

Wyoming Outdoor Council

Summer 2017

FRONTLINE

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



The Next 50 Years
Starts Now

A Message from the Director



GARY WILMOT
Executive Director

Wyoming artist Virginia Moore created the stunning oil painting, “Wind River Red Rock,” featured on this issue’s cover, in honor of the Wyoming Outdoor Council’s upcoming 50th anniversary celebration. The beautiful piece is just one of the many handpicked auction items that you can bid on during our Citizen Advocacy Summit and celebration in Lander in September—when I know the entire Outdoor Council staff and board is looking forward to connecting with old friends, making a few new ones, and discussing what the future of conservation looks like for Wyoming.

You may have seen that we recently teamed up with Summit for Soldiers, a nonprofit organization raising awareness of the problem of suicide among U.S. armed services veterans while helping them tap into the healing power of the outdoors. This group came to Wyoming at the end of July and successfully scaled Gannett Peak as part of its quest to climb the high points in all 50 states.

This collaboration spoke to the heart of the Outdoor Council’s mission and is an essential part of our origins. As you’ll read, our founder, Tom Bell, came back from World War II both physically and spiritually wounded, and went out onto public lands to heal. That profound experience was

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Wyoming Outdoor Council

Established in 1967, the Wyoming Outdoor Council is the state’s oldest independent statewide conservation organization. Our mission is to protect Wyoming’s environment and quality of life for future generations.

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one of the reasons he created the Outdoor Council: to protect these wild places so future generations could benefit from them too. Public lands are important to so many Americans for so many reasons. Tom recognized that.

Which brings me to reflect on a component of our work that often goes unnoticed, but is essential to preventing irreparable harm to beloved landscapes and important habitat. While much of our vital advocacy is forward looking and focused on influencing future management, the hardest work often comes later, as we strive to make sure that promised long-term visions are, in fact, faithfully implemented. Some might describe this as watchdogging, but for me it's more about vigilance and accountability—and it's why you want an organization that's been around for 50 years to remain a strong voice in conservation in coming years. In that light, I'd like to share two recent successes that, despite their technical natures, underscore how essential such painstaking work is:

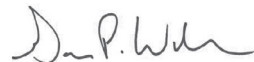
- **Last fall we challenged a Bureau of Land Management decision** to approve an oil and gas well in southern Wyoming's Little Snake River Valley because it would have allowed for the unmitigated loss of crucial wildlife habitat. Although the BLM had identified "residual" harms from the proposed development, including loss and fragmentation of crucial winter range habitat for mule deer and important habitat for sage-grouse, the agency's approval of the well did not adhere to its own requirements that energy operators mitigate this damage. The Wyoming BLM State Director agreed, and sent the decision

back for additional review—effectively suspending development of this well and a dozen other proposed wells in the area until an adequate analysis is completed.

- **We also received a good decision from the Wyoming BLM Deputy State Director** on a different challenge to the authorization of three oil and gas wells proposed inside the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's Chain Lakes Wildlife Habitat Management Area in southern Wyoming, which is subject to special management that emphasizes the protection of wildlife and the unique natural values found in the area. We argued that the BLM failed both to disclose this essential information and to adequately assess the impacts of the proposed Chain Lakes drilling project. The Deputy State Director issued a favorable decision requiring additional environmental analysis by the BLM field office. We are pleased with this decision, which should result in better protections for wildlife in this sensitive, specially managed landscape.

Although these wins are admittedly "wonky," they're an indispensable piece of Wyoming's conservation puzzle. They're also representative of the kind of work the Outdoor Council does every day.

Our work for the next 50 years starts now. We're building an exciting vision for Wyoming, even as political and economic conditions change at the state and federal levels, and we look forward to visiting with you about it in September!



P.S. You can bid to win Virginia Moore's painting and see our other auction items at bit.ly/WOCauction.

How to Get Out into the Red Desert: *A LANDSCAPE AT THE HEART OF OUR HISTORY*



STEFANI FARRIS
Development
Coordinator

Wyoming's Red Desert is an inextricable part of the Wyoming Outdoor Council's origin story. Not long after being awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action in World War II, a young Tom Bell was severely wounded during a mission over Austria by a burst of flak that nearly killed him. He returned home to Lander in 1944 and spent his days wandering the desert's vast expanses as he healed. Over the years, he told many friends that after the horrors of war he needed to see and experience "the beauty of nature" in what he called his "beloved homeland." Like so many of us—service members and civilians alike—Tom understood that the natural world could be an incredible salve.

