

Wyoming Outdoor Council

Winter 2020

# FRONTLINE



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

**INSIDE:**

## CHARTING A PATH FOR WYOMING

Community  
perspectives  
on our future

**A SPECIAL EDITION**

Image: Nick Knoke

# A Message from the Director



LISA MCGEE  
Executive Director

In this issue of Frontline, we address the future of Wyoming in the context of the ever-growing threat of climate change, and the associated impacts that market shifts are having on our communities.

Our state's budget and local government revenue have long been dependent on taxes and royalties that flow from extracting coal, oil, and natural gas. As U.S. consumers and markets respond to irrefutable scientific data linking fossil fuel emissions to a warming climate, and with more competitive and abundant natural gas production in other states, Wyoming's primary revenue streams will continue to wane.

*Diversify our tax base*

What does this mean for conservation? For one thing, state agencies like the Department of Environmental Quality will continue to have to work with shrinking budgets. Last month, we urged Gov. Mark Gordon not to cut funding for an air quality inspector — a position desperately needed in Sublette County with its dangerous spikes in ground-level ozone — from the state's proposed budget.

*Recognize the growing importance of outdoor recreation as a viable and sustainable industry for Wyoming*

For another, it means short-sighted ideas — ideas inspired not by what's best for Wyoming, but rather by the prospect of quick income — will gain traction. Bills that would transfer our public lands to the state or invite storage of the nation's nuclear waste are two recent examples of this type of thinking we've worked successfully to defeat.



## 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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*Promote new industries and ways of thinking about our economy and natural resources*

**WHAT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT THING WYOMING CAN DO TO PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE?**

The economic vulnerability of a state so reliant on one sector also means that decision makers are more susceptible to industry lobbyists who promise increased revenues and new jobs, while demanding fewer regulations. How else to explain the state's ambivalence about a proposal to discharge 8 million gallons a day of oil and gas wastewater into Boysen Reservoir and its tributaries — threatening downstream drinking water and the Wind River's prized fishery? Or the proposed legislation based on a wish list from the petroleum industry that would take away the Game and Fish Department's authority to identify big game habitat? Or the Wyoming State Legislature's attack on rooftop solar — the fastest growing industry in the nation?

As national and global markets shift away from coal and other fossil fuels, Wyoming will be dealt a significant blow not only to our state's budget, but also to families and communities who have built livelihoods and identities around this once-thriving industry. Wyoming governors, at least since the 1970s, have talked about the need to diversify the state's economy. We understand that, if this were easy, it would have already been done.

We at the Wyoming Outdoor Council certainly don't have all the answers. That's one of the reasons we asked several guest authors to give us their perspectives on the future they see for Wyoming.

What we do know is this: We can't ignore the reality of climate change. We have to support our friends and neighbors who have lost jobs and whose communities are struggling. And, as we look for answers to our state's economic challenges, we can't sacrifice our public lands, our wildlife, or our clean air and water in the process. As the Code of the West wisely reminds us: We have to know where to draw the line. We also need to remember that some things aren't for sale.

Throughout 2020 and beyond, we'll

continue to invite perspectives on these topics — dedicating space on our website and on social media for discussion. We'll begin conversations in communities around the state and engage decision makers. With support and input from our members, we'll address topics like our state's tax structure, ideas for sustainable revenue generation, economic diversification, and initiatives that ensure that Wyoming remains a place where people want to live and can make a living. And we'll never lose sight of our mission to protect Wyoming's environment and quality of life now and for future generations.

We're all in this together — all of us who live in and love Wyoming — and it's up to all of us to demand that our elected officials help us chart a courageous path forward. I welcome your thoughts and am grateful for your continued support of the Wyoming Outdoor Council.





FOR  
WYOMING,  
CHANGE  
IS COMING.

CAN THE  
WYOMING  
OUTDOOR  
COUNCIL  
HELP LEAD  
THE WAY?

# LARRY WOLFE

*Larry is a mostly retired natural resources, environmental, and energy lawyer who has practiced in Wyoming for almost 40 years. He is a passionate long distance cyclist and traveler.*

I came to Wyoming in 1974 and stayed because its future looked promising. The prairies of Campbell County were sprouting surface coal mines, and new power plants were being built to burn the millions of tons that the massive mines produced. Oil and gas had long been here, but we did not yet know of the bounties that fracking, coal bed methane and interstate pipelines would bring. In a state so friendly to the energy industry it was easy to be convinced that riding the coattails of the coming booms would make for a good career. That proved to be true and Wyoming treated me very well.

But, as Wyoming limps into 2020, every assumption on which the state's economy is based is being called into question. Coal, natural gas, and oil are in decline. Power plants are closing. The country's appetite for these products is falling. It won't be overnight, but the transition is jarring, nonetheless. Wyoming's economy in 2040 will look a lot different than it does now.

