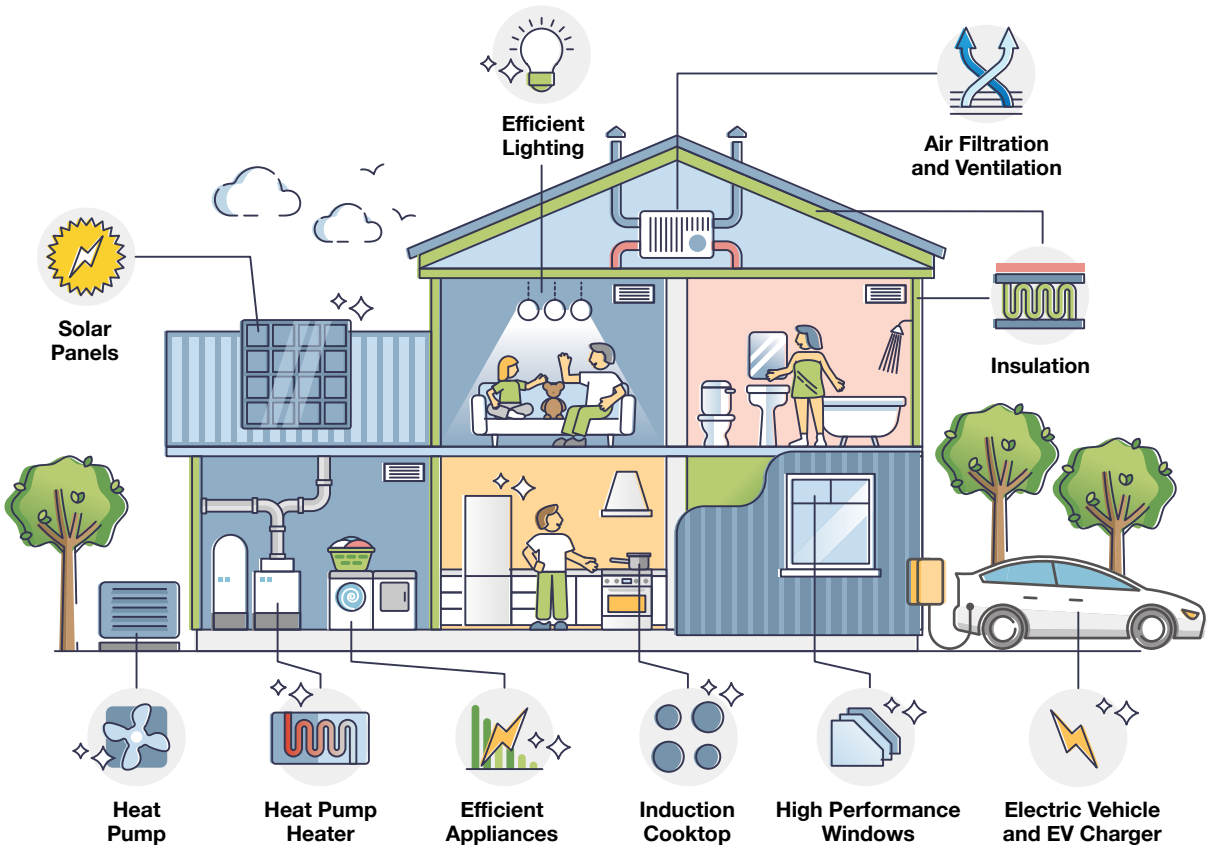


In a time when fear, not facts, have dominated the narrative about what some of these proposed changes would mean for Wyoming, WOC's advocates strive to help you cut through the noise. And much as my colleague advised, we'll continue working tirelessly as educators, collaborators, and conveners to advocate for strong conservation policies for the places that matter most. We're confident these policies and plans will help maintain our wildlife, water, beautiful landscapes, and the communities that rely on them. In other words, these changes will help keep Wyoming, Wyoming. What's not to love about that?

