

Friends of the Green River Valley Land Trust

A GREEN RIVER VALLEY LAND TRUST
NEWSLETTER

**SPECIAL
POINTS OF
INTEREST:**

The GRVLT has hosted six **Field Trips** — which featured a variety of activities held at sites around the County. Two trips in November remain:

Yarn While You Knit at the Senior Center
3:30 pm—6:00 pm on Tuesday, 11/8/05

Flower Arranging at the Sublette County Library
12:30 pm—4:00 pm

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**A HISTORY OF SUBLETTE COUNTY
FROM VISIT SUBLETTE COUNTY.COM**

Sublette County has a storied past.

American Indians were the earliest inhabitants of the area, with artifacts dating back approximately 10,000-11,000 years. Much later, Sublette County was home to the Shoshone and the Sheepeater Indians.

Early archaeological sites show evidence of earlier Native Americans who lived here and hunted buffalo and antelope.

The first white men came to Sublette County in late 1811 as part of an exploration party for the American Fur Company. The “Astorians” crossed Union Pass and camped near the Hoback Rim for 5 days to stock up on meat from the abundant buffalo herds in the Green River Valley before continuing on to the Columbia River. Three legendary trappers, Hoback, Reznor

and Robinson, guided the party. The returning Astorians also entered the Green River Valley in 1812 and were the first white men to cross an established Indian trail over South Pass. This pass provided an easy crossing of the Continental Divide and became the gateway to Oregon and the west.

In the early 1820s and 1830s, western Wyoming was the heart of “mountain man” country. Hardy fur traders and trappers, such as Jim Bridger and William Sublette, came here to make a living from the beaver that inhabited the area streams. The Green River Valley was the site for most of the fur trade Rendezvous which were held in the spring to refurbish the mountain men with supplies and buy the pelts. The annual Rendezvous, which was held in a different location each year, brought many mountain men and natives together for fun

and trade. This valley and the rendezvous were such a central part of the fur trade era that phrase “Meet me on the Green” was known by all. Many historical sites commemorate the Mountain Man in Sublette County including Trapper’s Point and For Bonneville near Daniel, and Union Pass. The Museum of the Mountain Man, located in Pinedale, has many exhibits about the fur trade era and early county history.

In the 1840s through 1850s, with the fur trade era over, emigrants began passing through the area on their way to Oregon and California. The Lander Cut-Off, a short cut of the Oregon Trail established in 1859, passes through the county and parts of the trail are still visible today and can be followed. “Buckskin Crossing,” on Big Sandy Creek, was a ford of the Lander Cut-off of the Oregon Trail.

A HISTORY OF SUBLETTE COUNTY (CONT'D)

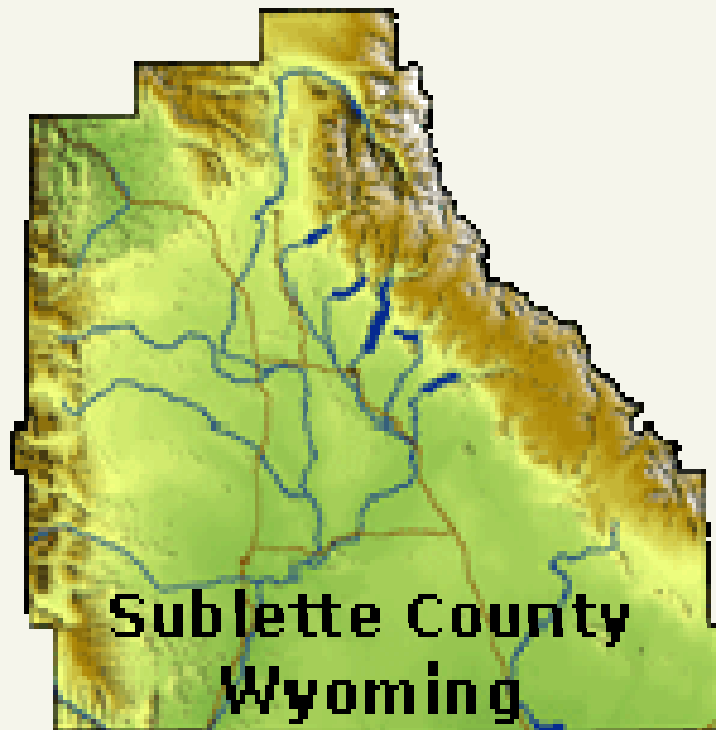
It was an important resting and watering campsite that was heavily used by the emigrants. This trail was the mail route from the east to the west side of the Wind River Mountains in the early 1900s.

