

# Wyoming Landowners' Characteristics and Preferences Regarding Conservation Easements: Results from a Survey



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## Executive Summary

A survey mailed to landowners in Colorado and Wyoming elicited responses to a variety of questions pertaining to landowner characteristics as well as preferences for land conservation and conservation easements. The results presented target responses from Wyoming landowners to improve the understanding of landowner attributes and their interests and concerns related to land use and to conservation easements.

Results indicate that Wyoming landowners feel a strong attachment to the land they own or manage; that Wyoming landowners believe their land provides excellent habitat and diversity for plants and animals; and that Wyoming landowners have comparatively less experience with conservation easements compared to landowners elsewhere. Survey results also suggest Wyoming landowners may be less likely to accept conservation easements than landowners elsewhere. Overall, results indicate Wyoming landowners may benefit from information regarding conservation easements.

## Purpose of the Research

Rural and primarily agricultural landowners in the Rocky Mountain West have a variety of options concerning disposition of their lands. One option is to eliminate non-agricultural development on some or all of their land. A means to achieve this outcome is to engage in a conservation easement whereby the development rights are separated from the land and extinguished. For more information pertaining to what conservation easements are and their relevance to Wyoming, please see Perrigo and Iversen (2002), Agopian and Benson (2007), and Lindstrom (2005).

The objective of this research is to gain an understanding of landowner characteristics and factors that influence landowners' preferences for, and decisions regarding, conservation easements. Investigation of agricultural landowners' characteristics, decision-making processes, and their preferences regarding conservation easements may provide policy makers, conservation organizations, and landowners valuable information that facilitate better-informed land use planning, and conservation efforts.

## Research Approach

The results reported in this bulletin were obtained from responses to the Wyoming and Colorado Landowner Survey conducted in January 2007 as part of a joint study between the University of Wyoming and Colorado State University. Information used to construct the survey was gathered through a series of focus groups with Colorado and Wyoming landowners. Focus groups were conducted using directed interview techniques, in which landowners were encouraged to respond freely to selected, open-ended questions related to land characteristics and conservation easements. For the survey sample, the Wyoming Agricultural Statistics Service, in conjunction with the Colorado Agricultural Statistics Service, drew a random sample of agricultural landowners throughout Colorado and Wyoming that had at least 50 acres and \$1,000 annually in sales. The sample drawn was to be representative of producers in Colorado and Wyoming as a region according to the most recent agricultural census conducted prior to the survey (Miller, 2007).

Surveys were mailed to 4,935 potential respondents. All potential respondents were mailed a reminder card one week later. Phone interviews were conducted several weeks later with approximately 10 percent of non-respondents. This yielded 2,270 responses for a total response rate of 46 percent. One thousand five hundred seventy-five Colorado and 508 Wyoming landowners responded to the survey, while remaining respondents did not indicate a state of residence. Miller (2007) examined those responding and concluded the sample was representative of the above target survey population.

## **Survey Results**

Outcomes for the Wyoming landowner survey are reported as three separate sections corresponding to sections of the survey instrument (Parts A, B, and C), which relate to different aspects of land use and conservation preferences. A fourth section (Part D) consists of survey respondents' demographic information. There are also places where Wyoming landowner data are compared to overall (Wyoming and Colorado combined) survey data. This overall group is thought to be closer to a regional rather than a state-specific sample and useful for comparison with Wyoming outcomes. Corresponding tables and figures are listed in each of the respective sections.

## Part A: Knowledge and Attitudes about Agricultural Land Use and Conservation

Landowners were queried about their perceptions concerning land use and conservation. Landowners were asked to circle a value that best indicates their agreement with the statement about land use or conservation. Values were labeled 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree). Wyoming landowner responses are compared with the combined Colorado and Wyoming outcomes (the latter referred to as “overall”). Table 1 provides the results of the landowner comparison. Results from the survey indicate that Wyoming landowners are more likely to agree/strongly agree that agricultural lands are being converted to other uses (see Survey Question A1A in Table 1). Approximately 76 percent of Wyoming landowners agreed/strongly agreed agricultural land is being purchased by non-agriculturalists, and approximately 58 percent of Wyoming landowners agreed/strongly agreed that population growth threatens their livelihoods (see Survey Questions A1B and A1E, respectively, in Table 1). These statistics suggest Wyoming landowners are more likely to agree that population growth and corresponding conversion of land use are being implemented by people not having a vested interest in agriculture and that land conversion is threatening their livelihoods when compared to the overall sample.

Approximately 81 percent of Wyoming landowners agreed/strongly agreed that lands within their communities should be protected for future generations. About 86 percent agreed/strongly agreed that they, as landowners, have a responsibility to conserve nature (see Survey Questions A1F and A1I, respectively, in Table 1). Nearly 96 percent of Wyoming landowners agreed/strongly agreed being a good steward of their land is important (see Survey Question A1K in Table 1).

Approximately 80 percent of Wyoming landowners agreed/strongly agreed their personal histories and identities were tied to where they reside. Nearly 71 percent agreed/strongly agreed their community offers the amenities they look for in a place to live (see Survey Questions A1G and A1Q, respectively, in Table 1). About 60 percent of responding Wyoming landowners agreed/strongly agreed their families’ livelihood is dependent on the economic productivity of the land. Seventy-eight percent agreed/strongly agreed their future livelihoods are dependent on the flexibility to use their land how they see fit (see Survey Questions A1R and A1S, respectively, in Table 1).

In summary, respondents indicate that changes in population and land use are leading to a modified rural landscape and culture. The respondents generally expressed the importance of taking care of their land for bequest, financial, and community purposes. They indicate having a strong connection to their land. These insights are important to understanding the basis for landowner land use and conservation decision making.

