

## POWDER RIVER'S NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SHARES THOUGHTS ON BUILDING COMMUNITY

*Lessons from the Court: Teamwork in Leadership*

Sharon Buccino  
Executive Director

As I stepped into the office at 934 N Main, I recalled the first time I had visited. It was the summer of 2007. Kevin Lind greeted me with a broad smile and open arms. I was an idealistic attorney working with Powder River to address the impacts of coalbed methane drilling. I was passing through Sheridan with my husband and two young daughters – Johanna (8) and Gabrielle (6). I wanted to see the land and meet the people affected by the work that I was doing. Employed by a national non-profit in Washington DC, I maintained my sanity (and my effectiveness) by spending time in the communities on whose behalf I worked.

Like my own spirit, Powder River's identity and mission centers around community. As our board chair said in his note, our job is "to understand and speak on behalf of practices that will help build vibrant human communities living with the natural world not against it." These practices center around conversation – finding what unites rather than divides us.

As I step in as your interim Executive Director for the next six months, I am excited to strengthen connections in community. How we define "community" is one of the key questions for us to answer together. Rooted in the geography of the Powder River Basin, our organization can facilitate conversations about what a resilient and prosperous future looks like. Identifying what it takes for the region to thrive are the same answers Wyoming and the nation need. I look forward to creating new opportunities for conversation both on our own and with partners interested in the same thing.

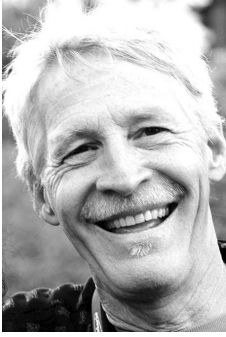
Some of you whom I've met know that I coached rec basketball for 12 years. Each year I took 10 players and made a team of them. I loved the chance to see where each girl started and help her learn and grow. It required harnessing the strengths of 10 individuals to create a cohesive and collaborative whole. Leading our organization requires something similar. We're in this together. Each one of us has an invaluable role to play on the Powder River team as we help build community offering everyone the opportunity to thrive.



### MEET THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

- Former attorney advocating for communities
- Passionate about local conversations and resilience
- Longtime basketball coach who values teamwork

# Message from the Chair



There's a fancy word sometimes heard in academia—precarity. It's used to describe a people, a culture, a language, a situation in which we find something we hold dear to be in danger of disappearing, of being lost, of being destroyed either by ourselves or by some outside force. To live in precarity means to live in uncertainty. In economic terms it means persistent insecurity in terms of one's job or salary.

To many people in Wyoming, in the United States, and indeed throughout the world, it seems we are in a time of increasing precarity in an increasing number of realms. One of these realms is that of democracy itself. People of different ages, backgrounds, and political perspectives have in recent months spoken to me about their fears for democracy. Are we losing our democracy? The anxiety people feel is driven by human division which in turn drives ever greater anxiety and so makes it hard for us to treat each other with compassion and kindness, to see each other as friends and neighbors.

Our work at Powder River is not directly concerned with political action, with speaking on behalf of particular political parties or ideologies. Rather, it is to understand and speak on behalf of practices that will help build vibrant human communities living with the natural world, not against it. Our towns, states, and nations are part of a broader community that includes diverse peoples and life forms spread across the planet, a great interwoven web of all living things. We want to keep this community healthy for ourselves, for our children and grandchildren, and for those living in a future we will never know.

To do this work we must be able to speak freely and honestly while listening to one another thoughtfully and openly. And if we can do that, I believe the anxiety we feel about the political and social challenges we face will be greatly diminished.

Many of you know that I came to Powder River not as a person trained in biology or geology, not in wildlife or resource management, not in anything that suggests any competency related to Powder River's main concerns, but as a musician playing often for the Powder River annual meetings. I continue to work as a musician and a few Saturdays ago I was playing with a quartet at a business that has both a small intimate bar and a larger events room with various sized tables seating two to six people. The event space also has cushioned easy chairs and couches. There are no TVs. People talk to one another. To strangers.

At this recent gig I spoke with the audience between songs, telling stories of the music's history or of other times when I'd played a given song. We played a song called "Embarrassing Moments" during which audience members were invited to come to the stage and tell about something in their own lives that was embarrassing for them. It can't be someone else's story. Only your own. Many people in the room had known each other for years—it's a small town—but there were newcomers, too, and people from nearby towns, even people visiting from afar. The embarrassing moments brought us together while also bringing audience members into the band to help make the music.