Thousands of people, cattle and horses passed through Sublette County to the northwest when the Sublette Cut-off of the Oregon Trail was opened in 1857. None settled in this county. At the close of the Indian Wars in 1877, cattle herds from Oregon came this way to meet the railroad and to stock Wyoming ranges. As more and more people decided to stay in the area instead of moving on, the territory began to be populated with settlers. These early cattlemen began the ranching industry in the county. The first Sublette County herds were started with other western cattle settling on Fontenelle, LaBarge and Piney Creeks. The county's first barbed wire was unrolled in 1881.

In the late 1800s to early 1900s, tie hacks came to the Sublette County area to cut down trees to create the ties needed for the construction of the transcontinental railroad which went through Rock Springs. The trees were cut and shaped into railroad ties, then floated down the Green River to Green River City. A large tie hack camp was located in the Upper Green River drainage north of Cora. Old tie hack cabins can still be found sprinkled throughout the forest in several locations.

*"Sublette County
contains
3,154,160 acres
of land. Of this,
2,562,998 acres
are publicly
owned (81%),
and the
remaining
591,162 acres
are privately
owned (19%)."*
Sublette County
GIS Office

Sublette County was named for William L. Sublette, a fur trapper and trader who operated in the area in the early 1800s. Perry W. Jenkins named the County after Sublette when he introduced the bill to form the County in 1921.



**EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW
ABOUT...
CONSERVATION EASEMENTS –
BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK**

In the last issue, we provided an overview of conservation easements. In the next several issues, we plan to provide a more in-depth explanation of that tool for private land conservation by addressing commonly asked questions about conservation easements.

HOW RIGID ARE CONSERVATION EASEMENTS IN RESTRICTING ALL PRESENT AND FUTURE USES OF LAND?

Conservation easements are actually flexible and can be designed to meet the needs of a landowner as long as they also protect resources that benefit the public (to be tax deductible). This does not mean that they have to provide public access. The terms of each easement are negotiated between a landowner and the land trust, which would hold the easement. In addition, conservation easements can be amended in certain circumstances.

DO CONSERVATION EASEMENTS CHANNEL PRIVATE LANDS TOWARD GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP?

No. Conservation easement-protected property remains in private land ownership, unless a landowner personally decides to enter into an easement contract with a government entity.

Otherwise, a landowner can specify in an easement contract that the conservation easement be passed to another private land trust if the original land trust can no longer hold the easement. The easement contract can expressly prohibit transfer of the easement to government ownership.

**TOP 9 PRESSURES ON AGRICULTURAL
LANDS IN SUBLETTE COUNTY**



1) Population Growth: Sublette County's population increased by more than 22% between 1990 and 2000 (2.5 times the state average); the population grew an additional 14% between 2000 and 2004. It is estimated that the population will grow a further 29% in the next decade.



2) Residential Development: This population growth could translate into an additional 1,174 new homes throughout the County in the next 10 years. Sublette County saw its acres of developed land increase by 2.6 times between 1982 and 1997. This represents an average of 18.6 acres of new development for each additional person residing in the County between 1982 and 1997. Sublette County also saw a 36% increase in the number of new houses between 1990 and 2004. There are over 30 properties covering more than 28,000 acres of working rangeland currently for sale in Sublette County (average listing = 826 acres). This means that developers have over 30 opportunities to purchase and subdivide these properties.



3) Oil and Gas Development: Sublette County is experiencing an unprecedented natural gas boom. While most of the oil and gas development in Sublette County occurs on public land, private landowners face challenges as well. Under Wyoming's split estate system, private landowners own surface estates and others like the Federal government own the mineral estate. Because the mineral estate is dominant in Wyoming, companies that lease the mineral rights on private land from the Federal government generally can explore for and extract those minerals without interference from the surface owner.



