

STEFF'S SPRING UPDATE

Dear Friends,

It's only April, but we're already seeing some great conservation outcomes for Wyoming — including the creation of the first-ever Wyoming Public Lands Day! This new state holiday, set for the fourth Saturday in September, is the result of lots of hard work from many partner groups, citizens, and lawmakers — and is a testament to the incredible value of public lands for Wyoming's economy and way of life. Thanks to everyone who helped make it happen. We look forward to celebrating with you this fall!

Meanwhile, we've organized some fun events this spring to celebrate Wyoming's world-class mule deer migrations and to build support for their protection. (Get ready to don your felt antlers and take part in a pub crawl — er, migration.) There's lots to do in the next few months — and lots of ways you can join us. We're so grateful for your membership!



Image: Karlee Provenza

Conservation Wins at the 2019 Wyoming State Legislature

Wyoming Public Lands Day wasn't the only good news out of Cheyenne this session. We also successfully advocated for a number of bills that are good for wildlife, including better regulation of hunting methods, and increasing and ensuring funding for the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust. Some of our "wins" are incremental: we saw a net-metering bill gain traction this session and while it didn't ultimately pass, it's been taken up as a interim topic — evidence of the growing support for rooftop solar in Wyoming. And we're pleased to let you know that every bill WOC lobbied against was defeated, including legislation that sought to chill

free speech, especially protests against oil and gas operations. Thanks to everyone who helped us this year. The work isn't over, though, so make sure you're signed up for our email alerts so you'll know how to weigh in on legislative issues throughout the year. And if you haven't already, please check out the great reports from our stellar legislative interns, which are posted on our website. A few highlights from their experiences are below.

“ The lessons I learned through my brief internship will have lasting impacts on my life and my career. I found joy and invigoration in advocacy that I plan to take with me in my future.”
— Mary Grace Bedwell, 2019 legislative intern

“ This experience allowed me to explore policy in the context of the legislative session, which is grounded in recognizing that policy work also happens outside of session.”
— Jason Hill, 2019 legislative intern

“ I am encouraged by the experience, and better prepared to take part in policy work, both as a scientist and as a citizen.”
— Rhiannon Jakopak, 2019 legislative intern

Other Program Updates

Watchdogging Air, Water, and Wildlife Threats from Drilling

We're keeping a close eye on massive drilling projects underway in Wyoming this year — especially Aethon Energy's plan to drill 4,250 new wells in the Moneta Divide, and another group of operators' plan to drill 5,000 new wells in Converse County. Both projects pose significant air and water quality threats, and we're independently evaluating them. We're particularly troubled by Aethon's proposal to dump eight million gallons a day of "produced" water — which includes fracking chemicals not disclosed to the public — into Badwater Creek in central Wyoming. The polluted water would flow into Boysen Reservoir, a popular recreation area, which then feeds the Wind River and Bighorn River — Blue Ribbon trout fisheries, municipal drinking water sources, and the lifeblood of agricultural irrigation in the Bighorn Basin. We've asked the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality to allow more time for public comment so we can analyze the many water quality impacts to this important Wyoming resource. Stay tuned.

Good News in Southern Wyoming!

We recently learned that an oil and gas operator abandoned plans to drill more than a dozen wells in the Little Snake River Valley near Baggs. The investment firm-backed Greater Rocky Mountain Resources gained permits to drill federal leases in some of the most important and sensitive wildlife habitat in the state. The targeted area included mule deer crucial winter range and migration corridors, and priority habitat for Greater sage-grouse. This picturesque and wildlife-rich area of the state should never have been leased in the first place. We worked for years with local landowners and partner organizations to advocate for better wildlife protections, and we're happy to report a very big win for Wyoming and its wildlife!

'Surf the Green Wave' and Celebrate Big Game Migrations!

Come *Surf the Green Wave* with us this spring in celebration of Wyoming's awe-inspiring mule deer migrations. Be on the lookout for invitations to 'surf' events in Lander, Rock Springs, Laramie, and Casper, where we'll discuss Wyoming's migration

corridors as well as threats to our migratory herds, and rally support to protect vital habitats. Bring your friends, because we have a few fun surprises in store. Our first event is April 22 in Lander at the Coalter Loft — we'll celebrate Earth Day the Wyoming way! Next, we'll be at Square State Brewing in Rock Springs on May 16. Then we'll visit Casper and Laramie. (Watch for dates because we'll be reenacting a migration — a pub crawl — and offering prizes along the way!)



Image: Flickr Creative Commons: Wyoming Migration Initiative/University of Wyoming

Moving the Needle on Wildlife Protections

Wyoming is seeing unprecedented levels of oil and gas leasing: approximately 1.6 million acres of public lands have been offered for lease since January 2018, including in migration corridors, crucial winter range, and other sensitive wildlife habitat. We're glad to see the state start moving in the right direction on this issue: the Wyoming Game and Fish Department has begun weighing new science to help inform its recommendations for oil and gas lease deferral. This has already resulted in BLM responding to Game and Fish recommendations to defer all parcels in migration stopover sites. Plus, the Office of State Lands and Investments pulled all oil and gas parcels in the Red Desert to Hoback migration corridor from its March 2019 lease sale. We've been advocating steps like these for months, and we'll continue to push state and federal agencies to prioritize the protection of wildlife, sensitive landscapes, and habitat.

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