

FRONTLINE



Working to protect public lands and wildlife since 1967

A Vision for the Wind River Basin

Protecting the gateway to the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and one of the richest wildlife areas remaining in the West.



Our vision for the basin

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Don't you like us?

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Message from the Director

LAURIE MILFORD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Persistence Pays Off



The Wyoming Outdoor Council has been hard at work this past year representing your interests in conserving Wyoming's natural heritage. We've

succeeded in safeguarding places we all care about, and we've accomplished important protections for air and water quality.

We are right now celebrating a momentous success in the Wyoming Range that has taken more than six years of dedicated work by our staff. As a direct result of our legal challenge to more than 44,000 acres of improperly sold oil and gas leases along the eastern front of the range, the U.S. Forest Service has decided not to lease these acres. This decision will protect permanently this crucial wildlife habitat stretching along the eastern front of the range from oil and gas development.

Additionally, actions we took against imprudent oil and gas leasing over the past three years encouraged the BLM to reverse course on leasing in special places including Adobe Town, Little Mountain, and the Jack Morrow Hills in the Red Desert.

You, our members, have made it possible for the Council to be persistent and tenacious. Just one result of this tenacity is that there have been no oil and gas leases issued in the Jack Morrow Hills since the 1990s.

In 2010, we also won an important victory for Wyoming's clean air stemming from investigative and legal work initiated back in 2007. The Council's lawsuit against the Jim Bridger Power Plant—for violating its air quality permit thousands of times over the course of five years—resulted in the biggest cash penalty ever levied in Wyoming against a single facility for air pollution violations. But more importantly, as we learned during settlement proceedings, our action led immediately to improved operations at the plant. Operators significantly reduced the amount of pollution the power plant emitted throughout the four years we waited for the suit to conclude. The people of Wyoming have benefited.

The Council is as big as it has ever been, and influential, too—twelve staff who

show up, on behalf of all of us, every day, throughout the state. We now have the capacity to capitalize on once-in-a-lifetime opportunities, as they arise. This past year, for example, the Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission approved a groundbreaking measure to require companies to disclose the chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing. This rule has made Wyoming the first state to require detailed disclosure of these constituents. The Outdoor Council was able to devote three staff members to this effort last year. Our engagement in the rulemaking strengthened what would become the new policy.

We were also able to provide detailed input as the Wyoming Game and Fish Department developed new recommendations for wind development in sensitive wildlife habitats. These guidelines were finalized in 2010. The agency was receptive to our recommendations, which will now help lay the groundwork for responsible wind-energy development statewide.

Of course we still have much to do. We have already been making a significant effort this year to help provide Wyoming's new governor, Matt Mead—and a legislature with 23 new faces—with consistent, sound, science-based information. Negotiating the change in administrations isn't easy, but we made some strides (successfully defending against anti-environmental bills, for example) during the 2011 legislative session. (See our blog for details.) Your membership gives us the endurance we need to continue in Cheyenne and around the state in the years to come.

This newsletter features our vision for the Wind River Basin long-term management plan, which should be released in draft form sometime this spring or summer. As our members know, engagement in these long-term land-use plans is paramount. We will spare no effort to help land managers make the right decisions.

Thank you for standing with us in 2010. I think you should feel proud of that decision. And I do hope you plan to continue your membership in 2011.

Yours,
Laurie

Wyoming Outdoor Council

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

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A New Plan for the Wind River Basin:

Home to some of America's finest wildlands, open spaces, and historic trails



Plus, Schmitzer



BY NATHAN MAXON, ENERGY AND PUBLIC LANDS FELLOW

The Wind River Basin bounds the southeastern edge of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and is one of the richest wildlife areas remaining in the Northern Rockies. Its public lands contain some of America's finest wildlife habitats, intact historic trails, dramatic open spaces, and wildlands.

These priceless values remain because development here has been relatively minimal compared to many other important wildlife regions in the West. With thoughtful management we can ensure that open spaces survive and wildlife will continue to thrive here.

The Bureau of Land Management is in the process of creating a new long-term management plan for the Wind River Basin. A draft is expected sometime this spring or summer. We have worked hard to present our vision to federal land managers for how these lands could be managed to conserve their important values.

The majesty of the Wind River Basin

An array of landforms in the Wind River Basin give rise to salt deserts, sagebrush steppe, native grasslands, shrublands, juniper woodlands, aspen stands, cottonwood and willow riparian corridors, and evergreen forests—nearly every Wyoming habitat type can be found in this spectacular landscape.

