



## 2021 Webinar Series

### Explores Resources & Opportunities for the New Economy

Wyoming's dependence on coal means that the entire economy is in transition as markets shift to cheaper and cleaner sources of energy. Finding grassroots solutions to this reality has been Powder River Basin Resource Council's work for some time. Last spring, we launched our *Reclaiming and Growing Wyoming's Future* webinar series, which we are continuing this year with a focus on families impacted by the transition.

Not only will we highlight the many supportive resources available, but also discuss opportunities to better support Wyoming families and communities undergoing change. The underlying theme of our webinars series this year is that a transitioning worker doesn't have to bear the burden of change alone. Programs by employers usually encompass only the workers, not their spouses or other family members, so that's a gap this webinar series aims to fill. Taking a family approach may be a way for us to collectively prepare for and navigate the coming changes. The webinars are free and information on each one can be found on at [www.powderriverbasin.org/events](http://www.powderriverbasin.org/events).



#### Webinar One – Family Resources for a Changing Wyoming Workforce

The workforce needs and opportunities of the state are evolving. Families can be the best support for a transitioning worker. Becoming aware of services, leveraging financial resources, and supporting well-being are skills that can help families transition to self-sufficiency.

At this first webinar on April 27, moderator Dr. Rob Godby, co-author of the recent *Adapting to Coal-Plant Closures: A Framework for Understanding State Resistance to the Energy Transition* and panelists Director of Workforce Services Robin Cooley, Katie Hogarty of CLIMB Wyoming, and Dr. Kim Dale, President of Western Wyoming Community College, discussed a full spectrum of workforce issues, including identifying job trends and needs, educational and career opportunities, job transition and retraining, supporting current employers, and attracting new ones.

"We all need to work together to continue to strengthen Wyoming," said Cooley. "This means helping people who have lost their jobs find meaningful, well-paying work with businesses in our state. This is the top

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## Powder River Welcomes New Executive Director



Hello to the Powder River community! I can't tell you how excited I am to be joining you all in doing the great work of this organization. Today I have the opportunity to share with you what brought me to Powder River, though in many ways it feels more like a return than an arrival. I was born and raised in Wyoming, splitting my time between Laramie in the summer and school years in Sheridan. My folks, Elizabeth Mason and Kevin Chartier, still live in Sheridan, and they are equally thrilled that I now have another reason to spend

more time in the area. I will primarily be working out of a new Lander office with Monika Leininger (located at 153 N. 4th St. in Lander if you're in town). However, I also expect to visit and work from the Sheridan office regularly.

In my teens and early twenties, I focused on environmental activism, working as a volunteer, employee, and eventual board member of the Biodiversity Conservation Alliance. However, from there my interests shifted to local food systems, in part because I felt environmental organizations too often left *people* out of activism conversations. I completed my undergraduate degree at the University of Wyoming,

receiving a B.S. in Environment and Natural Resources and a B.S. in Zoology and Physiology. While at UW, I also helped found the student farm, ACRES.

With incredible support from my professors at UW, I applied for and received a Marshall Scholarship, funding my graduate studies at the University of Oxford in England where I received an MPhil in Geography and the Environment. While in England, I spent time volunteering at intentional communities to learn from community members and involved government officials about how varying approaches to sustainability affect (food) policy and innovation.

After my graduate degree, I returned to Laramie to work as the project coordinator for a research effort called Food Dignity. I went on to act as project manager for numerous research efforts focused on food sovereignty and health, namely a program called Growing Resilience, which assessed the impacts of home gardens for health on the Wind River Reservation. In this position, I oversaw research staff, managed multi-million dollar budgets, assisted with grant writing, and led reporting to private and federal funders.

Last fall, knowing the grants funding my position would be wrapping up in March of 2021 and feeling the itch to do something new after 10 years of employment at UW, I saw the Executive Director position announcement at Powder River. After informally chatting with

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**Powder River Basin Resource Council (Powder River)** is a grass-roots organization of individuals and affiliate groups dedicated to good stewardship of Wyoming's natural resources. Powder River was formed in 1973 and stands for the preservation and enrichment of our agricultural heritage and rural lifestyle; the conservation of Wyoming's unique land, minerals, water and clean air consistent with responsible use of these resources to sustain the livelihood of present and future generations; and the education and empowerment of Wyoming's citizens to raise a coherent voice in the decisions that will impact Wyoming residents' environment and lifestyle.

**Powder River** is a member of the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC). WORC member groups are Dakota Resource Council, Dakota Rural Action, Idaho Organization of Resource Councils, Northern Plains Resource Council, Oregon Rural Action, Western Colorado Congress, Western Native Voice and Powder River Basin Resource Council.

**The services** provided by Powder River include public education, community organizing and lobbying as permitted on behalf of its membership. Powder River is a non-profit, 501 (c)(3) tax-exempt organization.

**Membership dues:** \$30 for individuals, \$50 for families and \$20 for students and senior citizens. Powder River is dependent on contributions for its work; contributions, large and small, are welcomed.

**Active Affiliate Organizations**

- Alliance for Renewable Energy (ARE)
- Clark Resource Council (CRC)
- Cheyenne Area Landowners Coalition (CALC)
- Pavillion Area Concerned Citizens (PACC)
- Ranchers & Neighbors Protecting Our Water (RNPOW)
- Sheridan Area Resource Council (SARC)

**Board of Directors**

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 Vice Chair.....Joyce Evans  
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**Staff**

Executive Director- Alyssa Wechsler (Incoming)  
 Executive Director-Jill Morrison (Outgoing)  
 Executive Administrator-Stephanie Avey  
 Staff Attorney-Shannon Anderson  
 Communication/Dev. Dir-Robin EH. Bagley  
 Organizers- Pennie Vance, Sheridan, Monika Leininger, Lander and Michele Irwin, Green River.

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**Powder River Breaks**

Editor: Robin EH. Bagley  
 Layout: Stephanie Avey  
 Photos by Powder River staff and members.

# Message from the Chair

Dear Powder River members and friends,



When I was standing at the checkout counter at the grocery store today (I'm writing this on April 19), I noticed the clerk gazing out the window at the snow swirling in fierce eddies in the parking lot. "Springtime in Wyoming," she sighed the familiar refrain. "If you don't like it, wait a minute." As if on command, I did. We both stood momentarily transfixed, as if our attention on the window could conjure a blazing sun to melt the ice and induce the entering shoppers to slough off their parkas. Of course, such fantasy was short-lived, and we soon returned to the carrots, onions, and other soup items before us. Winter lets go reluctantly in our state, as spring insists over and over again its right to exist. My sister, who lives in North Carolina where spring seems to awaken with yawning ease, has been texting me photos of brilliant red and yellow tulips, azaleas, trillium, pansies, arugula, primroses, and Carolina spice bush. Meanwhile, I have been savoring spring's entry by watching wobbly calves on snow-spattered landscapes, steeling themselves against the wind aside their mothers' flanks. Or sometimes I search to see if the three purple vincas are able to poke their heads through a melting snow bank.

