



Wyoming Outdoor Council

ANNUAL REPORT

2018



HOLDING THE LINE FOR WYOMING



LISA MCGEE
Executive Director

A message from the director

2018 WAS A TOUGH YEAR FOR CONSERVATION IN WYOMING. Our experienced policy, legal, and science staff worked hard to hold the line against bad policies and proposals out of Washington.

Federal plans that were cause for celebration a few years ago — plans to conserve sage-grouse habitat, for instance, or to require oil and gas companies to fix leaky infrastructure in an effort to curb greenhouse gas emissions — went on the chopping block. In their place: decisions from the White House that deny climate change, prioritize oil and gas leasing over all other uses of our public lands, and seek to undo smart, cost-effective air pollution controls.

IN WYOMING, THE STAKES OF SHORTSIGHTED ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES ARE HIGH.

Because nearly half our acreage is public land — offering some of the best wildlife habitat and recreational access anywhere — and because we rely so heavily on revenues from mineral extraction on these public lands, bad federal policies disproportionately affect us. In 2018 alone, more than 1.5 million acres of public land in Wyoming were offered for lease for oil and gas development — in some of our most vital wildlife habitats.

The Wyoming Outdoor Council worked with partners throughout the year and fought successfully to hold on to as many good aspects of existing federal plans as we could. But we did so knowing that national policies are always vulnerable to the pendulum swings of D.C. politics.

THAT'S WHY OUR ONGOING WORK TO FIND SOLUTIONS AT THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVELS IS SO IMPORTANT. It's also why we expanded our civic engagement program in 2018 and sought to share the tools of effective advocacy with more Wyomingites than ever. Wyoming's small population, a shared love of our wild backyard, and the relative accessibility to powerful decision makers make it possible to effect real change here.

WE'RE PROUD OF THE CONSERVATION WINS WE HELPED ACHIEVE AT HOME. We worked with partners and the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality to secure strong, statewide air pollution controls, and we held the DEQ to account for its flawed model that allowed for higher pollution levels in numerous rivers and streams where people recreate. We successfully promoted bills in the state legislature that supported wildlife, government transparency, and economic diversification. And we worked with citizens and the Game and Fish Department to ensure that, even in the face of an "energy dominance" mandate, vital habitat — like big game winter range and migration corridors, and sage-grouse core areas — remains intact and functional.

THIS IS THE ESSENTIAL, HANDS-ON ADVOCACY THAT MAKES AN IMMEDIATE DIFFERENCE RIGHT HERE IN WYOMING. And it's your financial support — along with your willingness to take action when we need you — that makes these homegrown efforts possible. **THANK YOU.**

In December, our volunteer board of directors finalized an ambitious strategic plan for the next five years. I invite you to take a look on our website. **MEANWHILE, OUR TEAM OF POLICY, LEGAL, AND SCIENCE EXPERTS WILL KEEP WORKING AROUND THE CLOCK TO MAKE SURE THE OUTDOOR COUNCIL REMAINS YOUR VOICE FOR CONSERVATION IN WYOMING — AT EVERY LEVEL — FOR YEARS TO COME.**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa", is positioned in the lower right corner of the page. The background of the entire page is a faded, high-angle photograph of a vast, rolling landscape with yellowish-brown hills and a hazy horizon.

GROWING THE NEXT GENERATION

CONSERVATION DEPENDS on informed, engaged citizens, and we worked hard in 2018 to help more Wyoming citizens learn the ins and outs of grassroots advocacy.

We launched our inaugural conservation leadership training in Lander, an intensive eight-week course that introduced 17 aspiring citizen advocates to the tools of effective organizing and campaign planning. Students of all ages and backgrounds learned everything from how to run a Facebook page to the best strategies for approaching legislators about a policy issue. The program was one of our most popular, and we're eager to develop it in the future.

As part of our new legislative internship program, we also brought three citizens to Cheyenne for a week each of hands-on lobbyist training during the 2018 session.

17

students

+

2

instructors

+

16

guest speakers

participated in our inaugural conservation training program.



OF CONSERVATION LEADERS

CITIZENS AROUND THE STATE learned about Wyoming's legislative process at our well-attended Beers & Bills events in Dubois, Pinedale, Laramie, and Cheyenne.

