



Wyoming Outdoor Council



ANNUAL REPORT

2019

CONSERVATION IN ACTION



LISA MCGEE
Executive Director

A message from the director

2019 BROUGHT ITS SHARE OF THREATS TO CONSERVATION IN WYOMING. Some, unfortunately, were easy to foresee — such as the federal government’s continued effort to scale up oil and gas leasing in irreplaceable wildlife habitat. Others were new and unexpected, like legislative attempts to dismantle the state’s rooftop solar industry or open Wyoming to nuclear waste storage. Regardless, the Wyoming Outdoor Council’s staff of conservation advocates brought their legal, policy and scientific expertise to bear to help safeguard our public lands, wildlife, air, and water.

While there are successes to point to in 2019, **WE’RE ESPECIALLY PROUD TO HAVE CONTINUED TO SERVE AS AN ORGANIZING FORCE** to help build community around public lands and our outdoor way of life in Wyoming. And of remaining true to our mission to support citizens and organizations that are working, in ways big and small, to preserve the things we value most about our state.

WOC held events and attended meetings in



Wyoming communities.

CHEYENNE • LANDER • CASPER
ROCK SPRINGS • SHERIDAN • PINEDALE
JACKSON • GREEN RIVER • DUBOIS
CODY • THERMOPOLIS • GILLETTE • RIVERTON • POWELL
SARATOGA • BASIN • FT. WASHAKIE • FARSON • ATLANTIC CITY
BOULDER • LONETREE

Our achievements in the past year were no accident. **THEY WERE THE RESULT OF DOGGED WORK BY STAFF AND THE PASSIONATE, UNBENDING SUPPORT OF OUR MEMBERS.** Thank you.

At the Outdoor Council, membership means much more than just offering financial support. In this state, aptly described as a “small town with long streets,” it means showing up to public meetings, writing to your legislator, attending community events, educating yourself about issues by reading our publications, or emailing staff members to ask questions. **IT MEANS YOU’VE CHOSEN TO TAKE ACTION.**

The year to come will, no doubt, bring a host of challenges. Some will be predictable, others may take us by surprise. We will face our work within the context of a continuing global pandemic and with a commitment to seeking social justice. With your continued engagement, the Outdoor Council — all of us — will be ready to act.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND EACH OTHER,



“Surfed the Green Wave” with

170 citizens

in Laramie, Casper, and Rock Springs

Co-hosted

161 runners

at the sixth annual Run the Red

Invited

5 storytellers

up on stage to explain why they do what they do for Wyoming

RESPONDING TO EMERGING THREATS: NUCLEAR

MANY IN WYOMING WERE SURPRISED over the summer when the Wyoming State Legislature decided to study, once again, the possibility of bringing nuclear reactor waste, in the form of spent fuel rods, to the state for storage.

This high-level radioactive waste is currently stored at nuclear reactor sites around the country — intended to eventually be transferred to Yucca Mountain in Nevada for permanent underground storage. But after three decades of study, legal battles, and dampening political will, work has halted on the Yucca Mountain project. By allowing “temporary” storage in Wyoming, legislators would have likely made our state the nation’s permanent nuclear waste dump — threatening public safety, tarnishing our image as an outdoor destination, and hobbling future economic diversification — while generating relatively little income for the state.

The Outdoor Council responded by researching the issue, distributing fact sheets and other information to the public and the media, coordinating with partner groups including Wyoming Against Nuclear Dumps and the Powder River Basin Resource Council, and mobilizing members to contact their legislators. We’re happy to report the legislature’s Joint Minerals Committee abandoned the idea in November.

With the state’s revenue outlook continuing to worsen due to changes in fossil fuel markets, we have championed efforts by the legislature to diversify the economy and will continue to do so. However, we aren’t willing to sacrifice public health or the quality of life we enjoy by allowing Wyoming to become the country’s nuclear waste dumping ground.

Federal law requires spent nuclear fuel to be isolated from the environment for

10,000 years

Wyoming rejected

2 previous proposals

to store nuclear waste

The U.S. has spent

more than 50 years

unsuccessfully trying to establish a permanent storage site

WASTE AND THE ATTACK ON RENEWABLES

ANOTHER SIGNIFICANT THREAT THAT CAME OUT OF THE LEGISLATURE during the interim was a pair of bills in the Joint Corporations Committee that would have repealed or significantly degraded net metering in Wyoming.