Sadly, small towns that are dependent on mineral extraction and agriculture will lose their populations, leaving communities of mostly old folks to struggle for diminishing essential services. Revenues to state and local governments will continue to slide, and within a few years the rainy-day funds will be spent down as they are used to fill increasingly large funding gaps.

If I had to predict, modest-sized wind farms will be built, but the huge projects proposed for Carbon County will face uncertain futures. Industrial scale solar may arrive, and unless the Legislature screws it up, rooftop solar will expand. The uranium mining industry will cease, but trona will be stable.

Until the savings are almost exhausted, the Legislature will not impose new taxes to modernize our mineral dependent systems. The Joint Revenue Committee just soundly defeated a measure to raise ad valorem property taxes on homes. Magic elixirs for economic diversification, like blockchain, will fizzle, and they don't generate any tax revenue. Gov. Matt Mead's ENDOW initiative will be quickly forgotten, and millennials will continue to leave the state in search of greater opportunities.

Is there reason to be optimistic about Wyoming's future and the role that the Wyoming Outdoor Council can play? Of course. Wyoming has vast and accessible public lands and residents who are committed to keeping these lands in public hands. Wyoming ranks second, behind Montana, in the economic value of its outdoor recreation economy. For more than 50 years WOC has been at the forefront of telling that story.

People and nature have always been in competition for the soul of Wyoming. While development is apparent across some Wyoming landscapes, I just drove from Cheyenne to Lander and I am reassured by the vast spaces that are relatively unmarred by civilization. You can still go into the Red Desert or Green Mountain south of Jeffrey City and disappear. The future of Wyoming may lie in the millions of people who crave quiet and momentary isolation, and its potential to allow individuals to rub up against nature in raw form.

We are seeing a revolution in our understanding of big game migration and the

critical factors, such as protected habitat and movement corridors, that help ensure their survival. The Outdoor Council is good at persuading people that public land and wildlife protection are vital.

Wyoming is the headwaters of bountiful interstate streams. But our aging water infrastructure needs large investments. Drought and downstream demand will limit new development and convert existing uses. The Outdoor Council can encourage the state to make wise decisions about how water funds are spent.

Perhaps we will content ourselves to have a smaller permanent population, but more tourists, provided they are well behaved. If we adjusted our tax system, we might be able to get them to help pay for our education needs. Wyoming has a generally excellent K-12 education system, which enjoys broad public support and funding even in tough budget years. This must continue.

Public understanding of the need to address climate change is growing, and WOC can play a central role in education and by supporting policies that limit emissions and address climate disruptions. WOC's positive environmental message and its successes at protection can help counter "climate grief and eco-pessimism."

It would be comforting to end this article with a paean to Wyoming's mountains and plains and the indomitable spirit of its people. But, securing Wyoming's future will take leadership, hard work, investment, and a willingness to change. Driving change is the hardest part, and likely the real calling of the Wyoming Outdoor Council. ■

# Outdoor Recreation is the Future



## WADE LIPPINCOTT

*Wade is a husband, father, and owner of Atlas Roofing, as well as a marginal climber of rocks. He is a founder of the Hot City Outdoor Alliance, and a graduate of the Wyoming Outdoor Council's 2018 conservation leadership training.*

When I was growing up in Thermopolis, I spent my time fishing, hunting, and running wild in the Owl Creek Range. When we weren't doing any of that, we were either in the canyon, floating the river, cliff jumping, racing BMX bikes, or climbing.

Fast forward to 2020: I'm a father of three now, and I own a full-service roofing business. After a stint away from home, my wife and I moved our family back to Thermopolis. Besides family ties, outdoor recreation is the reason we moved home and it's why we have chosen to stay. Thermopolis is a little rough around the edges, but it's a great destination located in the middle of everything one could want. Hunting and angling opportunities ten minutes from town, hot springs, amazing geology, dinosaurs, a caring community, and a new hospital. Cody, Lander, and Ten Sleep are all day-trip destinations for our family. Over the recent holidays, we went ice climbing in Cody on a Saturday, rock climbing in Sinks Canyon on Tuesday, and then skiing in Jackson on Friday.

Recently, I decided that just enjoying

the outdoors wasn't enough — I wanted to help our community embrace, develop, and promote outdoor recreation in Thermopolis. In 2018, I co-founded the Hot City Outdoor Alliance. The Alliance works to develop and support outdoor recreation projects and programs that enhance the economy, community, and environment of Hot Springs County for the benefit of current and future generations.

