

# WYOMING PROGRAM



Saratoga, Wyoming



The Sonoran Institute's Wyoming Program represents an enduring commitment to Wyoming's land and people. From our office in Sheridan, we work with partners to shape a more sustainable future for healthy landscapes, vibrant economies and livable communities.

## VISION & GOALS

Wyoming's small communities and rural nature are integral to the state's identity. Communities are dispersed, but connected by a powerful landscape of plains, foothills, mountains and rivers that continue to attract people, homes and industry. The Wyoming Program was formed to help find constructive ways to protect Wyoming's wide open spaces and enhance its small towns and cities.

The Sonoran Institute works to ensure that development in Wyoming protects and maintains the social, cultural and economic vitality of Wyoming's unique communities. We provide a statewide voice for land-use planning that inspires cities and towns to become better places to work and live, for economic development policies that help communities improve their quality of life, and for initiatives that protect our vital natural treasures – rivers, ranches, farms, open spaces and wildlife. Through civil dialogue, collaboration and applied knowledge, we work toward a shared vision of lasting conservation and prosperity.

### To achieve this vision, we:

- ❖ Work with community partners to develop innovative, tested plans and policies for guiding growth.
- ❖ Conduct and distribute research about the costs, benefits and tradeoffs of local community decisions.
- ❖ Provide training and outreach to build local capacity and leadership.
- ❖ Promote state policies that enable local communities to plan for sustainable development and conservation.



Shaping the Future of the West

[www.sonoraninstitute.org](http://www.sonoraninstitute.org)

# Challenges & Opportunities



“We can either be victims of change or we can plan for it, shape it and emerge stronger from it. The choice is ours.”

- Luther Propst,  
Executive Director

## Wide Open Spaces

*The Challenge:* Wyoming’s open lands support ranching, wildlife habitat and clean water supplies, but they are at risk due to increased pressures from sprawling growth, energy development and energy transmission.

*The Opportunity:* Work with landowners, developers, public land managers and local officials to create collaborative strategies for protecting and managing the private and public lands which are so critical to the state’s identity and prosperity. Our strategies encourage land-use practices and policies that protect Wyoming’s small town character, open spaces, working landscapes and water resources.

## Growing Smarter

*The Challenge:* Wyoming is a great place to live, play and work. Its quality of life and rich natural resources have attracted significant growth in recent decades, often at the expense of the wildlife, open spaces, working ranches and tight-knit communities that drew people here in the first place. Growth will continue, but how and where it occurs is critical to the future of Wyoming’s economy, environment and unique character.

*The Opportunity:* Help develop and support local plans and policies that guide growth to existing built-up areas and save money by utilizing existing infrastructure. Create compact communities with vibrant, walkable downtowns, which support a wide range of housing options. Provide technical assistance in land-use planning, community organizing and conservation-compatible economic development to local governments and community leaders.

## Healthy Rivers and Water-Wise Planning

*The Challenge:* Wyoming’s clean and reliable waters sustain ranches and towns; its healthy rivers provide habitat for world class fishing and hunting and support a thriving tourism industry; its watersheds capture, store and cleanse our water for everyone — free of charge. Poorly planned growth, inefficient management practices, and increasing water demands in Wyoming and in neighboring states are stressing the quality and reliability of the state’s water supplies and the health of the rivers and watersheds that provide them.

*The Opportunity:* Work with local officials, landowners, water managers, watershed organizations and others to promote the most efficient use of Wyoming’s valuable water supplies. Minimize the impact of development on watersheds and the resources they provide. Encourage regional collaboration and planning to address issues such as housing, transportation and water conservation because rivers cross jurisdictional boundaries.



## Sustainable Energy Solutions

*The Challenge:* Our dependence on foreign oil is unsustainable and threatens our national security. Increasing the nation's production of clean renewable energy is a matter of economic necessity and environmental sustainability. Wyoming is blessed with an abundance of natural resources — coal, oil, gas, uranium and wind. Development of these energy commodities will become ever more important to the state and its local economies. Our challenge is to manage energy development in a way that protects Wyoming's values and character, wildlife and important landscapes.

*The Opportunity:* Work with communities to develop and implement sustainable energy plans that promote conservation and efficiency, and encourage sustainable development patterns that don't undermine Wyoming's environment. Help the state create an effective plan for siting new transmission lines in a way that preserves vistas and landscapes that are integral to Wyoming's rural character.

## Mobilizing a Diverse Constituency

*The Challenge:* Too often, divisiveness and distrust prevent solutions to our most significant challenges. There is a sense by many that their opinions don't matter or fall on deaf ears. The challenges we face are too important to let ideology get in the way of making Wyoming a better state.

*The Opportunity:* Our challenges demand collaborative solutions. We are committed to bringing people with different perspectives together and helping them reach a common understanding of the issues and options for shared solutions. We will inspire communities to build leadership capacity among citizens and local groups to support conservation efforts over the long term.

