



Volume XV, Edition II

# WYOMING WILD



A hiker takes in the beauty of the setting sun within the Honeycomb Buttes Wilderness Study Area in southern Wyoming. © LightAlive Photography

## Collaboration key to protecting **WILDERNESS**

by Shaleas Harrison

The Wyoming Wilderness Association focuses primarily on the preservation of wild places and wilderness values. We achieve this goal by informing the public about threats to these values and by working with federal agencies to protect designated wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, and other roadless areas on public lands.

Due to recent budget cuts, the Bureau of Land Management is struggling to enforce regulations that protect WSAs. In the Red Desert, one of our focus areas and home to nine WSAs, unauthorized ORV use has created roads that degrade the wilderness resource and lead to confusion about what activities are permitted in these areas.

To help address this problem, we launched a new wilderness preservation project this summer in

partnership with the BLM and the Wyoming Conservation Corps. Our goal for the project was to help prevent motorized encroachment by placing signs to indicate the locations of the WSAs.

The WCC crew placed 113 signs around five of the nine WSAs in the Northern Red Desert. The project was an important collaboration among WWA, the BLM, and the WCC. WWA sponsored the crew, ensured the students' experience included an educational component, and worked as a liaison between the BLM and WCC. The BLM Recreation Planner, Georgia Foster, provided tools, maps, and project details for the crew. The WCC Program Director, Patrick Harrington, provided a work crew of seven university students. The project will help preserve the unique features of the Northern Red

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Desert by preventing motorized encroachment. Next summer, we will continue to work with the BLM and the WCC in the Red Desert to reclaim roads that were created from unauthorized use within WSAs. With the support of the BLM's Botanist, Recreation Planner, and Range Land Manager, the WCC crew will use native seed mixes and up-to-date reclamation techniques to help restore damaged areas.

This project helped set a wonderful precedent for collaboration between the BLM and nonprofits to reach shared stewardship goals. More importantly, the project helps ensure that the wilderness character of the Red Desert is preserved for future generations to experience.



The Wyoming Conservation Corps crew at work in the Red Desert.

The Red Desert is a priority project because it is a unique, undeveloped landscape in Wyoming. It is a place where visitors can encounter Wyoming's paleontological and anthropological past; fossils and artifacts are found in abundance. The landscape is also important to wildlife. For example, the area contains part of the largest over-land ungulate migration route in North America and is home to one of the largest desert elk herds in North America. These valuable features are concentrated within the nine Wilderness Study Areas in the northern Red Desert, which remain vulnerable to illegal motorized use.

Collaborating with agencies is a proactive solution to counter increasing threats to wilderness resources. This partnership also defines WWA and makes our work all the more important for the future of wilderness in Wyoming. Our efforts would not be possible without the support of our members. Join or renew your membership today to help keep Wyoming wild!

NOTICE: Changes to WWA's bylaws soon will be submitted to the Governing Council for approval. The most notable change will be to allow GC members to be eligible for re-election to the GC for an additional year for every year they serve as an officer. The purpose of this change is to allow WWA to benefit more fully from the experience acquired by its elected leaders. Officers serve one-year terms but may be re-elected for an additional two years. Members having an opinion about this change, or desiring to know about other changes that are proposed, should call our office at 307-672-2751 or send a message to marco@wildwyo.org before November 1, 2017.



# Momentum Builds Across the State to

## KEEP IT PUBLIC

During the last legislative session, Wyoming's public lands faced a serious threat when the Select Federal Natural Resource Committee drafted a bill that attempted to change Wyoming's constitution. In short, the amendment would have paved the way for the state to take over federal lands. Legislators in favor of the bill argued that it would increase the state's control over public lands, while also increasing the state's revenue. Critics of the bill noted that if federal lands were transferred to the state they would be in danger of privatization and economic development, essentially locking out the public. Furthermore, critics argued that the state of Wyoming lacks the administrative and financial capabilities to appropriately determine the future of our public lands. WWA, other advocacy groups, and citizens from all corners of the state formed a coalition in response to the threat. We mobilized to oppose the bill, which resulted in the failure of the bill to move forward as law. The fight to "keep it public" is not over, so the coalition is using its momentum to draft proactive legislation that updates Wyoming's constitution and creates an official Public Lands Day in Wyoming.

