

Wyoming Outdoor Council

Winter 2024

# FRONTLINE



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

## **INSIDE:** STRENGTHENING THE CURRENT OF CONSERVATION

*plus*

**all the ways you can make positive change:**

- at the state legislature, p. 8
- for pronghorn migration, p. 10
- in your community, p. 4



## Wyoming Outdoor Council

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 one change you've seen in yourself, your community, or the landscape outside your door in the past year?

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Leaning deeper into "home" by appreciating the seasonal changes along my favorite runs and hikes.

With respect to our climate, things have changed, therefore we must change, there is no choice.

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**CARL FISHER**  
Executive Director

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I'm excited to write to you as the newest member of the Wyoming Outdoor Council team. It has been an absolute pleasure getting to meet the staff and board, share a few new ideas, and build from the solid foundation Lisa McGee developed in her tenure. There's no doubt we might do things a little differently, but I promise you that the vision, drive, and care for Wyoming and its communities will be unwavering as we move forward.

We live in a time of change. And while some changes (such as the climate or destruction of wild ecosystems) are unwelcome, others create opportunities to do and be better. For much of my life, I've embraced change, believing that it's better to change human behavior than complex and beautiful natural systems. As we change, or as change happens to us, my goal is to make sure we take care of each other and the landscapes we are fortunate to call home.

There is a lot happening across Wyoming right now, and this issue of Frontline captures some of our recent efforts. You'll read about courageous community responses to climate change, our work to elevate your priorities at the State Legislature, and the push to protect Wyoming's most prolific pronghorn herd. I also sat down with Max Owens, WOC's communications manager, for a Q&A that I hope serves as an introduction to who I am.

Of course, the efforts in these pages (and many others not included here) depend on

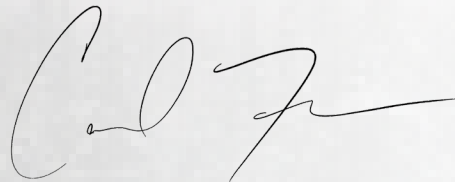
citizen engagement. Please make sure you sign up for our emails and text messaging services to stay up-to-date on the critical issues shaping the future of Wyoming's forests, deserts, rivers, and wildlife.

Through all of our campaigns and projects, we must also work to keep our organization strong. We will be engaging you in our strategic planning, as our members and communities play a critical role in shaping the next iteration of the Outdoor Council. Your voice, your ideas, and your support are crucial as we respond to the growing challenges facing Wyoming and the West — and I look forward to hearing from you.

I've received such a warm welcome from the WOC community (for both me and my family), and I look forward to traveling the state to meet with partners, agencies, policy makers, thought leaders, experts, and the entirety of Wyoming's community. Please don't hesitate to drop me a line — though to be honest, it would be my strong preference to wet a line with you.

I look forward to rising to the challenges before us with you all, building community and resilience for Wyoming along the way.

For the wild,





# COURAGE & RESILIENCE in Local Climate Action

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## JOHN BURROWS

Energy & Climate Policy Director

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**IN 2006, WYOMING OUTDOOR** Council founder Tom Bell had this to say about humanity’s response to climate change: “This is one of those critical times in history when courage of an uncommon kind is going to be required to make decisions that err on the side of human safety.”

Today, Tom’s insistence on facing down climate change (well before many others had grasped its significance) has become a part of WOC lore — particularly as we build our burgeoning climate team and engage with more communities across the state.

In last year’s winter Frontline, we shared our road map for community climate action, which guided Wyoming communities toward addressing the threat of climate change on their own terms. A lot has happened in Wyoming since as citizens and communities have begun to step up and have conversations about solutions and resilience.