4) Aging Ag Operators and a Lack of Young People Entering the Industry: The most recent Census of Agriculture found that the vast majority (79%) of ranchers in Sublette County are 45 or older, with average operator age of 54.6 years. Experts have noticed two obvious trends in agricultural operator demographics: (1) the age group "65 and over" has increased dramatically during the past 40 years and the age group "under 35" has significantly decreased during the same period.

In general, the population is living longer, healthier lives as medical care improves. Technology has allowed operators to keep working well into their later years, being more productive longer. This means the next generation is coming into its inheritance later in life, which may help to account for the 54.1 percent decrease in the share of operators under 35 years. This trend suggests that as the population of operators ages, they are controlling farms and ranches longer. Their children will not become managers until later in life. As an intergenerational transfer approaches, the younger generation may have been away from agriculture long enough to make the transition harder and, in some cases, less likely and less successful.



5) Lack of Profitability of Agriculture: The limited profitability of Wyoming agriculture may also be a reason for the lack of young people entering the industry. After peaking in 1993 at almost \$200 million, the net profit for agriculture in Wyoming has declined drastically during the last seven years and was in fact negative in 1996 (-\$116,000) and 1998 (-\$7.0 million) (U.S. Dept. of Commerce 2001). Despite some improvement in 1997 and again in 1999, low profitability makes it difficult to retain land in agricultural production, particularly when there is the potential for other more profitable land uses like subdivision and commercial development.



6 Increase in Agricultural Land Values: Between 1990 and 2004, agricultural land values in Wyoming increased dramatically: Based on preliminary figures, the average value of an acre of irrigated meadow increased by nearly 204% (from \$493 in 1990-92 to \$1,497 in 2002-04). The average value of an acre of irrigated cropland increased by nearly 114% (from \$661 in 1990-02 to \$1,417 in 2002-04). Agricultural land values in Sublette and surrounding counties have followed suit: Again based on preliminary figures, the average value of an acre of irrigated meadow increased by nearly 80% (from \$557 in 1990-02 to \$1,005 in 2002-04). The average value of an acre of irrigated cropland increased by nearly 109% (from \$623 in 1990-92 to \$1,303 in 2002-04). Experts believe that these increases, coupled with low to negative profit levels, expand the potential for the conversion of agricultural land to other uses like subdivision and commercial development.



7) Effect of Estate Tax on Intergenerational Transfers of Agricultural Land: For agricultural operators, land often comprises their largest asset. This is often referred to as the "land rich, cash poor" phenomenon. Increasing agricultural land values, coupled with an unwillingness or inability to plan, often subject agricultural operators to estate taxes. Under the current federal estate tax system, individuals need only file an estate tax return if their gross estate exceeds the "applicable exclusion amount." This amount is \$1.5M in 2004 and 2005, \$2M in 2006-08, and \$3M in 2009. Absent Congressional action, the estate tax will expire in 2010 but return in 2011. Then, individuals will only be able to leave up to \$1 million at death without estate tax exposure. Amounts in excess of \$1 million will be subject to estate tax, with tax rates starting at 41% and rising to 55%. The average ranch size in Sublette County is 2,169 acres. Based on recent sales, the average price per acre for ranchland in Sublette County is \$2,194. Without accounting for special use valuation and other "agriculture-friendly" estate tax provisions, this means that a family wishing to pass the average ranch in Sublette County to the next generation this year would be subject to the estate tax on roughly \$3,258,786. At the 2005 top marginal estate tax rate of 47%, the family would pay \$1,531,629 in estate taxes.



8) Additional Pressures on Federal Land Grazing: Seventy six percent of ranches in Wyoming depend on Federal grazing to sustain their operations. These grazing permits are critically important to the profitability and financial stability of the operations that hold them. Notwithstanding this fact, grazing on public lands is unstable. Though most ranchers are only partially dependent on Federal land grazing for forage, this forage source is typically a critical part of their operations. The reduction or elimination of Federal grazing permits impacts the viability of agricultural operations and the private land they occupy.



9) Opposition to Easements in the Agricultural Community: For a variety of reasons, many ranchers oppose conservation easements. As a recent *Range* magazine article put it, "Conservation easements can cause harm to the local community and economy, lock up the land forever, and will never again be under an individual's control. The moral issues of destroying private property rights 'in perpetuity' should be considered. Future generations' right to choose what they do with private property will not be returned." Despite realities to the contrary, this perception poses a distinct challenge to private land conservation.



