

Wyoming Outdoor Council

Summer 2025

# FRONTLINE



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

## INSIDE: THE COST OF LAYOFFS

*plus*

- Showing up for Sublette Pronghorn
- Wyoming's nuclear resurgence?





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 gives you hope for Wyoming's public lands?

The power of personal connections. These places have inspired millions from all walks of life, backgrounds, and interests.

As a parent, what gives me hope is how instinctively we teach our children to care for public lands. We don't do it because we "should" — we do it because we feel the importance of these places deep in our souls.

# A message from the director

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**CARL FISHER**

Executive Director

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THESE PAST FEW MONTHS have been a testament to the power of collective action. We've been diligently keeping public lands in public hands and advocating for management that respects both our heritage and our future. Our team's presence at the Capitol during the legislative session (and the ongoing interim sessions) was crucial in safeguarding our wild places from harmful policies. We also defeated bills attempting to make Wyoming the nation's nuclear dumping ground.

We continue to champion critical wildlife migration corridors, like those used by the iconic Sublette Pronghorn. We're deeply invested in protecting clean water, from high-elevation streams to the drinking water in our communities. And our clean air initiatives are moving forward, including advocating for methane emission reductions that protect our health and climate.

It's been frustrating to see many important projects — particularly those related to climate and tribal conservation — halted due to federal layoffs and cancellation of grants. What wasn't cancelled, however, was the community support and the partnerships that have been built around these programs. Necessity is the mother of invention, and we are finding new ways of realizing these programs in the absence of this administration's support.

Many challenges remain, and more will surely mount. What gives us all immense hope is your unwavering support. It's your engagement, your compassion, and your financial contributions that fuel our mission

and make our victories possible. With a new strategic plan and a growing staff, we are well positioned to rise to these challenges with grit and determination alongside incredible community partners. As we bring our Road Ahead events to your community, we hope you'll engage with us and with one another.

**What gives us all  
immense hope is your  
unwavering support.**

A healthy Wyoming — now and for future generations — is possible, if Wyoming works together. No politics, no labels, just a caring community focused on doing good for land, wildlife, water, and one another.

Thank you for being a vital part of the WOC family. Together, we're playing the long game for Wyoming. Let's continue this journey, onward!

For Wyoming,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Fisher', is written over a faint background image of a mountain range.

# THE LAND PAYS THE PRICE

*Federal employees are the heartbeat of public lands stewardship.  
What happens when they're gone?*

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**MAX OWENS**

Communications Manager

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A GIANT DOWNED TREE and wreckage of limbs block the trail. Peggie dePasquale considers the obstacle in thoughtful silence, calculating the angles. Finally she nods. “If we cut here, and get a little lucky, we may be able to roll it off the trail — no need for a second cut.” She pauses to wipe the sweat from her forehead. “But we definitely need to get a little lucky.”

My colleague Gabby Yates and I have joined Peggie here in Wyoming’s Gros Ventre Range — an amorphous group of mountains in designated wilderness between the Continental Divide and the Tetons — to see firsthand what’s happening to public lands as the Trump

administration culls the federal workforce. For much of the morning we’ve been inching up a forested ridgeline, stopping frequently to clear deadfall.

Gabby lops off limbs with the Pulaski, a modified axe, while Peggie and I sever branches with handsaws. Then it’s time for the giant log, and the crosscut saw. The tinny rasp of the five-foot saw, commonly used in wilderness areas where mechanized equipment isn’t allowed, rings through the forest. Fifteen minutes of steady, sweaty back-and-forth later, the log





finally splits and crashes to the ground.

Until recently, Peggie roamed this area as a wilderness ranger for the Bridger-Teton National Forest, where she not only did trail upkeep but also collected vital data and educated visitors. But in February, she was terminated from her position, joining thousands of other federal employees suddenly out of work. Now, months later, the cost of having fewer people to steward public lands — people who maintain campgrounds and trails, protect wildlife habitat and cultural resources, manage wildfire risk, and respond to emergencies — is becoming clearer and clearer.

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Peggie had worked in and around the Bridger-Teton National Forest for more than a decade, first as a field instructor for the Teton Science School and later as an organizer for the Wyoming Wilderness Association. But she was relatively new to the Forest Service, with just two field seasons as a ranger under her belt.

