

Wyoming Outdoor Council

Winter 2023

# FRONTLINE



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

A photograph of three pronghorn antelope standing in a snowy field. The antelope are in the foreground, looking towards the camera. The background is a soft-focus snowy landscape with some dry grasses.

## **INSIDE:** IT'S NOT TOO LATE FOR WYOMING'S WILDLIFE

**NOMINATIONS FOR RED DESERT PROTECTIONS P. 10**

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**A CASE FOR COMMUNITY CLIMATE ACTION P. 6**

Image: Dave Showalter



## 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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What is one thing you are proud of that the Outdoor Council stands for?

### STAFF

**LISA McGEE** *Executive Director*     **KYLE ELMQUIST** *Engagement Coordinator*

**KRISTEN BROWN** *Associate Director*     **MISTI HAASE** *Office Manager*

**JOHN BURROWS** *Energy & Climate Policy Director*     **BRANDON REYNOLDS** *Program Director*

**MICAH "BIG WIND" CARPENTER** *Tribal Engagement Coordinator*     **MEGHAN RILEY** *Public Lands & Wildlife Advocate*

**ALAN ROGERS** *Communications Director*

**CLAIRE CELLA** *Communications Design Associate*     **HANNAH SKINNER** *Administrative Assistant*

**TYLER CESSOR** *Development Director*     **YUFNA SOLDIER WOLF** *Tribal Conservation Advocate*

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*Give Wyoming Campaign Chair*

That we focus on Wyoming. This singular but statewide focus has allowed WOC to be effective in the long term.

I'm proud the Outdoor Council cares for Wyoming's amazing natural environment for all Wyomingites and has done so for many, many years.

# A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

**LISA McGEE**  
Executive Director

**TOO OFTEN** conservation groups talk about the problems we face, rather than the bright future we're working to ensure. January presented an opportunity to take a look ahead, to envision what's possible, and to remind ourselves why the work we do matters. It's about the lands and wildlife that sustain us, clean air and water, and a quality of life for all Wyoming people. If I have a New Year's resolution it's this: To spend a little more time focusing on what we're *for*, rather than solely on the threats.

Now in February, we've put plans on paper and are already making steady progress toward our lofty goals. I'm excited to share that the Wyoming Outdoor Council is taking some bold steps that will impact Wyoming's lands, wildlife, climate, and communities — as well as our organization itself — hopefully long into the future. In the year to come, we will:

**Seek protections for special areas in Wyoming's Red Desert.** Boar's Tusk and Indian Gap Trail hold cultural and historical significance for the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes, among others. The Red Desert is also home to the longest mule deer migration corridor and best sage-grouse habitat left on Earth. These are treasures we cannot afford to lose.

**Grow local and grassroots climate action statewide.** Using our success supporting the Lander Climate Action Network and establishing the 2022 Wyoming Climate Summit as a guide, we'll support local climate action in two Wyoming communities this year.

**Pursue new avenues to protect big game migration corridors.** Faced with a state process for designating new corridors that has largely stalled, we'll continue to champion mule deer and pronghorn herds by strengthening partnerships and exploring on-the-ground opportunities to safeguard these habitats.

**Continue to be your conservation voice at the Wyoming Legislature.** This legislative session, WOC has once again been at the Capitol every day to ensure your values are represented in the halls where decisions about Wyoming's future are made. You'll continue to hear from us frequently as we stay engaged year-round to support good legislation.

We're also making an investment in the future of the Outdoor Council: This year, we hope to **break ground on a new building in Lander that will be WOC's forever home.** More than just office space for our staff, it will also be a gathering place for members and a resource for conservation partners, local nonprofits, and others in our Lander community. And, true to our values, it will be a simple and efficient building that will serve us for decades to come. After years of thoughtful planning I can't wait to take this incredibly significant step to support the current and future generations of conservation leaders in Wyoming.

Thank you for being the driving force behind every step we take, no matter how big or how small.

With gratitude,



# GAINING GROUND:

## *Efforts to protect wildlife migrations*

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**MEGHAN RILEY**

Public Lands & Wildlife Advocate

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**WYOMING IS HOME** to iconic big game species like mule deer, pronghorn, and elk that migrate each spring and fall to find food, give birth to their young, and avoid the worst of winter's fury. Some herds make epic journeys of 100 miles or more, others simply walk down to foothills that are visible from their summer home in the high country. But however long or short their trip may be, these herds all depend on interconnected habitat. For our wildlife to thrive into the future, industrial and residential development need to be sited right — and in some places, avoided altogether.