These habitats support mule deer, elk, pronghorn, moose, beaver, prairie dogs, golden eagles, bald eagles, and many other

wild creatures, including large predators such as grizzly bears and wolves. One of the best known wild herds of bighorn sheep relies on some of these BLM lands.

The southern portion of the Wind River Basin is home to one of the world's best remaining sanctuaries for the greater sage-grouse. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service described this area in 2010 as one of the two most important "remaining areas of contiguous range essential for the long-term persistence of the species."

The historic and recreational trails in the Lander Field Office are nationally recognized and are some of Wyoming's finest contributions to the National Landscape Conservation System.

Every year, thousands of visitors from across the nation travel to the Sweetwater Watershed to celebrate and commemorate 19th century journeys along the Oregon, Mormon, California, and Pony Express trails.

Hikers can enjoy the unique high desert portions of the Continental Divide Scenic Trail on their way through the Red Desert.

Our vision for the Wind River Basin

Our proposal to the Bureau of Land Management envisions a balance between energy development and the protection of wildlife and special places.

With so much of Wyoming already dedicated and available to energy development, we believe the BLM can

and should ensure protection of some of Wyoming's most extraordinary, open, wild, and undeveloped landscapes.

Even if the BLM were to ensure the protection of these treasured landscapes, a significant portion of the Lander Field Office—an area with oil, gas, uranium, and wind resources—could remain available for development. This is the very definition of balance.

Towns such as Lander and Dubois have been growing even during the recent economic downturn because their diversified economies rely in large part on natural and recreational values.

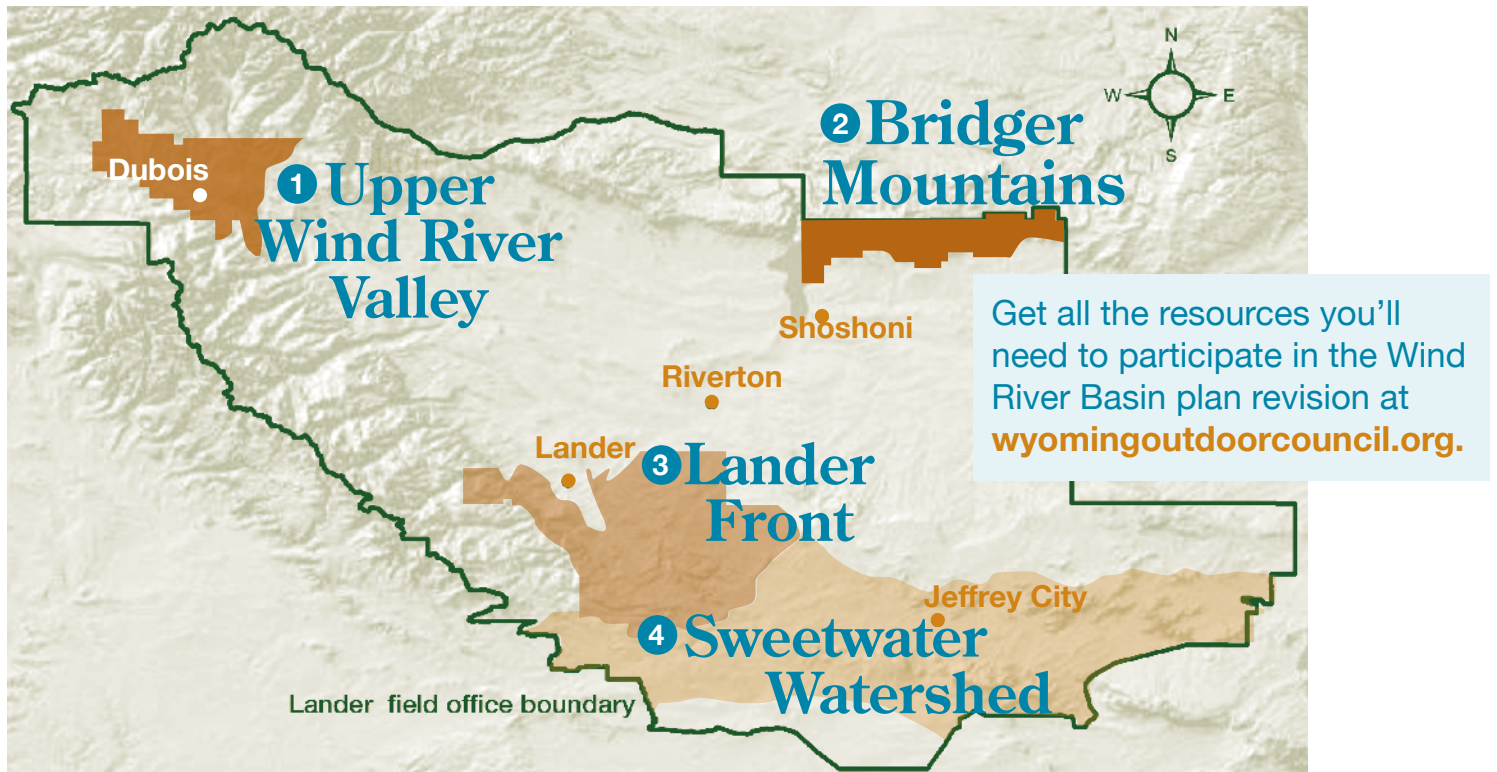
The landscapes that surround these towns draw visitors, hunters and anglers, and people who love the outdoors. Protecting these landscapes will not prevent economic development; rather it would help to bolster continued diverse economic growth.

