

Wyoming Outdoor Council

Winter 2019

FRONTLINE



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

INSIDE:

WORKING TO SAVE WYOMING'S MULEYS

Your Guide to the 2019
Wyoming State Legislature

AND MORE!

A Message from the Director



LISA MCGEE
Executive Director


*Oh, give me a home,
where the buffalo roam,
where the deer and the
antelope play.*

The landscape of the American West has changed dramatically since those lyrics were penned in 1872. But in Wyoming, they still ring true. The vast swaths of open public lands and intact habitat, where wildlife and big game herds can still move freely, are part of what makes our state unique. They're also a big reason why hunters, wildlife watchers, and outdoor enthusiasts of all backgrounds live in and visit Wyoming.

But indiscriminate oil and gas leasing decisions — part of the Bureau of Land Management's "lease it all" policy, which threatens some of this country's last best wildlife habitat — are putting our mule deer herds and Wyoming's way of life at risk. And right now, the only thing keeping that policy in check is western states standing up to demand a respite for the most important habitats.

Unfortunately, Wyoming has chosen a timid approach. Fearful of recriminations from the legislature and the oil and gas industry, our state's wildlife managers have adopted a strategy based not on science (or even a sound understanding of the rights granted to companies upon the sale of a federal oil and gas lease), but rather on hope: that once operators acquire leases inside

Sipping my morning coffee in Alaska while a few thousand caribou amble right through my campsite.



Wyoming Outdoor Council

Founded in 1967, we are a statewide citizen advocacy group, working to protect public lands, wildlife, and clean air and water in Wyoming. We believe conservation is not a partisan issue, and that informed and engaged citizens matter.

262 Lincoln Street, Lander, WY 82520
wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org
307.332.7031 | info@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

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*Sunrise on a lek
revealing birds that
have been drumming
and dancing in the
dark, lighting up the
sagebrush steppe.*

STAFF

LISA MCGEE
Executive Director

DUSTIN BLEIZEFFER
Communications Director

KRISTEN BROWN
Membership Director

CLAIRE CELLA
Creative Content Director

STEFANI FARRIS
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MARY JOYNER GREENE
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KRISTEN GUNTHER
Conservation Advocate

DAN HEILIG
Senior Conservation
Advocate

STEFF KESSLER
Program Director

JOHN RADER
Conservation Advocate

LINDA SISCO
Administrative Coordinator

*Came around a
switchback and
nearly walked
straight into a
couple of black
bear cubs!*

WHAT'S YOUR
MOST MEMORABLE
WILDLIFE ENCOUNTER?

one-of-a-kind migration corridors, they will simply choose to do the right thing, and site energy development at the edges. That's embarrassingly wishful thinking, and we deserve better.

Wyoming decision makers often use the word "balance." They take pride in the notion of balancing oil and gas development with the needs of wildlife and open space. Yet we have repeatedly asked the state to urge the BLM to temporarily set aside just 5 percent of the total acreage from upcoming lease sales until we can be sure development won't happen inside

Wyoming's irreplaceable migration corridors ... and state wildlife managers have repeatedly told us no.

In 2019, the Wyoming Outdoor Council will redouble our efforts to remind state leaders that decisions made today — about wildlife, about public lands, about air and water quality — will affect Wyoming's future for decades to come. To be successful, we'll need your help. Please join us.

Lisa Mitchee

The Outdoor Council is Working for You at the Legislature

The 65th Wyoming Legislature convened its two-month general session on January 8 with many new lawmakers and a new governor. One bill we're excited to support is HB 99, to establish a Wyoming Public Lands Day. This is a declaration of bipartisan values shared by all Wyomingites, and an acknowledgment of the importance of public lands to our state. At press time, we didn't have all the details about upcoming legislation, but as we do every year, we'll support bills that reflect our state's shared conservation and outdoor recreation values, and those that promote good governance.

Many years, we find that we need to defend existing state laws and policies that protect our wildlife and our clean air and water. We'll continue to support the autonomy of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, and advocate the independence and objectivity of the citizen-led Environmental Quality Council. We will ensure the state agencies and bodies tasked with managing and overseeing our natural resources remain independent,

and are adequately funded.

Legislatively, good governance means many things. We'll promote policies that are science-based and appropriate for Wyoming and that avoid legislative micromanagement or politicizing wildlife management or other professional activities. We'll support bills that increase government transparency and accountability, and we will oppose measures that limit free speech or civic participation.

We've already asked members to contact their legislators and ask them to oppose this year's "Crimes Against Critical Infrastructure" bill. As it did last year, this legislation would create a new category of penalties against citizens and groups that exercise their freedom of speech rights in protest of oil and gas and big industry facilities.

