

WYOMING PUBLIC LANDS INITIATIVE: JOHNSON COUNTY

You can help determine the future of some of our wild local landscapes by applying to participate in the Johnson County advisory committee! Deadline is September 1st.

WHAT IS THE WYOMING PUBLIC LANDS INITIATIVE? The Wyoming Public Lands Initiative (WPLI) is a county-convened process intended to bring together a wide range of stakeholders to collaborate and create federal legislation for public land management. This opportunity will attempt to address management designations for our special landscapes, including “wilderness study areas.” Johnson is one of six counties in Wyoming actively participating in this process.

WHAT ARE WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS? Wilderness study areas, sometimes called WSAs, are special places that, almost three decades ago, were determined to have wilderness character. Only the U.S. Congress can designate wilderness, so after these wild lands were inventoried, they were given the status of “wilderness study areas.” There are 42 of these areas managed by the BLM and three managed by the Forest Service in Wyoming, totaling over 700,000 acres. Because they lack the permanence of formally designated wilderness, their status has been in limbo for years. The agencies manage them to retain their wilderness character until directed by Congress for permanent protection or some other management prescription.

WHY NOT JUST LEAVE THEM THE WAY THEY ARE? The status quo might not be the best option anymore. Wilderness study areas were always an impermanent designation. These lands were never meant to be managed for so many years as wilderness without formal designation—and there are stakeholders in Wyoming who would like to see the question resolved and see a permanent decision. Many of these areas’ wilderness qualities have been threatened by mismanagement and impairment and there’s the threat that Congress could make a decision about their fate without our input.

WHAT CAN WE DO IN THIS PROCESS? There are a range of options that might be considered for these lands. Some stakeholders might like to see all wilderness study areas released, which means they wouldn’t be managed to retain their wild character. Others might like most or all of them to be permanently designated wilderness. Middle ground proposals might be considered too, that could include adjacent lands and have specially designed management prescriptions, or a designation such as a National Conservation Area or National Recreation Area. We believe that in order to be successful in finding win-win solutions, this process may need to look beyond WSAs boundaries to adjacent lands or other county landscapes to explore options.

WHAT IS THE BEST CASE SCENARIO? Stakeholders with diverse interests work together in good faith to create legislation permanently addressing Wyoming wilderness study areas, and to design permanent management for other important landscapes, using a process that is fair, inclusive, transparent, and appropriate for the values in question. We believe it’s possible to create win-win solutions that protect these landscapes and provide certainty for our local communities. **If done right, there is a chance that we could see the first new wilderness designations in Wyoming in more than 30 years and other permanent designations for our special local landscapes.** This could happen only if a bill is crafted that has broad local support from hunting, angling, recreation, business, agriculture and cultural interests, as well as

the support of the conservation and sportsmen community and elected officials. In our minds, that's a goal worth working toward for these special places.

WHAT CAN YOU DO? You can help by getting involved in this process! By participating, you will be able to bring your unique perspective and local knowledge to a diverse table of stakeholders. We can help create federal legislation that could permanently protect some of these areas and design management for others that would conserve their important values. This is a not a chance that comes around often.

HOW DO YOU GET INVOLVED?

- ✓ **You can apply to be a formal representative on the county's Citizen Advisory Committee.** The county is looking for sportsmen, conservation, motorized and non-motorized recreation, agriculture and energy representatives, as well as members of the public. They are interested in recruiting people who know the Gardiner Mountain or North Fork WSAs and you do not have to be a Johnson County resident. They anticipate a one year's commitment. We suggest you check all of the categories that you can represent, including "general public" on the application, which can be found on their website at www.johnsoncountywyoming.org.
- ✓ **You can attend the meetings and field trips of the Committee as a member of the public, and offer your viewpoints.** The county is required to make all meetings public and solicit general public input. Let me know if you want to be alerted to these meetings or fields trips.
- ✓ **Help us build a citizen network that tracks this process.** We need to ensure there's adequate public involvement. Please sign up for our emails and we'll try to keep folks involved.

JOHNSON COUNTY'S WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS:

Gardner Mountain – 6,423 acres

North Fork – 10,089 acres

(Fortification Creek WSA will not be considered under this process yet due to the shared geography with Campbell County.)

NEED MORE INFORMATION? FEEL FREE TO CALL OR EMAIL STEFF KESSLER AT 307-332-7031 x 18; STEPHANIE@WYOMINGOUTDOORCOUNCIL.ORG. WYOMING OUTDOOR COUNCIL, 262 LINCOLN STREET, LANDER WY 82520

THANKS FOR YOUR COMMITMENT TO OUR PUBLIC LANDS!

