

FRONTLINE



Working to protect public lands and wildlife since 1967



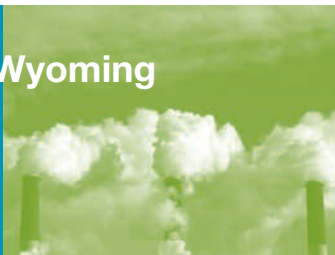
People, Passion and Perseverance

People
p6



Peter Absolon: A Tribute

Around Wyoming
p8



Clearing the haze ... still

“Life is for living,
Time is a smile;
Good men and women,
all make it worthwhile.

I thank God for all
the beauty he’s/she’s
shown; Wild places
I’ve been to, great
people I’ve known.”

Bart Koehler

The Wyoming Outdoor Council Celebrates 40 Years of Conservation

Tom Bell thinks he was about six when he created a makeshift bridge across a ditch for a sage grouse hen and her brood. “I’d seen the babies drown trying to follow their mother and I wanted to help. I guess that was the beginning of my ‘do-gooder’ tendencies.”

A ranch kid raised outside of Lander, Tom always had a deep connection to the land and to Wyoming. This connection was strengthened upon his return from World War II, when, emotionally scarred and missing an eye, he found sanctuary in Wyoming’s wide-open spaces. After the war, Tom went back to school. He worked as a wildlife biologist, and later as a school teacher and a journalist, but by the mid-1960s Tom could not ignore the threats facing his beloved homeland. In 1967 the Wyoming Outdoor Coordinating Council was born.

The vision behind the council was to bring together various organizations in the state to speak as one voice on conservation issues. “The first meeting was held in Casper,” Tom says. “I remember a sense of excitement. Maybe we could all pull together to work on some of these issues and get something accomplished. And we did.”

The early cast of characters represented a true cross-section of Wyoming. Leslie Petersen was just a girl when she was first dragged to council meetings by her parents, Dubois ranchers Les and Alice Shoemaker, two of the earliest board members.

“I think what was critically important,” Leslie says, “was the fact that **the Wyoming Outdoor Council has always been made up of the people of Wyoming.** Nobody could claim that it was Washington, limousine liberals. It’s the real heart of Wyoming conservationists acting in unison, struggling for the protection of the things we all value about Wyoming, in particular the air and the water and the wildlife and the open spaces.”

The bond unifying this nascent team of conservationists began with this shared commitment to the land, but quickly developed into a sense of solidarity and camaraderie. Wyoming was then, as it is now, a lonely place to be an environmentalist.

“We stayed with the volunteering and the traveling all those years mainly because of the marvelous friendships we made and the lovely people we met,” Glenda Borzea recalls in *Ahead of Their Time: Wyoming Voices for the Wilderness.*

Continued on page 3

Message from the Director



Photo: Rob Thurston

In late May, when the board offered me the permanent position of executive director of the Wyoming Outdoor Council, I was overwhelmed with

honor. Tom Bell, our founder, made the offer as we stood in Mardy and Olas Murie's home in Moose, Wyoming. The board and staff had gathered at the Murie Center for our quarterly meeting; we had spent the previous day attending to the business of the organization. But on Sunday morning, the board asked me to step out of the room and give them an hour to talk among themselves. My husband, Jeff Rickerl, and I took advantage of the time to walk down to the Snake River. It was a gorgeous, clear day.

On that walk, Jeff and I saw two sandhill cranes—birds that are significant for my family because we watched their stopover on the Platte River in Nebraska as solace as my beloved uncle, Donald Milford, was reaching the end of his life in a nearby hospital. There are six subspecies of sandhill cranes, and many of them migrate as far as Canada to Mexico. Cranes have been migrating through the plains of North America for more than 9 million years; they were here when the Great Plains might have been called the Great Savannah.

I returned to the meeting, and Tom asked me if I would direct the Wyoming Outdoor Council. If you believe, as I do, that the universe has a fate in mind for all of us, then you will understand why I felt the portent of that moment. I'm honored and excited to be serving the Wyoming Outdoor Council—including all of you—in carrying out our goal to protect Wyoming's public lands and wildlife.

In this issue, you will find a history of our organization. That's a simple concept but not a simple reality. Forty years ago, Tom Bell sat down with other conservation leaders, including Mardy Murie, to set out their vision of Wyoming. They saw crystal skies, clear water, plenty of wild places, and wildlife enough to keep the jaws dropping. Our mission is tough. But forty years later, we have something to be proud of. The staff and board are outstanding in their dedication and expertise and always have been. "The heart and soul of Wyoming" is what one of our colleagues recently labeled our group. I leave you to decide for yourselves after you read our story.

Before closing, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to Emily Stevens, a woman whose activism and generosity made the Wyoming Outdoor Council what it is today. See our "Supporters and Friends" page for her story. Let's carry on with Emily, Mardy, and Tom's vision.

Yours, Laurie

Wyoming Outdoor Council
Established in 1967, the Wyoming Outdoor Council is the state's oldest and largest independent statewide conservation organization. Our mission is to protect Wyoming's public lands and wildlife. Our newsletter, the *Frontline*, comes out three times per year and is a benefit of membership. Letters to the editor and articles by members are welcome.

For more information contact:

Wyoming Outdoor Council
262 Lincoln St.
Lander, WY 82520

wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

307-332-7031 (phone)

307-332-6899 (fax)

woc@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

Board of Directors

Scott Kane, Lander
President

Anthony Stevens, Wilson
Vice President

Keith Rittle, Laramie
Treasurer

Susan Lasher, Worland
Secretary

Tom Bell, Lander
Emeritus

Joyce Evans, Saratoga

Mindy Harm Benson, Laramie

Mac Blewer, Tacoma Park, MD

Barbara Oakleaf, Lander

Barbara Parsons, Rawlins

Sandy Shuptrine, Jackson

Jim States, Saratoga

Staff

Molly Absolon

Communications Director

Lisa Dardy McGee

National Forests and Parks Program Director

Bonnie Hofbauer

Office Manager

Steve Jones

Watershed Protection Program Attorney

Bruce Pendery

Staff Attorney and Program Director

Sophie Osborn

Wildlife Program Manager

Kathy Sanderson

Administrative Assistant

Laurie Milford

Executive Director



Cirque of the Towers, Wind River Range, Shoshone National Forest. Credit: Jeff Vanuga

The vision behind the Coordinating Council was to bring together various organizations in the state to speak as one voice on conservation issues.

