

Wyoming Outdoor Council

Winter 2025

# FRONTLINE



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

**INSIDE:** *resilience*  
**TAKES ROOT  
IN WYOMING  
COMMUNITIES**

*plus*

- Navigating the legislative landscape
- Reflections from the Red Desert



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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**Tell us about a recent meaningful time you spent outdoors with others.**

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When I visit my childhood home in New York, I adore taking walks with my three-year-old niece. We don't get far — we stop at every puddle, bug, and blade of grass — but her curiosity is both contagious and aspirational.



I spent much of my youth in Sunlight Basin working on a ranch with many people my age. The bond we formed continues: 40 years later, several of us spent a week in Sunlight, riding, hiking, fishing, irrigating, reminiscing, and building even deeper connections.



# A message from the director

**CARL FISHER**

Executive Director

*Whether we're talking about the climate, politics, economies, our communities, or the land, change is constant. Some change we drive, for better or worse. Other change we shape.*

Last August, on the heels of a needs assessment, the WOC staff gathered in Cody to kick-start a strategic planning process. We kept at it through the end of the year and by January, had a strategic plan to guide our work for the next decade. It was a lot of hard work, but we still managed to squeeze in time to float some rivers, fish some streams, climb some mountains, and pursue ungulates all across the state.

Many times over the last year, we heard requests for a stronger in-person presence from WOC across the state, and a desire for WOC to convene community groups and share ideas through genuine conversations about the issues confronting Wyoming. We've hired an organizing team to meet that request — and we're so appreciative of the community support that made this a possibility! Organizing isn't making sure that our office is neat and orderly; it is the recognition that anything we do, be it for wildlife or water, land, air or climate, is

fundamentally about people.

Too often, our public discussions outpace people. With this new team, we aim to be more responsive to our members, partners, and the communities they belong to. We aim to build a community that better understands the issues facing us, in all their complexity and nuance. Take nuclear waste storage — a complicated issue — as an example: While many folks are interested in WOC's position on the matter, many others simply want better information to make their own decisions and meaningfully engage on this and many other issues.

Change and challenges, hard as they are to grapple with, are inevitable. Our strength and resilience lie in our ability to adapt. But true durability comes from staying grounded in our roots. At WOC, our roots are in people, conservation, and quality of life. We're excited to build on our history, innovate solutions, and invite more voices to help shape the vision and outcomes for Wyoming's conservation story.

**Organizing isn't making sure that our office is neat and orderly; it is the recognition that **anything we do, be it wildlife or water, land, air or climate, is fundamentally about people.****





# RED DESERT ECHOES

## *Reflections on a Wyoming treasure*

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**ALEC UNDERWOOD**  
Program Director

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**A FEW MONTHS AGO**, while hunting elk, I spotted a large mule deer buck and several does traversing the Prospect Mountains on their annual migration to the Red Desert — the world’s longest recorded mule deer migration. They weaved through a steep aspen grove toward a lone resting bull elk. Through my spotting scope, it seemed the deer passed just feet from the elk, who sat motionless as they filed past.

There’s something truly special about the Northern Red Desert and Big Sandy Foothills, where encountering the West’s iconic wildlife species is a regular occurrence. I recall another moment driving along the Wind River Range foothills, watching pronghorn from the famed Sublette herd fan out across the expansive

sagebrush. Or the frigid spring morning spent with friends in the area known as the Golden Triangle, where we watched nearly 200 sage-grouse strutting during their mating routine.

Spend any amount of time in these landscapes, and you’ll come back with stories — stories not only of abundant wildlife, but of rich cultural resources, riveting adventures, and so much more. Over the past several years, we at the Wyoming Outdoor Council have been working to secure stronger management direction to protect the Northern Red Desert and Big Sandy Foothills through the Rock Springs Resource Management Plan. As we continue those efforts, we feel it’s essential to tell some of those stories — from those who are intimately connected to these irreplaceable landscapes. We hope you enjoy them.