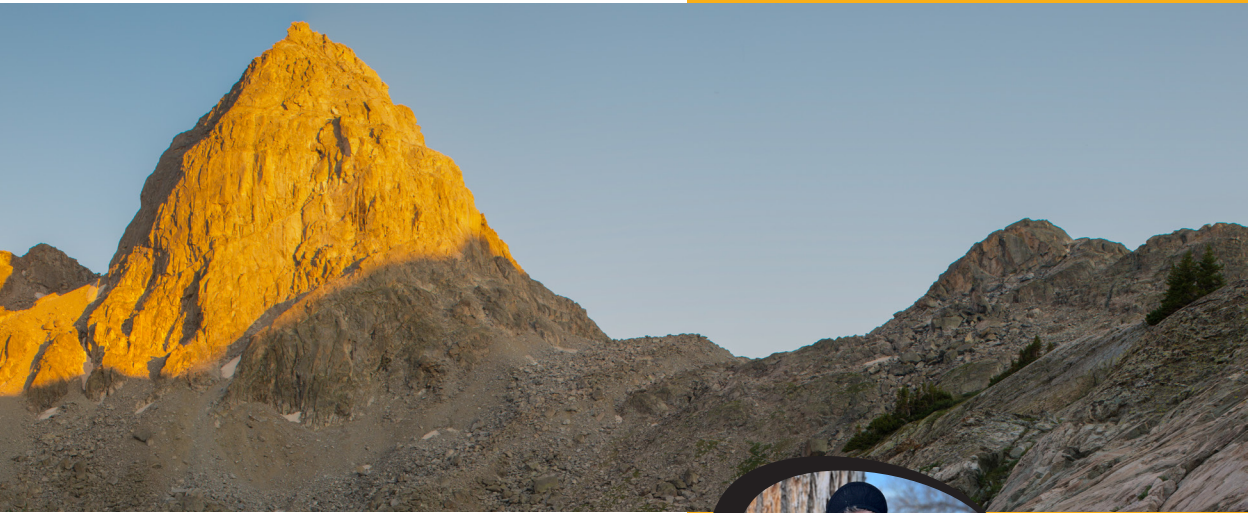
At the Outdoor Council, we know climate change presents both direct and indirect threats

to the environment, wildlife, communities, and economy of the state we love, and we see local climate action as an opportunity for communities to not only address these threats, but also become more resilient, self-sufficient, and forward-looking in decades to come. As Tom knew well, the need is urgent and the time to act is now. With his call for “uncommon courage” in mind, we’re excited to roll up our sleeves and talk about where things stand now and what you can expect from us heading into 2024. As always, we appreciate your feedback and thoughts. We can’t do this work without the support of members like you.

## WHERE WE ARE NOW

In case you missed this bit of news, 2023 was the hottest year on record for our planet. In fact, since 2014, we’ve experienced nine of the warmest years ever recorded globally. Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the mid-18th century, average temperatures have climbed by 2 degrees Fahrenheit — primarily because of greenhouse gases that humans have emitted into the atmosphere.

The global consequences of this warming



are serious, but we needn't look much further than beyond our own doorsteps to see the impacts. In Wyoming, a general trend of warmer winter temperatures is driving the stark decline of whitebark pine — a keystone high-elevation tree species that is being decimated by the mountain pine beetle, which thrives in these warmer temperatures. Warming waters pose a threat to our coldwater fisheries and world-class trout streams. Changes in precipitation patterns and increased drought impact the viability of big game migration corridors and hamper agriculture and grazing. Glaciers in the Wind River Range are rapidly melting, and the risks of both wildfire and flooding continue to increase for Wyoming and across the West.

While these impacts paint a bleak picture, they don't capture the entire panorama. That's because right now, technological and economic change is helping to drive innovative policies and climate solutions around the globe. Renewable and low-carbon energy sources continue to get cheaper. Battery storage technology is evolving. Consumers and markets are beginning to demand energy with a lower carbon footprint, and historic investments in energy efficiency, carbon management, and



## WOC'S CLIMATE TEAM IS GROWING

In September 2023, Jonathan Williams (JW) joined WOC as our first Energy and Climate Associate. He will engage communities around the state to advance local climate and energy efficiency solutions. Prior to WOC, JW directed the environmental stewardship, sustainability, and public policy efforts of the National Outdoor Leadership School — where he secured grant funding for a large solar project and helped develop the school's first climate change curriculum. JW's climate work is motivated by his deep love for exploring wild places through paddling, hiking, biking, and skiing. This passion fueled a strong commitment to serve people and communities who rely on intact ecosystems for sustenance, clean water, and inspiration. We're excited to have you on board, JW!

renewable energy are coming to fruition.