Let us show you the West like you've never seen it before ... and we'll prove it, free.



High Country News
A Climate Change Solution?

An award-winning news magazine that will keep you up-to-date with the environment, natural resource and community issues that are affecting the American West.

Get two FREE issues.
www.hcn.org/trialoffer.jsp
800-905-1155

High Country News
Founded by Tom Bell

“People like Olaus and Mardy Murie, the Nobles, Tom Bell and Chief Justice William O. Douglas,” adds her husband, John Borzea, a former board president. “We all worked together to educate others on how to make the concept of multiple use and conservation practical.”

A critical force in the council’s inception was Cora rancher Carroll Noble, who earned the less-than-complimentary moniker “Mr. Conservation” from his neighbors. Many ranchers feared Carroll’s outspokenness could lead to the loss of their grazing privileges—or worse. But Carroll, who died in 1973, never let popularity sway his convictions. His legacy, like Tom’s, continues to influence Wyoming’s environmental movement today.

The Issues

From its inception, challenges barraged the Wyoming Outdoor Coordinating Council. **There were plans to dam the Upper Green River near Pinedale and clear-cut large sections of the Bridger-Teton and Shoshone national forests around Dubois.** A proposal was afoot to use nuclear bombs to release natural gas in the Upper Green River Valley, and thousands of miles of illegal fences criss-crossed BLM lands, disrupting migrations and killing pronghorn and deer. In northwestern Wyoming, the energy crisis of 1973 led to a proposal for 25 new coal-fired power plants and expanded strip mining.

The council’s lifeblood from the beginning was Tom Bell, who put everything he had into making the organization a success. In the early 70s, though, Tom resigned as director to take on the editorship of the fledgling *High Country News*, a paper begun as a small camping magazine that would grow into the council’s newsletter and ultimately a national news journal on western environmental issues. Thermopolis rancher Keith Becker took over as the council’s director, but he and Tom—who continued as a board member—were a team. Together they helped determine which issues to fight and which to let slip away.

In 1971 Tom wrote, “This is one of those times when I am feeling rather low. (I think Amos and Andy call it ‘down in the dumps.’) There is so much to do and so little time to get it all done. Until I became immersed in the work of the Wyoming Outdoor Coordinating Council, I had no idea of the time and energy which could be expended in the cause of the environment....

“The ... council has built a reputation. We cannot back away from that now. We have made implacable enemies at the highest level of state government because we dared to expose the facts and the truths. That is all the more reason to persevere. Power and political influence have already taken their toll on our environment. I for one say, ‘No more.’ The remuneration is practically nil but the rewards are many. My conscious is clear and I can sleep well. Tomorrow is another day of challenge and exciting work. No man could ask for more.”

But challenging and exciting work does not always pay the bills. Tom worked without salary for months on end. Finally, in 1973, he announced that *High Country News* would cease publication.

In a column published in what everyone believed would be the final issue, Marge Higley wrote, “Sometimes the ‘final straw’ is a very tiny thing indeed. It’s just possible that it can be as small as the little white price tag stuck on a pair of child’s snow boots.”

She continued, “How much can a family sacrifice for a cause they believe in? It’s easy enough to say ‘I guess they must live on love!’ But love can’t buy groceries for a family of five. It can’t even buy a little pair of snow boots.”

That issue of *High Country News* became the source of legend. Donations poured in from across the country—enough to keep the paper afloat. But Tom was burnt out. In 1974 he resigned from the paper and the Wyoming Outdoor Coordinating Council and moved to Oregon.

“I just got tired,” he recalls. “I loved Wyoming so much, I couldn’t stand to see what was going to happen. I guess you could say I lost it.”

1975: 40 Days and 40 Nights That Changed Wyoming

Fortunately, many of Tom’s dire predictions did not come to pass, largely because the price of oil dropped and the energy boom went bust. In addition, groups like the Wyoming Outdoor Coordinating Council managed to have some significant successes.

In 1975, the council joined with the Sierra Club to create a “citizen’s lobby” that would have a presence in Cheyenne during the legislative session. The group rented a house near the capitol building, and a roving contingent of dedicated conservationists came and went. The list included many home-grown activists who would leave a lasting

Continued on page 4

mark on Wyoming's environmental history—Colleen Cabot, Bart Koehler, Leslie Petersen, Hank Phibbs, Charlie Scott, Lynn Dickey, and numerous others.

"1975 was the ultimate," recalls then-director Bart Koehler. "We survived 40 days and 40 nights and we prevailed."

That year, the citizen's lobby succeeded in securing the passage of the Industrial Siting Act, strengthening the state's clean air and water regulations, and bolstering its regulatory power—critical pieces of legislation that we continue to fight to protect today.

"Connections were very strong and we had a lot of influence," Leslie Petersen says of how they managed to accomplish so much during that seminal legislative session. "It was still such a small state and a lot of us were longtime Wyoming people with good connections. Plus the threats were so severe. I know you won't believe this, but at that time Al Simpson and Malcolm Wallop were both in the state senate and they were great. They were very, very good on environmental issues."

Still, success did not readily translate into money for conservation groups. Bart Koehler was just one in a series of executive directors for what became known as the Wyoming Outdoor Council. Their tenures tended to be short, as money was tight and even the most dedicated needed to make some kind of a living. Bart remembers earning "a whopping \$400 a month" for his work—and The Wilderness Society paid part of that salary. "We did great on issues," he says, "but we weren't holding it together. There was nothing in the bank. I didn't really care if I was paid, but I needed gas money."

The 1980s

Wyoming's conservation movement really gelled around the passage of the Wyoming Wilderness Bill in 1984. The Wyoming Wilderness Association, an affiliate of the Wyoming Outdoor Council, had led that effort, and many of their key players were names familiar to the council—Mardy Murie, Bart Koehler, Colleen Cabot, John Perry Barlow.

Len Carlman, a future board member, was working for the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance when he first heard of the Wyoming Outdoor Council. "I really got my orientation to the organization when we were working on the long-term planning effort for the Bridger-Teton National Forest," he recalls. "At that time Louisiana Pacific made its money by cutting timber on the BT at a net cost to the public. The cost of building roads and marking out timber sales were all borne by the Forest Service. They were freebies to the lumber company.