A Balanced Approach for Jobs, Wildlife, and Open Spaces

We are asking the BLM to protect four remarkable landscapes within the Lander field office. These landscapes—the **Upper Wind River Valley, the Bridger Mountains, the Sweetwater Watershed, and the Lander Front**—each have unique resources that are incompatible with industrial development and should be protected for current and future generations.

Continued on page 4

Protecting four remarkable landscapes



We're asking that these four areas, which make up 51 percent of the BLM managed federal mineral estate within the Lander Field Office, be made administratively unavailable for industrial development throughout the life of the revised long-term management plan for the Wind River Basin.

The remaining 49 percent of the federal mineral estate in the field office—an area with oil, gas, uranium, and wind—would remain available for development.

Because relatively few conflicts occur in the areas we propose for protection, the BLM can protect sensitive natural, historic, and recreational resources while also allowing the development of energy resources to help satisfy national energy needs.

1 Upper Wind River Valley

The Upper Wind River Valley is one of our nation's most spectacular landscapes and finest wildlife areas. Nestled between the high peaks of the Wind River, Absaroka, and Owl Creek ranges, these lands support a full array of native species, including grizzly bears, wolves, bighorn sheep, elk, peregrine falcons, bald eagles, and Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

The area's iconic views, opportunities to see wildlife, and other nature-dependent rec-

reational pursuits draw many visitors, who in turn support most of the businesses and residents of the Upper Wind River Valley.

The entire valley lies within occupied grizzly habitat and is used by the bears primarily after they emerge in the spring and move to lower-elevation lands to feed on green plants and winter-killed ungulates.

With the devastating loss of so many high-elevation whitebark pines and their seed crops, an important food source for grizzlies, these lands may become increasingly important to foraging bears at other times of the year.

Bighorn sheep, once found throughout the Rocky Mountains, are still common in the Upper Wind River Valley, which encompasses both their winter range and their lambing grounds. The resident sheep herd, often referred to as the "mother herd," has historically been robust enough to be used as a source population in efforts to re-establish native sheep in other parts of the American West.

Every fall, more than three thousand elk from the surrounding mountains and Yellowstone National Park migrate into this valley to spend the winter. The native grasses that are found on the windswept mid-elevation ridges and rolling terrain are

key to the elk's survival during the long winter months.

While elk in many parts of western Wyoming congregate unnaturally on artificial feed grounds, elk in the Upper Wind River Valley are more dispersed and subsist on natural feed. Consequently these elk exhibit a low incidence of brucellosis infection.

Natural winter ranges that have lower concentrations of elk also may help to sustain the health of Yellowstone's herds by reducing the potential transmission of the virulent and devastating chronic wasting disease. For more than 40 years, the federal Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, and private landowners have invested a substantial amount of time and money to protect crucial wildlife habitats in the Upper Wind River Valley.

With no or very low potential for oil and gas in this valley, habitat and recreation are the highest-value and best use of these BLM lands, which should be conserved to ensure a vibrant and resilient Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem for future generations.