# Connecting through adventure



## GABE & JENNY JOYES

*Run the Red race directors Gabe and Jenny Joyes live in Lander. Join them in September for this year's race — they're scheming new ways for runners to experience the Red Desert, with new courses for both the 25K and 50K!*

At first I found the Red Desert hard to love. Compared to the jagged and intimate alpine peaks where I spend more time, the Red Desert is sensationally enormous and feels nearly limitless. Jenny Joyes and I are the race directors of Run the Red Desert Trail Runs, and it was only after we spent hours exploring

endless two-tracks, tucked-away narrow canyons, and top-of-the-world highpoints that we both became swept away by the Red Desert.

**The Red Desert is sensationally enormous and feels nearly limitless.**

Sometimes folks need a reason, or nudge, to explore somewhere new and different to them. Through Run the Red, countless runners from all over the country (who likely would not have visited otherwise) have embraced the opportunity to explore this special corner of Wyoming by foot. It is difficult for people to care about places they have never experienced — and if people don't care about a landscape, then in all likelihood its future is bleak. A desire to counter that is exactly why sharing the Red Desert with runners and other adventurers is a passion of ours.

# Enduring ties to the land



## JASON BALDES

*Jason is the executive director of the Wind River Tribal Buffalo Initiative, which works to restore his community's connection to the buffalo. He lives in Kinnear.*

I grew up hunting, fishing, and camping in a way that was about sustenance and relationship. I learned this from my dad, who learned from his parents. My dad was a biologist, and I was fortunate to spend quite a bit of time out in the Red Desert, where I got to witness what

## My hope is that this place can be as magnificent to people in 250 years as it was for me 40 years ago.

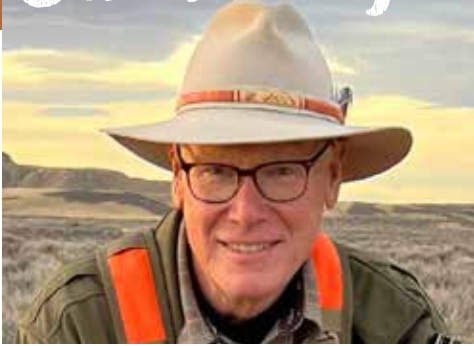
it was like to bridge science and Indigenous knowledge.

The Red Desert provided the Eastern Shoshone people with things that were important to us. There was a vast trade network there that existed prior to westward expansion, and the Indian Gap Trail was a part of it. This trail, thousands of years old, would have been a thoroughfare for people trading a multitude of

goods and resources.

Because most of the country has been plowed up and fenced in, there are few places left in the West that we can consider for intact wildlife habitat. The Red Desert is one of the largest unfenced areas left — so why not keep it that way? I have a lot of fond memories as a kid, wandering around the desert and gaining an understanding of how old this place is. My hope is that this place can be as magnificent to people in 250 years as it was for me 40 years ago. My hope is that our relationship to our lands, waters, animals and plants remain, because this type of knowledge is going to be invaluable in the future.

## The last of the best



### TOM CHRISTIANSEN

*Tom has worked in and around the Red Desert for more than 30 years as a biologist and Sage-Grouse Program Coordinator for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Now retired, he lives in Green River.*

It is the last of the best. It is the crown jewel of what remains of North America's largest ecosystem — that of sagebrush. It has the perfect climate for sagebrush and it remains largely unspoiled by the human footprint. It supports the densest population of sage-grouse on the planet. It allows mule deer, pronghorn

and elk to migrate with minimal resistance.

It is where I brought my friend, suffering from a cancer that might cut his days short, to hunt sage-grouse and another, an octogenarian, to hunt desert elk. It is where a guest from Sweden overlooking an expanse of unbroken landscape said, "All this country and I can't believe there are no buffalo."

## It is the crown jewel of what remains of North America's largest ecosystem.

It is unknown, undervalued, and unappreciated by most — but it is my sanctuary, refuge, place of rest and renewal. It is where I'll rest permanently, eventually. It is special, spiritual ... even holy. It is a place I'll defend from exploitation and abuse. It is Wyoming's Northern Red Desert and Golden Triangle.



# NAVIGATING THE LEGISLATIVE LANDSCAPE

Chart a course through the 2025 General Session and become an advocate for our lands, wildlife, and climate.

## Start here



Committee meetings, floor debates, and vote after vote after vote ... the state legislature can be one of Wyoming's more confusing landscapes. While it's all too easy to lose your way, your participation is critical to the health and resilience of the places we love — so let's establish our bearings.