We hope you'll participate in this legislative session to support conservation policies in Wyoming. Check out our tips for effective involvement on page 5. And be sure you're signed up for our email alerts so you'll know how and when to chime in! ■

TELL WYOMING LEGISLATORS:

CONSERVATION IS NOT A PARTISAN ISSUE



Image: Nick Knoke

People who live in Wyoming love the outdoors. We spend more time recreating outside than most Americans, and our children spend twice the time outdoors as the average American child. So it's no surprise that protecting our public lands, wildlife, clean air, and clean water is a bipartisan priority among Wyoming voters.

In fact, Wyoming voters are more likely to identify as conservationists today than just two years ago — from 71 percent in 2016 to 80 percent in 2018, according to last year's "State of the Rockies: Conservation

in the West" poll by Colorado College. And they largely agree that protecting Wyoming's natural resources is not in conflict with maintaining a robust energy industry.

Unfortunately, too many lawmakers seem unaware of these widely shared values, and take a more partisan approach to conservation issues. We're asking you to join us in reminding them that Wyomingites — outdoor enthusiasts of every stripe — expect legislators to protect and invest in public lands, healthy wildlife, and clean air and water. ■

Here are some highlights from recent polling we think every Wyoming elected official should know:

89%

of Wyoming voters agree with Gov. Mark Gordon that protecting wildlife corridors does not have to be at odds with Wyoming's energy industry.

77%

of Wyoming voters say that "wildlife are an important part of my daily life."

The outdoor recreation economy in Wyoming generates:

\$5.6 billion in consumer spending annually.

\$1.6 billion in wages and salaries.

\$514 million in state and local tax revenue.

50,000 direct in-state jobs and more jobs than oil, gas, mining, and all extraction combined.

67%

of Wyoming voters support extending air pollution rules to all oil and gas production in Wyoming. Only 24 percent oppose such an extension.

80%

of voters believe public lands in Wyoming support our economy, provide opportunities to hunt, fish, and enjoy the outdoors, and enhance our overall quality of life.

Authors of the 2018 Conservation Policies in Wyoming poll summarized the results simply:

"Wyoming voters express support for a range of conservation policies, and say that conservation of wildlife, water and natural areas helps the state economy and is a legacy they want to preserve for the future."

That's a message we'll make sure our lawmakers hear loud and clear.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

As a small state, Wyoming allows us to have ready access to elected officials and a direct impact on decision making in Cheyenne. Yet even with the best research, compelling arguments, and good relationships, what wins the day is the people standing up for an issue.

EMAILS

• *Avoid form emails, which lawmakers don't read.* Instead, write your own message and speak from personal experience. We suggest three sentences to quickly get attention and convey your concerns:

- 1 Introduce yourself and make a personal connection so the legislator sees you're not writing a form letter. This is as easy as saying, "Hello Rep. Smith, I'm a resident of Casper and a constituent of yours."
- 2 Get to the point. Say what you want them to do and reference the bill number. For example: "I'm writing to ask you to vote no on HB 10, the Crimes Against Infrastructure bill."
- 3 Tell your story, express your values, and (briefly!) state your thoughts. For example, "As a Republican, I see no need for this bill and it's just more unnecessary government interfering in our freedoms and rights."

• *Keep it brief and respectful — always!* Legislators are more likely to want to read your next email! And it's always nice to thank them for their time and service. These folks work very long hours.

CALLS AND VISITS

We sometimes ask members to call legislators during the session. A receptionist will take your message and ensure it is delivered. Just leave your name and your request for how you'd like a legislator to vote. *This gets attention!*

Senate: (307) 777-7711

House: (307) 777-7852

OTHER RESOURCES

Wyoming's Legislative Service Office has excellent resources to help you participate, including a website (www.wyoleg.gov), fact sheets, a database of bills, and live streaming audio. Browse the website, or tune in to a live floor debate!

SIGN UP FOR EMAIL UPDATES

Remember, things change quickly during the session. We make it easy to stay up to date! Sign up for our email alerts and you'll receive all the information you need about upcoming legislation.

Go to wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org and click "Take Action" then "Sign Up."

THANKS FOR PARTICIPATING!

WYOMING MUST DO MORE TO PROTECT MULE DEER MIGRATIONS

Game and Fish officials concede to leasing in migration pathways



DUSTIN BLEIZEFFER
Communications Director

Wyoming has been in the world spotlight since the discovery of the longest known mule deer migration, which runs 150 miles between the northern Red Desert and the Upper Hoback. That such an ancient migration

still exists — despite roads, fences, housing, energy development, and other human activities — is amazing.

