

Wyoming Outdoor Council

Winter 2009

# FRONTLINE



Working to protect public lands and wildlife since 1967

## The Next Boom

Amid the rush to develop industrial-scale wind farms, the Wyoming Outdoor Council is offering leadership on the ground.

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The Council welcomes Janice Harris to the board



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Join the Outdoor Council's Jamie Wolf for a tour in the Big Horn Basin



# Message from the Director

Laurie Milford, executive director

## Launching a new program in energy policy



IN WYOMING, we are increasingly aware that energy development doesn't just affect land and wildlife—that the damage caused by a well pad doesn't stop with a scar on the surface. The development of fossil fuels affects our health, and our profits, too. Whether it's contaminated water in Pavillion and Clark, harmful mercury levels in Wyoming trout, or unhealthy amounts of ozone in the air in Pinedale, the production of energy takes a toll that is largely unaccounted for in the price we pay for electricity and natural gas.

According to a new report from the National Research Council commissioned by Congress in the 2005 Energy Policy Act, damage from air pollution resulting from the generation of electricity in 2005 cost America's businesses, governments, and households about \$62 billion. This figure includes the cost of harmful emissions such as sulfur dioxide, oxides of nitrogen, and particulate matter but does not include greenhouse gases and the damage caused by climate change. Even when the costs of climate change are left out of the equation, we still create about 3.2 cents in expense for every kilowatt-hour of electricity we produce, according to the study.

At my house in Laramie, my family and I use on annual average about 12.6 kilowatt-hours of electricity each day. In one year, through our use of electricity alone, we cause more than \$14,000 in damage to recreational opportunities, outdoor vistas, infrastructure, agricultural yields, and human health. Until I read the NRC report, I didn't realize the full extent of the environmental damage caused by my choices as a consumer. Am I going to stop watching college football on Saturdays? No, but you can bet I use a power strip, so when I'm not watching TV I can shut off the supply of power completely.

Governments and businesses, too, may be surprised to learn the monetary value of the damage done by the motors and generators they use, and the amount of money they could save with efficiency.

For these and many other reasons, the Wyoming Outdoor Council this year

launched **a new program in energy policy**. Richard Garrett, who joined our staff in July 2008, has taken on the responsibility of promoting, at the state level, policies that remove barriers to energy efficiency and distributed—meaning locally generated—renewable electricity. He'll also participate in the planning and oversight of major sources of electricity such as power plants and industrial-scale wind farms. He'll engage in the regulation of electrical transmission lines. Richard will also be our point-person on carbon capture and sequestration. The management of pollutants associated with making and moving electricity is a prominent goal of Richard's work.

To complement Richard's efforts to shape emerging energy policies, we've hired Nate Maxon as our energy and public lands fellow. Nate will engage with decision makers on the scores of proposed and approved wind energy and transmission projects throughout Wyoming. He will be working side-by-side with our biologist, Sophie Osborn, to address industrial-scale wind development and transmission as it plays out in some of our most cherished landscapes and most valuable habitats. Nate will also work with the communities of Thermopolis, Worland, Cody, Lander, Riverton, Rock Springs, and Green River to identify the effects of possible future energy development as the BLM revises long-term management plans for nearly 12,000 square miles of public lands near these communities.

And to round out our nimble staff, this fall we hired Jamie Wolf as our outreach coordinator to help bring to the table the most important element of our organization: our membership. Watch in the coming months for Jamie's productions—a series of opportunities *to get outdoors* (and indoors, and informed) with the Outdoor Council.

As we approach the second decade of the 21st century, the Wyoming Outdoor Council has renewed a promise it made in 1967 when Tom Bell, Mardie Murie, and other leaders founded the organization: to represent the interests of the public in decisions made about Wyoming's land, air, water, and wildlife.

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 environment and quality of life for future generations. Our publications come out quarterly and are a benefit of membership. Letters to the editor and articles by members are welcome.