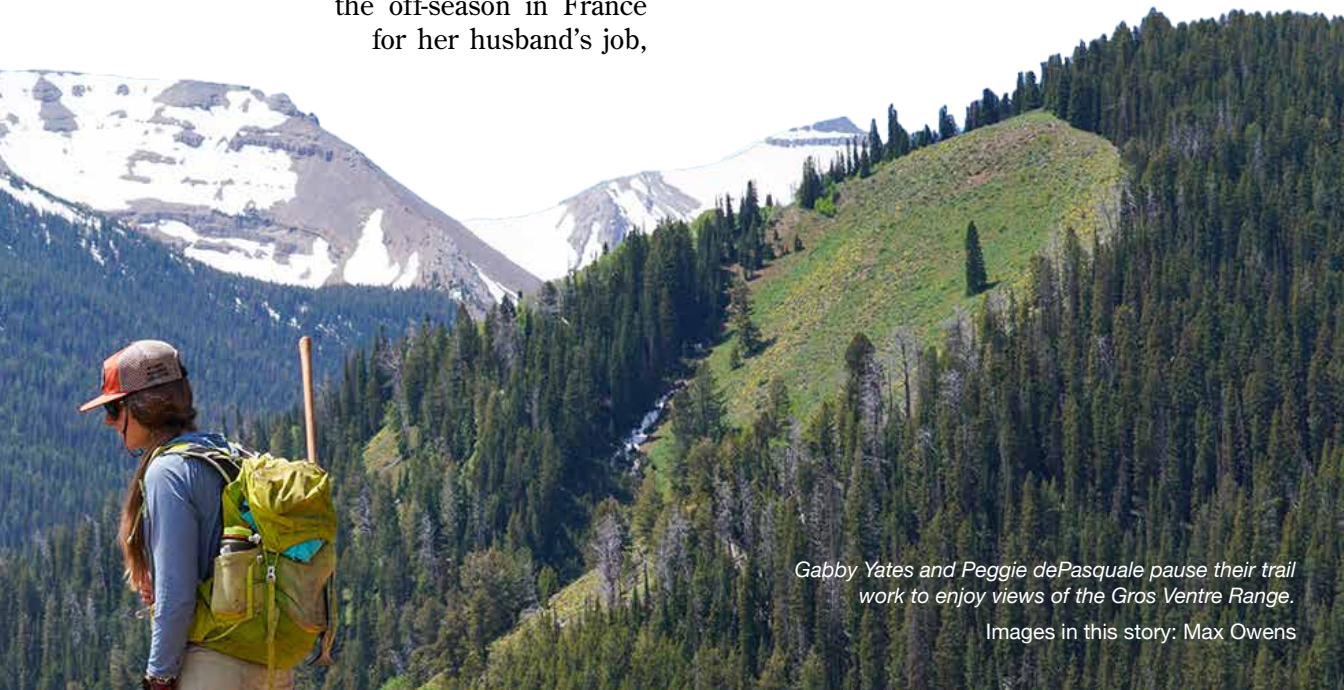
In late January of this year, while spending the off-season in France for her husband's job,

Peggie received the infamous “Fork in the Road” email pressuring federal employees to resign. She had been looking forward to the upcoming season in the Gros Ventre: Her work plan was finalized, and a promotion to crew lead was on the horizon. Leaving her post was the last thing she wanted. She ignored the email.

But on Valentine's Day, while skiing with friends, she received a text: The district ranger needed to speak with her immediately.

“I found a way to give them a call and received the news that the leadership at the Jackson district of the Bridger-Teton Forest were instructed as of that morning to terminate all probationary staff based on performance,” Peggie tells us. “Leadership had been given a day to make these calls to people who they wanted, more than anything, to keep on their team. Their hand was forced.” The call was followed up with a letter that said that she had not performed up to par and that's why they were letting her go, despite her excellent performance reviews.

Peggie was among



*Gabby Yates and Peggie dePasquale pause their trail work to enjoy views of the Gros Ventre Range.*

Images in this story: Max Owens

# **Because of staffing cuts, it's unlikely that a Forest Service crew will make it to this trail this year — meaning the hard work that keeps trails accessible and safe just won't happen.**

at least 2,400 Forest Service employees with probationary status (which includes new hires and recently transferred or promoted employees) who were fired that weekend. In the weeks and months that followed, chaos within federal agencies reigned, with further mass layoffs and the shuttering of dozens of federal offices. As of June, in the Forest Service alone, the number of employees fired or who took the government's "deferred resignation," a buyout designed to downsize the federal workforce, totaled 7,500 — more than 20 percent of the Forest Service's workforce.