## WHERE WE'RE HEADED

Our climate work at WOC is built on the premise that Wyoming communities can and should be part of the solution to reduce emissions. Over the last year, we've seen outstanding examples of this in communities such as Lander and Cody. This past December, Lander became the third town in Wyoming — joining Laramie and Jackson — to pass a city resolution establishing greenhouse gas emission reduction targets. This huge step towards lowering municipal emissions and energy expenses was the result of a multi-year effort by the Lander Climate Action Network to build grassroots support for climate solutions. Similarly, citizens in Cody came together to create the Park County Citizens for Sustainability, a group whose mission is to “transition our communities to renewable energy, using scientific data, economic fairness, and public education.”

In both Lander and Cody, WOC played a critical role in bringing these groups together around a table. But this is only the beginning, as we see opportunities to widen community engagement, especially through common-sense energy efficiency and cost-saving measures. Staying true to our roots — Tom initially founded WOC as the Wyoming Outdoor Coordinating Council — we intend to work with Lander, Cody, and other groups across the state to grow local climate solutions. Specifically, we want to ensure that communities and residents get the support they need to take advantage of new programs, rebates, and grants, such as the new federal Home Energy Rebates, which are designed to cut emissions while saving Wyomingites on energy and utility costs.

As we look toward another full year, we will also continue working for smart,

proactive policies that encourage responsible energy siting — especially for large-scale renewable energy projects.

We believe solutions to decarbonize our grid should not come at the expense of world-class wildlife and cultural resources. But the truth is that we need both. Without reducing our emissions through a low-carbon grid,

these same habitats and ecosystems will become imperiled in the future. This belief in balance and doing it right is one of the reasons WOC will continue to firmly support rooftop solar, which empowers Wyoming residents and communities to generate their own clean electricity on already developed locations.

It's been almost two decades since Tom asked the Outdoor Council to turn its sights on one of the most complex challenges humanity has ever faced. Climate change is not something that WOC, Wyoming, or even the United States can solve on its own. But, if we've learned anything over our 57 years, it's that Wyomingites have the resilience and ingenuity to play an outsized part of the solution — so why not start in our own communities? Of course, it will take global action to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change, but the courage to stare down an issue that's bigger than us is something that we can practice right here in Wyoming. ■

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# HOME ENERGY REBATES:



*How new programs will bring enormous benefits to Wyomingites*

By providing rebates for energy-efficient appliances and technologies, two federal programs — the High-Efficiency Electric Home Rebate Act (HEEHRA) and Home Energy Efficiency Programs (HOMES) — could provide as much as \$70 million in incentives to Wyoming families, businesses, and workers. The rebates would help residents install new energy-efficient and cost-saving appliances, update outdated electrical systems, and improve home weatherization and insulation.

For qualifying low- and middle-income households, these rebates could cut energy usage by 40–60 percent per household ... while providing thousands of dollars in benefits for home efficiency upgrades! These programs are expected to be made available as soon as this summer — we'll keep you updated.



# AMPLIFYING IMPACT:

Why **your voice** is the best tool in our 2024 legislative session toolbox.

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## ERA ARANOW

Government Affairs Manager

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**AS THE 2024 SESSION** of the Wyoming State Legislature rapidly approaches, I've been thinking a lot about the tools I have in my advocacy toolbox. There are a lot in there, from airtight arguments, to relationships built over months and years, to loads of research. Each of these tools can help stop harmful bills in their tracks, or advance ones that protect our environment and quality of life.

But if there's one tool above the rest that I'd reliably reach for — the tool with the potential to make the greatest impact at the legislature — it would be your voice. This tool has proven to be far more powerful than everything else in the advocacy toolbox.