**Table 1: Frequency of responses to survey questions A1A – A1T**

<b>Survey question</b>	<b>Frequency of responses for landowners overall</b>	<b>Frequency of responses for Wyoming landowners</b>
A1A: Undeveloped, rural and agricultural lands are being converted into housing developments	58.10% agree or strongly agree	62.60% agree or strongly agree
A1B: Agricultural land is being purchased by people who have little interest in agriculture	70.40% agree or strongly agree	75.59% agree or strongly agree
A1C: People moving into my community are changing its customs and cultures	59.40% agree or strongly agree	59.84% agree or strongly agree
A1D: Population growth has led to conflicts between neighbors	42.89% agree or strongly agree	45.67% agree or strongly agree
A1E: Population growth has led to more rules that threaten my livelihood	53.47% agree or strongly agree	57.68% agree or strongly agree
A1F: I believe the land I own or manage should be protected for future generations	77.00% agree or strongly agree	81.10% agree or strongly agree
A1G: My personal history and identity are closely tied to my land and where I live	73.60% agree or strongly agree	80.12% agree or strongly agree
A1H: Agriculture is part of the historical character of my community	88.71% agree or strongly agree	87.20% agree or strongly agree
A1I: I have a responsibility to conserve nature (wildlife, open space) on my land	81.54% agree or strongly agree	85.63% agree or strongly agree
A1J: I manage my land in a way that maximizes benefit to my community	74.28% agree or strongly agree	76.38% agree or strongly agree
A1K: It is important to be a good steward of my land	93.97% agree or strongly agree	95.67% agree or strongly agree
A1L: My community is where I most belong	72.26% agree or strongly agree	76.77% agree or strongly agree

**Table 1. (continued)**

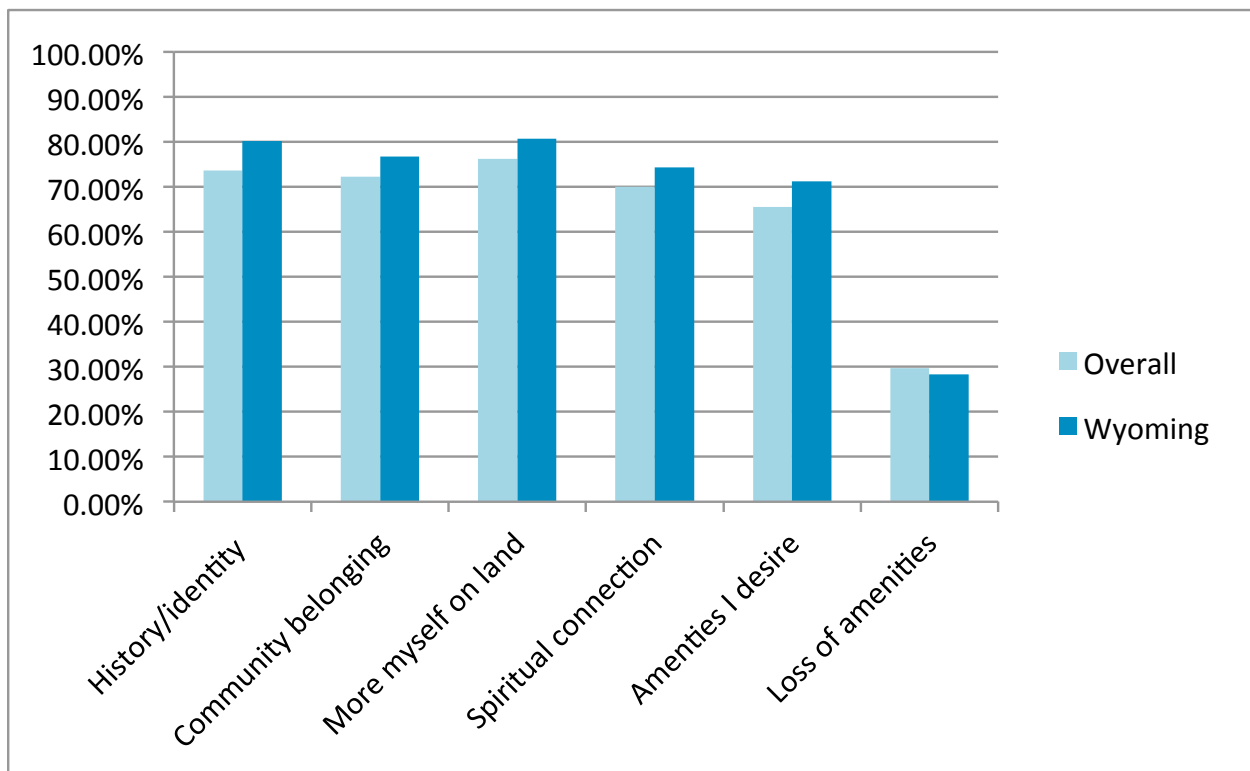
<b>Survey question</b>	<b>Frequency of responses for landowners overall</b>	<b>Frequency of responses for Wyoming landowners</b>
A1M: I feel more myself here than anywhere else	76.28% agree or strongly agree	80.71% agree or strongly agree
A1N: I feel a spiritual connection to where I live	70.01% agree or strongly agree	74.41% agree or strongly agree
A1O: Natural amenities in my community should be protected for future generations	77.62% agree or strongly agree	77.76% agree or strongly agree
A1P: If the natural amenities around me changed, I would not stay	29.65% agree or strongly agree	28.34% agree or strongly agree
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Overall frequencies</b>	<b>Wyoming frequencies</b>
A1Q: Lands in my community offer the amenities I'm looking for in a place to live	65.57% agree or strongly agree	71.16% agree or strongly agree
A1R: My family's livelihood depends on economic productivity from my land	52.85% agree or strongly agree	59.84% agree or strongly agree
A1S: My future livelihood depends on having the flexibility to use my land the way I see fit	73.36% agree or strongly agree	77.98% agree or strongly agree
A1T: My family's financial well-being frequently conflicts with my plans for conservation	44.28% disagree or strongly disagree	39.37% disagree or strongly disagree

The survey questions given in Table 1 were categorized into similar themes and analyzed to reveal additional insights into landowner responses. For example, survey questions A1G, A1L, A1M, A1N, A1Q, and A1P are considered “attachment” questions. Attachment to a place or community is a concept that encompasses landowners’ emotional and sentimental relation to a particular area (Eisenhauer et al., 2000). The six questions mentioned above elicited responses from landowners indicating attachment to the land they own and the communities in which they reside. These questions obtained responses from landowners stating whether they agreed on the following: that their personal histories and identities are

tied to the land; that they feel a belonging within the communities; that they feel more themselves on the land; that they feel a spiritual connection to the land; that the land provides the amenities they are looking for in a place to live; and that if the amenities around them changed they would not stay. The importance of such questions is to get at how strongly the owners identify with their properties and communities. The intensity of these relationships may provide insights as to the tendency of owners to protect or convert their lands.

