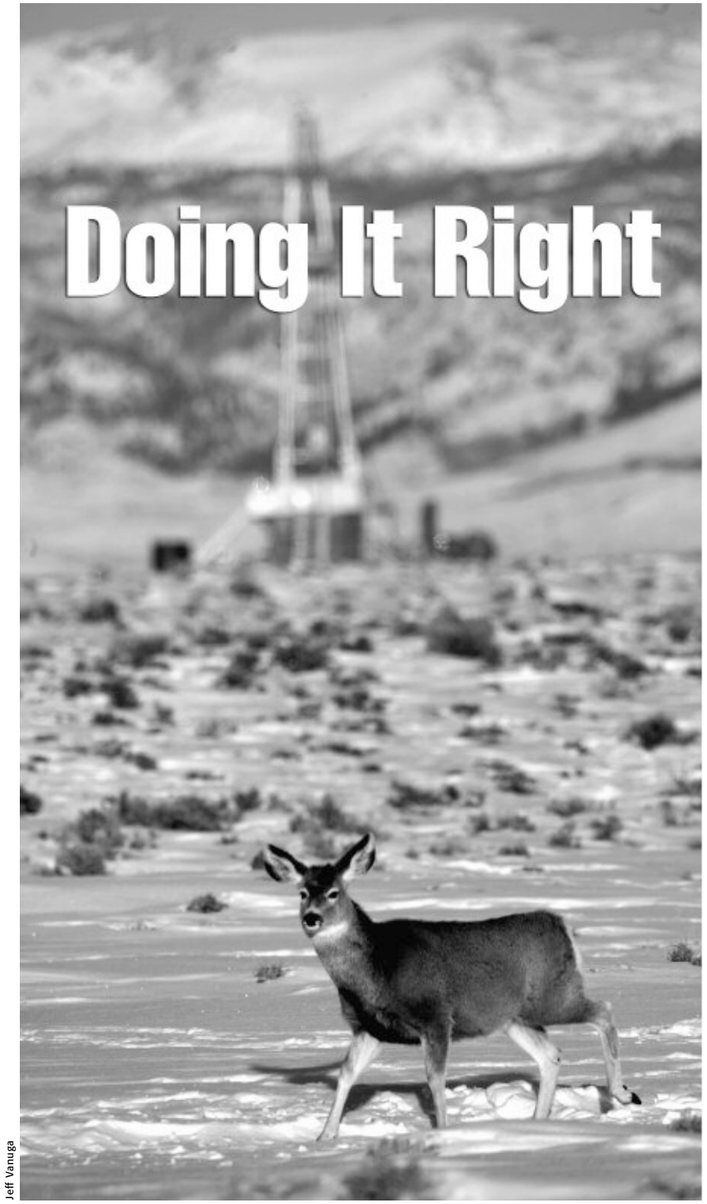
37 Years of Conservation Action

WYOMING OUTDOOR COUNCIL

FRONTLINE REPORT

SPRING 2004



Jeff Vanuga

A Means to Responsible Oil and Gas Development That Respects Our Natural and Cultural Heritage

By Bruce Pendery

Pronghorn graze among sagebrush scoured free of snow by the wind. In the background, the open plains stretch unbroken for miles. But underneath the placid herd, natural gas is flowing to a well six miles away. This is "doing it right."

"Doing it right" is an approach often mentioned when WOC seeks ways to keep the explosive oil and natural gas development rush sweeping across Wyoming from ruining the state's rural communities and the natural environment. The question is: what is "doing it right"?

On the one hand, "doing it right" is like "multiple use"— a philosophical approach for how to treat the land and the people using it. But there are a number of specifics that give "doing it right" substance. These specifics transform philosophy into a framework for responsible development on both public lands and private lands with underlying federally-owned oil and gas deposits (so-called "split estates").

According to the Northern Plains Resource Council, which popularized the phrase, there are at least six elements to "doing it right" in coalbed methane country, such as the Powder River Basin:

- effective monitoring of development and enforcement of existing laws;
- provision for surface-owner consent and surface-use agreements on split estate lands;
- the use of best-available technologies to ensure aquifer recharge along with clustered development to reduce the area impacted;
- the collection of thorough information on fish and wildlife resources followed by phased development to diffuse impacts;
- meaningful public involvement in the decision-making process; and
- complete reclamation of disturbed areas accompanied by bonding sufficient to ensure that taxpayers are not saddled with reclamation costs.

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Executive Director Dan Heilig's Farewell Message

Dear Friends,

After almost thirteen years working for WOC, seven as staff attorney and the last five and one-half as executive director, I have decided—after a considerable period of introspection—to heed the advice of Ed Abbey: "It is not enough to fight for natural land and the west; it is even more important to enjoy it. While you can. While it's still there..." In this spirit, I will be stepping down as WOC's executive director on August 31, 2004. I look forward to a very appealing period of relaxation and adventure, followed by the flexibility and freedom to explore new opportunities.

This was not an easy decision for me. During my years at WOC I developed strong bonds with many people throughout the state and region. These people are all exceptionally talented, committed, caring, and principled individuals who are working for a better world. I feel privileged to have worked with them on both a professional and personal level. I will miss my frequent interactions, based on a shared commitment, with my many friends.

I have provided more than seven months notice to the Board of Directors so that a thorough and successful executive director search and transition can take place. My passion for protecting Wyoming's wildlife, wildlands and quality of life stays very strong, as is my belief that WOC is among the most effective organizations in the West fighting for these goals. Thus, I am deeply committed to making sure that the transition to the new executive director goes smoothly.

I am confident WOC is in a position to use this transition as an opportunity for further growth. Your continued involvement with WOC and support of our work through this transition will allow us to sustain and strengthen the vibrant and effective organization you have helped us build.

In closing, please allow me to say how deeply appreciative I am of your support and the trust and confidence you have invested in this wonderful organization. Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time with any questions.

Sincerely,

Dan Heilig
Executive Director

Established in 1967, the Wyoming Outdoor Council (WOC) is the state's oldest and largest independent statewide conservation organization. Our mission is to protect and enhance Wyoming's environment by educating and involving citizens and advocating environmentally sound public policies and decisions.

Frontline Report is the quarterly newsletter of WOC and is provided as a benefit of membership. Letters to the editor and articles by members are welcome.

For more information contact:
WOC, 262 Lincoln, Lander, WY 82520
(307) 332-7031 *(phone)*
(307) 332-6899 *(fax)*
woc@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

A Heartfelt Thanks to Dan Heilig

Law firms call their most successful attorneys "rainmakers," near-miracle workers who significantly boost the firms' revenues, reputation and prestige.

If WOC were a law firm, Dan Heilig would be its undisputed rainmaker.

Now, after nearly 13 years at WOC, the past five and a half as executive director, Dan has decided to take a well-deserved period of R&R.

Dan came to Wyoming in the late 1970s drawn by the state's mountains and work with the National Outdoor Leadership School based in Lander. He spent eight years leading courses and traveling around the world climbing before deciding to go back to school. After graduating from the University of Wyoming's College of Law and working as a law clerk for Wyoming District Court judge Arthur Hanscum, Dan came to WOC in 1991.

As WOC's staff attorney, Dan joined four other full-time WOC employees, including our most senior staff member, Bonnie Hofbauer. For the next seven years, Dan aptly tackled a brutal workload of detailed comments to public agencies on development proposals and complex administrative appeals and lawsuits defending Wyoming's wild, open spaces and clean environment from ill-conceived logging, mining, and oil and gas drilling on our public lands.

By the time Dan took over as executive director from Tom Throop in September, 1998, WOC had a growing reputation as Wyoming's environmental 911—the group everyone called about threats to the state's wildlife, wild places and environmental quality.

In his nearly six years as ED, Dan has increased WOC's staff from five to 12, hiring talented and passionate lawyers, organizers, and media and development professionals; substantially boosted our annual budget by attracting generous individual donations and foundation grants; built strong coalitions with state, regional and national conservation partners; increased and diversified the organization's membership; and overseen the creation of a professionally managed endowment fund to ensure WOC's long-term financial stability.

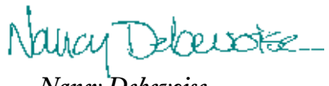
Under Dan's leadership, WOC has won a number of precedent-setting administrative and legal victories in the seemingly never-ending battle to protect Wyoming's natural treasures, clear skies, clean water and quality of life from runaway industrial development and violations of environmental laws and regulations. National and international media coverage has highlighted WOC's campaigns to protect the Red Desert, the Powder River Basin, the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and other areas of the state besieged by oil and gas drilling, logging and other environmentally destructive activities.

In mid-January, after Dan told the board of his plans, we immediately convened an eight-member ED Search Committee. The committee has developed a plan and timeline for a comprehensive and professional executive director search, including a detailed schedule of activities and firm deadlines for this important executive search effort.

Thanks to Dan's extraordinary leadership, the bright and dedicated staff he's attracted to WOC, and the organization's well-deserved reputation as one of the most effective and respected environmental organizations in the West, we look forward to receiving strong applications from highly qualified candidates. We anticipate welcoming WOC's new executive director to Lander in early August, permitting several weeks of orientation by Dan before his planned departure on August 31.

While executive director transitions inevitably involve a lot of work and some stressful moments, we are confident that with your continued support and involvement, WOC will use this opportunity to continue to grow and strengthen.

Dan has done a superb job of leading WOC and he will be greatly missed. On behalf of WOC's staff and board, members, funders and all those who love Wyoming, I offer Dan our heartfelt thanks for his devotion to WOC and his prodigious achievements as rainmaker extraordinaire.



Nancy Debevoise
Board President

Bob Kiesling

Thank you Nancy

After seven years and 28 issues, Nancy Debevoise has passed the role of WOC *Frontline Report* editor to Lander writer Molly Absolon. Nancy continues her committed service to WOC as president of the board of directors.

Nancy brought *Frontline* to a new level of professionalism. The newsletter has been praised by WOC members and other readers for its clean look, its pithy articles, its range of subject matter, and its relevance, much of which can be attributed to Nancy's influence.

Thank you, Nancy, for all your hard work.

Doing It Right *continued from page 1*

Each of these techniques allows responsible oil and gas development to occur while protecting valuable public assets such as open space and hunting opportunities.

Directional Drilling

One of the most important ways to do it right is to maximize the use of "directional drilling," a technique that allows multiple wells to be drilled from a single well pad. Directional drilling allows wells to be drilled outside sensitive areas and can reduce the amount of surface disturbance by clustering wells in one area.

According to a report by the Biodiversity Conservation Alliance, current technology allows directional drilling to reach oil and gas deposits up to six and one-half miles from the drill pad, and is technologically and economically feasible under a broad range of conditions.