"Louisiana Pacific wanted to log the headwaters of the Green River, but to do so they needed to straighten one hairpin turn on the Union Pass Road," he continues. "That proposal unleashed a great amount of energy and effort from ranchers and cattlemen and cattlemen, particularly in the Upper Green. We held very tough on the issue."

Much of the council's credibility came from its board of directors, which continued to attract dedicated and committed conservationists from across the state. Board work was demanding. Well into the late 1980s, the staff consisted of one underpaid executive director and some scattered part-time help. The board was crucial

for prioritizing issues, attending meetings, testifying, lobbying, raising money, and providing the organization with its sense of mission and vitality.

Finances continued to be tight and the organization struggled to make its payroll.

At one board meeting in the late 1980s, board members wrote personal checks to meet expenses for the following month. Still the group managed to limp along, thanks largely to a few key supporters, including Gil Ordway, a Wyoming resident who has several times kept the organization afloat, and longtime Wyomingite Emily Stevens.

"My mother first came to Wyoming to the T-Cross Ranch near Dubois as a young woman and fell in love with the place," says Anthony Stevens, Emily's son and current board vice president. "She ended up coming back and buying the ranch later."

Anthony grew up on the T-Cross, and remembers his mother taking off for board meetings around the state. "I had no clue what could be wrong that demanded so much of her time. Wyoming is such a great state; as a kid, it seemed perfect. It was only later that I began to see what she was all fired up about. We ran a dude ranch in those days and I recall riding with a string of horses up over Elk Horn Ridge when a helicopter flew up and dropped something. I think they were doing seismic work, but there was a huge blast and echo across the valley that scattered the horses. It was crazy.

"As I got older I became more aware of these things, and my mother's activism began to make sense."

Not only did Emily Stevens serve on the board for years, but her financial support was critical to the organization's solvency. As Tom Bell recalls, "Whenever things would get tight, a check for \$1,000 or so would arrive from Emily. She was a lifesaver."

Tom, who returned to Wyoming in 1983, admits that at times things were pretty grim for environmentalists in the state, not only because of the constant financial struggle, but also because it seemed no battle was ever won. Still former board and staff often recollect the "good old days" with a sense of nostalgia for their teamwork, humor, and perseverance.

Dan Heilig was hired as the associate director of the Wyoming Outdoor Council in 1991. By then, the staff had grown to include Steff Kessler as executive director, Donn Kesselheim as director of environmental education, Bonnie Hofbauer as office manager, and Dot Vali, who ran the recycling program. Despite the growing staff, Dan remembers things being tight.

"I think the annual budget when I was hired was around \$92,000. I used to carry a memo from Bart Koehler to board meetings that read: 'We have \$432 left in our account. What do you want me to do?' It was just a reminder of where we'd come from and how quickly we could go there again."

"The Wyoming Outdoor Council was running on fumes most of the time," Dan adds. "We had no resources. That changed in the early 90s. We became more financially stable, and we developed the tools we needed to find places where we could be effective, where we were most likely to have success."

Continued on page 14

More than anything, you told us you value Wyoming's public lands and access to those lands. You appreciate this state for its clean air and water. And without its wildlife and fish, you told us, Wyoming would not be Wyoming.



Wyoming Outdoor Council

Introducing Our New Look

In June 2006, the Wyoming Outdoor Council started to update its logo.

Why? We believe the new logo represents our story of courageous citizens making a better Wyoming. Our founders, whom you will read about in this issue, were folks like you and me who saw a problem and rolled up their sleeves to fix it. They saw a Wyoming landscape in trouble. They saw our wildlife, air, and water facing terrific threats. They looked to the future—to their children and grandchildren. To quote a 1942 hit song about pilots in World War II, our founders “came in on a wing and a prayer” to do what they could to make our lives healthier and richer. They were heroes.

We also wanted the new logo to reflect you, our members. One year ago, we mailed a survey to all of our members (about 1,000) as well as to nonmembers who identified themselves as either hunters or people who enjoy the outdoor life (3,000 folks drawn from a mail-list service). We had an astonishing return rate (20 percent), and we learned a lot about what you think the Wyoming Outdoor Council ought to spend its time doing. More than anything, you told us you value Wyoming's public lands and access to those lands. You appreciate this state for its clean air and water. And without its wildlife and fish, you told us, Wyoming would not be Wyoming. Many of you have chosen to live here because of the lifestyle Wyoming offers. We work to protect all of that.

After completing the survey, we began the work of creating a logo worthy of our legacy and all that you expect of us. We found that people responded positively to the artwork

you see at the top of this page. Folks said the image represented key characteristics that we try to live up to as we wrangle with environmental issues: credibility, expertise, leadership, joyfulness and pride.

Respondents said the image made them feel optimistic. And that's why the sun is a prominent part of our new mark. It symbolizes solutions to the challenge of building a world sustained by clean and renewable energy. As Tom Bell said during one session working on the logo, “The sun is our future.”

Please watch for our new logo on other publications. Our goal where communication is concerned is to foster awareness and appreciation for our work. Stay tuned, too, for the launching of a new Wyoming Outdoor Council website and blog.

The new logo will not change the science-based advocacy you have come to expect from us. After all, we have a 40-year tradition of serving the public interest, and we want to uphold that tradition. But the new logo will help us to reach more people. We hope it inspires you to work for Wyoming, too.

Thank you to the people who dedicated their time and expertise to this project: Ennis Carter and her team at Design for Social Impact, Chuck Pettis of BrandSolutions and designer Anne Austin. Our deep gratitude also goes to the logo committee, including Molly Absolon, Tom Bell, Scott Kane, Lisa Dardy McGee, Barbara Oakleaf and Anthony Stevens. 

Laurie Milford

Photo: Molly Absolon



People

Photo: Mark Fisher



In Memoriam: Peter Absolon

With heavy heart we announce the loss of a much-loved member of our community. Peter Absolon, Wyoming Outdoor Council member and husband of our communications director, Molly Absolon, was killed by an accident while climbing in Leg Lake Cirque near Lander.

Pete was a climber, hunter, mountain biker, paddler, and backcountry skier. There was not a season when Pete was waiting around for better weather, more snow or less snow. He was out there all year round. There are few who have ever taken better advantage of life in our incredible natural setting. If the measure of an “environmentalist” is how much time he or she spends in the environment and the intensity of joy while immersed in it, Pete was a modern John Muir.