We strongly believe that the only reasonable management strategy under the revised long-term resource management plan is to protect the sustainable local economy and

Plan Area Highlights

- A sanctuary for the greater sage-grouse.
- The Oregon, Mormon, and California National Historic trails draw visitors from throughout the nation.
- Rare species such as wolves, grizzly bears, and peregrine falcons continue to roam some of these BLM lands.
- Hikers experience the high desert as they pass through this area on the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail.
- Thousands of bighorn sheep, elk, mule deer, pronghorn, and moose range across these public lands throughout the year.
- A balance between energy development and conservation will maintain natural and recreational values and will continue to support diversified local economies.

these wild and scenic treasures by administratively withdrawing this valley from oil and gas leasing and other industrial activities.

2 The Bridger Mountains

A lonely, stark, and windswept mountainous uplift known only by a handful of hunters, cattle growers, and explorers rises above the vast arid sagebrush hills of Central Wyoming near Boysen Reservoir.

With incredible opportunities for solitude, even by Wyoming's standards, the Bridger Mountains are a place where one is surprised to encounter another person.

A variety of habitats including sagebrush steppe, salt desert scrub, grasslands, juniper woodlands, and lush riparian corridors provide an important refuge for a number of sensitive species and big game.

The official wilderness study area and two citizens' wilderness proposals that lie within this relatively small region are indicative of its wild nature.

The Copper Mountain wilderness study area is a stunning place of high topographical relief characterized by sheer cliff faces and narrow granite slot canyons that ensure seclusion and offer exceptional recreational challenges. To the east lies the

Fuller Peak citizens' proposed wilderness, which is a precipitous and jagged landscape drained by clear streams that have scoured deep tranquil pools into the granite.

East of Fuller Peak sits the Lysite Mountain citizens' proposed wilderness, a rugged canyon badland where one can find solitude, fascinating geology, beautiful displays of unusual wildflowers, and, of course, a vast array of wildlife.

The late David Love, Wyoming's most celebrated geologist, said "Lysite Mountain is one of the most significant areas in [Wyoming] because it is the only place where the late Cenozoic record is preserved."

Within this tiger-striped mountain, lies a one-thousand foot cross-section of the Cenozoic sedimentary strata that once filled the Wind River and Bighorn basins before they were excavated by the Wind River and its tributaries.

A diverse assemblage of plants and animals provides a fitting complement to the incredible wild lands of the Bridger Mountains. At least six rare plant species are found here, including Porter's sagebrush, Owl Creek miner's candle, bun milkvetch, hairy princes-plume, Watson's prickly-phlox, Hapeman's sullivania, and tomentose balsamroot.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department has designated a substantial portion of this region as a key nongame wildlife area because of its importance to rare species of bats such as the Townsend's big-eared bat and birds including the peregrine falcon.

Much of the area is also classified as crucial winter range for elk, mule deer, and pronghorn and as core or "priority" habitat for the greater sage-grouse. The area also supports many common Wyoming species such as badgers, bobcats, foxes, coyotes, and golden eagles.

Significant oil and gas development is already occurring to the south of the Bridger Mountains. We are asking for proactive management under the forthcoming Bureau of Land Management's revised long-term management plan to ensure that the scenic, wildland, and wildlife values of this area are protected.

According to the BLM, this relatively small area has low potential for conventional oil and gas resources. Because of this low potential and because most of this area remains unleased, we believe it should be administratively withdrawn from future

leasing in the final resource management plan to protect its wildlife and its remarkable wild and scenic character.

3 Lander Front and Beaver Rim

The Lander Front and Beaver Rim encompass some of the most celebrated viewsheds in Wyoming. Descending from South Pass, travelers see the dramatic and colorful Red Canyon and the impressive Wind River Mountains.

Looking west from atop Beaver Rim, residents and visitors are treated to an awe-inspiring panorama of colorful sandstone outcrops, rugged canyons, and rolling hills which support sagebrush shrublands, juniper woodlands, aspen groves, cottonwood gallery forests, and native grasslands.

The diverse BLM lands within this landscape are critical for wildlife and loved by local residents for their outstanding recreational opportunities.

This area is part of what the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identifies as "one of two remaining areas of contiguous range essential for the long-term persistence of the [greater sage-grouse]." Many sage-grouse that spend the summer and fall on the higher-elevation lands of the Sweetwater Watershed and South Pass descend into this area to take advantage of important winter and spring habitat.