And new science is conclusive on two points: mule deer avoid development, and once a route is impeded, the deer don't adapt. Unfortunately, under the new energy dominance policy, the BLM is offering oil and gas leases inside this corridor other crucial wildlife habitat. And unless they hear from state wildlife managers, they'll continue to do so.

The existence of the longest known mule deer migration is something Wyoming can no longer leave to chance. If we allow oil and gas activity here, the loss of this unique pathway will be on us.

Wyoming Game & Fish Department must step up

Wyoming's wildlife is a tremendous part of our outdoor culture and a driver of our statewide economy. Big game hunting alone brings in about \$300 million annually. According to a recent poll from Public Opinion Strategies, an overwhelming majority of all Wyoming voters — 89 percent — agree

with Gov. Mark Gordon that protecting wildlife corridors does not have to be at odds with Wyoming's energy industry.

Even former Interior Sec. Ryan Zinke understood the importance and popularity of protecting big game herds for westerners. Last year, he signed an executive order “to enhance and improve the quality of big-game winter range and migration corridor habitat on Federal lands.”

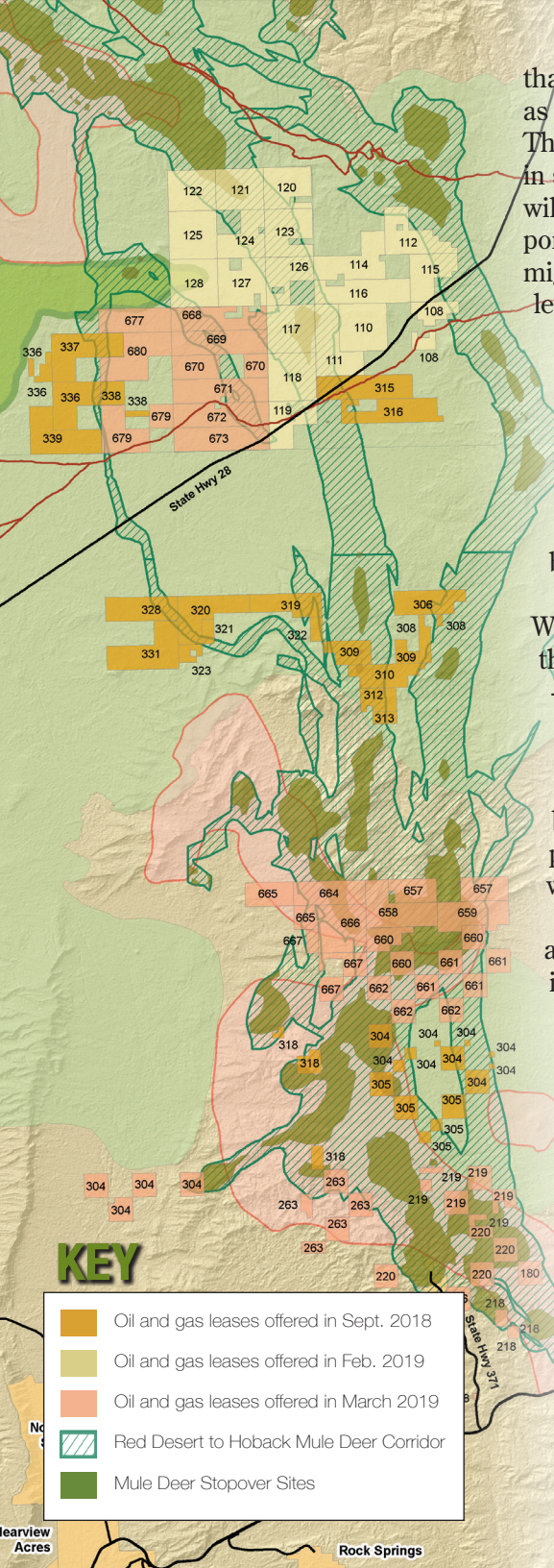
Yet the BLM continues to sell leases inside these habitats.

The thing is, states have the power to push back. When western states have asked the feds to pull oil and gas leases that have been offered in vital big game habitat, we've seen the BLM respond. Last year, the agency pulled more than a quarter of a million acres in Colorado from oil and gas lease sales at the request of state leaders.

And on the few occasions when the WGFD has asked the BLM to defer leasing parcels that fall entirely within a designated migration corridor — a very small percentage of the total number of oil and gas leases being offered in corridors — the BLM has granted its request.