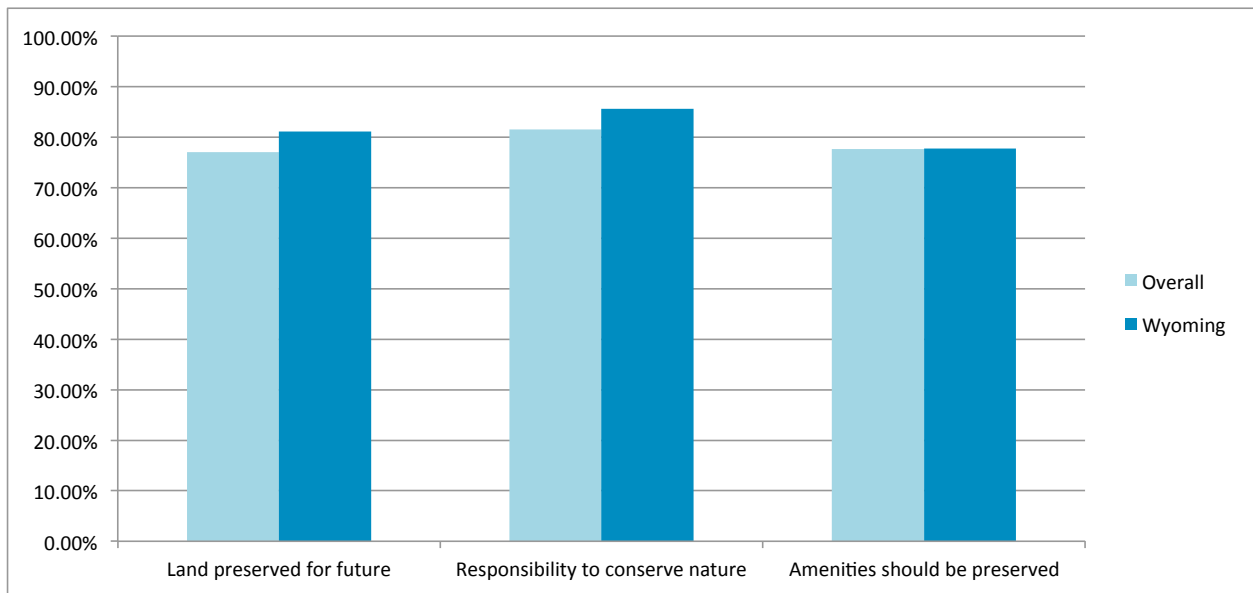
Compared to general survey results, responses from Wyoming landowners indicate, for five of the six “attachment” questions, a greater percentage of Wyoming landowners agreed or strongly agreed with their given statements (see Figure 1). This suggests that Wyoming landowners may feel a greater attachment to their land than landowners in Colorado. This may mean that any proposed policy that comes between the landowner and his or her property (that alters the existing property rights and management regime) will be challenging to implement. It may also mean policies that support or protect the attachment the landowner feels for his property might be viewed favorably.

**Figure 1: Frequency of responses for landowners overall and Wyoming landowners to “attachment” survey questions (all percentages indicate percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree with survey question)**



Survey questions A1F, A1I, and A1O may be considered “conservation/protection” questions. These questions elicited responses from landowners indicating whether they agreed on the following: that they believe that the land should be protected for future generations; that they have a responsibility to conserve nature; and that the natural amenities should be protected. A regional perspective denoted as “overall” (Wyoming + Colorado responses) is then contrasted with a state (Wyoming) perspective.

The survey results indicate that, for all of the “conservation/protection” questions, a greater percentage of Wyoming landowners agreed or strongly agreed with the given statement (see Figure 2). This suggests that, compared to overall survey responses, Wyoming landowners potentially feel a somewhat greater need to protect the land and its associated environmental amenities. Land protection may have traction, under certain conditions, with Wyoming landowners as part of a grazing association, an agricultural use district, or a county land use planning effort.



**Figure 2: Frequency of responses for landowners overall and Wyoming landowners to “preservation/conservation” survey questions (all percentages indicate percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree with survey question)**



## Part B: Land Values and Characteristics

This section provides responses from Wyoming landowners concerning the value and attributes of their farms or ranches. Part B of the survey asked landowners to indicate their best estimates of what their land would sell for, on average, in the current land market (i.e., average price of their land on a per-acre basis). Wyoming landowners responding to the survey had average per-acre estimates for the market value of their land that were considerably lower than per-acre estimates for landowners overall (in the combined Wyoming and Colorado responses). Table 2 reports results indicating that the average market value price per-acre for Wyoming landowners was approximately \$3,100, whereas landowners overall responded that the average market price per-acre was approximately \$4,900 (see Table 2). Average price per-acre estimates may be influenced by extreme high or low responses to this question. Therefore this report will analyze the middle 95 percent of responses; in other words, eliminating the extreme high and low \$/acre estimates from the analysis. Table 3 reports the results when considering the middle 95 percent of responses. Results reflect landowners' perceptions of market estimates for their land rather than actual appraisal or sales data. Prices are reported in 2007 dollars.

**Table 2: Average \$/acre estimates for survey question B1**

Survey question	\$/acre average for landowners overall	\$/ acre average for Wyoming landowners
B1: \$/acre estimate	\$4,917 per acre	\$3,092 per acre

**Table 3: Average \$/acre estimates for survey question B1 (middle 95% of responses)**

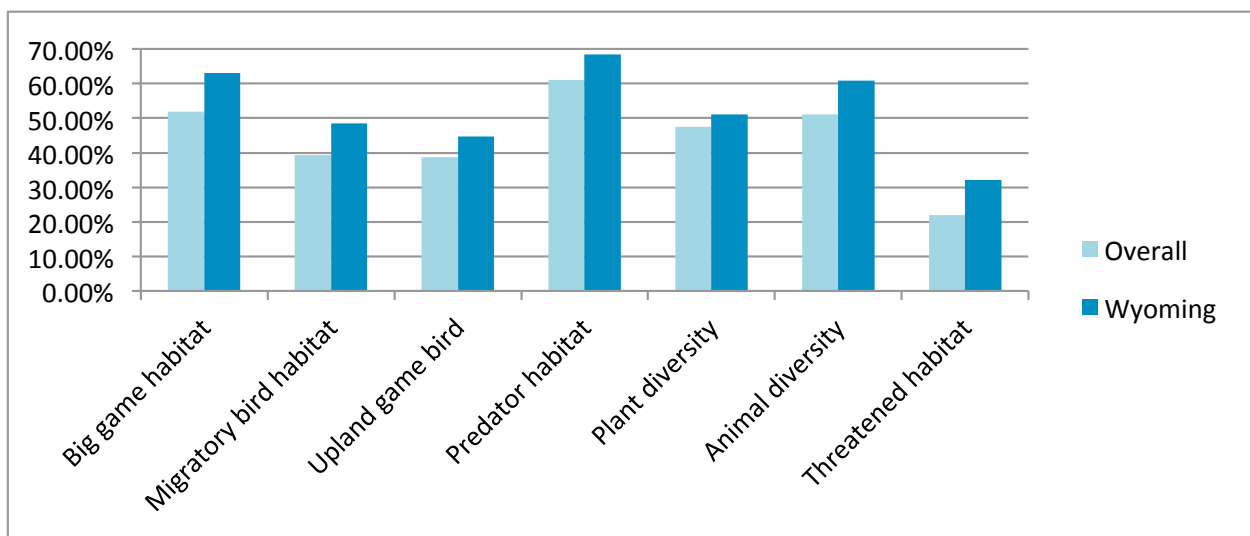
Survey question	\$/acre average for landowners overall	\$/ acre average for Wyoming landowners
B1: \$/acre estimate	\$3,728 per acre	\$2,380 per acre