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# Getting out in front of the next boom

BY CHRIS MERRILL



**W**YOMING'S NEXT ENERGY BOOM, in the form of industrial-scale wind farms, might already be here.

And the sheer volume of new applications for Wyoming wind projects has taken most observers by surprise. There have been about 100 applications for potential wind farms on federal land, alone, since 2002—and most of those have come in the past three years.

"The pace is staggering," said Sophie Osborn, wildlife biologist with the Council. "And I think a lot of people don't realize it."

Earlier this year, Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal said that the push for wind energy development is coming to Wyoming "with a gold rush pace." And more concerning, he said, is that it's coming with a "gold rush mentality."

"Seemingly every acre—sage-grouse core areas, private, state, and federal lands, important viewsheds and otherwise—is up for grabs in the interest of 'green, carbon-neutral technologies' no matter how truly 'brown' the effects are on the land," Freudenthal warned.

In response to these kinds of concerns, **the Wyoming Outdoor Council has created a team of staff members whose goal it is to get out ahead of the next energy boom**, and to offer meaningful leadership on the ground.

"We've worked hard to develop the expertise, and the means, to engage effectively with decision makers," said Laurie Milford, executive director. "And we're now in a position to help ensure that we make strides as a nation toward curbing climate change, without sacrificing Wyoming's wildlife and most cherished landscapes."

## Where we stand

The Wyoming Outdoor Council supports wind energy development because **it helps reduce emissions** including greenhouse gasses, mercury, particulates, and other types of air pollution that can be harmful to people and can diminish visibility over Wyoming's much-loved landscapes.

Wind is currently one of the most viable **alternative energy** sources, and the Council hopes Wyoming wind will help provide the nation with a domestic source of clean, renewable energy.

As a guest on the PBS show *Wyoming Perspectives* earlier this year, Milford said: "We just need to keep in mind that wind energy, like any industrial development, has the potential to create site-specific problems for Wyoming's wildlife. Our hope is that we can all work together to make good decisions about where we put these wind turbines."

## Reasons not to rush

Although wildlife biologists already know that a poorly placed wind farm can kill large numbers of birds and bats—and scientists are fairly certain that industrial-scale wind farms will lead to declines in sage-grouse populations (see page 7)—it's still anybody's guess as to how other animals will respond.

**"We're now in a position to help ensure that we make strides as a nation toward curbing climate change, without sacrificing Wyoming's wildlife and most cherished landscapes."**

—Laurie Milford, executive director

"We really don't know yet how these wind farms might affect Wyoming's big game, for example," Osborn said. "Will wind turbines change movements and affect pronghorn, elk, or deer? Will turbines displace these animals from crucial seasonal ranges? We need good research on the potential impacts of turbines on Wyoming's wildlife to better inform our placement of wind farms."

For this, and for many other reasons, most non-industry observers in Wyoming—including lawmakers, state game managers, and federal land administrators—have reached the same conclusion: It could be a very big mistake to rush into large-scale wind energy development in Wyoming without a good plan, and without considering all of the possible ramifications.

The Council is now engaging on a daily basis in the planning processes for wind farms, with very specific goals in mind.

The Wyoming Outdoor Council has developed a set of 'best management practices' for developers, in order to encourage wind energy companies to site farms appropriately—and even to site individual turbines appropriately—and to do other things in order to limit impacts on wildlife.

## What's at stake

In the wake of the recent oil and gas boom, Wyoming's response to wind energy will likely determine whether populations of sage-grouse finally begin to stabilize, or whether they and other animals are pushed to the brink of extinction and listed, out of necessity, as threatened or endangered species.

The wind resources best suited for energy development in Wyoming are found, in general, in the central and eastern parts of the state. Wind developers face relatively few environmental conflicts in southeastern Wyoming. However, potential problems are more likely on the sagebrush steppe habitats that dominate south-central Wyoming, where much of the development pressure is currently focused.