But directional drilling does not solve all impact issues. "Doing it right" recognizes that there are areas where other public values and assets simply outweigh the value of oil and gas. For example, oil and gas development in grizzly bear or lynx habitat in the Shoshone and Bridger-Teton national forests can rarely, if ever, be done without jeopardizing these rare and magnificent species.

WOC advocates doing it right

There is no question the impacts of oil and gas development on the land, and on people who use the land such as hunters or ranchers, could be greatly reduced while allowing oil and gas development to occur if "doing it right" techniques and approaches were widely used.

WOC supports and advocates this approach. In our view, "doing it right" is fully consistent with and required by current law and policy, such as the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. We believe it is also what Wyoming residents want. But it is not what they are getting.

BLM stuck in dated development strategies

On public lands in Wyoming, the Bureau of Land Management almost invariably rejects or greatly underutilizes "doing it right" approaches to oil and gas development.

BLM does not support phased development (an approach where further development is not allowed until existing disturbed areas are fully reclaimed) because it believes this would not allow the corporations that have been granted access to public oil and gas resources to develop those resources at the rate or in the manner they want.

BLM also allows companies to post the minimum permissible bonds to ensure compliance with lease terms, including reclamation obligations, even though these amounts are woefully inadequate given the huge numbers of wells being drilled and the large areas affected by oil and gas development.

As for directional drilling, the BLM frequently rejects the technique without serious consideration if industry expresses any concern—supported or not—about its costs and technical feasibility.

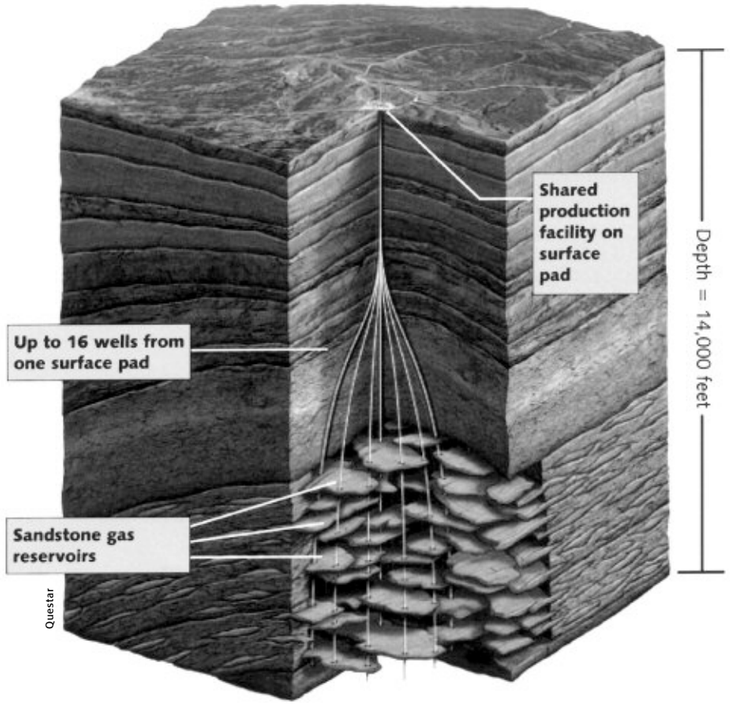
And when WOC and others submitted a citizens' proposal for coalbed methane development in the Powder River Basin that had several provisions for "doing it right," including requiring protections for farmers and ranchers owning split estates, BLM summarily dismissed consideration of the alternative.

At its root, BLM's rejection of "doing it right" results from an unwillingness to think outside the box of traditional oil and gas development methods.

"Doing it right" is based on the premise that federal land managers can, and must, regulate oil and gas development for the benefit of all resources and all Americans, even if that means economic returns to oil and gas corporations are not quite as great in the short term.

BLM, however, invariably makes almost all public lands available for oil and gas leasing and then facilitates development of a lease to the maximum extent possible if that is desired by the corporate lessee. In the process it often disregards or de-emphasizes countervailing public values.

Rejection of the "doing it right" approach is especially evident in the Bush Administration, which has issued numerous edicts that elevate oil and gas development to first priority on the public lands, effectively demoting all other resources to secondary status. Moreover, the administration has not only failed to adopt "doing it right" practices, it has affirmatively sought to weaken or eliminate the few "doing it right" principles BLM does regularly employ, such as stipulations protecting Wyoming's big game populations on their crucial winter ranges.



One of the most important ways to do it right is to maximize the use of "directional drilling," a technique that allows multiple wells to be drilled from a single well pad. Current technology allows directional drilling to reach oil and gas deposits up to 6½ miles from the well pad.

Mule deer on Pinedale Mesa

Jeff Vanuga

In supporting appropriate development, WOC recognizes our own daily dependence on oil and gas as well as the significant economic benefits energy development provides Wyoming.

Doing it right does not mean not doing it

In supporting appropriate development, WOC recognizes our own daily dependence on oil and gas as well as the significant economic benefits energy development provides Wyoming through severance fees, taxes and employment opportunities. But oil and gas development has tremendous impacts, too, the most significant, but difficult to quantify, being the slow, but steady, industrialization of the state and conversion of its wildlife-rich vast open spaces into something akin to a petro-chemical industrial complex largely devoid of these values.

Few Wyomingites desire this outcome for their state, yet that is where we are headed unless the federal and state governments, particularly the BLM, fully embrace and implement the concept and techniques of "doing it right."

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Well flares blacken the skies

Gas-well flaring sends plumes of smoke into the air above the Upper Green River Valley

By Molly Absolon

February the 13th was literally a Black Friday in Pinedale, Wyo. Beginning at 8:30 a.m. and lasting until evening, an Anschutz Corporation gas well in the Pinedale Anticline field began to spew out a plume of black smoke that spread for miles across the clear winter skies.

"This was not an isolated incident," said Perry Walker, a Pinedale-area resident and an amateur astronomer.

"It's becoming a serious problem because these flares occur frequently throughout the area," Walker said. "I am becoming increasingly concerned about our air quality because these flares continue to burn, free from regulations intended to protect the environment."

On the weekend of April 3rd, Walker sighted another well flare. This one belched out a black cloud that was a mile and a half wide and 15 miles long according to his calculations.

Walker, a former Air Force nuclear engineer and infrared scientist, is actively lobbying state and federal officials to stop the air pollution. He is not alone. In March, WOC filed a formal petition with the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality asking for the implementation of new rules requiring the use of Best Available Control Technology (BACT) for all natural gas well field operations in Sublette County.

The petition seeks to protect air quality and visibility in the Pinedale area, as well as in the nearby Wind River mountains' Bridger Wilderness, which is part of the largest pristine "Class I" airshed in the lower 48 states. Protecting this air quality would require reducing emissions from well flaring, a technique used to stimulate production from newly completed natural gas wells. Currently well flaring does not require any special pollution controls. Operators are simply required to notify state agencies of their intention to flare a well prior to the event.

Although flaring is a common practice, it is not necessary if Best Available Control Technologies are used in well development. Two oil companies drilling in the Upper Green River Valley—Shell and Questar—have successfully used existing technologies to limit the use of well flaring, thereby reducing the amount of air pollution their wells emit.

"A number of operators in the Jonah and Pinedale Anticline Fields have completely eliminated flaring of the gas except for the short initial period while sand is flowing out of the well," wrote Don Likwartz, the supervisor of the Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, in a March 17th letter to WOC.

Despite the fact that wells can be completed without resorting to extended flaring, the practice is not against regulations and, therefore, is commonly used. Pinedale area residents believe the reason for this is that it costs more not to flare. The pollution, they contend, is fueled by profits, not by the lack of available technology.

William Belveal

On February 13, an Anschutz Corporation gas well sent up a cloud of smoke over the Upper Green River Valley that blackened the skies for hours.

Anschutz spokesman Todd Kalstrom's response to questions about the February 13th flaring seem to confirm this belief. Kalstrom told the *Pinedale Roundup* on March 11, 2004 that flare-control technology "is not required by the regulations in Wyoming. We are doing what is acceptable and haven't really considered going to flareless completion."

What Kalstrom implies is acceptable is a practice that pours tons of particulate matter into the atmosphere, spreading pollutants that cause both human and environmental health problems as well as contribute to regional haze. Such pollution may be allowed under existing Wyoming laws, but that doesn't make it right or acceptable.

"When I retired I moved onto property I bought 20 miles north of Pinedale where I have a large telescope and once had clear skies," Walker said. "I'm now disgusted by the hazing of the Wind River mountain range and the night sky by the energy industry."

Although several studies have been conducted, the precise cause of the haze blocking views across the Upper Green River Valley has not been conclusively established. Nonetheless, it is believed that some of the degradation in visibility can be attributed to emissions from oil and gas activities, which are spreading rapidly across southwest Wyoming.

"Oil and gas activities such as drilling, production, treatment, and transmission represent the largest single source of air pollution in Sublette County and the fastest growing source of air pollution statewide. Emissions from oil and gas operations typically include nitrogen oxides, sulfur oxides, hazardous air pollutants such as benzene, and fine particulates," said Dan Heilig, WOC's executive director.

WOC's Leslie Gaines produced a piece on well-flaring for KGWC-CBS in Casper and its many sister stations throughout Wyoming that appeared on the evening news on April 9, 2004. The clip can also be viewed on the WOC website at www.wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org.

John Corra discusses his vision for Wyoming DEQ

By Molly Absolon

John Corra was appointed head of the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality by Governor Dave Freudenthal just over a year ago. Corra, who was the Health, Safety and Environment Manager for FMC Corporation in Green River at the time of his appointment, was viewed with some suspicion by the environmental community because of his close ties to industry. A year later, Corra's work has eased suspicions somewhat, but the fear remains that his past ties could result in undue industrial influence on environmental regulations and enforcement in the state. Within the DEQ, Corra is well-liked and many employees believe he is a better advocate for environmental protections than his predecessor, Dennis Hemmer. Corra has twice met with WOC's board of directors for informal discussions. He also recently took part in a phone interview with board member, Molly Absolon. What follows are excerpts from their conversation.

Q: What are your top three priorities for the DEQ?

A: The top priority I have for the department right now is that we get clear on our mission, our values, and our performance measures, and that we begin to look at using them as a guide for the way in which we go about doing our work.

The second priority I've got is to make sure that our environmental values survive what I call the energy rush. There's a tremendous amount of [natural resource extraction] activity occurring in the state, and one of my priorities is to make sure when it is done, we don't look at what is left and say, "Damn it, we should have done something different." So that is a priority.

And we need to become a more proactive agency.

Q: When you talk about using the mission and values to guide the agency, was that something that wasn't there prior to your tenure?

A: No, the agency had a mission, and of course it had its statutes and its rules and regulations. But I came in with a fresh perspective. I have the ability, based upon my newness, to be able to ask questions about what is working and what is not working and to get honest feedback from everyone.

