

Open Lands

News from Park County Open Lands

Fall 2023



Dear Friends & Neighbors,



Alexandra Munger

In this newsletter, you will discover the fruits of our labor — success stories, progress updates, and tales of the indomitable spirit of our community. As we gather around the harvest table this fall, I am reminded of the incredible support that each one of you provides, and I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for being a part of our journey.

So, grab a warm beverage, cozy up by the fire, and let the stories within these pages warm your heart. Here's to a bountiful fall season filled with gratitude and anticipation for the future.

With warm regards,

Alex Few
Park County Open Lands Regional
Director, Jackson Hole Land Trust

As the warm hues of autumn fill the region's wetlands, I am delighted to welcome you to our first annual fall newsletter. It is a season of change, a time when we bring in the summer's harvest, not only from our farms and ranches, but also of the precious memories made high in the mountains.

Partnerships forged over the last year between private landowners and a private nonprofit program, Park County Open Lands, have been nothing short of remarkable. Together, we've sowed the seeds for thousands of acres of open space, working lands, and wildlife habitat to be forever protected from development through voluntary conservation easements.

Park County Open Lands Projects In Motion

Park County Open Lands, a vision nurtured over the past several years, if not a decade, has by all measures taken to its wings. Whether it is the ongoing support from our local founding donors, the 150 resilient souls who gathered at our inaugural Annual Community Picnic in the rain, the Chamberlin Inn's gracious community contribution fee from their guests, or the 84 landowners we've met at kitchen tables around the county, the interest has overwhelmed both our hearts and inboxes. Thank you.

Our community-led land trust program has also grown to meet this demand. We've welcomed Cody's own Emily Reed to our team as a conservation project manager to help steward the unprecedented number of

potential conservation easements around the county through the years-long process. Emily brings a wealth of expertise and passion for working lands conservation, and we're excited about the positive impact she will make on our mission.

