



POWDER RIVER BASIN  
*Resource Council*

# 2021 ANNUAL REPORT



**ENCOURAGING RESPONSIBLE  
DEVELOPMENT TODAY**

**...For Tomorrow**

## **Protecting Wyoming's Quality of Life Since 1973**

Powder River Basin Resource Council was founded by ranchers and townspeople concerned about the impacts of strip mining on landscapes, communities, and freshwater aquifers. For 48 years, we have worked for responsible energy development in Wyoming. Using community organizing, scientific, policy, and legal experts, and coalitions with other organizations, we wage effective campaigns to protect Wyoming's air, land, water quality, and wildlife and to promote sustainable agricultural practices and policies. We are committed to community organizing, leadership development, and the empowerment of citizens.

The successes we found in our early work have continued throughout the years. For nearly five decades, the concentration of our work has been on ensuring responsible development that prevents and mitigates the negative impacts of energy development on the environment and Wyoming citizens. We have worked hard to prevent energy companies from harming private property or ruining our clean air and water. Our citizen power has effectively limited energy company influence over the legislative process and administrative agencies.

Additionally, a core part of our mission is protecting Wyoming's agricultural heritage and ensuring a sustainable ag economy. We have helped ensure a future for family farmers and ranchers, worked to curb corporate control of livestock markets, and passed legislation to provide more rights for ranchers and farmers negotiating with energy companies. Recently, we have expanded our work to support our state's growing local food and new agricultural economy.

### **Our Mission**

- The preservation and enrichment of our agricultural heritage and rural lifestyle;
- The conservation of our unique land, mineral, water, and clean air resources, consistent with responsible use of those resources to sustain the livelihood of present and future generations; and
- The education and empowerment of our citizens to raise a coherent voice in the decisions that will impact their environment and lifestyle.



## **49<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting**

November 5th –6th, 2021

### ***Reimagining Wyoming: Buffalo, Sustainability & Transformation***

#### **Keynote Speaker:**

**Friday, Nov. 5—5:30 pm**

**Online via Zoom Platform**

#### **Jason Baldes**

**Tribal Buffalo Program Manager -  
National Wildlife Federation,  
Eastern Shoshone Tribe's Buffalo Manager  
Wind River Reservation**

**Saturday, Nov. 6—9:30 am**

**Business Meeting**

**Online via Zoom Platform**

**2021 Annual Report  
Powder River Basin Resource Council**

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## 2021 Coal Campaign Highlights

### Powder River Basin Mine Closures Increase Importance of Bonding & Reclamation Work



*Black Thunder Mine*

The coal industry's downward spiral that started years ago continued in 2021. While there was a slight uptick in production in 2021, mine production and employment stayed low. New renewable energy generation continued to outpace coal, putting significant pressure on Powder River Basin coal mine operators. A big announcement came from Arch Resources – formerly Arch Coal – with the closure of the Coal Creek Mine and a marketable down-sizing in the Black Thunder Mine. Arch's announcement followed the closure of the Decker Mine, just across the border in Montana, where hundreds of miners were laid off in Sheridan.

### Wyoming is Now Self-Bond Free

Powder River continues to be the voice of the public interest to ensure the best possible protection for our land and people as the industry winds down. We continued our multi-year campaign to ensure reclamation bonds are available to cover the full cost of repairing the lands and waters of Wyoming after mining. The good news is in 2021 more mines replaced risky “self-bonds” with third-party



surety bonds and now, **no Wyoming coal mines are self-bonded**. This means, there is a third-party insurance company on the hook for reclamation costs in the case of a coal company going bankrupt and

abandoning its reclamation responsibilities. Thanks to our advocacy work at both the state and federal level, this is a marketable shift in a positive direction from where we were five years ago with \$2 billion in self-bonding pledged by coal mine companies going through bankruptcy.

We also continued to address risky new coal mine operators, getting involved in bankruptcy and permitting proceedings before state and federal regulators.

Our focus on bonding and reclamation is more important than ever, and our push to help Wyoming transition our economy and support workers and communities in the process will continue to be a key part of our work going forward.

### **Bringing Coal Back in Focus in D.C.**

A priority of our coal work in 2021 was getting the attention of the new Biden Administration and pushing to move key pieces of policy reform forward that had been stalled during the years of the Trump Administration. One of those key pieces is federal coal leasing reform, which restarted in earnest this fall. We dusted off over a decade's worth of previous comments, reports, and scientific studies, and mobilized our members and allied groups to submit recommendations to the administration. We anxiously await the next steps in their



review process, which will likely include new regulations governing the way federal coal is leased and mined in states like Wyoming.