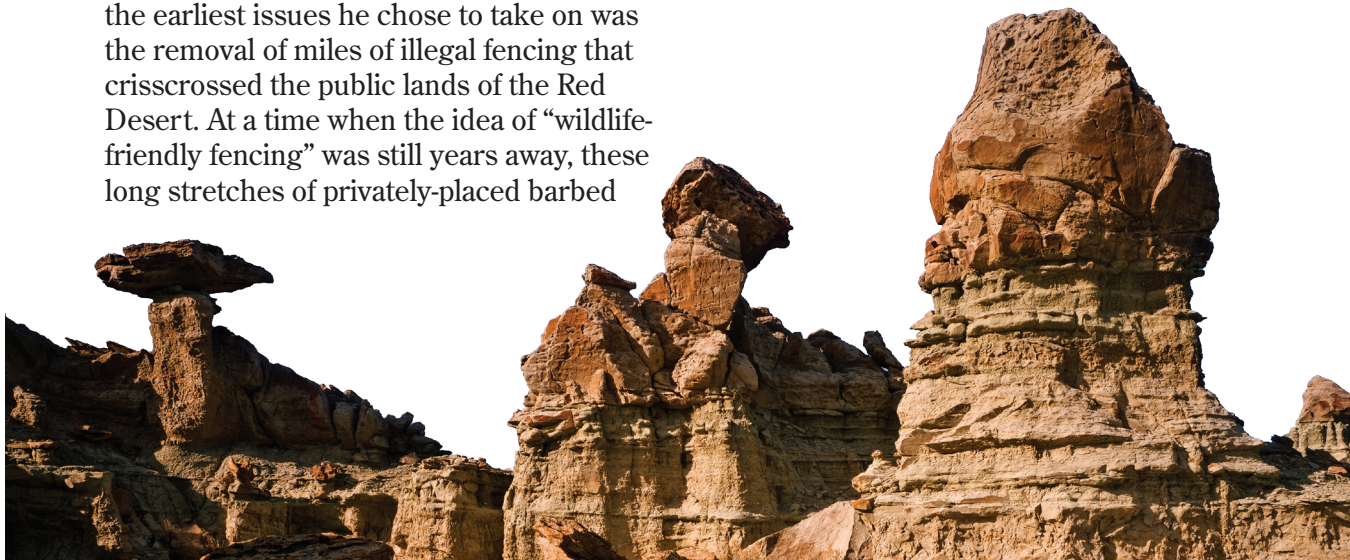
Twenty-three years later, Tom would go on to found the Outdoor Council. One of the earliest issues he chose to take on was the removal of miles of illegal fencing that crisscrossed the public lands of the Red Desert. At a time when the idea of "wildlife-friendly fencing" was still years away, these long stretches of privately-placed barbed

wire were not only unlawful, they were also a death sentence for the migrating pronghorn and mule deer that got hung up in them every year. This early work in the Red Desert was the Outdoor Council's first success story—and remains at the heart of our 50-year history of advocacy for wildlife and open spaces.

Lose Yourself (Without Getting Lost): *We Have Tools for You*

Part of what makes the Red Desert unique is its isolation. Even for Wyoming—where people tend to be unfazed by hundred-mile stretches of high and lonesome terrain—the desert feels vast. "There's a lot of space out there, a lot of wildness," says Julia Stuble, the Outdoor Council employee who's probably spent more days and nights in the desert than the rest of the staff combined. "You really get the sense that you're on your own."

For Julia and many others, that remoteness and solitude is precisely the point. In a fast-paced, ultra-connected world,



there's much to be said for venturing deep into a place where cell coverage is unlikely and the only sounds are the wind and the occasional spade-foot toad, sandhill crane, or bugling elk. Long before smartphones and a 24-hour news cycle, Tom Bell understood the allure of the desert's stillness and quiet. That pull is only more powerful today.

The best advocates for the Red Desert are people who have spent time there—playing with kids in the sand dunes, glassing for elk at dawn. But for many would-be visitors the draw of this remote landscape can be outweighed by intimidation. Where to go, exactly? How to get there? And what kind of planning is necessary? Surprisingly little information exists for the uninitiated.

We thought it might be helpful to put together a few resources to help answer your questions and empower you to experience the power of the desert for yourself.

Running the Red, DIY Trips, and Armchair Exploration

If you're up for a few hours of physical exertion as you pass beneath the shadow of Table Mountain or circumnavigate the Boar's Tusk, a great way to get out into the northern Red Desert is to sign up with a friend or two for our annual trail run in the spring. For four years, we've been partnering with local nonprofits to host Run the Red Desert, which celebrates this landscape and educates participants about ways to speak up for its protection.