As much as I appreciate the sensual pleasures—the warmth, hues, textures, and fragrances—of more temperate zones, I also admit to admiring the virtues symbolized in Wyoming's spring. Springtime in Wyoming performs persistently in its repeated attempts to thrust itself into being ("If at first you don't succeed..."). And then there is its unpredictability. It can be fascinating to arise each morning not knowing what will happen next: rain? snow? wind? sleet? sunshine? all of the above? Such uncertainty and openness to surprise can foster curiosity and, perhaps if we're lucky, resilience. Finally, the jarring contrasts, the arresting juxtaposition of unlikely images—like the staunch of daffodils blooming defiantly under falling snow—can inspire courage and creativity.

I like to think these very same qualities inspire our work at Powder River. Certainly, the staff have been resilient and persistent, especially this year, as they worked tirelessly and creatively to address the issues which our members have raised. Voicing opposition to a bill to eliminate net metering is a recent example. Through the staff's efforts and the unprecedented groundswell of support provided by Powder River members and allies, the bill was finally tabled so that small, distributed, customer-generated solar energy could be preserved. However, with the possibility that new attempts may arise to overturn this form of renewable energy and source of economic diversification, our staff will be working with coalitions of supporters and local governments to act proactively to demonstrate the many benefits of this easily accessible and affordable form of sustainable energy.

As we continue supporting Wyoming's coal-dependent communities' transition into a more diversified economy, the staff are creating "Reclaiming & Growing Wyoming's Future," a series of webinars which provide education, tools, and resources in response to our state's economic challenges. The first webinar in this series, offered on April 27, "Family Resources for a Changing Wyoming Workforce," included topics on training and educational opportunities, new job trends, family financial health, job placement, and other life skills. Additionally, staff created another webinar (unrelated to the series), "Building Soils for Fat Cows & Ranch Profit" which featured rancher, author and soil health pioneer, Gabe Brown and conservationist and rancher Ann Fisher on April 29. If you missed these informative programs when they first aired, they and subsequent webinars are fortunately available on our website to view at your convenience

These are just a few of the ways we have been working to support our communities and agricultural heritage. As spring gains a firmer foothold and summer emerges, we look forward to a time when we may once more gather safely. Meanwhile, stay safe and keep your fingers crossed for an in-person Harvest Celebration.

With gratitude,

*Marcia Westkott*

# Eagle Specialty Materials & Interior Reach Troubling Deal on Unpaid Coal Royalties

In February, the Department of Interior, Eagle Specialty Materials (ESM), and the attorneys in Blackjewel's bankruptcy case released a settlement agreement for unpaid royalties on federal coal leases mined by Blackjewel, and its predecessor, Contura, at the Eagle Butte and Belle Ayr mines. According to the legal filing, over \$32 million in royalties are unpaid at the Belle Ayr Mine and \$27.8 million in royalties are unpaid at the Eagle Butte Mine, with hundreds of thousands owed in interest.

Powder River Basin Resource Council decried the sweetheart deal struck between the Department of the Interior and ESM, a company that was paid over \$80 million to take over the Belle Ayr and Eagle Butte coal mines from Contura during the Blackjewel bankruptcy proceeding in October 2019. The settlement of approximately \$61.5 million debt of unpaid royalties and interest for a few cents on the dollar and insecure interest-free future payments and royalties has cost Wyoming and American citizens tens of millions of dollars. Wyoming receives approximately half of all federal coal royalties, so loses half of these unpaid royalties.

"This terribly one-sided settlement allows Belle Ayr and Eagle Butte to keep operating for now," said Bob LeResche, a Powder River Board member, "but it forgives tens of millions of dollars in royalties that should have been supporting Wyoming schools and other federal projects."

"Interior has failed Wyoming and American taxpayers in two ways in this debacle," LeResche continued. "First, the bond provided to guarantee financially shaky Blackjewel would pay their royalties was pitifully small. It covered less than 20% of back royalties the company didn't pay. Second, Interior failed to collect as months went by and

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**– Bob LeResche**

unpaid royalties accumulated, and allowed Blackjewel to escape into bankruptcy court before acting in the American taxpayers' interest."

"We hope that in the future the Department of the Interior will more aggressively meet their proprietary responsibilities to Wyoming and U.S. taxpayers. They need to manage the thousands of federal mineral leases in Wyoming in a way that collects the critically important revenues that are due."

"As a miner, you expect the company you work for will make good on what they owe our communities in taxes and royalties. I'm disgusted that Blackjewel didn't pay what they should have and disappointed that ESM isn't being held responsible for what is owed," said Lynne Huskinson, a retired Eagle Butte miner.

The settlement – made to allow Interior to transfer the coal leases from Blackjewel to ESM – collects only a small portion of the unpaid royalties. The deal:

- Allows ESM to pay off the royalty debt owed by Contura over a ten-year period, interest free, in spite of Contura paying \$8.7 million to ESM to hold in an escrow account for this very purpose as part of the October 2019 sale agreement;
- Forgives ESM from paying all but \$324,955 of the Blackjewel debt at the Belle Ayr Mine, leaving over \$22 million left as unsecured claim in the bankruptcy proceeding, likely to remain unpaid given the bankruptcy estate's insolvency;
- For the \$324,955, allows ESM to pay it off over a ten-year period, interest free;
- Sets up a payment plan for \$17.6 million of the unpaid royalties

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## Wasting Water in Laramie County

Water, it's more precious than oil and gas. This is especially true in the eastern two-thirds of Laramie County, where the State Engineer on April 1, 2015 issued the Laramie County Control Area order. This water shortage order is to remain effective for five years. During this time the State Engineer called for well spacing requirements for all new wells, which includes closing areas to further permitting for large capacity wells in the High Plains Aquifer. The High Plains Aquifer is the aquifer from which rural Laramie County residents get their potable drinking water, and from which ranchers extract water for agricultural purposes. The further east one goes in Laramie County the more severe the water shortage problem.

Back in April 2019, Ty Lerwick, Keith Lerwick, and Jill and Rodney Lerwick filed a permit application with the State Engineer's Office for permission to establish eight new high-capacity water wells on their properties which are a few miles west of Albin. These new well permits would extract 4,642 acre-feet, or 1.5 billion gallons, of water per year from the High Plains Aquifer. Surrounding landowners are in opposition to this because it will negatively impact the availability of ground water and likely dry up surrounding streams. Permitting these wells would also create a dangerous precedent, which would enable

others to petition the State Engineer's Office for high-capacity water wells in the future.

The Covid-19 crisis put the contested hearing process on hold for more than a year. Now it looks like this hearing before the Ground Water Advisory Committee will occur in mid-June. The Cheyenne Area Landowner's Coalition, with its more than 200 members, is opposed to the granting of these permits because it will decrease the availability of water in the High Plains Aquifer and negatively affect surrounding landowners and others who depend on the aquifer for potable drinking water.

If you are not a party to this contested hearing, you are encouraged to express your concern to Mr. Greg Lanning, State Engineer, 122 W 25<sup>th</sup> Street, Herschler Building 2 W, Cheyenne, Wyoming 82002. Email: greg.lanning@wyo.gov.

**Alex Bowler  
Cheyenne**

*Editor's Note: This originally ran in the April 21, 2021 issue of the Wyoming Tribune-Eagle.*

# Abandoned Mine Land Fund Reauthorization Introduced in Congress

In March, Rep. Matt Cartwright (D-PA) introduced the Revitalizing the Economy of Coal Communities by Leveraging Local Activities and Investing More Act (RECLAIM) Act as well as legislation to reauthorize the Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) fund with bipartisan support to spur immediate job creation and help ensure coal country is a part of the economic recovery.