We also significantly strengthened our partnership with allied groups in Appalachia and other coal regions, such as the Navajo Nation, to focus on common problems in coal mine regulation and bankruptcy. We have been stronger together and have worked to address serious environmental issues and reclamation bonding concerns. Our groups released a policy briefing on proposed reforms in January and spent the rest of the year having productive meetings with the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation & Enforcement (OSMRE), officials within the Department of the Interior (DOI), and members of Congress. We remain optimistic about moving key reforms forward as we head into the next year.

We have also been actively supporting the reauthorization of the Abandoned Mine Land (AML) fund to continue funding for orphan coal mine cleanup, as well as the RECLAIM Act, which would allow AML funding to be used for economic development projects on reclaimed land.

### **Protecting the Tongue River Valley from the Ramaco Coal Mine**

Our victory before the Environmental Quality Council (EQC) in 2018 to strike down the proposed coal mine permit for Ramaco Carbon's mine in Sheridan County forced the company to go back to DEQ to improve its permit application. The company's revised application reduces anticipated coal production by 90% from the previous version of the permit, avoids mining in a hydrologically sensitive area next to the Tongue River, supplements baseline water testing, and places new restrictions on blasting. DEQ's final permit also prevents underground highwall mining until



*Historic subsidence*

additional geotechnical analysis is completed to assess the risk of subsidence (the ground caving in). The DEQ's review of the permit carried out over an unprecedented *twelve* rounds of technical review.

While the EQC affirmed this second iteration of Ramaco's permit in February of this year, we are keeping the accountability pressure going and will hold the company to the high standards we helped to create with DEQ's permit conditions. The company's financial wherewithal to open a new mine remains highly dependent on future federal grants, and to date, no coal has been mined from the permit.

Our members are now in the post-permitting stage of the campaign, and we successfully addressed problems with the mining company this year, such as getting no trespassing signs removed. We continue to engage the Sheridan County Commissioners as needed to maintain important public access and address other issues, such as taxation of their industrial property.

We remain committed to this multi-year campaign to protect the Tongue River Valley and its residents, and we will continue our efforts in 2022 and beyond.

### **Pushing for Retirement of Outdated & Expensive Coal Plants**



### **Carbon capture mandates are short-sighted, hurt Wyo ratepayers**

October 19, 2021

This year, we supported plans from utilities to close some of the largest, dirtiest coal plants in the state. PacifiCorp plans to close four coal units at its Naughton and Jim Bridger power plants in Southwest Wyoming and its Dave Johnston plant near Glenrock. Black Hills Power also announced the closure of the Neil Simpson 2 coal plant near Gillette. Unfortunately, the utilities have been under attack from Wyoming

politicians and those loyal to the fossil fuel industries of the state. Powder River and our members have been active in opposing and amending bad legislation aimed at “saving” coal plants at the expense of ratepayers.



We have followed that legislation through to the rulemaking process before the Wyoming Public Service Commission (PSC). This year, the PSC wrapped up its rulemaking for a controversial new bill from the 2019 legislative session that forces a utility to try and sell a coal plant before it retires it. We pushed for several key parts of the regulations, including bonding to cover reclamation and decommissioning costs for new owners and full disclosure of an operational plan and the new owner’s financial and technical capacity to run the plant. These measures will limit negative impacts for utility customers and prevent a coal plant from being orphaned and becoming a state liability.

We’ve also been commenting regularly in the rulemaking process to implement a bill from the 2020 legislative session that requires a utility to generate a portion of its power from coal plants with carbon capture technology. We participated in several stakeholder meetings throughout the year and fought off attempts to push the rules through in an emergency rulemaking, which would have limited public comment opportunities.

To support our efforts, and to better engage our members and other Wyomingites concerned about the future of our electric grid, we launched the Wyoming Ratepayers



Association. The association has a web presence, and its own social media accounts, to advocate for a just transition from higher-cost coal generation to lower-cost renewable energy and to pushback against regulatory mandates that threaten the affordability of

electricity in Wyoming.

All in all, our involvement in proceedings before the PSC and in other stakeholder meetings with the utilities is instrumental in providing public comment, expert testimony and information, and legal argument to secure retirements of coal plants and help our state transition to a cleaner energy future.

### **Coal Communications Work Remains Strong**

There remains tremendous public interest in coal, and Wyoming is a focal point for coal news and information. This year, a wave of documentary filmmakers and national reporters traveled to Wyoming to report on the energy transition post-election. Our staff and leaders field regular calls and emails from local, regional, and national reporters, and we help to provide critical background information and a Wyoming perspective on these stories. We continue to make front page news here in Wyoming and across the nation. This year, our reach continued to grow thanks to dedicated communications staff and member-authored opinion pieces. The pandemic also spurred on more virtual reporting opportunities such as podcasts and webinars. We also engage with members, reporters, allies, and decision-makers through social media to help push out our Wyoming news and perspective beyond the borders of the state. Our Twitter account is closely watched for live-tweeting during important hearings and following coal industry announcements. Follow us on Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram to get the latest news!