A few months ago my wife and daughter and I were day-hiking in the Wind River Range. We were 7 miles in from the Big Sandy roadhead believing that we were taking a respectable mountain hike. Just then, from up the trail came two figures; they were running fluidly and chatting despite the burden of daypacks and climbing equipment. Molly and Pete were on their way back from a climb of Pengora in the Cirque of the Towers. They had made the twenty-mile round trip run and had spent six hours climbing the beautiful rock spire. As they ran off ahead of us, they looked like they were just starting out.

Pete provided us with a model of what life looks like when lived with a passion for your place. 

SCOTT KANE, BOARD PRESIDENT

Goodbye, and Thanks, Meredith

There’s no place Meredith Taylor would rather be than outside. Whether she’s on her hands and knees identifying a flower or riding her horse through the mountains, Meredith renews her energy by getting close to the land she’s worked so hard to protect for the last 30 years. Now she’s saying goodbye to the Wyoming Outdoor Council and we hope her new freedom will give her plenty of soul-time outside.

“It’s important to work hard at fighting for the land, but it’s also important to play hard in the special places we’re dedicated to protecting so we don’t burn ourselves out,” Meredith told the Wyoming Outdoor Council back when she was hired in 2001. And for the last six years, Meredith has managed to fulfill this mantra while juggling her twin careers as the Wyoming Outdoor Council’s wildlife program director with her outfitting business.


“I’ve heard Meredith described as a ‘zealot,’” Valerie Drake said at the 2003 Greater Yellowstone Coalition meeting where Meredith was named outstanding activist of the year. “That description fits—she’s ardently active, devoted, diligent, persistent and passionate—and we’re thankful to have her boundless energy focused on this area we all care so much about protecting.”



Photo: WOC Archives

Former staffer Meredith Taylor (second from the left) stands with some of the mavens of Wyoming’s conservation movement: (l-r) former board member Nancy Debevoise, Taylor, Natural Resource Defense Council’s Louisa Wilcox, and Wyoming Wilderness Association’s Liz Howell.

During her long career both on the payroll of conservation groups and as a dedicated private citizen, Meredith can be credited with bringing the issue of migration corridors into the headlines and public awareness. She has been a brave and outspoken supporter of wolves and dared to stand up in hostile public meetings to call for a rational debate on the issue. She’s fought for protecting Wyoming’s beloved elk herds from disease and strove to make the Togwotee Pass Highway reconstruction project as ecologically friendly as possible.

“Meredith’s service to the Wyoming Outdoor Council has always displayed her love and dedication not only for wild places but to our organization and for that we owe her our deepest, heartfelt thanks,” says Wyoming Outdoor Council founder and emeritus board member Tom Bell. “We have benefited from Meredith’s resourcefulness, her abilities, her toughness and her commitment to her ideals. We thank her for her hard work and wish her the best in her future endeavors.” 

Pete provided us with a model of what life looks like when lived with a passion for your place.

Mindy Harm Benson Joins Our Board

New Wyoming Outdoor Council board member, Mindy Harm Benson, grew up in the high desert plains of Idaho. In the summers, her family piled into the camper and headed to the mountains to fish and escape the heat.

“When you grow up in the rural West, you find yourself falling in love with the open spaces and big skies,” Mindy says. “But it wasn’t until I moved for college that I realized not everyone grows up that way.”

Mindy uprooted herself from the sagebrush steppe of her hometown to the lush, forested North Pacific for college at the University of Oregon in Eugene. She remembers that she would often go hiking in search of a high point or open area during her freshman year.

“Now when I think about what I was doing, I realize I was trying to get above the trees so I could see,” Mindy says. “There was no horizon in Eugene. It’s beautiful country but it wasn’t home.”

Mindy returned to Idaho after graduation and she began working for the Idaho Conservation League. After a few years, she decided to go to law school in order to become a more effective advocate for the environment. In 2002 after receiving her degree, she moved to Laramie with her husband, Reed Benson, who was newly appointed to the faculty of the University of Wyoming’s Law School.

“Wyoming felt like Idaho,” Mindy says. “It’s higher than Kuna where I grew up, but the desert is the same. I’m comfortable here.”

Mindy spent her first couple of years in Laramie working for Western Resource Advocates, where she represented the Wyoming Outdoor Council on a case. Now she teaches at the Helga Otto Haub School and William D. Ruckelshaus Institute of Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Wyoming.

“I was asked to join the Wyoming Outdoor Council board several years ago, but I declined because of other commitments,” Mindy says. “I am now excited to be able to be involved. The Wyoming Outdoor Council is the preeminent conservation organization in the state. It’s the right organization at the right time for Wyoming as we face the challenges of energy development and resource management. I want to help.

“I see real opportunities for the organization under Laurie’s leadership,” Mindy adds. “I think we are becoming an even more effective voice for conservation.”


Mindy continues to balance her work with play. She loves to get out trail running in the summer and skiing in the winter. She hikes and boats and works hard to make sure that she maintains the link with the outdoors that drew her to conservation work in the first place. Welcome, Mindy. 



Photo: Reed Benson

“When you grow up in the rural West, you find yourself falling in love with the open spaces and big skies.”

Around Wyoming

Greater Yellowstone

Federal legislation introduced to protect the Wyoming Range. For more than two years, the Wyoming Outdoor Council has worked with a broad group of citizens to gain permanent protection for the Wyoming Range through federal mineral withdrawal legislation—something Senator Thomas was drafting before he passed away. On October 25, we were excited to learn that Senator Barrasso introduced this legislation, which if passed, will remove 1.2 million acres in the Wyoming Range from future oil and gas leasing. Two processes we hope will happen concurrently with passage of the bill include: (1) an administrative cancellation of the 44,600 acres of contested leases; and (2) a voluntarily sale, trade or donation of existing leases that can be permanently retired. The Wyoming Outdoor Council appealed the sale of the 44,600 acres in 2005–2006, which led to a stay on development. Together with the legislation, these negotiations will safeguard the Wyoming Range, keeping Wyoming's namesake mountains a place for future generations to visit and enjoy.

