



| 2026 Winter Newsletter



Open Lands

| Letter From the President

Long-Term Health

Winter in Northwest Wyoming has a way of sharpening our awareness of the world around us. The season is exceptionally challenging for the natural world, and many survival strategies may sound familiar to us. Some species sleep through it entirely, like hibernating bears or plants entering senescence. Others balance active periods with long rests, such as mountain chickadees entering torpidity every night. Some leave altogether, undertaking long-distance migrations, like ungulates and birds. This unseasonably warm and dry start to winter reminds us that the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem is a complex, living system whose long-term health depends on foresight, careful planning, and stewardship that extends well beyond a single season.



This same perspective guides our conservation work. The long-term health of Wyoming's lands, wildlife, and working landscapes depends on thoughtful planning and sustained stewardship.

In this newsletter, we explore what it means to steward land and community for the long haul. You'll read about how the Danish concept of hygge reframes winter as an invitation to slow down and find connection outdoors. You'll discover how protecting critical winter range and migration corridors in the Upper Wind River Valley is helping secure the future of Dubois's iconic Whiskey Mountain bighorn sheep herd. You'll learn how the completion of East Gros Ventre Butte represents the final link in a vision years in the making. And you'll hear about what it means to defend a conservation easement — and why that commitment, even when it requires legal action, is fundamental to everything we do. Together, these stories point to the same truth: it is sustained care, not a single moment of action, that makes conservation last.

At its core, our work is about foresight and enduring impact. It is about anticipating the challenges of the future, planning carefully, and acting in ways that safeguard ecosystems, wildlife, and working lands for generations to come. Thank you for being part of this work and for supporting the long-term health of Northwest Wyoming's lands, wildlife, and communities. Together, we are ensuring that these places continue to thrive this winter and far into the future.

Sincerely,

Max Ludington
President

Mission

Our mission is to protect and steward Northwest Wyoming landscapes for current and future generations.

Vision

We envision a legacy of resilient open spaces, wildlife habitat, working lands, and community places, forever protected across Northwest Wyoming.

66,147

Acres conserved in partnership with families across Northwest Wyoming.

Photo: Alexandra Munger



| Former Board Member Tribute

Remembering Tony

The Jackson Hole Land Trust is sad to share that Tony Brooks has passed away. Tony served two terms on the board from 1999-2005, acting as the chair of the board during his second term. Known for his passion for the valley, candid demeanor, and sharp wit, Tony led the Jackson Hole Land Trust through significant conservation success and will be warmly remembered.

| Tax-Smart Gifts

Give a Gift

From all of us at the Jackson Hole Land Trust, we are deeply grateful for your support of conservation in Northwest Wyoming. As a reminder, our fiscal year ends on June 30. We accept gifts of stock, wire transfers, qualified charitable distributions, and other non-cash assets. Please note that our stock and wire instructions have recently been updated. For details or assistance, contact Jill at jill@jhlandtrust.org.

Cozy in the Cold

The Danish concept of hygge (pronounced HOO-gah) has steadily made its way into North American culture. Often translated as “coziness,” hygge is commonly associated with fuzzy blankets, glowing candles, and fresh pastries shared indoors. It evokes images of intimate gatherings, crackling fires, and slowing down with loved ones. But while fuzzy socks and cardamom buns certainly fit the mood, hygge is less about objects and more about atmosphere.

According to Denmark’s government, hygge is defined by the feeling of warmth and connection that comes from being together and intentionally making time for the people you care about. It’s about presence, comfort, and ease – creating spaces, both physical and emotional, where people feel at home. And

while hygge is often imagined indoors, its spirit is equally at home outside, even, or especially, in winter.

In the Tetons, short winter days can feel fast-paced and high-energy – powder days spark early alarms, and bluebird skies demand immediate attention when storms finally clear. In the rush to maximize every moment, it can be easy to overlook the quiet magic of simply being outdoors without an agenda. Yet taking time to experience nature, particularly in winter, offers deep, restorative benefits. Outdoor hygge in Jackson Hole can be wonderfully simple. It could be a cross-country ski with friends at Emily’s Pond, lingering afterward with a thermos of hot chocolate shared on the tailgate. Or meeting a friend at the Greenspace on the Block,

catching up while the cold air sharpens the conversation. It might be a slow stroll around R Park, watching kids sled down the knolls, observing the quiet rush of the Snake River, or practicing “Shinrin-yoku” or forest bathing along the park’s western edge. Some of the most restorative winter experiences require nothing more than showing up and slowing down.