#### **Editorial board: Trying to control energy markets isn't a viable strategy for Wyoming**

The editorial board writes: We need to recognize that energy markets have always changed and will continue to change. Fighting to control them...

# 2021 Coal Transition

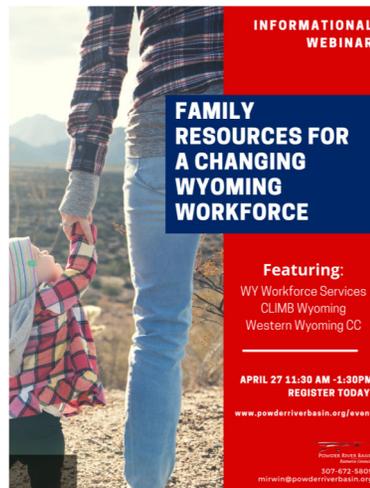
## Just & Equitable Transition in Southwest Wyoming

Southwest Wyoming is transitioning from coal, and communities are moving forward with Powder River’s help. Our work has had an impact in shifting the narrative this past year. A year ago, “transition” was a trigger word, leading politicians and coal employees to dig in defending the industry. In response, we have worked to normalize our energy transition and direct the conversation to solutions that are available for those most impacted by the downturn in the coal industry.

## Webinars Highlight Available Resources

This year’s webinar series, *Reclaiming & Growing Wyoming’s Future*, continued the conversation around the state’s changing economy by highlighting the value of “soft infrastructure.” Especially important during times of change, various services and support systems are already available within the state, but people may not be aware of what is there. We also highlighted these services and their importance as the state goes through rounds of budget cuts.

One of the realizations from our first webinar, *Family Resources for a Changing Wyoming Workforce*, was to recognize that there are many programs available to workers to help them shift jobs and get new training. Unions and technical schools like WyoTech also offer important options for job skills training. Further conversations are needed to address questions facing our state like how we define



“work” and what kind of work Wyomingites want, as well as what resources are needed for our state's tribal and rural workforce.

Our second webinar, *Tools for Tough Time During Wyoming's Energy Transition*, featured the perspectives and expertise of two Powder River members, and noted how vital food banks and mental health support are when there is a massive economic crisis in a community. Our speakers also talked about what people can do ahead of time to better navigate change, as well as offering some self-help skills that will benefit anyone facing challenges in this changing landscape.

Our final webinar featured another member and served as an introduction to our new executive director, who moderated the session. The speakers focused on the value of a care or wellness sector of the economy, which already exists but can be expanded in a number of ways, including through small businesses and professional services.

It's encouraging that Governor Gordon and agencies within the executive branch, many of whom were speakers in our series, are being mindful of the opportunity to direct federal funds to areas that could be of value to Wyoming as it transitions to a new economy.

Overall, the webinar series exceeded our expectations once again. The attendance of our webinars, the amount of press coverage generated, and the caliber of the



*Webinar Three Presenters*

speakers created a good spark for the important conversations to come in Southwest Wyoming and across the state.

### **Wyoming Voices Story Project Launch**

In 2021, working with the UW Haub School of Environment & Natural Resources and the Story Center we launched a new story project aimed at shifting the narrative around Southwest Wyoming's energy transition and building community. The project has already had some great successes, and we have witnessed community members finding their voices and understand they have an important story to tell that should be shared with others. The process helped uncover and reveal community leadership. Our project includes holding story circles, creating a digital product, and then reviewing them all to see what we learned. Though the project is still in process, we are already looking forward to building on this year's successes with phase two of the project next year. This project is helping us reveal some of the opportunities in transition, and kindling local power is one we can use to our advantage.

In addition to the webinars and story project, our work in Southwest Wyoming continued over the past year on a variety of fronts, including one on one conversations with community leaders and prospective members, generating local solutions via grassroots power building, creating regional and national partnerships for economic transition, and communications work.



# 2021 Renewable Energy

## Laramie Solar Tour Amps up the Community

The first ever Laramie Solar Tour took place in October to educate and inspire Wyomingites to launch their communities into reaching their full solar energy potential. Over 50 members of the public attended the tour, whether via the in-person bike tour, self-guided driving tour, or live streaming online to visit a variety of residential, university, commercial, and municipal solar power installations.

The bike tour visited locations around the community, including the Laramie Ice & Event Center, the university's Indoor Practice Facility and Visual Arts Center, Bim Kendall House/Haub School, Downtown Clinic, and two private residences. Additionally, there was a self-guided driving tour that featured five private residences. Speakers from Rocky Mountain Power (RMP), the University of Wyoming, the City of Laramie, and local solar installer, Creative Energies, joined the tour attendees to talk about the benefits of these solar setups.