Contact: Lisa McGee at lisa@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

New drilling proposal halted—for now—on the Bridger-Teton National Forest. In April 2007, the Houston-based Plains Exploration & Production Company (PXP) submitted a proposal to drill three new gas wells seven miles south of Bondurant, WY, in a roadless area on the Bridger-Teton National Forest. This met opposition from residents of the nearby Hoback Ranches subdivision, Governor Freudenthal, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, the Wyoming Tourism Board, the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce, sportsmen and conservationists. The Wyoming Outdoor Council submitted comments on the draft environmental impact statement, arguing the scope of the project was misleadingly narrow and the Forest Service and PXP should admit that a larger development scenario—encompassing far more than three wells—was probable. In response, PXP withdrew its proposal. As road-building was slated to begin this summer, this delay was welcome news. The company will submit a new plan this fall that asks the Forest Service to assess the impacts of development of the full field, and we will again work toward defeating this proposal. With the anticipated passage of legislation to protect the Wyoming Range, we hope PXP recognizes there is no way to drill responsibly in the Wyoming Range and that negotiating a buy-out is its best course of action.

Contact: Lisa McGee at lisa@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

Clearing the haze ... still. Our appeal of the Jonah Infill project related to air quality remains in place. The Interior Board of Land Appeals has rejected our calls for limits on the air pollution; nevertheless our appeal is having a positive influence. The BLM has abandoned the antiquated method it used for analyzing ozone, and the DEQ is moving toward regulating emissions from drill rigs, which are likely the biggest source of haze in the Bridger Wilderness.

Contact: Bruce Pendery at bruce@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

A balanced future for the Upper Green? The Pinedale Anticline Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and the Pinedale Resource Management Plan occupy a great deal of our time. Working as part of the Upper Green River Valley Coalition, we provided detailed comments on both projects on air quality, big game, sage grouse, sagebrush ecology, water quality and socio-economics and engaged in major publicity campaigns. We are cautiously optimistic that both projects will be improved.

Contact: Bruce Pendery at bruce@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org



Photo: Lisa Darity McGee

Red Desert

The planning in the Jack Morrow Hills is over; now implementation begins. The BLM issued its record of decision approving the Jack Morrow Hills Coordinated Activity Plan in July 2006. The Wyoming Outdoor Council continues to monitor activities in this area, attempting to ensure oil and gas development does not destroy its special values. In February 2007 BLM was set to offer the first oil and gas lease parcel for sale in the area, but following our complaints, the parcel was removed from the sale.

Contact: Bruce Pendery at bruce@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org



Photo: Erik Melvar

Energy development has targeted the Greater Red Desert under the Rawlins Resource Management Plan. Several projects for a total of about 20,000 wells are proposed for this wild, remote area.

Elsewhere in the desert, natural gas development looms. We await the release of BLM's final resource management plan for the Rawlins Field Office, a plan that will guide land management for the next 20 years. The BLM has just approved the 2,000-well Atlantic Rim coalbed methane project. We, along with other groups, filed a lawsuit in U.S. district court over the project. The area is known for its trophy game and important sage grouse habitat. We are monitoring other large oil and gas projects in the Red Desert, including the 9,000-well Continental-Creston project and the 4,000-well Hiawatha project.

Contact: Bruce Pendery at bruce@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

Only by getting our house in order can we be in a good position to encourage others to do the same.



Photo: Tova Weyelechowitz

Powder River Basin

Fortifying Fortification Creek against coalbed methane. The Wyoming Outdoor Council has joined with other groups seeking to protect the wild Fortification Creek area in the Powder River Basin. This tributary to the Powder River north and west of Gillette contains important habitat for elk and has wilderness-quality lands.
Contact: Bruce Pendery at bruce@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

Success in the Powder River Basin. The State of Wyoming has been reclassifying some streams in the Powder River Basin from Class 3 (which can support aquatic life) to Class 4 (which need not be protected for aquatic life). The Wyoming Outdoor Council appealed one of these reclassifications for three tributaries to Crazy Woman Creek. The Environmental Quality Council met in September to hear the case. Before the hearing began, council members discussed the merits of our motion for summary judgment and granted the motion, which means we won the case. This case has important implications as the DEQ attempts to downgrade streams.
Contact: Steve Jones at steve@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org



Photo: Peter Absolon

Statewide

Walking the talk. As a part of our Climate Change Initiative, the Wyoming Outdoor Council has begun to examine its own greenhouse gas emissions. Our process included an inventory of all travel as well as all electricity and natural gas used. Though other activities such as the consumption of water or office supplies should also be considered, we started by addressing the big-ticket items. Our bottom line? In 2006 the Wyoming Outdoor Council's activities resulted in the emission of approximately 40 metric tons of carbon dioxide. Roughly half of that amount came from travel, the other half from the energy we use in our offices. Is this too much? Well, yes. We all need to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. What is exciting for us is that we now have a baseline from which to implement reductions. Look to our website in the months ahead for updates.

Contact: Laurie Milford at laurie@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

Protecting Wyoming's 100-mile views. The Wyoming Outdoor Council is working to clean up Wyoming's air. We have recently commented on several DEQ permits, including the proposed Dry Fork power plant, proposed changes to "opacity" (smoke density) regulations, and on requirements for controlling pollution from gas wells. We also prepared a report for the Forest Service on air pollution in the Bridger Wilderness area. If the Forest Service were to certify impairment of visibility here, gas development in the Upper Green might have to slow down. Finally, we filed a Clean Air Act "citizens suit" in an attempt to force the Bridger Power Plant near Rock Springs to clean up its act.

Contact: Bruce Pendery at bruce@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

Rewriting the regulations doesn't clean up the water. We have appealed Chapter 1 of Wyoming's Water Quality Rules and Regulations to the State District Court over a new provision that will permit water pollution by rewriting state regulations. Many streams in Wyoming have been subject to discharges from oil and gas facilities for years. These discharges have degraded the water quality of the streams until they no longer meet the standards required to protect fish and aquatic life. Now, this new regulation allows DEQ to waive the requirement to meet water quality standards for streams that are overwhelmed by pollution. To the best of our knowledge, if approved by the Environmental Protection Agency, Wyoming will be the first state in the country where such a sleight of hand has been allowed.
Contact: Steve Jones at steve@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

Tom Bell: Of Ink and the Patron Saint

By Todd Wilkinson
For the Wyoming Outdoor Council

Please allow me to make a confession: I think often of Tom Bell. Sometimes, I invoke Tom's name as a sort of personal incantation to summon up courage when I need it. But my ritual is seldom performed during the clear light of day when it is easiest to see the truth, or to take a stand.

For a writer like me who works late and rises early, Bell is best reserved for those inevitable periods of darkness when the demons of self-doubt pay their visitation upon us. They haunt us at night because they know it is then when we feel most alone.