Communities across the United States that have historically depended on the coal industry have been hit doubly hard in the last year, with more mines and coal plants expected to close as the coal economy's decline is accelerated by COVID-19. The legislation introduced by Rep. Cartwright would invest in cleaning up abandoned mine lands, creating jobs restoring damaged lands and waters, and transforming them into economic hubs. In fact, the passage of the RECLAIM Act and the AML reauthorization legislation would create an estimated 13,000 new jobs immediately in reclamation alone.

In 1977, Congress established the AML fund under the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA). Since then, the program has eliminated over 46,000 open mine portals, reclaimed over 1,000 miles of dangerous highwalls, restored water supplies to countless residents of coalfield communities, and created jobs and economic development opportunities. It's also protected 7.2 million people nationwide from hazards like landslides and flooding that result from leaving damaged lands unaddressed. But, funding for the AML program is set to expire this year, with at least \$11 billion in investment needed to reclaim and restore the remaining high priority abandoned mines throughout the country. Rep. Cartwright's legislation reauthorizes funding for the program for 15 years by extending a small fee on coal severance.

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**"The Abandoned Mine Land program will expire this fall if it's not reauthorized. AML provides vital funds for Wyoming and other coal producing states who have many abandoned sites yet to be reclaimed."**

**- Stacy Page**

reauthorized. AML provides vital funds for Wyoming and other coal producing states who have many abandoned sites yet to be reclaimed," said Stacy Page, Powder River and WORC Board member and a former Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality regulator. "With the fee collection already decreasing due to the contracting coal market, we can't afford to let the program expire. It needs to be reauthorized at the current fee level and extended long enough for states like Wyoming to finish

reclaiming these abandoned sites."

By investing \$1 billion in projects in 20 states, the bipartisan RECLAIM Act works together with AML reauthorization by repairing land and waterways damaged by mining, treating polluted waters, sealing and filling abandoned mine entries, and developing erosion prevention measures to prevent dangerous land and mudslides. Then, with abandoned mine sites made available for new uses, the RECLAIM Act funds projects on these sites that turn them into economic hubs for agriculture, tourism, retail, and renewable energy while injecting new resources into the local tax base.

"As a former coal miner and resident of a coal community dealing with the closing of both a plant and a mine, I am glad to see Congress move forward with mine reclamation funding. The RECLAIM Act and the Abandoned Mine Land Fund have long had bi-partisan support and will help communities like Nucla move forward into the future," said Roger Carver, retired coal miner, former president of UMW Local Union 1281, and Western Colorado Alliance member. "RECLAIM alone will bring \$27 million in investment back to Colorado's coal communities to put miners back to work cleaning up old mines and diversifying our rural economies. It's time to move forward, not backwards, and invest in a better future for our kids."

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## Ramaco Tries to Close Public Access

I see that Ramaco has just put up No Trespassing signs at the access point for Game and Fish Walk-in Area No. 1 near the Acme Road exit from I-90, closing public access. I wonder what happened to their promise given at all of the public meetings and hearings for the mine and the property rezone that they wouldn't be shutting off access to any public recreation areas. I suppose it went the same way as their promise of a public park on the banks of the Tongue River that suddenly became infeasible the second that their property was rezoned, or the \$25,000 boat ramp and picnic area at the Kleenburn Recreation Area that turned out to be built with mostly donated materials and labor and has not the slightest resemblance to the plans they published in the Press. It probably went the same way as the architecturally designed building that would be the jewel of the Tongue River Valley that actually turned out to be the cheapest prefab cowshed that they could buy. I could go on and on because there are dozens more but I think my point is made.



Ramaco posted No Trespassing signs at the gates to the walk-in area. After members of the public contacted the county about this matter, Ramaco had to change the signs.

So far, the number of promises made to get permits and rezoning that have actually been kept is zero. Another loss to the citizens and sportsmen of the area in favor of an out-of-state corporation.

**John Buyok  
Ranchester**

*Editor's Note: This letter-to-the-editor was submitted to the Sheridan Press in early March, but was not published. John Buyok, Joan Tellez, Anton Bocek, and others also contacted the County Commissioners about Ramaco putting up the No Trespassing signs. On April 7, 2021, Sheridan Media reported that the signs had been changed to remove the No Trespassing notice. In that article Jeff Barron, representing Ramaco, said, "in the permit, it also allows for the walk-in areas to be utilized when active mining isn't occurring, which is the case now." Ramaco has not started mining the area yet and has no projected date for doing so.*

# It's Time for Wyoming Leaders to Focus on Real Solutions

Dear Wyoming Leaders,

With deep concern for Wyoming's future we need your focus on the critical issues and facts facing our state.

## **Coal, oil and gas production will continue to decline.**

Coal funded our government services for decades. Wyoming production peaked at 466 million tons in 2008 and has dropped to less than half that amount today. Legislative schemes to require a carbon capture based portfolio standard can never make a dent in this problem. Only 5% of coal produced in Wyoming is consumed by in-state power plants. Most of that power is exported to neighboring states that are transitioning to cleaner energy sources. Only 2% of Wyoming coal production generates electricity for in-state loads.

Oil will not rescue our state budget. Wyoming accounted for less than 2.3% of US oil production in 2019. North Dakota's Bakken Formation, the Permian Basin and the Eagle Ford shale are North America's low-cost oil producers. North Dakota produces five times as much oil as Wyoming, and Texas 18 times as much. Globally, Saudi Arabia is the low-cost producer. A recent price war with Russia created an oversupply and lowered world oil prices. These national and global realities ensure that Wyoming, a minor producer, will always be first out in declining markets.

Worldwide, oil supplies are increasing, and demand is dropping. Markets for petroleum-based transportation fuels will shrink with today's rapid rise in electric vehicle sales. Already, Tesla has a market capitalization per dollar sales 50 times higher than General Motors, reflecting the investment community's bet on the future of EVs. Even GM has announced plans to phase out internal combustion engines in 14 years.

Although natural gas will temporarily provide some replacement power for coal, it is likely that gas-fired generation will decrease as prices rise. It will also decline as renewable sources of energy and battery storage provide lower cost power and add resiliency to the grid. In the end, gas will likely fuel only generating plants providing peaking power and backup to renewable energy sources.

## **Carbon Capture and Sequestration Technology is experimental, unproven and prohibitively expensive.**

There are no successful CCUS projects in the United States. All projects attempted have been abandoned due to skyrocketing costs (Kemper) and economics (Petra Nova). Requiring Wyoming power producers to use carbon capture on old coal plants is prohibitively expensive, will destroy market pricing, and will lead to higher bills for utility ratepayers. The breakeven price of compressing and pipelining carbon dioxide for enhanced oil recovery exceeds today's market price for oil.

## **Wyoming's over reliance on declining revenues from fossil fuels leaves us with a budget crisis that threatens our health, safety, and future prosperity.**

Proposed cuts of 10% in education and health services, on the heels of repeated cuts since 2017, will exact a heavy toll. Additional cuts of \$100 million in K-12 funding, \$35 million in University of Wyoming funding, and \$25 million in community college funding will degrade the viability of these institutions, the economic health of their host communities, and the future quality of our workforce. The next biennium calls for a \$138 million cut in the Wyoming Department of Health budget, including a \$49 million loss in federal matching funds. This deprives tens of thousands of uninsured or disabled Wyoming residents of health care. Cumulative state budget cuts exceeding 20% will diminish the quantity and quality of public services, cause loss of jobs and economic activity in our communities, and make us less attractive to new businesses.