## Laramie Unveils New Solar Array

The City of Laramie has completed the installation of a solar array to serve the Laramie Community Recreation Center and the Ice & Event Center. This project represents the first major step toward the City of Laramie's carbon neutrality goal.



*Laramie Solar Tour*

According to the city, these facilities were selected for the inaugural solar investment due to their impact toward the municipal goal of reaching net zero emissions by 2050 as well as their

ability to serve as an educational site for the thousands of guests visiting both facilities.

This project was made possible by a Blue Sky Grant through RMP, which is funded by the option for customers to pay \$1.95 per 200 kWh block per month on their electricity bill. This fund provides grants for certain solar installations in the utility's service area.



*Laramie's new solar array*

Powder River's Laramie Affiliate, Alliance for Renewable Energy, had helped to educate the City of Laramie on the opportunity for Blue Sky Grants and submitted letters of support in the application.

### **Joint University-City-County Taskforce to Tackle Laramie-Area Emissions**

Powder River's affiliate, Alliance for Renewable Energy (ARE), has formed a joint taskforce to tackle Laramie-area carbon emissions. This effort is a collaboration with the Laramie City Council, Albany County Board of Commissioners, the University of Wyoming operations staff, and residents of Laramie to foster discussion and cooperation on a joint campus-city-county emissions reduction and climate action planning process. This taskforce will meet monthly with the help of a professional facilitator to identify critical collaborative projects, strategies for emissions reduction, and explore opportunities to reinvigorate the university's Climate Action Plan.

To date, out of these entities, only the City of Laramie has made commitments and taken strategic action to reduce local carbon emissions. The Albany County Commission has yet to make any formal commitments to carbon reduction but remains interested in the conversation. In 2009, the university adopted a Climate Action Plan but later withdrew from climate commitments in 2017 amid budget cuts. This taskforce aims to align city, university, and

county carbon reduction efforts with the city's existing emission tracking and reduction goals and strategies. In the spring of 2022, the joint group will present key recommendations and strategies to university, city, and county leadership.

### **Lander Forms Energy & Environment Intergovernmental Taskforce**

Since 2020, Powder River has been working in collaboration with Lander residents, Wyoming Outdoor Council, and National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) to help Lander follow in the footsteps of other communities across the state that are decreasing their carbon emissions and promoting investments in renewable energy. Through this partnership, the grassroots, non-partisan group Lander Climate Action Network (LCAN) has formed with a mission to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through a commitment to environmental sustainability, community engagement, and economic viability.

In 2021, LCAN created the intergovernmental Lander Energy and Environment Taskforce to evaluate ways to lower Lander's carbon emissions and increase municipal energy efficiency. Since the conception of the taskforce, they have joined a national group for local government sustainability to begin evaluating the city's baseline emissions. The taskforce has also met Lander's city engineer to discuss areas for improved energy efficiency, and arranged for RMP's Wattsmart program team to tour Lander's least efficient facilities to identify ways to improve heating, cooling, lighting, and other electrical equipment.

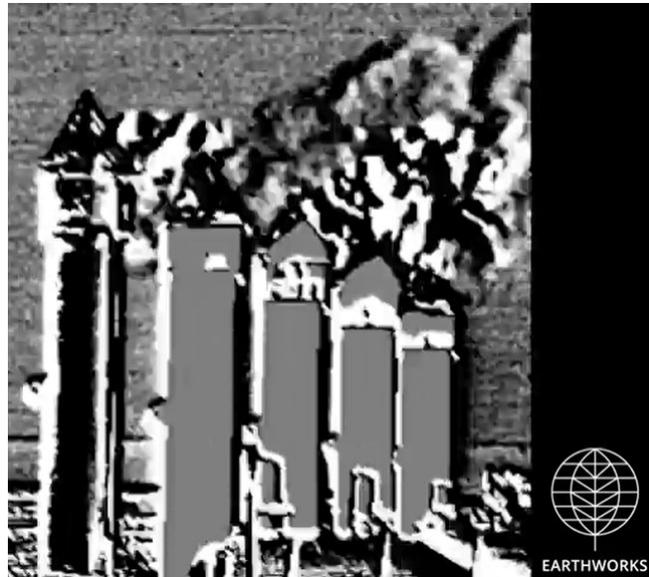
### **Sheridan Area Resource Council Update**

Sheridan Area Resource Council (SARC) has continued its reorganization throughout 2021, focusing on educating the community on the benefits of rooftop solar. A community solar project is still in the preliminary phase, with promising potential for a local business to sponsor the plan. Updates and more information will be made available once the sponsor agrees to make the information public. Additionally, discussions are underway about expanded work in 2022 to encourage more rooftop solar in the Sheridan area.

