

Wyoming Outdoor Council

Summer 2020

# FRONTLINE



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

**INSIDE:**

**COMING TOGETHER  
IN A TIME OF CRISIS**

**Climate change:  
the front line conservation  
issue in Wyoming**

**AND MORE!**

Image: Kathy Lichtendahl

# A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

IF YOU ASK ME, summer in Wyoming is always late in coming and never long enough. And this year, after so many weeks of staying close to home in response to COVID-19, summer's arrival finally offered not only the chance to hike, camp, and enjoy our public lands, but also to gather again with friends and family at a safe distance outside. This lifted my spirits.

But I'll be honest — more often than not these days, my heart feels broken. I bet yours does, too. Many of us are living with collective heartbreak. For too long, fair and equal treatment of people of color in our country has been withheld through laws and policies that work to their extreme disadvantage. This is not news to the Wyoming Outdoor Council's Indigenous, Black and Brown members, partners, and friends who are living not only with broken hearts, but also with the tangible impacts — sometimes life-threatening impacts — of systemic racism in our country.

How do we reconcile the pride we have for the ideal of equality upon which our nation was founded with the fact that we aren't living up to it? When it comes to the history of public lands in our country, there are also complicated tensions to address.

Like you, I believe passionately in public land conservation. National parks — and by extension all our public lands — are lauded as the "best idea America ever had." Having access to millions of acres of breathtakingly beautiful landscapes and the opportunity to explore them is the reason so many of us live in Wyoming. We

*Visiting the Red Desert to learn from the incredible expertise we have in our local community (being socially distant outdoors, of course)!*

*Friends and family have been helping us celebrate the upcoming arrival of our baby — lots of FaceTime happy hours and virtual baby showers!*



## 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.

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HOW HAVE YOU REMAINED  
CONNECTED TO YOUR COMMUNITY  
DURING THE PANDEMIC?

celebrate the fact that public lands belong to all of us. We often refer to this collective ownership as our birthright.

But how do we reconcile the pride we feel for this birthright with the knowledge that it came at the price of conquest, forced removal, and killing of Indigenous people? How, in good faith, do we advocate public land conservation without acknowledging the fact that racial and economic disparities prevent equal access to and enjoyment of these places? How do we ensure our actions on behalf of conservation aren't also marginalizing the people whose help we need to effect change?

I returned to a book I read some years ago called *Healing the Heart of Democracy* by Parker Palmer. When we despair in the face of injustice, we cannot help but feel broken-hearted. Palmer explains, however, that as long as our hearts are broken open, rather than broken apart, there remains space for us to grapple with contradictions while we strive for change. "Progress in America has often come from the agitation of ordinary people, heartbroken people, who

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— LISA McGEE,  
WYOMING OUTDOOR COUNCIL

in solidarity with our fellow citizens, we will continue to work every day to make Wyoming a better place to live.

would not settle for the status quo."

For those of us whose hearts have broken open, we have work to do.

To be successful in pursuit of our conservation mission — to protect Wyoming's environment and quality of life now and for future generations — we must acknowledge the political, environmental, and economic context of our work. Racial injustice, climate change, a global pandemic, and a state budget in peril are tremendous challenges. We don't have all the answers, but we do know this: the status quo is not acceptable.

As a member of the Outdoor Council, you already know this. Your support helps ensure that in small but important ways, and



**LISA McGEE**  
Executive Director

# EVERYTHING WAS NORMAL. THEN ...

*Filling in the connection gap left in the wake of COVID-19*

**ONE DAY IN MID-MARCH**, all of us on the Wyoming Outdoor Council staff found ourselves sitting at home. The safest thing to do was to stop all work-related travel and work remotely rather than from the Lander office. Our office remained open a few hours a day for our administrative staff (thank you Maureen and Misti) to process mail, pay bills, and acknowledge new and renewing memberships, but things had changed.

Like you, we stayed awake at night worrying about the health of our vulnerable family members and friends. We tried to make sense of a rapidly evolving global pandemic while facing new, everyday challenges, like kids who could no longer go to school or how to safely get groceries. Overall, we did our best to stay positive.