## **Decline in mineral revenues does not render Wyoming unable to afford quality education, health services, and other public infrastructure.**

Our state's per capita tax burden is one of the lowest in the nation. According to the Wyoming Taxpayers Association, the average household paid \$3,000 in total taxes and (before the budget cuts) received public services costing \$30,000. Our free ride is over. Most Wyoming residents choose to live here for our state's quality of life, not our ten-to-one tax advantage. We believe citizens and non-energy corporations would accept higher taxes commensurate with the government services they desire.

We need our elected officials to take bold action to lead Wyoming forward to a more diverse economy and expand revenue streams to support our citizens. Wyoming workers and communities need state leaders who will work to recruit diverse industries, restructure our tax code, and seek funding from the new federal administration to provide job re-training and recruitment opportunities.

We offer our support to move forward to re-invent and re-invigorate Wyoming. We need your leadership.

**Marcia Westkott**

**Chair, Powder River Basin Resource Council**

*Editor's Note: This ran in the Casper Star-Tribune on February 25, 2021. The Powder River Board also sent a letter elaborating on these concerns to Governor Mark Gordon.*

## **Powder River Solar Energy Production**

**Energy Produced: 371 kWh  
Carbon Offset: 565 lbs**

**We have offset the equivalent of 6 trees in February & March 2021!**



## **Did you know that Powder River has a YouTube Channel?**

You can find us by going to YouTube.com and searching PowderRiverBasinRC. All of our solar stories and our oil & gas impact videos are available to watch.

# 2021 Legislative Session Wrap-Up!

After a session unlike any other, the 66th Wyoming Legislature has adjourned. We are so thankful for our members who throughout this long and strange session engaged with their representatives and senators to make their voices heard. We are also giving our gratitude to our legislators for the hard work they did throughout a challenging session as well as all the Capitol staff and faculty, who despite concerns of COVID-19, dedicated their time to serving our state. In spite of lobbying from our homes, thanks to Powder River's members we had a successful session in defeating, amending, and improving many of the bad bills that came through the chambers, see below for the highlights!

## Solar Freedom Lives!

Brought forward at the last interim meeting of the Corporations Committee in November 2020, Senate File 16-New Net Metering Systems was a surprise measure which we strongly opposed throughout the session. Unlike many committee bills, this measure was never posted publicly before the interim committee vote and received very little vetting before heading into the session. Senate File 16 sought to overhaul Wyoming's laws for rooftop solar and backyard wind (customer-generated systems) by repealing the current statutes for net-metering. Those of you who have been following this issue for a while know that in the past the legislature has tried to reduce the payback for rooftop solar, but this bill was more vague and problematic than previous attacks on net-metering. That is because Senate File 16 would have entirely gotten rid of the statute that guarantees customers can hook up their renewable energy system to the grid and receive credit for the power they generate. Instead of having the protections that are in place in the statute, the bill would have required the Public Service Commission to decide the terms, conditions, and rates for net-metered systems, with the legislative charge under the bill to remove "subsidies," also known as "cost shifts," for solar in the electricity rate structure, even though they haven't been shown to exist at Wyoming's current level of rooftop solar generation. The bill attempted to grandfather current net-metered solar systems, but repealing the law presented great uncertainty to both current and prospective solar owners on whether they would be able to get a return on their solar investment.

After barely passing the Senate and being held on the Speaker of the House's desk for over a month, Senate File 16 was tabled in the House Corporations Committee by a narrow vote. At that meeting,

citizen opposition to the bill was outstanding! The chairman said there were over 52 people who wanted to testify over Zoom with countless citizens who traveled to Cheyenne to be in-person for the hearing. Representative MacGuire who made the motion to table the bill said that this bill was "putting the cart before the horse" by deciding there was a problem that had not yet been shown to exist, and ultimately the majority of the committee agreed.

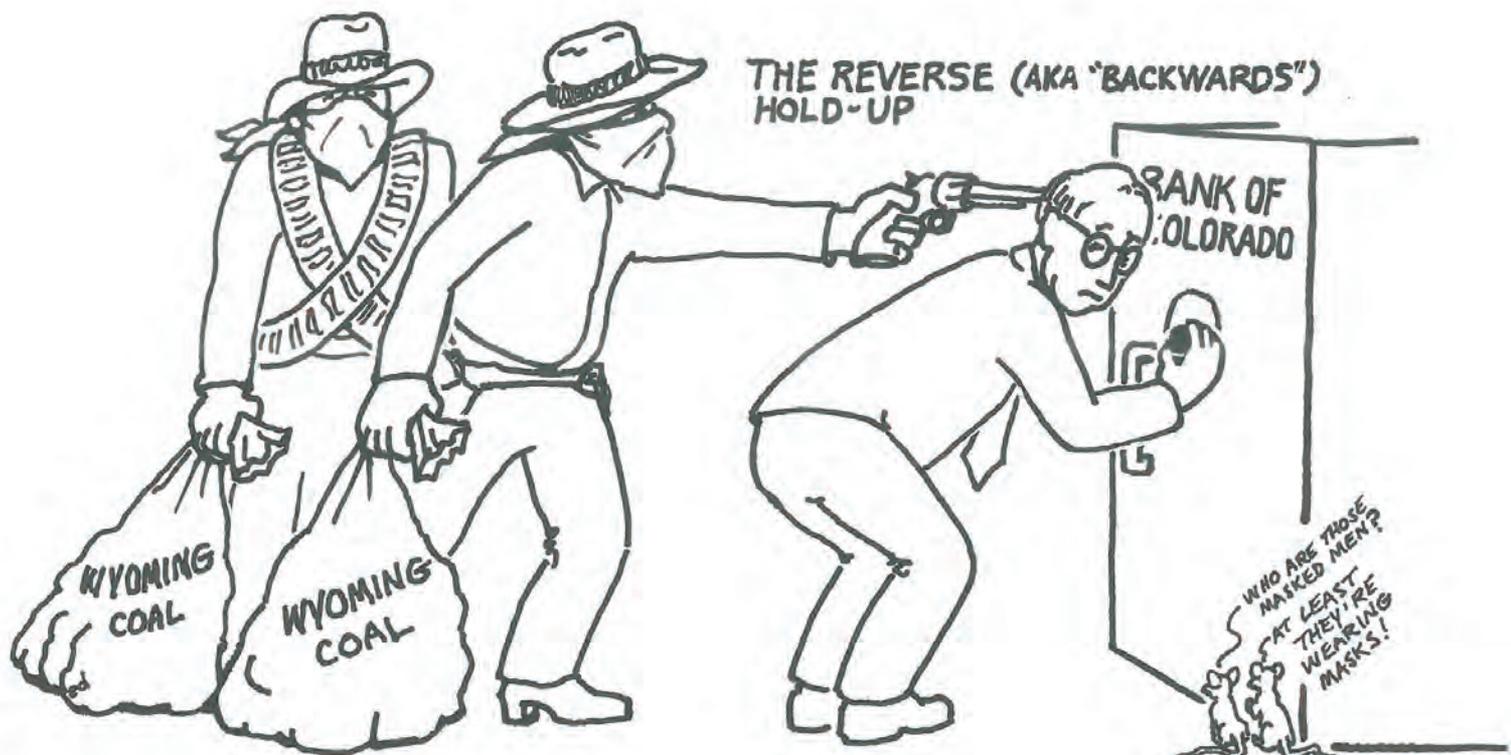
At Powder River we know this issue won't go away, and we are dedicated to promoting transparency and seeking truth about the reality of small-scale renewable energy in Wyoming. In the meantime, customer-generated energy continues to provide benefits to residents, businesses, and local governments across the state.