Recent research indicates that sage-grouse winter concentration areas, like those found here, are essential to the species.

BLM lands in this area also ensure the survival of thousands of wintering elk, mule deer, and pronghorn that subsist on a variety of natural vegetation.

Despite the recent economic downturn, the town of Lander continues to grow new businesses and attract young people, in large part because of its proximity to undeveloped public lands and the wealth of recreational opportunities they provide.

Residents and visitors prize these lands because they offer some of the state's best hunting, hiking, biking, trail running, rock climbing, horseback riding, nordic skiing, and wildlife viewing opportunities.

The undeveloped public lands in this area are a major economic asset to the local community and help create a quality of life that is the envy of much of Wyoming. The fact that these lands remain undeveloped continues to make the Lander area one of Wyoming's top destinations **Continued on page 6**



Chris Merrill

Protecting the Oregon Trail should be a priority for the Lander BLM.

for visitors, outdoors enthusiasts, new residents, and Wyoming retirees.

With such celebrated viewsheds, unspoiled crucial wildlife habitat, and world-class recreational resources—all of which are essential to the local community, its economy, and its quality of life—we believe the Lander Front and Beaver Rim area must be managed with great care.

We have asked the BLM to administratively withdraw this area from future oil, gas, and phosphate leasing to protect its valuable wildlife and recreational resources so they will continue to support the social and economic stability of this area.

4 Sweetwater Watershed

The Sweetwater Watershed is home to some of the last, best, intact sections of the Oregon, Mormon, California, and Pony Express National Historic Trails.

These trails traverse a vast and stunning landscape that is teeming with iconic western wildlife—a landscape that endures today much as it was when pioneers traveled through 150 years ago.

Hikers on the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail can experience a vast, intact, and healthy sagebrush landscape as they stride toward the Wind River Mountains. People who love the outdoors appreciate this landscape for the opportunities to climb, hike, run, rock hound, fish, hunt, and explore in a seemingly boundless and untrammeled setting.

The increasingly popular Continental Divide trail provides an awe-inspiring passage from the southern Rockies to the northern Rockies for adventurous travelers.

This landscape's greatest economic values are its world-class wildlife, fishing, hunting, hiking, climbing, and horseback riding. Several vibrant local recreation-based enterprises that contribute consistently and substantially to the local economy—in a sustainable manner—rely on the unspoiled character of this landscape.


This watershed is home to one of the two most important areas remaining for the survival of the greater sage-grouse species. These sagebrush uplands, riparian corridors, and scattered stands of aspen and pine also support robust populations of pronghorn, white-tailed prairie dogs, badgers, mule deer, abundant ferruginous hawks and golden eagles, and the occasional wolf and Shiras moose.

To cross through the formidable Rocky Mountains, pioneers followed the Sweetwater River from Independence Rock up relatively gentle terrain to South Pass. Today, thousands of visitors flock to this area every year to learn about and sometimes reenact the heroic journeys that played out here more than 150 years ago.

With so many irreplaceable national resources—whose integrity demands minimal human intervention—we believe that the ecological, historical, and recreational significance of this watershed should take prior-

ity over the relatively minor and short-lived benefits that oil and gas and other mineral development would provide.

We are deeply concerned about climate change and understand the pressing need to develop renewable energy sources, but because of this area's importance to greater sage-grouse and the sensitivity of historic and recreational resources, we believe that industrial-scale wind facilities and their associated, roads, activity, traffic, transmission lines, and collector lines are not appropriate in this landscape.

Our job now is to help the Bureau of Land Management provide visionary stewardship that recognizes all of the basin's irreplaceable ecological, cultural, and recreational resources. 

We need your help to realize this vision for the Wind River basin.

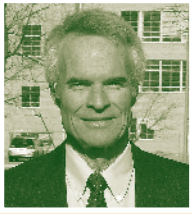
Your chance to influence the final plan is just around the corner.

Check out our website for the most current deadlines and to learn what it takes to engage effectively. While there, also be sure to sign up for our e-communications. It's the best way to ensure you have the most up-to-date information and resources.

wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

A call to continuous action

BY RICHARD GARRETT,
ENERGY AND LEGISLATIVE
ADVOCATE



The 2011 legislative session in Cheyenne has ended and the Wyoming Outdoor Council can mark several victories. But, of course, our work doesn't end with the session.

