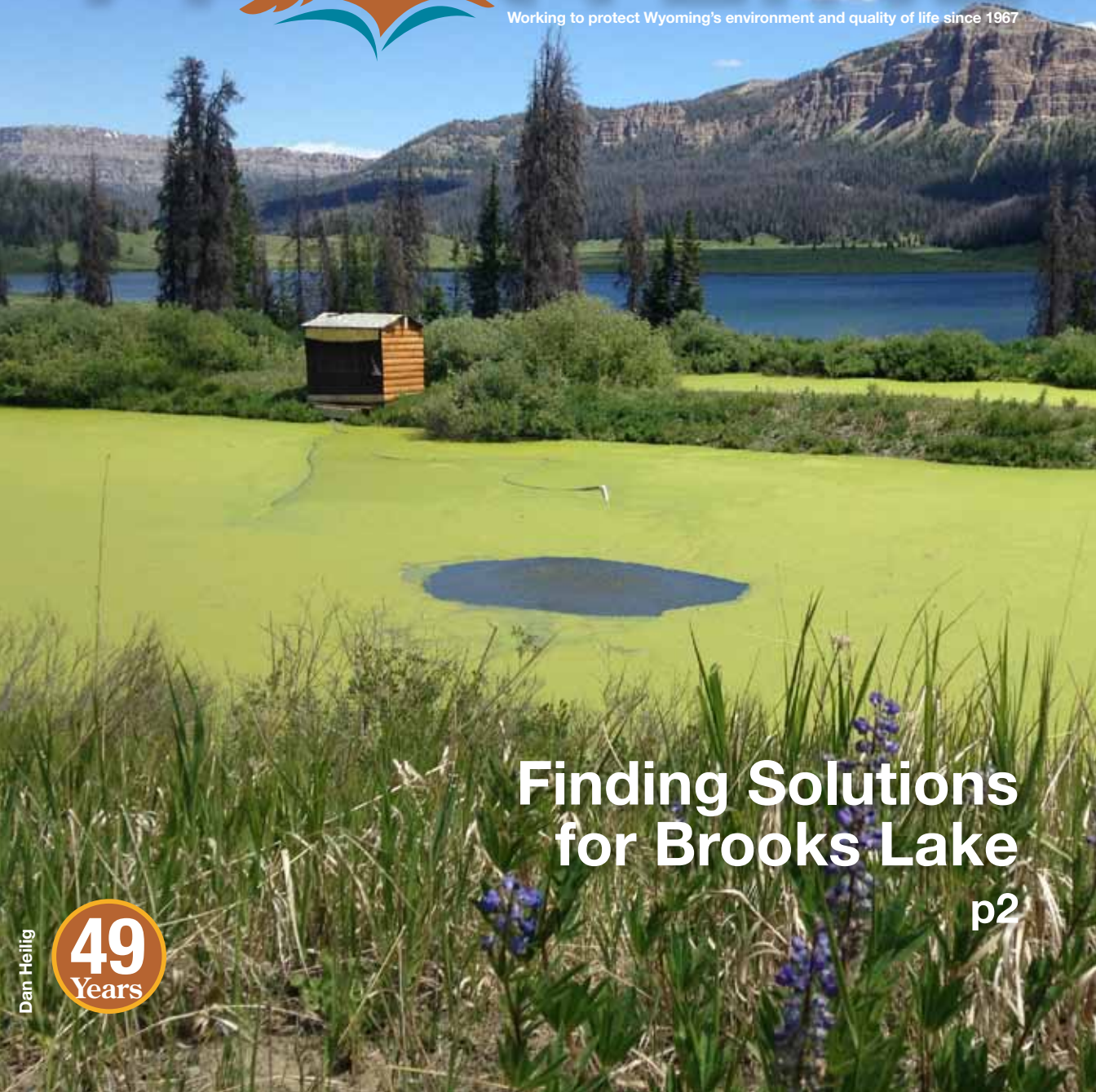


Wyoming Outdoor Council

Summer 2016

FRONTLINE

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



Finding Solutions for Brooks Lake

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Dan Heilig

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Years

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—Dan Heilig

Preventing Another Wind River Fish Kill: Working Together to Solve the Problem



BY CHRIS MERRILL
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

One of the worst fish kills ever documented in Wyoming happened in the Shoshone National Forest in September 2008, on a 10-mile stretch of the Wind River just below Brooks Lake, in the high country of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

According to a Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality investigation, it was an algal bloom in Brooks Lake—fed at least in part by nutrients from the Brooks Lake Lodge & Spa—that caused the die-off.

The Jackson Hole News & Guide, on June 29, 2016, ran an in-depth story about the state’s investigation into the fish kill. Joe Deromedi, a fisheries biologist with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, witnessed the die-off in person.