And our Wyoming gubernatorial candidate survey on conservation issues received more than 1,200 views on our website, offering a valuable resource to voters and the media.

“ The Conservation Leadership Institute was a veritable highpoint in my conservation education. This amazing experience will serve all attendees well as we pursue our various pathways of helping to solve Wyoming's conservation challenges.”

— RONALD K. SMITH,
PRESIDENT, BIGHORN RESTORATION GROUP

WOC held events and
attended meetings in



Wyoming communities.

CHEYENNE
LANDER • CASPER
JACKSON • LARAMIE
PINEDALE • DUBOIS
ROCK SPRINGS • GREEN
RIVER • CODY • THERMOPOLIS
RAWLINS • ENCAMPMENT • POWELL
SARATOGA • FT. WASHAKIE • TEN SLEEP
BIG PINEY • TORRINGTON • EVANSTON
WORLAND • GILLETTE • DOUGLAS

Convened

162 citizens

for Beers & Bills

Hosted the 5th annual Run
the Red, a race that offered

74 runners

a chance to experience and
stand up for the Red Desert

Educated

350 cyclists

in the Tour de Wyoming about
mule deer migration corridors

An aerial photograph of a winding river with a central island, surrounded by dense green vegetation. The river is a vibrant blue, and the surrounding land is a mix of green grasses and shrubs. A thin orange horizontal line is visible at the top of the image.

DEMANDING STRONG WATER QUALITY STANDARDS

IN 2018, THE WYOMING DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY began the first steps of a triennial review of its water quality standards. This is an opportunity for protections to be strengthened — or made worse. Under pressure from various sectors, the agency proposed changes to weaken existing standards. We submitted detailed comments, advocating that the state do a better job of protecting Wyoming's lakes, rivers, and streams. The process isn't over. There will be more opportunities for public input, and we'll make sure citizens know how to make their voices heard.

DEFENDING CLEAN WATER FOR RECREATION

IN 2016, THE DEQ MADE A SWEEPING DOWNGRADE of 87,775 miles of streams to allow for a 500 percent increase in *E. coli* levels when it reclassified these waters from “primary contact” recreation to “secondary.” Its work missed thousands of miles of streams that people regularly use for dunking, splashing, and swimming. We worked throughout the summer of 2018 to identify streams across Wyoming that should have retained the state’s most protective classification. For example, the DEQ identified just three dispersed campsites in all of Fremont County to retain the strongest protections, yet we found more than 30 such campsites off Lander’s Loop Road alone. These are waters where people regularly recreate — and which should never have been downgraded. They include streams near the Fremont County Youth Camp, which hundreds of children visit each year.

We alerted the DEQ to more than 75 recreation sites overlooked by its flawed model, and NOLS made the DEQ aware of an additional 63 missed locations. In response, the DEQ agreed to consider restoring stronger protections where people recreate.

ADVOCATING CLEANER AIR

AFTER YEARS OF ADVOCACY BY WOC AND PARTNER GROUPS, the DEQ in late 2018 adopted stronger air pollution requirements that will help curb fugitive greenhouse gas emissions around the state. Under the new guidance, oil and gas companies in Wyoming will now be required to check new and modified production facilities for leaks at least twice each year. Implementing this requirement statewide will be critical as new oil and gas projects come online across Wyoming. We’ll continue advocating that existing oil and gas operations — often the ones most in need of inspection and repair — are held to the same requirement.

“**Maintaining high water quality is essential for growing Wyoming’s outdoor recreation economy. We can’t thank the Outdoor Council enough for their outreach and advocacy to improve recreational water quality standards. Their work is crucial for maintaining the environment businesses like ours need to prosper.**”

— AARON BANNON,
NOLS ENVIRONMENTAL
STEWARDSHIP AND
SUSTAINABILITY DIRECTOR

DEFENDING WILDLIFE & LANDSCAPES FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

IN 2018, THE BLM ISSUED PLANS to roll back federal protections for the Greater sage-grouse. We worked with partners to organize public opposition against the move, provided expert analysis to state officials who can influence the BLM, and insisted on continuing science-based efforts to protect vital sagebrush habitat.