A month after Peggie was fired, a federal judge ruled some of the layoffs unlawful, and Peggie was told she could return to her post. But by that point, she had already accepted another job offer.

She faced a dilemma: Should she stick with the new position, or return to the job she'd been heartbroken to lose? And if she did return, would she lose the job again just as easily? As one current Bridger-Teton National Forest employee (who asked to remain anonymous for fear of retaliation) described, the atmosphere within the agency for those who remain has been turbulent, in large part due to ever-shifting directives. "Sometimes

it seems purposefully chaotic, but I think a fair amount of it is sheer ineptitude," they said. "In the meantime, agency personnel are getting ping-ponged back and forth with no context, no clarity, and no real actionable direction."

Ultimately, Peggie decided not to return to the Forest Service, opting instead to stay in the role she'd just accepted: National Forest Wildlands Director for the Wyoming Wilderness Association, her previous employer.

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We traverse flower-filled meadows bordered by red rock outcroppings and hike higher into the mountains. Peggie literally wears a different hat now — an orange cap emblazoned with WWA's logo — and the trail work we're doing with her today is not part of her typical job duties. But she's the kind of person who can't visit the forest without pitching in: When Gabby and I asked her to show us around, there was never any question that we'd load up the saws.

As we hike, Peggie points out examples of the work she and her former colleagues did here in past years. Some, like the sturdy bridges that span creeks and streams, are obvious displays of labor. Others, like the drainage ditches dug to mitigate rutted trails, are less obvious. Peggie shares that because of staffing





*Left to right: The Blue Miner Lake Trail climbs through meadows and forest in the Gros Ventre Wilderness. Peggie (left) shows Gabby how to install the handle of a crosscut saw.*

cuts, it's unlikely that a Forest Service crew will make it to this trail this year — meaning the hard work that keeps trails accessible and safe just won't happen.

Rutted trails and deadfall may seem like a minor inconvenience for many visitors. But for others, like horsepacking outfitters, the impacts can be far greater. "There are people that rely on these trails for their livelihood, and who don't necessarily have the capacity in the pre-season to spend whole days clearing trail," my colleague Gabby, who has a background leading horsepacking trips, explains. And with fewer Forest Service staff, the backlog of trails that need clearing will continue to grow.

The impacts of staffing cuts don't stop with unmaintained trails. Fewer backcountry crews means less data on wilderness visitorship, which forest managers use to make sound management decisions. Cuts have also halted studies of invasive weeds, which Peggie says represent one of the most pressing threats

to the Gros Ventre. "At the end of last year, we were working with our GIS specialists to create a survey that would allow us to track infestations," she shares. From there, managers would work with an invasive species specialist to find a solution. "But now, a program that had so much potential and energy and enthusiasm is just no longer."

Then of course there's wildfire: Wilderness crews, like the crew Peggie was on, reduce fire risk by educating visitors about campfire safety, ensuring campfires are properly extinguished, and reporting newly started blazes in the backcountry. Other Forest Service employees play vital roles, too. Without adequate staff for fuels mitigation or trail maintenance, catastrophic burns are more likely, and firefighting personnel may struggle to get where they need to go. Without administrative staff, fire crews face travel delays. And with fewer support staff trained to aid in fires — red card carriers — crews on the frontlines carry a



heavier burden.

The Bridger-Teton National Forest, though it encompasses an enormous 3.4 million acres, represents only a fraction of the 30 million acres of federally managed public lands in Wyoming — nearly half the state. I ask Gabby, who is in charge of the public lands program at the Wyoming Outdoor Council, how the impacts from layoffs that we're seeing here fit into the larger picture of public lands across the state and the West.

She says she's less worried about unmaintained trails or bathrooms and more concerned with, "What's going to happen to these ecosystems? We're talking about wildlife resources. We're talking about watershed resources. If there's no one there to manage these issues, the problems we have are just going to be exacerbated."