More on that in a minute. First, some nuts and bolts: This year's legislative session, which begins February 12 and runs until early March, is a budget session. This means that legislators will be mainly focused on understanding, amending, and eventually approving the budget for the next biennium, the two-year

period from 2025–2026. However, numerous non-budget bills addressing all aspects of life in Wyoming will also be up for consideration.

Along with other WOC staff, I'll be at the Capitol throughout the session to watchdog the budget and other legislation that pops up. We'll advocate for adequate funding for state agencies; defend existing environmental laws and policies; make sure that Wyoming's "All of the Above" state energy strategy includes renewables; and call for reasonable recreation in the face of increasing demand. We'll also keep an eye on the bad bills that regularly creep into the legislature, such as state takeovers of public lands.

Throughout the session, your voice is essential. One of the wonderful things about the Wyoming legislature (and yes, there are aspects of a citizen legislature that are truly wonderful) is how accessible your elected officials are. Hearing from you — their constituents and neighbors — can be a major factor in how they vote. Sharing with legislators what matters most to you is the best way to impact what happens at the Capitol. ■





# What's in **YOUR** legislative toolbox?

Maximize your impact during the session with these tips and tricks.

## 1 THE LATEST NEWS

Things change rapidly at the Capitol. Get the most up-to-date information when you sign up for our emails. We'll send out action alerts when your voice is needed, as well as weekly recaps during the session.

### ★ NEW FOR 2024! WE'RE GOING MOBILE!

Receive text message action alerts by opting in to mobile messaging. On our sign-up page ([wyoingoutdoorcouncil.org/signup](https://wyoingoutdoorcouncil.org/signup)), check "Yes, sign me up for text messages."



## 2 REACHING OUT TO YOUR LEGISLATOR

Your senator and representative often decide how to vote based on what they're hearing from their constituents — that's you. Reach out to them via email or phone during the session.

**Find their contact information:** [bit.ly/find-my-legislators](https://bit.ly/find-my-legislators)

## 3 EMAIL KNOW-HOW

Sending a personal email to your legislator is a quick, impactful way to make a connection. Instead of using pre-written form emails, take a moment to write your own subject line and a personalized message, which will be much more meaningful. A few sentences will do the trick — shorter messages are more likely to be read by time-strapped legislators! Try out this formula:

- **Introduce yourself and establish a personal connection** (legislators often skip emails that look like generic form messages). For example, "Hello, Rep. Doe, I'm a resident of Cody and a constituent of yours."
- **Clearly state the position you want them to take** and reference the bill number. "I'm writing to ask you to please vote no on SF 90, Federal Lands Transfer."
- **Tell your story** or the reasons behind your stance, drawing on your experience and values.
- **Reiterate your ask** of the legislator, to vote yes or no on legislation.



# Completing the Puzzle for Sublette Pronghorn

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**MEGHAN RILEY**  
Wildlife Program Manager

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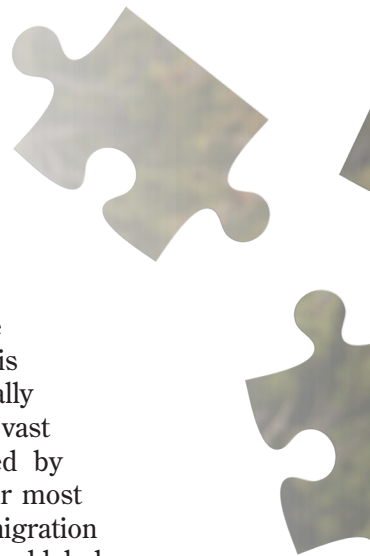
**OF ALL THE QUALITIES** that attract people to Wyoming, our state's ecological integrity is extraordinary. A rarity in the lower 48, this is a place where extensive open country still supports the full range of species — from wolverines to grizzlies and so many others between — that thrive as they did before European contact. It's a place where long-distance land migrations are still possible, and where ungulates still outnumber people. It's a place where the relatively few people that do live here enjoy connecting with wildlife on trails, out car windows, and in backyards. It's plain to see that these days, what we have in Wyoming is increasingly uncommon.