Eliminating extreme high and low \$/acre estimates lowered the average price per acre for both sets of landowners. However, the results still show a significant disparity in price per-acre estimates for Wyoming landowners and landowners overall. Table 3 indicates that Wyoming landowners on average own or manage land valued at approximately \$1,350 less than land elsewhere (\$2,380/acre vs. \$3,728/acre). The lower Wyoming prices may reflect less pressure from increased demand for agricultural lands than in other regions. If conservation easements are contemplated between the two samples, then Wyoming opportunities may be less expensive based on perceived land value criteria.

Survey questions B2B, B2C, B2D, B2E, B2G, B2H, and B2I may be considered “habitat” questions. These questions elicited responses from landowners indicating whether they agreed or strongly agreed that their land provides: excellent habitat for big game species; excellent habitat for migratory birds; excellent habitat for upland game species; excellent habitat for predators; excellent habitat for threatened or endangered plant and animal species; and excellent diversity in plant and animal species.

There was some disparity in landowners' perceptions about the suitability of land to support diverse wildlife habitat. However, compared to the overall survey responses, Wyoming landowners report that they perceive their land as amply able to support diverse wildlife habitat. About 63 percent of Wyoming landowners agreed/strongly agreed their land provides excellent habitat for big game species. Nearly 49 percent agreed or strongly agreed their land provides excellent habitat for migratory birds. Forty-five percent agreed/strongly agreed their land provides habitat for upland game birds. Approximately 68 percent agreed/strongly agreed their land provides habitat for predators. Survey results indicate 52 percent of landowners overall agreed/strongly agreed their land provides excellent habitat for big game species; 39 percent agreed/strongly agreed their land provides habitat for migratory birds; 39 percent agreed/strongly agreed their land provides habitat for upland game birds; and, about 61 percent agreed/strongly agreed their land provides habitat for predators. These survey results suggest Wyoming landowners are more likely to own lands they perceive provides habitat for species than the overall sample (Figure 3). It may also suggest the Wyoming lands and landowners offer opportunities for wildlife-based interests to initiate conservation easements. The following outcomes further substantiate the opportunities for Wyoming wildlife habitat protection.

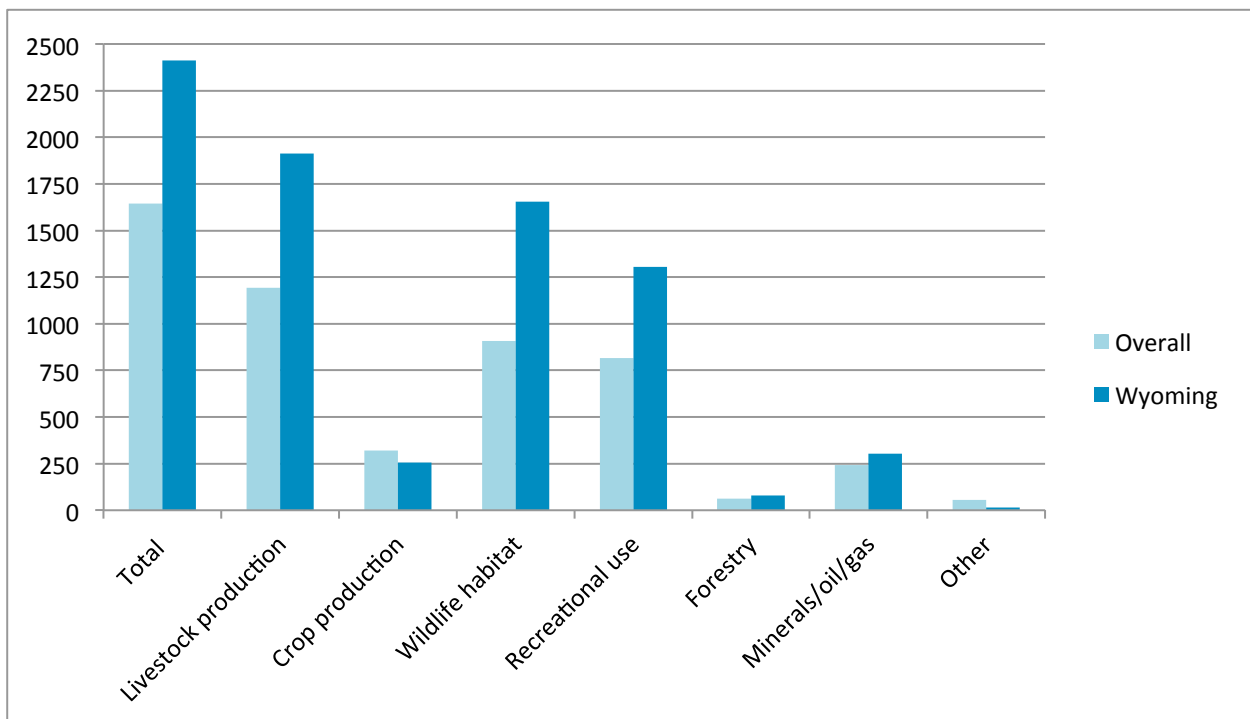
Approximately 51 percent of Wyoming landowners agreed/strongly agreed their land provides diversity in plant species, and approximately 61 percent of Wyoming landowners agreed/strongly agreed their land provides diversity in animal species as compared to 47 percent and 51 percent of landowners overall, respectively. These results suggest Wyoming landowners believe their land is greater in plant and animal diversity than the landowners in the overall sample. Approximately 32 percent of Wyoming landowners agreed/strongly agreed their land provides habitat for threatened or endangered plant and/or animal species, whereas 22 percent of landowners overall agreed/strongly agreed their land provides habitat for threatened or endangered species. This result suggests a greater percentage of Wyoming landowners believe their land provides habitat for threatened or endangered species than landowners in the total sample.