We must continue to engage with legislators and decision makers throughout the year.

During the 2011 session we helped ensure that two ill-advised House bills died, both of which threatened significant provisions of the Industrial Siting Act—and the modest but important protections they afford Wyoming's environment.

However, as long-time observers know, legislators are a persistent bunch. They have decided to use the interim session to investigate (and perhaps assail) the ISA with even more vigor.

A study by the Minerals, Business and Economic Development Committee, for example, is intended to determine if the industrial siting process has outlived its usefulness and threatens Wyoming's industry-friendly business climate.

The committee will specifically examine permitting processes, timing, administrative procedures, "archaic rules," and impact assistance to local governments.

We will be following this study throughout the interim and will work hard with colleagues, friends, and other organizations to resist anything but improvements to the Industrial Siting Act.

We invite your attention as well. For additional information on this or any other legislative issue, please be in touch with me, Richard Garrett, at 307-438-9516 or richard@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

Don't you like us? Calling all Facebook users

BY JAMIE WOLF, OUTREACH COORDINATOR



You can help us advance our reputation and achieve our mission by increasing our presence in the social networking world of Facebook.

As I write this, it is the last day of February 2011 and 332 people currently "like" the Wyoming Outdoor Council. Considering that we have 1,400 members, and many of them are on Facebook, we have an opportunity to grow that number and spread the word

even wider about the environment and public lands in Wyoming.

So we need you to help us grow that number to better reflect our influence on environmental issues in Wyoming.

I have three simple requests of you:

1. If you haven't already, find and "Like" us on Facebook. To do this, type in Wyoming Outdoor Council in your Facebook search browser, or go to wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org for a direct link. Like us by clicking "like" with the thumbs-up icon. It's easy and free! You can do it right now.
2. Get the most current conservation news from around the state by visiting the Outdoor Council's Facebook page. Help bring our page to your friends by "liking" and "commenting" on the posts that appeal to you. This helps us engage with members and friends and it fosters feedback and discussion. Furthermore, these "Likes" and "Comments" help raise our profile on Facebook.
3. Check back regularly to see if there are any new posts you can "like" and "comment" on to keep our page alive and talkin' in the Facebook social world. (Each time you come back, you can also see how much our "likes" have grown.)





Wyoming Outdoor Council


Must-see footage: Public uproar over a proposed gas field development in a Greater Yellowstone national forest: <http://bit.ly/gVoDln>


February 23 at 2:55pm via Twitter · @OutdoorCouncil on Twitte

👍 2 people like this.

 **Janice Harris** Really helpful video.
February 25 at 10:14am

 **Gary Wilmot** I'm inspired by the passion people have for this place.
28 minutes ago

 **Jamie Wolf** Agreed. The video is both informative and inspiring. Wow!
14 minutes ago

 **Sara DiRienzo** Thanks for posting this video. The Outdoor Council is always providing me with up-to-date, pertinent, information!
10 minutes ago

Facebook is a great new networking tool that can be used to demonstrate, share, and ultimately multiply support for our work. Let's take advantage of this new tool. It can help us achieve lasting protections for the places we all love.

Thanks for your help. Now go get on Facebook!



Submit your best Wyoming photos for inclusion in the Wyoming Outdoor Council's 2012 calendar!

Help us honor and celebrate Wyoming's abundant wildlife, treasured landscapes, and outdoor traditions.

Winning photographs will be published in our 2012 calendar. Submission deadline is September 15, 2011.

Do you have great shots of Wyoming's spectacular landscapes, wildlife, and people enjoying the great outdoors? If so, get them published in our annual calendar.

Previous calendars have included photographs by some of Wyoming's best professional photographers, as well as some of its most gifted amateur shooters.

Rules:

- Photographs must be taken in Wyoming and can include landscapes, lifestyles, wildlife, and people.
- All photos must be submitted in digital form by email or an online file sharing tool, mailed on a CD or DVD, or hand delivered on a CD, DVD, or flash drive.

- Photos can only be published if available in a high-quality, relatively high-resolution, digital format.
- Photograph entries constitute permission to use the images with credit to the photographer without monetary compensation.
- Please include your name, address, city, state, zip code, daytime phone number, email address, and description of your photo including where the photo was taken.

To submit photos, please email or mail to Chris Merrill:

chris@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

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The Council's influence grows with each and every member. Please join or renew your membership today.