There are many ways to protect big game habitat, but it will take all of us working together to identify and implement them. For a couple of reasons, we're hopeful. First, unlike most states, Wyoming still has enough open space and intact habitat to support these herds. It's not too late. Second, there is widespread support for these herds. Perhaps nothing unites us as much as our collective enthusiasm for these animals and the ways of life they support in Wyoming.

In 2023, we will:

**Co-host a migration corridor/big game habitat summit.** With new threats to big game habitat emerging, along with new federal funding sources available for habitat protection measures in Wyoming, it is time for us to take stock. WOC is partnering with other groups to bring together a broad array of organizations and individuals in Wyoming to coordinate our efforts and lay out a vision for effective habitat

protection before we lose any more ground.

**Track planning and zoning in key counties.** Although not traditionally in WOC's wheelhouse, it has become apparent that the threats to migration corridors and big game habitat on private lands are serious and growing. Members can expect to hear from us when their participation at the county level could help move the needle in support of big game habitat where they live.

**Sustain the Red Desert to Hoback mule deer corridor.** In light of WOC's commitment to see the Red Desert intact and whole, protecting the world-famous Red Desert to Hoback mule deer migration remains paramount. We will continue our advocacy with the Bureau of Land Management and work with local landowners to help them access funding for voluntary conservation measures to benefit mule deer and other wildlife.

**Advocate and engage in the corridor designation process.** Despite the lack of a timeline, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department has maintained its intention to recommend the Sublette pronghorn migration corridor for state designation, which if approved would give the agency new tools for keeping corridor habitat connected. We will stay in close contact with WGFD, continue public outreach, and mobilize quickly in support of corridor protections as soon as that process moves forward. ■

# CONNECTING: *Habitat & Humans*

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CLAIRE CELLA  
Communications Design Associate

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**MARTHA PRESTON MOVED TO WYOMING** when she was 19, and has lived in Bondurant since 1991. She's spent much of that time in the outfitting business, and all of her summers and falls in the surrounding wilderness. Now she owns a place on 2.5 acres at the edge of the National Forest — where she can ride out on her horses for overnight pack trips or stand at her windows and watch wildlife move through. She can often see pronghorn herds right outside as they graze in the hay meadows.

Each spring, the pronghorn Preston watches from her window make a 150-mile journey — the longest land migration in the Lower 48 — from their lower-elevation winter habitat near the Big Sandy River in Sublette County to their summer range in Grand Teton National Park. They'll reverse that journey in the fall.

"It makes me feel like I'm living in — because I am living in — their habitat," she said. "When they move through my property, I'm reminded of this. And that I need to be mindful and try not to disturb them. I'm in their place, they're not in mine. They are not intruding, I am."

Preston recently wrote a letter to Governor Mark Gordon, asking him to prioritize the designation and protection of migration corridor habitat on equal ground with economic development. She felt it was important to remind the governor of the perspective that we, as the encroachers, need to make accommodations for wildlife, "before it's too late."

Because she moved to Wyoming for the wildlife and open space, she's been disheartened to see increasing development threaten healthy herds and habitats. She knows certain development is necessary, but believes it should be planned in a way that first and foremost protects wildlife and the land they move through.

"Once something — some wild land — has been lost to private enterprise, residential, or any human activity where there wasn't before, you're never going to get it back." ■



# A roadmap for **community climate action**

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**JOHN BURROWS**  
Conservation Advocate

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**WITH A PROBLEM** as enormous and complicated as climate change, it can be hard to know where to look for solutions — as individuals, organizations, and local governments. The challenge is particularly hard in Wyoming where, for the last century, our state’s prosperity has been tied to exporting fuels that we know now are contributing to the underlying problem — increasing greenhouse gas levels.

At the Wyoming Outdoor Council, we’ve grounded our climate change work in a simple maxim: “Think globally, act locally.” This is our guidepost. It helps us keep the big picture in mind, while we focus on the places where we can do the most good — at the local level. Here in Wyoming — a small town with long streets — working locally matters, and each small victory adds up, making a difference at the state and regional level.

Consider for just a moment that Wyoming produced 40 percent of U.S. thermal coal in 2021 and is responsible for nearly 14 percent of total U.S. carbon emissions. For a population of only 580,000 people, our state’s brand is a carbon-intensive one. Reducing our carbon footprint would bring climate benefits at a national and even global scale. Not only that, but we’re constantly learning that the actions we take within our communities to reduce emissions are practical and cost effective, protect public health, and signal an openness to innovation.