## Unfortunately, Coal Decline Denialism Continues...

With the irrelevant to Wyoming, but tragic, recent power outage disaster in Texas on everyone's minds, keeping coal going for "reliability" purposes was the new argument this session against coal fired power plant closures. A number of bills this year attempted to prevent utilities from retiring coal plants early, or even at all. Originally there were eight bills proposed, but only three made it all the way to the Governor's desk, in heavily amended forms. Two bills that passed the legislature, House Bill 166-Utilities-presumption against facility retirements and Senate File 136-Public service commission considerations, create new roadblocks in the regulatory process. These new bills build on previous years' bills SF159 (forced coal plant sale) and HB200 (carbon capture and reliability mandates) and will require a utility to jump through more hoops before a coal plant can be closed. Even more troubling, House Bill 207 created a \$1.2 million litigation fund, encouraging our Attorney General to embrace losing legal theories to take on Oregon, Colorado, or other states that supposedly are reducing the market share of our coal plants. Powder River sent a letter to the Governor asking him to veto this ill-informed piece of legislation, but he signed the bill, even after his staff acknowledged to us that "None of us can accurately predict the extent to which this fund may be used." This session shows how much our state needs to focus on tackling head-on the real issues we need to address, like revenue losses in local communities when coal plants shut down and providing jobs and opportunities for our future.

## New Opportunities for Meat Prevail!

Wyoming's homegrown agricultural industry continues to be a



# Study Demonstrates Madison Aquifer Should Be Protected

A study and analysis sought by Powder River and our allies, Wyoming Outdoor Council and Natural Resources Defense Council, demonstrates that the Madison Aquifer in the Wind River Basin near the Moneta Divide field is an economic and practical source of drinking water for the future and should not be exempted from drinking water protection standards to be used as an underground waste disposal site for oil and gas polluted wastewater. On March 22, we submitted the study to EPA Region 8 because they are the final agency that must authorize approval for any aquifer exemption submitted by Wyoming.

Dr. Robert Raucher, an economist and water supply expert, and Karen Raucher, a policy analyst, researched and wrote the detailed 26-page report, concluding, “Aethon Energy’s request for an aquifer exemption for the Madison formation should be denied for numerous reasons, based on the high value that the aquifer system holds as an economically and technologically practical source of drinking water in the future.”

The most recent attempt to exempt the Madison Aquifer formation in the Moneta Divide area from drinking water protection standards was a renewed request from Aethon Energy in a hearing before the Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (WOGCC) held on Nov. 15, 2020. The WOGCC heard testimony from numerous Wyoming citizens, experts, and organizations against the aquifer exemption, but still the industry-friendly WOGCC voted 4 to 1 to approve Aethon’s request. The decision opened the door to allow Aethon to exempt and pollute the Madison Aquifer in the Moneta Divide area so they could dispose of over one million gallons a day of contaminated oil and gas wastewater. Notably, the WOGCC reached an opposite decision in 2015 when Powder River successfully argued against the same Madison Aquifer exemption, and the WOGCC unanimously voted against polluting this valuable aquifer.

In this new report Dr. Raucher wrote, “This analysis provides USEPA Region 8 reviewers of the Aethon Energy request for an Aquifer Exemption with an understanding of the enormous potential economic value, practicality, and feasibility of the Madison Formation groundwater resource to meet future drinking water and other water supply needs, both within the surrounding counties, and across broader regions of the State of Wyoming and beyond.”

Dr. Robert Raucher, an economist and water supply expert, and Karen Raucher, a policy analyst, researched and wrote the detailed 26-page report, concluding, “Aethon Energy’s request for an aquifer exemption for the Madison formation should be denied for numerous reasons, based on the high value that the aquifer system holds as an economically and technologically practical source of drinking water in the future.”

## Powder River Welcomes...Continued from page 1

Monika and spending more time on the organization’s website, I came to better understand the degree to which it is a people-focused organization, and I was intrigued by the organization’s growing focus on local agriculture and other forms of community development. Here I saw an incredible nexus of my passions for supporting people (members, stakeholders, and staff alike), protecting Wyoming lands and lifestyles, building local food systems, and using the administrative skills I’d gained as a research project manager. I’m thankful the board and staff agreed!

**“This analysis provides USEPA Region 8 reviewers of the Aethon Energy request for an Aquifer Exemption with an understanding of the enormous potential economic value, practicality, and feasibility of the Madison Formation groundwater resource to meet future drinking water and other water supply needs, both within the surrounding counties, and across broader regions of the State of Wyoming and beyond.”**

**- Dr. Robert Raucher**

within the surrounding counties, and across broader regions of the State of Wyoming and beyond.”

The report provides a detailed analysis of the specific reasons the aquifer exemption request should be denied based on the high value of the Madison Aquifer and the fact that the aquifer is an economically practical source of drinking water in the future. The Rauchers’ economic analysis clearly demonstrates that: 1. Aethon’s review was very limited; 2. an expanded analysis shows it is economically practical to tap the

Madison formation as a future drinking water source at the local, regional or even statewide level; 3. more expensive water supply options that were once thought to be economically and technologically impractical, such as water reuse and desalination, are currently being adopted in many locations of the U.S.; 4. climate change has implications on the value of water that the WOGCC did not take into account, and 5. shows the economic value of Aethon’s produced water as a water resource, rather than a waste produced to be disposed of while impacting another freshwater resource. The report states:

The analysis provided in this report concludes that the Madison formation has significant potential to serve as an economically practical future source of drinking water. As such, in accordance with the applicable governing framework, an aquifer exemption, should be denied. The economic analysis presented here makes clear that using this high-quality water resources for waste disposal will degrade a very valuable potential future source of drinking water for many households, businesses, and water agencies in Wyoming, and across the states throughout the broader region of the western United States.

While the WOGCC approved Aethon’s request for the Madison aquifer exemption nearly six months ago, they have yet to sign the final decision and forward it to EPA Region 8 for review and a final decision. We will continue to stay engaged and to ensure protection of our vital freshwater resources from oil and gas wastewater and pollution.

**Jill Morrison  
Powder River Staff**

Outside of work, I’m an avid cyclist and certified mountain bike instructor, an enthusiastic and sometimes-successful gardener, and part-time backyard chicken wrangler. I also am excited to share with you my upcoming marriage to a wonderful person, Kyle Duba, who loves to climb rocks and works as a photographer and videographer for Wyoming PBS. Our family also includes Grady the loyal old brown dog and Salvador the sassy one-eyed pirate cat.

I’m looking forward to meeting (and re-meeting) you all!