Hot City was created to fill a real need in our community. There's so much potential here for outdoor recreation to make our community stronger and more vibrant. Although we're relatively new, we have already found success, and have a great deal of community support. This year we cut a trail on the T-Hill with the help of Hot Springs State Park, installed a Frisbee golf park, created a community ice skating rink, and held an outdoor day. These activities have all been received with open arms in our community, and we have seen several other non-profits step up alongside us to make these projects a reality.

And now that we have some momentum, we're able to turn our attention to the bigger picture needs of the community. We've held numerous "windshield sessions" driving partners around in our trucks, and held dinners and meetings with our agency and nonprofit stakeholders, talking about the future of Thermop and the potential opportunities ahead of us. We're in the process of developing a comprehensive and sustainable trail plan that includes the downtown and creates trails for equestrians, hikers, and bikers. Long-term, we also want to start a bike share program, and work with agencies to open up new areas for recreation.

We have a lot of big picture goals to work toward over the next 15 years, and all of them will help create a dynamic shift in our economy, leadership, and general health of our community. Imagine a doctor on the job market has three offers on her desk, and she finds that Thermopolis not only has a new hospital, but has numerous types of recreation and a warm community — she might like to move here. If her partner has always dreamed of running a small business and sees an available, "healthy" workforce, it might just seal the deal. That's good for the community, good for the region, and good for Wyoming.

Wyomingites have always embraced extractive resources as the engine of our economy, but it's time to find new paths forward. That goes for both small communities and the state as a whole. Outdoor recreation promotes a clean economy, creates communities invested in a

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**What we in Thermopolis hope to show our state is how this kind of community-building work can be accomplished through outdoor recreation, so others can duplicate our efforts in their own communities.**

positive lifestyle, advances forward-thinking, community-minded leaders, and empowers others to get involved.

What we in Thermopolis hope to show our state is how this kind of community-building work can be accomplished through outdoor recreation, so others can duplicate our efforts in their own communities. In order to make change, you just need to step outside your comfort zone and take some risks. You'll be surprised at how many others are willing to step up and lead with you. ■



# CONNECTED, UNIFIED, STRONG: THE WYOMING I WANT TO SEE

## KARA COLOVICH

*Kara's professional background is in climate change and sustainable business practices yet her experience as a farm hand and Nordic ski instructor also speak to her passions. Having moved back to the place she loves, Kara is looking forward to starting a small farm and producing many of the goods her family and friends have come to enjoy.*

Over the past couple of months, my partner and I have made some pivotal life decisions. Like many millennials, we face daunting pressures to get advanced degrees (and burden ourselves with enormous amounts of debt), chase high-paying jobs, move to the big city, and save up for our first house in the midst of a difficult financial market. We were succumbing to these pressures, but it didn't align with the vision we had for ourselves. Where was the small farm with a greenhouse, chickens, and goats? Where was the deer salami and smoked trout hanging in the cellar? Where was the small-town community of support where everyone looks out for you? Instead of "paying our dues" in a lifestyle we could hardly recognize for ourselves, we screeched on the brakes. We decided to start with where we know we want to live and go from there. The place that kept calling to us was Wyoming.

I loved growing up in Wyoming, but only in returning as an adult can I truly say I appreciate what this state has to offer. With its wide open spaces, down-to-earth people, unparalleled quality of life, and relative affordability, I look forward to making Wyoming my permanent home and raising a



family here. That being said, even this state is not perfect, and as citizens, we need to be engaged in the change we want to see.

The Wyoming I want to see is connected, unified, and strong. Living in such a dispersed state can make us feel isolated — not only physically, but socially and personally — in our ability to express our concerns and make our voices heard. By creating stronger state-

carbon footprint. Wyoming should seize the opportunity to become a leader in this market by incentivizing renewable energy production, teaching ranchers about carbon-sequestering rangeland management practices, and encouraging methane capture in landfills — to name only a few examples of the enormous potential.

This flurry of new business and industry

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wide networks, we can empower those who do not have a voice. Whether it's students who want to speak out about climate change in the face of opposition or farmers who want to adopt sustainable practices and sell locally but lack the collective buying power and marketing influence to do so, by coming together under one voice Wyomingites become stronger.

My Wyoming is also forward-looking while still holding on to our rich heritage and traditions. Being a fifth-generation Wyomingite, I treasure the history of my ancestors. It is important to celebrate their accomplishments and recognize their struggles — after all, they helped form who I am today. However, with my knowledge of climate change, I cannot help but think into the future.

We need a Wyoming that prepares communities to cope with the effects of climate change while simultaneously readying them to lead in a new, diversified economy. States, cities, and businesses across the U.S. are mitigating their impact on climate change by looking for ways to offset their

would bring in more state revenue sources and help inspire an ever more mission-oriented younger generation to remain here in Wyoming. If we only hold on to our past without acknowledging our future, we will lose our chance to adapt to the harsh realities facing our society.