Let’s take the city of Lander as a case study and example for how local action could have meaningful impacts in other Wyoming towns. Over the last three years, a group of local advocates called the Lander Climate Action Network have come together to help the city reduce emissions and implement energy efficient and cost saving solutions. Their story goes something like this:



1.

## **SPARK THE CONVERSATION**

It all started with a book — *The Uninhabitable Earth*, by David Wallace Wells — and a single passionate advocate who convened a small group of neighbors and community members to talk about the issue. Pretty soon the group was meeting regularly to share information, ideas, and inspiration on ways the city might be able to reduce emissions, and save money in the process.

## BUILD YOUR FOUNDATION

The citizen group decided to put on an educational series for the public in 2019, which became known as the Lander Climate Action Series. The series of events brought in local experts from different fields to discuss the impacts of climate change, both globally and locally, and talk about solutions. More than 250 people attended the different sessions and many expressed interest in getting more involved.



2.

### ORGANIZE

With the momentum from the climate action series, the original group decided it was time to formally create an organization to champion the community's climate efforts. They formed what would be called the Lander Climate Action Network, which included roughly 60 members and a six-person steering committee.

3.

4.

### TAKE ACTION!

LCAN worked with local city officials resulting in a Climate Proclamation signed by the mayor, which recognized climate change as a threat and encouraged the city to work toward local solutions.

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The work didn't stop there. In the last two years, LCAN has:

**Created a city Energy and Environment Task Force** to advise the Lander City Council on energy efficiency, emissions reductions, cost savings, and climate resiliency projects.

**Hosted a statewide Wyoming Climate Summit** in June 2022, which brought together citizens from across the state and region to discuss climate change and solutions.

**Worked locally on projects** like a streetlight inventory to replace broken streetlights with new LED bulbs, and raising

money to support local rooftop solar and electric vehicle projects.

**Received grant funding** to hire a consultant to work with the city to identify opportunities to save money and cut emissions. The final product was a municipal energy and environment report that can be found on the City of Lander's website.

Wyoming is a grassroots state. What happens in our small towns eventually influences what happens in Cheyenne and beyond. Lander is an example of one Wyoming town that has started the conversation by taking common-sense and practical steps to begin reducing its emissions. And it's just getting started.

Although the roadmap to climate

resiliency may look different in each Wyoming community, it's our hope that highlighting the work we've supported in Lander will help inspire and guide other communities around the state down their own path toward change and transition.

If local climate action can teach us anything, it is that change is possible, and not always linear. Under the right circumstances, and with the right champions, one small action can build and grow — from one person, to a group, to a community, to a city, to a county, to a state. All that's needed is a spark.

Let us hear the ideas you have for your community — or if you want help getting started. We are all ears. ■

# Meet the team

*Your Wyoming Outdoor Council conservation champions*

## *New staff*

Public Lands and Wildlife Advocate **Meghan Riley** came to WOC in September to lead our work on, you guessed it, public lands and wildlife. This includes focusing on big game migration corridors, watchdogging development, and working with citizens and partner groups to safeguard the Red Desert and sage-grouse habitat. Meghan has an impressive background working on the ground as a wildlife biologist, including time managing caribou on the Alaska Peninsula and stints studying grizzlies, black bears, and wolverines in Wyoming. She and her family are longtime Dubois residents with an ardent appreciation for all the outdoor pursuits available on the public lands out their backdoor.

Development Director **Tyler Cessor** joined WOC at the start of the New Year and is the first person to serve in this role in quite some time. In it, he'll help grow our base of support and seek out new funding opportunities. Born and raised in Cheyenne, Tyler now lives in Casper with his wife (and high school sweetheart) Ashley, and their young daughter. Prior to joining WOC, Tyler was the Executive Director of ART 321 in Casper, where he built partnerships at the intersection of arts, health, economic development, equity, and inclusion. Tyler's excited to start meeting members around the state.



## *New roles* —————

**Brandon Reynolds** is the Outdoor Council's new Program Director, where he heads up our dedicated conservation advocacy team. Brandon previously led our work on water quality — an issue where he'll continue to contribute his expertise.

**John Burrows** is now WOC's Energy and Climate Policy Director, a new role that will reflect his — and WOC's — increased focus on local initiatives that address climate change.

**Yufna Soldier Wolf** joined WOC to engage tribes in our collective grassroots efforts to protect special places in the Northern Red Desert. Today, as Tribal Conservation Advocate, she is still focused on better management of this ancestral landscape.

**Big Wind Carpenter** began at WOC in a part-time capacity to support communications and outreach for the Indigenous Land Alliance of Wyoming. They are now our full-time Tribal Engagement Coordinator, involved in climate and water issues as well as our Red Desert campaign.