And it's not that I think the agency was necessarily doing anything wrong. But I do believe that it wasn't always living up to the expectations of its stakeholders, and I think the way in which it was going about its work needed to be looked at.

Q: You mentioned that you wanted to make sure our environmental values survive the energy rush. Do you mean Wyoming's physical environmental qualities or our individual environmental values?

A: Values is probably the wrong word. What I meant was Wyoming's physical environmental qualities.

These qualities are the "why" we all live here, and the "why" people want to come here to visit, but it is the energy, minerals, natural resources businesses that provide the "how" people live here.

So the challenge is, how do you ensure both? How do you make sure that people are earning a living and natural resources are being taken advantage of in the state, while at the same time taking care that the state is still a very desirable place to work and live and visit?

Q: I found the similarities between WOC's mission and the draft mission for DEQ striking. But while our goals are similar, we seem to find ourselves in adversarial roles frequently. Why?

A: I thought it was interesting that the mission of the Wyoming Outdoor Council is in fact similar to ours. The difference lies in how we go about doing things. There is tension between the need to take advantage of our natural resources and the need to protect them. If there was not that tension there would be no need for the DEQ.

In order to be able to reach solutions, I think we need to change the way we look at a problem. If I start from a place where the solution has to be "either/or," then there is no progress from that place. Because it all of a sudden creates a sense of the absolute. You either don't do something or you do do it. If you do do it, you've screwed everything up, and if you don't do it, you have protected everything but have no oil, gas or coal for energy.

Instead we need to approach from an "and or both" viewpoint in order to be able to progress.

And we can't forget the dimension of time when we look at these things. So, for example, if you look at a large surface coal mine today, you see one heck of a lot of disturbance. You see a lot of alteration of the landscape, and you know it is going to be there for a while.

But when you think about the dimension of time, you say, "Okay I know this disturbance is going to happen today, but I also know that it is going to be reclaimed later." Then you recognize that you can actually do both.

I thought it was interesting that the mission of the Wyoming Outdoor Council is in fact similar to ours. The difference lies in how we go about doing things. There is tension between the need to take advantage of our natural resources and the need to protect them. If there was not that tension there would be no need for the DEQ.

John Corra

So the challenge is…how do you make sure that people are earning a living and natural resources are being taken advantage of in the state, while at the same time taking care that the state is still a very desirable place to work and live and visit?

Q: That makes sense, although I would argue there are some places where there are absolutes, where development should not take place, but I can see that approach is a place to start to move forward.

A: You see, if a conflict between one group's opinion with another group's opinion is viewed as "That's just the way things are, there's going to be that conflict," well then it is certainly not positive. But if you look at it and say, "Well wait a second, there's a conflict here but as long as that conflict can be utilized to develop a better outcome, then hey, it's okay to have the conflict."

In this situation, I know something better will come from conflict. There's a nuance there, and I don't do a very good job of describing it, but if conflict is simply a means to an end, then it is always going to be negative, but if conflict is the result of differing opinions and those differing opinions lead to better solutions, then that is a good thing.

Q: I've heard you use the word "stakeholders" a number of times today and in the past. Who are DEQ's stakeholders and how do you determine those individuals or entities?

A: I use the word "stakeholders" very broadly. It includes those who have an interest in the work we are doing. A specific example would be the issue of landfills.

We have a number of leaking landfills in the state, we have landfills running out of space, and there are landfills that do not live up to new, tighter standards of performance. This is a big problem for communities, and so, via the governor's office, we've formed a citizen's advisory group that consists of landfill operators and community leaders from around the state, as well as representatives from DEQ. They are meeting to problem solve, brainstorm solutions, and develop recommendations to deal with the challenge.

Another example is the NPDES task force. We had members of industry — they were stakeholders. We had some environmental groups — they were stakeholders. We had ranchers and landowners — they were stakeholders, and we had DEQ people.

Q: Typically do you seek out these stakeholders or do they come to you?

A: Well, normally we seek them out. But on occasion people will call and ask to be included, and we'll say okay.

Q: I wanted to follow up on Jeff Kessler's —the conservation director of Biodiversity Conservation Alliance—question at the WOC board meeting in February. He was specifically concerned about the fact that members of the coal industry had been meeting with DEQ without public involvement to discuss proposed changes in the rules affecting the industry. Do you agree with the issues he raised?

A: I can understand his concern. I took that question back to my staff. We discussed it at a staff meeting and then we actually had another meeting to talk about what we ought to do.

His concerns about where do we start and how does someone other than industry get their perspective weighed in early enough in the game to influence the outcome are good concerns. We are going to do things slightly differently in the future in a way that will, I think, get at most of what Jeff wanted.

What we are exploring—and this is not a final decision—but what we are exploring is a way that we can keep matters that we are working on posted on our website.

We'd have a special spot highlighting current issues on our website. You could click on that spot, and see what is occupying the agency's attention at the moment along with the name of a contact person for each issue.

Then if you wanted to learn more, you could call the contact person and say, "Hey, I see that you are meeting on coal vegetation rules, what are you doing? Who are you meeting with? When's your next meeting? Can I come?" And the answer would be: "This is what we are doing, this is our next meeting, see you there."

So rather than trying to commit to some big process where we provide public notice, we'll put the information on the website and people who want to pay attention to what are currently the priority issues at the DEQ will be able to find them online and hook in.

There will still be all kinds of other times people can get involved. But this allows public involvement earlier in the process.

Q: At our February board meeting in Laramie, I got the impression that coalbed methane was overwhelming DEQ's resources. Is that an accurate assessment?

A: Yes, it is. It is occupying a tremendous amount of resource time and also management time. The way we've responded to that is by adding people. In our budget for this year we have added quite a few extra people to our water quality division, in large part to respond to the increased workload from CBM development.

But the development is paying its own way. The taxpayers are still getting a very good value for their dollars.

Q: Do any other programs suffer as a result of this focus?

A: No.

Q: Even though John Wagner, the administrator of the Water Quality Division, was talking about things like the leaking underground storage tanks that won't be dealt with until 2015 because of limited resources?

A: Well that is a good remark. The underground storage tank program has been in place for a long time, in fact well before the coalbed methane development took off. It was set up and staffed according to however the management at the time felt it should be set up and staffed.

However, over time, the demands placed on that program have grown. John was just commenting that when he looks at the current demand and current resources, he realizes that it is going to take him a lot longer to get the job done. But that is a result of more leaking tanks being discovered, and a result of us learning that it takes longer to remediate one of these sites. It has nothing to do with CBM.

Q: How do you describe your leadership style?

A: The way I look at it, the best way for me to add value to this agency is to ask the right questions, provide a different perspective, and as I said earlier, work to get clarity around our mission, clarity around our values, and clarity around our performance measures. I certainly don't have the experience of any of the detailed programs to be able to walk in and say, "You know I have a better way of doing this." I can't do that. But what I can do is facilitate everybody else finding better ways to do things. That's where I view my role.

Q: It often seems as if the DEQ gets attacked from all sides and I wondered how that affects morale at the organization?

A: That does happen, but I don't know that morale is a function of that so much as it is a function of how well the agency supports its staff, how well leadership engages staff, and how we go about doing our work.

I think sometimes people in our agency get it from both sides for so long they insulate themselves from everyone. Subconsciously or consciously they may reach a point where they say, "You know I'm going to catch hell for this no matter what happens, so I'm just going to go ahead and do it." They tend to build walls or seal themselves away from outside contact.

When I came to the agency I sensed some of this. We need to make sure we don't allow it to happen. We can't stop listening to everyone despite the fact that some of them may be very critical when they speak to us.

Q: If you had all the money in the world for the DEQ where would you put it?

A: If there was an unlimited supply of money, I would accelerate the pace of change for bringing information technology tools and solutions into the agency. I would do more monitoring. And I would also accelerate the rate at which we get our work done.

Leaking landfills threaten state's ability to handle its waste

By Molly Absolon

In Fremont County, the solid waste district calls it a crisis. The Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality prefers to say "problem" or "challenge." The choice of word seems to be dictated by who is footing the bill, but regardless of whether you view it as a crisis or challenge, Wyoming is facing growing problems with the way it disposes of its garbage.

It's hard to imagine Wyoming, with its miles of wide-open spaces and low population, having a solid waste disposal problem. There seems to be plenty of unoccupied land to dump on. And 30 years ago, that was true. In those days, most people in the state either got rid of their garbage on the "back 40" or they drove out an old two-track on public land, emptied out their trash, and set it ablaze. But then in 1979, with growing awareness of the need to protect public health and environmental quality from unsanitary and reckless waste disposal techniques, the Wyoming legislature established more stringent laws for waste disposal and free-form dumping became illegal.

Today's pending disposal problem can be traced to a number of factors. First and foremost is the amount of waste being generated. Wyoming residents produce almost twice as much garbage per person per day as the national average. (Approximately nine pounds per person as opposed to 5.3 pounds elsewhere.)

In addition, changing regulations and new monitoring standards have affected the way landfills are managed.

The Problem

As the Wyoming DEQ began to monitor Wyoming's landfills more carefully in the 1990s, it discovered that 13 of the state's 53 operating landfills and approximately eight of its 77 closed landfills were leaking pollutants such as vanadium, mercury, tin, and vinyl chloride into underlying aquifers. (Note: The number of leaking closed landfills may exceed eight since many of these sites are not currently monitored.)

In Fremont County, groundwater contamination—coupled with the discovery of an important archeological site in the middle of the Riverton landfill, and a conflict with a power line right-of-way in Lander—meant that the district went from an estimated 50 years of landfill life to less than five in a matter of weeks. Since it takes up to ten years to permit and construct a new landfill, Fremont County may run out of landfill space if something is not done quickly.

Cheyenne and Casper are also facing impending limits on how long they can continue to run their operations as they have in the past, while the town of Guernsey has been forced to close its dump because it could not afford to assess—let alone cleanup—its groundwater problem.

"The cost of remediation at the affected sites is high," says Bob Doctor, the DEQ's program manager for solid waste permitting and corrective action. "We estimate it could cost between $500,000 to 2.5 million per site. You do the math. We're talking a lot of money."

Most landfills in the state do not charge dumping fees, rather services are paid for by mill-levies on local property and mineral taxes. This indirect method of financing means that there are no incentives to reduce or recycle waste. In addition, the funding does not have any direct relationship to the actual cost of doing business, leaving many solid waste districts without any resources to pay for the cost of remediation.

"Many of the little municipalities around the state are having a hard time coming up with enough money to figure out the extent of their problem, let alone how to fix it," Doctor says.

Regionalization, Recycling, Remediation

As part of a multi-pronged effort to address major waste disposal problems in Wyoming, the DEQ, in conjunction with Governor Freudenthal, has set up a citizen's advisory group that will explore new ways to handle garbage in the state. WOC's Michele Barlow is a member of the group.