In such moments of vulnerability, ambivalence, and detachment from one another, we must choose: Do we adhere to personal conviction, OR do we take the easy way out and lie down in the face of challenge?

These are the reckoning trials that every conservationist knows, whether we are parents concerned about the quality of life our kids will inherit once we are gone; citizens fighting to defend a piece of earthly paradise; an individual struggling to find the right words in a midnight letter to Congress; or, in my case, a journalist, humbly churning out newspaper and magazine articles, never knowing if they are finding a receptive audience.

I mention this as a prelude, for Saint Thomas Bell, as a forerunner to what I do, has practiced the hardest kind of advocacy: He has staked out positions he knew would leave him alienated from his neighbors by calling their sacred culture (and his) into question. Any time a journalist asks readers to take a hard look at themselves in the mirror, he is asking for trouble.

I have in front of me, as I write these words, a pair of newspaper articles that appeared in the *Wyoming State Journal* during the last weeks of 1959. In these front-page stories, state senator Frank Mockler from Fremont County went on the offensive to try and stop the creation of additional wilderness in Wyoming, by using inflammatory rhetoric intended to make conservationists appear to be extremists. "I can see why the East would want a playground but it is detrimental to Wyoming," he declared.

In response, it was one Tom Bell, then a former wildlife biologist and neophyte jour-

nalist, who went before the Lander Rotary Club and challenged the pronouncements of perhaps the most powerful man in his community. Bell presciently argued that Lander would prosper in the generations to come with wilderness lands out its back door. "Surely, we are not so impoverished as a nation that every square inch of land must ultimately be considered in terms of the dollar sign," he said. **"Wilderness areas have something to offer each and every one of us.** Human populations are increasing rapidly. Our civilized ways get more complicated day by day. How many of you are moved by the urge to get away from it all; to go where rubber tires can't take you?"

Standing before the business leaders of Lander, Bell paused. He looked them in the eyes nearly HALF A CENTURY AGO and asked: "Are you rich easterners?"

Even now, Tom will tell you, there remains a prevailing persistent myth that modern environmentalism is nothing more than a plot, devised by elitists, to "lock up" land west of the 100th meridian. Yet Bell, the man who grew up with a cowboy hat on his head and the red stain of sunburn on his neck, remains the personification of a firm rebuttal. **"Local western people don't love wilderness or benefit from it any less than visitors do, but we don't speak up often enough to say it," he says. "We need to; otherwise it's going to be taken from us by the extractive industries who don't care what kind of landscape they leave behind."**

Tom Bell was raised during the Great Depression on a ranch outside of Lander. Born April 12, 1924, he was a product of multiple use of public lands. To avoid foreclosure, his father toiled in the black soot of a coal mine east of Lander near Hudson. When the Bells weren't running livestock and getting by on chicken scraps, they stole away time hunting and fishing in the Wind River mountains, and riding across the sagebrush plains spilling away from the Rocky Mountain massif.

Ranch work, the stuff of sweat equity, led Bell to become a teenage naturalist and he suffered the universal lament of deciding to pursue his own dreams instead of accepting a career handed to him by his family. After high school, he went to Laramie, aspiring to earn a degree in wildlife management. But



Photo: Mike McClure

"Our civilized ways get more complicated day by day. How many of you are moved by the urge to get away from it all; to go where rubber tires can't take you?"

Many say it was Bell's barrelfuls of ink that spared Wyoming wildlands from being drilled.



Photo: WOC Archives

following his freshman year at the University of Wyoming, he was waylaid by World War II.

He enlisted at age 18 to serve in the Air Force flying missions over the southern European theatre. During one of Bell's bombardier sorties, he lost an eye from flying shrapnel and was sent home to mend. Wild country was his solace.

Bell went back to college and earned his degree, getting a job with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department as a fisheries biologist. As part of his survey work, he spent months in the field, though it struck him that something was wrong.

Wolves already had been wiped out in the Cowboy State; grizzlies were heading in the same direction; rivers were tarnished with the abandoned wastes of mining; industrial-strength forestry was just starting to rev up; and poison was being spread across the rangeland to exterminate coyotes. When Bell shared his observations with colleagues, many didn't want to listen. But Bell discovered that kindred spirits were asking the same kinds of questions. Olaus and Adolph Murie were speaking up over the mountains in Jackson Hole, as was Rachel Carson in the East; and Aldo Leopold, who was penning essays from Sand County in Wisconsin.

In Wyoming, Bell took aim at local state game wardens, who often lacked knowledge about the resources under their care, who were not required to meet any professional standards and who were given jobs as payback for political favors. Bell attempted to resolve the matter within the Game and Fish Department but when his efforts were scuttled, he quit and began writing a column that appeared in the *Wyoming State Journal*. It caused a firestorm.

Tom's *High Country* column became the genesis of *High Country News*. When he founded the publication, whose motto is "For People Who Care About the West," there wasn't an environmental issue that Bell regarded as a sacred cow. Many say it was Bell's barrelfuls of ink that spared Wyoming wildlands from being drilled, and he made the case for wilderness legislation that came in the 1970s. **He argued that advocacy was essential** to citizenship, and that no matter what they claimed, neither journalists, scientists, politicians, nor ranchers could ever be objective about the things they loved.

During a recent visit with the green saint, who had become an octogenarian only a few weeks earlier, I asked Tom if he had ever thought of abandoning the fight to save Wyoming wilderness and the crea-

tures inhabiting it. He offered an answer I hadn't expected.

Tom shared a tale that served as a parable about one day back in the early 1970s. He had sold his beloved family ranch to pay the creditors in order to publish one more edition of *HCN*. He was feeling socially shunned by folks in his hometown. He felt abandoned by long-time friends. Beaten down, he thought to himself about the reality of the moment. Resource extraction lobbyists had him outnumbered in Congress and in Cheyenne 100 to one.


Bell had sacrificed everything he owned to fight the good fight. On that day burdened down by the issues when everyone else in Wyoming seemed unaware, he carried a pile of markup sheets out to the trash dumpster and decided to give up. "I really asked myself whether it was all worth it?" he mused. "I thought, 'Why the hell am I doing this? I'm losing friends; I'm going broke; we're watching the best of Wyoming and the West disappear, but no one seems to care.'"

