

strategic

stra·te·gic

/strə'tējɪk/

adjective

adjective: strategic

Relating to the identification of long-term or overall aims and interests and the means of achieving them.



tactical

adjective

tac·ti·cal 'tak-ti-kəl

- : of or relating to small-scale actions serving a larger purpose
- : made or carried out with only a limited or immediate end in view
- : adroit in planning or maneuvering to accomplish a purpose



Wind River Visitors Council

Strategic Plan 2025 - 2029

Destination, Mission and Vision

Fremont County is one of the largest counties in the United States. It is filled with a multitude of communities, Native American tribes, natural resources, historic sites, wildlife and outdoor recreation opportunities. The County had an estimated 39,815 residents in 2023, the fifth highest in Wyoming.

In 2023, tourism generated \$170.2 million in visitor spending in Fremont County, ranking eighth in travel impact among Wyoming’s 23 counties. Travel and tourism accounted for 1,553 jobs, and state and local tax revenues amounted to \$8.9 million, representing a \$558 tax relief per Fremont County resident.

The Wind River Visitors Council (WRVC), a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), is charged with the responsibility of investing lodging tax revenues to facilitate wider promotion and marketing of Fremont County and the Wind River Indian Reservation (branded as Wind River Country) as a tourist and visitor destination.

The WRVC is a joint powers board with appointments from the County Commission and the communities of Dubois, Hudson, Lander, Riverton and Shoshoni. The organization is funded by a combination of 1) a portion of the statewide lodging tax (equal to a 2% lodging tax) and 2) a local option county lodging tax of 2%, which is voted on by county residents every four years. Combined, these two revenue sources equal a 4% tax rate applied to the cost of a lodging stay. Fremont County voters overwhelmingly supported the Lodging Tax referendum in 2022.

Mission: The Wind River Visitors Council’s mission is to increase awareness of, and encourage visitation to, the unique destinations, activities and events in Wind River Country for the benefit of area citizens and the local economy.



The following Strategic Plan is a research-based plan based on input from the Wind River Visitors Council Board of Directors in a planning workshop that took place on October 11, 2024. It was facilitated by Young Strategies and Rudloff Solutions, in partnership with staff from the Wyoming Office of Tourism.

Overall Direction and Organization Structure

The Wind River Visitors Council is committed to promoting and building awareness of Wind River Country 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 brand, Wind River Country, which recognizes and celebrates the unique attributes of numerous communities in both Fremont County and on the Wind River Indian Reservation.

The WRVC provides leadership to the travel industry to sustain a year-round visitor destination that benefits local citizens with jobs and tax revenues. At the same time, the WRVC respects and protects the natural environment, business infrastructure and resident quality of life.

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 Wind River Country Vision for 2029 in partnership with County/City/Town Officials and other economic development groups. The WRVC will foster, facilitate and encourage the growth and development of the destination.

Staff Focus

1. Marketing Wind River Country to visitors.
2. Coordinating the implementation of the Board Vision for the destination.

REPORTING STRUCTURE



Strategic Initiatives

This Strategic Plan provides the leaders of Wind River Country with a road-map that the Wind River Visitors Council (WRVC) and staff are following to grow the local travel economy for the benefit of residents and visitors alike.

The plan demonstrates that the organization has carefully considered its options and established conscious priorities for moving Wind River Country forward as a travel destination. Using this Strategic Plan as a guide, the Wind River Visitors Council will develop annual marketing/business plans that describes in tactical detail the actions needed to implement the initiatives identified in this Strategic Plan.

Market the Destination

The WRVC will continue to market its brand that recognizes and celebrates the uniqueness of its individual communities. It will increase awareness of Wind River Country as a destination, which is more than a stop-over.

A Hospitality Workforce

To Provide Optimum Visitor Experiences
 – Foster a highly skilled hospitality workforce to support Wind River Country’s travel industry businesses.



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.

Destination Development and Outdoor Recreation

The WRVC strives to maintain and enhance Wind River Country’s active, outdoor lifestyle with its partners. In addition, the WRVC works to develop other attractions and community amenities for the benefit of both citizens and visitors.

STRATEGIC PLAN 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 will invest in market research to guide future sales and marketing efforts.



1

Market the Destination

Wind River Country is a diverse region of outdoor, historic and community attractions located on a major thoroughfare to Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. The WRVC will continue to aggressively market its Wind River Country brand that recognizes and celebrates the uniqueness of its individual communities. This marketing will incorporate issues of responsible outdoor travel and sustainability for the area's environment and citizens.

- a) **Conduct annual market and accountability research** to direct and measure marketing efforts. The WRVC will research the seasonality and regional disbursement of visitation, as well as resident and business sentiment about visitation levels. They will identify places and times of overtourism and excess capacity.
- b) **Create and follow an annual marketing plan supported by the market research** and by the local travel industry. The WRVC will market to niche markets that match local attractions, capacity and regional support. Examples include winter sports, mountain biking and military history.
- 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 Wind River Country.
- d) **Promote education and understanding of Native American culture, the Wind River Indian Reservation, the Eastern Shoshone and the Northern Arapaho.**
- e) **Partner with the Wyoming Office of Tourism** on marketing efforts to reach broader audiences.
- f) **Develop and promote travel during non-summer periods** to continue to promote Wind River Country as a year-round destination, that keeps businesses and employees active throughout the year.