# 2021 Oil & Gas Review

## Raising Awareness by Visualizing Oil & Gas Air Pollution

In an effort to demonstrate widespread concern about air quality related to oil and gas development in Laramie County, Cheyenne Area Landowners Coalition (CALC), an affiliate of Powder River, teamed up with Earthworks' Community Empowerment Project to film several leaking wells with state-of-the-art infrared cameras. Pollutants leaking from oil and gas wells are invisible and therefore difficult to locate while harming air quality and the health of nearby residents. Earthworks has made their FLIR Gasfinder 320 infrared camera, along with a certified infrared thermographer, available to communities who are experiencing the harmful effects of these air pollutants. The camera's infrared technology is able to render the pollutants visible and helps document them for investigation.



*An infrared image of a leaking oil & gas well*



We documented four different leaking facilities and called on the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to investigate and take action to reduce this air pollution. In early 2021, CALC held a press conference in partnership with Earthworks to release and explain the footage of leaking oil and gas wells in order to encourage greater awareness on this important public health issue.

### **Supporting Strengthened Federal Air Quality Regulations**

In May, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced a public engagement process to begin crafting new rules to tackle methane and associated pollution from new and existing oil and gas operations. As a part of this process, EPA hosted listening sessions in mid-June to allow communities, Tribes, businesses, organizations, and industry to weigh in and make their voices heard ahead of a September rule-making process. Powder River and Powder River's affiliate organization, Cheyenne Area Landowners Coalition (CALC), testified to the EPA about the importance of reducing the release of toxic chemicals from oil and gas drilling and production to protect public health and safety. The new rules are expected to be released to the public by the end of October 2021.

### **Plugging Orphan Wells & Maintaining Idle Well Bonding**

Powder River continues to keep pressure on the state, BLM, and industry to plug orphan wells in a timely fashion. Our efforts this year influenced the Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (WOGCC) to make their monthly meetings permanently available online, greatly increasing transparency. We also supported the use of additional funds to increase the plugging of orphan oil and gas

wells and pits. As of Oct. 12, the WOGCC has plugged 602 wells this year. We also continue to support better bonding practices, and enforcement of idle well bonding rules, to ensure reclamation funding is available when wells go orphan.

### **Advocating for Federal Leasing and Bonding Reform**

A new administration in Washington, DC has created new opportunities for reform of the federal oil and gas program. We've been active this year advocating for better bonding, improved fiscal policies, and leasing reform. In April, we mobilized our members to submit comments to the BLM recommending key reforms to the federal oil and gas program. In July, Powder River provided the new BLM leadership with a memo containing data demonstrating the inadequacy of the current bonding adjustment practices and advocating for full-cost bonding for new and existing wells. We advocated for a focus on bonding in the federal review of the oil and gas leasing program, and we worked with allies to pressure the Biden Administration to complete its review of the program before offering new lease sales.

We have also been working with allies to defend the administration's reform action in court, intervening on behalf of the Department of the Interior in challenges brought by the State of Wyoming and the oil and gas industry. Since the cases are in the District of Wyoming, our staff attorney has been serving as local counsel for our partners Earthjustice and the Western Environmental Law Center as well as the 20 tribal and conservation organizations represented in the case.

Powder River members have also contributed a great deal to public coverage of this issue. Our members have published opinion pieces in Wyoming papers and online, and we released statements advocating for oil





and gas reform, as well as new studies and information supporting reform. It's been a busy year, and our work will continue into the new year to achieve the reforms we have been advocating for.

### **Progress on Rural Pavillion Area Water**

Powder River continued its long history of involvement in the Pavillion area this year with renewed efforts towards a long-term drinking water solution for the rural area. Our members in the area are still struggling with the impacts of groundwater contamination following oil and gas development. Groundwater cleanup efforts have not been successful, so area residents have been forced to look for other water options. Bottled water deliveries, which have provided many residents with clean drinking water for the last decade, ceased this April after funding ran out, and the cistern program will run out of funding sometime in 2022. We are exploring options to ensure residents have access to clean water, including the possibility of forming a special rural water district and securing a study and funding for water infrastructure. Powder River has connected with DEQ, the Water Development Commission, and Wyoming Association of Rural Water Systems staff to advocate for a Pavillion area project, and we are currently working with agency staff and residents to explore funding options for the project.