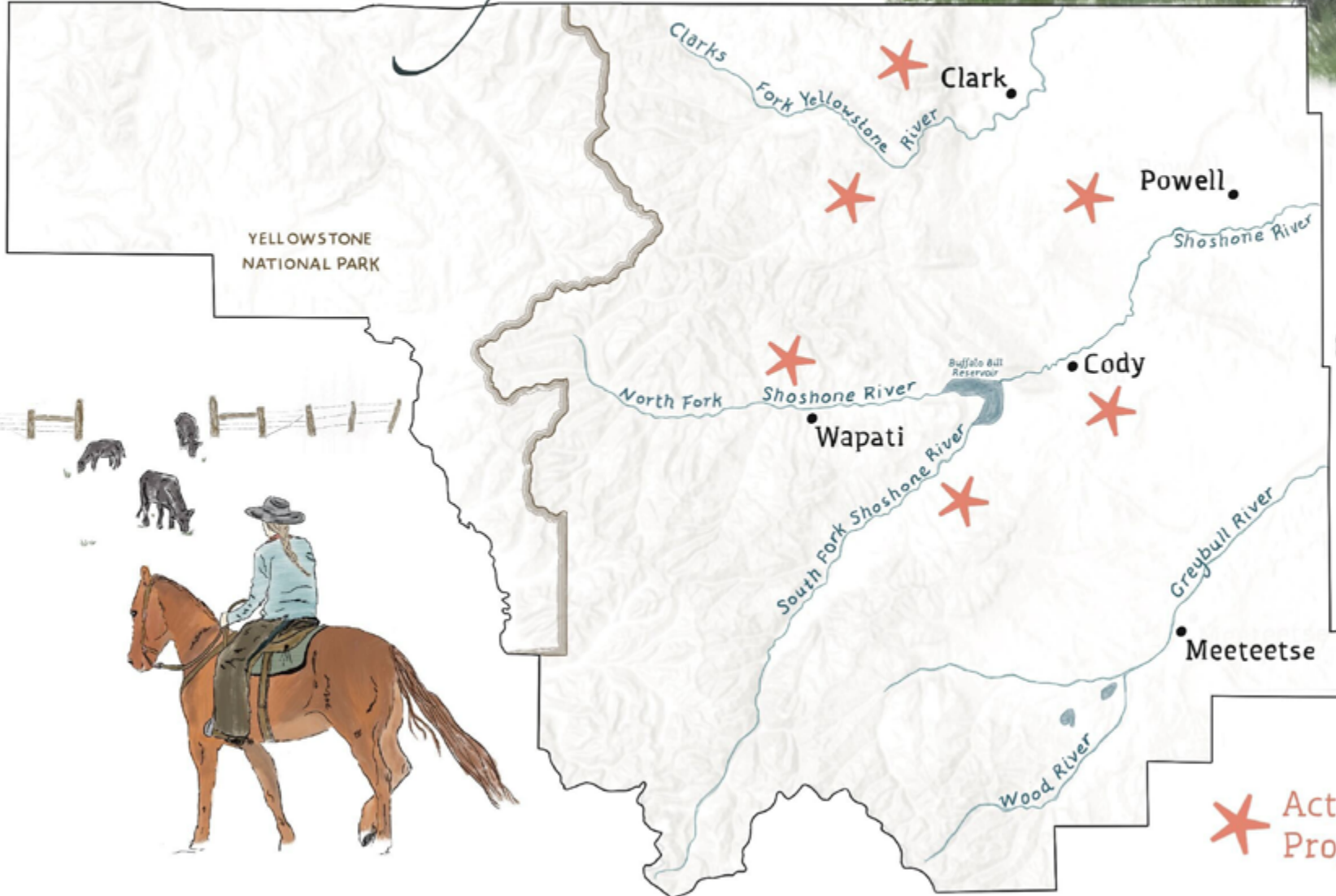
It is with great hope for a connected Park County, full of life both wild and domestic, that we share our early progress. As of October 3, thanks to committed landowners and support from our board, we are actively working to advance ten potential conservation easements on 3,014 acres from Sunlight to the state line and the South Fork and Wapiti to Powell that represent important wildlife habitat and working lands. They represent farmlands, ranchlands, private residences, and a private educational center. We are grateful for the momentum behind these projects and look forward to sharing the news of our program's first completed conservation easement soon!



Wright Light Imagery

Interested in learning more about conservation easements and their potential benefits? Email Emily Reed, conservation project manager, at emily@jhlandtrust.org for more information on the easement process and details on how conservation benefits agriculture, wildlife, community, and you as a landowner.

Park County



YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

Clark

Powell

Cody

Wapati

Meeteetse

Clarks Fork Yellowstone River

Shoshone River

North Fork Shoshone River

South Fork Shoshone River

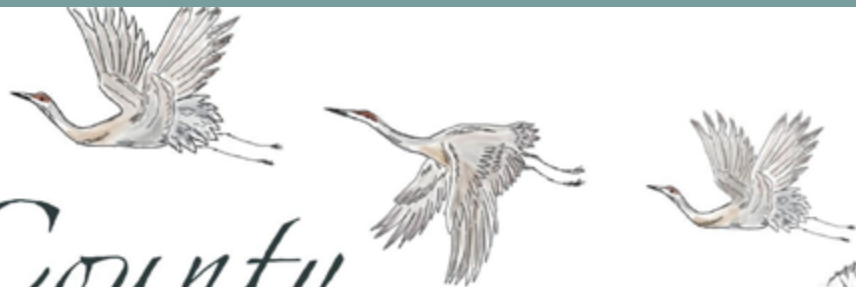
Greybull River

Wood River

Buffalo Bill Reservoir



★ Active Project Areas



Wildlife, Ranching, and Resilience: The Hogg Family Story

Lazy BV Ranch is nestled among the yellow and orange-tinged cottonwoods along the tranquil Greybull River southwest of Meeteetse. Its devoted owners, Allen and Kris Hogg, are now in their sixties and sit in contemplation of its future. This idyllic scene along the Greybull River is the heart of the ranch