I'll be honest ... when I consider the varied species I come across living in Wyoming, pronghorn are standouts. Yes, bison are on the state flag, and we are surrounded by thriving populations of elk, coyotes, and cottontails, too. But there is something captivating and quintessentially Western about pronghorn. Besides sporting those striking patched coats, being highly visible from roadways across the state, and showing up in cowboy songs, these animals are wholly unique. They're the sole survivors of a lineage that predates the Ice Age, and their wonderfully weird adaptations reflect an era when cheetahs patrolled the plains. They're a true North American native that cannot be found elsewhere on Earth. And Wyoming — this rare stretch of land I feel lucky to call home — is the pronghorn's greatest remaining stronghold.

But while Wyoming may be a haven for pronghorn, ensuring it remains so is not guaranteed. With so many competing demands on the landscape, we must commit to providing these animals the room and resources they need. In order to preserve space for wildlife and prevent choice pronghorn habitat from being degraded, we must take deliberate steps.

Thankfully, the state is poised to take such a step in 2024. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is moving towards officially recognizing the vast migration corridor used by Sublette Pronghorn, our most prolific herd. A formal migration corridor designation would help safeguard the ability of thousands of animals to travel between summer and winter ranges by naming, mapping, and prioritizing protections along this ancient pathway.

Wyoming has made tremendous strides in securing connectivity for migratory ungulates over the years, from constructing road crossings for mule deer near Kemmerer to facilitating voluntary conservation measures on private lands. Designation of the Sublette Pronghorn migration corridor would continue this vital work and help sustain this herd far

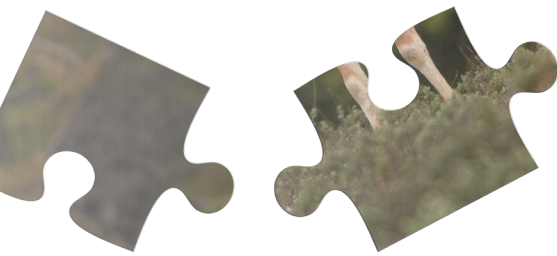


into the future. We should do everything we can to support it.

Whether you're a local who finds joy in observing pronghorn in your day-to-day, or a visitor excited to see a species that has faded from memory in much of its historic range, the importance of migration corridors cannot be overstated. We can't hope to have massive herds like Sublette Pronghorn prosper if we don't make concrete plans to safeguard the

