



## Pilot Hill Case Study

Study and Brief by Bree Clausen and Isaac Bartlett

April 2025

### Why this study was needed

Pilot Hill is a unique recreation area. It was born out of community collaboration and action. It is one of the first State Trust land (STL) recreation leases in Wyoming and has created many benefits for the people of Laramie. It continues to inspire communities around Wyoming to utilize STL for recreation purposes. It is still a work in progress and will hopefully someday allow southeast Wyoming to become a hotspot for recreation.

Although the project is unique, we believe that recreation areas like Pilot Hill could be repeated in the future. There are several characteristics that made the parcel a prime candidate for a recreation lease: Its position above the Casper aquifer was a great incentive to protect the parcel. During preliminary studies of the parcel before its acquisition by the state no extractable materials (coal, oil, etc.) were found underground dissuading extraction-based companies from lobbying for the parcel. The Albany county community was on board with the project from the very start. Many people volunteered their time and money throughout the creation of Pilot Hill. State, university and private stakeholders made many compromises throughout the project. Without the level of collaboration that happened between the stakeholders Pilot Hill would not have been created with the ease that it was.

Overall, many things needed to go right. We researched what went well and what could have gone better to someday relay this information to any motivated individuals willing to recreate an area like this in their own community. Recreation on STL is very new to Wyoming and we would like to raise awareness that projects like Pilot Hill are possible.

### Statistics

The following statistics were taken from the Pilot Hill Project website and our interview with the Director of Pilot Hill Inc, Sarah Brown Matthews.

- \$1.2 million value added to the local economy
- Supports at least 150 local jobs
- 150,000 visits annually
- 45,000 non-local visits annually
- \$15 million land worth
- \$42,000 + 2.38% lease per year
- 3,076 Acres of wildlife habitat
- 4,010 Acres of recreation
- 82% community vote of approval in initial poll

## How it was done

In order to obtain the most up to date information available we interviewed a wide range of locals professionals as our main form of research. There is more information on interviewees below.

## Why it's important

Communities around the state have seen the benefits Pilot Hill has had on the Laramie community and are inspired to recreate a similar recreation site in their hometowns.

Some of these benefits include promoting a healthy lifestyle for the city by providing easy access to recreation, which was not possible without a car before.

As Pilot Hill becomes more popular as a destination, it has begun to boost the local economy. Its strategic trailhead location forces tourists to make their way through Laramie and its many businesses. The protection of the view shed east of town has benefited local land value in many neighborhoods.

The conservation of the ecosystem is also of utmost important. The Casper Aquifer has been protected from development, allowing the county to have clean drinking water. There is also now protected open space for wildlife many miles east of Laramie.

Pilot Hill has set a precedent throughout the state towards community based recreation. Recreation areas like these allow for a healthy, autonomous community that involves themselves as stewards of the land.

## General process

- 1 Identify parcel of land**  
And the owner
  - 2 Test parcel for resources**  
Mineral extraction generates more revenue than recreation and conservation
  - 3 Establish non-profit organizations**  
To maintain parcel and build trails
  - 4 Initiate STL land swap**  
Identify stranded parcels of equal value that would be a good fit for a land swap
  - 5 Fundraise**  
Hold community events and write grants to pay for annual lease and maintenance
  - 6 Rally your community around your cause**  
Pilot Hill could not be what it is without the Laramie community
- These steps can happen simultaneously
  - Steps may look different for your location
  - Likely will take years to accomplish

### Interviewees

#### Richard Vercoe

University of Wyoming

#### Dewey Gallegos

Owner, Pedalhouse

#### Sarah Brown Matthews

Director, Pilot Hill Inc

#### Elise D'Alessandro

UW Outdoor Program

#### Ian Hall

Local Mountainbiker

#### Birch Malotky

Ruckelshaus Institute

#### Evan O'Toole

Former BikeNet President

### Authors

#### Isaac Bartlett & Bree Clausen

Environmental Systems Sciences

Environment and Natural Resources

Study conducted as University of Wyoming  
Haub School Capstone



Ruckelshaus Institute  
of Environment and  
Natural Resources

William D. Ruckelshaus Institute of Environment & Natural Resources

(307) 766-5080 | [uwyo.edu/haub](http://uwyo.edu/haub) | [ruckelshaus@uwyo.edu](mailto:ruckelshaus@uwyo.edu)