**Alyssa Wechsler  
Powder River Staff**

# Powder River Supports Department of Interior Oil & Gas Leasing Pause

This month, Powder River and its members submitted detailed comments to the Department of Interior (DOI) expressing support for the agency's review of oil and gas leasing and development. Separately, we joined with 20 other local, regional, and national conservation organizations to defend in court the agency's pause on new oil and gas leasing while the review takes place.

"The Department of Interior's actions pause the looting of public resources by developers accumulating excess leases at bargain basement prices," said Bob LeResche, Powder River Board Member from Clearmont. "The pause will not harm actual producers, who today hold thousands of acres of undeveloped leased resources. It will give our nation time to rationalize and restructure management of our public energy resources to meet future needs of climate, restoration, multiple use, and revenues."

The oil and gas industry has stockpiled more than 7,000 federal drilling permits—permits for new drilling that will take years for industry to complete. The industry has also stockpiled more than 13 million acres of public lands oil and gas leases. That means the oil and gas industry can continue operating as normal for years. Nationally, industry produces oil and gas on less than half the public lands for which it owns leases. And you don't have to just take our word for it. "We have a deep inventory of approved federal drilling permits in hand that essentially cover all of our desired activity over the next presidential term," said David Harris, an executive vice president for Devon Energy Corporation on an investor call in October.

The leasing pause gives DOI time and space to review comments and public calls for reform of the way oil and gas is developed from federally-owned minerals. In Powder River's comments to the agency, we asked for a number of reforms, including:

- Increasing royalty rates and other compensation to Americans to put federal royalty rates on par with state and private rates;
- Updating bonding requirements to require a company to cover the full cost of plugging and reclamation work at well sites;
- Better protecting public health and safety of people living near oil and gas development;
- Increasing landowner consultation and participation regarding leasing and development of split estate minerals; and
- Managing the federal mineral estate in alignment of goals to address climate change.

Powder River's members also weighed in with strong comments in support of reform of the oil and gas program. In her comments, Powder River member and split estate Converse County landowner Maria Katherman offered some sage wisdom to DOI:

"You have a big task in front of you. But I can tell you we have a

**"Bonding for oil and gas operations must be brought up to the realistic costs of cleaning up the damage from development so that if the operator walks away, there is money available in the bond to cap and restore the area."**

**– Nancy Sorenson**

big problem living with this industry here because the obvious solutions and protections have not been implemented although we all know about the damage. This has been a century of mounting destruction so we must turn the ship around! Thank you for being brave and bold enough to undertake this review."

Powder River member and Campbell County landowner Nancy Sorenson commented on the need to reform oil and gas bonding by telling DOI:

"While many of the wells have been reclaimed on state land and minerals and private minerals, thanks to Wyoming bonding practices, we have not seen any wells reclaimed on federal land or on split estate land where the federal government owns the minerals. One reason is that bonding for reclamation at the federal level does not come close to covering the costs of proper capping of the wells and restoration of the land where it exists. By allowing oil and gas operators to damage private and federal property without being responsible for its restoration is unacceptable and is actually an under the radar way of subsidizing the fossil fuel industry. Bonding for oil and gas operations must be brought up to the realistic costs of cleaning up the damage from development so that if the operator walks away, there is money available in the bond to cap and restore the area."

Many of our members focused on the need to balance oil and gas development with protection of land, air, water, and wildlife resources, and the global climate. For instance, Sylvia Bagdonas of Laramie commented:

"The United States is facing drastic, last minute decisions regarding the stewardship of our public lands and water. The clock is ticking as we face devastating consequences due to years of neglect and unjust energy production that benefited a few citizens while the remaining tax payers with no voice in the regulation practices of the Department of Interior payed for the damage to our public lands and climate. It is time to change the regulation of federal oil and gas leasing and permitting with a focus on climate change and how these practices impact our world. We need to update the leasing and permitting rules to maximize the use of science in decision making for protection of our public health, air, water and wildlife."

Overall, 115,000 people from around the country submitted comments to DOI. The DOI will be considering all of the comments over the next few months, and a report on its next steps in the review and reform process is expected in June.

**Shannon Anderson  
Powder River Staff**

## Sheridan Seed Library Reopens!

In March, Powder River Local Foods Committee members, John Buyok, and Rachel and Luc Bourgault, met at the Sheridan Public Library to stock and re-open the Sheridan County Seed Library, which had been closed since March of 2020 due to the pandemic. Fortunately, Powder River was able to adapt and safely distribute hundreds of seed packets to

the local community last spring from the outdoor porch of the Sheridan office. This year, the Seed Library is back in its proper place with plenty of seeds for the public.

Each year seed companies generously donate hundreds of packets of non-hybrid fruit, vegetable, and flower seeds to Powder River so we

**...continued on page 10**

# Expanding Markets for Locally Grown Foods

Farmers markets are a great place for local food producers to market their goods, but in small communities that usually means the producer can only market for a few hours, one or two times a week. Some producers also sell from their doorstep, take phone orders, and do home deliveries. While improving the flow of goods, all of these options have significant limitations that inhibit business growth.

Entrepreneurial local food producers, Christine Hampshire of Cross E Dairy near Ucross and Adam Bunker of Papa Joe's Produce in Sheridan, who is also president of the Wyoming Food Coalition, decided to do something about these limitations. Hampshire made the bold move of securing a retail space on Sheridan's South Main Street where she opened the Food Freedom Store and sells only local and Wyoming food products.

"I didn't have a big dream to be a store owner, I just wanted to do something to help other producers and to help our community," said Hampshire. When asked how it was going and what the biggest challenge has been, she said the store was going well, and the toughest challenge is making local folks aware that the Food Freedom Store exists and what it offers to both producers and consumers.

According to its Facebook page, the store makes it "easier than ever to shop homegrown, homemade local food products. From raw A2 milk to farm fresh produce, all our products come straight from nearby producers. It doesn't get fresher than this."



Christine Hampshire visits with Joe Wesnitzer at the Food Freedom Store in downtown Sheridan.

The store operates somewhat like a co-op for local foods, wherein each vendor has a separate account and is responsible for delivering and maintaining their inventory.

Seeing a need to bolster marketing at the store, Bunker put his web development expertise to work and created a virtual e-commerce website for the store, similar to one he operated for local producers during the pandemic.

Many local food producers who sell at the Sheridan farmers markets now also sell directly and online at the Food Freedom Store. This expands their ability to sell produce, baked goods, jams, heritage grains, eggs, and other foods covered by the Food Freedom Act from a few hours a week to five days a week and provides a drop off place for online and phone orders.

Bunker is enthusiastic about what the Food Freedom Store is doing for his business, Papa Joe's Produce, and all local foods producers. He said that the store "allows producers to reach more customers who can't go to the Saturday farmer's market." Having a Main Street storefront is "pulling in new people and expanding the local foods movement." According to Bunker, the store has helped Papa Joe's increase sales by 50%. That's quite an asset for our local foods producers and customers.

Hats off to Hampshire, Bunker, and the Food Freedom Store at 110 S. Main Street, Sheridan, [www.facebook.com/CrossEFreedomFoods/](https://www.facebook.com/CrossEFreedomFoods/) for creating a charming space for the ongoing growth and development of our local foods community.