While many residents traditionally hold Wyoming's forests and mountain ranges in higher esteem than they do its high-desert basins, there is growing appreciation amongst Westerners for the sagebrush sea, and its importance in supporting vital, yet increasingly threatened, habitats. **The sagebrush ecosystem is considered by scientists as one of the most imperiled in the U.S., with more than 350 plant and animal species at risk of local or regional extinction.**

Neil Rodgers, a wildlife film producer based in Casper, has created a series of educational films for Wyoming PBS on the state's rich biodiversity.

"The sagebrush steppe is such a marvelous place," Rodgers said. "I'll never forget one time I was out at [a sage-grouse mating ground in the Shirley Basin] to get footage of sage-grouse strutting and doing their displays, and ... there was a feeling in the air there that was so magical; it just created a sense that this is unlike anywhere on earth, right here in Wyoming."

*continued on page 4*

Most people are surprised to learn just how many creatures—aside from the sage-grouse—rely on the sagebrush steppe for survival, Rodgers noted.

Osborn agrees.

“Pronghorn also rely on this ecosystem year-round,” she said. “As do other animals that are entirely dependent on sagebrush habitats for their survival, including the pygmy rabbit, Brewer’s sparrow, sage thrasher, sage sparrow, sagebrush vole, and sagebrush lizard. Overall, nearly 300 bird species, 87 mammal species, and a host of reptile, amphibian, and fish species are associated with sagebrush habitats in Wyoming. When you look closely, you realize there’s a lot at stake when we talk about developing wind farms in this state, so we have to make informed decisions.”


Wind farms are least harmful to wildlife when they are sited in already-developed or heavily fragmented landscapes. **Where wind projects are proposed in less developed**

**habitats, many decision makers and biologists in Wyoming have increasingly come to agree on some basic tenets that wind development should follow in order to avoid major damage to the ecosystem.**

Most legislators and wildlife managers now concur that **wind farms must be kept out of sage-grouse core areas.**

Otherwise the species’ long-term survival could be threatened. Doing so also will help protect other vulnerable sagebrush species.

There is growing recognition among legislators and land managers that they should encourage wind development in the eastern part of the state, where there are fewer environmental conflicts, and discourage it in more sensitive wildlife habitats in other parts of the state.

“Out of necessity, these wind farms will need to be sited in places where they are going to do the least harm—and once they are put in place, there are things developers can and should do to make them less harmful to wildlife,” Osborn said. 



Sage Thrasher

## Proposed wind projects, by the numbers:

- The federal Bureau of Land Management in Wyoming has fielded **about 100 applications** for potential wind farm developments over the last few years.
- The **BLM’s Rawlins field office had 30 applications** for potential wind projects in 2008 alone.
- Although unlikely, if all of the applications were approved and developed, wind farms could cover an estimated **1 million acres of public land**—and perhaps another **750,000 to 1 million acres of private land** in Wyoming.

## TRANSITIONS

### Arrivals:



**Janice H. Harris** of Laramie joined the board in June. She received her bachelor’s degree from Stanford University in 1965 and her Ph.D. from Brown University in 1973, when she and her husband Duncan Harris moved to Wyoming to join the faculty of the University of Wyoming in the department of English. At UW, Janice was an award-winning professor, published widely in her field of modern fiction. She held administrative positions within the College of Arts and Sciences, and served as chair of the English department and the Women’s Studies program. She also chaired the Wyoming Council for the Humanities in 1982-1983. In 2004-2005 she spent a year in Japan as a visiting professor of literature. Janice retired from the university in May 2008. Upon retirement she has sought to serve Wyoming as it faces the challenges of the

21st century, and the Wyoming Outdoor Council seems an ideal focus for her, she said, because of its emphasis on balance and collaboration.

**Nathan Maxon** of southwest Wyoming joined the staff in October as our energy and public lands fellow. He holds a bachelor’s degree in wildlife and fisheries biology, as well as a law degree, both from the University of Wyoming. Nate worked as a legal intern for the Council during the summer of 2008. Prior to



his legal studies, Nate worked primarily as a field biologist, spending time with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. As a biologist, Nate worked with rare amphibians, a variety of birds, and several mammal species in Wyoming, Oregon, Montana, and Alaska.