Finally, while we play our roles, we can't say enough how grateful we are to you for playing yours. If you were one of the many, many people who wrote to the BLM in favor of any of the above rules and plans, thank you! If you're interested in getting more involved, make sure you're signed up to receive our emails — and, if you aren't already, consider becoming a member. ■



Are you subscribed to WOC's updates?
Scan the QR Code to sign up



NOW'S THE TIME:

PLAN AHEAD AND PREPARE FOR ELECTRIFICATION

JOHN BURROWS
Energy & Climate Policy Director

THERE'S AN OLD SAYING: *The best time to repair a roof is when the sun is shining.* The same is true for upgrading the appliances and technologies in your home: Ideally, you have a solid plan in

place before your heater finally bites the dust in January.

But being proactive and making a plan for appliance and technology upgrades has benefits that extend far beyond your home's comfort — it can help your wallet, and the climate, too. The ways we heat, cool, and operate the places we live and work have a huge impact on the climate. In

There's an old saying: The best time to repair a roof is when the sun is shining.

fact, roughly 30 percent of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions come from the residential and commercial sector. Fortunately, this is a sector that we, as average people, have control over. One of the best and easiest things we can do to reduce our emissions at the individual and community level is to start electrifying the things we use everyday, from our household appliances, to our transportation, to our heating and cooling systems.

Electrification allows us to tap into cleaner sources of energy, which reduces our emissions, improves air quality, and yes, can even help us lower our utility bills.

Of course, there are challenges to electrification, especially in Wyoming. We hear this a lot. Wyoming is cold! The distances between communities are far! And the upfront cost of new technology is expensive! All of these are true statements, but fortunately, we are living in a time when these barriers are decreasing, even for us here in the Cowboy State.

Take dramatic improvements in heat pump technology over the last decade: Modern heat pumps can efficiently heat homes at well below -10 degrees Fahrenheit, and operate at more than double the efficiency of resistance or gas systems below 0 degrees. Cold-weather heat pumps can also be integrated with electric resistance

systems as a backup for colder weather climates like ours.

And it's not just the technology that's getting better. The number of incentives available to homeowners, businesses, and local governments for electrification and energy efficiency upgrades is growing. **At WOC, we're committed to compiling these benefits so you can plan ahead to cut emissions, save money, and set yourself up to go electric.**

Some of the already existing tax credits could help you and your family:

- **Save up to \$2000** on heat pumps or efficient wood stoves.
- **Save up to 30 percent** on home renewable energy project expenses.
- **Save up to \$1000** on home vehicle charging equipment.

For a full list of available federal tax credits for homeowners, check out the enclosed guide, and help us spread the word!

You don't have to be a climate policy advocate to reduce emissions. Making an impact can be as simple as calling a local contractor and talking through your options before it's time to replace your home's old or inefficient technologies. When you factor in tax credits, rebates, and energy savings, you might be surprised at what you can save. ■

The same is true for upgrading the appliances and technologies in your home

Building on Solid Ground

The future of Wyoming conservation depends on a clear-eyed understanding of the past

MAX OWENS

Communications Manager

ENDURING SOLUTIONS TO WYOMING'S

urgent conservation challenges cannot come without the historical insight of those who have coexisted with these lands, waters, and wildlife the longest. The tribes of the Wind River Reservation, the **Eastern Shoshone** and **Northern Arapaho**, have cared for Wyoming's treasures for many generations — and continue to do so.

As recipients of gracious knowledge-sharing, the Wyoming Outdoor Council strives to follow in this tradition by sharing some of this history with you, too. Many thanks to the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribal members who shared their knowledge and provided consultation on this article.

For both Wind River tribes, **the second half of the 1800s brought unprecedented challenges**, as the U.S. government sought to clear a corridor of safe passage for white settlers. The government made many promises that were never honored, while purposefully erasing tribal cultures and eroding tribes' ancestral lands to clear the way for extractive development. However, despite the generational traumas associated with this violent history, **efforts to revitalize tribal culture, especially through language, are alive and well today.**



Tribal treaty boundaries within present-day Wyoming: Lands promised to the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho have drastically shrunk over time.