Kris Hogg

itself — the house where Allen grew up, once his grandmother's home, and later the place where Allen and Kris raised their three children. The Lazy BV Ranch, at first glance, appears to embody the timeless tale of a multi-generational ranching family deeply connected to their land. Yet, beneath the seemingly straightforward narrative lies a quilted tapestry of resilience and history stitched together through land and wildlife. The first pieces of the quilt came together when Mina and Thomas Hogg, Allen's grandparents, ventured into the arid landscapes of the West, first homesteading on Spring Creek outside of Meeteetse before their move in 1918 to what would eventually become the Lazy BV Ranch. Over the years, they expanded their land holdings, passing down a legacy

of stewardship that continues to shape the ranch's future.

In 1981, a curious discovery on the Lazy BV Ranch would set in motion an extraordinary chapter in the Hogg family's history. It all began when Lucille Hogg, Allen's mother, decided to decorate the ranch's mantel with a mysterious weasel-like creature that their loyal dog, Shep, had brought home. Unbeknownst to her, this seemingly innocent act would trigger a remarkable turn of events. The taxidermist recognized the creature as a black-footed ferret, a species believed to be extinct since 1979, just six years after its listing under the newly established Endangered Species Act. This unexpected encounter led officials to the astonishing discovery of 124 individuals residing in the area. The population faced further

decline, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) refused to stand idly by. In 1987, the Hoggs said a bittersweet goodbye to the remaining ferrets as they were captured, initiating a captive breeding program that secured the species' future.

The Hogg family's commitment to future generations extended beyond wildlife conservation. In 2009, faced with the challenging circumstances of Allen's brother's cancer diagnosis, they made a heartfelt and difficult decision. The

ranch was divided, with Allen's brother taking ownership of the Luxford Pasture, where the family had summered their cattle for years, as well as other lands. Determined to continue their ranching legacy, Allen set his sights on expanding to the nearby McGuire Pasture, a move that would nearly double the ranch's size. This expansion was rooted in a deep sense of responsibility to pass on something meaningful to his family.

However, the road to securing the McGuire summer range was far from easy. Allen, ever

the visionary, devised a plan. He reasoned that placing a conservation easement on their existing property could generate the necessary income to acquire the idyllic McGuire summer range, which had already been conserved through an easement by the previous landowner. Unfortunately, the timing of these two real estate transactions didn't align perfectly. The conservation easement on their cherished home place along the Greybull River didn't close until 2019. "Those five years were pretty



tough," Allen reminisced. "We learned to tighten our belts and budget our money."

Kris added, "I have no idea how we did it, but it was Allen's dream." When those challenging five years passed and the conservation easement finally

closed, the Hoggs wasted no time. They reinvested in their ranch, adding pivots, paying off debt, and strengthening their commitment to both the land and the generations to come. Kris described the process, "The bumps in the road that we had were significant, and that's what people need to understand. It's a long, drawn-out process."

Allen added, "And it was worth it."

In July 2016, a full 35 years after Shep and Lucille's discovery of the black-footed ferrets, the USFWS made a poignant return

to the Lazy BV Ranch. They came bearing not only 35 live ferrets for release on the Lazy BV and the neighboring Pitchfork Ranch but also a taxidermied ferret similar in size to the one that had first piqued Lucille's curiosity. This stuffed ferret now resides proudly on the Hogg's mantel, right where Lucille had envisioned it all those years ago. With the ranch now complete, boasting ample summer pasture and a thriving population of ferrets, the Hogg family continues their legacy as stewards of an economically and ecologically vibrant ranch. As Kris put it, "I just want whoever runs

this place next to love it as much as Allen does."

Allen remarks, "I think my parents would be proud. Everything has come full circle."