I tell you this to emphasize that the more we are in contact with each other, the more we talk to one another while listening well, the better chance we will have of finding a way toward shared resolutions in the face of conflict. Ah, you may think, finally we are getting to the subject. And yes, while it took a while, the time spent getting there may be as central to our success as the destination itself. So, let's talk to one another. And while we're at it let's talk with our local, state, and national representatives, too. Through face to face contact, we can come to feel greater sympathy for one another. Our anxiety about what the other may "do" to us will go down and we can move forward together doing more effective work on behalf of the air, water, land, and living beings with whom we share the planet.

*David Romtvedt*

**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, Nebraska Organizing Project, North Dakota Native Voice, Northern Plains Resource Council, Oregon Rural Action, Western Colorado Alliance for Community Action, 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)
- Sheridan Area Resource Council (SARC)

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

CHAIR..... David Romtvedt  
 VICE CHAIR..... vacant  
 SECRETARY ..... Lynne Huskinson  
 TREASURER ..... Bob LeResche  
 Joyce Evans , Barbara Chase, Maria Katherman,  
 Liza Cuthbert-Millett, Tudor Marks, and  
 Gillian Malone, and Eric Krszjzniek

## STAFF

INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR..... Sharon Buccino  
 OFFICE MANAGER/MEMBER RELATIONS  
 COORDINATOR ..... Katherine Schrock  
 COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS:  
 SHERIDAN..... Pennie Vance  
 LARAMIE..... Natalie Johansen

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## POWDER RIVER BREAKS

EDITOR: Sharon Buccino  
 MANAGING EDITOR: Pennie Vance  
 Photos by Powder River staff and members

# Building Connections: PRBRC Hosts Legislative Lunch in Cheyenne

## *Real Conversations, Real Impact*

Natalie Johansen  
Powder River Staff

There's something special about Wyoming's citizen legislature—these lawmakers are our neighbors. Like their constituents, legislators are ranchers, teachers, small business owners, and citizens who step up to serve our state. This diverse community was in full attendance at Powder River's legislative lunch on February 6th, where open conversations flowed freely between legislators and their constituents.

Powder River members joined over a dozen legislators for an afternoon of genuine discussion about issues that matter to Wyoming communities. Members shared their thoughts on everything from net metering and nuclear waste storage to agricultural challenges, highlighting the local expertise that makes Wyoming's legislative process unique. "We are a citizen legislature, we rely on organizations like yours to bring us the facts," said one senator who came to the lunch to thank Powder River for testifying on the net metering bill.

“Legislators need to hear from us. When we show up, speaking to them face-to-face, it is impactful.”

– Liza Cuthbert-Millet

The event's success was due in large part to Nancy McCann, Powder River's government relations consultant. Her extensive knowledge of the legislative landscape and established relationships with lawmakers helped the attendance and meaningful engagement. This kind of face-to-face interaction is crucial to the function of a citizen legislature and to Powder River's mission as a member-led organization.

"My impression is that our legislators do listen more closely to real constituents that make the sojourn to Cheyenne," said Maria Katherman, Powder River Board Member, whose reflections on the experience demonstrate the value of in-person advocacy in Wyoming's legislative process. "My mission was to talk with Natrona county legislators, most of whom I have a connection with, and call their attention to proposed hazardous waste storage in the state that deserves serious thought and citizen engagement." Another board member echoed Maria's thoughts, "Legislators need to hear from us. When we show up, speaking to them face-to-face, it is impactful." said Liza Cuthbert-Millet.

The personal connections made during the legislative lunch remind us that behind every bill and every vote, there are real people with real experiences to share. Whether over lunch at the capitol or a cup of coffee at a local cafe, Powder River's commitment to community organizing fosters conversations such as these throughout the year, creating the understanding between citizens and their representatives that is the foundation of Wyoming's democratic process.



# 2025 Legislative Session: A Year of New Faces and High Volume

Natalie Johansen  
Powder River Staff

The 2025 Legislative Session brought significant shifts to Wyoming's Capitol, with approximately two-thirds of legislators serving fewer than two terms and the Freedom Caucus securing a majority position. This new dynamic, combined with a whopping 555 bills introduced—the most in the last 24 years—created both challenges and opportunities for building relationships and finding common ground. One key lesson this session was the importance of not making assumptions about voting patterns or positions. Despite the Freedom Caucus majority, several environmental and resource bills found unexpected allies.