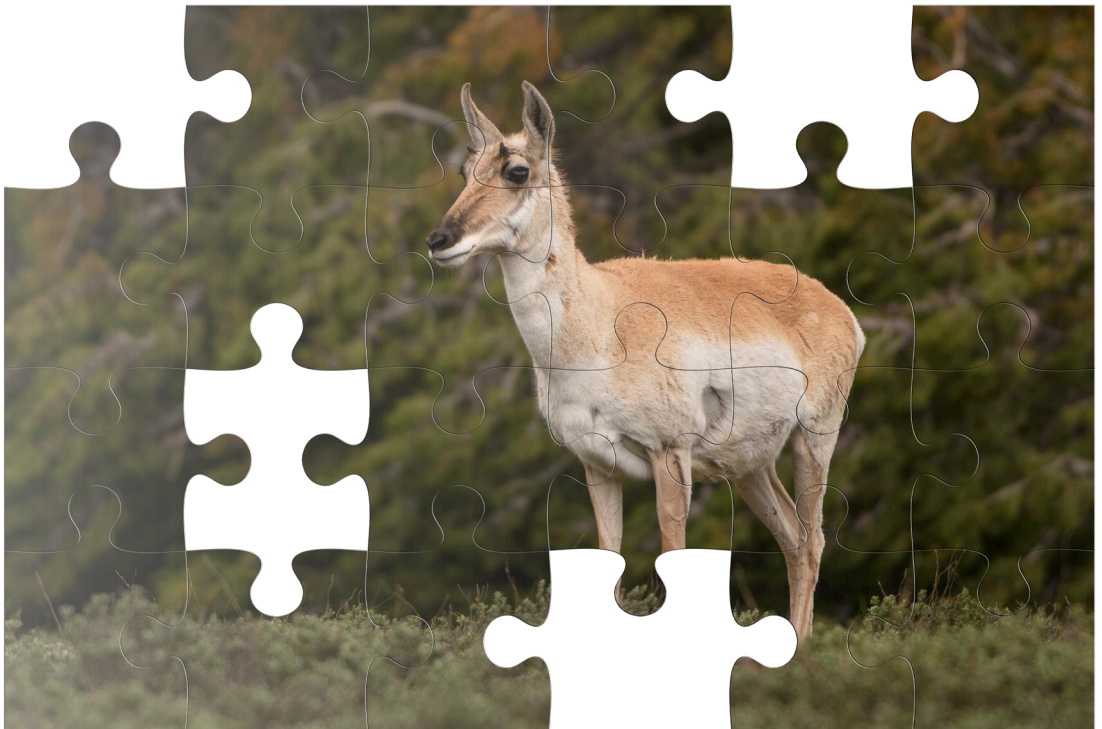
lands they depend on. Pursuing designation for this migration corridor reaffirms Wyoming's dedication to our remarkable wildlife and is something we can all celebrate.

Learn more about the Sublette Pronghorn migration corridor, and how you can support designation, at [wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/about/protect-pronghorn](http://wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/about/protect-pronghorn). ■



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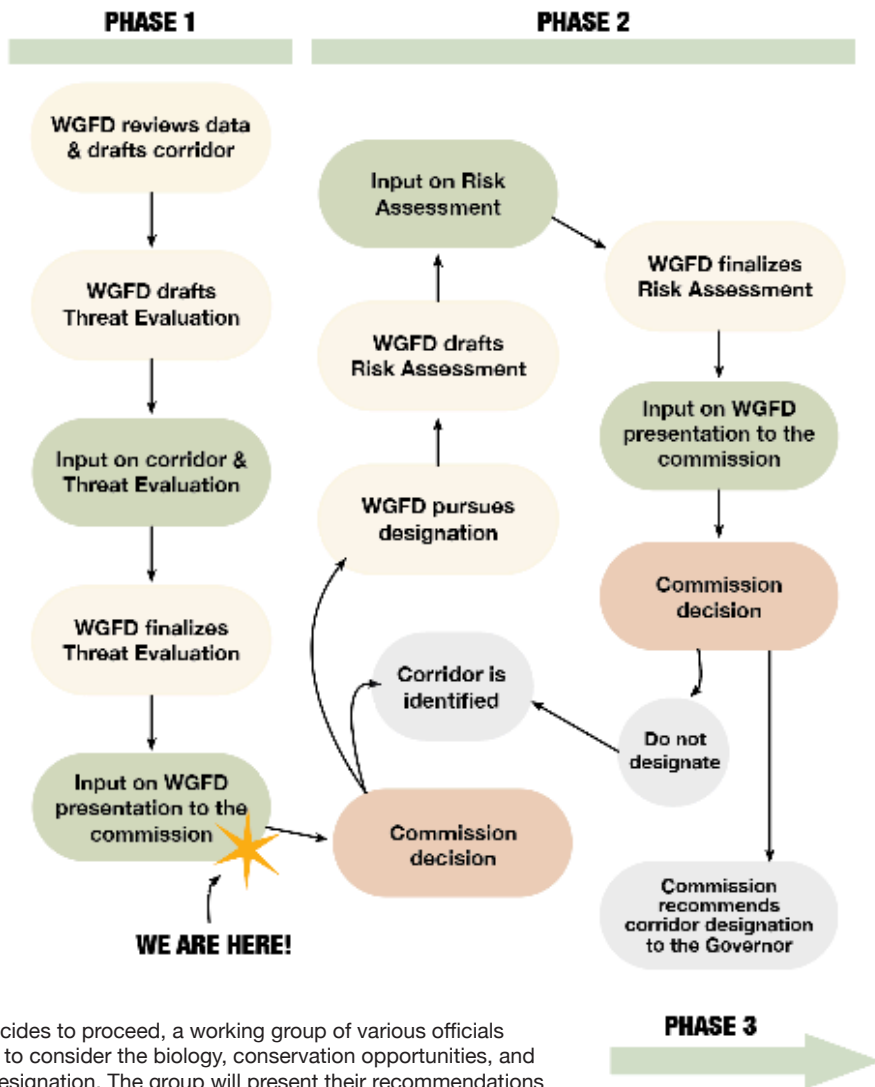