Bell strolled to the garbage dumpster and then went home, disillusioned. When he returned mournfully the next day to collect his things, his two sidekicks, the late Marge Higley and Mary Margaret Davis, had come into the office, rescued Bell's words and pasted them up in advance of the press run for another edition of *HCN*. They fought with Bell. They intoned that he was making a difference. They sat him down. "They just believed in me and wouldn't let me quit," he says.

We need more Tom Bells, but just as vital, we need more Marge Higleys and Mary Margaret Davises; we must be willing to step forward and we must not let our friends feel so defeated or burned out that they quit. Pats on the back are good medicine, so are encouraging words and phone calls. Tom says it never hurts to drop a postcard in the mail to a friend reminding them: "You are making a difference."

Today, when I think of Tom Bell and need strength, I hear his voice imploring us: Fight for what you love; never yield to the demons of self doubt that come screeching in the night. In those darkest hours we must remember above all else: When morning comes, we will not be standing alone.

This article appears with permission from Todd Wilkinson. A longer version of the piece was included in Ahead of Their Time:

Wyoming Voices for the Wilderness. 

Highlights from Our History:



Photo: WOC Archives

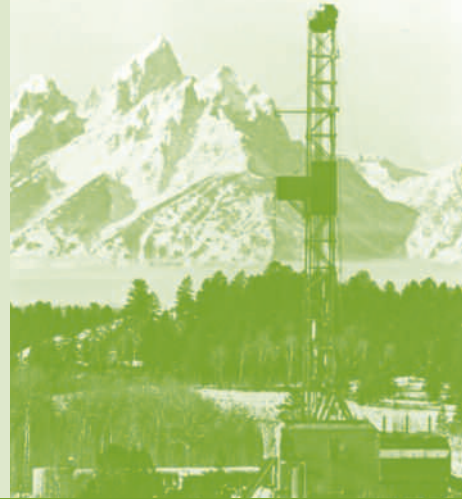


Photo: Phil Hocker



Photo: Dan Hellig

1960s

- Uncovered and publicized the presence of thousands of miles of illegal fences on BLM lands that blocked pronghorn movement and caused the deaths of hundreds of animals. As a result, fences were removed.
- Led the effort to block the damming of the Upper Green River.
- Helped stop Project Wagon Wheel, which proposed nuclear bombs to release natural gas from deep under the Upper Green River Valley.

1970s

- Helped form the citizens' lobby that succeeded in securing the passage of the Industrial Siting Act, strengthening air and water regulations, and tightening regulatory powers for the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality.

1980s

- Stopped clearcutting on the Bridger-Teton and Shoshone national forests around Dubois.
- Supported efforts to pass Wyoming Wilderness Bill.
- Promoted the successful designation of the Clark's Fork River as a Wild and Scenic River.
- Worked to secure the passage of brownfields legislation to ensure the clean up of industrial pollution from the Casper Amoco refinery.



Photo: WOC Archives



Photo: Tova Wojciechowicz

1990s

- Worked with other environmental groups to convince President Bill Clinton to block the Noranda gold mine near Yellowstone National Park.
- Prevented the construction of the Altamont pipeline across historic South Pass.
- Stopped the construction of a monitored retrievable nuclear storage facility in Fremont County.
- Worked to prevent natural gas leasing in the Shoshone National Forest, specifically Togwotee Pass.

2000s

- Won landmark Pennaco decision in the Powder River Basin ensuring that coalbed methane development scrutinized differently than conventional natural gas development.
- Earned a temporary stop to oil and gas leasing in the Wyoming Range, allowing time to generate support for permanent protection.
- Fought to preserve roadless area protection.
- Generated the public awareness campaigns about the Red Desert and Upper Green River Valley.
- Played a key role in the adoption of clean energy goals—a 20 percent increase in energy efficiency by 2020 and an additional 30,000 megawatts of clean energy by 2015—by the Western Governors' Association.

Visit wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org
for more of our history.

The 1990s

Steff Kessler, who came to the executive directorship from the National Outdoor Leadership School in 1990, remembers: “I told the board we could be good at our grassroots and write professional, technical analyses. We also began to write annual work plans. I made the pitch that investing in our program would produce results, and it did. Our fundraising turned around.”

And still the organization continued to confront tough issues, including contesting uranium mining at Pathfinder Mine. Kessler recalls, “We told the governor’s office that we would sue the state for failure to enforce the Environmental Quality Act if they didn’t take care of this. We brought the contested case before the Environmental Quality Council and brought our own attorney, Kate Fox, who was fresh out of law school. She took the case pro bono and won it.”

But it was the council’s work on nuclear waste that secured the group’s reputation. In 1991, the Fremont County Commissioners decided to pursue a local site for storing the nation’s radioactive waste. The Wyoming Outdoor Council made this a statewide issue and, in 1992, convinced Governor Mike Sullivan to veto the bill that would have established the site. Kessler notes, “WOC was seen as the leader of the groups educating the public about why this was not a good idea. Dave Love, the preeminent Wyoming geologist, grew up near the area proposed for dumping. He joined the campaign and was very vocal.” Meanwhile, the nuclear storage industry spent hundreds of thousands to promote the site and staff members even received death threats for their work to keep Fremont County free of radioactive waste. “At one protest,” Kessler recalls, “Colleen Whalen held a sign that read, ‘Why worry about wolves in Yellowstone? The Department of Energy is in Fremont County.’” Eventually the team was victorious, and their expertise stood them well in other legislative and regulatory fights around the state.

Other major efforts in the 1990s included defending historical South Pass from the Altamont pipeline. The Wyoming Outdoor Council also played a critical role in protecting the Shoshone National Forest from oil and gas development and saving the borders of Yellowstone National Park from the Noranda gold mine. There were smaller victories, too. Dan Heilig remembers a local climber coming into the office concerned that the Wyoming Department of Transportation wanted to reopen a limestone quarry adjacent to the popular rock climbing area, Wild Iris. Dan was able to look at the forest plan for the area and determine that such a quarry was incompatible. The idea was dropped.

But for Dan, who became executive director in 1998, the most exciting campaign he worked on revolved around three leases in the Powder River Basin that Pennaco Energy had purchased for coalbed methane development.

“Pennaco was the glory days for me,” Dan says. “I’d go for a bike ride with Tom Darin and we’d talk strategy.”

Dan and Tom and others won the Pennaco case and the BLM was forced to go back to the drawing board in its planning for the Powder River Basin. Unfortunately, the reprieve was brief. The BLM fulfilled its legal obligations, then proceeded to approve more than 50,000 wells for the area.

