

INFLUENCING THE DECISIONS THAT WILL SHAPE WYOMING'S FUTURE

Sharon Buccino
Executive Director

Upon starting at Powder River three months ago, I was excited to create conversation to provide a strategic roadmap for the organization. We are well on our way.

Our mission is strong – protecting Wyoming's land, water, air and people. The times demand that we lean into the people part. That we give people reason to come together – for connection, joy and to shape a positive future together.

Staff, board and members have discussed (1) how we define community; (2) how we strengthen community; (3) how we create conversation among those with different views. We brought together members and others to talk about economic diversification in Gillette, water in Laramie and local food in Sheridan.

We've learned that place matters, but it is not all that matters. Litigation matters, but it is not all that matters. Saying yes (and here's how) is more important than saying no.

At our May meeting in Casper, board and staff discussed a draft Strategic Roadmap. The draft proposes to shape Powder River's work around four basic human needs – energy, water, food and shelter. It proposes to bring people together to articulate a positive vision for their communities and measure proposed development against this vision.

Initially, we're thinking about focusing on four key projects:

- Promoting effective community engagement and education regarding development of the manufacture of advanced nuclear generators

- EPA's proposed rule changes to produced water disposal
- Securing mitigation from expanded oil and gas production in Converse County
- Building community support for net-metering legislation and responsible renewable development to support Laramie's net-zero emission goals.

This is where you come in. What resonates with you in these focus areas? What's missing? Are there other issues in your community that demand attention? Your lived experiences and local knowledge are essential to getting this right. Email the staff at info@powderriverbasin.org, give us a call or come on into the office at 934 N Main in Sheridan.

After the May board meeting, we will refine the Strategic Roadmap based on your input. We will revise our website to reflect the direction we are headed and the work we are doing to get there. We will reach out to new potential members and partners. We will seek funding available to support the work we believe is most critical to do. We are excited to share how things are going at our fall Harvest Festival (September 20) and our Annual Meeting (October 25). Both in Sheridan!

At its founding, Powder River shaped the legal framework that would govern coal mining for 50 years. Now Powder River has the chance to shape what happens to coal, the basin and Wyoming's communities for the next 50 years. By honoring not ignoring differences, Powder River can build stability. The alternative is the policy whiplash generated by Presidential politics. By building from the bottom up and the middle out, communities can create a prosperous future that lasts.

“ By building from the bottom up and the middle out, communities can create a prosperous future that lasts. ”



Staff and Board at Thyra Thompson State Office Building, Casper, WY

Message from the Chair



Working Together for the Good of All

Sometimes it seems that as I try to work on behalf of the environment, I find myself speaking against something when what I want to do is speak on behalf of something. I want to be in favor of policies that serve the common good while ensuring the health of the planet and of all the creatures who live on it, including us—we complicated and sometimes troubled human beings. This is especially important now in a time of social tension that influences our relationships with one another as individuals and as members of our communities.

In January of this year, the president issued an executive order he called “Unleashing American Energy” which included freezing congressionally approved funds meant to pay the costs of plugging orphaned oil and gas wells. While I oppose this order, what’s more important is what I favor—finding ways to work together on behalf of creating policies and funding for the plugging of abandoned and orphaned wells. It was by working together that the original funding was agreed upon.

As we hope legislators will, we work together to solve problems. And as we hope they will, we work together in support of principles of federalism that take into account various viewpoints. We work together to consider possible solutions to environmental problems. And we work together to avoid waste in the use of finite resources, to prevent unhealthy emissions when we engage in minerals exploration. We work together to protect habitats upon which non-human species depend, aware that because of the inter-connected web of life, protecting non-human species protects us. And we work together to create economic diversity that will maintain social stability and enhance the well-being of Wyoming’s people.

The Interior Department estimates that there are about 157,000 orphaned oil and gas wells in the U.S. while the Environmental Protection Agency estimates there may be up to 3.4 million such wells. While the companies who engage in minerals development should through bonding pay the costs of remediation and reclamation when developments are completed, such is not always the case and so public funds sometimes must be tapped to do this work. In such cases we work together to set in place policies that do not unfairly burden one group. We all benefit from the use of finite resources and so we all must share in the cost of repairing environmental and social damage caused by development.