This instinct to seek warmth and light in winter is deeply rooted across cultures, especially around the Winter Solstice. On the darkest day of the year, people around the world reach for light. Candles glow in windows, strings of lights shimmer in trees, and hearth fires burn bright, softening the long night when Earth tilts farthest from the sun.

Near the Arctic Circle, Scandinavian cultures have celebrated the return of light for centuries. Yule logs burned for days, evergreen boughs decorated homes as symbols of life, and feasts marked the promise of brighter days ahead. In China, the Winter Solstice festival, Dongzhi – celebrated since 1045 BC – honors the balance of yin and yang and the gradual return of light. In Persia and Central Asia, Yalda brings families together to eat red fruits like pomegranates and watermelon, symbols of dawn and renewal. Across cultures and centuries, the impulse is the same: gather close, make light, and wait out the dark together.

The Lantern Trail at R Park draws from these centuries-old traditions. Each winter, softly glowing lanterns illuminate the paths of R

Park, inviting the community to slow down, gather close, and mark the season together. It is hygge made visible – light and connection on the longest night. The Winter Solstice, after all, is not just the darkest day of the year. It is the turning point, the moment when light begins, quietly and imperceptibly, to return. Community open spaces like R Park, Emily’s Pond, and the Greenspace on the Block make room for that kind of noticing – for introspection, for connection, and for the particular beauty of winter in this valley we share.

And while hygge is often imagined indoors, its spirit is equally at home outside, even, or especially, in winter.

Photos: Alexandra Munger



Defending Easements

Conservation easements are one of the most powerful and effective tools for protecting private lands. Once completed, they are meant to protect a property's conservation values forever, and defending the integrity of these easements is at the core of the Jackson Hole Land Trust's (JHLT) work. In the rare instance that a landowner violates the terms of an easement, the JHLT is structured to exercise legal powers of enforcement.

A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement that allows a landowner to retain private ownership and use of their land while securing a legacy for their property, whether that be protecting wildlife habitat or the family ranch from subdivision and development. Each conservation easement is a perpetual responsibility to uphold a conservation vision that the JHLT takes extremely seriously.

The JHLT maintains a partnership-based approach to honor easement integrity year after year. Each summer, JHLT stewardship staff conduct monitoring visits with all easement landowners and managers to check in on the property and the easement. This stewardship ensures that landowners are active partners in upholding conservation values.

The vision of each easement reflects the easement grantor's unique properties, goals, and values. In Wyoming, those values often include maintaining wide-open spaces, protecting crucial wildlife habitat, and keeping working ranches intact and operational. Over time, properties may change hands, but the conservation easement remains. New landowners may bring different goals, expectations, or perspectives. While this can present challenges, the JHLT's stewardship

commitment ensures that the original conservation vision continues to guide how the land is used and cared for.

Conservation and conservation easements are not about preventing change. Conservation easements are designed to allow flexibility so that the next generation may adopt new management practices, build and develop responsibly, and meet the demands of changing land management practices and agricultural economies. This flexibility is important so that working lands and ranches can remain viable. At the same time, when a core tenet or value of an easement is challenged, the JHLT has an obligation to act.

Defending conservation easements begins with relationships. Easements are fundamentally partnerships, and the best way to prevent violations is through communication, relationship building, and a collaborative approach. Most potential issues are resolved through open dialogue and a shared commitment to the land. More substantial requests or proposed changes typically arise with new landowners who were not the original easement donors. Even in these cases,

the JHLT is frequently able to find common ground that strengthens the easement's conservation values while providing flexibility for landowner needs.