The group's goals, according to Dave Finley, the administrator of the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality's Solid and Hazardous Waste Division, who spoke at a solid waste meeting in Lander in February, can be summed up with three Rs: Regionalization, Recycling and Remediation.

Ironically, one of the more conventional uses for the three Rs is Reduce, Reuse and Recycle, a mantra that might have helped the state avoid its current situation had it been followed more closely in the past.

Finley believes that regionalization is critical, spreading costs beyond municipalities so citizens in rural areas will still have access to affordable waste disposal services. Currently, the DEQ is looking to states like Idaho, where regional landfills have proven to be very cost effective, as models on how to consolidate Wyoming's waste disposal efforts. A representative from Idaho made a presentation at a March 15 citizen's advisory group meeting.

Recycling is also a priority in order to reduce the amount of waste going into state landfills. Wyoming's recycling rates are much lower than the national average. States such as Oregon boast that as much as 46 percent of its waste stream is recycled. The national average is 26.7 percent. *Biocycle* magazine estimates that Wyoming recycled only 1.7 percent of the waste it generated in 2003.

Doctor thinks *Biocycle's* number is low. He says he would guess three to five percent of the waste stream is recycled in the state. Regardless, the numbers are not up to par. The recycling rates are low for various reasons, according to Doctor. Inconvenience, lack of education, the cost and distance of transportation, the fact that it is cheap to dump, and the state's low, dispersed population all contribute.

Fremont County is one district currently exploring options for dealing with what its solid waste disposal board of directors frankly call a crisis. Recycling has been around for more than ten years in the county. It started as a grass-roots effort with WOC and an all-volunteer group, Lander Recycles, providing support and leadership to get the program off the ground. Eventually recycling grew to the point where it was handed over to Community Entry Services to operate.

Reuso, the recycling wizard, was created as part of an educational campaign to encourage recycling in Fremont County.

When the county became aware of the looming space shortage in its landfills two years ago, the solid waste disposal district launched an extensive educational campaign to try to increase recycling rates.

Ads were run in both the print and broadcast media, bins were placed in more convenient places around the communities, and a commercial cardboard pickup program was started. In the two years since this campaign was first implemented, recycling has grown by 30 percent. But it can't grow anymore without an influx of funds, which the county does not have. Other parts of the state face similar challenges with their recycling programs.

"We are trying to find ways to concentrate our solid waste facilities both for traditional garbage and recycling," Doctor says. "This way we can all share the cost."

Protecting groundwater

The final "R" in the DEQ's plan involves remediation or the cleanup of landfills where groundwater contamination is currently occurring. Wyoming's statutes state that groundwater quality in Wyoming cannot be degraded by any activity. This water—considered a precious resource because of its scarcity—is protected for both its intended use and for any use for which it may be suitable.

DEQ's Northwest District Engineering Supervisor in the Water Quality Division, Jeff Hermansky, said in a phone interview that groundwater can be cleaned if it becomes contaminated, but the process is very expensive and time consuming.

"The expenditure for remediation can literally be 100 times more than it is for prevention," Hermansky says. "It's much cheaper to spend money up front protecting groundwater than it is to spend money cleaning it up."

"The expenditure for remediation can literally be 100 times more than it is for prevention. It's much cheaper to spend money up front protecting groundwater than it is to spend money cleaning it up."

The DEQ's position on this is clear, despite some grumblings by local officials that the regulations are overly stringent. At the February meeting in Lander, Fremont County Commissioner Doug Thompson said he thought some "common sense" needed to be applied when determining how degraded water can be. He added that much of the groundwater affected by Fremont County landfills is already unfit for human consumption.

"Who knows when we may need that water," DEQ's Doctor says. "It's wrong to be sure that because an aquifer is not used now it won't be in the future.

"Eight-two percent of Wyoming's pubic water supplies rely solely on groundwater," he adds. "There are more than 50,000 permitted domestic wells. Much of that water is technically unsuitable for human consumption, but it is treated and used all the time. That's the reason arguing that nobody is using the water now doesn't work."

The Citizen's Advisory Group hopes to come out with its recommendations on what to do about the state's landfill problem by July 2004.

Reuso Wizard and Photo: Fremont County Solid Waste Disposal District

Reducing the amount of waste going into Wyoming's landfills through recycling is one way the state hopes to deal with its growing solid waste disposal problem.

WYOMING OUTDOOR COUNCIL

FRONTLINE

37 Years of Conservation Action

2004 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

The 2004 Wyoming legislative session was a budget session. Budget sessions take place in even-numbered years and typically last 20 rather than the 38-40 days required for a general session.

During a budget session, all bills—except the budget bill—require a two-thirds vote from either the House or the Senate to be introduced for discussion. Consequently, many conservation-oriented bills did not garner enough votes to get onto the floor. Nonetheless, a number of important debates and votes took place during this legislative session.

Pollution permit fees established

"HB 12 was the best conservation bill of the session," said WOC's Michele Barlow. "It was the result of years and years of work by WOC and by many others."

The bill, which was signed into law by Governor Freudenthal on March 4, 2004, establishes an annual fee of $100 for every active, permitted surface-water point-source discharge in the state.

Prior to the passage of this law, a person or company could legally discharge pollution or waste into the state's waters by simply obtaining a free permit. Although these permits required compliance with specific rules and regulations, no funds were generated to help administer the permit application process. With the recent exponential growth of water discharge permits due to coalbed methane production, it also meant monitoring and enforcement of the permits was inconsistent due to woeful underfunding.

The money raised through the new fee program —roughly $1.6 million over three years—will be used by Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality to monitor and analyze the quality of surface water in the state.

"$100 is a really small fee compared to the fees charged in surrounding states," Barlow says. "But it is something. It provides needed funds to DEQ, and it shifts the burden of paying for the cost of pollution from the taxpayers to the polluters."

The bill passed with no resistance in large part because it was backed by an NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) task force recommendation and sponsored by the Joint Interim Minerals, Business and Economic Development Committee.

The task force, organized by DEQ to look into the issue of water discharge permitting, was made up of representatives from industry, agriculture and the conservation community. This broad-based support guaranteed the bill's success with minimal debate. The final vote in the Senate was 23-7 and in the House 58-0.

Surface Owners' protections fail

HB 70/SF 90 was the second attempt in two years to increase protections for private landowners facing oil and gas development on their land. This year's bill—the result of a study conducted by the Joint Judiciary Interim Committee—never got off the ground after a massive lobbying effort by the minerals industry killed it on the second day of the session.

The need for surface owner protection

Under current law, landowners who do not own their mineral rights have very limited power to negotiate compensation for damages resulting from oil and gas development. The issue came to a head in Wyoming after a number of surface owners experienced problems with road proliferation, downed fences, disturbed livestock, contaminated waterways, erosion, noise, dust, and other problems associated with oil and gas drilling on their property.

Split estates—where the surface owner does not own the rights to the minerals underlying his or her property—are common in Wyoming, so the problem associated with their development is not likely to go away any time soon.

The interim study conducted by the Joint Judiciary Committee on the split-estate issue, which resulted in HB 70, included public meetings and hearings and provided opportunity for input from the governor, industry, landowners, and conservationists.

What was notable, according to Powder River Basin Resource Council's lobbyist and lead staff on agriculture and trade, Pennie Vance, was industry's relative quiet during the interim study.

"The mineral lobby had a full year just like everyone else to weigh in on this issue," said Vance in a phone interview.

"But they didn't say much. This made their lobbying really seem like an eleventh hour effort and it took us by surprise…they brought out their heavy hitters. It was fast and furious, and the legislators were hit over the head.

"Legislators were pinned to the wall by industry lobbyists," she concluded. "These were powerful people, professional lobbyists. There was a CEO from Halliburton. Our citizens lobbyists were outgunned frankly."

Oil and gas producers oppose protections

HB 70, and its Senate version SF 90, would have required oil and gas companies to provide a comprehensive plan to surface owners at least 60 days prior to development. It would have required compensation for "reasonable" property damage, including the loss of agricultural production and income, loss of land value or use, and other factors. The bill would have also required the oil and gas companies to post bonds to guarantee payment for any damage the surface owner incurred. Finally, HB 70 would have required companies to reclaim lands impacted by oil and gas development.

This bill provided protections already in existence in many oil and gas producing states such as Montana, North Dakota, Oklahoma, and South Dakota.

The bill failed in spite of Governor Freudenthal's support. On February 9, he gave a speech to the Legislature where he strongly advocated giving landowners more leverage in dealing with developers.

"The same national energy economy that fills our coffers could inadvertently turn our state into a water and wildlife wasteland," Freudenthal said in his speech.

But even Freudenthal could not sway the state's lawmakers in the face of industry opposition. The power of the lobby had its impact, and the bill failed the House vote for introduction 27-32 with one excused.

"The Legislature has spoken," wrote Bill Garland, a rancher from Pavillion, Wyo., in a letter to the editor of the *Casper Star-Tribune*. "We don't have the guts to do anything that might upset the oil and gas industry, even debate the split-estate issue openly."

Garland has been described as the "poster child" of split estates. He is finding it hard to operate his ranch in the Wind River Basin because of the dozens of wells that have sprung up in his hayfields. An active supporter of surface owner protections legislation, Garland spoke at the recent Conservation Congress in Pinedale. (See pages 17-19 for details.)

A second interim committee has been established to further study the issue.

Jeff Vanuga

The 31,000-acre Moskee Tract would have provided recreational access to 140,000 acres of national forest lands.

Moskee Tract purchase denied

The Senate lost a unique opportunity to provide public access to 31,000-acres of undeveloped lands in the Black Hills when it voted 14-16 against SF-12 on the bill's third reading.

SF-12 would have authorized purchase of Moskee Tract by the state of Wyoming. Located in Crook County in northeastern Wyoming, the land in question is currently owned by the Homestake Mining Company. In addition to providing excellent turkey and white-tail deer habitat, and 14 miles of trout streams, the tract controls access to 140,000 acres of National Forest lands.

Private buyers are reportedly interested in purchasing the Moskee Tract, which could lead to subdivision, access closure and the loss of habitat.

SF-12 ultimately failed because of its price tag. The Homestake Mining Company wanted $30 million for the land. The bill originally proposed funding the purchase through the Common School Permanent Fund. Both conservationists and the governor agreed that this source of funding could create an unfortunate precedent for the State Lands Board to seek financial returns on state lands through development that would likely conflict with recreational use.

When another source of funding for the Moskee Tract was not agreed upon by legislators, the bill died.

Reclamation and Remediation Study

Senators Mockler and Decaria introduced SF88 that would have required the Joint Minerals Interim Committee to "conduct a study to consider all remediation and reclamation avenues available through federal and state programs, which address the adverse environmental effects from any mineral, industrial, agricultural or domestic use of the land." The bill failed to win introduction with the senate vote of 14-15 with one excused.