**Jamie Wolf** joined the staff in November as outreach coordinator. After graduating in May 2009 from the University of Wyoming with a dual bachelor’s degree



in international studies and environment and natural resources, she aspired to use her education and experiences to give back to the state that has given so much to her. Jamie is from Worland, and grew up hiking, camping, fishing, and exploring the great outdoors. As a UW student, she dedicated much of her time to leadership and civic engagement, and she worked hard to improve the sustainability and environmental stewardship of the campus. She is fascinated by the relationships that individuals and communities have with their natural environments, and is excited to connect people to the outdoors and remind them of why Wyoming is so special.

# Your membership at work

A few highlights from 2009

## Working to finish the job on the Wyoming Range

**MORE THAN HALF** of the contested oil and gas leases in the Wyoming Range were rescinded this fall, much to the appreciation of conservationists, hunters and anglers, Wyoming residents, and elected officials.

The Wyoming Outdoor Council had worked for nearly four years to get these leases rescinded.

This August—during a celebration for the passage of the widely popular Wyoming Range Legacy Act—the federal Bureau of Land Management announced it had rescinded 24,000 of the nearly 45,000 acres of contested oil and gas leases on the Bridger-Teton National Forest in the Wyoming Range.

“This is a huge deal,” said Lisa McGee with the Council. “This is a really positive step toward accomplishing what we all want to accomplish, which is the cancellation of all of the remaining leases.”

McGee and others—including the governor’s office—have long argued that none of the contested oil and gas leases should have been issued in the first place.

*For more information, including an in-depth explanation of the history of these leases, visit [wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org](http://wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org).*

## Safeguarding the Jack Morrow Hills

**THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT** had intended to offer 8,000 acres of oil and gas leases in the iconic Jack Morrow Hills area in Wyoming’s Red Desert during a 2009 oil and gas lease sale.

We and our coalition partners convinced the BLM to withdraw the five parcels.

The Jack Morrow Hills area is a vast 620,000-acre undeveloped expanse of high-desert sagebrush. It is home to some of the most intact segments of the Oregon, California, Mormon, and Pony Express pioneer trails, as well as vital habitat for large herds of mule deer, pronghorn and elk, and thus is a popular hunting area. It is also a stronghold for the sage-grouse.

“Given the wide range of special values and the importance of the resources in the Jack Morrow Hills, we didn’t think the BLM should have engaged in leasing in this area, and we’re happy the agency ultimately agreed,” said Bruce Pendery, program director of the Council. “There are more than 13.5 million acres of federally owned minerals already under lease in Wyoming and there were 263 other lease parcels available in this lease sale alone, so we did not think holding back on leasing the 3,000 or so acres in one of our heritage landscapes was going to harm oil and gas development efforts.”

## Protecting Adobe Town

**THE BLM HAD PLANNED TO AUCTION OFF NEARLY 15,000** acres of oil and gas leases during its December 2009 sale for the beloved Adobe Town area of the Red Desert—but the agency pulled all of the proposed parcels in response to protests from the Outdoor Council and others.

The pulled leases would have fallen within a citizens’ proposed wilderness area. The sections would also have been on a landscape recently designated “very rare or uncommon” by the state of Wyoming.

“Adobe town is one of Wyoming’s most impressive jewels,” said Laurie Milford, executive director of the Wyoming Outdoor Council. “It’s an oasis for wildlife and recreation, and it’s a place that we need to make sure we preserve for our children and grandchildren.”

*For more information about Adobe Town and what makes it one of Wyoming’s heritage landscapes, visit [wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org](http://wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org).*

## Big Council, Big Influence

**THE WYOMING OUTDOOR COUNCIL** is growing—not just in membership, but in influence. We have 12 staff members covering the state, working every day to protect Wyoming’s environment and quality of life. We started with just a handful of members back in 1967, grew to 500 after 20 years, and today we are 1,300 members strong. Our goal is to grow to more than 2,000 members by 2011. Why? Because in terms of membership, size matters. And when thousands of supporters stand behind our staff, people listen.