Measurable Success:

* Annual plan with trackable ROI

* Increased visitor center attendance

* Niche market campaigns

* Increased participation in partner program

* Longer length of stay

* Increased winter visitation

* Increased spending

* Growth in lodging room demand & ADR



2 A First-Class Destination Marketing Organization

The WRVC strives to be a financially solid, cutting-edge tourism marketing and management organization recognized as an industry leader locally and with statewide clout.

- a) Meet the highest **standards of financial and ethical accountability**.
- b) **Support the Executive Director** in the hiring and retention of the highest caliber DMO team with competitive wages, benefits and ongoing training/education.
- c) **Restructure the Tourism Asset Development (TAD) program** to make its administration more streamlined and less labor intensive for the WRVC staff. Modify program rules as necessary so the program creates new events and activities, producing benefits for residents and visitors.
- d) Develop and **maintain positive relations with the WRVC's joint powers** (county and municipalities) so they are strong partners working in concert with WRVC on tourism development.
- e) **Contract with marketing and public relations agencies** to provide the highest caliber of marketing services, producing a positive return on investment for Wind River Country and its communities.
- f) **Continue to communicate updates of WRVC's activities and accomplishments** to elected officials and residents through annual presentations to stakeholder groups (local governments, civic organizations). Produce a WRVC Annual Report that is widely distributed.
- g) **Enhance ties to the corporate community** and travel industry by recruiting WRVC board members and non-voting "affiliate members."
- h) **Advertise within Fremont County** so residents are aware of local attractions and WRVC efforts. The goal of this effort is to create local pride and awareness so residents can become community ambassadors in helping to promote the area.
- i) **Maintain reserve funds** with a target balance equaling 50% of the last three years' average gross revenue to cover crisis-related expenditures.
- j) **Maintain an annually updated crisis communications plan** that details how WRVC will gather accurate information and communicate it to industry stakeholders and the media in case of a crisis.

Measurable Success:

- *Successful approval of lodging tax referendum 2026
- *Annual report produced and distributed
- *Annual presentations to elected bodies

- *Crisis communications plan
- * Reduced TAD administrative workload

- *Unqualified annual audits
- *Staff retention



3 Destination Development and Outdoor Recreation

The Wind River Country brand is built upon an active, outdoor lifestyle. The WRVC strives to maintain and enhance this natural advantage with its partners. In addition, the WRVC works to develop other attractions and community amenities for the benefit of both citizens and visitors.

- a) **Work with the WR Outdoor Recreation Collaborative and other partners** to promote existing outdoor opportunities, develop/enhance trail networks, improve visitor permitting procedures and provide responsible access to public lands.
- b) **Engage with federal, state and local agencies and departments** that either control or greatly influence the outdoor recreation assets in the region. Communicate regularly with them on policies, procedures and future plans.
- c) **Consider efforts to further develop and market select niche markets** that match local assets and lodging availability in a sustainable manner. Examples include mountain biking, winter outdoor recreation and military history.
- d) **Develop cellular phone and wi-fi accessibility** in high-traffic 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.
- e) **Seek out and identify new opportunities** for authentic and respectful Native American experiences as appropriate.
- f) **Investigate and encourage new product amenity development** utilizing the Wyoming Office of Tourism’s Destination Development Program.
- g) **Partner with the airport, economic development organizations and governments** to expand local air service.
- h) **Market and support existing outdoor recreation services and equipment providers** to enhance access to equipment and guide services for visitors to enjoy their Wind River Country experiences. Recruit more outfitters and guides as needed.
- i) **Host outdoor recreation events** to increase travel to Wind River Country and to engage outdoor enthusiasts.
- j) **Support development of new sports facilities** based upon thorough analysis of competitor facilities, costs and ROI.

Measurable Success:

- * Partnership with WR Outdoor Recreation Collaborative
- * Broadened Wi-Fi/cell service
- * Increased # of outfitters
- * Increased enplanements
- * Outdoor recreation recognitions
- * Improved and expanded trail network



4 A Hospitality Workforce to Provide Optimum Visitor Experiences –

The WRVC will provide linkages between travel industry businesses, schools, governments and workforce agencies to foster a highly skilled hospitality workforce to support Wind River Country’s travel industry.

- a) **Be the voice of the hospitality industry** on workforce issues before elected officials, education providers and workforce agencies.
- b) **Support local workforce entities** in providing hospitality industry training, holding job fairs and other recruitment efforts.
- c) **Explore partner opportunities with secondary, vocational and higher education institutions** to generate interest in hospitality industry careers and providing the needed training for those careers. Possibilities: High School Pro Start, College Work/Study programs, etc. Consider hosting mini job fairs that link local students with area businesses for part-time, summer and full-time employment.
- d) **Explore partner opportunities with area colleges** to access their alumni networks of young leaders who can contribute marketing, technology and entrepreneurial knowledge and enthusiasm for Wind River Country. Consider hosting virtual focus groups of alumni members to investigate ways they can contribute to Wind River Country – from coming back to visit to starting new businesses.
- e) **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.
- f) **Support and promote Tribal Fish and Game** training programs and workforce initiatives as appropriate.
- g) Once worker availability for the hospitality industry is no longer a crisis, **develop a program of hospitality training** where frontline hospitality workers earn certification as Wind River Country brand ambassadors delivering high customer service.

Measurable Success:

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

**"If you build a place people want to visit,
you build a place where people want to live.**

**"If you build a place where people want to live,
you'll build a place where people want to work.**

**"If you build a place where people want to work,
you'll build a place where business has to be.**

**"And if you build a place where business has to be,
you'll build a place where people have to visit."**

—Maura Gast, Irving, TX, CVB and DMAI Chair, July 2009.