We, here in America, are privileged to have the freedom of choice. The choice of the career we pursue, the lifestyle we live, and the place we call home. I choose Wyoming with all its wonders and its shortcomings. If we choose to come together and focus on our future, Wyoming will thrive for years to come. ■

# Wyoming Needs Leaders

## LUCAS SCHWANDT



*Lucas moved to Lander in 2016 in order to attend school at Central Wyoming College. Now, he's a designer and builder who digs minimalism, and when he's not building, he's out riding his bike or exploring the hills.*

After growing up in South Dakota and serving in the Marine Corps, I got my first brush with the beautiful state of Wyoming. Since then, I have been a carpenter in Cody, a gunsmith in Meeteetse and a student in Lander. During my time here, I've fallen in love with Wyoming. I've spent time hiking, biking, climbing, and skiing. I've spent even more time forming relationships with the wonderful people who live here. Now, as a 30-year-old, I am ready to settle down and start a life somewhere. I'm not sure, however, if Wyoming can be — or is — that place. For the time being, I have decided to stay and try to make it work, but just a few weeks ago, I wasn't so sure.

Like too many others my age, I struggle to see a future here. From the outside, it appears as if Wyoming cannot even see a future for itself. Why is this? Why has no one articulated a future for Wyoming other than simply doubling down on declining extractive industries?

Humans have evolved to hunt. We seek out opportunity and we take aim. We aim by looking, assessing the landscape and choosing our target. As a species, we are quite good at

this. So, as a state, what are we aiming for? Is our way forward really going to be business as usual, or that popular definition of insanity — doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results? Surely, this cannot be the road map for Wyoming's future.

We are a state, in a country, on a continent, on a planet. One planet. Earth. We are global citizens with a responsibility to ourselves, each other, and our home. I've been looking at the landscape, along with the rest of my generation, and I see insect populations crashing, topsoil and glaciers disappearing, sea levels rising, and a climate that is unquestionably changing. Technology is still on a near-vertical trajectory, and the value of big data is starting to eclipse that of almost all other things. To me it seems like as a state, we are the last people to join the myriad important conversations that the rest of the world is having without us.

This is especially frustrating because Wyoming has such potential. I see a plethora of natural resources whose management could take on an economically and environmentally sustainable model. I see opportunities for new types of schools to

educate young people to solve the complex problems our immediate future brings. I see a strong work ethic and an eagerness in the younger generations to accept the massive responsibility that is the stewardship of our environment. Like a small business that can easily adapt, move quickly on its feet, and address a rapidly changing market, Wyoming is a state with a small population and a similar capacity for adaptability. I truly see more in this state than any place I've ever been, and I want a promising future for Wyoming. I'm choosing to stay, for now, in the hopes that Wyoming can and will realize its potential.

In order to do this, the citizens of this state need leadership, though. We need people with the courage to stay, to think boldly, and to propose new ways forward. Global trends are moving so quickly that keeping up can be a daunting task. However, if we look past our own borders we can

easily see large-scale trends developing. We see a growing environmental movement (especially abroad), exemplified by reductions in housing sizes, conscious shifts away from frivolous consumerism, an exploding outdoor recreation economy, and the race for many companies to produce effective electric vehicles for transportation. These examples and more point to the adoption of environmental sustainability as a cultural centerpiece for younger generations. The future economy of the world won't be measured in GDP — it will be measured in terms of sustainability. Not because it's simply a good idea, but because we are on a collision course with the wholesale extermination of our own species if we cannot get it together. The necessity of environmental sustainability will drive the new world economy.

Wyoming can lead the way or risk being left behind. ■

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Why has no one articulated a future for Wyoming other than simply doubling down on declining extractive industries?

# JOIN THE CONVERSATION

The Wyoming State Legislature's budget session begins on **February 10**, and we'll be at the Capitol to **support the good bills** that reflect our state's shared values and **defend against the bad bills** that threaten them.

We'll also be hosting **Beers & Bills** events throughout the state, so if you live in one of these communities, **come learn how you can make a difference as a citizen!** And if not, sign up for our email alerts so you'll know how and when to chime in during the session.

[wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/signup](http://wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/signup)

**Jan. 31 | Cody | 5–7 p.m. | Trailhead**

**Feb. 7 | Green River | 5:30–7:30 p.m. | Hitching Post Restaurant & Saloon**

**Feb. 13 | Cheyenne | 5–7 p.m. | Danielmark's Brewing Co.**

Wyoming has the **opportunity**  
to look ahead and decide  
**who we want to be.**

**TOGETHER**, we can chart the  
course to a livable future.  
**Will you join us?**



Wyoming Outdoor Council

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