**Pennie Vance**  
**Powder River Staff**

## Pursuing Knowledge at the 2021 Wyoming State Science Fair

Each year the Powder River Basin Resource Council offers Bill Barlow Memorial Youth in Conservation awards to students participating in the University of Wyoming's State Science Fair. While the Science Fair provides a forum for sixth through 12th grade student scientists to conduct and share original research in a broad array of science, engineering, technology, and math fields, Powder River's awards honor projects that examine Wyoming ecosystems, the impact of human activities on the world around us, sustainable agricultural practices, and innovative alternatives to nonrenewable energy sources.

For the 2021 fair, I had the honor of serving with Powder River Board members Liza Cuthbert-Millett and Wayne Lax as a juror for the Youth in Conservation awards. In most years this would have meant traveling to Laramie to spend a day walking through the exhibits and then on the following day talking with individual students about their work. But this year, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the science fair was conducted online.

Sixty-nine individual or collaborative projects were posted with photos of the student researchers, abstracts of their projects, presentations of the hypotheses to be examined, descriptions of the methodology and activities involved in the research, and the final results of that research. Each individual or group also posted a video describing the project and the researchers' interest in the topic—why it was chosen, what it meant to the student.

Liza, Wayne, and I began by independently reading through all the projects and making a list of those we thought were most appropriate for the Youth in Conservation awards. We then met for a telephone conference call to choose finalists projects whose student researchers we would

interview—again independently. While this was more cumbersome than in-person meetings would have been, we were able to read everyone's project papers and conduct video interviews with all of our finalists. Finally, we had another phone conference meeting to select the award recipients.

The first Youth in Conservation Award was presented to Laramie Middle School student Padmalakshmi Ramesh for her computer science project "Application of Data Science & Visualization Concepts for Analyzing Patterns in Wyoming Wildfire Data." Ramesh looked at data on 370 wildfires between 1984 and 2018. Her work is important not only for its predictive possibilities, but for enhanced knowledge of the contributing factors to wildfires and the nature of regeneration following fires.

The second Youth in Conservation award went to Shanti Junker of Lander Middle School whose project "Moving, Mobbing, Mowing" looked at the carbon capturing capacity of plants and the influence of different grazing practices on this capacity as well as on soil regeneration and health. Her project is directly related to questions concerning both sustainable agriculture and problems we face due to increasing levels of atmospheric carbon.

The final Youth in Conservation award went to Makaila Merriam of Meadowlark Elementary School in Cheyenne for her project "Effect of Acid Rain on Germination." Merriam was surprised to discover that while high acid water sped the germination rate of seeds by causing more rapid cracking of the seed coat, the same high acid water then slowed the growth rate of plants after germination. As if often the case, her discovery

...continued on page 10

# Hugelkultur at the Sheridan Food Forest



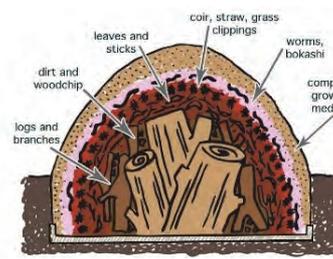
**Ted Lapis fills the hugelkultur trench with logs.**

An ambitious group of workers met in April to build a hugelkultur demonstration project at the Sheridan Food Forest. Hugelkultur, a German word meaning mound or hill culture, is a method of imitating the natural establishment of the thick, rich litter soil found in mature forests.

Hugelkultur mounds usually cover an area three feet wide and six or more feet in length. There are numerous designs, but the food forest process involved digging and filling a trench bottom with wood stumps and logs which are thoroughly soaked, then creating the mound with branches, wood chips, straw and leaves, compost, and finally a layer of soil.

As one might expect, the decomposing plant material helps feed the soil, but the real science “magic” of a hugelkultur mound is its ability to store water in the wood layers which is slowly released for days and even weeks to the plants growing in the top layer.

The Food Forest is a community garden project open 24/7,



**Diagram of how a hugelkultur mound is constructed.**

Everyone is welcome to the twice-monthly workdays on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month at 10 am (8 am when the weather gets hot). They hold a community pollinator count at noon sharp on the third Saturday of the month, May through August. For more information view the Sheridan Food Forest Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/SheridanFoodForest/> or contact Carol LeResche at [leresche@rangeweb.net](mailto:leresche@rangeweb.net).

**Pennie Vance**  
Powder River Staff

## Students Lead Way to Carbon Neutral Goal

For the third year in a row, the University of Wyoming’s Spring Campus Sustainability Course has partnered with the City of Laramie and local Powder River affiliate, Alliance for Renewable Energy of Laramie (ARE), on projects that can help Laramie meet its carbon neutral by 2050 goal. In previous years these students conducted Laramie’s first municipal and community-wide baseline emission inventories and have outlined the city’s municipal climate action plan.

This year, two student groups are carrying on the work from their past colleagues. One of the student groups has been exploring options the city council can take to encourage residents, businesses, and developers to invest in rooftop solar to increase local energy efficiency and decrease carbon emissions. Another student group has

been garnering support and exploring a strategy to implement a joint city and university climate action plan. To this date, the City of Laramie has formal carbon neutral commitments, but the University of Wyoming, located within Laramie, has yet to implement any comprehensive emissions reduction strategy. The goal of this project is to demonstrate widespread community and university support for a dual partnership on carbon emissions tracking and reduction.

ARE will continue to support students throughout the semester and in future years to come in projects to reduce Laramie’s carbon emissions.

**Monika Leininger**  
Powder River Staff

## Seed Library...Continued from page 8

can replenish our free seed library open to the public.

Non-hybrid seeds, also called open pollinated or heirloom seeds, come from plants that are naturally pollinated. Some varieties have been around for centuries. Heirloom/open pollinated seeds will produce plants whose seeds produce more plants like the parent plant. Seed libraries encourage their users to harvest seeds in the fall, only from heirloom or open pollinated plants, and donate them back to the seed library.

Hybrid seeds are not engineered to be reproduced. Seeds harvested from hybrid plants might not grow, will not reproduce the parent plant and are



**Members John Buyok, Rachel and Luc Bourgault helped restock the seed library and get it ready for spring planting season.**

usually inferior, often unhealthy plants.

The Sheridan County Seed Library is located at Sheridan Fulmer Public Library. Individuals can “check out” and take home up to five packets per month; organizations can check out up to 20 packets per month.

For seed saving classes: [rockymountainseeds.org](http://rockymountainseeds.org)

For a guide on how to save seeds: [www.seedsavers.org/how-to-save-seeds](http://www.seedsavers.org/how-to-save-seeds)

**Pennie Vance**  
Powder River Staff

## Pursuing Knowledge...Continued from page 9

revealed things as being more complicated than we might have thought.

All three students received a \$250 award for their work and our gratitude for their projects that help us to better understand our world and, we hope, to live more harmoniously with it.

As a new board member and first-time juror for the Youth in Conservation awards, I’m grateful to the student researchers for their scientific passion, to the University of Wyoming for its sponsorship of the science fair, to Powder River for endowing these awards, and to my

fellow jurors whose expertise helped me immeasurably.

I look forward to next year’s science fair which I hope will once again be held in person. And if not, perhaps some curious student social scientist will design a project examining the influence of online design on both scientific research and the reporting of that research.

**David Romtvedt**  
Powder River Board Member

## 2021 Webinar...Continued from page 1

priority at the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services.”

