

Wind River Visitors Council

Strategic Plan 2020 - 2025





STRATEGIC PLAN

The following Strategic plan is a research-based plan based on input from 71 community, civic and travel industry leaders who participated in the DestinationNext Planning Model and a planning workshop conducted with the Wind River Visitors Council Board of Directors and staff. The survey and workshop were conducted in August – September 2020 by Berkeley Young of Young Strategies, Inc. in partnership with staff from the Wyoming Office of Tourism.

IMPLEMENTATION

Annual reviews of this five-year strategic plan will take place in lieu of annual retreats. The annual review takes place with key staff and Board leadership. There is no need for a retreat if the plan implementation is on track and there are no external factors that change overall strategies and goals. If significant changes are needed the Board/staff may schedule a retreat to adjust the plan. The WRVC should invest in market research to guide future sales and marketing efforts.

Destination, Mission and Vision

Fremont County, Wyoming – Wind River Country!

Fremont County is one of the largest counties in the United States and is filled with a multitude of communities, Native American tribes, natural resources, historic sites, wildlife and outdoor recreation opportunities. The Wind River and Absaroka mountain ranges dominate the landscape, boasts 19 of Wyoming's 20 tallest peaks and provides the scenic beauty and outdoor activity of the County. Fremont County has an estimated 39,531 residents, fifth highest among WY counties.

In 2019, tourism generated \$139.8 million in visitor spending in Fremont County, ranking 8th in travel impact among Wyoming's 23 counties. More than 1,450 jobs were directly attributed to travel and tourism, and state and local tax revenues amounted to \$7.1 million, representing a \$448 tax relief per Fremont County resident.

The Wind River Visitors Council is responsible for promoting the Fremont County travel industry. The Council is a joint powers board with appointments from the County Commission and the communities of Lander, Riverton, Dubois, Shoshoni and Hudson. The organization is funded by a dedicated county-wide lodging tax of 4% which is voted on by county residents every four years. The Council is well-regarded as a marketing organization that encompasses such a large area full of diverse interests.

Mission: The Wind River Visitors Council's mission is to develop and promote the Fremont County travel industry for the benefit of area citizens and the local economy.



Overall Direction and Organization Structure

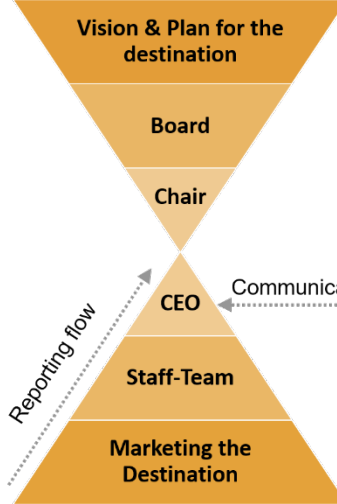
The Wind River Visitors Council (WRVC) is a destination marketing and management organization focused on the growth of the travel industry in Fremont County, WY.

The Wind River Visitors Council is committed to promoting and building awareness of Fremont County as a leisure and group destination with the highest caliber staff in the industry providing leadership and innovation. The organization enjoys a strong record of successfully marketing a county brand, Wind River Country, while also recognizing and celebrating the unique attributes of numerous communities and tribes. This unified, county-wide effort can be a successful model for other economic development efforts in the county.

The WRVC is committed to creating a total visitor destination by providing additional leadership and innovation from the Board of Directors and staff that is focused on improving the overall visitor experience and reaping the benefits. Top strategies include:

- 1. Market the Destination** –Fremont County is a diverse county of outdoor, historic and community attractions located on a major thoroughfare to Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. WRVC should continue to aggressively market its county brand that also recognizes and celebrates the uniqueness of its individual communities and tribes. Increase awareness of Fremont County as a destination, more than a stop-over.
- 2. A First-Class Destination Marketing Organization** – The WRVC is committed to being a financially solid, cutting-edge tourism marketing and management organization recognized as an industry leader locally with statewide clout.
- 3. Outdoor Attractions and Amenities to be More of a Year-Round Destination** – The Wind River Country brand is built upon an active, outdoor lifestyle. The WRVC can build upon this natural strength to increase its year-round tourism offerings and drive increased demand as a year-round destination.
- 4. A Hospitality Workforce to Provide Optimum Visitor Experiences** – Foster a highly skilled hospitality workforce to support the county’s travel industry businesses.