Today, Allen and Kris continue to work with government and nonprofit partners to find wins for the ranch and for wildlife. The old cedar fence will soon be replaced with a new wildlife-friendly fence funded by the Wyoming Big Game Conservation Partnership Pilot (see the following article) and pioneered on the ranch with the help of local NRCS District

Conservationist Rory Karhu. The Hogg's commitment to conservation and wildlife makes good financial sense, as external funds help replace a 50-plus-year-old fence. But it's not all about money. It is hard to miss how much the Hoggs appreciate wildlife with the spotting scope planted in their dining room window. As Allen spoke of the future, he shared, "I would just keep doing this forever if I could. I just love it so much." This sentiment echoes their profound commitment to the land, wildlife, and the legacy they continue to build on the Lazy BV Ranch.

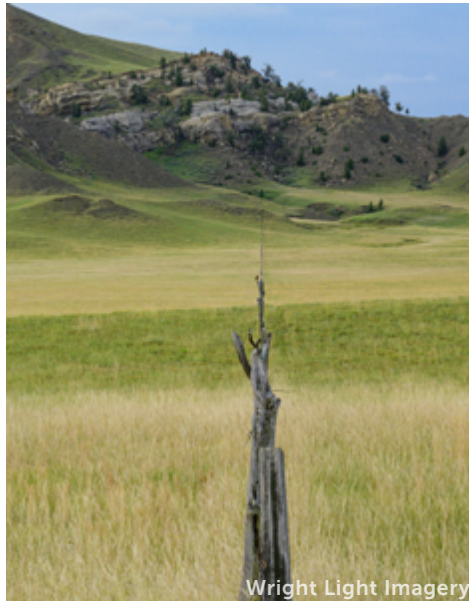


Big Game Pilot: An Investment in Stewardship

Park County farmers and ranchers pursuing conservation easements now have access to a new funding source in recognition of the critical role working lands play in sustaining wildlife. The new funding will be available to landowners for conservation easements through the Natural Resource Conservation Service's (NRCS) Agricultural Conservation Easement Program and Environmental Quality Incentives Program, as well as the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Grassland Conservation Reserve Program. Together, these collaborative programs are a monumental step towards ensuring that private, agricultural landowners have the financial support they need to continue a legacy of land stewardship that is essential to our way of life and our iconic wildlife.

This summer, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) committed an additional \$500 million to these programs nationwide. In the Mountain West, this builds upon last year's creation of the USDA-Wyoming Big Game Conservation Partnership Pilot, a pivotal partnership between the State of Wyoming and the USDA. The pilot project is an innovative approach to protecting big game habitat (mule deer, pronghorn, and elk) across five key focus areas — one of which is here in Park County.

One of the ways the pilot project



aims to keep working lands wild is by encouraging landowners to keep their acreage in agriculture through conservation easements, which limit development in exchange for financial incentives. Last year alone, the pilot program added \$10 million to fund conservation easements across the state. The pilot also incentivizes good stewardship of farms and ranches that results in healthy habitat for wildlife through projects in partnership with the NRCS and FSA.

Additionally, the pilot expands the Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (GCRP) that offers 10-15-year habitat leases on agricultural lands. These contracts allow landowners to continue grazing, haying, and seed harvesting while ensuring the land remains

suitable for wildlife and preventing development or subdivision. Park County is within the priority zones for GRCP, and in addition to payments based on county per-acre grazing rates, ranchers are also eligible for cost-share assistance to implement grazing and haying practices that benefit wildlife long-term.

"I like to describe habitat leases as compensating landowners for the costs of providing habitat for wildlife," says Park County Open Lands Director Alex Few. "Whether that's livestock losses to grizzly bears and wolves, lost forage to wintering elk, or the additional time it takes to repair elk damage to fences — providing habitat for wildlife affects the bottom line. Wyoming producers are great stewards of the land — that's why we have the longest intact migrations in the lower 48."

One of the central features of this pilot is its flexibility. It permits the layering of complementary conservation tools on the same acreage. This approach optimizes support for landowners and ensures a balanced focus on agricultural productivity and habitat conservation.