As a result of our victory, we are working to ensure the permanency of our federal lands. "Keep It Public" (KIP) partners have created draft legislation to establish a Wyoming Public Lands Day, held annually on the last Saturday in September (visit [keepitpublicwyo.com](http://keepitpublicwyo.com)). The proposed bill would require the governor to issue an annual proclamation encouraging observance of the day. Such action would highlight the importance of public lands, encourage volunteer stewardship activities, and give students in public schools the option to have the Friday before the holiday off to hunt and recreate with family. The bill also includes language that would repeal outdated statutes passed in the 1970's. In summary, this bill would help prevent future attacks from the state to take over federal lands.

To gather support for the bill, WWA with KIP recently held rallies in Laramie, Jackson, and Sheridan. Attendees listened to speakers from the coalition, including WWA organizers Shaleas Harrison, Heidi Davidson, and Leah Zamesnik, who informed attendees on the importance of public lands. People sent letters supporting the bill to their representatives and shared their common interest of public lands. The rallies also mobilized community leaders to share with their representatives the importance of a public lands day in Wyoming.

Threats to our public lands will not stop if we only play defense. Some legislators and developers will continue to find ways to privatize and diminish the federal planning processes. We successfully fought the public lands threat last year and, as a result, KIP is gaining ground by building on our momentum to fight future attacks. To pass a bill of this magnitude, we again need the help of our members. On behalf of public lands, we urge you to contact our elected Senators and Representatives and let them know you support a Public Lands Day in Wyoming!

- by Heidi Davidson

## Hawks Rest Bridge - Teton Wilderness

The Hawks Rest Bridge spans the Yellowstone River in the Teton Wilderness on the Bridger-Teton National Forest. Located about 80 miles north of Jackson, the bridge is part of the North Buffalo Trail, which provides access to the Thorofare, the most remote area in the lower 48 states. Three concrete piers within the river support the 158-foot, multi-span steel bridge. The bridge is allowed in wilderness because it was constructed before the Wilderness Act of 1964.

During an inspection last summer, engineers deemed the bridge unsafe and called for its immediate replacement or repair. The U.S. Forest Service has proposed the use of a helicopter, motorized tools, and a generator to remove and replace the bridge.

WWA submitted comments against the proposal, citing the negative impacts to wilderness character, visitor experience, and wildlife and vegetation; and the use of non-conforming mechanized equipment. We also believe additional analyses should be conducted to evaluate these impacts.

Despite these concerns, the U.S. Forest Service approved a plan to replace the aging structure on August 1. Since that time, however, the agency has postponed receiving bids for the project for lack of funds. The project is being reevaluated and new proposals from qualified engineers may be submitted. WWA will continue to monitor this project and work with the Forest Service to try to preserve wilderness character in the Teton Wilderness.

- by Leah Zamesnik



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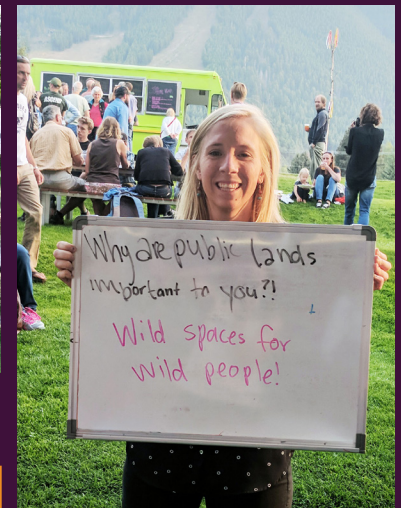
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WWA staff member Heidi Davidson hands out Keep It Public, Wyoming! stickers at the coalition rally in Sheridan.



Keep it Public, Laramie rally participants, with WWA's BLM Wild Lands Community Organizer, Shaleas Harrison.

**JOIN OR RENEW YOUR  
MEMBERSHIP TODAY**



Leah Zamesnik, WWA's Bridger-Teton Community Organizer at the coalition rally in Jackson.

Visit [wildwyo.org](http://wildwyo.org) for more information!