### **Protecting the Madison Aquifer**

In 2021, we continued our years-long campaign in partnership with Wyoming Outdoor Council and Natural Resources Defense Council to protect the Madison Aquifer from oil and gas wastewater pollution. Although the WOGCC approved a controversial permit for Aethon Energy in November 2020, the order has never been signed. The EPA still has the final say on whether the aquifer should be exempted from drinking water standards. Earlier this year, our organizations commissioned a report from water experts Karen and Bob Raucher that illustrates that the Madison Formation in the Wind River Basin is an economically viable and practical future source of drinking water not only in the immediate area but also across the broader region of Wyoming. The WOGCC recommended that Aethon’s aquifer exemption was justified under the regulatory criteria that the aquifer “cannot now and will not in the future serve as a source of drinking water because it is situated at a depth or location which makes recovery of water for drinking water purposes economically or technologically impractical.” The Rauchers’ report strongly rebutted that assertion and gave EPA a significant basis to deny Aethon’s request, and we are now awaiting their decision.

### **DEQ Expands Electronic Public Comment Opportunities**

In response to a request made by Powder River and its members, the DEQ started offering an opportunity to submit public comments on air quality and other permits via the agency’s website. The public comment website has greatly increased the ability of people from across the state to timely give feedback and information to DEQ’s office in Cheyenne. DEQ has also been improving its online records request systems and databases to facilitate more timely and effective information for the public about industrial facilities in the state.



# 2021 Agriculture Work

## Local Foods

Powder River continued to work with local foods producers and farmers' markets to support the role they play in providing healthy food for our local communities. We again worked with the Department of Family Services to send over 600 postcards out to SNAP recipients in Sheridan County with instructions on how to utilize their SNAP benefits at the Downtown Farmers' Market to purchase healthy, locally produced food for their families.

Despite all garden seed companies being overwhelmed with customer purchases this spring due to a big spike in family and community gardens, we were able to successfully solicit a good stock of new seed, mostly from organic and heritage seed companies, for our Sheridan Seed Library at the Fulmer Public Library. The seeds are free to all members of the community. A group of local food producers worked with Powder River to restock and reorganize the library. Most of the seeds were gone by mid-summer.

We promoted the Sheridan Food Forest through our social media, encouraging the community to enjoy the forest and assist on work days and with the bee census. Volunteers helped install a Hugelkultur project in the spring, which produced an abundance of sunflowers, lettuce, bright red pumpkins and other squash. The Food Forest is an extraordinary community project that grows and matures each year.

The Food Forest was also the sight of this year's successful Picnic on the Pathway event in August. Powder River worked with Science Kids, Sheridan Community Land Trust, North Main Downtown Association, and Food Forest volunteers to host the family event which provided science related activities such as bug and fish identification in nearby Goose Creek and a treasure hunt of the many fruits, vegetables, and pollinator plants



that grow in the Food Forest.

The Landon Farmers' Market local foods vendors again generously donated their homemade foods and an abundance of fresh garden produce to our yearly Harvest Celebration basket. The successful raffle was conducted by mail because for a second year in a row, the in-person celebration had to be postponed due to COVID.

Powder River staff continued to be actively involved with the Wyoming Food Coalition in their statewide work to unite the local foods community through a number of initiatives and work groups. The WFC is increasingly looked to as a source of information on the local food movement in Wyoming.

### **Regenerative Agriculture**

Powder River's work helping farmers and ranchers interested in regenerative agriculture grew this year. While considered somewhat a fringe issue several years ago, today regenerative ag is being taken seriously across the globe. The practices are a means to help farmers and ranchers be more productive and profitable, expand their independence from a broken industrial system, revive soil health, and sequester carbon in the soil to grow healthier crops and help reduce the atmospheric carbon.

Powder River conducted a number of events promoting our regenerative ag work:

- Arranged for a free screening of "Kiss the Ground" the award winning documentary on the growth and importance of regenerative ag to a healthy earth.
- Conducted a successful regenerative ag webinar, "Building Soils for Fat Cows and Ranch Profits" with veteran soils expert, Gabe Brown, and Ann Fischer, NRCS conservationist. The webinar is available on Powder River's website.



*Regenerative Ag Webinar*

- In September, we kicked-off our regenerative rancher to rancher support group, which was met with enthusiastic support and meets monthly. Our plan is to share information and experiences in a friendly “coffee shop” atmosphere, bring in speakers and conduct fieldtrips.

Powder River staff participated in the USDA NRCS Division IV Local Work Group in Buffalo where they helped establish priorities for the distribution of USDA conservation funds in the coming year. It proved to be a good opportunity to share the work of Powder River and help elevate regenerative ag priorities in the funding allocations.

### Other Ag Support Work

Powder River closely tracked developments in legislation and regulation of ag related initiatives. At the national level we are helping support a more progressive agenda by the US Department of Ag in seriously addressing the damage that’s been done by the monopolization of our food system, particularly by the big four international packing companies which control 84% of the packing industry.

Working with the WORC ag group, we are closely tracking and supporting legislative efforts to strengthen the Packers and Stockyards Act and implement regulations to insure fair and transparent markets. Powder River staff and members have participated in meetings with USDA officials to elevate the extent of the threat that independent farmers and ranchers face under the current monopolized system.