**Figure 3: Frequency of responses for landowners overall and Wyoming landowners to survey questions pertaining to habitat quality (all percentages indicate percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree with survey question)**

Landowners were also asked to indicate the number of acres within their deeded land being managed for specific uses and also to indicate the percentage of total acres being managed for a specific use. Landowners could identify multiple categories for the same parcel of land; as a result, land could be used in more than one category and percentages could add up to more than 100.

Wyoming landowner survey responses indicated they had, on average, considerably more total acres used for agriculture (2,411 acres) than landowners overall (1,645 acres), as well as for livestock production (1,913 acres vs. 1,194 acres), wildlife habitat (1,655 acres vs. 909 acres), recreational uses (1,305 acres vs. 815 acres), forestry (80 acres vs. 62 acres), and minerals/oil/gas (303 acres vs. 243 acres) (see Figure 4). It appears Wyoming landowners manage their land for a variety of non-agricultural purposes in addition to livestock production when compared to the larger sample of respondents.



**Figure 4: Average acre estimates for landowners overall and Wyoming landowners regarding questions ACRES1 – ACRES8 or land uses**

Current landowner land use is then juxtaposed with what might become of the lands they owned. Landowners were asked to mark the option that best represents their future plans regarding the land and current characteristics of the land (Table 4). Variable B4 had three potential responses: sold to next generation (1); given to next generation (2); sold to someone outside family (3). Questions B5 and B6 were set up as: yes (1); no (2). Variable B7 was set up as: yes (1); no (2); and do not know (3). Survey results indicated a slightly higher percentage of Wyoming landowners expected to sell their land to the next generation (12.99 percent) as compared to the total sample (9.85 percent), and the majority of respondents (both Wyoming and total sample) plan to give their land to the next generation.

Approximately 32 percent of Wyoming respondents and approximately 28 percent of landowners overall indicated their land borders an area with a housing subdivision on it (see Table 4). This result suggests a greater percentage of landowners in Wyoming have experienced development in the form of subdivisions. It also reveals landowners in Wyoming have less adjacent property, as well as their own properties, in conservation easements.

**Table 4: Frequency of responses for survey questions B4 – B7**

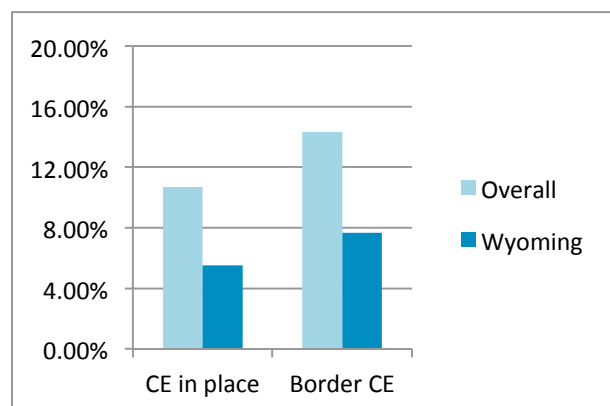
<b>Survey question</b>	<b>Frequency of responses for landowners overall</b>	<b>Frequency of responses for Wyoming landowners</b>
B4: What are your plans for the intergenerational succession of your operation	Sold to next generation – 9.85% Given to next generation – 58.73% Sold outside of family – 21.86%	Sold to next generation – 12.99% Given to next generation – 57.09% Sold outside of family – 20.08%
B5: Does your land currently border an area with a housing subdivision on it?	Yes – 28.07% No – 70.25%	Yes – 31.89% No – 66.73%
B6: Is there currently a conservation easement in place for a parcel on the land you own or manage?	Yes – 10.71% No – 86.23%	Yes – 5.51% No – 91.54%
B7: Does your land currently border land that has a conservation easement in place?	Yes – 14.35% No – 54.42% Don't know – 28.65%	Yes – 7.68% No – 57.48% Don't know – 33.07%

## Part C: Conservation Easements

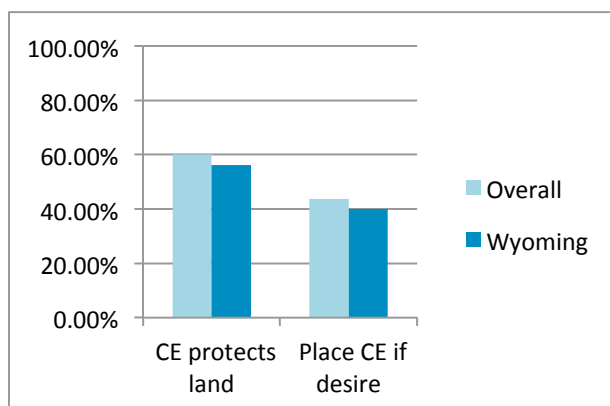
Survey questions B6 and B7 (from the previous section) and questions C3C and C3D can be grouped together and considered “experience with, and knowledge of, conservation easements” questions. These four questions elicited responses from landowners regarding their experiences with conservation easements and their knowledge of easements. Landowners were asked to circle the value best represents their situations and views about conservation easements. Values were labeled 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree). Results are illustrated in Figure 5.

Based upon this data, Wyoming landowners demonstrated less experience with conservation easements compared to overall survey respondents. A lower percentage (approximately 5.5 percent) of responding landowners in Wyoming were identified as having a conservation easement on their land, whereas approximately 11 percent of overall landowners responded that an easement was in place. Similarly, a lower percentage of Wyoming respondents (approximately 8 percent) indicated their land borders property that has a conservation easement in place whereas approximately 14 percent of landowners overall responded their land borders land that has an easement. These results suggest conservation easements have not been implemented as frequently in Wyoming as in Colorado.

Further analysis offers potential insights into the disparity illustrated in Figure 5. Figure 5 displays survey results indicating approximately 56 percent of Wyoming landowners agreed/strongly agreed they know what easements are and they can be used to protect land from development. Figure 6 indicates a greater percentage of total landowners (approximately 60 percent) agreed/strongly agreed with the same statement. Similarly, Figure 6 results indicate approximately 40 percent of Wyoming landowners agreed/strongly agreed they know enough about easements that they could place (or have placed) one on their properties, whereas a greater percentage of overall landowners (approximately 44 percent) agreed/strongly agreed with the identical statement. These results suggest the overall sample of landowners is more likely than Wyoming landowners to have a conservation easement and have more knowledge of easements. It could be landowners in Wyoming view conservation easements as a wedge between their interests and use of their land. They may be concerned their benefits may not be adequately protected from new arrangements concerning their land uses. This may arise, in part, due to incomplete landowner information concerning, or lack of experience with, conservation easements.