A DEAL WAS STRUCK IN JULY to protect another 24,000 acres in the Wyoming Range — the last “valid, existing leases” — from oil and gas drilling. We’re grateful to our partners at the Trust for Public Land for helping us see this through. The deal closes another chapter in the ongoing effort to protect a wild landscape that never should have been leased.

In 2018, more than
8.4 million acres

of public lands were already leased in Wyoming for oil and gas development, with less than half in production.

There were more than
25,000
active applications for permit to drill.

The BLM offered an additional
1.5 million acres
for lease.

Our requests to defer leasing in migration corridors and crucial winter range accounted for
just 7%
of that additional acreage.

WORKING FOR LASTING CONSERVATION OF PUBLIC LANDS

A LONG COUNTY-BY-COUNTY EFFORT to address future management of wilderness study areas in Wyoming ended in 2018. Several counties submitted recommendations to the Wyoming County Commission Association for review, some of which were sent on to Sen. Barrasso to be considered as part of a larger legislative package. Throughout the often-contentious Wyoming Public Lands Initiative, we pushed for a fair process and for pragmatic conservation outcomes. Carbon County’s stakeholder group was the only one of eight to reach full consensus about the future of special public lands in their county, and put forward a management proposal we supported.

PROTECTING WYOMING'S MULE DEER

FEDERAL OIL AND GAS LEASING ON PUBLIC LANDS

exploded in 2018, with dozens of parcels offered inside vital wildlife habitats, including mule deer migration corridors. Science shows that development inside corridors hurts mule deer herds that rely on these routes for survival. We provided sound legal analysis and well-reasoned arguments to urge the state and the BLM to take a more precautionary approach to leasing until enforceable, science-based protections are put in place. While the BLM did postpone leasing a handful of parcels at the state's request, we believe more deferrals were warranted. Our work continues with the goal of keeping these corridors intact and functional.



LEADING CONSERVATION AT THE WYOMING LEGISLATURE

IN 2018, WE DEDICATED two full-time advocates to the legislative session in Cheyenne and hosted three legislative interns for one week each. We worked with a broad coalition of partners and members to defeat several bad bills, including a proposal to ease small mine regulations and another designed to chill free speech and public dissent. We joined with partners to secure special license plates to help fund wildlife crossings and to advocate good governance reforms, including a bill requiring recordings and statewide broadcasts of interim committee meetings.



“ I’ve spent years teaching about the value of nature, public lands, and the outdoors . . . now I want to learn how to stand up for these ideas.”

— ERA ARANOW,
2018 LEGISLATIVE INTERN

COMMITTED TO SOLUTIONS AT HOME

THE SOLAR PANELS on WOC's Lander office kept approximately 3,200 pounds of CO2 emissions out of the atmosphere in 2018 — the rough equivalent of planting 80 trees. At the end of 2018, we worked with Creative Energies to upgrade to a larger, more efficient system, which should produce enough energy to offset almost 100 percent of our usage in Lander annually. We look forward to keeping approximately 13,200 pounds of CO2 emissions out of the atmosphere in 2019.

FINANCIALS

Program: \$726,491 **Administration & Management:** \$143,225 **Fundraising:** \$124,110

TOTAL EXPENSES: \$993,826*

*In addition to ongoing operations, WOC invested \$35,000 in 2018 for comprehensive campaign planning.

WYOMING NEEDS YOU

IN 2018, THE WYOMING OUTDOOR COUNCIL had close to **2,000 active members**. These are individuals who **donated** — **at whatever level they could afford** — to make our statewide conservation work possible. As we look ahead to the opportunities and challenges facing Wyoming, we know **we need to increase that number**. You can help. If you're one of the **thousands of people** who **followed us** on social media or **took action** on our alerts, but you aren't yet a member, **please join us**. If you are a member, spread the word. Encourage friends and family to join, or — even better — **give them a gift membership**. The Outdoor Council's work to keep our air and water clean, safeguard our public lands, and defend our healthy wildlife **benefits everyone** lucky enough to live in or pass through this wild state. **Members make it all possible**. Join us!