# Making tracks to migration corridor designation

The path to officially designate the Sublette Pronghorn migration corridor unfolds over three main phases. As Frontline goes to press, we've nearly made it to the end of Phase 1. Many WOC members answered our call to provide public comment in Phase 1 — thank you! If you missed out, stay tuned for more opportunities to participate.

**PHASE 1:** Biologists from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department create a migration corridor map and identify current threats and protections. The public provides input on the map and threat evaluation. Then, revised versions are presented to the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission. This meeting is currently scheduled for March 12–13. If the Commission approves, we move to Phase 2.

**PHASE 2:** Biologists conduct a thorough “biological risk assessment.” As in Phase 1, they’ll collect input from the public on their draft. Then they’ll present to the Game and Fish Commission. If the Commission recommends bringing the designation before the Governor, we move to the final phase.



**PHASE 3:** If the Governor decides to proceed, a working group of various officials and interest groups will meet to consider the biology, conservation opportunities, and implications of the corridor designation. The group will present their recommendations to the Governor, who will decide whether or not to (finally!) designate the corridor.

# In Conversation with Carl:

## Meet WOC's new director

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### MAX OWENS

Communications Manager

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*Those of us at the Outdoor Council have been buzzing with excitement in recent weeks as we welcome new executive director Carl Fisher. While he's been getting settled at our Lander headquarters, he has also been traveling around the state to meet members. If you live near Cheyenne, Lander, Laramie, or Cody, stay tuned for information from us about a visit! In the meantime, enjoy this conversation between Carl and communications manager Max Owens. They sat down to talk about impactful experiences in wild places, the greatest challenges to conservation, and why Carl's so optimistic about our work in Wyoming.*

Interview edited for clarity.

**MO:** What would you like folks to know about yourself?

**CF:** So much of who I am revolves around my last 23 years with Save Our Canyons, a Utah nonprofit, where I worked on public lands and conservation issues for an environment that means a lot to thousands of people, not just in Utah, but across the country. I believe the outdoors and high-quality wild ecosystems are critically important. My wife and her family are all from Wyoming — I feel adopted by this state, in a way — and I understand how integral the landscapes, environment, and ecosystems are to our quality of life here. Finally, I believe that in many regards, it's people that have caused

the harms to nature that we face today, but it's also people that can fix them. That's the energy I'm harnessing and advancing in this role.

**MO:** Whether we're here for the wildlife, the incredible recreation opportunities, the wide-open spaces, or something else, those of us who live in Wyoming love it here. Can you share what you value most about Wyoming?

**CF:** I've been lucky to have some wild experiences in this state — from the high desert to the high peaks, with a backpack on my back or a fly rod in my hand. I first fell in love with Wyoming when I visited my wife's family in Green River. I'd head into Seedskaadee National Wildlife Refuge with my fly rod, and I've probably walked the entire length of that place. But I know these experiences and places can be lost. With Seedskaadee, for example, there's the threat of industrial mining close by. But these activities are also the livelihood of Wyoming, and I think there's a balance to be maintained there. The very existence of that wildlife refuge is in part because of the mining operations there, so there can be some benefits. But we can all do better, all the time — for the wild and for one another.