In the case of oil and gas development, as unmaintained wellbores, wellheads, pipes, and casings age, corrode, and deteriorate, harmful gases, such as methane and hydrogen sulfide are released into the environment. The Interior Department’s Orphaned Wells Annual Report to Congress of November 2024 noted that individual unplugged wells have been measured emitting as much as 76,000 grams of methane per hour. Over the course of a year, this is equivalent to the greenhouse gas emissions from over 4,000 gasoline powered automobiles. By supporting funding for the plugging or abandoned oil and gas wells, we can avoid wasted resources and minimize noxious emissions that damage both our day to day quality of life and our efforts to limit the effects of climate change.

Maybe it’s simplest to say Powder River seeks to work with others to create vibrant welcoming communities existing in cooperation with the natural world that supports all life.

We see this in the work of the journalist Randall Sullivan who said that while covering the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the 1990s he went from having no religious belief to being a Catholic. Following that conversion, he was in an airport and started thinking about how things look to God, how we and the world we’ve made look to God. He thought God was telling him, “This is how it looks to me.” In that moment he felt compassion for every person he saw. That compassion is what allows us to work together on behalf of shared goals.

Related to Sullivan’s sense of universal compassion is a comment by columnist Bret Stephens on the spirit of the presidency and of the Constitution reminding us that all branches of government are co-equal partners working together “through respect and negotiation in pursuit of win-win solutions.”

In speaking on behalf of funding for the plugging of orphaned oil and gas wells, we work together to make the land safe for the generations that come after us, to avoid unnecessary harmful emissions into the air and water and the waste of precious resources, and to restore the natural beauty that gives us pleasure and meaning. Compassion and working together—win-win for us all.

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)

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POWDER RIVER BREAKS

EDITOR: Sharon Buccino
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Photos by Powder River staff and members

Federal Funding Cuts – Legal or Not?

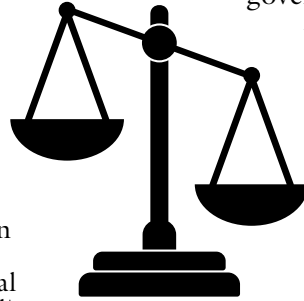
Sharon Buccino
Executive Director

My heart broke once again as I opened the paper to the news that the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) had canceled nearly \$400 million in AmeriCorps funds dealing “a devastating blow to the state of Wyoming.” This was just the latest example of unlawful overreach to block previous Congressional actions.

From the news, we hear an endless litany of the consequences to Wyoming’s land, water, air and people from DOGE cuts. The impacts include: less help for farmers; less money to fight wildfires; fewer summer job opportunities for Wyoming youth; lost careers and despair for Wyoming families. I won’t argue that enhancing government efficiency is not needed, but a slash and burn approach is not the way to do it.

Put aside whether shrinking the federal government is the right thing to do. Is it legal? The answer is no and here’s why. One of the bedrock principles of the U.S. Constitution is the “separation of powers” between three equal branches of government: the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. As the U.S. Supreme Court has said, separation of powers “protects the liberty of the individual from arbitrary power.”

In this case, Congress has passed laws that create and fund programs like AmeriCorps. Congress could amend its previous actions, but until it does so, the executive is responsible for implementing the laws Congress passes.



In many cases, the government has signed contracts to provide certain funds for certain purposes. The President wouldn’t want someone to back out of a business contract he or she signed. So why would it be okay for the federal government to do that?

The laws passed by Congress and the Constitution establish that American society is governed by the rule of law not the whim of one man. Wyoming has regularly stood strong against arbitrary action by the federal government. In fact, Congressional law – the Administrative Procedure Act – protects us from “arbitrary and capricious” agency action. It requires federal agencies to have rational basis for their actions. As a judge in Washington, DC, said, the government’s actions “flunk that test.” The government “cannot provide a reasonable explanation for why they needed to freeze all federal financial assistance in less than a day to ‘safeguard valuable taxpayer resources.’”