# COMMUNITY SUPPORT

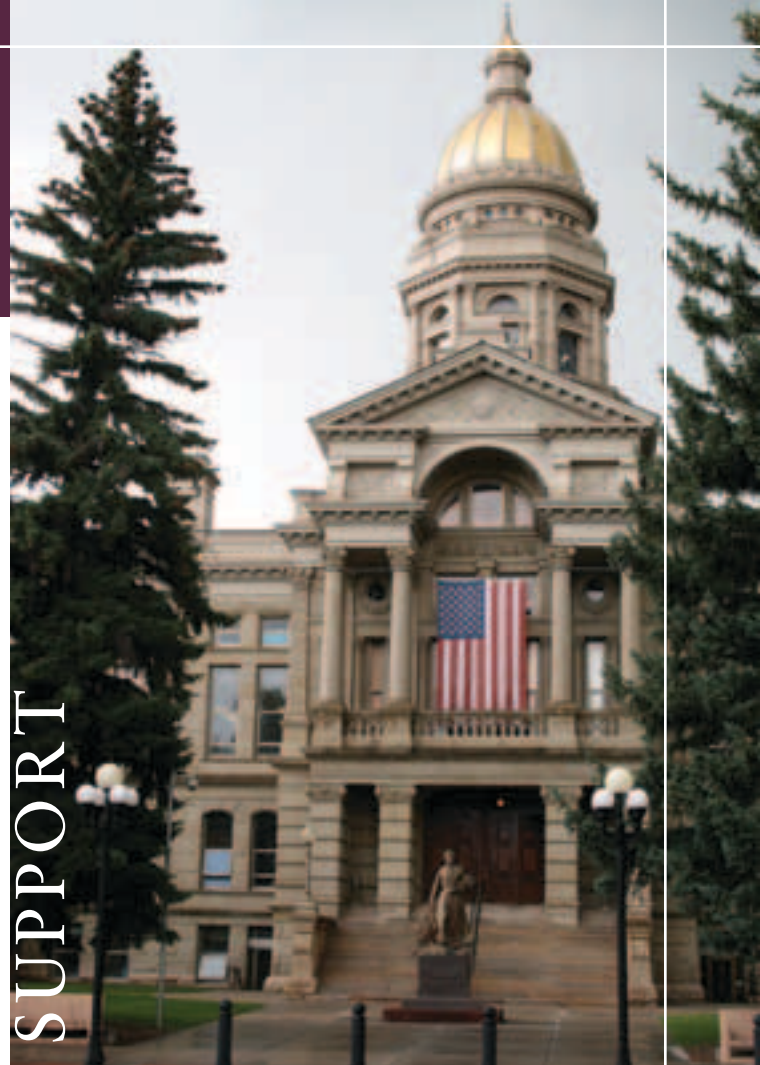
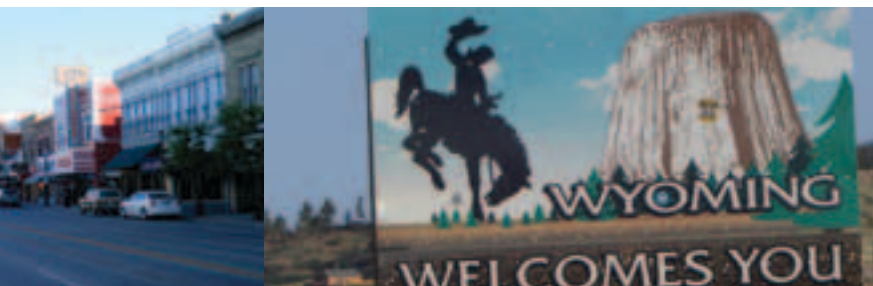
By applying 20 years of experience, the Sonoran Institute helps communities advance regional solutions and achieve lasting results. Our support includes:

**Education and Outreach** – Building community awareness of challenges and potential solutions to promote informed dialogue and strengthen local decision making.

**Policy Reform** – Aligning community conservation goals with state and federal policy efforts to advance the formation of sustainable communities.

**Research** – Providing sound information, facts, and perspectives for effective local decision-making.

**Training** – Facilitating leadership training for local officials, community leaders and conservation partners.





# Current Initiatives

## North Platte River Valley

The Sonoran Institute is working with landowners, community leaders, agencies, and organizations to help the Valley grow in a way that preserves and enhances its rich character, natural resources and vibrant economy. The Institute is hosting public education events, visioning exercises, leadership development workshops; researching real estate market conditions and subdivision development trends; and exploring state-private land trade options. These efforts will help guide a renewed land-use planning process.

## Big Horns

The Institute’s work in Sheridan County began more than 10 years ago. We have worked with the County’s citizens and communities providing economic and land-use analyses, growth management seminars and subdivision design workshops. We are currently involved with efforts to gauge public opinion on development issues and subdivision regulations. This work will raise the bar for development and conserve the riparian areas, foothills, working agriculture and scenic vistas that are vital to the area. Sheridan’s leaders are managing complex growth-related issues; the Institute remains committed to working with them throughout the process. With your help, we will stay engaged with the individuals and groups shaping the area’s future.

## Legislative

The Institute supports ongoing efforts to discourage suburban sprawl in Wyoming. The Institute is also actively working for state policies that will require locating wind farms and transmission lines in a way that respects private property rights while recognizing the value of Wyoming’s wide open spaces, wildlife and outdoor recreation. We lobbied successfully for more authority for counties to regulate large tract subdivisions, require groundwater availability studies for subdivisions, give incentives to developers for cluster subdivisions and require the formation of homeowner associations for rural subdivisions.

## Research

Wyoming needs to develop a stronger planning process. The Institute recently completed a statewide survey of planners to identify opportunities to improve state and local land-use regulations and policies. This year we will be interviewing county commissioners, mayors and other decision-makers for their ideas about Wyoming’s planning and subdivision laws and regulations. This research will lead to a comprehensive review and reform of Wyoming’s problematic subdivision statutes.

*The Sonoran Institute inspires and enables community decisions and public policies that respect the land and people of Western North America.*

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