“So issues keep coming back again and again,” Dan says. “As has happened in the Powder River Basin. Legal decisions give us breathing room. Time to formulate a new plan. Then we are back at it.”

The 00s


The issue that has come to dominate the Wyoming Outdoor Council’s work in the 21st century is energy. **The boom that began in the 1990s now influences all aspects of our work to protect Wyoming’s public lands and wildlife, as basin after basin fills with drill rigs.** The well numbers proposed are staggering—10,000 in the Upper Green, 20,000 in the Greater Red Desert, 50,000 in the Powder River Basin—all in areas that harbor Wyoming’s beloved wildlife and provide opportunities for hunting, fishing, grazing, and other forms of outdoor recreation.

The council’s more recent work has brought national attention to the Red Desert and the Upper Green River Valley, to the water-quality problems associated with coalbed methane development, and to the consequences of coal mining. The Wyoming Outdoor Council provided a critical pause in the rush to develop the Wyoming Range by winning a stay on leasing in the area. This pause is being used to generate local and national support for legislation to protect the range permanently.

Efforts are also underway to promote clean or renewable energy, both as an alternative to the industrialization associated with drilling for natural gas and as a way to reduce greenhouse gases as we come to grips with the reality of climate change. Again the board has been influential in developing this campaign, with Tom Bell—now an active octogenarian and emeritus board member—leading the effort.

The Wyoming Outdoor Council’s work continues to range far and wide depending on the need. We are working to improve air quality in the state, preserve ancient migration paths, maintain roadless areas, bring some rational discourse to the wolf issue, limit the spread of disease among elk herds, protect our clean water and fisheries—and the list goes on.

The Future

In some ways the best future would be an end for the need of an organization like the Wyoming Outdoor Council, but history indicates that such an outcome is unlikely. The state needs a watchdog to protect the public lands and wildlife that define its quality of life and environmental health. In 40 years, we’ve grown from a one-person operation with lots of volunteer support to a staff of ten with more than 1,000 members in Wyoming and across the country. Our work will continue to be dictated by the winds that blow. And as anyone who’s ever gotten out of the car in Wyoming knows, that wind never stops for long. 

MOLLY ABSOLON



Emily Stevens's Legacy

Photo: Anthony Stevens

A very special thank you to Emily Stevens, a rancher in Dubois who was a steadfast supporter of ours until her death in 2001. In July 2007, we received a bequest from Emily's estate of \$550,000 plus stock valued roughly at \$300,000. Most of this money will be invested in our endowment, which we were able to establish in 2003 because of Emily's generosity. The endowment benefits the Wyoming Outdoor Council with earned interest: 5 percent of it is used each year to support full-time staff to carry out our work.

In 1974, Emily gave up on the harried life of the East; she had fallen in love with Wyoming, in particular the wild places of the Wind River Basin. She purchased the T-Cross Ranch near the Washakie Wilderness and raised her family there. Emily was a tenacious environmentalist. She helped the Wyoming Outdoor Council to establish the Industrial Siting Act, and she hosted Dave Foreman, Bart Koehler, Howie Wolke, and Mike Roselle in the first meetings of Earth First! Moreover, Emily was a generous donor to the cause. In the words of another beloved cofounder, Tom Bell, "Were it not for Emily, I am not sure we would have made it all these years. You can work as hard as possible and do your damndest but it still takes money and that is where Emily seemed to know when to step in and take up the slack. What a grand and magnanimous person, and lovely to boot. I am eternally grateful for what she did, not only for the Wyoming Outdoor Council, but for the Wyoming she loved."

Amen. Bless Emily. Let's carry on with her vision.

Supporters and Friends

A Gift from Earth Friends Wildlife Foundation

Earth Friends Wildlife Foundation has pledged to give \$10,000 to the Wyoming Outdoor Council if we can raise \$100,000 of new money in 2007.

This is an opportunity for you to stretch your contribution, making your money work even harder for public lands and wildlife.

Contact Laurie Milford, laurie@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org



Thank You

To the many supporters of the Wyoming Outdoor Council in 2007:

Institutions

Blue Ridge Fund
Cafferty Philanthropic Trust
Cinnabar Foundation
Deer Creek Foundation
Earth Friends Wildlife Foundation
Educational Foundation of America
Environmental Center of the Rockies
Gilman Ordway Charitable Trust
Hewlett Foundation
Isaak Walton League of America-Casper
Maki Foundation
New-Land Foundation

Patagonia
Ruth and Vernon Taylor Foundation
Storer Foundation
Wallick Family Foundation
Walter and Mary Tuohy Foundation
Wildlife Heritage Foundation of Wyoming
Wolf Creek Charitable Foundation
Wyoming Community Foundation
Wyss Foundation
Champions (\$10,000 and over)
Anonymous
Nancy Debevoise

Stanley Family Fund of the Community Foundation of New Jersey

Sustainers (\$5,000-\$9,999)

Scott Kane and Michelle Escudero
Anthony and Erika Stevens

Stewards (\$1,000-\$4,999)

Lynne Bama
Joyce Evans
Burdick Faulkner Charitable Fund
Rich and Mary Guenzel

Kathe Henry
Carl and Emily Knobloch Donor Advised Fund of the Community Foundation of Jackson Hole
Robert and Michele Keith
George McClelland Gates Richards
Keith and Kathleen Rittle
Jack VanBaalen
Harriette (Kip) Wallace
Rossetter Donor Advised Fund of the Community Foundation of Jackson Hole

Old Bill's Fun Run

Thank you to the Community Foundation of Jackson Hole for including the Wyoming Outdoor Council in its Old Bill's Fun Run 11, which took place in Jackson September 8, 2007.

Photo: Greater Yellowstone Coalition



Wyoming Outdoor Council founder Tom Bell receives the Len and Sandy Sargent Lifetime Achievement Award from the Greater Yellowstone Coalition at the GYC Annual Meeting in Cody in June 2007.



Wyoming Outdoor Council



A Symbol of Our Commitment

In celebration of 40 years of service, we're pleased to unveil our new logo and believe it represents our story of courageous citizens making a better Wyoming. [Read the full announcement on page 5.](#)



Wyoming Outdoor Council

wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

262 Lincoln Street
Lander, WY 82520
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
Paid
Permit No. 149
Lander, WY 82520