

STEFF'S FALL UPDATE

Dear friends,

The hot, dry days of summer are quickly fading into the all-too-brief Wyoming autumn. My family and I tried to make the most of the past few months with plenty of time spent in the mountains and out enjoying our public lands, and I hope you can say the same.

But the summer was hardly a break for the Wyoming Outdoor Council staff as we continued to push forward on a number of issues. The same goes for our members who kept in touch and made time to attend our recent online events. Thank you for your support, and for staying involved with WOC!

Advancing the Cause of Clean Water in Jackson Hole

In Jackson Hole, anglers and tubers ready to enjoy a late summer day on the pristine waters of Fish and Flat creeks found signs at public access areas warning about the presence of dangerous *E. coli*. These high levels of bacteria are just the tip of the iceberg of water quality concerns in Teton County: Most concerning is nitrate pollution in the Snake River Aquifer. Fortunately, we've seen some early steps toward addressing the looming crisis. At our request, the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality is investigating groundwater in Hoback Junction. And together with our partners at Protect Our Water Jackson Hole we successfully convinced the county commission to begin drafting a comprehensive wastewater management plan.

Elsewhere, we're keeping an eye on a harmful blue-green algae bloom in Brooks Lake near Togwotee Pass, and awaiting the DEQ's next steps on a wastewater discharge permit for the Moneta Divide oil and gas field.

Doing Renewables Right

At the close of the Wyoming Legislature's 2020 budget session we requested that the Joint Corporations committee spend the interim studying a possible statewide siting plan for



utility-scale wind and solar energy development. The locations for these projects are currently considered on a case-by-case basis, but the state has an opportunity to proactively identify areas that are most suitable for development and would minimize impacts on wildlife, public access, and viewsheds. While we still believe a siting plan is key to future development, we ultimately urged the legislature to set aside this and all other non-essential interim topics to focus on the response to COVID-19 and Wyoming's budget shortfall.

Meanwhile, Outdoor Council staff have been conducting our own research on large-scale renewables and workforce transition. In recent months we've interviewed about 30 stakeholders, including state agencies, industry representatives, county officials, conservation groups, and academics to learn how Wyoming can best

guide the development of wind and solar over the coming years. We've also taken steps to strengthen our relationships with labor groups such as AFL-CIO. We see this as a starting point for developing concrete policy ideas to help Wyoming "do renewables right," making sure Wyoming workers and communities aren't left behind and that our cherished open landscapes are protected as the national appetite for renewable energy grows.

Live Streaming the Legislature

So many aspects of public life have changed due to COVID-19, and the work of the Wyoming Legislature — as well as state boards and commissions — is no exception. We've adjusted to attending meetings online or in hybrid settings, and to giving testimony via Zoom. This is a critical juncture as Wyoming faces a massive budget shortfall with, as of now, no clear way to resolve it. Many revenue bills considered during the Joint Revenue committee's August meeting died, unable to find support to advance them to the full legislature. A real estate transfer tax was the lone meaningful revenue bill to survive — the Outdoor Council testified in favor, having previously proposed it as an interim topic. The topic and bill will be revisited at the committee's November meeting.

Conservation Cafeteria

You're already up to speed on the latest happenings at the legislature if you tuned in to our most recent Conservation Cafeteria, a new series of discussions we're hosting at noon on the first Wednesday of each month. There will be a new topic each month and most of the hour-long Zoom sessions are interactive and dedicated to sharing ideas and answering your questions. Watch your email for an invitation to join the next conversation. If you don't already receive our email updates, now is a great time to register by visiting www.wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/signup.

Red Desert Road Trips

While COVID-19 put a damper on a number of in-person events we would have hosted, we were fortunate to lead several socially distanced tours of the Northern Red Desert — including a day-

long trip with Gov. Mark Gordon and his staff.



This fall, we'll be taking out business owners and travel and tourism representatives from Sublette and Sweetwater counties. Exposing decision makers to the beauty and potential of the desert — and to the citizens who value it — is an important step toward preserving the current balance on the landscape. Representatives of Citizens for the Red Desert also participated in these tours. You can learn more about this grassroots group at www.reddesert.org. If you don't have a Red Desert driving tour map yet, email info@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org and we'll get a copy to you.

Time to Do Your Part!

We're all working together to help shape Wyoming's future, and the easiest way to make that happen is to get out and vote. Election Day is only a few weeks away, so now's the time to make a plan to visit the polls on November 3 or mail an absentee ballot. While you're at it, pick a friend or family member and make sure they vote, too! Take care, and have a wonderful fall.

Steff Kessler
Program Director

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steff Kessler".



P.S. Don't forget to renew your membership now to get a copy of our 2021 calendar, featuring gorgeous photography of Wyoming's wild places!