Overall, Powder River should be extremely proud of the results we achieved during the session. We celebrated the defeat of fifteen bills we actively opposed including HB16 regarding used nuclear fuel storage. This bill would have allowed the disposal of high-level nuclear waste in Wyoming, creating significant environmental risks for future generations. Ensuring that the Legislature did not authorize nuclear waste storage without careful consideration of the risks and impacts was one of Powder River's two top priorities. While the bill passed the Senate, the House Minerals committee said "no" in large part due to the effective testimony and lobbying by Powder River.

The latest attempt to attack net metering (SF111) would have created barriers for residents and businesses wanting to install solar or small wind systems. This bill proposed a two-tier system that would have punished new installations and given utilities control over customer compensation rates. Through engagement from our members and allies, this anti-rooftop solar bill was defeated on third reading in the Senate.

The good net metering bill (HB183) that we had promoted unfortunately was amended in a way that Powder River and other renewable energy advocates could not support. As designed, this agricultural-backed bill sponsored by members of the Freedom Caucus would benefit non-residential net metered customers by increasing the system cap to 200kW and allowing for multiple meters on a single property. The bill initially flew through the House with 56 to 4 vote on the floor. However, complications arose in the Senate. The Senate Minerals committee added an amendment giving the Public Service Commission (PSC) authority to

set rates for all net metered customers, including residential. This strikes a section of the 2001 net metering statute that provides protection to net metered customers from additional fees. Additional amendments on third reading before the full Senate, including one exempting co-ops from PSC oversight, made the bill unacceptable. In the end, the bill as amended failed to pass as 16 voted against it compared to the 15 who supported it. While we lost the opportunity for positive action on net-metering, we avoided losing ground and moving backward on the issue.

We saw seven other bills that we supported die before passage. Among these casualties was HB59, which would have modified Wyoming law regarding limited mining operations and expanded water quality testing requirements for small-scale mining activities. Many bills failed due to the session's limited timeframe and high volume of bills, highlighting the challenge of moving legislation through both chambers with so many competing priorities.

Agricultural issues remained part of Powder River's legislative work. Two key bills we supported passed and have been signed by the Governor. SF84 establishes country of origin labeling for Wyoming-born, raised, and processed beef, providing consumers with transparent information about their food sources. SF64 continued our long-standing opposition to federal mandates by rejecting requirements for electronic identification of cattle crossing state lines – a position Powder River has advocated for years.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all of you for your involvement in Powder River's work by contacting legislators, speaking at committee

meetings, and advocating on issues that matter to you and our state. Powder River's success during the session would not have happened without you or Nancy McCann who delivered strategic and powerful lobbying. And a particularly HUGE thanks to member Jill Morrison who threw herself "all in" to setting us up in Cheyenne and steering our engagement. When citizens spoke with knowledge and passion about Wyoming's resources and future, legislators listened.

As we transition to the interim committee work already underway, we face opportunities to shape policy development before the next legislative session. Several issues ranging from water quality protection and nuclear energy development to mining regulations will receive in-depth study in the coming months. By continuing to engage year-round—not just during the legislative session—we strengthen our collective voice for responsible resource development and environmental protection in Wyoming.



# OPINION: Thinking Seriously About Highly Radioactive Waste

Maria Katherman  
Powder River Board Member

Wyoming's acceptance of the proposed building of a new type of nuclear reactor, the sodium reactor project slated for Kemmerer, has been noticed by the industry. Among many other ideas, several startups have been designing a type of "advanced nuclear reactor" known as micro reactors. These would be small reactors, transportable by semi-trailers that would be manufactured one place then deployed to serve as an energy source elsewhere. Although none have yet been fully permitted nor successfully tested at the Idaho National Laboratory, one such startup, Radiant Energy, engaged with the Wyoming legislature to allow them to store the highly radioactive waste (HRW) that will be associated with their reactor manufacture, fueling & refueling. They propose Casper for a location. As a result, the legislature considered a bill that would amend a Wyoming statute prohibiting the storage of HRW in Wyoming to say that spent nuclear fuel that is stored by an advanced nuclear reactor manufacturer in Wyoming is not "high-level radioactive waste" so could be stored here. What?