Eastern Shoshone:

- The **1863 Treaty of Fort Bridger** created “Shoshone Country,” spanning **44 million acres** that included lands in present-day Wyoming and bordering states.
- The treaty was signed just months after the Bear River Massacre, in which government troops killed hundreds of Shoshones — making clear the lengths the government was willing to go to force compliance.
- Settlement by whites within the treaty territory spiked after gold was discovered near South Pass. The government sought to renegotiate the 1863 treaty. The resulting **1868 Treaty of Fort Bridger** created the Shoshone

Reservation (now called the Wind River Reservation). This reduced the Tribe's land base to just **4 million acres**.

- Further erosion of Tribal lands occurred with the 1872 Lander Purchase, reducing the reservation to **3.2 million acres**.
- **The Shoshone language** is central to Eastern Shoshone culture. It is part of the Uto-Aztecan language family, one of the oldest and most broadly distributed language families in the Americas.
- During the boarding school era, Native American students were forbidden from speaking their language. While there are few fluent Shoshone speakers still alive today, Shoshone language preservationists have compiled vast dictionaries. They've also embraced technology to help speakers learn, including developing a language app.

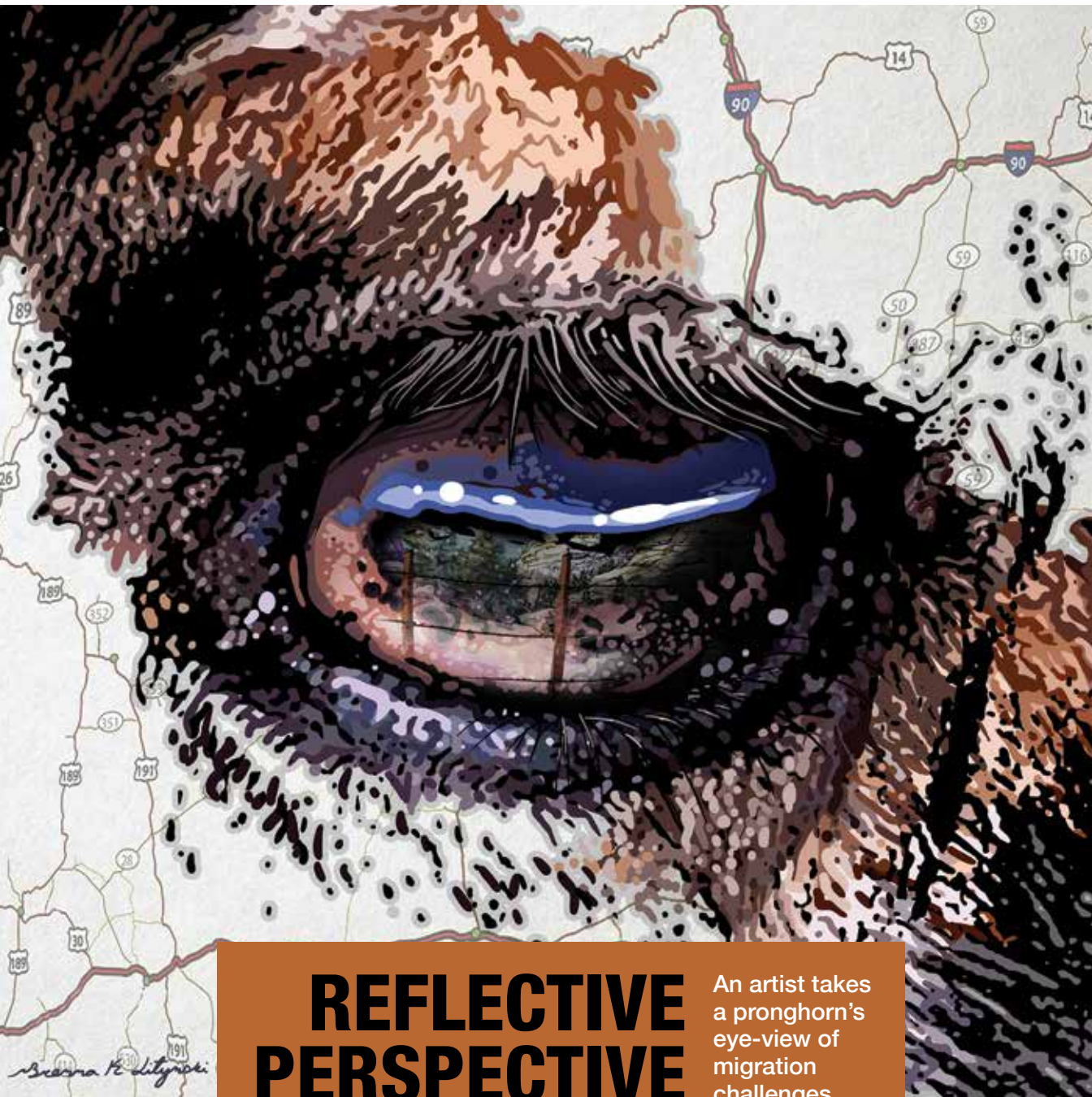
Northern Arapaho:

- The **1851 Treaty of Fort Laramie** gave the Northern Arapaho sovereignty over a broad territory within the Platte River Basin (a small segment of their traditional territory) and promised payment for previous intrusions on their land.
- After gold was discovered, settlers continued to stream into Arapaho territory, depleting the Tribe's valuable resources — even as the payments promised by the government failed to materialize.
- The **1861 Treaty of Fort Wise** chipped away at the Arapahos' allotted lands. Afterwards, escalating tensions resulted in atrocities such as the **1864 Sand Creek Massacre**, where hundreds of Arapaho and Cheyenne people, mainly women and children, were murdered.

- The **1868 Second Treaty of Fort Laramie** left the Tribe without a land base. Afterwards, they were permanently placed on the Shoshone Reservation. Promises of a reservation all their own went unfulfilled.
- **The Arapaho language**, the primary symbol of Arapaho ethnic identity, is regarded as sacred. It is one of the oldest languages in the Algonquian language family.
- Native languages did not receive legal protections until the **Native American Religious Freedom Act of 1978**. While there are few fluent Arapaho speakers alive today, efforts to revitalize usage of the language (including immersion schooling and language meetings) have gathered momentum.

Anything built on a shaky foundation won't stand the test of time. At terrible cost to tribes, 19th century policies cleared the way for resource extraction as the primary goal of land management. The way forward, in contrast, must reimagine the way we care for our lands. Honoring Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge and forming tribal co-stewardship and co-management agreements are pathways towards restoring relationships — with Wind River tribes and the Wyoming landscapes we cherish.

We're deeply appreciative to the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribal members who shared this gift of knowledge with the Wyoming Outdoor Council. In keeping with tribal traditions, when you receive a gift, you not only give a gift in return but more importantly, you share the gift you've received. In turn, we're sharing this knowledge with you. Now that you are in receipt of a gift, what will you do with it? How and who will you share it with? We and our tribal communities are here to support you. ■



REFLECTIVE PERSPECTIVE

An artist takes a pronghorn's eye-view of migration challenges

Brenna Litynski is a Wyoming-based illustrator and fine artist. She draws inspiration from her deep-rooted passion for education, the great outdoors, and agriculture, fostered by her graduate studies in animal science at the University of Wyoming. Enthralled by Western landscapes and wildlife, her art aims to educate and inspire. When she's not immersed in her art, you'll find her working as a University of Wyoming Extension Educator in Albany County, spinning across country swing dance floors, enjoying time spent with family, or in the mountains to hike or fish.

To learn more about Brenna, please visit her on Instagram @brennalitynskiart

BRENNA LITYNSKI

PERSPECTIVE MAKES EVERY HUMAN or animal unique. When challenged with how to reimagine conservation through art for the 2023 Re-Imagining Conservation exhibition at the National Museum of Wildlife Art in Jackson, I thought about perspective: A being is only truly understood if we are willing to step into their shoes and experience both their struggles and triumphs through a new lens.