Fortunately, most of our work continued from home offices, but other aspects — holding public events, attending legislative and state agency meetings, getting together with members and partners — evaporated

overnight, and we were left wondering how to fill that gap. It quickly became apparent this situation wasn't going to resolve itself anytime soon, and after just a few days of self-isolation our staff was eager to connect with one another and our members.

## The first step was the easiest.

Even in normal times, the Outdoor Council offers a variety of trainings and resources for citizens who want to be better informed about conservation issues in Wyoming and empowered to participate in public processes that affect our public lands, wildlife, and environmental quality. We'd already planned to bring our citizen outreach and engagement work under a single banner, and took the opportunity this spring to launch FIELD: Fostering Impact through Environmental Leadership Development.

We dove in headfirst with a brand-new offering: a continuing series of video lessons for kids and teenagers that we dubbed Live



# SUDDENLY, IT WASN'T.

from the FIELD. In each installment, students had the opportunity to learn from a Wyoming expert, then participate in a live Q&A session over Zoom. We heard about mule deer, big game migration, and wildlife ecology from University of Wyoming research scientists Samantha Dwinell and Rhiannon Jakopak, wildlife disease from Hank Edwards of Wyoming's Wildlife Health Laboratory, the sagebrush ecosystem from Gina Clingerman of the Bureau of Land Management, and healthy streams from fly fishing guide and longtime member George Hunker. When we noticed many adults were tuning in as well, we took a bigger creative risk and put together a live, online variety show about the National Environmental Policy Act.

Was there an occasional technical difficulty? Of course. Was using a fireside monologue, game show-style trivia, and puppets to explain federal environmental law a bit corny? Maybe. But the response these events elicited showed us that people in Wyoming are eager to learn and excited to engage in new ways. If you missed the sessions, you can find recordings on our YouTube channel.

## The next step was slightly more daunting.

What was to become of our flagship conservation leadership program — the newly renamed FIELD Training — if we couldn't assemble the eight weeks of class meetings in person? As was so often the case during the first months of the pandemic, taking the program online was the solution. This proved to be as much of a benefit as it was a hurdle.

Nothing compares to a face-to-face conversation, but delving into remote learning allowed many people from around the state to participate. How

else could a dozen passionate citizens from communities as far-flung as Lusk, St. Stephens, Alpine, and Wapiti all get together for twice-weekly workshops?

It was evident from the start that the value of engaging with people through these online platforms went far beyond a temporary workaround. It's not a perfect solution, but in this big, sparsely populated, mostly rural state, it's a step toward bringing us all a little closer together. It's our intention that these online offerings will continue and expand.

## It was evident from the start that the value of engaging with people through these online platforms went far beyond a temporary workaround.

The past months have shown us new opportunities to reach people in Wyoming who care about conservation, and strengthen the type of community building we've always done. We're proud to have a resourceful and energetic staff that can adapt and react quickly. And none of this would be possible without the unwavering support of members like you who took a chance with us and tuned in, demonstrating your commitment to protect Wyoming's environment and quality of life. Thank you. When the next unexpected challenge arises, as it inevitably will, we'll rise up to meet it together.



**ALAN ROGERS**  
Communications Director

# CLIMATE CHANGE:

## *The new front line for conservation in Wyoming*

**WYOMING IS CHANGING**, faster now than any of us could have predicted even six months ago. In our last issue of Frontline, we addressed the reality of climate change and what it means for Wyoming's future. Climate change is not a separate issue, but one that is deeply intertwined with all aspects of our work — from protecting our state's big game populations to reducing harmful air emissions, to safeguarding our clean water, public lands, and ultimately our way of life. And if we are to succeed in our mission, we must advocate for policies that directly confront the real and growing threat of human-caused climate change.