Indiscriminate firings of land stewards are a devious part of a much larger effort to transfer public lands to state control, Gabby continues. "With these layoffs, there's a slippery slope: If we're not properly staffing these places, we're not properly managing them, and when that occurs, they become more of a liability than an asset, and there's more of an excuse to sell them off."

Although the push for public lands transfer has a long history, it was brought into sharp focus this summer, when Congress tried to include the sale of millions of acres in the federal budget reconciliation bill. If there's anything to learn from the past, it's that transfer of public lands to states is a direct pathway to sale and privatization, as states eventually realize they have nowhere near the resources needed to manage lands, let alone turn a profit.

If there's anything else to be learned, it's how fervently Americans want to see their

**"It's people who are bringing us to this point of conflict, and it's also people who give us hope that we're capable of finding a solution."** — Peggie dePasquale





public lands protected, not sold off. With the recent sell-off attempts in Congress, for example, the backlash was swift and enormous, and showed just how disconnected many politicians are from the lands they seek to sell off. “Decision makers aren’t seeing places that people care about, or rely on for clean water, or cultural values, or recreation,” Gabby says. “They’re seeing something that you can extract value from.”

Places like the Gros Ventre are ground zero for such attempts: It’s Forest Service land that doesn’t have the recognition of, say, a national park, and therefore means little to distant politicians. Yet for those nearby — people like Peggie, Gabby, and countless others — such places are more than just land. They’re cherished parts of their backyards, places whose true value defies measurement.

We clear tree after tree as the heat of the afternoon builds. Peggie patiently explains to Gabby how to avoid getting the crosscut saw stuck; she hands me the axe and tells me to enjoy some “wilderness therapy.” The work feels good, and the results are immediately tangible — one of the things Peggie loved most about this work.

On a small scale, there’s no doubt we’re making a difference. And we’re not the only ones, either: From individuals to organizations, there’s no shortage of people stepping up to fill the gaps left over from staffing cuts. The Friends of the

Bridger-Teton, for example, recently launched the FBT Forest Corps, an initiative that lends a hand on vital trail infrastructure projects. WWA, Peggie’s organization, helps fund this new initiative, and also regularly trains volunteers to conduct solitude monitoring surveys that would otherwise go undone.

On the other hand, Peggie is clear that our work today is but a drop in the bucket. Nothing, she says, can replace the work done by a full wilderness crew.

We stay past our agreed-upon turnaround time to clear one last log. Finally, though, we turn our backs on whatever awaits up the trail and begin the hike down.

Our talk turns to what gives us hope, for the Gros Ventre and places like it. “For me, it’s the community of people who care for wild places,” Peggie says. “Which is interesting — this idea that it’s people who are bringing us to this point of conflict, and it’s also people who give us hope that we’re capable of finding a solution.”

As we pass the wooden sign marking the wilderness boundary, Peggie gives it a pat like it’s an old friend. With it, she seems to say goodbye. And — I’ll be back. ■

*Clearing trails is difficult,  
time-consuming work.  
With fewer Forest Service  
employees, the backlog  
of trails in need of  
maintenance is growing.*

**Have you noticed impacts  
on public lands from  
federal layoffs?**

**Let us know!**



# HEADWATERS

## A poem by Matt Daly

You begin where the Bear settles  
in a basin and becomes crystalline.

From among pilgrims, you find in the first wash  
of stars the two bears pouring into each other.

The tip of the tail leads your family north  
toward a braided river named as if it were serpentine.

You also follow another watershed reclaiming  
an ancient seabed green.

Your own name is all sharp angles  
you ask many tributaries to aid in wearing down.

With the tug of water all around you, you look up  
to the wind-smoothed shapes of clouds.

You feel your feet on a ridge where three springs  
trickle westward but not toward each other.

All of your travels hold within them this form  
of following the currents of the world.

The places you know become themselves again  
even when fettered by levees and dams.

You step into silt and wait for the settling  
long enough for killdeer to stop rushing along the bank.

When you hear the word *bank* you do not consider  
what you might extract from the earth for profit.

Every lake is made of what pours into it  
and what it offers to the farther downstream.

**Matt Daly** is the author of two poetry collections: *The Invisible World* (Unsolicited Press, 2024) and *Between Here and Home* (Unsolicited Press, 2019), and the poetry chapbook, *Red State* (Seven Kitchens Press, 2019). He lives in Jackson Hole.