“The river looked like pea soup,” Deromedi told News & Guide reporter Mike Koshmrl. “It was green in color and people all the way down to Dubois were saying, ‘What’s going on?’ It killed fish all the way down the river. Almost to the Dunoir River, it killed fish in the main stem of the Wind River. . . . At least 10 miles of stream there were dead fish, plus in the lake.”

Whitefish, rainbow trout, and sucker species were among the dead, “suggesting the water had been so completely depleted of oxygen—a condition called anoxia—that in places there was an absolute kill. The dead fish were too numerous to count,” Deromedi said.

It was a tragic event that nobody wants to see happen again, said Dan Heilig, senior conservation advocate with the Wyoming Outdoor Council.

In recent months, Heilig led our own investigation into the Brooks Lake problem, and this summer he worked to bring together state DEQ, Game and Fish Department, and Shoshone National Forest officials along with the management of Brooks Lake Lodge,

to discuss solutions. Heilig said he’s optimistic that Brooks Lake Lodge can help fix the problem.

The lodge, which conducts business under a special use permit from the U.S. Forest Service, currently treats its human waste in open lagoons, which, according to the DEQ, aren’t doing the job of keeping the associated nutrients away from the lake.

The good news, Heilig said, is that it’s a fixable problem and all parties seem *(continued on page 4)*



Dan Heilig

“Dan has been researching and sharing with us, the DEQ, Forest Service, the lodge manager, he’s sharing potential solutions to the suspected problems,” Deromedi said. “He’s looking at what they do in other states and bringing case examples. I think that is a good role for a group like the Wyoming Outdoor Council.”

(continued from page 3) to share the same goals of preventing future algal blooms and fish kills.

“I believe if we continue to come together in good faith—the lodge, the Forest Service, the DEQ, all of us looking to protect the fisheries and water quality in Wyoming—the lodge will be able to come up with an answer,” Heilig said. “There are better options, better technologies available to treat waste. It’s just time for an upgrade. There might be other problems to address as well, but these lagoons should be the first priority.”

Adam Long, the general manager of Brooks Lake Lodge, told the Wyoming Outdoor Council in August that the lodge is investigating several different technologies and approaches to managing the waste, and is committed to addressing the problem.

“That die-off that happened was a major one and it affected a lot of people, including us,” Long said. “Business-wise, the better the water quality for this watershed, the better (it is for the lodge). We don’t want to have a negative impact on the water. We want to make sure that people have good fishing, that our guests have good fishing. People come here to see wildlife, too. We want to make sure we’re doing our part to better the land that we’re using.... Our objective is to get people outside.”

In an interview with the Wyoming Outdoor Council, Deromedi said he has appreciated our solutions-oriented approach to addressing this issue.

“Dan has been researching and sharing with us, the DEQ, Forest Service, the lodge manger, he’s sharing potential solutions to the suspected problems,” Deromedi said. “He’s looking at what they do in other states and bringing case examples. I think that is a good role for a group like the Wyoming Outdoor Council.”

The Outdoor Council will continue to monitor the lodge’s progress and help in any way it can.

“I’m optimistic,” Heilig said. “If everybody follows through on what we’ve committed to doing, we should be able to bring about a real success for Brooks Lake. Sometimes we get the best, most expedient solutions when we solve these problems outside of the legal system.”

The ‘Ghostbusters’ Side of Our Work

This Brooks Lake effort is typical of the everyday work the Wyoming Outdoor Council does, yet we don’t always have a chance to report about it to members.

“When we talk about our work, we tend to focus on the big successes, the big vision of the organization, big accomplishments, and that makes sense,” said Gary Wilmot, the Wyoming Outdoor Council’s executive director. “We don’t want to spam people with too many emails, too much information, stuff



Amber Wilson

“Amber might very well have helped the community save Lander’s recycling program. She did yeoman’s work getting good information out to people, researching technical options, hammering out ideas with the waste management folks, and really bringing the community together to come up with solutions—ways we could feasibly keep the recycling program running.”

that is hyper-local. But there’s this other side of our work—this kind of Ghostbusters role that we play—where the alarms sound, maybe something bad happens . . . we’re constantly responding throughout the state, showing up, helping people and local communities take care of problems big and small.”

Other recent examples of this include an ongoing effort to save Lander’s recycling program, which was on the chopping block, and swift work to help Saratoga residents advocate that their town’s leaders come up with a better plan to deal with sewage (a plan that would not let the sewage seep through a diffuser pipe into a Blue Ribbon fishery, as proposed).

“There are lots of these kinds of examples,” Wilmot said. “Look at what (staff member) Amber (Wilson) did in the last few months. She might very well have helped the community save Lander’s recycling program. She did yeoman’s work getting good information out to people, researching technical options, hammering out ideas with the waste management folks, and really bringing the community together to come up with solutions—ways we could feasibly keep the recycling program running. This kind of work is not on the same scale as statewide air quality, or disclosure of fracking fluids, but it’s important. And it’s part of what this organization has always done.”