At the state level, we actively monitored and provided input on legislation regarding new and improved meat packing facilities across the state, supporting endeavors to serve Wyoming meat in the schools, ag land tax rate qualifications, expansion of the Wyoming Food Freedom Act, ranchers’ choice of animal identification methods, and improved notification for water permit notice requirements. (See the Legislative Report for more details.)

## 2021 Legislative Victories

Because of COVID-19, the 2021 legislature was like no other, with an all-virtual mini-session in January and then a longer in-person session with opportunity for remote participation in March. While it was challenging to lobby from our homes, the legislature's technology opened up access to legislative committee meetings, and we were able to Zoom in experts and members to the capitol. It was also the first session with a live video feed of floor debate in the House and Senate. We have supported the legislature making these increased transparency and remote participation opportunities permanent. While the process was better than expected, the substance of the 2021 session left something to be desired. Nevertheless, we had a successful legislative session in defeating, amending, and improving many of the bad bills that came through the chambers. We stopped the passage of 14 bad bills this session and even got to support a few good bills that were signed into law. Here is a quick run-down of some of our biggest legislative victories this year.

**Solar Freedom Lives!:** A surprise measure, Senate File 16 -New Net Metering Systems received very little vetting before heading into the 2021 session. Senate File 16 sought to overhaul Wyoming's laws for rooftop solar and backyard wind (customer-generated systems) by repealing the current statute for net-metering. The bill also 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. 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. At that meeting, citizen opposition to the bill was outstanding! The chairman said there were



over 52 people who wanted to testify over Zoom and many other citizens who traveled to Cheyenne for the hearing.

**New Opportunities for Meat Preval:** Wyoming's agricultural industry continues to be a key sector of our economy that also upholds the Wyoming way of life. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerability of facilities being controlled by a few companies. Powder River supported House Bill 54-Wyoming Meat Packing Initiative which creates a new program in the Wyoming Business Council to support the start-up of meatpacking 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.

**Freedoms for Ranchers:** Powder River supported House Bill-229 Livestock Identification Choice Act. This bill preserves Wyoming ranchers' choice of selecting among various lawful forms of animal identification when complying with a federal law for identification on adult cattle and bison when moved interstate.

**Stopping More Industry Tax Breaks:** We successfully defeated three bills that would have given the oil and gas industry more tax breaks and stopped the sunset of a tax exemption for railroads.

**Protecting Wyoming Ratepayers:** We stopped the passage of five bills aimed at stopping coal plant closures and successfully amended the three that passed and were signed into law.

**Keeping Public Lands in Public Hands:** We worked with the Keep it Public, Wyoming coalition to once again defeat a bill aimed at transferring federal lands and minerals to the state, and after the bill's defeat we stopped it from becoming a topic for the interim session.

**Making Sure Industry Pays Its Way:** We successfully supported a bill that has been a long time coming to increase permitting fees to the Department of Environmental Quality. These fees help ensure that the costs of permitting new industrial facilities like oil and gas wells falls on the permittees, not the Wyoming public.

## Youth In Conservation

Each year Powder River offers Bill Barlow Memorial Youth in Conservation awards to students participating in the University of Wyoming's State Science Fair. 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.

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. This year, as a result of the COVID pandemic, the science fair was conducted online. Powder River Board members David Romtvedt, Wayne Lax, and Liza Millett served as judges.

The first award went 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."

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.

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.

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.

# Administration

In 2021 after an early spring of continued COVID precautions and virtual meetings, late spring and early summer were marked by a series of in-person events and changing of faces among the Powder River staff. In April, Powder River welcomed a new executive director, Alyssa Wechsler Duba. After 30 years of service to the organization, including four as director, Jill Morrison retired at the end of June and was danced out in style during a July retirement party, attended by friends, family, colleagues, and Powder River members. In June, we also welcomed a new oil and gas organizer, Lottie Mitchell, to take over Jill's organizing work. After this much-needed time together, we found ourselves once again scaling back our in-person events due to the COVID surge. Fortunately, the Powder River staff have developed myriad new skills for working and organizing in a pandemic, and our work continues to thrive.

This work is overseen by our Board of Directors who live in Wyoming and are elected from and by the membership for two-year terms. As a membership-driven organization, members decide the direction of Powder River's work by drafting and proposing resolutions for a vote of membership approval at the annual meeting and providing leadership on the campaigns embraced by Powder River Basin Resource Council.