This is a big, big change to the Wyoming laws around nuclear waste and was proposed with little or no public engagement on the topic. For decades Wyoming people have shouted "No!" to even "temporary" storage of HRW here, despite many attempts mostly originating in Fremont county. "Temporary" in this context is shorthand for permanent because the U.S. has failed to address permanent HRW storage on a national level for the last 75 years. The long-proposed site, Yucca Mountain, was finally abandoned because of public pressure against it in Nevada. No progress has been made since.

Defining HRW to exclude spent fuel from advanced nuclear

reactors does not mean that it is true. Smaller nuclear reactors may produce a smaller amount of radioactive waste, but it is still the same kind of waste—highly radioactive. Plus nothing in the proposed bill prevented "advanced nuclear reactors" from storing highly radioactive waste generated elsewhere and transporting it to Wyoming. Allowing for its "temporary" storage does not mean it will really be temporary, either. Furthermore, this is not a decision to be made by a few legislators in a hurry to set things up for a startup that has not even had its prototype tested yet. Nor has the public been asked to engage about the idea to begin with.

But there is good news: even after passing through the Senate with little opposition, the House Minerals Committee wisely chose to oppose the proposition and suggest it as an interim topic instead. Effective engagement including key testimony by Powder River members helped produce this result.

My hope is that the people of Natrona County & Wyoming in general will get an opportunity to think this over; ask their questions and voice their opinions about this new industry locating in Casper. Advanced nuclear reactors may be an important part of Wyoming's future, but Wyoming citizens deserve a chance to see how well funded this startup is and how their prototype does at the Idaho Lab when tested. We don't know what Radiant expects from Wyoming in terms of industrial siting, state or local subsidies, discounted land, access to water, etc. and we need to carefully consider what Wyoming's expectations are from this new industry coming here. This is not going away, so we need to engage for the long run—and it's a really LONG RUN—this HRW remains lethal for thousands of years.

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## Tomorrow's Community Leaders Compete in FFA Border Wars

Pennie Vance  
Powder River Staff

Over three hundred high school students from across Wyoming and several communities in Montana descended on the Sheridan College campus in Sheridan on March 3rd for the annual Future Farmers of America Border Wars competition. The students participated in several agriculture related fields including Environment and Natural Resources, Veterinary Science, and Farm Business Management. Powder River member, John Buyok and staff organizer, Pennie Vance, joined the crew of community volunteers who helped register the students and judge the events.

"I enjoyed seeing all of the FFA students from around 30 different schools furthering their education by competing in these contests," said Buyok. "They were serious about the competition but were also having fun and making new friends."

The Wyoming FFA, with over 4000 members statewide, is part of the National FFA Organization with over one million members across America. FFA is a school-based leadership development organization which uses ag-related classroom curriculum and experiential learning to provide young people with the training they need to become tomorrow's highly skilled workforce and leaders in their communities.



High school FFA students on Sheridan College campus.

# Bill Barlow Memorial Award for 2025 Wyoming State Science Fair

## Recognizing the Next Generation of Conservation Leaders

Maria Katherman, Natalie Johansen, Liza Cuthbert-Millett

Thanks to the generous donation from the Barlow family, every year a team of PRBRC staff and board members select recipients for the “Bill Barlow Memorial Youth in Conservation Awards” at the Wyoming State Science Fair held at the University of Wyoming. We select student projects that address aspects of Wyoming’s ecosystems, sustainable agriculture, land development, conservation and renewable energy.

The scene is a ballroom full of students and their posters being interviewed by 20+ judges, including the team from Powder River. This year our team was Liza Cuthbert-Millett, Natalie Johansen & Maria Katherman.

The students come from all over the state, though we note that not all schools choose to participate. There is a glaring absence of students from the larger towns except Cheyenne and each year there seem to be fewer projects that are related to our subjects of our interest. This year we had to stretch our criteria a bit to have a reasonable number of projects to consider.

We were unanimous in our selection of the 1st place winner in the Senior Division (High School-aged students): Joel Cox from Cheyenne Central High School. He did a well-thought out and executed project on “Changes to Vegetative Cover of Riparian Areas with and without Grazing”. Joel took advantage of a series of exclusion fences along Cow Creek to compare the vegetation and creek bank using his phone’s camera and the latest technology of photo analysis. His understanding of his results, the implications and what might be next steps for further investigation was impressive.