**Claire Cella** will expand the scope of her work to play a hands-on role in supporting local climate action. Claire is WOC's Communications Design Associate, which involves graphic design and managing digital platforms. She's played an important role in the Lander Climate Action Network and last summer's Wyoming Climate Summit.

## *Fond farewell* —————

We'd be remiss not to thank **Ryan Sedgeley**, who left to pursue a direct advocacy role in conservation and social justice. Ryan spent several years as Development Associate and was essential in meeting WOC's fundraising needs and building relationships with members.

## *Coming soon* —————

**Era Aranow** of Lander has represented WOC at the Wyoming Legislature for the 2021 and 2022 sessions as a contract lobbyist. In May, she'll officially come on board as WOC's Legislative Advocate to lead our engagement with lawmakers and support good legislation in Cheyenne. ■

### **YOUR WOC TEAM**

**Front (L-R):** Claire Cella, John Burrows, Lisa McGee, Kyle Elmquist, Era Aranow, Hannah Skinner.

**Back (L-R):** Big Wind Carpenter, Yufna Soldier Wolf, Brandon Reynolds, Ryan Sedgeley, Kristen Brown, Alan Rogers, Meghan Riley, Tyler Cessor, Misti Haase.





# PUTTING PROTECTIONS ON PAPER

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**ALAN ROGERS**  
Communications Director

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**THE OUTDOOR COUNCIL** has long been committed to lasting protections for Wyoming’s Red Desert: one of the last interconnected, unfenced, and undeveloped landscapes remaining in the Lower 48. It’s a place where iconic Western wildlife still thrive, and where people still can escape our busy lives to find peace and tranquility under the vast skies. It’s also the ancestral homeland of many tribes that remain connected to this place.

In 2023, WOC is pursuing protections for several important places on public lands in the

desert. Designating these “areas of critical environmental concern” will give federal land managers the tools they need to protect the unique historic and cultural values of each, safeguard wildlife habitat, and create opportunities for federal land managers and tribes to steward the land collaboratively.

An ACEC can be created as part of a comprehensive land use planning process, such as the still-ongoing Rock Springs Resource Management Plan that will include public lands in the Red Desert. But ACECs can also be designated at any time by the Bureau of Land Management.

**It's a place where *iconic Western wildlife still thrive, and where people still can escape our busy lives to find peace and tranquility under the vast skies. It's also the ancestral homeland of many tribes that remain connected to this place.***



*WOC is supporting ACEC protections for three iconic locations in the Red Desert:*

**BOARS TUSK.** More than 400 feet tall, this isolated remnant of an ancient volcano towers above the sagebrush flats that surround it. Boars Tusk has served as a landmark for thousands of years and has historic and cultural significance for Indigenous peoples including the Shoshone, Bannock, and Arapaho. Today, it is perhaps the most recognizable geologic feature of the Northern Red Desert. The area surrounding Boars Tusk lies squarely within high priority sagebrush habitat, Greater sage-grouse core population areas, and pronghorn winter range. The Indigenous Land Alliance of Wyoming envisioned and is spearheading the effort to nominate Boars Tusk for ACEC protections, with the support of WOC and other groups.

**INDIAN GAP TRAIL.** According to oral histories, Indian Gap Trail follows a traditional buffalo trail and was part of a sophisticated network of trade and travel routes. Seasonal movement with the buffalo allowed tribes to thrive in this region for thousands of years. The trail was also likely used for trade between tribes and early settlers. It passes between Essex Mountain and Steamboat Mountain, and overlaps crucial winter range for mule deer and elk along with a portion of the Red Desert to Hoback migration corridor. ILAW is also championing an ACEC designation for Indian Gap Trail.

**RED DESERT TO HOBACK CORRIDOR.** The Outdoor Council first proposed the Red Desert to Hoback mule deer migration corridor as an ACEC in 2016. We maintain our position that this world-renowned migration corridor is worthy of additional protections, and recent federal guidance prioritizing habitat connectivity and migration corridors on public lands only strengthens this case. We re-submitted our nomination to the state BLM office in December.

We'll keep you updated on this process in the months ahead. ■

# WILL YOU DONATE TODAY TO:

Seek protections for special areas in Wyoming's Red Desert?

Grow local and grassroots climate action statewide?

Support WOC's new forever home in Lander?

Ensure a conservation voice at the Wyoming Legislature?

Pursue new avenues to protect big game migration corridors?



[www.wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/donate](http://www.wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/donate)