In the rare instances when a significant violation of a conservation easement occurs and cannot be resolved collaboratively, the JHLT is obligated to defend the easement, including legal action when necessary. This responsibility is not discretionary; it is essential to honor the commitments made to landowners, protect the integrity of all conservation easements, and maintain 501(c)(3) nonprofit status. While the JHLT does not typically publicize our legal actions, the organization has a strong legal structure and an exceptional track record of defending easements in court.

The JHLT's conservation approach is ultimately about respecting landowners' intentions, Wyoming's working and wild landscapes, and the perpetual commitments that conservation easements represent. Through partnership-based stewardship, the JHLT strives to ensure that conserved land continues to serve our landowners and communities today and far into the future.

The JHLT is frequently able to find common ground that strengthens the easement's conservation values while providing flexibility for landowner needs.



Photo: Jansen Gunderson



Photo: Alexandra Munger

| Wildlife Spotlight

Bighorn Country

The Upper Wind River Valley is nestled around the town of Dubois at the western foothills of the Wind River Range, bounded by the rugged Absaroka Mountains to the north. It is rich in archaeological artifacts, wilderness, and water resources, and it supports thriving populations of mule deer, pronghorn antelope, elk, moose, and the landscape's iconic bighorn sheep.

Bighorn sheep are emblematic of the area's ecology. As Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) Wildlife Biologist Zach Gregory explains, "Bighorn sheep represent a healthy, intact ecosystem and live in some of the most beautiful and rugged landscapes in Wyoming. We all need to continue the work that will ensure their future."

For millennia, the Mountain Shoshone, known as the Tukudeka or "sheep eaters," relied on these herds for food and tools, including highly valued bows and drinking vessels crafted from rams' horns. Despite ongoing challenges from disease and habitat loss, the herd has continued to endure and to shape the ecosystem and the people of the area.

While early population estimates are inexact, bighorn sheep were widely abundant before western settlement, and early accounts indicate they were among the most prolific wildlife herds in the Greater Yellowstone region. Following the introduction of domestic sheep herds, available forage declined and traditional migration routes to winter range were cut off, leading to a precipitous population decline. Even so, strongholds remained. Among them was the Whiskey Mountain bighorn sheep herd, once the largest in North America, peaking at more than 2,000 animals in the 1980s. As a flagship herd, Whiskey Mountain played a critical role in restoring bighorn populations across the West, with more than 1,900 sheep transplanted to establish or supplement other herds.

Today, the Whiskey Mountain herd numbers approximately 400 sheep, well below WGFD's population objective of 1,350. Disease and habitat loss are the primary challenges, and WGFD actively manages the herd through population surveys and targeted interventions. Recent efforts have shown early promise, with observed lamb numbers on the rise.

Habitat is critical to the herd's long-term survival. Each year in late May, the sheep migrate upward as much as 60 miles and more than 10,000 feet to reach their summer range. In November, approximately 100 sheep descend into Torrey Valley to winter. The herd depends heavily on Torrey Valley's open, rugged landscape and intact ecosystems during the coldest winter months.

This is where conservation makes a direct and lasting difference. In 2009, the Jackson Hole Land Trust secured the Ring Lake Ranch Conservation Easement, protecting key migratory routes and preserving historic petroglyphs on the ranch. One year later, Torrey Lake Ranch was permanently conserved, safeguarding wetlands, riparian areas, and important sagebrush steppe habitat. Now forever protected in part by the JHLT's Wind River Program, the Torrey Valley will remain intact in perpetuity, continuing to provide essential habitat for the Whiskey Mountain herd.

The National Bighorn Sheep Center in Dubois further amplifies these efforts through education and outreach, building what Interim Director Anna Miller calls "a conservation ethic" and "a deep appreciation for our wild sheep, wildlife, and wildlands." The Dubois community takes pride in living in sheep country and remains committed to ensuring these herds endure.

"The collaboration among advocates for



Photo: Alexandra Munger

bighorns is paramount to the success of the herds! WGFD brings science and management, the JHLT secures landscape habitat and migration corridors, and the National Bighorn Sheep Center's mission is to inspire, educate, and conserve bighorns. This chorus of voices comes together for our wild neighbors that need protection," reflects Carolyn Gillette, Wind River Program Advisory Council member.