From mid-January to March, lawmakers from around the state will debate bills impacting every aspect of life, including Wyoming's lands, waters, and wildlife. With many important conservation-related bills up for discussion this year, now's the time to pull out the map and compass.

The Wyoming Outdoor Council strives not only to be your steady voice for conservation at the Capitol, but to guide you through this rapidly changing environment and share tools to help you interact with it — so you can use your voice for good, too.



## Tips for the trail



- **Know who your elected officials are.** In Wyoming, we're lucky to have such great access to our elected officials. Simply sending them a message or calling them ahead of votes on important bills can truly make a difference. Find your legislators and their contact info on our legislative webpage.
- **Keep messages to legislators simple.** Whether you're sending an email or making a phone call, a few sentences is plenty: Introduce yourself, state the position you want them to take, and tell the story behind your stance. Draw on your experiences and values! If sending an email, personalize the subject line of your message.
- **Use your resources.** You're not alone in the legislative wilderness! Find fact sheets and guides that make participating easy on the legislative page of our website. Finally, don't hesitate to ask us questions!

**Legislative webpage**



**Interested in nuclear?**



## Obstacles (& opportunities!) ahead

### TREAD CAREFULLY ON RADIOACTIVE WASTE

Should Wyoming become the nation's dumping ground for radioactive waste? Some lawmakers are once more pushing a bill that would bypass the state's existing laws and extensive environmental, social, and public review processes to allow storage of waste from the nation's nuclear reactors. The bill streamlines the process for siting a large-scale storage facility by using a misleading definition for high-level radioactive waste, which remains hazardous for tens of thousands of years.

Legislators argue storage would be temporary, but with national discussions on a permanent facility "stalled indefinitely," it's likely to be permanent. We're concerned about long-term environmental and health impacts, economic impacts, transportation risks, and the federal government's inability to fulfill its promises to states on this matter. We don't think that Wyoming should race to the bottom to take this hazardous waste from other states — especially when it's already being stored safely on-site near where it was produced. This highly radioactive material is not something that should be transported (let alone multiple times!) in Wyoming.

Care about this issue and want to stay updated? Join our list of grassroots advocates against nuclear waste storage.





## Where to go from here?

### KEEP PUBLIC LANDS IN PUBLIC HANDS

Wyomingites are lucky to have access to abundant public lands — half of our backyard is open to explore, camp, hunt and fish, stargaze, and view wildlife. Unfortunately, some people see the value in public lands as something to sell off, rather than a legacy to pass down to future generations. Last fall, the State of Utah filed a lawsuit that seeks to control ownership of millions of acres of federal public lands. Both the Wyoming Freedom Caucus and State of Wyoming have endorsed the concept through the filing of amicus briefs in the case.

In addition to threats on a federal level, we fully expect to see some lands transfer legislation pushed by state lawmakers. Though the threat is very real, the transfer of public lands to state and private control is something we've beaten before — and defeating any legislation to dispose of our public lands will be a top priority for WOC. We'll keep you informed as this issue develops, and will look to you to speak up for the Wyoming public lands that you love!

There are many more issues that we simply don't have the space to cover here. But if you're looking for one easy way to make a difference right now ... sign up for Wyoming Outdoor Council emails! We frequently send alerts with easy, clear instructions to take action on these and many other important issues.



**Sign up for our emails!**

Finally, the journey to good conservation policies doesn't stop when the session ends. During the interim (the period between legislative sessions), keep an eye on our social media, website, and emails for great ways to stay involved. ■

# CLIMATE ACTION:



## Wyoming communities TAKE THE LEAD

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### JOHN BURROWS

Energy & Climate Policy Director

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**THE LAST SEVERAL MONTHS** have brought much uncertainty for those of us working on climate change. Questions about the direction of U.S. climate policy loom, and it's likely that many recently established programs — including ones WOC staff have tirelessly supported — are at risk.

Despite the challenges, we've found many reasons to stay encouraged. First, most Americans, including a majority of Wyomingites, want stronger climate action. Second, many emissions-reduction solutions are technologically feasible and increasingly accessible. (Nearly half of U.S. emissions come from just a handful of household technologies — meaning our individual decisions around

how we heat, cool, and power our lives really do matter!) Finally, with national leadership lacking, the spotlight has shifted to local communities driving the conversation and taking action.