REPORTING STRUCTURE



Board:

- Long-range vision
- Policy & oversight
- Advocacy with partners
- Advocacy with electeds

Visionary Strategic Plan:

- Sustainable long-term funding
- Destination Management
- New Product Development
- Measurable ROI- Accountability

Communications & Reporting; Runs the DMO

WRVC Board and Staff Focus

The WRVC Board of Directors will be engaged in two primary functions:

- 1) Providing proper oversight** related to the function and ROI of the staff’s research-based marketing of the destination.
- 2) Fulfill the vision for Fremont County in 2025** in partnership with County/City Officials and other economic development groups. The WRVC will foster, facilitate and encourage the growth and development of the destination.

Staff Focus

- 1) Marketing Fremont County to visitors.
- 2) Coordinating the implementation of the Board Vision for the destination.



1. Market the Destination – Fremont County is a diverse county of outdoor, historic and community attractions located on a major thoroughfare to Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. WRVC should continue to aggressively market its county brand that also recognizes and celebrates the uniqueness of its individual communities and tribes. Increase awareness of Fremont County as a destination, more than a stop-over.

- a. Conduct annual market and accountability research to direct and measure marketing efforts. Consider using cell phone GPS data to determine traffic levels and visitor characteristics for the county's communities and attractions.
- b. Create and follow an annual marketing plan supported by market research and by the local travel industry. Use a variety of targeted, cutting-edge marketing, public relations and sales techniques.
- c. Deliver on the Wind River Country outdoor adventure brand promise – a promise that entices visitors to enjoy the best of Wyoming's outdoor opportunities year-round at locations throughout the county.
- d. Promote education and understanding of Native American culture and the Wind River Indian Reservation.
- e. Partner with the Wyoming Office of Tourism on marketing efforts to reach broader audiences. Consider a partnership with Hot Springs Travel and Tourism based upon the proximity of Boysen State Park, Hot Springs State Park and the Wind River Canyon.
- f. Provide leadership with the local travel industry in creating coop marketing, PR, training, research and workforce efforts.
- g. Develop and promote shoulder seasons to become a year-round destination, along with public and private partners.
- h. Use outdoor education resources such as National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), Wilderness Medicine Institute, Central Wyoming College and Wyoming Catholic College connections and programs to market and build the Fremont County travel industry. Ex: NOLS Rocky Mountain branch programs attract outdoor enthusiasts from throughout the world. WRVC should build upon this natural connection for mutually-agreed-upon strategic projects: marketing and promotions; alumni reunions and events; outfitter recruitment; creation of new outdoor amenities; entrepreneur development, etc.

Measurable Success:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| *Annual plan with trackable ROI | *Increased participation in partner program | |
| *Increased visitor center attendance | *Longer length of stay | *Increased Spending |
| *Increased visitor satisfaction | *Increased winter visitation | * Growth in lodging room demand & ADR |



Strategic Initiatives

- 2. A First-Class Destination Marketing Organization** – The WRVC should strive to be a financially solid, cutting-edge tourism marketing and management organization recognized as an industry leader locally and with statewide clout.
- a. Contract with marketing and PR agencies to provide the highest caliber of marketing services.
 - b. Produce a WRVC Annual Report that describes WRVC’s accomplishments and activities, as well as industry statistics and positive hospitality improvements. Distribute it widely to elected officials, civic and business leaders, as well as the general public.
 - c. Recruit WRVC board members and non-voting “affiliate members” to enhance ties to the corporate community and travel industry. Examples include representatives from the lodging and restaurant sectors, NOLS, Wind River Outdoor Recreation Collaborative, Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service and the Native American tribes.
 - d. Make annual presentations to stakeholder groups (local governments, economic development and civic organizations), describing the travel industry’s positive impact on the local economy and county residents.
 - e. Maintain an annually updated crisis communications plan that provides a manual for how WRVC will gather accurate information and communicate it with industry stakeholders and the media in case of a crisis.
 - f. Advertise within Fremont County so residents are aware of local attractions and WRVC efforts. The goal of this effort will be to create local pride and awareness so residents can become community ambassadors in helping to promote the area.
 - g. Partake in ongoing educational opportunities and publicize opportunities to area hospitality members to ensure the highest level of professionalism and up-to-date knowledge in the industry. Meet the highest standards of financial and ethical accountability.
 - h. Monitor the new state lodging tax and its effects on the ability of counties to pass their local option lodging taxes. Explore other funding sources to ensure WRVC is adequately funded to market, develop and manage the local hospitality industry.
 - i. Maintain reserve funds equal to three months of operating budget to address unforeseen crises or opportunities.
 - j. Encourage and assist a PAC (as appropriate) every four years to campaign for voter approval of the lodging tax.