This should be good news. But a state has to believe that the science matters, and then it must have the will to speak up. Unfortunately, that's not what we're seeing in Wyoming. Right now, the WGFD is operating under the flawed premise that if only a *portion* of a particular lease parcel falls within a wildlife migration corridor, there's no threat to our wildlife. But that isn't the case.

The WGFD has developed a “strategy”



that endorses leasing inside migration corridors so long as at least 10 percent of a parcel falls outside the corridor. The rationale — which the WGFD admits is not rooted in science — is based on the hope that energy operators will “do the right thing,” and locate infrastructure in the portion of the lease parcel that’s outside the designated migration corridor. Unfortunately, operators are not legally bound to do so.

Crossing our fingers that private energy companies will do what’s best for our wildlife is no way to manage one of Wyoming’s most important resources. But unless the WGFD finds the will to ask the BLM to pull these leases, blind hope is all we’ve got for now, because there’s no legal way to ensure that energy operators will limit development to outside corridor boundaries.

Even more troubling, when pressed, both the WGFD and the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission — the bodies charged with protecting Wyoming’s wildlife — have said they can’t ask to defer leasing in this tiny portion of Wyoming’s most important big game habitat for fear of retribution from the legislature and the oil and gas industry. This is despite an overwhelming and bipartisan majority of Wyoming voters agreeing that protecting wildlife corridors does not have to be at odds with energy development.

The bottom line is that there is no need to offer oil and gas leases in Wyoming’s migration corridors. Even if every lease that abutted the Red Desert to Hoback mule deer corridor were made off limits tomorrow, millions of acres of public lands are still available to lease — and develop. Wyoming is not so poor that (for as little as \$1.50 per acre — less than a slice of pizza or a cheap cup of coffee) we should give away to energy companies our most crucial big game habitats and the very future of our big game herds.

Working to save Wyoming’s muleys — and how you can help

We’ll continue to review every BLM oil and gas lease sale in Wyoming and file protests when the agency ignores our

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

Learning the ART of advocacy

Citizen advocates converge for WOC's inaugural Conservation Leadership Institute



KRISTEN GUNTHER
Conservation Advocate

On a November evening at the Lander Library, Mike Burd, a sportsman and trona miner from Green River, spoke to a group of 17 students about the value of partnerships. More than a decade ago, when labor union leaders sat down

with hunters and conservationists to discuss potential oil and gas development in the Wyoming Range, they all agreed about the need to protect this special area.

“We all wanted a clean environment, safe places to live, and some places set aside from development,” he said. Despite having wildly different backgrounds and experiences, the key to success, Mike suggested, was finding common ground.

For the students, his advice wasn't just conceptual. This was a session of the Wyoming Outdoor Council's first Conservation Leadership Institute, a free eight-week course designed to introduce aspiring grassroots leaders to the tools of organizing, and to help build stronger connections with one another.

History and goals

WOC's CLI was modeled on a program created by the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance. We tailored the program for Fremont County, bringing in experienced Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho tribal leaders as speakers, recruiting a variety of conservation and outdoor recreation

stakeholders in the region, and distilling lessons from advocacy practices from around the state. CLI introduces emerging advocates to the basics of organizing, from leading a successful meeting to crafting a letter to the editor, and emphasizes community and relationship building, especially within the group.

Our syllabus was made up of eight action-packed weeks covering everything from Wyoming's election laws to effective communications. We also asked each student to workshop a project to test concepts learned in class.

WOC's first CLI class

Lander was ready for a program like CLI — the class filled in a matter of days. The 17 students who enrolled represented a range of experiences, backgrounds, ages, and connections to Wyoming. Some students were new to Lander and wanted to meet like-minded community members; others had deep Wyoming roots and wanted to build skills to support their passions. Their diversity is evident in their array of projects (see some examples on page 9).

The eight weeks were packed with guest speakers and information — covering everything from how to run a Facebook page to tips for approaching legislators about a policy issue.

Guests, too, represented a range of experiences, coming from groups such as the Wyoming Education Association, The Wilderness Society, and the Wyoming Trial Lawyers Association. There was plenty of opportunity for fun, too. Students practiced short, fast pitches before experienced Wyoming lobbyists and learned the basics of campaign planning through a Lord of the Rings framework. (“One does not simply walk into Mordor.” Before setting off to reach a goal, you must analyze the landscape, gather allies, and make a plan of approach.)

One success of CLI 2018 was the connections students made with one another. Their mutual support and friendships will strengthen their projects and their communities into the future. To us, that’s the most valuable lesson: advocacy in Wyoming is all about building relationships and finding common ground. ■

Interested in CLI? We’re planning for 2019! Email Kristen Gunther — kristen@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

WADE LIPPINCOTT, who owns a roofing company and lives in Thermopolis, is forming a collaborative group to conduct recreational planning and development in Hot Springs County.