### **Wildlife and migration**

As you know, the Wyoming Outdoor Council's wildlife work over the last several years has focused on protecting Wyoming's big game migration corridors — and for good reason. The science is clear about the crucial role these corridors play in maintaining ungulate populations that in turn support our state's recreation economy and outdoor heritage. Yet, a changing climate could easily undermine many of these hard-fought efforts. For one, changing precipitation patterns and drought increasingly threaten the ability of animals to “surf the green waves” that connect their seasonal habitats. Wyoming has seen warming temperatures and drought intensify over the last 20 years and most experts agree that, at least for our state, this trend only gets worse. If we are to ensure that our state's wildlife remain protected for the long term, we must also consider how these populations stay resilient and capable of adapting to these changes, while taking responsibility to mitigate the most

damaging forecasted climate scenarios.

### **Clean air**

It's hard to talk about clean air and the policies necessary to maintain it without acknowledging the relationship between climate change and the greenhouse gases at the heart of Wyoming's air quality problems. We often think of natural gas as a cleaner fuel than coal — and it is, *if* we minimize the amount of fugitive emissions that leak into the atmosphere as it is produced and processed. The Outdoor Council has repeatedly called on Wyoming's Department of Environmental Quality and the oil and gas industry to address air quality concerns, by advocating improved Leak Detection and Repair requirements for oil and gas infrastructure and opposing rollbacks of critical methane capture rules. With natural gas expected to play a major role in energy production for years to come, Wyoming must keep on raising the bar for air quality standards not only to protect our health, but to reduce our greenhouse gas footprint and stay competitive in energy markets that are favoring cleaner energy.

### **Clean water**

One of the most alarming aspects of climate change in Wyoming is its impacts on our arid state's already limited water resources. If current projections for warming hold, Wyoming could see significant loss of coldwater fisheries and native trout habitat



*If we cannot find ways to address and mitigate this looming crisis and do our part as a state, our conservation work in all of our traditional program areas will fall short.*

by the end of this century due to increased water temperatures and loss of instream flows as our snowfields and glaciers shrink. These conditions exacerbate water quality concerns the Outdoor Council has been working hard to address, such as reducing harmful *E. coli* concentrations in our waterways. Warming temperatures are also projected to increase the amount of rainfall as opposed to snow, which reduces the amount of stored water potential available in the summer and fall. This spells increasing challenges and conflicts for ranchers, farmers, cities, recreators, and, again, our wildlife.

### **Our public lands**

Advocating responsible energy development has been at the heart of the Outdoor Council's public lands policy work — whether that's fighting back against efforts to privatize public lands, urging the protection of special landscapes, or watchdogging development in crucial wildlife areas. We've recently reported on the rampant and largely speculative oil and gas leasing taking place across large swaths of the state. Not only do these lease sales come at the expense of other uses of our public lands, for those that are developed, they come at the expense of the quality of the environment that future generations will inherit. Remarkably, nearly one quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions produced in the United States originate from public lands — lands that are supposed to be managed with both current and future generations in mind. This is not sustainable. To the greatest extent possible, our public lands should be managed in ways that mitigate climate change and help

surrounding communities be more resilient into the future.

### **Confronting climate change also means addressing our economy**

Climate change is a reality that ripples through the conservation issues the Outdoor Council has been engaged in for decades. It is something that our founder, Tom Bell, understood early on and urged us to address directly. If we cannot find ways to address and mitigate this looming crisis and do our part as a state, our conservation work in all of our traditional program areas will fall short.

Tackling climate issues in Wyoming will require hard and honest conversations about the dependency of our state's economy on fossil fuels, and it will require creativity and investment into bold new ideas. The new front line for conservation means wading into policy issues that, at least on the surface, seem less directly tied to it — like helping communities transition from fossil fuels, promoting economic diversification, and supporting new sources of state revenue. As daunting and intimidating as this might feel, we believe it's critical. Our state's economy and conservation policies are interconnected. Wyoming's outsized influence on climate change means that the policies and actions we take in our communities can have national — even global — impacts.