The study would have reviewed all existing land remediation programs in the state, including programs run by the DEQ, the Wyoming Oil and Gas Commission, and under the jurisdiction of the State Mining Inspector. The goal of the study was to determine program effectiveness, analyze costs, and eliminate overlap.

The bill would also have created a land trust fund as a source of future revenue for the remediation of land damage.

Conservationists supported the bill and will seek to have it reintroduced in the 2005 General Session.

Wolves: lost in a quagmire of vitriolic rhetoric

Nearly 10 years after wolves were first reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming's lawmakers still cannot reach consensus on how to properly manage the species.

The debate in Cheyenne was contentious. Few seem able to discuss the topic of wolves without getting lost in a tangle of hyperbole and rhetoric. The newspapers are full of heated editorials and letters to the editors. Wolves are vilified on one page and glorified on the next. The "Feds" are bullying Wyoming on the issue according to some–Governor Freudenthal among the most outspoken in that camp—and just doing their job in the minds of others.

Fish & Wildlife Service rejects Wyoming's wolf plan

Last fall, United States Fish and Wildlife Service officials rejected the Wyoming Game and Fish Commissioners' wolf management plan because it—and existing Wyoming statutes relevant to wolves—failed to provide adequate controls over the taking of wolves. Specifically, Wyoming statutes classified wolves as trophy game in the wilderness areas adjoining Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks, but as predators, subject to killing on sight without a license, everywhere else in the state.

To meet the federal government's requirements, the state must drop predator status for wolves and require licenses for the killing of any of the animals.

Under the USFWS's recommended alternative, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department would have the authority to determine the number and cost of a wolf license, which leaves the state a great deal of freedom in controlling wolf numbers. But this concession did not appease lawmakers, who appeared to be angry with the federal government for "misleading" the state with respect to the acceptability of its plan for dual classification.

According to Governor Freudenthal and others, the Fish and Wildlife Service had assured the state its wolf plan would be accepted.

"Now, in the face of direct representations to the contrary, and in the face of nearly unanimous agreement that the best-available science supports the dual-status approach, Wyoming's wolf management plan has been rejected," the governor wrote to Interior Secretary Gale Norton in early February.

Wolves in the legislature

Wyoming's obstinacy appears, at least according to some observers like Jason Marsden of the Wyoming Conservation Voters, to be based largely on political maneuvering rather than hard science—the state just doesn't like being told what to do by Washington.

"The mainstream Wyoming conservation community, and many among the general public...strongly believe that the state's professional wildlife managers can protect both wolves and the people living in wolf country, if raw politics are left out of the equation," Marsden wrote in his online legislative report.

USFWS

Gray wolf

Wyoming's legislators had three opportunities to address the wolf issue: HB 111, which sought the dual classification of wolves as either trophy game or predators, and SF 73 and HB 155, both of which called for trophy game status for the animals throughout the state. None of the bills made much headway. HB 111 died in the Senate Travel Committee, SF 73 failed in the Senate, and HB 155 died on General File without debate.

WOC's position

WOC has consistently argued for designating the gray wolf as trophy game animal throughout the state, with harvest quotas based on biological needs and the prey base. This position is basically the same as the plan that was originally advocated by Wyoming Game and Fish Department wildlife biologists before the Game and Fish Commission modified the department's recommendations and called for dual classification

In addition to assuring a controlled, science-based management of the species, trophy game status will provide some financial support for the wolf management program through the sale of wolf licenses. Trophy game status also allows control of nuisance wolves to minimize wolf/livestock conflict and wolf/wildlife conflict.

Delisting of wolves delayed indefinitely

In the absence of a wolf management plan acceptable to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, wolves will continue to be managed according to Endangered Species Act protections—protections which seem to be leading to an expansion of the animal's geographic range and an increase in its numbers

"Ironically, the legislature's inability to draft legislation that meets the minimum requirements of the Endangered Species Act has led to the continued protection of wolves," said WOC Executive Director Dan Heilig. "Their lack of consensus on proper management of the species serves as a reprieve to the wolves' death sentence, which was really what Wyoming's wolf management plan meant."

The legislature's failure to amend Wyoming statutes to address the USFWS's concerns also means that it will be many years before the wolf debate cools. Currently, the governor's office is moving toward filing a lawsuit against the federal government on the issue of wolves. Meanwhile, Idaho and Montana are moving ahead with plans to manage the species under state wildlife law—plans that have already been approved by the USFWS.

In the Trenches

An overview of some of the key issues WOC is currently working on.

In the Courts

Powder River Basin Coalbed Methane Development. In 2003, the Montana and Wyoming offices of the Bureau of Land Management authorized two of the largest onshore oil and gas development projects ever considered, granting permission for 51,000 coalbed methane (CBM) wells in Wyoming and 29,000 CBM wells in Montana. These wells would degrade 13 million acres of public and private lands and cause the release of nearly two trillion gallons of polluted groundwater—enough to fill Flaming Gorge Reservoir seven times over. Four lawsuits were filed challenging these projects, with WOC being a plaintiff in one of them. The lawsuits are slowly winding their way through the legal system. No decisions are likely until late this year or 2005. *Contact Bruce Pendery*

Coalbed Methane Leasing. In 2002, WOC received a major decision in a case brought before the Department of Interior's Board of Land Appeals, or IBLA, that held BLM issued federal oil and gas leases in the Powder River Basin without first taking a hard look at the unique and potentially severe impacts of coalbed methane (CBM) extraction, as required by federal law. In 2003, the oil and gas industry and the State of Wyoming persuaded the Wyoming District Court to reverse the decision, clearing the way for future leasing and development. WOC and others have appealed the district court's decision to the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver. A ruling is expected later this year or in 2005. *Contact Bruce Pendery.*

Shoshone Oil and Gas Leasing. WOC's challenge of oil and gas leasing in the Brent Creek area of the Shoshone National Forest, an area containing critical grizzly bear habitat and exceptional scenic and outdoor recreation opportunities, is now before the U.S. Appeals Court for the District of Columbia Circuit. The issue before the court is whether the Forest Service violated the Endangered Species Act by issuing oil and gas leases without first considering, in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the specific adverse impacts to grizzly bears, a threatened species. *Contact Dan Heilig*

Corps of Engineers General Permit GP-98-08. WOC's challenge of a general permit issued by the U.S. Corps of Engineers that authorizes construction of dams and reservoirs to contain billions of gallons of groundwater produced by coalbed methane extraction in the Powder River Basin has moved to the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver. In the meantime, the construction and operation of ponds and reservoirs to dispose of CBM water continues to cause significant environmental impacts to ranchers and other residents of northeastern Wyoming. *Contact Steve Jones.*

Questar Winter Drilling Proposal in the Pinedale Anticline Field. Whether winter drilling is allowed on "the Mesa" west of Pinedale—one of the most important wildlife habitats in the lower 48 states—may depend largely on what Wyoming District Court Judge Alan B. Johnson rules later this year in a case brought by WOC and others challenging the BLM's approval of Questar's through-winter drilling operations. The BLM's decision approving the project flies in the face of long-standing state and federal wildlife policy that restricts drilling in big game crucial winter ranges when wildlife are most vulnerable and sensitive to disturbance. *Contact Marisa Martin*

Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem/Upper Green River Valley

Pinedale Resource Management Plan revision. The Bureau of Land Management is revising the Pinedale land-use plan in the face of tremendous pressure from Washington, D.C. to allow for more oil and gas drilling with fewer restrictions in this 1.2 million-acre area nestled between the Wind River and Wyoming ranges in western Wyoming. After several delays, a draft environmental impact statement and draft plan are expected to be released in June. WOC and other conservation organizations have developed and submitted to BLM a "citizens alternative" which emphasizes multiple use and provides a framework for the protection of the Sublette pronghorn migration corridor, the longest migration of big game animals in the continental U.S. *Contact: Marisa Martin*

South Piney Natural Gas Development Project. Infinity Oil & Gas of Wyoming, Inc. and other operators propose to drill 210 natural gas wells, including coalbed methane wells, along the scenic east flank of the Wyoming Range, west of Big Piney. A draft environmental impact statement is expected in April or May. *Contact Bruce Pendery*

Jonah Infill Project. EnCana, Inc., has asked the BLM for permission to drill up to 3,100 additional "infill" wells in the Jonah Field, located 32 miles southwest of Pinedale in Sublette County, to fully exploit the estimated 10 trillion cubic feet of gas locked in the field's deep sand formations. According to information provided by the Pinedale BLM office, a minimum of 64 well pads would be constructed per section, a level of development so intense it prompted some BLM officials to consider closing the 30,000-acre field to public access due to concerns over air quality and public safety. A draft environmental impact statement is expected in April or May. *Contact Marisa Martin*

Wildlife Migration Corridors Protection. Residential and energy development projects along several key constrictions, or "bottlenecks" in Sublette County, including the controversial Trapper's Point, threaten to cut off the longest migration of big game animals in the lower 48 states. Efforts are underway to map the corridor and protect bottlenecks from further encroachment. *Contact Meredith Taylor.*

Continued on next page

Bridger-Teton National Forest Oil and Gas Leasing Project. Forest officials have provided advance notice of their intent to offer oil and gas leases covering tens of thousands of acres of habitat for lynx, gray wolves and bald eagles in the Wyoming Range. Stay tuned. *Contact Bruce Pendery*

National Elk Refuge and Grand Teton National Park Bison and Elk Management Plan. This plan will govern management of bison and elk in the National Elk Refuge and in Grand Teton National Park. Two of the more controversial aspects of the plan are the proposed continuation of the supplemental feeding program and the vaccination of wild elk and bison against brucellosis, a practice that has been shown to be largely ineffective against the spread of the disease. WOC has submitted an alternative management plan based on concepts developed in conjunction with our Restoring Wild Patterns program. A Draft EIS is expected this spring. *Contact Meredith Taylor.*

Red Desert

Jack Morrow Hills Coordinated Activity Plan. Seven years and 100,000 comments after the initiation of what has become one of the most controversial land-use plans in the agency's history, the BLM appears to be on the verge of releasing its final plan for the management of the 622,000-acre Jack Morrow Hills area in the

Tom Dustin

heart of Wyoming's wild and mysterious Red Desert. If the BLM hands the keys of this important area over to the oil and gas industry, as many observers expect, WOC will be there to offer a different vision, as we have since the beginning. *Contact Mac Blewer and Bruce Pendery*

Watersheds

Revisions to Water Quality Rules and Regulations. The State of Wyoming has "primacy," or legal authority, to administer certain provisions of the federal Clean Water Act, including the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program under section 402, which requires a permit before pollutants can be discharged into our rivers and streams. In order to maintain legal authority to administer this program, states must ensure they have adequate rules and regulations, as well as adequate staffing and funding to do the job. Nearly 30 years have passed since Wyoming first assumed control of this program. Incredibly, during this entire period, the rules have not been amended to comply with numerous changes that have been made to federal law. WOC is spearheading an effort to make certain that revisions made to Wyoming's NPDES program comply fully with the letter—and the spirit —of the Clean Water Act to ensure our rivers stay clean and healthy. *Contact Steve Jones.*

Off-Channel Containment Ponds. Hundreds of unlined disposal reservoirs are being constructed in the Powder River Basin to "manage" polluted groundwater pumped to the surface during the production of coalbed methane gas, and thousands of additional reservoirs are planned. WOC has appealed the issuance of a general permit that would facilitate the use of this environmentally damaging water disposal technique, highlighting its many problems including the absence of reclamation requirements and lack of public participation opportunities. *Contact Steve Jones.*

Grazing

Smiths Fork Allotment. For years WOC has been working to improve grazing practices on the Smiths Fork Allotment in southwest Wyoming, near Cokeville. BLM records show that the allotment is among the most heavily damaged and poorly managed in the western United States. The chronic failure by the BLM to prepare an allotment management plan, or AMP, required by federal law, prompted WOC to appeal the BLM's decision to allow continued grazing on the Smiths Fork to the Department of Interior's Office of Hearings and Appeals. Just days before the briefs were due, the BLM agreed to prepare an AMP to better manage livestock grazing on the allotment. *Contact: Bruce Pendery*

Environmental Rulemaking and Policy Development.