ERYN PIERCE, NOLS’s art director, is building a grassroots network of local artists to volunteer time to advocacy or nonprofit groups in Fremont County.

SKYLER DIXEY, executive director of the Wind River Native Advocacy Center, wants to enhance the effectiveness of the group’s outreach and programs.

AARON FOSTER, district supervisor of Fremont County Weed and Pest, wants to improve local participation in the “Play, Clean, Go” campaign to reduce the spread of noxious weeds.

LUKE STACY, a Creative Energies employee, is volunteering with the Wyoming Wildlife Federation to expand their Hunters for the Hungry food donation program.



Steff Kessler speaks to the first CLI cohort in Lander.

Image: Claire Cella

MEMBER PROFILE

DAY SCOTT

“When I found out about WOC and what they do, making a difference just seemed easier.”

at NOLS, dinner invitations from nearby campers, and, most recently, to meeting a group of likeminded people eager to learn the ins and outs of advocacy.

Last month, Day graduated from WOC’s inaugural

Conservation Leadership Institute. Of everything she learned, she was especially interested to discover that nearly all the presenters over the eight-week course highlighted one theme as the basis of successful advocacy: relationship building. That term is used a lot these days, “but it really is the basis of life,” she said. “It’s so important. This is it!”

Day moved to Lander last spring, after taking a class with the Wilderness Medicine Institute of NOLS. She’d been living in L.A. for more than a decade, where she’d worked as a technical writer for a major social media company and then as a naturalist and manager of environmental education and outreach for a state ecological reserve. She also spearheaded a wetlands restoration project and, most recently, had started an environmental-based



Image: courtesy Day Scott



STEFANI FARRIS
Associate Director

Listen to naturalist, outdoor educator, and new WOC member Day Scott talk about her journey from Los Angeles to Wyoming and it’s clear she’s hardwired to forge connections and build community.

In the six months since moving to Lander, Day has become a regular volunteer and photographer with a pet rescue organization, helped out at the farmers’ market, served as a wilderness first responder for local events, and had her wildlife photography featured on the Only in Wyoming media company’s Facebook page. The connections she’s made have led to continuous house- and dog-sitting opportunities, a marketing job

summer camp for kids. She enjoyed her work, but needed a change from the crowds and the pace.

She found that change in Wyoming. Soon after coming to Lander, Day drove through Sinks

Canyon and up to a lake on the Shoshone National Forest. “I literally cried. I thought, how can this exist here? It’s just here and I have access to it. And how can people in L.A. survive and be happy when they don’t have this?”

Day admitted that in the beginning she didn’t know what to expect from Lander. She was nervous about how she’d be perceived as a black woman in a predominantly white small town. “At first, I got a lot of stares,” she said. But she pushed through the discomfort of being alone, and began making friends

“I literally cried. I thought, how can this exist here? It’s just here and I have access to it. And how can people in L.A. survive and be happy when they don’t have this?”

and connections. Soon, word was out that she needed a place to live, and one thing led to another. “Someone let me stay at their house who didn’t even know me — turned over their

dogs and house to me ... that gave me such a sense of community and total trust. And that’s happened here more than once.”

That sense of community, coupled with Wyoming’s awe-inspiring landscapes, have made Day feel she’s found her home here. “I feel like I need Lander in my life,” she said. As for why she joined WOC, she said that after belonging to bigger, national groups, she was excited to be part of a local, statewide conservation organization. “When I found out about WOC and what they do, making a difference just seemed easier.” ■

MULE DEER MIGRATIONS

concerns. We’ll keep testifying at Game and Fish Commission meetings, respectfully urging this body, charged with protecting Wyoming’s wildlife, to heed the science and take a stronger stand. We’ll keep meeting with WGFD leaders — and with the governor and his policy staff — to pore over maps and advocate better strategies. We’ll work with with partners, sportsmen and women, and citizens around the state to get the word out.

And we will continue to weigh all our options, including filing a legal challenge.

That’s not a step we’d take lightly, but it’s one we’ll consider if it means protecting the future of Wyoming’s mule deer.

Wildlife and the vast open lands they need to survive define us in Wyoming. The Wyoming Outdoor Council is more committed than ever to work on behalf of Wyomingites to defend these irreplaceable resources and protect the state’s migration corridors for future generations. ■



**Your membership
is your
VOICE.**

Join us.



Wyoming Outdoor Council

wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/member