

# mission

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

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# wyoming

## update

### FALL/WINTER 2006



Winter arrives in Wyoming. © Scott Copeland

#### A Message from the Director

*"On every occasion when we thus rode out in the morning we saw great numbers of prairie fowl... They would often be right round the cattle, and went indifferently among the sage-brush...."*

These words resonated for me a few weeks ago at our Winchester Ranch, as my horse ambled along the Wind River on a cool fall day. Teddy Roosevelt wrote them during his 1885 tour of the West. He was describing Wyoming.

The shiver I felt on the back of my neck as I rode was only partly due to the changing weather. More than a century later, I'm awestruck that I can view this country in the same way that inspired the great man.

Here at The Nature Conservancy of Wyoming, we've been listening to you, our membership, and our partners as we ask: What needs to be done to make sure our landscapes and way of life endure? I am very proud to tell you in this update that we have identified four focal habitats where

we'll focus our efforts in the coming years: *Freshwater. Desert Basins. Grasslands. The Greater Yellowstone Region.*

In the next two pages, I'll tell you more about our work in these areas. We have a talented team of professionals on our staff, including scientists and land managers, backed by a tremendous board of trustees. And we count on you, our dedicated members, who sustain us.

Teddy Roosevelt's words still describe the simple beauty of the West. Our quest is to make sure our children will have the same opportunity to experience what Teddy saw a hundred years ago...and I was lucky enough to see just the other day.

We are all involved in this quest, and I look forward to your continued ideas and support.

Andrea Erickson Quiroz  
State Director

# INVESTING IN NATURE

Your conservation dollars allow us to make significant progress in preserving Wyoming's natural lands and waters for future generations.



Riparian habitat. © Scott Copeland

## Freshwater: Key to Human Health

Flowing through all the world's rivers, freshwater has nourished people and nature since the dawn of civilization. But today, freshwaters suffer from pollution and man-made changes to water flows. The results have severe consequences for the people who depend on them for drinking water, agricultural and industrial needs, as well

as for the natural world to which we all are bound.

Wyoming's freshwater ecosystems are essential to habitat health, delivering nutrients to floodplains, wetlands, and estuaries, and moderating floods and droughts.

### Ongoing Project

• A dedicated group of landowners is driving an effort to **protect and restore 65 miles of the Gooseberry and Grass Creek watersheds** in northwest Wyoming. This broad partnership includes the Conservancy, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and the Wyoming Stock Growers Agricultural Land Trust. The project—a model for future watershed projects—focuses on one of Wyoming's most biologically important areas, with significant habitat for sage grouse, black- and white-tailed prairie dogs, elk, antelope, mule deer, the burrowing owl, and mountain plover.

For more information on these projects, visit [www.nature.org/wyoming](http://www.nature.org/wyoming)

## At a Crossroads: Partnerships in the Greater Yellowstone

Today, the Greater Yellowstone region remains one of the few places in the Lower 48 where visitors from around the globe may still encounter a full complement of large, wild mammals in one of the most biologically intact ecosystems in the United States.

Much of the wildlife habitat in the Greater Yellowstone region exists on private lands surrounding the geological wonders of our nation's first national park. These lands face unprecedented development pressures, making our work to protect biologically important areas more challenging than ever.

### Ongoing Projects

• We continue to raise funds to support two conservation projects on ranches in the Greater Yellowstone. A collaboration to preserve the Ramshorn Ranch near Dubois has permanently protected 6,000 deeded acres and ensured the stewardship of 66,000 acres of public land grazing leases. On the Twin Creek Ranch near Lander, local ranchers, the Conservancy, and the USDA's Farm and Ranchland Protection Program have teamed up to **maintain important wildlife habitat on almost 5,000 deeded acres.**



Twin Creek rancher Tony Malmberg. © Edward Orth



Sagebrush sea. © Joe Kiesecker

## Desert Basins: Under-appreciated Landscapes

Wyoming's desert basins sweep across one-third of Wyoming. These are harsh lands of severe weather, vast spaces and few trees. It's easy to fall into a false sense that this is an empty or biologically-dull place. In fact, two-thirds of the rare plants native to Wyoming live here.

Desert basins are home to neotropical migrant birds, several rare or endangered fish species, and prairie dogs, whose range has been drastically reduced over the years. This habitat faces threats from invasive species, altered fire regimes, energy extraction and residential development.

### Ongoing Projects

• The Conservancy has embarked on a science-based project to inform **off-site mitigation decisions for biological impacts to the Jonah Field.** Armed with our scientific planning process, we are providing tools to British Petroleum (BP) and the Jonah Interagency Mitigation and Reclamation Office to help achieve lasting conservation results in Wyoming's desert basins.

• Located in northwest Wyoming, the Conservancy's Heart Mountain Ranch hosts a revolving "bank" of grazing lands for local ranchers when they **choose to employ conservation tools on regular grazing lands.** This season, Heart Mountain provided a total of 2,491 animal unit months (AUMs) to ranchers pursuing a variety of conservation projects such as prescribed burns on their home ranges.

## Grasslands: Protecting Wyoming's Native Prairie

Grasslands hug Wyoming's eastern half, covering more than 17 million acres of the state. But with less than two percent of their total area under at least some sort of formal protection world-wide, grasslands are among the least protected habitat types on Earth.

Compared to many of the highly impacted regions of the Great Plains, grasslands in Wyoming are relatively healthy throughout much of their historic range. That's because large, untilled tracts of private land still exist here. That means Wyoming holds some of the country's last remaining short- and mixed-grass prairies—and the unique opportunity to protect them.

### Ongoing Projects

• The Thunder Basin Prairie Ecosystem Association is a coalition of land managers, including ranchers, federal and state agencies, and industry, all dedicated to the **effective stewardship of the Thunder Basin Grasslands.** The Conservancy has joined this effort to explore solutions that address human needs as well as conservation priorities.



Wyoming's short-grass prairie. © Edward Orth

• The Conservancy has invested a quarter of a million dollars in **matching funds to Wyoming's Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust** for projects in the Shirley Basin and Thunder Basin grassland areas. Our scientists have identified both as landscapes of high biological significance. The first project has been selected in the Thunder Basin Grasslands and will use fire, grazing management, and invasive control to enhance habitats for grassland birds, raptors, small mammals, and other wildlife.

## great places network

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