Nevertheless, there are interpretational challenges associated with the project's regulations. The FSA provides guidance, but the compatibility of these tools remains somewhat vague. Park County Open Lands has made it a priority to track the implementation of and enhancements to the pilot project so that we can support local landowners with the best available resources. Each conservation easement is unique, and so Park County Open Lands commits to ensuring that our easements are compatible with a landowner's future enrollment in GRCP.

The USDA-Wyoming Big Game Conservation Partnership Pilot and successive expansions to the Working Lands for Wildlife framework are pivotal steps toward wildlife conservation and sustainable land management in Park County and across the West. Park County Open Lands and the broader Jackson Hole Land Trust organization look forward to leveraging these programs to support our partners in conservation: farmers, ranchers, and conservationists across Northwest Wyoming.



Meet the Park County Open Lands Advisory Council

For years, a group of long-time Park County residents engaged in discussions around the need for a local land trust to address the development pressure encroaching upon Park County's open spaces. To meet the pressing demand for conservation easements, the group forged a partnership with the Jackson Hole Land Trust, drawing upon its extensive four decades of expertise and experience. The Park County residents now form the 11-member advisory council that ensures our work is rooted in local values.

Jarren Kuipers, Advisory Council Chair Jarren is the founder of Land Steward Services, which provides support services for land trusts and their landowner partners across the West. He has 20 years of experience in private lands conservation working for and with land trusts. Thirteen of those years have been in Park County. Prior to that, he grew up on a medium-sized family farm in eastern South Dakota that focused on dry land crops and livestock. Jarren however, was too easily distracted by hunting, fishing, and trapping; an affliction that eventually led him to a BS in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences from South Dakota State University and an MS from the University of Wyoming in Zoology. He and his wife Tara enjoy exploring Park County's wilds by foot, pedal, and paddle.



Mark Fisher, Advisory Council Vice Chair and Jackson Hole Land Trust Board Member Mark is a geologist living in Powell. He grew up in Cincinnati collecting fossils and received his BS and MS in Geology from the University of Cincinnati. Mark worked for 34 years for Marathon Oil in the oil and gas exploration and development business as a geologist and manager. Most of that time was in the Rockies and Gulf Coast with an emphasis on Wyoming and the Bighorn Basin. Since retiring from the oil industry, he has built a website (Geowyo.com) with two other geologists that details over 80 special geology sites in Wyoming. In the last few years, he has led field trips and given talks for the Forest Service, Nature Conservancy, Montana Tech, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, and local rock clubs. Mark has been teaching dance in Cody and Powell for the past fifteen years. If you play a song, he probably knows a dance you can do to it. When not dancing or looking at rocks, Mark loves hiking and exploring in the Bighorn Basin and surrounding mountains with his wife, Connie.



Mark Brusino Mark is a retired 32-year employee of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department where he supervised the department's Large Carnivore Program. Mark has extensive experience working with large carnivore-human conflicts, population monitoring, policy development, and human dimensions in wildlife conservation. In 2013, Mark was awarded the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Lifetime Achievement Award for his long-term contributions on behalf of wildlife conservation. Through his decades of work with wildlife in the Yellowstone region, Mark believes that the most urgent action needed in wildlife conservation and to maintain our rural lifestyle is to protect open space on private lands and support our agricultural producers. Mark and his wife Leah live in Powell, WY.



Rebekah Burns Rebekah is the Executive Director of Powell Economic Partnership. She supports and grows our existing businesses, develops industries, and recruits businesses that match the people and culture of the Powell Valley. She serves as Treasurer for the Park County Museum Board. She is a graduate of PCLI Class XII and served on the steering committee for XIII. She has a Film Production degree from Towson University. For over 15 years, she has worked in video production and content creation as Multimedia Marketing Manager at the first international video production crewing agency. She worked in customer service for a major credit card company and sales and buying for an outdoor recreation retailer. Currently, Rebekah loves exploring the wilds of Wyoming with her sons and husband.