*“I joined the Outdoor Council in March. My parents are new members, and my husband is too. Wyoming is our home, and we take heart in the fact that the Council is looking after the places and the wildlife that mean so much to us.”*

**—Rebecca Biles**  
*New member, 2009*

**Please keep your membership current, and make sure that wherever we go, the room is crowded. Join today!**

## Working for wildlife in the Cody area

**WE SUCCEEDED** in getting the BLM to defer leasing on nearly 1,500 acres in a 2009 oil and gas lease sale for the Cody region. The parcels in question are adjacent to the Shoshone National Forest in important habitat for moose, mule deer, elk, bighorn sheep, grizzly bears, and wolves. 🐾

# New oil well threatens the nation's first national forest

BY LISA MCGEE

**U**NTIL RECENTLY the Shoshone National Forest was one place in Wyoming that seemed relatively safe from oil and gas development. With no active wells on the forest, and only a handful of existing, long-suspended leases, new drilling appeared unlikely.

Unfortunately, the Shoshone now seems ready to approve a company's decade-old application to drill on the national forest outside of Dubois. This would be the first well drilled on the forest in more than twenty years, and it could authorize four drill sites of unlimited size and an unlimited number of wells from those sites in a currently undeveloped area. It would also require the clear-cutting and leveling of several acres of Shoshone National Forest land to make way for new and upgraded roads and a large well pad.

## The Wyoming Outdoor Council believes the Shoshone National Forest deserves better.

This drilling proposal originally came before the Forest Service in 1999 and—due to public opposition and company inaction then and over the last decade—it was never approved and has remained under suspension.

But this past year the Bureau of Land Management urged the U.S. Forest Service to deal with the long-suspended lease, and the Forest Service responded by contacting the company, Hudson Group, LLC, which subsequently expressed a renewed interest in developing the lease.

The proposed oil well was controversial ten years ago and is even more unsettling today. The land in question provides crucial winter and spring habitat for elk, and is on a migration route connecting it to elk summer range in Yellowstone National Park. It also is an area a local wildlife manager referred to as “bear central,” because it provides some of the most important springtime grizzly bear habitat in the Greater Yellowstone area, offering the bears a wide variety of lower-elevation food sources.




Site of the proposed well on the Shoshone National Forest.

This fall, the Forest Service indicated it might opt out of completing a detailed environmental review, claiming the project meets criteria such that it could be “categorically excluded” from review, which would essentially fast-track the approval. Traditionally used for minor administrative actions such as painting a building or mowing a lawn—actions that will have an insignificant effect on the environment—the use of categorical exclusions was expanded under the previous presidential administration. This type of exclusion was adopted toward the end of the last administration, and it would be its first application on any national forest in Wyoming.

The Wyoming Outdoor Council believes the Shoshone National Forest deserves better. The authorization of this kind of industrial development shouldn't be made without the most careful and detailed environmental analysis. **The Shoshone is one of our most treasured national forests, and is one of this country's last, best places for wildlife, biodiversity, and untouched backcountry landscapes.**

Bordering Yellowstone National Park, the Shoshone is the United State's first federally protected national forest, created by an act of Congress in 1891. Some have mused

that if Teddy Roosevelt were to visit the Shoshone today, it would look very much the same to him as it did when he visited the area in the late 19th century. This is a testament to an engaged public that has demanded routinely and passionately that the Shoshone be managed to retain the wild characteristics that set it apart from other forests in this country and around the globe. The Shoshone National Forest is what we at the Outdoor Council refer to as a “heritage landscape.” **Heritage landscapes are places where the wildlife, scenic, historic, cultural, or recreational values are too important to the people of Wyoming—and to the nation as a whole—to sacrifice to industrial development.**

The Council is working to ensure that the Shoshone National Forest remains a place where wildlife continues to thrive and people can go to experience world-class backcountry hiking, camping, hunting, and fishing—not unlike the experiences people had more than a century ago. There are perhaps few better examples of a heritage landscape than the Shoshone National Forest. Visit our website to learn what you can do to make sure the Shoshone remains the wild, backcountry forest America has valued for generations. 