## Pronghorn pride on full display



Earlier this year, folks hoofed it to events in Pinedale, Green River, Jackson, Lander, and online. The goal? Protect Sublette Pronghorn, Wyoming's most iconic herd, by supporting official designation of their epic migration route. And wow — more than 270 of you made your voices heard for the, *er*, herd by writing supportive comments!

The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission will vote on whether to move forward with designation at their September meeting. From there, the governor will appoint a working group to explore the implications of designation and offer advice before he makes the final call. The path to designation may be long, but **we're glad our community is going the distance!**



Pronghorn image: Jorn Vangoildtsenhoven

# LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP, WYOMING!

## The case for caution on a nuclear future

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**JOHN BURROWS & BIG WIND CARPENTER**

Wyoming Outdoor Council staff

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*IN THE LAST YEAR, we've heard a lot about Wyoming's "nuclear renaissance." With industry's narrative leading the messaging, it's hard to tell exactly how much is hype versus reality. But something does feel different about the conversations happening today around nuclear energy.*

*Things are moving rapidly in a new direction, which will likely have significant impacts on Wyoming. Now is a critical time to be paying attention, asking questions, and advocating for the best interest of our communities and state. It's important that we slow down and look before we leap headlong into a nuclear future we can't undo.*

## A confluence of political, economic, and logistical factors are driving the resurgence of nuclear discussions in Wyoming:

**The U.S. is experiencing a significant increase in demand for electricity**, driven largely by the expansion of data centers and artificial intelligence. Estimates vary, but in general energy demand is predicted to rise 1.5–2% per year over the next 20 years.

Many of the same companies, industries, and investors that are increasing electricity demand are **also seeking ways to reduce emissions**.

In June, the Trump administration issued **four new executive orders to expedite the testing and permitting process for new nuclear technologies** (including the TerraPower nuclear reactor in Kemmerer) and reforming the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

**The recently passed federal budget maintains many important subsidies for nuclear energy development**, while repealing subsidies for renewables and other forms of energy generation.

**Wyoming has the nation's largest recoverable uranium ore deposits**, along with ample open land, a skilled energy workforce, and a favorable tax environment, making it attractive to industry.





## What does this mean for Wyoming, and what do communities need to be thinking about to prepare?

**Communities need a clear and accurate understanding of what would happen to radioactive waste generated in Wyoming.** If Wyoming develops nuclear energy, Wyoming will have to deal with the by-products — high-level radioactive waste. This is critical to understand because currently the United States has no permanent repository for this waste. Nuclear waste generated in Wyoming will stay here for decades, or longer, as we wait for a federal solution.

**New technologies mean new challenges.** Demonstration reactors, such as the TerraPower reactor, are first-of-their-kind projects and use different types of fuel and cooling sources than existing commercial nuclear plants. Similarly, small modular reactors pose new and unprecedented transportation, safety, and security risks. These must be thoroughly considered at local and state levels before opening the door to nuclear development.

**Decision makers need to understand the actual cost of nuclear energy** — and not just the financial cost (which is very expensive), but also the environmental and social costs. The implications of introducing this new industry are multi-generational and far-reaching. We must consider long-term impacts and how projects would be decommissioned, bonded, and managed if new start-up companies fail to live up to their hype.

**The state, local communities, and tribes should be in the driver's seat.** Wyoming's decision makers must look beyond the bullish predictions of industry and the federal government, which has sweeping regulatory authority and oversight. New proposals must be evaluated objectively and address the fears and concerns of local communities. Siting should be consent-based, and agreements must prioritize the well-being of the communities that will host these projects for generations.

**We must understand and learn from our country's legacy of nuclear energy.** The nuclear industry has made mistakes in the past, and many deep scars remain — not only on our landscapes, but also in the families and communities that have shouldered the burdens and harms of this type of energy production over the years. Humility, thoughtfulness, and trust are needed now. Many Wyomingites are appropriately skeptical of these projects. The burden to prove otherwise should not be on those most vulnerable.