The Whiskey Mountain herd offers excellent viewing opportunities on its winter range from late fall through early spring. Visitors are encouraged to explore Torrey Valley, located south of Dubois off Highway 26 along Trail Lakes Road, where WGFD maintains a viewing shed. During the peak of the rut in late November or early December, visitors may be fortunate enough to see rams fighting for dominance of the herd — a reminder of the vitality this landscape continues to support.



| New Conservation Easement

The Final Link

Nearly everyone who drives north or south through Jackson Hole knows East Gros Ventre Butte. Rising above Highway 89 from the Dairy Queen to the Jackson National Fish Hatchery, the hillside frames daily commutes, winter mornings, and sunset views for thousands of residents and visitors each year. In 2025, the Jackson Hole Land Trust and The Conservation Fund partnered with a private landowner to protect the final piece of this iconic landscape — securing the last link in a conservation effort more than four decades in the making.

The newest conservation easement, East Gros Ventre Butte South, permanently protects 46 acres of highly visible open space just north of the Town of Jackson. This project completes continuous protection of the entire east-facing hillside, ensuring that this gateway to Jackson Hole remains undeveloped forever. The easement conserves important winter habitat for mule deer and sage-grouse, preserves the scenic landscape along one of the valley's most traveled corridors, and reinforces a vital migration corridor connecting the butte to the National Elk Refuge below.

For many ungulates, East Gros Ventre Butte provides a means to survive Jackson's harsh winters. Designated by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department as Critical Winter Range, the wind-swept butte supports a large mule deer herd that relies on its south- and east-facing slopes for forage when deep snow across the valley floor makes food scarce. Elk

descend from higher elevations to the refuge below, using the butte as part of a broader migration corridor. Raptors hunt the open slopes, and sage-grouse depend on intact sagebrush communities during the harshest months of the year.

The 2025 easement joins a long legacy of conservation on the butte, creating a true mosaic of protection. While the creation of the National Elk Refuge in 1912 protected large portions of the butte, critical portions of the sensitive habitat remained susceptible to development. The JHLT's earliest efforts to protect the remainder of the butte date back to 1984, when the JHLT formalized the Spring Creek Ranch and Belleview Cliffs easements. Those projects set the stage for future conservation, preserving tall shrub and sagebrush habitats for mule deer and elk.

Over the decades, additional easements steadily filled in the hillside. The JHLT completed the National Museum of

Wildlife Art's 35-acre conservation easement in 1995, protecting views from Highway 89 and ensuring the museum's dramatic setting remained wild. In the early 2000s and 2010s, the JHLT protected five more properties, totaling 313 acres. Many of these projects were priorities of the JHLT's "Forever Our Valley" capital campaign, reflecting broad community support for preserving this defining landscape.

Together, these easements — totaling 804 acres — form one of the most visible conservation success stories in Jackson Hole. While the Jackson Hole Land Trust owns or stewards the bulk of the protected private land, this achievement reflects decades of

collaboration with landowners, partners, and agencies, including The Conservation Fund, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Teton County.

The newly protected East Gros Ventre Butte South easement closes the final gap, ensuring that the entire hillside, from the valley floor to the ridgeline, remains intact. Explore the patchwork of conserved lands online on the JHLT's interactive web map at jhlandtrust.org/where, but the true impact is experienced simply by driving the corridor — watching mule deer bed down in winter sunlight, spotting a soaring hawk, or taking in an uninterrupted view of open land.

Photo: Zach Andres

Photo: Gannon Castle/USFWS



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Max Ludington, *President*
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Lindsay Halderman, *Director of
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Madison Harper, *Wind River Program Director*
Carly Hitchcock, *AmeriCorps Vista Volunteer*
Kyle Kissock, *Land Steward and Landowner
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Max Lewis, *Conservation Project Manager*
Will McDonald, *Staff Biologist and Land
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Sengen Meyer, *Communications Associate*
Alexandra Munger, *Events and Outreach
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Pati Rocha
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John Stennis



PO Box 2897
Jackson, WY 83001



Photo: Alexandra Munger