Smoke Management Regulations. In September 2003, the Air Quality Division of the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality began working with stakeholders to develop a range of methods to address smoke impacts on human health, welfare and visibility. The primary goal of the stakeholder process was to draft a proposed smoke-management regulation. Following extensive public comment, in March 2004 the Environmental Quality Council adopted new smoke-management regulations as well as revised open-burning regulations. *Contact Michele Barlow.*

Water Pollution Permitting (NPDES). The Water Quality Division of the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality is considering issuing discharge permits for coalbed methane water on a watershed basis rather than by individual wells. This approach would compel state and federal agencies, coalbed methane companies, private landowners, and the general public to cooperate more fully on water quality and water management issues. The WDEQ has held preliminary discussions with the Bureau of Land Management and the Governor's Office. In late April, WOC staff will meet with WDEQ administrators to discuss the watershed permitting concept. *Contact Michele Barlow.*

This article originally appeared in the Jackson Hole News and Guide on March 31, 2004

Forum decries impact of drilling on region's wildlife

More than 250 gather to counter oil, gas development south of Jackson Hole.

By Rebecca Huntington

PINEDALE - Chris Madson held the audience rapt as he described how his passion for hunting and fishing drew him to Wyoming—a Serengeti with its unparalleled solitude and expansive wildlife habitat.

Wildlife biologists described how Grand Teton National Park's pronghorn herd makes the second longest terrestrial migration among mammals in the western Hemisphere.

A Bighorn Basin rancher detailed his dream of retiring to a hay ranch in Wyoming and eventually passing the operation to his son.

Three groups that don't always agree—sportsmen, ranchers and conservationists—identified March 27 a common threat to Wyoming's way of life. The pace of oil and gas drilling in the state is threatening to trump other values Wyomingites hold dear—from ranching to migrating pronghorn to solitary hunts in an unspoiled landscape—citizens from disparate backgrounds agreed.

The Wyoming Conservation Congress drew more than 250 people to Pinedale on March 27 for Wells, Wildlife & the Quality of Life, an all-day conference.

During the conference, citizens repeatedly stressed that they do not want to stop oil and gas drilling. But many said development needs to slow down until scientific monitoring, land-use planning and laws can be put in place to protect Wyoming's way of life.

Some participants attacked the Bureau of Land Management, which manages the bulk of the mineral resources in the state, for shirking its multiple-use mandate. Many speakers said BLM is managing for only one use, energy development, to the detriment of wildlife, water quality, air quality and private landowners.

"Is a drastically altered and industrialized landscape places we want to hunt?" asked Dave Stalling, a Trout Unlimited coordinator spearheading Hunters and Anglers for Responsible Energy Development. "There's a growing scarcity of truly wild lands."

Erik Molvar

Governor Freudenthal spoke on oil and gas issues at the Conservation Congress.

Stalling attacked the Bush administration's energy policy and an energy bill pending in Congress as attempts to accelerate drilling by rolling back protections for fish and wildlife. Federal agencies such as the BLM are not thoroughly studying the impacts of energy development or disclosing those impacts to the public, he said.

"Our land-management agencies need to slow down and develop a better understanding of potential impacts before pursuing such an ambitious plan," he said.

Likewise, Madson said citizens face tough choices in the Upper Green River Basin where BLM is writing a new land-use plan, which could allow thousands of new gas wells. Only 40 miles southeast of Jackson, the Upper Green encompasses prime wildlife winter range and migration corridors —home to both mule deer and pronghorn, including the herd that makes the record migration from Grand Teton.

"Drilling in the sagebrush steppe is an experiment," said Madson, an avid hunter and angler and editor of *Wyoming Wildlife* magazine. "We don't know how sagebrush and wildlife will react."

Madson called for phasing in new wells slowly so that adjustments could be made along the way to protect wildlife and other resources as managers learn more about the impacts of drilling.

Like Stalling, Madson called for full disclosure.

"If we do nothing more, I hope we make those choices in the full light of understanding," Madson said. "That we understand what we will have to give for what we get."

Outfitter Courtney Skinner, whose family has been guiding hunting, fishing and camping trips in the Pinedale area for nearly 70 years, illustrated the pace of change in the Upper Green. He left the valley for five days during a recent trip, he said. On his drive home from the Jackson Hole Airport he discovered a new well pad "lighting up the night sky" along the banks of the Green River, he said. The well pad had not been there before his trip.

Rock Springs resident and outdoorsman, Craig Thompson painted a dire picture.

"It is very clear to me that a threat exists and a frightening future for wildlife in the Green River Basin if we don't come to grips with this fairly quickly," Thompson said.

Thompson said he wants to see the governor and the oil and gas companies agree to a "no net loss policy" for wildlife in the Upper Green. Thompson said such a policy would do more for wildlife than putting millions of dollars in wildlife mitigation funds as some companies have proposed.

"Wildlife is a huge portion of Wyoming's soul, and it's not for sale," he said to a roaring applause.

Gov. Dave Freudenthal, however, made no such promise during his luncheon speech, which followed Thompson's comments.

Instead, Freudenthal proposed taxing gas production to create a multi-million-dollar

Continued on next page

fund for wildlife to offset losses due to drilling.

The governor also stressed that oil and gas drilling means jobs, and he does not want to see the industry stopped. But Freudenthal did agree drilling needs to be more tightly regulated to ensure all companies are using best practices and the state's other values are preserved.

Several speakers, including the governor, lauded some gas companies for using environmentally friendly practices but said not all companies are following suit. Freudenthal said corporate executives cannot justify using more expensive methods to have a lighter footprint out of sheer goodwill. Freudenthal warned of a lack of government policy to enforce "discipline."

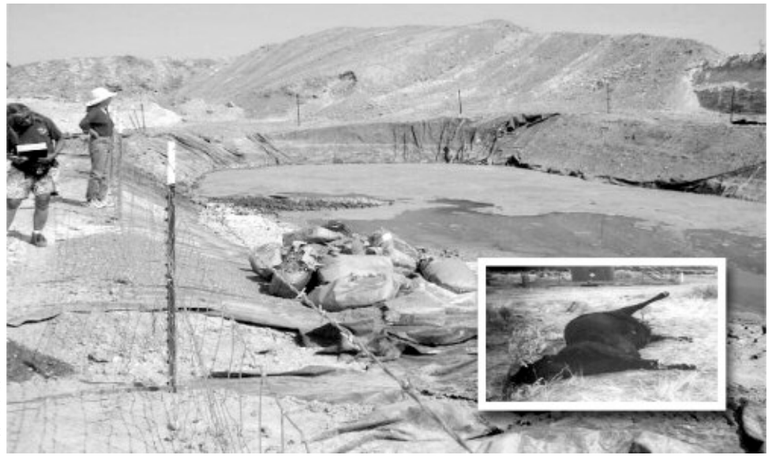
He also pointed to the state Legislature as a roadblock to greater regulation. He described the Legislature's failure to even consider a bill that would have given ranchers more protections when dealing with companies planning to drill for minerals underneath private property. Many ranches in Wyoming are split estates where ranchers own the surface and other parties holds the mineral rights underneath.

"[Wyoming] hasn't lost its soul," Freudenthal said, responding to the hunters. "What it has lost is its ability to manifest its soul in policy."

"[Wyoming] hasn't lost its soul," Freudenthal said, responding to the hunters. "What it has lost is its ability to manifest its soul in policy."

In addition, Freudenthal proposed a federal program to buy back leases as a way to eliminate mineral development in critical wildlife habitats while protecting the rights of mineral leaseholders.

But such a program and most decisions related to minerals in Wyoming rest with the federal government, which has shown no inclination to help the state solve problems, Freudenthal said.



Tweeti Blancett

In December 2003, Conservation Congress keynote speaker Tweeti Blancett was forced to sell her entire herd of cattle—a herd with bloodlines built up over six generations of ranching—rather than continue to lose animals from exposure to contamination by oil and gas development on their ranch.

The governor's speech drew a sharp response from rancher Eric Barlow, who disagreed that the federal government holds all the cards.

"I believe our quality of life is ours to have a say in how we affect it," Barlow said during a private landowners panel discussion following the governor's speech.

A rancher in the Powder River Basin, Barlow joined ranchers from the Bighorn and Upper Green basins where drilling pressures are colliding with private property rights. Rancher Bill Garland showed a slide of his ranch near Pavillion covered with red dots represented both existing and proposed gas wells.

"We're toast," said Garland, who others on the panel described as "the poster child of split estate." Garland said when he bought the ranch, he knew it was a split estate and expected some drilling. What he didn't foresee was so many wells he could no longer raise hay, he said.

Sublette County rancher John Andrikopoulos suggested the cost of natural gas does not reflect the cost to ranchers when their land is drilled. He also criticized the Legislature's failure to even introduce a split estates bill.

"We have to go to the people," Andrikopoulos said. Some ranchers are talking about starting a citizen's petition to bring a split estates bill to a vote.

"Unlike public lands where we do lose our heritage, what you lose with this is your family asset," he said, his voice choked with emotion.

In addition to ranchers and hunters, wildlife biologist also painted a bleak picture.

Kim and Joel Berger, wildlife biologists based in Victor, Idaho, warned that increasing disturbance on winter ranges in the Upper Green could mean fewer pronghorn migrating to Grand Teton National Park each the summer.

