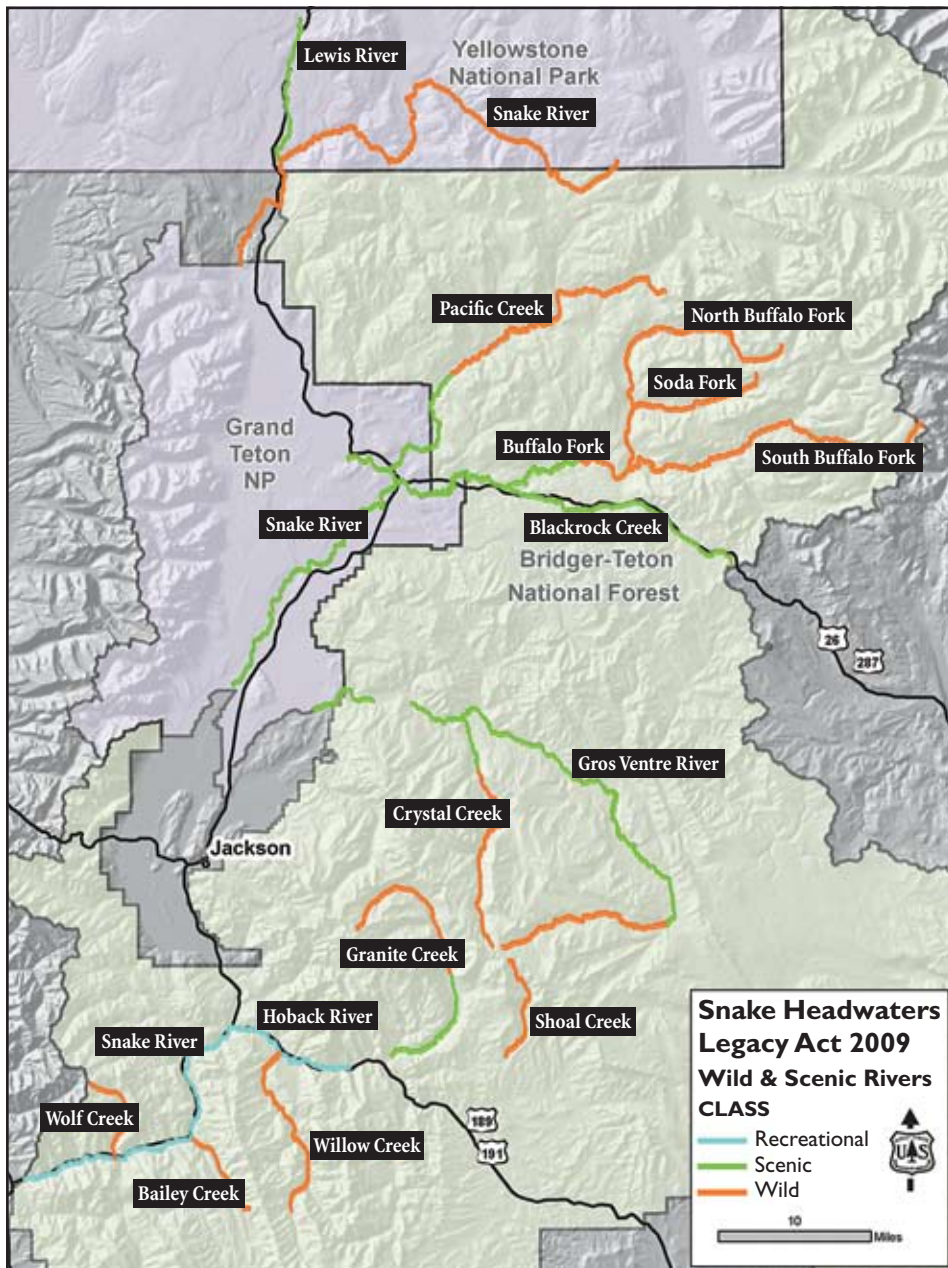




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As it winds its way through Jackson Hole, the Snake River nurtures one of the richest high-elevation riparian habitats in the United States.



Wow!

Snake Headwaters, Wyoming Range victories well-earned.

By Louise Lasley,
Alliance Public Lands Director

Way back in 2001, the Alliance began working with local citizens and other conservation groups to protect the headwaters of the Snake River. A few years later we joined another exciting effort aimed at protecting the Wyoming Range of the Bridger-Teton National Forest from increased energy development.