So what does this mean for the communities of the Powder River Basin? First, the government is wasting our taxpayer dollars on actions that courts have ordered stop. Second, the government has put the burden on those promised federal funds to plead their case to get their money. This is the opposite of what Congress mandated as two federal judges have decided. The President has appealed the court decisions.

Another lesson in separation of powers – courts are indispensable. But they have their limits. Final resolution takes time. In the meantime, communities in Wyoming are hurting.

Powder River Convenes Water Experts to Guide Future Initiatives

Natalie Johansen
Powder River Staff

Powder River recently hosted a discussion on water issues in Wyoming as part of our strategic planning process. Specialists gathered from Albany County Clean Water Advocates (ACCWA), Wyoming Anticipating Climate Transitions (WyAct), Laramie Rivers Conservation District, and local hydrologists to share expertise on regional water systems and help shape Powder River’s future water initiatives.

The conversation explored various water challenges and opportunities facing Wyoming communities today and in the future. Participants shared expertise on resource management and conservation approaches, highlighting areas where Powder River could make contributions. The discussion revealed important knowledge gaps in public understanding of the state’s water systems and examined how changing conditions might affect diverse water users throughout Wyoming.

Dialogue also uncovered potential partnerships between grassroots water advocacy organizations. By assembling local expertise and diverse perspectives, Powder River has gained valuable insights to inform our strategic planning, positioning the organization to develop effective, community-focused approaches to water conservation and protection as part of its ongoing mission in Wyoming.

We extend our sincere thanks to all participants contributing their time, knowledge, and vision to this important conversation. Your insights are invaluable as we work together to protect Wyoming’s resources.



Sheridan - at Tom Balding’s place.

Affiliates in Action

Building Community at the Sheridan Seed Library



Pennie Vance
Powder River Staff

SARC (of Sheridan and Johnson County) members gathered again this spring to sort, re-package, label and file hundreds of seed packets for the Sheridan Seed Library. This year many seeds arrived in large bulk packets that needed to be sorted into dozens of family-size packets. While this might sound like a tedious task, the crew who help each year have the process fine-tuned to a fun work session that includes an abundance of gardening chat and laughter.

Each year Powder River solicits seed companies across the US and Canada who participate in non-profit seed donation projects for their overstock and prior season seeds. Most of the seeds are open pollinated and/or heirloom, rather than hybrid. That's important for gardeners who save seed because true-to-type seed must come from that type of plant.

Community members are allowed to “check out” up to five packets of seeds and encouraged to save seeds in the fall to donate back to the library for the following year. Tragically, over 75% of the world’s seed diversity has been lost to the industrialization of seed production. The lack of diversity presents a severe risk to the security of global food systems. Without seed diversity, it’s difficult for plants to adapt to pests, diseases, and changing climate conditions — a particular concern as the world warms. When a field is planted in one seed type that lacks resistance to certain pests or diseases, an infestation can destroy the entire field. The saving of seeds encouraged by seed libraries is one small way that communities can help prevent even further loss of seed diversity.



Affiliates in Action

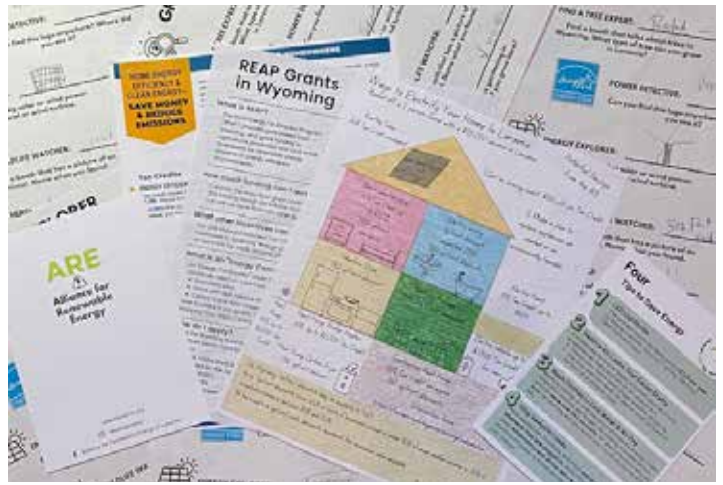
Alliance for Renewable Energy in the Community