“It’s important that we start thinking about how the energy transition will affect communities in the state and the existing resources in Wyoming that can support those that will be affected,” said Godby. “Impacts will be widespread, and in some cases, over the next decade could be severe. We need to understand what resources are available, and how they can be deployed to minimize these effects.”

### Webinar Two – All-Around Resources for Family Resiliency

The second webinar is in the making, scheduled for May 18, and will focus on the resources available to support physical, mental and financial well-being. Change can be better navigated with some basic life skills, including knowing when and where to turn to for help. Including the whole family in the discussion of these support services can help demystify and destigmatize them. Being proactive to support whole health is the best approach, but crisis intervention is at the opposite end of the spectrum. There are also plenty of opportunities between the two to learn successful life skills and become aware of alternatives.

Clint Hanes, Department of Family Services will discuss their basket of goods, including child support and their new rental assistance program, which is a blueprint for agency cooperation to determine what a community needs. Lynne Huskinson, a retired Campbell County miner, will discuss her experience as a transitioning Blackjewel worker. We are still confirming our full list of panelists and will have more information

## Abandoned Mine...Continued from page 4

The introduction of this legislation provides Congress with a bipartisan step forward to turn that potential into reality. Along with investing in the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund, reauthorizing the AML Fund and passing the RECLAIM Act would be a start to the important work to ensure an equitable and sustainable economic future in coal

## 2021 Legislative...Continued from page 6

key sector of our economy that also upholds the Wyoming way of life. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerability of our nation’s reliance on facilities concentrated in the hands of a few companies. Signed by the Governor, House Bill 54-Wyoming Meat Packing Initiative, creates a new program in the Wyoming Business Council to support the start-up of meat packing facilities. Another measure that Powder River has long supported, House Bill 52-School Protein Enhancement Project, is a new law that increases the opportunity for local meat in Wyoming schools.

Freedom for ranchers also prevailed this session on another important issue for our membership. House Bill-229 Livestock Identification Choice Act preserves Wyoming ranchers’ choice of selecting among various lawful forms of animal identification devices when complying with a federal law that requires official identification on adult cattle and bison when such animals are moved interstate.

This year, Powder River also supported numerous revenue bills

## Eagle Specialty...Continued from page 6

from the Eagle Butte mine, paid interest free, as an additional 1% or 2% royalty on the federal coal leases, dependent on future coal production;

- Specifies that only \$4.5 million of the unpaid Eagle Butte royalty debt can be left as an unsecured claim in the Blackjewel bankruptcy case, but as mentioned above, it is unlikely any of it will get paid;
- Collects approximately \$11.5 million from performance bonds held by Interior on the coal leases posted by Blackjewel,

soon.

### Webinar Three - Opportunities to Attract and Grow Local Economies

The final webinar is scheduled for June 8, and will focus on economic opportunities available in energy transition, as well as real-life examples from successful communities. Utilizing economic development tools to support mindful community planning is helping other resource-dependent communities around the state achieve more sustainable economies. To date we have Jay Stender on board, who worked for many years to successfully diversify the Sheridan area economy. He will address Sheridan’s success in building its manufacturing base and other possibilities in the state. Stay tuned as we get other presenters lined up in the next few weeks.

Families and communities benefit with open communication, an assessment of assets and vulnerabilities, and a consideration of the costs of inaction. Change is inevitable. Being flexible and resilient allows us to navigate it no matter what form it takes. With the proper tools and information, we can grow resiliency from the ground up by linking families and communities to the resources and tools they will need to go from here. For more information about these webinars, email [mirwin@powderriverbasin.org](mailto:mirwin@powderriverbasin.org) or visit our website.

**Michele Irwin**  
**Powder River Staff**

communities and a bipartisan victory for the people and places that powered our country for generations.

**RECLAIM Act Coalition**  
**Powder River & WORC Staff**

to support diversification of Wyoming’s tax base to help fund the state’s core public services in a way that equitably distributes the burden to uphold our state’s quality of life. Unfortunately, out of a handful of bills that we supported, not a single measure passed that increased opportunities for new revenue for our state. We will continue to need your support in talking to your family, friends and neighbors about the reality we face as a state that is heavily dependent on our declining fossil fuel resources to fund the services most important to current residents and future generations to come.

There is not much of a break after the session, as legislative committees will start meeting next month for the interim session - committee meetings between sessions. Throughout the interim session, we will keep you up to date about relevant legislation. We continue to count on our members for their engagement and participation. This year’s legislative session showed more than ever that we can’t move the needle without you.

**Powder River Staff**

contingent on ESM replacing the bonds for the leases at an amount of \$12.7 million.

Additionally, ESM is already in lengthy payment plans for back taxes owed to the State of Wyoming and Campbell County, Wyoming. Meanwhile, the mines have been reducing production and suffer the same economic challenges other Powder River Basin coal mines are facing. Coal plant closures across the nation are reducing production, which puts any future payments at greater and greater risk.

**Powder River Staff**



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- 27 April Reclaiming & Growing Wyoming's Future Webinar Series #1  
 29 April Building Soil for Fat Cows & Ranch Profits  
 18 May Reclaiming & Growing Wyoming's Future Webinar Series #2  
 21 May Board Meeting, Kearney Hall  
 8 June Reclaiming & Growing Wyoming's Future Webinar Series #3

# Planned Giving and Estate Planning Gifts

The Powder River "family" has been thinking a lot about the future lately, because, as the saying goes, "We aren't getting any younger." We want to make sure this organization remains viable for future generations in the same way it serves today's members. So we're inviting you, our extended family of members and donors, to consider including Powder River in your estate plans.

Your gift would create a living legacy allowing Powder River to continue our work far into the future and helping ensure Wyoming remains the place we know and love for our kids and grandkids.

As one long time Powder River member, Digger Moravek stated, "I want to raise Hell long after I'm gone." You too can do this through a bequest to Powder River.

The two easiest ways to include Powder River in your estate planning take little time (and no legal assistance).

- **THROUGH YOUR RETIREMENT ACCOUNT** (Your IRA, Roth-IRA, SEP-IRA, 401(k), or other such account): Name *Powder River Basin Resource Council* as a Primary beneficiary for a percentage. One percent, 10%, 25% or whatever you wish. You can do this through the account custodian, or often even on the custodian's website in a few minutes (Powder River's Tax ID is 74-2183158).

- **THROUGH YOUR LIFE INSURANCE POLICY:** - Name *Powder River Basin Resource Council* as a primary beneficiary of any percentage of your life insurance policy. You can do this through your insurance agent or the insurance company, or often even on your insurance company's website in only a few minutes (Powder River's Tax ID is 74-2183158).

If you are preparing a formal will or living trust document, you can include Powder River Basin Resource Council as a primary beneficiary of a specific dollar amount or percentage of your estate. If you already have such an instrument, you can have it revised to include Powder River. This is probably best done through your attorney.

Finally, there are several more complex tax-advantaged ways to contribute to Powder River's future and receive continuing income and tax advantages during your lifetime. These include "charitable remainder trusts" and sale of appreciated and depreciated securities. Please consult your legal and financial advisors about how you can use such tools to support Wyoming's most effective grassroots member organization, and how you might benefit.

If you have any questions, please give Powder River a call at 307-672-5809

Thank you!

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