I was honored to have my painting, *Reflective Perspective*, selected for the exhibition. In the painting, I tried to reimagine the challenges associated with migration routes of ungulates through a new perspective — that of a pronghorn antelope. Roads, fencing, and other manmade structures are pivotal to human development, but present unique challenges to migrating animals. In this artwork, an opportunity is presented to see these challenges through the eyes of a Wyoming pronghorn, should you take a moment to look closely enough.

I have severe asthma, and while living in Maryland my health gradually declined due to environmental factors. I took an opportunity to move west in 2021, and not only did Wyoming's climate allow me to heal and completely change my quality of life, but I also discovered my passion for agriculture and natural resources at the University of Wyoming. I obtained a love for the rugged landscapes and wildlife unique to Wyoming, and my art has since been heavily influenced by these things.

A big component of my wildlife artwork is taking complicated scientific and conservation topics and distilling it down to a beautiful image easily understood by many. Art plays a vital role in conservation by bridging the gap between science and emotion. Through visual storytelling, art evokes empathy, provokes thought, and inspires action by engaging diverse audiences in conservation efforts to protect natural resources and wildlife. ■

SPEAKING UP FOR WYOMING PRONGHORN

“Wyoming prides itself on bringing many stakeholders together to puzzle out solutions to thorny conservation issues. Of course, those whose livelihoods depend most on the lands being haggled over — the animals themselves — cannot advocate for themselves in these settings. We may not be able to hear from pronghorn directly when determining the fate of a migration corridor designation, but at WOC we’re focused on giving voice to the needs of wildlife in our communities and before our decision-makers.”

– Meghan Riley
WOC Wildlife
Program Manager



WE'RE GROWING!

GET TO KNOW OUR
NEW STAFF MEMBERS

Sandy Whitehair

Tribal Conservation Director



With a background in land use planning and policy development, Sandy has worked in tribal communities across the West. Now, as leader of WOC's tribal conservation program, Sandy will work to support the environmental efforts of the Eastern

Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes. She is a member of the Hopi and Dakota people from Arizona and South Dakota, respectively.

What's your favorite part of your work so far?

What's made me feel at home, especially moving into a new field, is how welcoming the staff is. I've really enjoyed getting back into the community, engaging with tribal communities, and working to understand what their needs are, so we can help them go the direction they want to go.

You've worked in many different tribal communities. What do you appreciate most about working with the communities here in Wyoming?

I've worked with the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes before, so now I get to reconnect with people, families, and communities that have been a part of my life in the past. This is where my kids grew up. We have roots here. For all of us, it's like coming home.

Tabatha Cruz

Administrative Coordinator

Before joining WOC, Tabatha spent eight years working on trail crews and as a wildland firefighter — protecting our public lands on the ground level. She was drawn to Lander by the Wind River Range, rock climbing, and small-town feel, and is excited to continue being an advocate for our outdoor spaces.



Has your experience as a firefighter influenced your perspective on protecting our public lands?

In my previous jobs working for the government, you're doing the work, but not effecting the change. I was motivated to be part of an organization that was on the other side of things. Since joining WOC, I get to work with really great people and see so much good work happening — I'm really learning a lot.

Since moving to Lander, what are you enjoying most?

I love how the wildlife here is just thriving, and making sure it continues to thrive is really important to people — it's part of the culture.

WOC SUPPORTERS AGREE: PROTECTING WILDLIFE MIGRATIONS IS ESSENTIAL!

Your top three reasons for supporting our migration work:

“Wyoming has some of the world’s last remaining, long-distance migrations, and they deserve protection.”

“Living in a place with abundant wildlife is central to my quality of life.”

“I want future generations to experience the same amazing migrations that I have witnessed.”

(Interim results from our 2024 Supporter Connection Survey)

We fight to ensure pronghorn, mule deer, and elk have the connected habitat they need to thrive.

Your donations make this work possible.

Will you donate today to strengthen protections for Wyoming’s migratory herds?

To make a gift, visit the link below or scan the QR code. [wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/donate](https://www.wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/donate)



www.wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/donate

Image: © Jens Lambert Photography