Natalie Johansen
Powder River Staff

Powder River's affiliate in Laramie has been building connections throughout the community this spring, with the Alliance for Renewable Energy (ARE) setting up informational tables at several events across Laramie. ARE focuses on transitioning communities to renewable energy through scientific data, economic fairness, and public education with volunteers spreading awareness about sustainable energy solutions in Wyoming. Volunteers tabled at Earth Day celebrations, Laramie's City Sustainability Kick-Off, and the Laramie Home & Garden Show. At

each event, they shared information about renewable energy opportunities and sustainable living practices with residents.

ARE meets every month to discuss ways it can promote renewable and efficient energy in the community and support the City of Laramie in its goal to reduce carbon emissions through municipal government operations and pursue a net zero, carbon neutral future by 2050 (City of Laramie Resolution, 2020-14). Meetings are on the fourth Thursday of each month at 5:30 pm in Laramie, and are open to all. Please reach out to Powder River for more information or if you want to get further connected.



Sheridan Members Take Action in Outdoor Cleanup Effort



THANK YOU MEMBERS

FOR YOUR TREMENDOUS RESPONSE TO THE 2025 RENEWAL SURVEY.

Identifying your interest in various issues Wyoming faces—from:



COAL MINING AND POWER PLANTS



LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION



RENEWABLE ENERGY



OIL AND GAS DEVELOPMENT

We'll be compiling your responses throughout the **summer months** to strategically focus our work where we can make the **greatest impact**.

Your indicated levels of involvement help us better understand how to serve you and inspire us to create additional ways for your voice and contributions to be heard.

Save the Date for the Harvest Festival!

September 20, 2025

Gillian Malone
Powder River Board Member

Powder River is bringing back the ever-popular Harvest Celebration this year, scheduled for September 20th. It will include the infamous “Pies by Guys” extravaganza, music by “the usual suspects” Kearney Hall jamming band, and a delectable feast featuring succulent, slow-barbecued pork with all the trimmings accompanied by a variety of gourmet dishes created from locally harvested produce.

Please feel free to contribute a side or salad or dessert to share! If you are interested in volunteering, please reach out to Powder River at info@powderriverbasin.org for more details. (More details will be provided closer to the event.)

We are excited to bring this event back, especially during a time in our 50-plus-year history when we need to gather and enjoy one another’s company and celebrate who we are as Powder River Basin Resource Council. Powder River let'er buck!



Photo Submission Request

Share Your Special Wyoming Places

Wyoming’s stunning landscapes connect us all. Whether it’s a family ranch passed through generations, a hidden fishing spot, a favorite hiking trail, or a view that takes your breath away– these places shape our commitment to protect them.

We invite you to share a photo of a Wyoming place that holds special meaning to you. If you would like, include a brief story about why this location matters or what memories it holds.

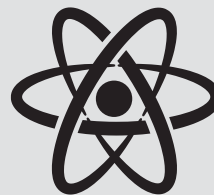
Please send your photo to info@powderriverbasin.org. With your permission, we look forward to sharing some of your special places in our upcoming newsletters.



SOLAR STATS
FROM POWDER RIVER OFFICE
SOLAR PANELS



Energy Produced:
226.8kWh



Carbon Offset:
362.7 pounds



We offset an equivalent of
2 trees
in April



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A LIFT TO WYOMING'S ECONOMY

If Wyoming households spent just **5%**
of their eat-at-home food budget on local foods,
Wyoming's economy would increase by over

\$61,000,000



Visit *WyoGives.org* on
JULY 16, 2025
and search for:

Powder River Basin Resource Council

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