Powder River's main office is located in Sheridan, and in 2021 it housed Jill Morrison until her retirement; Stephanie Avey, our ace executive administrator; Shannon Anderson, our energizer bunny who serves as our staff attorney and organizes on coal, oil and gas, legislative, and numerous other thorny issues; and Pennie Vance, our stellar local food and sustainable agriculture organizer who brings years of passion and deep community connections to the team. We also opened a new office in Lander in April, which is home base for the new executive director Alyssa Duba who lived in Lander and worked on the Wind River Reservation before joining Powder River; Monika Leininger, who leads organizing and legislative efforts for an impressive array of oil and gas, renewable energy, tax reform, and rate-payers coalition campaigns across the state; and our new oil and gas organizer Lottie Mitchell who joined us in June and

hit the ground running at full speed and in excellent form. Michele Irwin also continues her skillful organizing on coal transition work and buffalo medicine from her buffalo ranch near Green River, Wyoming. Last but not least, the amazing Robin EH. Bagley expertly leads all our communications and development work and assists with our ag organizing and campaign work.

Remember to check our website for campaign information, publications, and digital copies of our newsletter. You can also easily renew your membership or make a donation on our website; check it out at: [www.powderriverbasin.org](http://www.powderriverbasin.org). We are active on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and all members receive a copy of our informative newspaper, the *Powder River Breaks*, to update members on our issues and keep them involved in the issues that directly impact Wyoming.

## Treasurer's Report

The Powder River Board of Directors approved a 2021 amended budget of \$681,252.85 with a goal of raising \$691,180. As of September 30, 2021 we have spent 70% of our budget, or \$474,443.10. Our fundraising efforts have raised \$544,769.88, or 79% of our 2021 goal. However, we began our primary fundraising drive in early October and are still anticipating several grants to come in by year's end, so we expect to exceed our fundraising goals. As in 2020, we anticipate that we will be under budget for operating expenses due to the ongoing pandemic and continuing reduced conference, event, and travel costs.

Powder River continues to have a strong internal fundraising team and generous donors. In particular, we saw an outpouring of support and contributions in memory of Stacy Page, a beloved Powder River member and previous treasurer of the board who passed away in August. The donations in her honor have helped ensure that we can continue to live up to her passion and expectations.

We recognize and thank all of our foundation grantors and the Western Organization of Resource Councils for their partnership in helping with our foundation outreach and fundraising. We extend our gratitude and appreciation to our generous major donors and our members who are the heart and soul of this organization. You ensure our continued success!

## Coalitions and Affiliates

### **Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC)**

Powder River is a founding member group of WORC, an association of grassroots organizations in seven states including North Dakota, South Dakota, Idaho, Montana, Colorado, Oregon and Wyoming. Through WORC, these local organizations join together to provide training and technical assistance, policy analysis, research and networking to improve the effectiveness and regional coherence of the coalition members efforts. WORC provides consolidated fundraising and a critical presence in Washington D.C.

### **Equality State Policy Center (ESPC)**

Powder River has been a member of the Equality State Policy Center since ESPC's inception. ESPC is a coalition of a broad range of Wyoming organizations from labor unions to conservation groups, dedicated to good government for the people of Wyoming.

### **Community Affiliates Across Wyoming.**

Alliance for Renewable Energy Laramie  
Cheyenne Area Landowners Coalition  
Pavillion Area Concerned Citizens  
Sheridan Area Resource Council  
Clark Resource Council

Each affiliate may have representation on the Powder River Basin Resource Council Board of Directors. Affiliates are self governing and decide their own priorities and issues to pursue. Some issues become shared priorities with Powder River.

## 2021 Board and Staff

### 2021 Board

#### Officers

Marcia Westkott	~	Board Chair
Joyce Evans	~	Vice Chair
D.J. Purcell	~	Secretary
Cissy Dillon	~	Treasurer

#### At-Large

Lynne Huskinson	Shiva Polefka
Bob LeResche	Liza Millett
Wayne Lax	David Romtvedt
Gillian Malone	Stacy Page
Joan Tellez	Christy Gerrits

### 2021 Staff

Alyssa Duba ..... Incoming Executive Director  
Jill Morrison.....Outgoing Executive Director  
Stephanie Avey .....Executive Administrator  
Shannon Anderson .....Organizer/Staff Attorney  
Monika Leininger.....Organizer  
Lottie Mitchell .....Organizer  
Pennie Vance.....Organizer  
Michele Irwin.....Organizer  
Robin EH. Bagley....Communications & Development

## **Powder River Basin Resource Council 2021 Annual Report**

**For information on how to support Powder River Basin  
Resource Council please contact us at:**

**Phone: 307-672-5809**

**Email: [info@powderriverbasin.org](mailto:info@powderriverbasin.org)**

**Website: [www.powderriverbasin.org](http://www.powderriverbasin.org)**

**Powder River Basin Resource Council  
934 North Main Street  
Sheridan WY 82801**



**POWDER RIVER BASIN**  
*Resource Council*