Sage grouse expert Clait Braun, of Tucson, Ariz., predicted a long-term decline in sage grouse populations of 50 percent to 60 percent as well pads, roads and other disturbances replace sagebrush.

Braun did not point to gas wells as the only source of disturbance. He showed a picture of the Strutting Grouse Clubhouse at Jackson Hole Golf and Tennis where golfers have replaced grouse. In Jackson Hole, male grouse showing up at mating grounds to breed in the spring have declined 60-70 percent over the past five years, he said.

"We're trying to maintain the same population, but we're going to try to do it on fewer acres," he said.

Whether habitat can be enhanced to maintain higher populations on fewer acres is unknown, he said. "Within 20 to 50 years we will be out of sage grouse in many areas." ➤

WOC's Mac Bleuer and Leslie Gaines interviewed Governor Freudenthal. See excerpts at www.wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

Rancher Tweeti Blancett takes on the multinationals

The keynote speaker at the Conservation Congress in Pinedale was sixth-generation New Mexican, Tweeti Blancett, whose family ranch has been devastated by oil and gas development. She spoke out against the havoc being inflicted on the land and on the people who live on it by multinational corporations in their relentless search for energy. After her talk, Blancett spoke to WOC's Leslie Gaines and Mac Blewer. Below are some excerpts from their conversation.

Q: Tell me about your relationship with the oil and gas companies.

A: We had a wonderful relationship with the oil and gas industry for probably 35 of the last 50 years. They were partners, ...friends, neighbors. They understood stewardship of the land. They understood the precious resource of water, and they also understood who and what we were as people.

Q: Has the situation gotten better or worse with the Bush administration?

A: I don't think it's just this administration...I don't believe this to be a Democrat or Republican issue, nor liberal or conservative [one] for that matter...I think what we are seeing is an industry that is the largest on the face of the Earth doing what it chooses to do.

Last year my county, which is about the size of Connecticut, sent out 4.5 billion dollars [in oil and gas revenues]. One eighth of that was kept for the American people, for New Mexicans, and for private royalty owners like myself. [But] industry put 4.1 billion dollars in their pocket.

With that kind of money, I feel like there's no excuse for not taking care of the land, and the water, and the people on it. The issue we have with the oil and gas companies is that they are not following their own regulations.

Q: What is the solution to making the oil and gas companies take accountability for their actions?

A: The administration, and in our case, the Bureau of Land Management, has to be willing to enforce the existing regulations. I'll be the first to admit we don't need any new rules or regulations, we just need to enforce what's on the books. But more importantly, the corporate entities...have to be willing to bring their wells into compliance. All the wells have regulations, and they are totally being ignored. As a result, damage to the land and the water and the wildlife, the livestock and the people, is occurring because big business is not stepping up to the plate and doing what's right.

Q: What does your future hold?

A: We don't intend to quit fighting...but we're going to have to take this to a different plateau because going to Washington, going to Santa Fe, going to our local offices, it's not working. They're not interested in making changes so that the land, the water and the people can coexist. So we will be moving forward with legal action that says, "I'm sorry, you can't treat people like this." ➤

You can view excerpts from Tweeti's interview at WOC's website: www.wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

Leslie Gaines Joins WOC Staff

When you walk into Leslie Gaines' office, you feel as if you've walked into a whirlwind. There are stacks of books, magazines and videos on the floor and littering the top of a large table. Phones—both his cell phone and an office phone on his desk—ring incessantly. Leslie greets you with exuberance and in minutes you are caught up in his storm of ideas and enthusiasm.

That's why WOC's new communications director, who joined the staff in February, has already earned the nickname "Hurricane Gaines."

"I'm intrigued by everything around here," says Leslie, who came to Wyoming from Florida. "I made Mac [Blewer] stop four times between Muddy Gap and Lander the other day just to check things out. Everywhere I go, there's something cool to see."

Leslie's enthusiasm for Wyoming extends to his new job. A filmmaker by trade, he has been self-employed for the last 15 years making award-winning documentaries and television programs. Now he wants to use these skills to take WOC's communications into the 21st century.

"We reach 1,500 people with our newsletter," Leslie says. "We could reach thousands more through radio and television."

Leslie has already established connections with news station KGWC-CBS in Casper and its many sister stations throughout Wyoming. His first Wyoming video making the news was footage of dying elk near Rawlins.

Leslie hopes to establish a radio program like Radio High Country News to discuss conservation issues facing Wyoming and the West. He wants to climb—and film—the Grand Teton by moonlight this summer, and he's teaching WOC staffer Mac Blewer the fine art of becoming a soundman. He has thousands of ideas, and enough energy and enthusiasm to convince you he can actually transform those ideas into reality.

Courtesy Leslie Gaines

"We need to show people that conservationists are more than just greenie, east-coast liberals," he concludes. "It's a big challenge, but I'm excited about it." ➤

Welcome DJ Strickland

DonnaJo (DJ) Strickland thrives on stress. She likes nothing more than having 500 different things going on at the same time, and can't wait to get started planning events and meeting members as WOC's new development director.

"I love the rush of organizing big events. I love trying to anticipate things that might happen and making sure I've remembered everything," says DJ.

Size and numbers don't intimidate DJ. She organized 10,000 volunteer drivers at the Atlanta Olympics and ran her own fundraising and consulting business with clients like AT&T and the restaurant chain, Denver Buffalo Company. Prior to joining WOC's staff, she was the development director for Western Resources Advocates (formerly the Land and Water Fund and a frequent WOC conservation partner).

"The WOC job is exciting because I'm in the position to grow with the organization to the next level," DJ says. "If I was just being asked to maintain the status quo, I'd be bored in a couple of months. But WOC wants to increase its membership and build new relationships."

"I'm hoping that in three years, we'll look back and see a huge difference," she concludes.

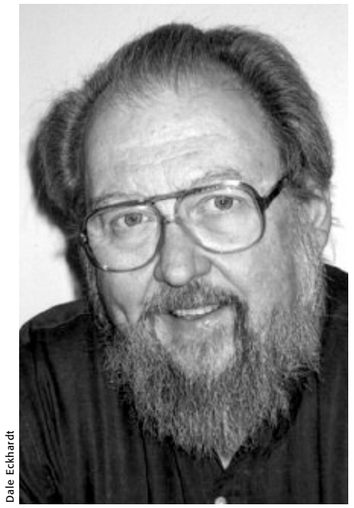
Her hobbies include hunting for everything from elk and deer, to bear and ducks. She plays volleyball, tennis, and softball, rides horses, and is a committed community volunteer. In Boulder, Colo., she volunteered for the Boulder County AIDS project, and she's hoping to find new volunteer opportunities in Lander.

"Not only does DJ bring strong development and administrative experience that will greatly benefit WOC, but she also brings an understanding of and commitment to protecting Wyoming's wildlife and wildlands developed through her professional and personal experiences," says WOC Executive Director Dan Heilig.

"We are very pleased she joined us."

Wendy Young

In Laughter and Awe: *Remembering the life and work of Charles Levendosky*



Dale Eckhardt

By Mac Blewer

District Judge Bill Downes' resonant voice sounded through the Nicolaysen Auditorium in Casper as clearly as if he were speaking within his own chambers.

"I got a call from Charles Levendosky several years ago, not too long after he had editorialized against me. He called me at the courthouse and he said, 'Judge, I need to ask a favor of you.' 'Well, Charles, what can I do for you?' I replied. He said, 'Would you marry me?'"

The judge paused for a moment for effect then continued, "I said, 'No, Charles, but I'd love to perform the service.'"

Nearly three hundred admirers of the late *Casper Star Tribune* editorialist and poet, Charles Levendosky, who were gathered at the Nicolaysen to honor his memory, burst into loud laughter and applause that Sunday afternoon in Casper, the sadness of the day evaporating momentarily.

"Mine was a rich relationship [with Charles] and I'm a better person because I knew him," Judge Downes added. "You might not like the position he took but you always knew that it was an informed position. We live in rancorous times and people shout at one another. We don't learn from one another. Charles taught us to learn from one another, and he lived his life with great dignity."

On March 14, after a ten-year battle with colon cancer, Charles Levendosky died at his home in Casper. Best known for his passionate editorials advocating First Amendment rights, social justice, good government, and conservation, he was also recognized as a respected poet, teacher, defender of the arts, dedicated family man, and friend.

His wife Dale Eckhardt noted that his last decade struggling with illness was his most productive. His columns appeared in more then 225 newspapers, including the *Boston Globe*, the *Denver Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, and were reprinted in over a dozen textbooks.

Levendosky received an undergraduate degree in both physics and mathematics, and a master's degree in education from New York University. He taught in classrooms from New York to Georgia and conducted poetry readings from Gillette to Boston. In 1972 he moved from New York City to Wyoming, continuing his career in education and poetry with the Wyoming Arts Council, and then later, as a journalist with the *Casper Star Tribune*.

Former Governor Mike Sullivan, under whom Charles served as Poet Laureate of the State of Wyoming, credited Charles with "raising the intellectual standard in this state."

"He added to the discourse of the discussion by advocating positions that weren't always in the mainstream," Sullivan said. "But in doing so he challenged all of us.

"He challenged people he didn't know," Sullivan added. "He raised their ire and he raised their passion. But he made them think. And I believe that we are all better people for having known him. Wyoming is a better state for him having adopted us."

Charles was many things to many people. As his son-in-law, David Nacht, said, "Charles made many paths in many different worlds."

At the memorial service, Charles' daughters Alytia and Ixchel reminisced about playing dolphins with their "shark" father on the living room floor, snowshoeing in wilderness areas with him, and about the way he supported their artistic endeavors. Rob Hurless, former publisher of the *Casper Star Tribune*, remembered his friend's stubbornness in arguments, but especially remarked on Charles' gentleness, patience and kindness. And nearly everyone had something to say about his keen sense of humor and his rumbling, infectious laugh.

Mike Shay, with the Wyoming Arts Council, referring to Charles' time working as a Writer in Residence for the Council, states, "Without Charles, there would be no literature program at the Wyoming Arts Council. He put things in place here that we're still doing 30 years later."

Tom Rea, who also worked with Charles during his time at the Arts Council, and later as an editorial assistant at the paper, said, "Charles was always positive and energetic. He was an energy center to all of us. But he also had the power of stepping out of the way."

Casper resident, Mary Lou Morrison, stated, "He made all of us become more motivated to oppose those things that we thought were wrong in the world."

"After writing my first letter to the editor, I felt that I had made a difference. He empowered us," she added.

Regarding Charles' work for the environment, especially for Wyoming's Red Desert and the state's wild places, former *Casper Star* editor, Dan Neal, thought that "Charles had come full circle" from the time he had first moved to Wyoming.

"In his last six or seven years he became more interested in open spaces and wildlife," Neal said. "He became more interested in what brought him here in the first place."