# Wyoming in the lead on sage-grouse ‘core’ areas

**A majority of the nation’s greater sage-grouse now live in Wyoming**

Sage-grouse numbers have been in decline throughout the West for decades, and today 54 percent of the remaining greater sage-grouse in the United States live in Wyoming.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s decision whether to list the sage-grouse as an endangered species will be swayed, at least in part, by the strength and efficacy of Wyoming’s policies toward the bird.

*An in-depth version of this story originally appeared on the new Wyoming Outdoor Council blog. For the full version, including related links and resources, navigate to: <http://www.wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/blog/>.*

**THE LOOMING THREAT** that the greater sage-grouse might be listed as an endangered species spurred Wyoming to adopt a new approach to protecting the celebrated bird.

As a result, the Cowboy State has emerged as the regional leader in re-thinking sage-grouse policies, focusing its conservation efforts on sage-grouse “core” habitat areas.

Following Wyoming’s lead, Montana’s state game agency recently adopted its own “core area” strategy.

There is some disagreement amongst Wyoming’s conservation community about the value of this core area approach.


But Sophie Osborn, wildlife biologist with the Council, said although the approach has some limitations, she believes Wyoming’s attempt to conserve core sage-grouse habitat might be the West’s best bet for maintaining viable sage-grouse populations,

and for keeping the bird off the endangered species list.

## **Introducing tall structures into a short ecosystem**

Having evolved in open, treeless habitat—in what some refer to as the “sagebrush sea”—sage-grouse show a strong aversion to vertical structures. Tall objects do not exist in the bird’s natural surroundings, and they can be used as perches by raptors that prey on grouse.

Sage-grouse populations have declined where trees, transmission lines, and oil and gas development have encroached on their habitat. In addition, grouse have been eliminated from habitats fragmented by roads and other forms of development.

Given these facts—coupled with the threat that sage-grouse could be listed as an endangered species absent a robust regulatory mechanism—the wind industry will have to focus for now on developing wind farms in areas with few or no sage-grouse, such as in the eastern portion of the state. 

BY CHRIS MERRILL

Jeff Vanuga




## **Winter Wander in the Big Horn Basin: Come Join Us!**

**JOIN THE WYOMING OUTDOOR COUNCIL** on a one-day wintertime tour to explore some of the wonders of the Big Horn Basin.

The Winter Wander is tentatively scheduled for late January, mid February, or early March, depending on the weather and snowpack, so stay tuned for more details.

We’ll begin with a visit to the Legend Rock Petroglyph Site, a sacred area in the Big Horn Basin 30 miles northwest of Thermopolis. The rock is adorned with hundreds of Native American drawings linked to numerous tribal cultures dating back thousands of years. To help us better understand the site, an expert will accompany us.

Next we’ll explore the 150,000-acre LU Ranch on Grass Creek. There will be a tour featuring the history, ecology, wildlife (including wolves and grizzlies), recreational opportunities, mineral development, and fire ecology of the land. We’ll lunch at the on-site 4-H camp, where an expert from the federal Bureau of Land Management will speak and answer questions about the ongoing process to revise the Big Horn Basin’s overarching management plan for federal lands.

After lunch—and weather permitting—we will enjoy a brisk cross-country ski/snowshoe loop on the ranch. 

**For more information email Jamie Wolf at [Jamie@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org](mailto:Jamie@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org), or call her at 307-721-7610.**

BY JAMIE WOLF

**Read more about this, including an in-depth explanation of Wyoming’s “core area” strategy for managing sage-grouse at the Wyoming Outdoor Council blog.**

*Once there, you can read more about the Wyoming Outdoor Council’s latest activities.*





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**Space-grouse 'core' areas might be bird's best bet**  
Posted on November 19th, 2012 by admin

**Conservation Next**

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