**JOHN BURROWS**  
Conservation Advocate

# WHAT'S NEXT FOR WYOMING'S MIGRATING BIG GAME?

**THIS WINTER, GOV. MARK GORDON** signed an executive order detailing how mule deer and pronghorn migration corridors will be identified and managed in the state. The Wyoming Outdoor Council was heavily involved in the advocacy, collaboration, and negotiations that led to this order, and we were pleased the governor took this important step. But what does this new policy mean? It means now the real work begins.

The governor's order affirmed the designation of three corridors that had gone through the Game and Fish Department's analysis and public process: the Sublette mule deer corridor (also known as the Red Desert to Hoback) and the Baggs and Platte Valley mule deer corridors. While the Sublette corridor has already gone through a risk assessment to evaluate landscape-level challenges affecting this herd and habitat, neither the Baggs nor the Platte Valley have.

We anticipate new information on these assessments in the near future, and have communicated with Game and Fish staff about our suggestions for best conducting these analyses. When these assessments are completed, they will be released as drafts for public feedback and discussed in public meetings before being finalized. After designation, the executive order prescribes the formation of local working groups for each corridor to discuss ongoing management challenges and opportunities.

When the executive order was signed, two corridors were in draft status (i.e. not yet formally designated): the Sublette antelope corridor (the Path of the Pronghorn) and the Wyoming Range mule deer corridor. These

corridors will be the first to move through the entirety of the new designation process. We anticipate seeing the Path of the Pronghorn discussed at a Game and Fish Commission meeting later this year, and will continue to advocate for designation.

The Game and Fish Department will also continue to identify other migration corridors around the state. Though the governor's order only applies to mule deer and pronghorn, the department will continue its work to identify and manage elk migration corridors. We will continue to advocate for a formal corridor designation process for other ungulate species. Stay tuned for new developments.

While the governor's order puts the weight of law behind the value of wildlife migration corridors, the future of our big game herds depends on us. Advocacy from Wyoming people about the value of our large, migratory herds was critical in getting us to this point, and will continue to be necessary in the long term.

Please watch for updates about the next opportunities to be involved in corridor advocacy, and reach out to us if you have interest in any of the specific migration corridors currently being studied.



**KRISTEN GUNTHER**  
Conservation Advocate



# FOR ALMOST 10 YEARS,

**we've been waiting  
for the release of  
the Bureau of Land  
Management's draft  
Rock Springs Resource  
Management Plan.**



Image: Matt Cuzzocreo

The release is imminent, according to the field office, although we've come to expect delays.

So why is this plan so important? Because it will determine how 3.6 million acres of public lands in southwestern Wyoming are managed for decades to come. This includes the Northern Red Desert, Greater Little Mountain, South Pass and parts of the Oregon Trail, Adobe Town, Devil's Playground, and the Golden Triangle, as well as the southern portion of the Red Desert to Hoback mule deer migration corridor. Based on recent land use decisions from across the West, we anticipate the Rock Springs plan will sacrifice the hunting and fishing, recreation, wildlife, and cultural values of these lands to facilitate more oil and gas leasing.

The Wyoming Outdoor Council requested the BLM postpone the plan's release until the COVID-19 pandemic no longer posed a roadblock to public participation. Other groups made similar requests, including the Sweetwater County Board of Commissioners, but the agency appears to be proceeding.

## SO WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### ▶ WATCH FOR UPDATES FROM US.

We'll let you know how and when to take action. If you don't already receive our email alerts, now is a great time to visit our website and sign up. We'll also share information on our social media channels.

### ▶ SUBMIT PUBLIC COMMENT WHEN THE TIME COMES.

Wyoming citizens who know and love these areas — not just appointed federal officials — should have a say in how they're managed. The 90-day public comment period is your opportunity. We'll offer you suggestions on how to craft an informative, personal message.

### ▶ SPREAD THE WORD.

Effecting changes to the draft will require the full support of all the people who care for this vast and varied part of Wyoming. Not everyone who hunts, hikes, horse packs, or off-roads in these areas will know what is at stake. Forward our emails to friends and family, encourage others to submit a public comment, write a letter to the editor or to the governor, or talk to your county commissioner.