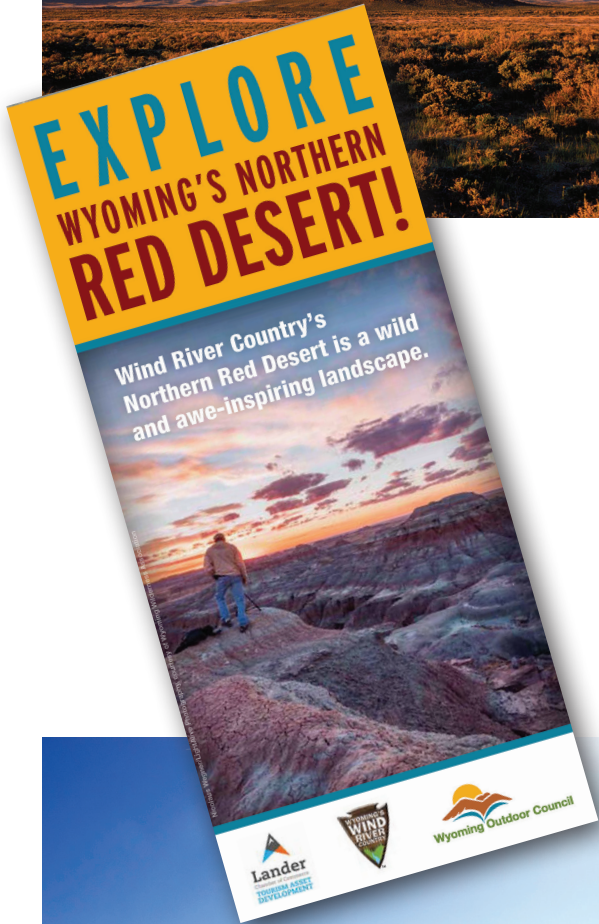
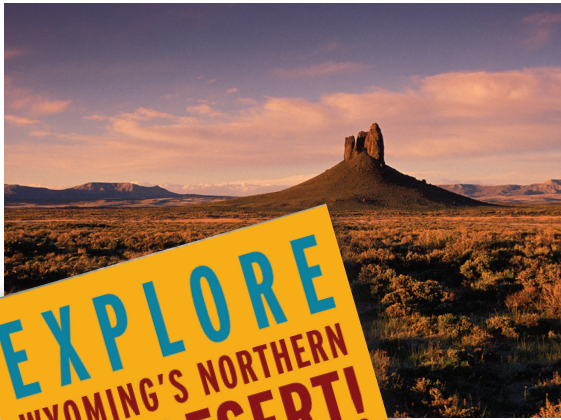
Runners and walkers come from throughout Wyoming, as well as from

neighboring states, camping in the desert the night before the race or setting their alarms and hitting the road before dawn. Year after year, we're told that what sets this event apart from similar ones throughout the West is its powerful conservation message coupled with the dramatic, one-of-a-kind course. And the run continues to grow, with more than 90 registrants in 2017. Next year, we're hosting the fifth annual Run the Red on June 3, with 5k, 23k, and 50k routes. It's a fun and challenging way to get to know a dramatic landscape.

But for many would-be visitors the draw of this remote landscape can be outweighed by intimidation. Where to go, exactly? How to get there?

But not everyone can tackle a 50k in the desert. That's why, with support from the Wind River Visitors Council and the Lander Chamber of Commerce, we've put together a new travel guide that fits right in your glovebox. Featuring travel tips and detailed driving directions to three of the northern Red Desert's coolest places, our travel guide is an excellent resource for anyone wanting to check out Whitehorse Creek, Oregon Buttes, or Honeycomb Buttes—which are all an easy drive from Lander, Rock Springs, or Pinedale.

And if you're not quite ready to air up your spare tire and throw your sleeping bag in the back of the four-wheel drive, check out the Red Desert Story Map on our website. This interactive map pairs stunning images with an in-depth exploration of the natural and cultural history of the desert.



Top to Bottom: Boar's Tusk at sunset (Image: Dave Showalter); our new Red Desert guide, available now in print; and trail runners at the 2017 Run the Red trail race (Image: Claire Cella).

You can choose a point on the map, zoom in, and see not only nearby landmarks, but also migration routes and emigrant trails. The story map offers a powerful overview of the many intersecting values and histories that make the Red Desert such a special landscape—and so worth protecting.