Garrett Growney, Jackson Hole Land Trust Board Member Garrett is Vice President of Commercial Lending with Pinnacle Bank in Cody. He has been in Cody for 20 years working to finance businesses and landowners in the local area. Garrett grew up in Northern Montana and has a BA in Political Science from Brown University and an MBA from Arizona State University. He and his family enjoy as much of the Wyoming outdoors as possible. Garrett is an avid fly fisherman, backpacker, skier, and boater. He cares deeply about maintaining the quality of life we enjoy in Park County.



Buzzy Hassrick Since 1976, Buzzy has been exploring the wonders of northwest Wyoming on horseback and foot, from the McCullough Peaks to the Absaroka and Beartooth ranges, developing a deep appreciation for that landscape. From those experiences has emerged a commitment to protect lands with aesthetic and wildlife values, as well as the culture of farming and ranching. When she's not hiking or cross-country skiing, she works as the part-time copy editor of the Cody Enterprise and writes occasional stories for the paper. Buzzy is also a sailor, community activist, and volunteer.



Allen Hogg Allen Hogg was born and raised on the Hogg Ranch in Meeteetse, Wyoming. He is a third-generation rancher on a 100+ year family ranch 12 miles SW of Meeteetse on the Greybull River. He has been married to Kristine for 42 years, and together they have 3 grown boys, Patrick, Tighe, and Wesley. He graduated from Meeteetse High School and NWC in Powell. He has served on many boards around the county including Park County Fair Board and Park County Predator Board, and is currently a member of Friends of the Black Footed Ferret and Sage Grouse Advisory Board. Allen and Kristine placed an easement on their property in 2019, and Allen believes that conservation is very important for the land use of Park County and Wyoming.



Read more of Allen's story in the preceding article, "Wildlife, Ranching, and Resilience: The Hogg Family Story."

Abby Scott Abby is the Migration Program Director for The Nature Conservancy in Wyoming. She began at TNC as the Northwest Wyoming Program Director, where she directed land and water conservation for TNC in the Cody region. She holds a B.S. in Economics and Environment and Natural Resources and an M.S. in Agricultural and Applied Economics from the University of Wyoming. Her M.S. research focused on the optimal placement of conservation easement purchases for conserving wildlife migration corridors. Prior to joining TNC, Abby worked for the UW School of Energy Resources, Haub School, and as a Mickelson Fellow for Western Governors Association, where she worked on Governor Matt Mead's species conservation initiative. Abby was raised in Cody and is passionate about conserving this special landscape and community. She now enjoys raising her two sons amid all that Cody has to offer.



James Seckman James moved to Wyoming from Michigan in 1979. He served in the military as a military policeman. He later graduated from the University of Wyoming in 1992. James has been in the practice of public accounting for the past 30 years, providing tax and auditing services. He spends all of his spare time at his cabin in the Bighorn Mountains and loves the wide-open spaces and recreation opportunities the Bighorn Basin provides.

Kelly Spiering Kelly and his two sons operate Spiering Farms. This is a 600-acre farm that specializes in growing and conditioning native plants including grasses, forbs, and flowers. They also produce seed for commodity crops. Spiering Farms was started in 1950 and Kelly joined the operation in 1976. Kelly has served on numerous boards with an acute interest in maintaining agriculture and businesses in Park County and keeping them profitable.



Anne Young Anne has enjoyed living and raising children in Park County for fifty-two all too short years; ranching, hiking, and taking adventurous pack trips with her late husband, Jim Nielson. As a long-time board member of the Wyoming Nature Conservancy and now a member of their Sage Council, Anne has remained active in conservation work, especially with the Heart Mountain Ranch Preserve and the Canal Park within the City of Cody. She believes it is vital to keep natural areas and open space within cities and throughout rural landscapes. Anne is committed to conserving agricultural lands, viewsapes, and critical wildlife habitat.





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Josh Metten



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