Measurable Success:

- * Successful approval of lodging tax referendum
- * Annual report produced and distributed

- *Crisis communications plan
- *Annual presentations to elected bodies

- *Unqualified annual audits



Strategic Initiatives

3. Outdoor Attractions and Amenities to be a Year-Round Destination – The Wind River Country brand is built upon an active, outdoor lifestyle. The WRVC can build upon this natural strength to increase its year-round tourism offerings and inspire increased demand as a year-round destination driving longer lengths of stay.

- a. Create *Outdoor Activity Hubs* in various communities. Partner with local governments, state agencies and civic groups to build on existing outdoor recreation attractions and stimulate the creation of new ones. Market these Outdoor Activity Hubs as Trailheads, along with links to other active lifestyle amenities, such as dining and nightlife.
- b. Work with the WR Outdoor Recreation Collaborative and other partners to promote existing outdoor opportunities, develop and enhance trail networks, improve visitor permitting procedures and provide responsible access to public lands.
- c. Develop cell phone and wi-fi accessibility in high-traffic areas, including rural areas where visitors need to access trail maps and other navigational tools. This access is critical for marketing the area as visitors share their experiences via social media.
- d. Seek out and identify new opportunities for authentic and respectful Native American experiences as appropriate.
- e. Partner with the airport, economic development organizations and governments to support and expand local air service.
- f. Market and support existing outdoor recreation service and equipment providers to provide access to equipment and guide services for visitors to enjoy their Wind River experiences. Recruit more outfitters and guides as needed.
- g. Host outdoor recreation events and NOLS-related events (ex: reunions) to increase travel to Fremont County and to engage outdoor enthusiasts.
- h. Investigate opportunities to increase visitor access along the Wind River Canyon, linking Boysen and Hot Springs State Parks.
- i. Support development of new sports facilities based upon thorough analysis of competitor facilities, costs and ROI.
- j. Investigate the Wyoming Main Street program as an option for downtown development. Explore the possibility of sharing a Main Street Manager among various communities.

Measurable Success:

- *Broadened Wi-Fi / Cell Service
- *Increased # of Outfitters

- * Increased Enplanements
- * Outdoor recreation recognitions

- * New Native American offerings
- * Improved & expanded trail network



4. A Hospitality Workforce to Provide Optimum Visitor Experiences – The WRVC will provide linkages between travel industry businesses and schools, governments and workforce agencies to foster a highly skilled hospitality workforce to support the Fremont County travel industry.

- a. Monitor the local hospitality workforce situation and explore options to address the issue with cost-effective strategies as appropriate. Update this Strategic Plan annually to align it with Board priorities related to workforce.
- b. Explore partner opportunities with secondary, vocational and higher education institutions to generate interest in hospitality industry careers and the needed training for those careers. Possibilities: College Work/Study programs where the work could be in the hospitality industry; High School and Community College Culinary programs and Intern programs.
- c. Explore partner opportunities with NOLS, CWC and WCC to access its alumni network of young leaders who can contribute marketing, technology, development and entrepreneurial knowledge and enthusiasm for Fremont County. Consider hosting virtual focus groups of alumni members to investigate ways they can contribute to Fremont County – from coming back to visit to starting new businesses.
- d. Explore housing opportunities for workers from former man camps and *other out-of-the-box* options. Monitor housing availability, and participate in efforts to encourage the development of affordable housing for workers.
- e. Support and promote Tribal Fish and Game guide training programs and other tribal workforce initiatives as appropriate.

Measurable Success:

- * Increased applicants for hospitality jobs
- * Higher visitor satisfaction ratings with service
- * No vacant travel industry jobs
- * # of brand ambassadors
- * Less turnover
- * Part-time jobs converted to full-time jobs
- * NOLS focus group sessions