**MO:** For nearly two decades, you shepherded Save Our Canyons through many successes and difficult advocacy moments. What conservation lessons are you bringing with you to WOC and to Wyoming?

**CF:** My style has been described as dogged,

and I think that's helped me be successful. I'll bring that doggedness, but I'll also bring an enthusiasm for sitting down at the table and having hard conversations with folks — including folks who may not have conservation as a priority. Those hard conversations are often the ones that lead to new ideas and opportunities. Two things that have been less present in my work in the Wasatch, that are both really exciting to me, are the climate issues that WOC is working on, as well our Indigenous conservation work.

**MO:** When it comes to the latter, there's a growing awareness in conservation that the Indigenous communities that have long been ignored and excluded must be brought into the conversation in meaningful ways. How can we move towards a future in which conservation is equitable and inclusive?

**CF:** There's a lot of opportunity to do better and elevate Indigenous voices, and make great strides toward repairing an extremely difficult past. A lot of healing needs to be done, and I think the first part is just listening and trying to understand. I don't pretend to have all the answers, but there's a lot of work and relationship-building to be done, and that's a priority of mine. Because I don't think you can solve the conservation and environmental issues that we are confronted with, which are giant, without holistic and comprehensive engagement and understanding.

**MO:** Particularly in Wyoming, no one's in this line of work because it's easy. What do you see as the biggest challenge to successfully advocating strong environmental protections and policies?

**CF:** In our social world, everything is a mirror and replica of ecosystems. I would say our



biggest challenge as a society, as well as the greatest challenge facing our ecosystems and wild places, is fragmentation. Fragmentation presents the greatest threat, both to ourselves and to the planet. And the treatment for fragmentation is unity. “Unity” isn't easy — it's a massive challenge — but it's what we need if we're to confront the fragmentation taking place in our country and here in Wyoming.

**MO:** Before we were the Outdoor Council, we were the Wyoming Outdoor Coordinating Council, a name that nodded to our unique role in bringing conservation groups across Wyoming together. What does strong collaboration with other organizations, governments, and communities look like to you?

**CF:** The official name of my previous



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**I'm really excited not only to *meet new people* and to be a sponge — to try to absorb what they know — but also to expand the relationships I've formed *with places in Wyoming* by experiencing them through others' lenses.**

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organization is the Citizens Committee to Save Our Canyons. When I learned about the history of the Wyoming Outdoor Coordinating Council, it was this moment of synergy and comfort for me. Both of those names go back to what we talked about earlier: how people are

the cause of the problems, but also the ones with the capability to solve them. We're all individuals, and we tend to live as if the world kind of revolves around us. And so we've got to constantly remind ourselves to look outside that narrow focus, and notice that we're sharing this world not only with other humans, but with wildlife and plants, too, that don't have any voice at all and yet are being challenged enormously. If we can come together and collectively align our interests and our values, a lot of great things can happen.

**MO:** Lately you've been on the move around Wyoming, meeting many of our members, partners, and decisionmakers. What excites you most about working with others in Wyoming's conservation community?

**CF:** There's so much experience, stories, and knowledge out there. I'm really excited not only to meet new people and to be a sponge — to try to absorb what they know — but also to expand the relationships I've formed with places in Wyoming by experiencing them through others' lenses. All of this will help me get a finer understanding of what really makes the Outdoor Council tick, so that I can support the mission and all the communities we serve.

**MO:** When you're not in the office, where can we find you?

**CF:** These days, I'm mostly spending time outdoors with my family, whether it's teaching my girls to fly fish, or floating rivers, or going backpacking. I also love to backcountry snowboard, but I've been teaching myself to ski a little bit as well, particularly with the little ones. I just love being outside, and I love being with friends and family.

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climate action?

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co-management  
of public lands?

Bring together  
voices for  
conservation  
across the state?

Sustain the  
migrations of our  
iconic big game  
herds?



[www.wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/donate](http://www.wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/donate)