FOCUS ON: PRONGHORN ANTELOPE

Not a true antelope at all, the pronghorn is found nowhere else in the world but North America and is the sole survivor of the family *Antilocaprae*, a species unique to America.

- It is the only animal in the world that annually sheds the outer sheaths of its permanent horn cores. Both male and female pronghorns have horns, although the female's are much smaller
- Noted for its speed, the pronghorn has been clocked at 60 mph and has been known to try to out-race vehicles! It is the fastest North American land mammal.
- The pronghorn has the ability to flare its brilliant white rump hairs to signal danger.
- Its large eyes are set high on the head and far back on the skull so the pronghorn can spot danger from a long distance. Seeing through the eyes of a pronghorn is similar to looking through a pair of 8 power binoculars.
- Most hoofed animals have four toes on each foot, but the pronghorn has only two. It also has a tough padding on its hooves which cushions the shock when running over hard ground.
- Because of the structure of its hind legs, it is more likely that a pronghorn would crawl under a fence than jump over it.



LAND MARKS— UPDATE ON LAND PROGRAM PROJECTS

Conservation Easement Typical Permitted Uses	Conservation Easement Typical Prohibited Uses
Continued agricultural use	Subdivision for residential or commercial activities
Construction of buildings, fences, water improvements, etc. necessary for agriculture and compatible with conservation objectives	Construction of non-residential or agricultural buildings
Sale, devise, gifting or other method of transferring land, subject to the terms of the conservation easement	Nonagricultural commercial activities
Landowner control of access	Dumping of non-compostable or toxic waste
Additional family and employee residences compatible with conservation objectives	Surface mining
Wildlife and fisheries protection, restoration and enhancement projects	
Use of land as collateral for loans	
Any and all uses not specifically prohibited	

“We have an update since the last newsletter. As of now, 10 projects covering more than 8,000 acres have strong potential to close this year.”

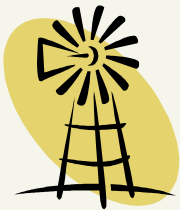
FRIENDS... SO FAR

- Bob and Laurel Barrett
- James Bond
- Joe and Diane Boroff
- David and Lisa Carlin
- Dean and Karen Clause
- John and Penny Chrisman
- Will and Laura Davenport
- Brian and Annie Espenscheid
- Gene and Sue Eversull
- Allen and Caroline Ferguson, Jr.
- Lance and Lana Koppenhafer
- Juli James
- Nannette Latchford
- Jim and Tina Nelson
- Dick Noble
- Norm and Barb Pape
- Jim Roscoe and Jane Baldwin
- Courtney and Maria Skinner
- Scott and Judy Smith
- Rollie and Bettina Sparrowe
- Hort Spitzer
- Phelps and Pam Swift
- Kenna Tanner
- John and Wendy Walter
- Phil and Patty Washburn
- Galen West

Green River Valley
Land Trust
P.O. Box 1580
Pinedale, WY 82941

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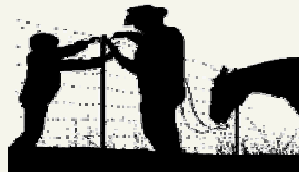
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136 West Pine Street
P.O. Box 1580
Pinedale, Wyoming 82941
Phone: 307-367-7007
Fax: 307-367-7207
E-mail: info@grvlandtrust.org

**2000–2005
CELEBRATING OUR
FIFTH ANNIVERSARY**

The mission of the Green River Valley Land Trust is to assist landowning families of the area in the conservation of agricultural, ranch and natural lands, in order to sustain and protect open spaces, watersheds, wildlife habitat and other ecological values for the benefit of today's inhabitants and as a legacy for future generations.

Since it was founded in 2000, the Green River Valley Land Trust has worked with more than 20 families to protect more than 10,300 acres of prime ranchland in Sublette County.



**ACROSS THE
FENCE POST...**

Across the Fence Post...
We hope to post *Friends* suggestions, landowner requests, and protected property owner needs here. Please let us know if you have anything to post.