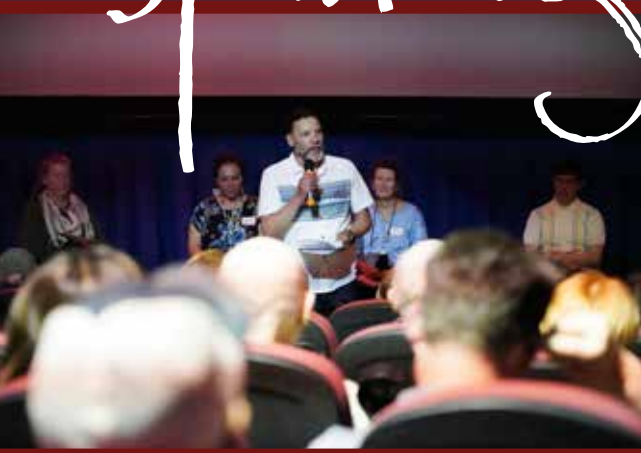
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*With the pressing need to reduce emissions from electricity production, new nuclear energy projects might very well have a place in our state's future. But if the terms and conditions of Wyoming communities are not being met, leaders must also have the courage to reject industry's sales pitch. Now is the time to slow down, ask the right questions, and develop proactive policy to guide development on Wyoming's terms. ■*



# Sparking stewardship

## AT THE WYLDER FESTIVAL



The inaugural WYlder Festival was born out of a belief that connection sparks care — care for one another and care for our environments. Over the course of three days at the end of May, around 85 of you joined us in Casper for a weekend of inspiration, learning, and community. Our hope was to use the event to build bridges between participants over shared appreciation for Wyoming's lands, waters, and wildlife.

As the event director, I had the pleasure of talking with many of the speakers, artists, and panelists in advance. I was, and still am, deeply grateful for everyone who shared their time in planning and who responded to a cold call or email with enthusiasm. I left the festival deeply inspired by the magnitude of experiences and expertise shared. I hope that everyone who attended left with a new connection and a nugget or idea to shape into a greater act of stewardship.

**We may have built the container but YOU filled it.**

The WYlder Festival will be back in 2026 — join us to continue strengthening our commitment to Wyoming's landscapes and people.

— Carlisle Idelzer, Organizing Director



# WELCOME TO THE TEAM

*Meet WOC's talented new staff members*



**Ryan Novak** | *Field Organizer*

Ryan, WOC's voice on the ground for southwestern Wyoming, brings a background in environmental social science and a wealth of experiences — including work on a Worland-based veterans fire crew. He loves mountain biking and rallying the staff for a game of pickleball.

**Matt Gaffney** | *Legal & Government Affairs Director*

After attending law school at the University of Wyoming, Matt spent 20 years as an environmental planner, administrator and attorney. When not working, you can find him exploring Pinedale-area landscapes by foot, bike, and splitboard.



**Lindsey Washkoviak** | *Water Program Manager*

With years of ecosystem restoration and natural resource management under her belt (and a stint as an artisan cheesemaker), Lindsey is our expert on all things water. She loves to backpack and fish on Wyoming's public lands.

**Auna Kaufmann** | *Government Affairs Manager*

Though originally drawn to Wyoming for avian field work, Auna returned to learn the ins and outs of public policy at the state legislature. Find her weaving with local wool, hunting, or hiking in the Snowies with her bird dog, Waverly.



**Willow Belden** | *Communications Director*

From producing a critically acclaimed podcast that explores life's questions through nature, to years spent as a broadcast journalist, Willow brings extensive experience crafting thoughtful stories about conservation. She loves to hike and cross-country ski in the mountains near Laramie.

**Claire Buchanan** | *Administrative Coordinator*

Claire recently completed her MBA at the University of Wyoming and has a background in nonprofit operations and development. She enjoys traveling to far-flung places and camping with her partner and two dogs.



Meet the rest of our team at [wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/meet-our-team](https://wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/meet-our-team)

# Where communities gather, stewardship **GROWS.**



From citizens raising their voice in unison for wildlife and public lands, to the bridges formed at the first-ever WYlder Festival, **the Wyoming Outdoor Council brings communities together**, empowering Wyomingites to be thoughtful stewards of our beloved outdoor spaces.

**Ready to help grow this work?** Support our community-building efforts by **becoming a business sponsor** for one of our events, or by **making a gift to WOC.**

## **SPONSOR AN EVENT—**

Contact Tyler Cessor, Development Director, at 307.488.3452 or [tyler@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org](mailto:tyler@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org).

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or scan the QR code below.