The Wyoming Outdoor Council was originally founded by Tom Bell and a handful of other visionaries to be a “coordinating” council, a group that would bring together other groups, citizens, and communities, in the name of conservation.

“That coordinating role continues today,” Wilmot said. “Even though our membership numbers and staff have grown—and our biggest goals might have gotten bigger—we still pay attention to the smaller but essential issues that affect Wyoming’s environment and quality of life.” 🏞️

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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Please connect with us on facebook and go to our website to sign up for electronic communications if you haven’t already. It’s the best way to stay informed about all of our work.

Message From the Director

The Changing Context of Our Work



BY GARY WILMOT
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Three years ago this summer we were working to create what would become our current 5-year strategic plan. The context of our work back then had everything to do with booming energy production in Wyoming.

Today, as this *Frontline* goes to press, coal companies that operate in Wyoming have declared bankruptcy. Natural gas prices have tanked, and the huge fields such as Jonah and the Pinedale Anticline now belong to private equity firms. Oil prices remain too low for much feasible development in Wyoming, most of the rigs have left the state, and coal and oil and gas companies have let thousands of workers go.

The revenues flowing to our state government have plummeted, and the Legislature, the governor, the University of Wyoming, community colleges, K-12 schools, counties, cities, hospitals, libraries—they're all trying to deal with larger and larger predicted shortfalls.

And, like clockwork, some legislators are bandying about the same old objectionable ideas: taking over and selling off public lands, turning Wyoming into the nation's destination dump for nuclear waste, and clearcutting our national forests.

The people of Wyoming have seen this all before. Such is life in a state that has no income tax and that relies on energy revenues and severance taxes to fund nearly every aspect of its government. And yet, even though the boom and bust cycle is well established in Wyoming, it always seems to take lawmakers and energy companies by surprise. The companies especially appear to believe—even going so far as to insist during the booms—that, for one reason or another, "This time will be different."

But we know better. And the Wyoming Outdoor Council has long argued that our state's overreliance on resource extraction comes at too high a price. The environmental legacy of our most recent boom

includes contaminated groundwater, imperiled wildlife populations, and air pollution rivaling that of our nation's most sprawling cities. Thankfully—and with considerable help from our members—we were able to take steps this time around to remedy some of these problems. But now the inevitable bust has arrived and, predictably, companies are claiming insufficient funds to clean up after themselves and reclaim the land. That leaves the rest of us holding the bag.

Here's the thing. The only way Wyoming will have the bright and stable future its people deserve is if it defends its defining values: open public lands, intact ecosystems, clean air and water, and healthy wildlife populations. The steadfast protection of our natural resources and our proud outdoor heritage will have to be prioritized over short-term economic gains. These are the unique values that have always drawn people to Wyoming, and these are the values that keep people here. Liquidating these assets is not the answer.

You know this. I know this. And with your help, we're working to ensure that our state's leaders know this. Even as our team is keeping an eye on budget cuts, resisting rollbacks on good regulations, and trying to prevent the next bad proposal to make a buck at the expense of our quality of life, we're also looking ahead. We're putting forward solid, workable solutions on a range of issues—from legislation to make residential solar power more feasible to helping build a diverse coalition of Wyoming businesses that can speak to the economic power of protected public lands.

The context of our work may have changed in the last three years, but our commitment to protecting the assets that make Wyoming special has not. I hope you'll join us as we work together to achieve this dream.

Best,

Gary P. Wilmot

You Know There Is a Better Way! Join Us!

The Wyoming Outdoor Council has long worked to bring people together to find real, homegrown solutions to tough problems. And these days, Wyoming is facing some tough problems.

As our economy sags in the wake of an energy boom some lawmakers are seeking a quick fix by paving the way to sell off our treasured public lands. At the same time, they're attacking smart environmental regulations that are in everyone's best interest.

Our members know there are better ways to usher in Wyoming's bright future. One way is by bringing together a wide range of interests to speak with one voice in defense of the

places where Wyoming families have been camping, hunting, fishing, and hiking for generations.

To do this vital work, we need your continued support. If you value Wyoming's clean air and water and if you treasure Wyoming's long, proud outdoor heritage, please join us. Become a member. Make sure your membership is up to date. Spread the word to family, friends, and coworkers and make sure they're members, too.

Together, let's keep building a legacy for Wyoming that we can all be proud of.

Courtesy Cynthia Stevens



Cynthia Stevens, Wyoming Outdoor Council member since 2008 and Tom Bell Legacy Society member

"I support the Wyoming Outdoor Council for many reasons—its mission of conservation, its distinguished history, and its commitment to promoting dialogue and compromise among conflicting points of view. I am especially appreciative of WOC's vision that conservation can only be achieved through discussion, understanding, and compromise. But WOC also stresses that such compromises must be made with integrity and with a focus on stewardship and preservation of our incredible lands and resources. WOC helps us all remember that once these amazing places are gone, we cannot get them back!"



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