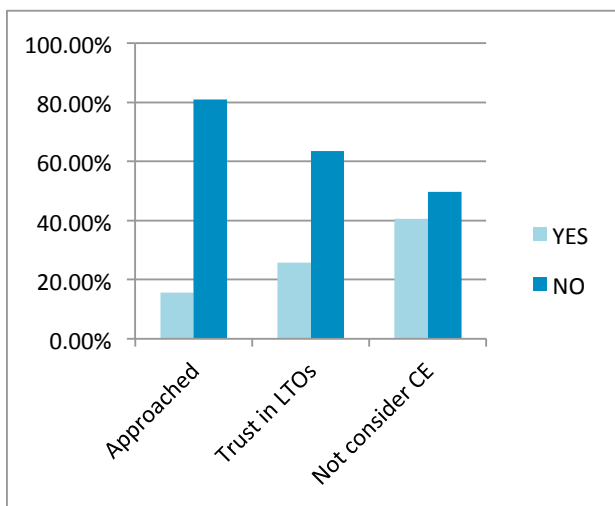


**Figure 5: Frequency of responses for landowners overall and Wyoming landowners to survey questions B6 (current CE in place on property) and B7 (land borders a CE) – all percentages indicate percentage of yes responses**

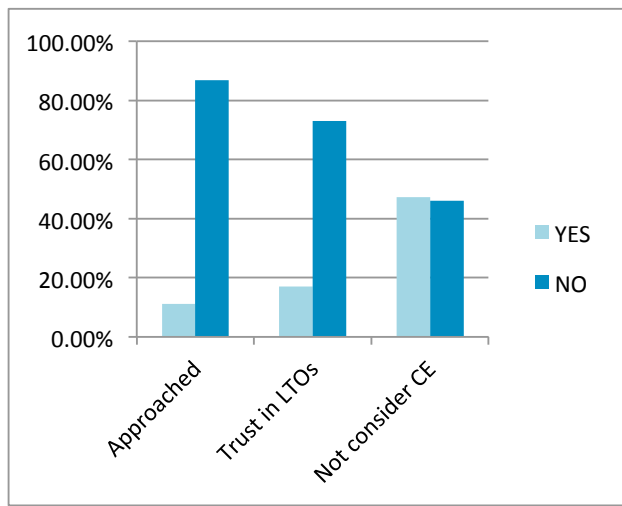


**Figure 6: Frequency of responses for landowners overall and Wyoming landowners to survey questions C3C (knowledge of CEs and that they can protect land from development) and C3D (belief that knowledge of CEs is sufficient enough to have placed one on property if desired) – all percentages indicate percentage of yes responses**

In general, Wyoming landowners showed a low level of willingness to engage in a conservation easement, particularly with respect to the overall survey population. Survey questions C4, C5, and C6 asked landowners to mark the option that best represents their experiences and attitudes regarding conservation easements. Variables C4, C5, and C6 were set up as yes (1) or no (2) questions. Figures 7 and 8 indicate approximately 11 percent of Wyoming landowners and approximately 16 percent of overall landowners responded that they have been approached by a conservation organization about placing an easement on their land. Wyoming landowners also responded less frequently that they have confidence in land trust organizations to protect their interests if they hold their easement; approximately 17 percent of Wyoming landowners responded they trust land trust organizations in comparison to approximately 26 percent of overall landowners (see Figures 7 and 8). Comparatively, more Wyoming landowners (approximately 47 percent) than the overall sample of landowners (approximately 41 percent) responded they would not consider putting a conservation easement on their property (see Figures 7 and 8).



**Figure 7: Frequency of Yes and No responses for landowners overall to survey questions C4, C5, and C6**



**Figure 8: Frequency of Yes and No responses for Wyoming landowners to survey C4, C5, and C6**

**Recall: C4 – respondent has been approached regarding CE placement;  
 C5 – respondent has trust in land trusts to protect his/her interests if CE is established; and  
 C6 – respondent would not consider putting a CE on his/her property**

## Part D: Demographic Information

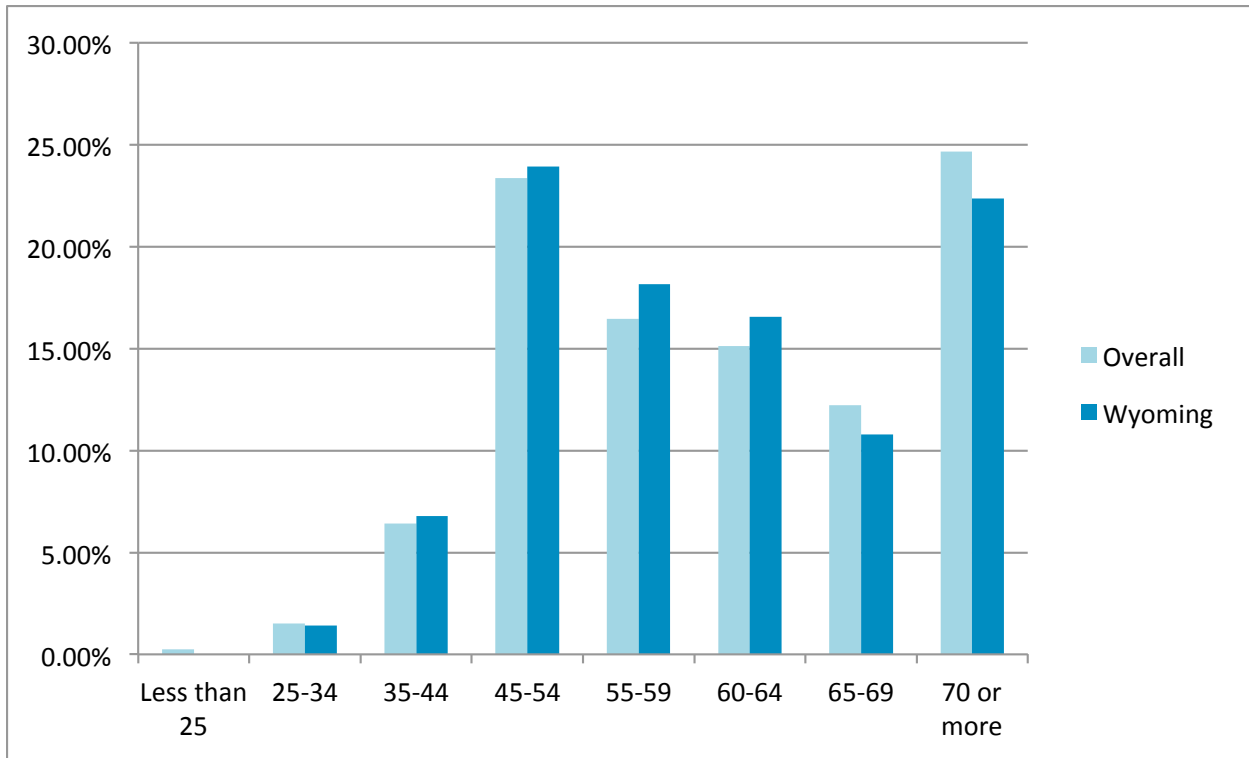
Landowners were asked to respond to demographic questions to ensure the survey sample was representative of the population of agricultural landowners possessing at least 50 acres and receiving \$1,000 in agricultural product sales across Wyoming and Colorado. Regarding gender, the number of years lived in current state of residence, and the age of primary landowner, there was little disparity between Wyoming landowners and landowners overall. The gender survey question was set up as male (1) or female (2). Approximately 80% of responding Wyoming landowners and 81% of responding overall landowners are male (see Table 5). The average number of years a landowner has lived in Wyoming is approximately 51, whereas the average number of years an overall landowner has lived in his or her current state of residence is approximately 50 years (see Table 6). The average age of a Wyoming landowner is 62 years and the average age of an overall landowner is 63 years (see Figure 9).