## FIELD TRAINING PROFILE



# YUFNA SOLDIER WOLF

“That’s where we came from, that’s who we are.”

**NO MATTER HOW** much Yufna Soldier Wolf insists she has more to learn about advocating for her community, her work already speaks for itself.

Yufna is the former director of the Northern Arapaho Tribal Historic Preservation Office, where she worked for 12 years. During her time with the office, she was responsible for repatriating the remains of three Northern Arapaho children — Little Chief, Horse, and Little Plume — to the Wind River Reservation from the site of a government boarding school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania where they died in the late 1800s. More recently she’s been doing consulting work related to environmental

policy, preservation of cultural resources, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, as well as Arapaho history.

Yufna grew up in St. Stephens, located just outside Riverton on the reservation, as the youngest of 10 children. She now has three kids of her own and lives in the house her father built, which is fitting given that she’s walking in his footsteps.

Mark Soldier Wolf, who passed away in 2018 at the age of 90, was Yufna’s introduction to dealing with tribal cultural resources and land management issues. Before the Northern Arapaho Tribe had an official historic preservation officer, he filled that role and a young Yufna was there to help. She quickly came up

to speed on Section 106 — a portion of the National Historic Preservation Act that requires federal agencies to consider impacts on cultural sites and artifacts — and other policies.

“Him being older, he didn’t really know computers or all this other stuff, so I’d be sitting there helping him read an [environmental impact statement] or an [environmental assessment],” Yufna said. “And I was in high school.”

Yufna has degrees from Montana State University and the University of Wyoming, and is currently taking courses at UW with her eye on another diploma. At the same time, she’s transitioned from student to teacher, sharing the traditional knowledge passed down by her parents through speaking engagements and her consulting work.

And, this summer, she decided to venture

down a new path of learning when she heard about FIELD Training, the Wyoming Outdoor Council’s conservation leadership program. It’s a natural fit for Yufna, whose career has been based largely around stewarding tribal lands and cultural resources — and focusing on “things that are important to me that, if I didn’t do them, probably would never have gotten done.”

Even though she has served as a Fremont County historic preservation commissioner, Yufna felt her experience in county and state government didn’t match her familiarity with the tribal and federal levels. Now, she’s expanding her comfort zone in FIELD Training, WOC’s free eight-week program designed to give engaged citizens the skills they need to be effective advocates for conservation in their communities. This year’s curriculum centers around public lands and covers the basics of Wyoming government and policymaking through the process of creating and carrying out a grassroots campaign.

For a small group project, Yufna and several other participants opted to research renewable energy development. Just like the state of Wyoming, she points out, the Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone tribes rely heavily on oil and gas severance taxes for revenue and need to be prepared for a future with lower prices or less demand.

“Education, healthcare, roads, maintenance ... you name it, it’s going to be impacted. So that’s why we’re going to talk about renewable energy and how it can be incorporated into land use.”

As a tribal member, Yufna says public lands carry a special significance.

“That’s where we came from, that’s who we are. Just being able to connect to areas that are special or sacred to us is important,” she said. “I think that’s why I work as hard as I do with these various entities and land issues. Land is the biggest resource we have.”



**Just being able to connect to areas that are special or sacred to us is important. I think that’s why I work as hard as I do with these various entities and land issues. Land is the biggest resource we have.”**

— YUFNA SOLDIER WOLF, FIELD TRAINING STUDENT

She isn’t sure where the future will take her, but she hopes to use her experiences to make sure Indigenous voices are heard at all levels of government, educate tribal members in Wyoming and elsewhere about the tribal impacts of county and state policies — like taxation and voting law — and encourage people to “help Wyoming be the best, most successful state we can be.”



**ALAN ROGERS**  
Communications Director



**CLIMATE CHANGE**  
threatens Wyoming's public lands,  
wildlife, and clean air and water —  
for us and for **future generations.**

**YOU CAN HELP.**

Donate today and have your gift matched.



Wyoming Outdoor Council

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