You Are the Desert's Best Advocate

A 2008 Backpacker Magazine article by Michael Behar noted: "In Africa, the Red Desert would be a wildlife sanctuary or game reserve. And anywhere else in the United States, a place this geographically astounding would be made a national park."

There are plenty of places in the Red Desert that remain wild and wide open: Adobe Town, Whitehorse Creek, Killpecker Sand Dunes, Oregon Buttes, Sweetwater Canyon, Honeycomb Buttes, the Jack Morrow Hills. These spectacular natural areas provide unparalleled opportunities for hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, exploring, and straight-up solitude. And they are worth protecting.

The good news is that there are some opportunities coming up for citizens to advocate for the Red Desert. One, the Wyoming Public Lands Initiative, is an ongoing, county-by-county effort to assess the long-term management of many of Wyoming's "wilderness study areas." WSAs currently under consideration in the Red Desert include Sweetwater Canyon and Whitehorse Creek. It will be essential for the public to speak up on behalf of these unique places.

Also underway is a revision of the Bureau of Land Management's plan for how to manage much of the Red Desert for the next 20 years. This new, big picture land-use proposal will ultimately determine which

lands will be made available for drilling, mining, and wind development—and which will be managed to protect wildlife habitat, recreational access, and scenic views.

Soon it will be your turn to help.

Once the draft plan is released, the BLM will open a public comment period. At that point citizens will have a chance to speak up and let the agency know how they'd like to see these places managed. **Your voice at this stage will be crucial. These are your public lands, after all. You have a say in their future.**

What's Next?

We'll be sure to keep you up to date and we'll let you know when it's time to weigh in and talk about why the desert matters to you. In the meantime, we hope you'll take a weekend or just a day to head out, get some sand between your toes, and experience for yourself the quiet, healing power of the rugged Red Desert. Stop by our Lander office to pick up your free Red Desert guide or email info@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org to have one mailed to you.

AS DIVERSE AS IT IS UNIQUE, the Red Desert is one of our country's last wild high-elevation deserts. Home to 50,000 pronghorn and huge numbers of mule deer, elk, sage-grouse, and other species reliant on the sagebrush ecosystem, the Red Desert is also traversed by the **second-longest ungulate migration corridor** in North America—a mule deer migration route rivaled in length only by that of the Porcupine caribou herd in the Arctic. The desert includes some of the best intact sections of the historic Oregon, California, Mormon, and Pony Express pioneer trails, and it offers **incredible sweeping views** from the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, which lies just within the desert's northern boundary. It also contains **countless sacred and spiritual sites** for American Indian communities. Home to the legendary Boar's Tusk formation as well as the world's second-largest active sand dune complex, the northern Red Desert truly is **one of our public land treasures.**

SEPTEMBER 22–23, 2017

Join us for our

LANDER, WY

Citizen Advocacy Summit

& 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Celebrate the Wyoming Outdoor Council's 50-year legacy and learn how to stand up for Wyoming's future. Reserve your tickets today! wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/50-years

Friday from 6–8 p.m. at Lander City Park | **Free Community Concert** featuring *Jalan Crossland*

Saturday from 8 a.m.–9 p.m. at Lander Community & Convention Center

THE STATE OF CONSERVATION & THE NEXT 50 YEARS IN WYOMING
8–9:45 a.m.

WORKSHOP BLOCK #1
10 a.m.–12 p.m.
Field Journal Sketching;
Videography & Conservation
Narratives; Nature Photography;
Effecting Policy Change in
Wyoming

WORKSHOP BLOCK #2
1–4:30 p.m.
Field Journaling on Red Butte;
Smartphone Videography;
Conservation Journalism
Roundtable; Red Butte Hike;
Citizen Science Panel

TOM BELL MEMORIAL RECEPTION & HARVEST DINNER
5–7:30 p.m.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS
8–9 p.m.
Gina McCarthy



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

JOIN US!

Citizens first came together to defend Wyoming's outdoor way of life back in 1967. Five decades later, the Outdoor Council is still here because of members like you.

Whether speaking up for wildlife or public lands in Cheyenne or just making sure we have the funds to get the job done, members have been helping us deliver on our mission for 50 years.

Help us be ready for the next 50 years of protecting Wyoming's outdoor heritage by keeping your membership up to date. Join or renew today!

HAVE A FRIEND WHO SHOULD BELONG TO
THE WYOMING OUTDOOR COUNCIL?

Join or renew by September 22 and receive a free gift membership to give to your favorite outdoorspeople!

Fill out attached envelope or visit wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/donate for details.