Net metering is a policy that allows owners of residential-sized renewable energy systems — typically rooftop solar panels — to get credit for feeding their excess power onto the grid. This credit helps offset the customer's utility costs in the future, such as during the winter months when there's less daylight and household power consumption may increase. Solar users still pay monthly utility connection fees, and net metering has no measurable impact on other ratepayers' energy costs or the viability of commercial power plants.

The changes proposed by lawmakers would have drastically reduced this credit, eliminated it altogether, or even charged customers for the power they generated and used themselves. The bills were clearly efforts to kill small-scale renewable energy use by crippling the growing rooftop solar industry along with the incentive for homeowners to invest in the technology.

We confronted this issue head on: organizing stakeholders, holding public meetings, engaging with legislators, and ensuring the members of Joint Corporations heard loud and clear that their constituents had no appetite for this assault on renewable energy — at the expense of families and small businesses. Both pieces of proposed legislation died before the legislature's budget session convened.

Solar energy is the
**fastest
growing job**
in the U.S.

Rooftop solar amounts to
**less than
0.04%**
of the power produced
in Wyoming

Nearly
**900 Wyoming
customers**
have net-metered
systems and
**10 small
businesses**

provide solar
installations in Wyoming

CONTINUING TO DEFEND AGAINST RAMPANT OIL AND GAS LEASING

OIL AND GAS LEASING ON PUBLIC LANDS CONTINUED TO ESCALATE this past year under federal policies that prioritize this use over all others, with high amounts of acreage opened up for leasing and many parcels going for the minimum bid of \$2/acre. In this fire sale, the Bureau of Land Management ignored federal requirements to prioritize leasing outside of core Greater sage-grouse habitat, offered up parcels in mule deer migration corridors and crucial winter range, and further neglected the duty to manage public lands for multiple use: balancing development with recreation, wildlife conservation, cultural and historic resources, and other values.

Outdoor Council staff attorneys filed public comments and protests of quarterly lease sales, advising a judicious approach to development that does not further imperil the habitat of iconic Wyoming species whose populations are already in serious decline. Our concerns have been largely ignored and that's one of the reasons we've sought greater state leadership.

USING COLLABORATION AND SCIENCE TO MANAGE OUR MIGRATION CORRIDORS

OUR DETERMINATION TO ROOT OUT LEASING CONFLICTS HELPED SET THE STAGE for real, state-level protections for big game migration corridors. When Gov. Mark Gordon convened his Migration Corridor Advisory Group in response to rising public concern, we shared key policy advice with the group as they worked to determine how to best safeguard our world-class big game habitat. The group's collaborative, consensus-based efforts led to an executive order detailing how the state will designate and manage migration corridors. A draft of the order was released in December, and Gov. Gordon signed the final version in early 2020.

Going forward, we'll push for strong implementation of the order and science-based, collaboratively-developed strategies to keep big game populations viable.

ENSURING WYOMING'S SAGE-GROUSE LEADERSHIP

IN THE ABSENCE OF FEDERAL LEADERSHIP ON SAGE-GROUSE PROTECTIONS, we worked hard to ensure Wyoming stepped forward and filled that role. While oil and gas leasing of priority sage-grouse habitat continued unabated at the federal level, Gov. Gordon issued a revised sage-grouse executive order which retained all existing protections and emphasized greater efforts to expand carrying capacity of existing habitat to increase bird populations.

The Wyoming Legislature also crafted a bill — which we supported — to codify a compensatory mitigation credit system required by the executive order. This measure successfully passed in the 2020 budget session.

“ I met [WOC conservation advocate] Kristen Gunther in 2019 through Governor Mark Gordon's working group on migration corridors. She listened to my perspective as a landowner, was open minded to solutions that addressed the root cause, and participated in finding a solution.”

— MARISSA TAYLOR,
OWNER OF
LONETREE RANCH

DON'T POISON BOYSEN

As part of a plan by Texas-based Aethon Energy to expand the Moneta Divide oil and gas field, the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality issued a draft permit that would have allowed the company to discharge 8.25 million gallons per day of polluted wastewater into creeks that flow to Boysen Reservoir and the Wind and Bighorn rivers. In making this proposal, the agency relied on a report from a consultant hired by Aethon that claimed this massive discharge of wastewater onto the surface would have no effect on human health or aquatic life in Boysen, and inconsequential impacts further downstream.

The Outdoor Council spent months working with fisheries biologists, hydrologists, and other experts to examine the draft permit and the modeling it was based on. Contrary to what the industry consultants said, we discovered a number of threats to aquatic life in Boysen and its tributaries, to water quality in the Wind River, and to drinking water for the town of Thermopolis.