**Table 5: Gender of landowners overall and Wyoming landowners**

Survey question	Frequency of responses for landowners overall	Frequency of responses for Wyoming landowners
Gender: Primary operator's gender	Male – 80.92% Female – 15.21%	Male – 79.53% Female – 16.54%

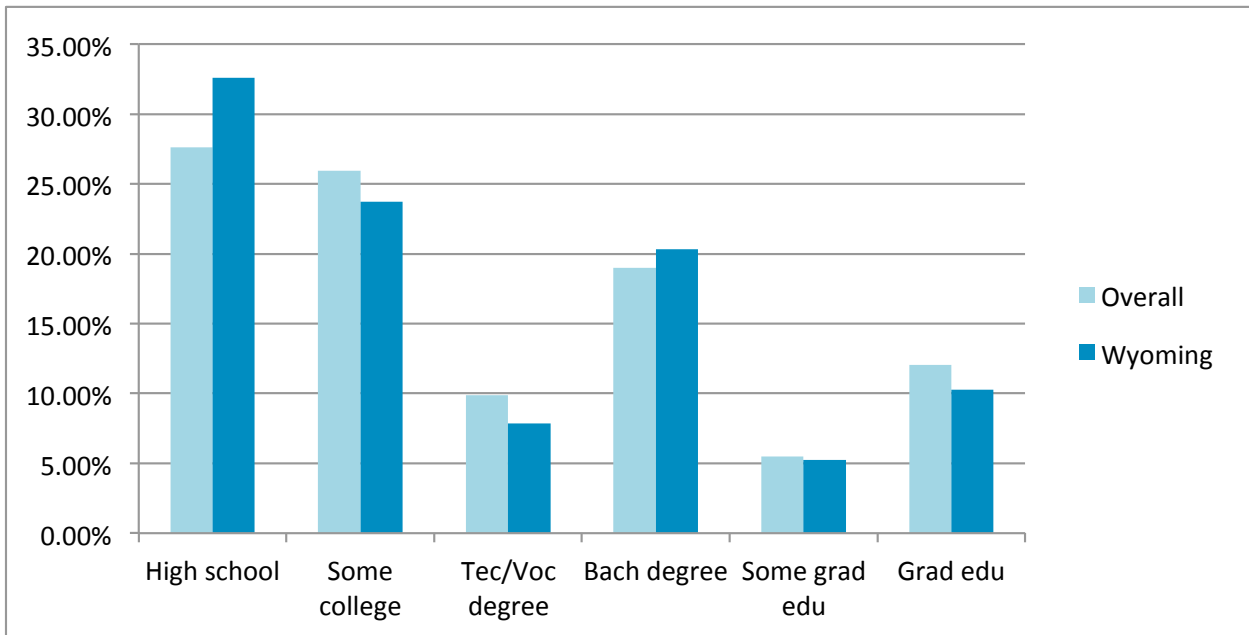
**Table 6: Average years lived in state and frequency of responses for landowners overall and Wyoming landowners**

Survey question	Overall average	Wyoming average	Frequency of responses for landowners overall	Frequency of responses for Wyoming landowners
Years: How many years have you lived in Wyoming or Colorado	50.57 years	50.25 years	0-20 years – 9.14% 21-40 years – 19.47% 41-60 years – 40.88% 61-80 years – 26.55% 81+ years – 3.96%	0-20 years – 8.96% 21-40 years – 19.13% 41-60 years – 43.82% 61-80 years – 23.71% 81+ years – 4.38%



**Figure 9: Frequency of responses to survey question regarding age for landowners overall and Wyoming landowners**

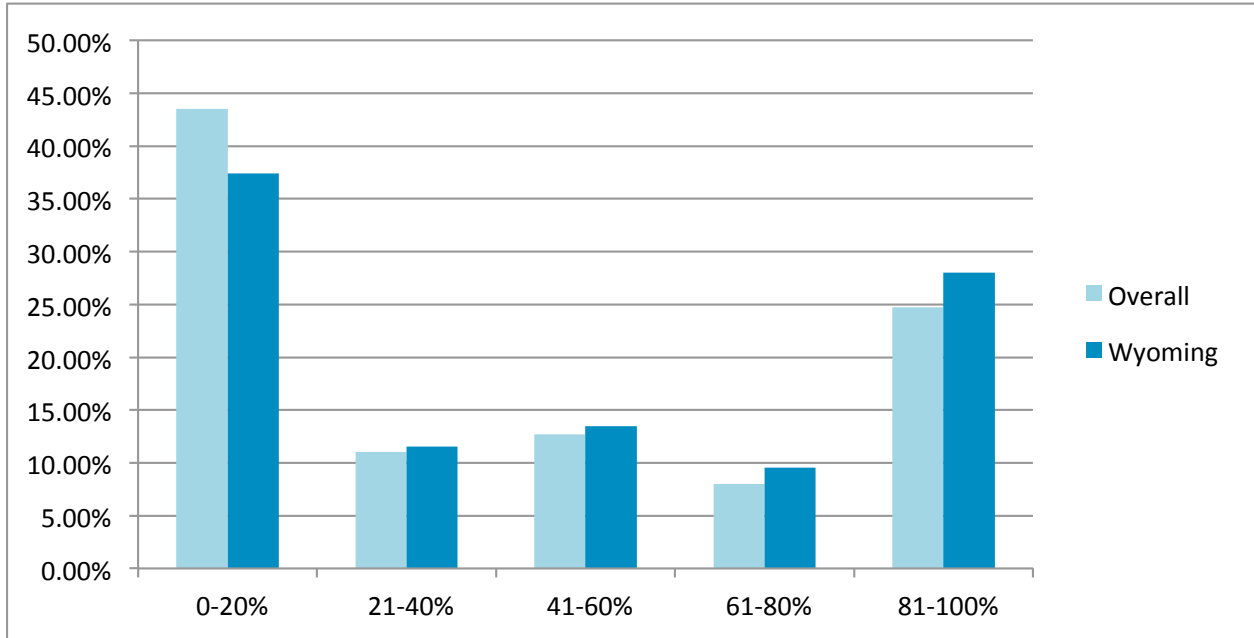
Survey results displayed in Figure 10 revealed the overall group tended to have slightly more percentage of respondents with some college or more education.