Due to Dan Neal, Rob Hurless and others at the *Casper Star*, Charles was provided with a home office in March of 1999, which enabled him to remain a viable part of the paper in spite of his illness. Dale Eckhardt said that this helped keep Charles alive.

For those who knew Charles, worked with him and admired his kindness, tenacity and courage, it is now up to us to honor this great man by speaking our minds with the same grace, humor and intellect that he was renowned for. As Mary Lou Morrison said, "I hope someone can help fill the void. Maybe it's up to us."

Charles would have it no other way.

Before his death, Levendosky asked people interested in honoring his memory with financial gifts to consider making contributions to organizations working for the causes he held dear. WOC is one of these organizations. If you would like to make a gift, please contact WOC Development Director, DJ Strickland at 307-332-7031 ext. 11.

Snowshoeing in the Mountains

By Charles Levendosky
For Ixchel

Snow groans as it packs beneath our long latticed tracks, the only sound we make. Our passage and the wind through pines hush us. We leave our too brief history behind us; silent testimony to those who follow, a father and his daughter passed this way. I taught you to lace the bindings, how to walk up the slopes by digging in your toes. Now you will break your own trails where the air is thin and shadows crisp. We squint against bright light, walk together a little way longer. Our passage hushes us; the sky a stream burbling below the snow. We stop for a moment and look back at our tracks sinking silently into blue shadows; our passage hushes us. The sun crosses the sky too swiftly; we feel the chill. Our passage hushes us.

SHOW ME THE MONEY

They're nasty litigators, agitators and coalition builders. They are lawyers, wealthy donors from out-of-state, and individuals who want to drive "you" out of business. They are environmentalists and they want POWER. They are WOC.

So says a power-point presentation called "Show Me the Money" that was sent to Wyoming state legislators this past January by Karen Kennedy, an oil and gas producer based in Gillette.

The presentation, compiled by Ron Arnold, the executive vice president of the Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise and a pioneer of the Wise Use Movement, would be amusing if it weren't so disturbing in what it says about the mentality of the oil and gas industry.

"This is an outrageous piece of propaganda," says Stephanie Kessler, former WOC executive director and now a public policy consultant. "It is far more condemning about the people who put it out than anything it says about the conservation community in Wyoming."

In "Show Me the Money," WOC is portrayed as an example of all that is evil with the environmental movement. Arnold says WOC is an organization focused on money and power and controlled by out-of-state special interests and wealthy foundations. He claims that "two of WOC's three trustees are from out of state," (Note: all of WOC's eleven board members are Wyoming residents) and lists every foundation that has given money to WOC, along with the state where that foundation is based.

Ironically, the photographs he uses to illustrate these kind of statements—photos such as one of WOC staff in t-shirts and shorts proudly showing off the new solar panels on their humble office in Lander —seems to contradict his assertion that WOC is a rich and powerful organization, but that nuance is obviously lost on Arnold.

He shows a photograph of Dan Heilig and says: "This is Executive Director Dan Heilig. He's a lawyer. He gets a salary of $43,541 and benefits of $2,096 to put you out of business."

The numbers are wrong, Dan does a little better than that, but even if they were correct, you'd think most people would laugh at the measly amount of money he makes with his law degree. NPR recently reported that bus drivers in Minneapolis/St. Paul make $45,000 after five years on the job. Dan has been at WOC for almost 13. He's hardly getting rich as a result of his dedication.

"I think it's funny they think Dan getting paid $43,000 is scary," Kessler says. "My response—'Isn't it amazing this highly qualified guy is getting paid so little, as a well-trained and obviously effective attorney? He's certainly not doing this work to get rich! And by the way, what is the salary of the CEO of Anadarko (or Exxon or whatever...)' Thank you for pointing out how self-sacrificing our staff are!'

The presentation flashes on a series of newspaper headlines obviously intended to alarm legislators. For example there's a headline about the fact that WOC hired a "community organizer," that it issued a "citizen's proposal," that it "protested oil and gas leasing near Yellowstone Park," and that it won a case where a coalbed methane project was "ruled illegal."

What's wrong with organizing the community? Isn't that what a democracy is about?! The same seems true for issuing a citizen's proposal. And if a CBM project is illegal, isn't that reason to block it? Aren't our laws designed to protect our environment?

And what about drilling near Yellowstone National Park? Public opinion surveys have shown that the majority of Wyoming residents do not want to see this happen, so it hardly seems as if WOC is out-of-line in protesting such action.

Arnold, with a kind-of conspiracy theory mentality, transforms foundation grants to environmental groups into a game of guilt, control, power, and outside influence that is fueled by anti-capitalist, anti-technology and anti-corporate motives. Nowhere does he acknowledge that maybe, somewhere, there is a kernel of truth in the missions of such groups to protect environmental qualities and wildlife.

"This is an outrageous piece of propaganda. It is far more condemning about the people who put it out than anything it says about the conservation community in Wyoming."

The presentation includes a slide of Arnold's website where he quotes himself in summarizing the environmental movement:

"The environmental movement is not what you think it is. It is not about the environment. It is about power."

For those of us involved with WOC it is somewhat amusing to consider the power and money we supposedly wield.

"I haven't laughed that hard since 'Blazing Saddles'," Dan Heilig said after reading about his money-grubbing vocation. "On the other hand, I also smiled with satisfaction as this major offensive against us shows we're having a real effect in the battle for Wyoming's future."

But the impact of such propaganda on state legislators is more concerning. Do they believe it? Who knows. In Wyoming, some of them just might.

Check out Ron Arnold's website at www.undueinfluence.com.

Contact WOC if you would like a copy of the power-point presentation.

A tale of skis, skies, miles, and smiles

Skiing the Loop Road with WOC

By Molly Absolon

With a few aching muscles and some new friendships forged, 21 Nordic skiers glided into Bruce's Parking area above Lander on March 7 after skiing the entire 26-mile Loop Road from South Pass to Sinks Canyon on a Wyoming Outdoor Council sponsored event.

The fastest skiers arrived at Bruce's by 1:30 p.m., while some of the others did not reach their cars until almost 7 p.m. that night, tired, but satisfied from a challenging, beautiful day.

"It was great, although I'm a bit more tired than I remember from last year," says Kathy Brown who was along for her second WOC Loop Road ski. "Classic folks like me are so psyched when we finish, since it usually turns into a long, yet rewarding day."

The ski was originally scheduled for Saturday, March 6th, but high winds caused the event to be postponed. Sunday was warm—in fact many of the skiers had to shed layers and some smart high school student ended up in t-shirts. The beautiful day also meant that the skiers weren't the only ones out enjoying the sunshine.

"I was surprised and amazed at the amount of snow machine traffic up there," said Darran Wells, who had never skied the Loop Road before.

"I knew the road was a popular spot for that in the winter, but didn't realize how popular. Wow. At times I felt like I was riding my bicycle on a motocross track.

"I also recognize that some people may not otherwise have access to such pristine areas (without snow machines)," he added.

The Loop Road is a primitive unpaved road that is maintained in the winter as part of the Continental Divide Snowmobile Trail. Currently there are plans to pave the first seven miles above Bruce's Bridge, which could compromise the snowmobiling and skiing along that section of road.

"Athletically it was a tremendous challenge, and finishing felt incredible," said skier Jules Feck of Lander. "The views of the Winds and Owl Creeks from the east side of the Blue Ridge were awe-inspiring!"

This year's group ranged in age from 12 (almost 13)-year-old George Cartwright up to a number of skiers in their 50s. A couple of people skied six miles out to Grannier Meadows and turned around, but the bulk of the team went through with Mike Bailey providing much-needed snacks, drinks, rides, and support on snowmobile.

"It was a beautiful day and it made me appreciate our protected wildlands," said skier Jan Segna. "But I have to say I was equally impressed by WOC's determination to get people out there to realize this beauty. Thank you WOC."

The skiers included: Molly Absolon, Kathy Brown, Barb Cartwright, George Cartwright, Michael Cheek, John Erickson, Jules Feck, Jenny Harris, Whitney Harris, Corrine Headley, Scott Kane, Christine Lichtenfels, Susie Miller, Eliah Pedersen, Evan Pruett, Tom Pryor, Mike Quinn, Deirdre Rainer, Jan Segna, Marcia Suniga, Sally Webster, Darran Wells, and Donna Yost.

Scott Kane

Loop Road skiers prepare to take off one their 26-mile journey.

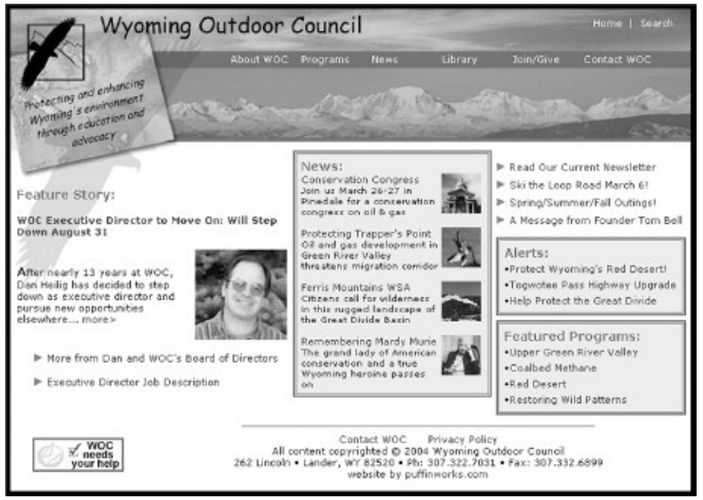
SPECIAL THANKS TO: Mike Bailey for spending his entire Sunday taking care of us on the trail. Todd and Amy Skinner for loaning us the snowmobiles. Michelle Escudero for baking yummy snacks. Mike Young at Freewheel Sports for providing ski equipment. NOLS Rocky Mountain for providing miscellaneous equipment. Scott Kane, Christine Lichtenfels, Molly Absolon for planning, logistics, and leadership.

New and improved WOC website now online

Want to know more about the Red Desert or Great Divide? Need to find out how to contact Wyoming legislators? Or maybe you want to see upcoming events WOC has scheduled that you can participate in or you want to make a donation to WOC online.

All this and much more is possible on WOC's revamped website at www.wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org. We hope you find the new design and updated content user-friendly, engaging and informative. Check it out! And please let us know how else we can make our website a helpful resource for you and others.

Our website creator, Bruce Hampton, has been a WOC member for nearly 20 years. One of his books, "The Great American Wolf," was selected for WOC's Emily Stevens Book Fund in 1997. Bruce specializes in conservation websites and more of his work can be seen at www.puffinworks.com.



WYOMING OUTDOOR COUNCIL
262 Lincoln • Lander, WY 82520
Ph: (307) 332-7031 • Fax: (307) 332-6899
email: woc@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org
web: www.wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org
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