In May, Outdoor Council staff visited the area in person, where we took water samples and observed black sediment deposits and an acetone-like odor. The DEQ inspected the site at our request, cited Aethon for multiple violations, and eventually revised the permit to cap wastewater discharge at the existing level of 2 million gallons per day.

A planned development will add

up to 4,100

oil and gas wells in the Moneta Divide field

Aethon is already allowed to discharge

2 million gallons

of wastewater per day into creeks, including

908 tons

per month of salts and other pollutants

Polluted water flows

40 miles

to Boysen Reservoir

CELEBRATING THE PUBLIC LANDS COMMUNITY

PUBLIC LANDS ARE THE FOUNDATION of most of our conservation programs, not to mention one of the things that unites all of us as Wyomingites. In the past year we embraced our shared connections more than ever with a host of events around the state. The most important of those was the first-ever Wyoming Public Lands Day, which we celebrated on Sept. 28, 2019. This occasion was the result of a two-year effort by a coalition of interests to pass legislation “in tribute to the importance of public lands in the state, to acknowledge the multiple use of public lands and in recognition of the value of public lands to the state’s economy, open spaces, diversity of mineral, grazing and forestry resources, wildlife and recreational opportunities.”

**THE SPARK — LIVE
STORYTELLING EVENT**
LANDER

**EARTH DAY THE
WYOMING WAY —
CONSERVATION
PROJECT FAIR**
LANDER

BEERS & BILLS
LARAMIE, CASPER,
JACKSON, LANDER

**SURF THE GREEN WAVE —
MIGRATION-THEMED
PUB CRAWLS**
ROCK SPRINGS,
LARAMIE, CASPER

**RUN THE RED
DESERT RACE**
SOUTH PASS

**PARTY FOR PUBLIC LANDS
LEGISLATIVE RECEPTION**
CHEYENNE

ADVOCATING CLEAN AIR IN THE UPPER GREEN

IN THE FIRST THREE MONTHS OF 2019, THERE WERE MANY HIGH READINGS OF GROUND-LEVEL OZONE in the Upper Green River Basin that exceeded public health and federal regulatory standards. Even with operators in the area taking preventative measures, such as rescheduling non-essential maintenance and avoiding vehicle idling, the DEQ later confirmed ozone pollution exceeded federal Clean Air Act standards on 10 days during the season.

Working with our partners in the area, we pushed the DEQ to do more, improve their enforcement and address gaps in emission controls. We were encouraged by their response to prioritize emissions inspections in the Jonah and Pinedale Anticline natural gas fields and work more closely with local residents. We successfully advocated for state funding to restore an additional air quality inspector to the agency's Pinedale office and, with our citizen partners at Citizens United for Responsible Energy Development, pushed for regulation of oilfield wastewater ponds and treatment facilities, which can emit volatile organic compounds that contribute to ozone.

“ CURED has been fortunate to work alongside the Wyoming Outdoor Council on issues related to migration corridors and air quality, as well as efforts to understand and influence the Wyoming legislature. Thanks to WOC's encouragement, suggestions, and outstanding research, we have remained focused and energized on the issues that affect the entire state.”

— JANA WEBER, CHAIR OF CURED

SHARING OUR EXPERTISE

ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS we can move the needle on conservation issues in Wyoming is by working behind the scenes to support citizens and small organizations around the state and to serve as a resource for state and local officials.

Among other efforts in 2019, Outdoor Council conservation advocates co-chaired the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's chronic wasting disease working group, helped the governor's staff interview and hire a new state engineer and water development officer, and provided the DEQ with analysis that helped protect water quality.

FINANCIALS

Program: \$717,416 **Administration & Management:** \$195,070 **Fundraising:** \$181,423*

TOTAL EXPENSES: \$1,203,909

*In addition to these ongoing fundraising expenses, WOC invested \$110,000 in 2019 for comprehensive campaign planning.

WYOMING NEEDS YOU

The generosity and spirit of members like you fuel our work. Thank you! A monthly or annual recurring gift is a great way to increase your impact. Or join the Tom Bell Stewardship Society with a gift of \$1,000/year (just \$84/month). **Another way to support WOC is to spread the word about our work.** If you have friends, family, and colleagues who share your passion for Wyoming's wildlife, public lands, air, and water, please encourage them to learn more about our mission! Gift memberships make meaningful presents all year long. And consider joining the Tom Bell Legacy Society by leaving a gift to WOC in your will, trust, or another form of planned gift. **These legacy gifts help ensure a voice for conservation into the future.** The Wyoming Outdoor Council needs you to help safeguard our wild places and way of life for the next generation!