**Figure 10: Frequency of responses to survey question regarding education level of landowners overall and Wyoming landowners**

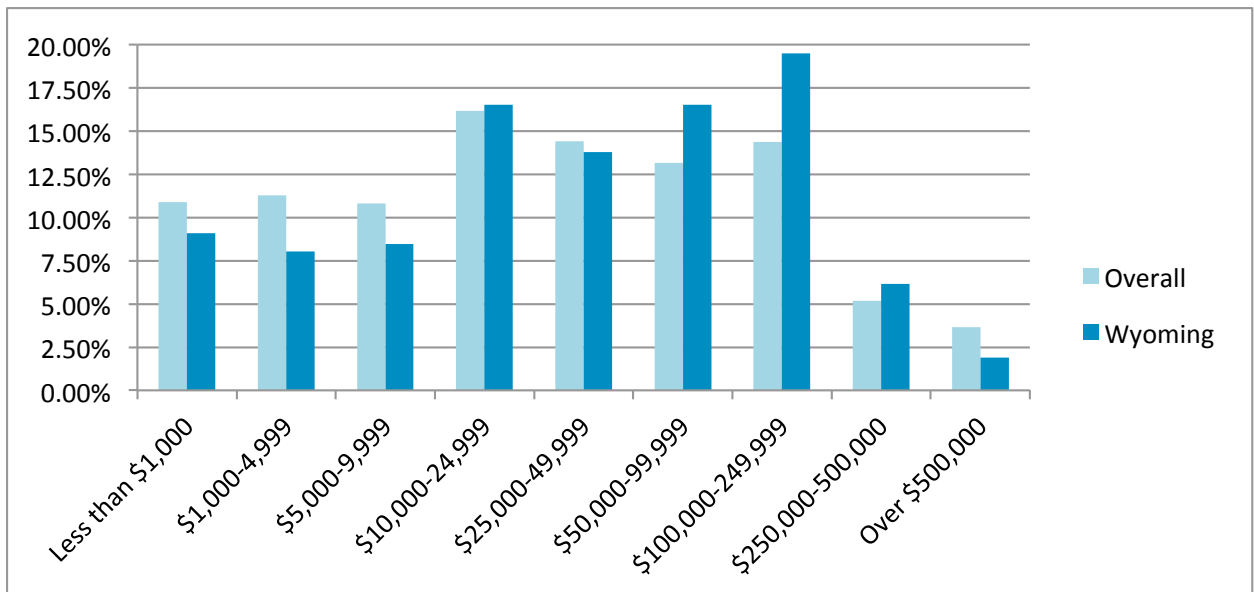


Landowners were asked to indicate what percentage of their incomes come from farming or ranching. Survey results reported in Figure 11 indicate Wyoming landowners earn a higher percentage of their incomes from farming or ranching than landowners overall if one compares those making more than 20 percent of their income from on farm sources. These results are supported by comparing frequency of responses to income percentage categories (see Figure 11).



**Figure 11: Frequency of responses to survey question regarding percentage of household income earned from farming or ranching for landowners overall and Wyoming landowners**

Landowners were asked to indicate their gross agricultural sales for the previous year. Survey results reported in Figure 12 suggest Wyoming landowners earn more in gross agricultural sales than landowners overall for the \$10,000 through the \$500,000 range of gross sales. The overall category tended to have greater sales below \$10,000 and over \$500,000.



**Figure 12: Frequency of responses to survey question regarding previous year's gross agricultural sales for landowners overall and Wyoming landowners**

## Discussion

Conservation easements are one of a number of tools to protect agricultural lands and their associated environmental and cultural amenities. The results here reflect the characteristics and preferences of landowners who may engage in conservation easements. Results indicate Wyoming landowners may be less likely to accept conservation easements than landowners in the overall sample. Results also indicate Wyoming landowners feel strong attachments to the land they own or manage, their land provides excellent habitat and diversity for plants and animals, and they have comparatively less experience with conservation easements than landowners in the overall sample. The remaining observations are split into the importance of the survey findings and how the findings may be applied or useful.

Important points from the results are as follows:

1. Wyoming landowners feel attached to their land and their communities.
2. Wyoming landowners are concerned about development pressures and the threat of a change to their communities' existing social and economic environments.
3. Agricultural landowners in Wyoming believe their land provides habitat to a variety of plant and animal species, and Wyoming landowners acknowledge and wish to protect these habitats.
4. Wyoming landowners have on average relatively less knowledge of conservation easements and their associated benefits than landowners elsewhere.
5. Wyoming landowners have, on average, relatively less trust in land trust organizations.
6. Wyoming landowners earn more from agriculture on average than most categories of the overall landowners surveyed.

The results indicate that differences exist within the preferences, experiences, beliefs, and demographics of Wyoming landowners as compared to landowners in the overall sample. It may then benefit organizations and/or individuals attempting to establish conservation easements in Wyoming to use these results to gain an improved understanding of landowner preferences for easements, and then provide appropriate information to landowners.

Potential policy implications and usefulness of results for public agency and land trust conservation efforts are as follow:

1. Local officials should be aware of their preferences for land conservation and future land uses.
2. The preferences of Wyoming landowners can be used to construct land conservation tools that reflect their objectives and preferences.
3. Policy makers and conservation organizations should be aware landowners may benefit from information about easements as a tool that will achieve habitat protection.
4. In that Wyoming landowners indicate needing more information about conservation easements, conservation organizations should seek to better inform landowners in Wyoming on these topics.
5. Given the lower trust level Wyoming landowners have with land trusts, policy makers and land conservation organizations should again seek to better inform landowners about conservation alternatives, conservation organizations, and what those organizations can and cannot do.
6. Wyoming landowners earn more from agriculture on average than other landowners surveyed. Information regarding potential financial benefits from easements may be useful to agricultural landowners.

## References

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