Across Wyoming, citizens and local groups are making a difference through municipal planning, community investment, and grassroots organizing. This work looks different depending on who and where you are — there's no one-size-fits-all solution. But that's partly the point, because local context and relationships are a strength and source of resiliency in this work.

So without further ado, we'd like to share the stories of several community leaders working to cut emissions and build sustainable communities. Their efforts inspire us at WOC, and we hope they will inspire you too.

# LARAMIE: Climate Solutions & Economic Sense

*Madeline Dalrymple serves as state coordinator for the Wyoming chapter of Citizens' Climate Lobby, a nonpartisan organization that focuses on climate solutions at the federal level. She and her husband, David Levitan, are also involved with the Alliance for Renewable Energy in Laramie, a group of citizens working on local sustainability initiatives as an affiliate of Powder River Basin Resource Council.*



meaningful because it opens the door for other opportunities and gives you a platform to build on.

**When it comes to reducing Laramie's emissions, what opportunities are you particularly excited about?**

**David:** We recently learned that the City of Laramie is redeveloping some of its properties into low-income housing, and we're really excited that the project may be a prime candidate for the EPA's Solar for All program. We've also been involved in optimizing Inflation Reduction Act opportunities.

**Madeline:** When there's money available for communities to support infrastructure, it clears the road to become more energy efficient and efficient with money, while at the same time allowing for climate solutions. I see a lot of possibilities for increasing energy efficiency by making our town more bikeable, and improving night lighting. You can save a lot of energy and money (and protect the environment) just by having efficient, safe, and appropriate lighting at night.

**Madeline:** The first thing was simply working with our community on a resolution to become carbon neutral at some point in the future. We partnered with student researchers from the Haub School and worked with volunteers to find energy efficiency solutions. Seeing that we could make improvements to city-owned infrastructure with grant money was an eye-opener for the community.

**David:** Because many cities and communities are not eligible for grants unless they have a plan, getting this plan articulated and then approved was a major milestone. For other communities seeking to learn from what we've developed here in Laramie, initiating an emissions reduction plan is very



# PARK COUNTY: Future Generations at the Forefront



*Nic Patrick and Hap Ridgway helped found Park County Citizens for Sustainability, a group that works with their community to access sustainability and efficiency programs.*

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**... we're thinking about the future — will our children and grandchildren find Wyoming to be anything like what it is now?**

**What makes you care about the environment or sustainability in your community?**

**Hap:** Just in the last year we lost 800,000 acres of forest and prairie lands to burns. We know the climate is getting warmer and drier, and we're thinking about the future — will our children and grandchildren find Wyoming to be anything like what it's like now?

**Nic:** We both grew up here. We were fortunate enough to experience the wilderness that surrounds us. So it's all about our grandkids and descendants, and not just ours, but everybody else's. We want them to have a habitable place to grow up in and have the sorts of experiences that we've had.

**What's something you're excited to see happen in your community, or are working on right now?**

**Hap:** Right now we're working on a movie event to bring more of our community in — to introduce them to Park County Citizens for Sustainability, share what we're doing, and also share a great night of movies.

**Nic:** In the next year, there's going to be a lot of opportunities with the Inflation Reduction Act, and I'm hopeful that we can help avail Park County residents of that, and to help them find ways to build more sustainable, efficient homes and communities.



## LANDER: Community is key

*The Lander Climate Action Network is a grassroots nonpartisan group working to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve community resilience. Ariel Greene, LCAN's president, co-founded the organization in 2020. Kyle Elmquist was LCAN's project manager for 2024.*

### What role does community play in LCAN's mission and day-to-day work?

**Ariel:** Community action is the key to making people feel like they're part of something bigger. Sometimes you need critical mass to build momentum, whether that's people filling a city council room to pass a resolution or sending letters to legislators. There's also an aspect that this work can be daunting, and I think just being around other people lifts one's spirits and drives one forward.

### What motivates you personally to do this work?

**Kyle:** In the past 150 years, we've been on a path that is very exploitative of nature, placing the interests of humanity above the wellbeing of our planet. I feel very passionate about realigning that balance and caring for our environments and our ecosystems.

