

Wyoming Rural Development Roundtable



Summary of Wyoming Rural Development Roundtable

Cheyenne, Wyoming

April 9, 2009

Those in Attendance:

Don Albrecht – Western Rural Development Center
Sheldon Jones – Farm Foundation
Milton Green – University of Wyoming Extension
Martin Griffith – Bureau of Land Management
John Keck – National Park Service
Sharon Kyhl – U.S. Forest Service
Jody Levin – Qwest
Jim Magagna – Wyoming Stock Growers
Steve Miller – University of Wyoming Agriculture Experiment Station
Mary Randolph – Wyoming Rural Development Council
Randy Teeuwen – EnCana Oil & Gas
Duane Williams – University of Wyoming Extension
Glen Whipple – University of Wyoming Extension

Session One: What do we value about the rural areas of Wyoming?

Participants were asked to list their two-three most important positive features about Wyoming's rural areas. Their responses were:

1. Expansive open space that provide a good habitat for humans to live
2. An extensive natural resource base that make it possible to have a resource-based economy. Valued resources includes amenities to attract tourists, agricultural resources, forests, energy resources (coal and natural gas), and resources for renewable energy such as wind and sun.
3. A strong sense of community with friendly people who are independent and hard-working

Session Two: Priorities for Strengthening the Future of Rural Areas

Participants were asked: As you ponder the future of your state's rural areas, which of the following general rural development topics would you (personally) identify as being of highest priority to promoting the long-term survival and strength of these areas? That is, what **THREE** broad areas listed below would you select as being of "highest priority" for the future of rural counties and communities in your state?

- Economic Development
- Economic/Social Inequality and Poverty
- Education and Workforce Development
- Health and Nutrition
- Housing
- Information and Communication Technologies
- Leadership, Citizen Participation and Rural Public Policy
- Population Change/Migration Patterns
- Public Land Use and Management
- Public Services/Public Infrastructure
- Renewable Energy Development
- Rural and Entrepreneurial Development
- Rural-Urban Interface and Growth Management
- Water, Biodiversity and other Natural Resources
- Other areas not listed above (please list):

Then the group narrowed down the individual responses into the following three priorities:

1. Connectivity and Telecommunication
2. Resource Conservation
3. Sustainable Rural Economies

Session Three: Digging Deeper into the Three Priority Areas

Next participants were asked to take these three priority areas they identified during Session Two and identify challenges and strategies/initiatives that could be launched to address the challenges. Their responses were:

1. Connectivity and Telecommunication
 - a. Specific challenges faced by rural areas in Wyoming
 - i. Parts of Wyoming lack sufficient cell phone connections and broadband capabilities to allow adequate delivery of health care and educational programs, and to allow businesses to operate effectively in a global world.
 - b. Strategies/initiatives that should be launched
 - i. Assistance is needed to help policy makers and community residents understand the economic and other benefits of the Internet and modern telecommunication technology. Delivery programs, such as e-commerce and Internet mastery are needed to help rural residents use the Internet

more effectively. Help is also needed in developing public and private partnerships.

2. Resource Conservation

a. Specific challenges faced by rural areas in Wyoming

- i. In a state where the rural economy is largely resource-based, there are several significant concerns. These include: pine beetles that have destroyed millions of trees; inadequate water supplies; rangeland ecosystem health, with specific concerns relative to invasive species and energy reclamation; trophy homes and ranchettes; visual implications of wind energy development.

b. Strategies/initiatives that should be launched

- i. Assistance is needed to articulate these issues and to develop educational conservation programs, such as water conservation programs. Educational programs are also needed to help trophy home and ranchettes owners avoid practices that lead to increased wildfire damage, invasive species problems, etc.

3. Sustainable Rural Economies

a. Specific challenges faced by rural areas in Wyoming

- i. There is a great need for more and better jobs in rural Wyoming. In particular, the state could benefit from more diverse jobs, as the state is now heavily dependent on resource-based industries that tend to have cycles of boom and bust.
- ii. There is also concern about a lack of leadership, especially among the younger generation.

b. Strategies/initiatives that should be launched

- i. Sustainable entrepreneurial training, including K-12 training. Local businesses bordering tourist sites on public lands could make the site more attractive and increase visitation.
- ii. Implementing and continuing leadership training programs. Wyoming has a program that could be beneficial to other western states.
- iii. Business retention programs to help communities retain viable businesses. Succession planning and the transition between generations would be especially helpful.
- iv. Diversification and value-added businesses could greatly benefit the state.
- v. Regional development programs to help communities work cooperatively

Session Four: Research and Extension Needs and Potential Partners

Finally, participants were asked to identify what they felt are the most critical roles that should be played by your state's land-grant universities in relation to the THREE priority areas identified in Session Two and discussed in Session Three. Their responses were:

1. Research Needs
 - a. Studies exploring the age distribution of community leadership, and the barriers to getting young people involved.
 - b. The benefits and costs of business retention vs. business recruitment.
 - c. Best practices with biomass and other types of renewable energy.
 - d. Identify the public costs of developments.
 - e. What are the economic values of amenities?
 - f. What are economic benefits of the Internet of other modern telecommunication technology?

2. Extension/Outreach Needs
 - a. Internet mastery or e-commerce
 - b. Entrepreneurial development programs, including K-12 programs, business retention programs, succession planning, and developing value-added businesses
 - c. Resource conservation programs
 - d. Programs to help trophy home and ranchettes owners implement best practices
 - e. Leadership training programs
 - f. Regional development programs

3. Potential Partners for WRDC and Land-Grant Universities
 - a. Wyoming Rural Development Council
 - b. Federal agencies (land management and others)
 - c. Building the Wyoming we Want
 - d. Private industry
 - e. Community colleges
 - f. Agricultural groups such as stock growers
 - g. City and county organizations