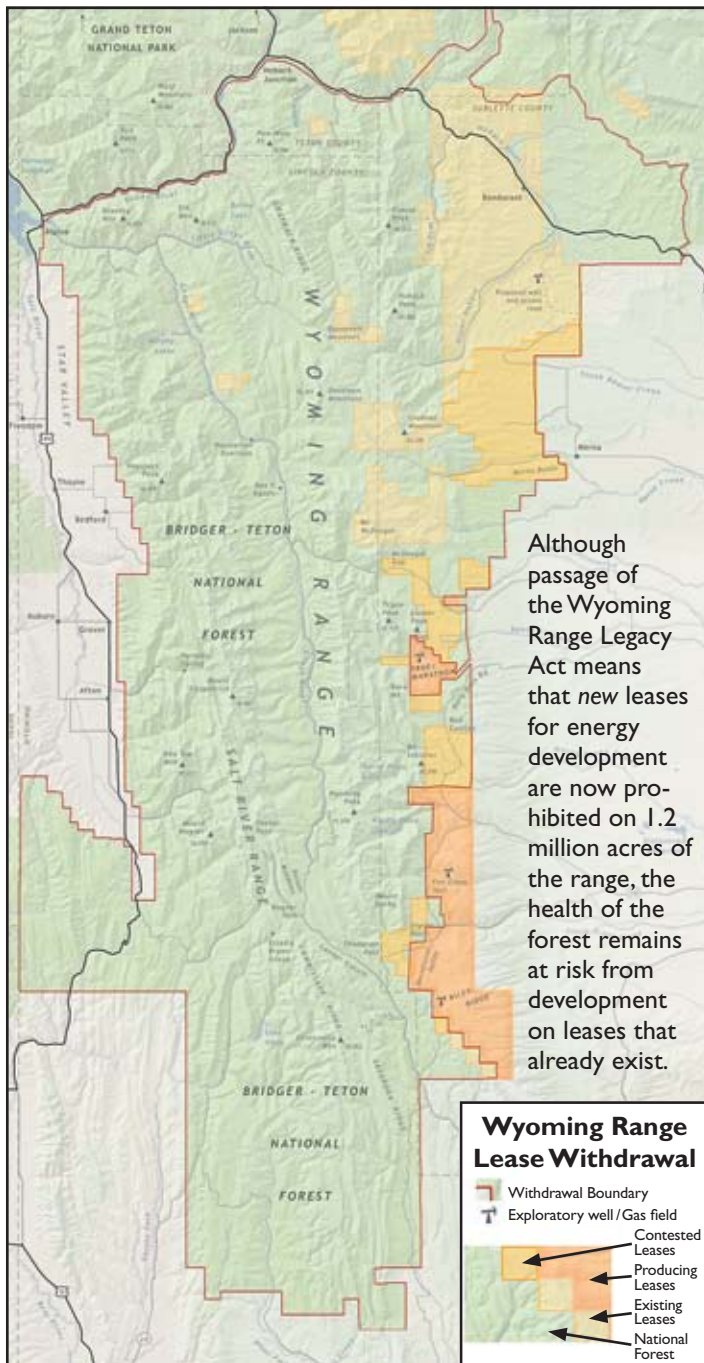
Both grassroots efforts reached a successful conclusion at long last in March, when President Barack Obama signed legislation protecting these critical parts of our unique landscape. The Craig Thomas Snake River Headwaters Legacy Act brings 387 miles of the Snake River and its tributaries under the protection of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The Wyoming Range Legacy Act prohibits new leases for energy exploration and development on 1.2 million acres of the Wyoming Range southeast of Jackson Hole.

Our thanks go out to everyone who supported these long campaigns, especially Craig Thomas, the late U.S. Senator from Wyoming, who was instrumental in developing legislation. Thanks are also owed to his successor, Sen. John Barrasso, whose persistence helped pay off in laws ensuring that Americans, in Obama's words, "will not take our forests, rivers, oceans, national parks, monuments and wilderness areas for granted, but rather we will set them aside and guard their sanctity for everyone to share." ■

A broad-based coalition of conservationists, outfitters and others saw their hard work pay off this past spring when nearly 400 miles of the Snake River and its tributaries were included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.



Developing energy responsibly includes recognizing that some places – like the Wyoming Range – are too special to drill.



American Wildlands map, courtesy The Wilderness Society

BUT THE FIGHT'S NOT OVER...

The Wyoming Range legislation discussed on Page 18 also allows conservation groups and others to buy and retire exploration and development rights currently owned by energy companies. Buybacks of these leases could be an option to avert oil and gas developments, such as the ones outlined below, but raising enough money and finding willing sellers in today's economy will be tough. Therefore, the following proposals will likely remain a threat to the health of the Bridger-Teton:

Hoback Wells – Originally due out in September 2008, the Bridger-Teton's analysis of the Eagle Prospect and Noble Basin Master Development Plan (aka Hoback Wells) now isn't expected until 2010. Bridger-Teton District Ranger Greg Clark says the delay is caused by the Forest Service trying to include more specific content on air quality and wildlife issues. This project near Bondurant initially proposed just three test wells back in 2005, but further study was required after Plains Exploration and Production Company switched in 2007 to a master plan with the potential for 136 wells. The draft environmental impact statement for the original project generated about 19,000 public comments; almost all opposed it. Public review and comment on the new DEIS will be accepted after its release; we'll keep you posted at www.jhalliance.org.

Contested Leases – Bridger-Teton officials also recently announced yet another delay of their supplemental analysis of 44,720 acres of contested leases on the Wyoming Range. The federal Interior Board of Land Appeals ruled in 2006 that an earlier National Environmental Policy Act analysis didn't adequately consider impacts to wildlife and the environment. Basically, the B-T is still reevaluating whether to allow oil and gas exploration on this acreage west of Merna. Their new draft supplemental EIS is now expected to be released in 2010. ■

Bridger-Teton management plan revision update

In late 2008, due to legal wrangling over rules about how the Forest Service is supposed to come up with long-range management plans for each national forest, Bridger-Teton officials decided to amend the forest's 1990 Plan Standards and Guidelines rather than continue with a revision of the entire plan begun in 2005. Those lawsuits appear to be drawing to a close, but meanwhile we're still waiting for word on when the B-T will release a draft EIS on 200 pages of amendments to the 1990 plan and begin taking scoping comments. The release was expected this summer; please check www.jhalliance.org for updates.