**Ariel:** Because of Wyoming's fossil fuel-based economy, addressing climate change here has for a long time been difficult or even taboo. If we can promote discussion and action around climate change in Wyoming, it shows that this work can be done everywhere.

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forward.**

### How can other communities get involved in the kind of work that LCAN does?

**Kyle:** It really comes down to community and connection, so it starts with facilitating a space that brings people together to identify shared interests and concerns.

**Ariel:** Look to other groups for inspiration. This work is being done around the country, so you can use their actions as a template, then choose goals based on what's appropriate for your community. Focus on solutions rather than political debate, and persevere — keep moving forward!



# #ICYMI

*(In case you missed it)*

## Here's what else you need to know in Wyoming conservation

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### ➤ What's next for Sublette Pronghorn?

Twice a year, Wyoming's largest pronghorn herd undertakes an epic journey, but the ever-increasing footprint of human development continues to threaten the migration for Sublette Pronghorn. Fortunately, the state is working on the second step in the process to formally "designate" this migration corridor, which would address threats to connectivity and increase protections for these pronghorn. Game & Fish biologists are preparing to present their risk assessment of the corridor to the Game and Fish Commission, which will vote on recommending designation to the governor — after which the final phase of the process begins!

### ➤ Good news for the Kelly Parcel — finally!

We're happy to share that the wild ride for the Kelly Parcel (a square mile of prime wildlife habitat bordered by Grand Teton National Park) is nearly over. When plans to auction the parcel to the highest bidder surfaced in late 2023, public outcry was swift, and advocates pushed for its incorporation into the park. Later, Wyoming lawmakers attempted to link its protection to the Rock Springs Resource Management Plan, in order to push back against the latter's strongest conservation measures. Thankfully, cooler heads prevailed, and the Kelly Parcel is on track for sale to the Park Service — a victory for wildlife, the land, and public school funding alike!



# NEW TO THE TEAM

*We're excited to welcome WOC's newest staff members.*



**Gabby Yates** | *Public Lands Program Manager*

Before joining WOC, Gabby spent six years guiding pack trips in the Wind River Range and caring for cattle in the Red Desert and Lander Valley. Now, she has an important role in protecting the public lands she's so passionate about.

**Jennifer Fienhold** | *Tribal Engagement Coordinator*

Jennifer, a member of the Eastern Shoshone Tribe, works to ensure that tribal voices are represented in conservation efforts. Outside work, she loves to cook and spend time with her Pembroke Welsh corgi.



**Kelyn Hilt** | *Administrative Coordinator*

Smooth behind-the-scenes operations are critical to WOC's success, and Kelyn removes the guesswork around technology and staff onboarding. In her free time, she enjoys climbing, hiking, and paddle boarding.

**Olivia Chase** | *Digital Communications Coordinator*

Checked out WOC's social media lately? Olivia builds community in the digital space and keeps our audiences up-to-date on conservation news and issues. Born and raised in Wyoming, she enjoys, skiing, hiking, and fishing.



**Carlie Ideker** | *Organizing Director*

Carlie leads our organizing team in empowering Wyoming communities to take action on the conservation issues that matter most to them. A fourth-generation Wyomingite, Carlie has worked in the Rocky Mountain region since 2012.

**Helen Lewis** | *Field Organizer*

With a background in outdoor education, Helen loves connecting with others over their ties to Wyoming's landscapes. When not working, she enjoys exploring the terrain near her Wilson home on foot or skis.



*Want to meet the rest of our team? Visit the staff page of our website!*  
[wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/meet-our-team](http://wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/meet-our-team)

# Protecting the best of Wyoming is a **MARATHON,** not a sprint.

**Wyoming's Red Desert abounds with wildlife,  
cultural heritage, and opportunities for recreation.**

But protecting this landscape and others across  
the state takes concerted effort over many years.

**Would you consider making a multi-year gift to  
the Wyoming Outdoor Council?**

Your pledge will  
allow us to meet today's opportunities and see them  
through to the finish line — no matter how distant.



**Learn more & make a pledge—**

Contact Tyler Cessor, development director, at  
**307.488.3452** or **[tyler@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org](mailto:tyler@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org)**.

Image: Claire Cella