2nd place: Caden Thacker from Greybull—“Bioaccumulation in *Daphnia* Exposed to Coal Fly Ash Leachate” Caden had a good understanding of the presence of heavy metals in fly ash as a waste product of generating electricity from burning coal. She lives in a community near a coal-fired power plant.

3rd place: Brandon Metz from Ft. Washakie and Pathfinder High School in Lander—“Measuring Atmospheric Particulates” He showed innovation and creativity by using his own programming and engineering skills plus a 3-D printer to manufacture his equipment meant to investigate the smoke-filled air of 2024.

In the junior division: Garret York and Landon Griffin from Big Piney and Marbleton—“The Effect of Fire Factors on Plants” This self-motivated duo designed and built an apparatus to test survival of aquatic plants subjected to aspects of forest fires that they thought that might impact plants.

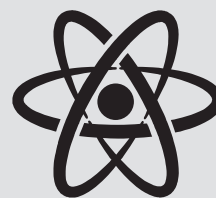
We look forward to seeing these young minds apply their curiosity to address environmental challenges of our state in years to come.



**SOLAR STATS**  
FROM POWDER RIVER OFFICE  
SOLAR PANELS



Energy Produced:  
**386kWh**



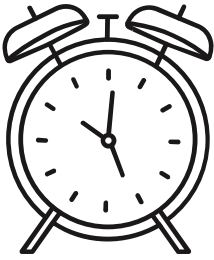
Carbon Offset:  
**617 pounds**



We offset an equivalent  
of 5 trees  
in February & March

# It's Annual Membership Renewal Time

Choose an option below to renew or sign-up as a member with PRBRC.



- A) Photograph the QR Code with your phone to renew online
- B) Fill in and deliver to: 934 N. Main Street, Sheridan, WY 82801

We look forward to further building community with the inclusion of your answers and input on this form.

## Member Information

First and Last Name(s) : \_\_\_\_\_  
Email Address(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Occupation: (optional) \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number (s) \_\_\_\_\_ Cell and/or Home  
Street, City, State and Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

## Please Circle All That Apply To You

I/We support the following issues effecting Wyoming.

- Coal Mining and Power Plants
- Local Food Production
- Coal Transition
- Renewable Energy
- Soil Health / Regenerative Ag
- Oil and Gas
- Livestock Issues

Write In \_\_\_\_\_

I /We have participated in these PRBRC activities

- Legislative Correspondence/Lunches
- CALC, ARE or SARC Meetings
- Harvest Celebration's
- November Annual Meeting's
- Sheridan Food Forest
- Coal Mine Tours
- Solar Power Events
- Agricultural Land Tours
- Seed Library @ Fulmer Public Library

I/We have a PRBRC Affiliate(s)Membership - Annual dues are

\$5.00 per year with an annual PRBRC membership.

**CALC** Cheyenne Area Landowners Coalition (**Laramie County**)

**SARC** Sheridan Area Resource Council (**Sheridan County**)

**ARE** Alliance for Renewable Energy (**Albany County**)

**PACC** Pavillion Area Concerned Citizens (**Fremont County**)

**CRC** Clark Resource Council (**Park County**)

Thank you!

Please provide any additional information you would like for PRBRC to know:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Please check the tax-deductible membership level of your choice and enclose payment with this form.

- \$20 Senior/Student  \$5 Affiliate
- \$30 Individual  \$100 Supporting
- \$50 Family  \$250 Contributing



934 North Main  
 Sheridan, Wyoming 82801

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## Calendar of Events

<b>March 26</b>	Community Conversation on Economic Diversification 10-11:30 am (Gillette)
<b>April 10</b>	Community Conversation on Water 2-3:30 pm (Laramie)
<b>May 6</b>	Community Conversation on Local Foods and Ag 10-11:30 am (Sheridan)
<b>May 7</b>	House Party at David Romtvedt's (Buffalo)
<b>May 22</b>	House Party at Gillian Malone's (Big Horn)
<b>September 20</b>	Return of the Harvest Festival at Kearney Hall (Story)
<b>October 25</b>	Annual Meeting at the Ramada Plaza (Sheridan)