

# WYOMING

## Wind River Reservation

Federal reservation  
Shoshone and Arapaho  
Fremont and Hot Springs counties, Wyoming

Arapaho Tribe  
P.O. Box 217  
Fort Washakie, WY 82514  
(307) 332-6120  
Fax: 332-7543

Eastern Shoshone Tribe  
P.O. Box 538  
Fort Washakie, WY 82514  
(307) 332-3532  
Fax: 332-3055

Total area	2,268,008 acres
Tribally owned	1,787,914 acres
Federal trust	1,828,540 acres
Other	142,540 acres
Total labor force	1702
High school graduate or higher	62.8%
Bachelor's degree or higher	6.2%
Unemployment rate	32.4%
Per capita income	\$4,340
Total reservation population	21,915
Tribal enrollment	
Arapaho	4,700
Shoshone	2,650

### LOCATION AND LAND STATUS

The Wind River Reservation is Wyoming's only Indian reservation. It covers 2,268,008 acres in the scenic west-central portion of the state, making it the third-largest Indian reservation in the country. The reservation stretches from the northern part of the Owl Creek Mountains on down to Sand Draw in the south. Its eastern boundary begins just west of the community of Shoshone and extends westward to the town of Dubois. The terrain is rugged and mountainous in parts, with significant forest and grazing lands. The reservation, originally spanning over 44 million acres, was established by the Fort Bridger Treaty for the Shoshone Tribe in 1863, who were joined in 1878 by the Arapaho. Land cessions reduced the reservation to its present size.

### CULTURE AND HISTORY

The Eastern Shoshone tribe of the Wind River Reservation migrated out of the Nevada-Utah area and onto the plains around the year 1600. The tribe's native language, Numic, comes from the Uto-Aztec linguistic family. The Northern Arapaho migrated west out of Minnesota onto the Great Plains at approximately the same time.

They descend from the Algonquian linguistic family. While the first Fort Bridger Treaty (1863) set boundaries encompassing an area of over 44 million acres for what was then called the Shoshone Reservation, the second Treaty of Fort Bridger (1868) pared this down to less than 2.8 million acres. In 1874, a government agent persuaded the tribe to sell another half-million acres so that the area could be opened up to gold mining.

In the meantime, the Arapaho tribe had migrated south in the wake of Custer's defeat (which some of their number had participated in), and were eventually promised a reservation near Casper in west-central Wyoming. The government backed away from this promise, however, and forced the tribe onto the Shoshone Reservation in 1876. The two tribes had been traditional enemies, making this forced coalition difficult for quite some time. Since that period, however, the two tribes have jointly ruled the Wind River Reservation, though each has retained its separate identity, culture, and tribal government.

The tribes experienced extreme hardship between 1900 and 1938, as prohibitions of off-reservation hunting, minimal governmental and outdoor investment, meager rationing, and tuberculosis and measles epidemics combined to decimate both the population and the peoples' spirit. After 1938, the Joint Business Council (JBC) received a \$4.4 million settlement for lands ceded north of Wind River. They were also able to reactivate oil, gas, and uranium mining leases and expand their cattle ranching operations. Health conditions improved as well, as effective treatment for tuberculosis became available. During this period of recovery, the two tribes finally began to interact more intensively and productively, though much ambivalence about their forced arrangement remains to this day. An even larger hurdle for the tribes has been overcoming prejudice and exploitation at the hands of local non-native business and political interests. Moreover, unemployment has remained a persistent problem, as Wyoming's economy suffered a sharp downturn during the late 1970s with the collapse of the oil-shale industry. Given these circumstances, the tribes have been remarkably innovative in developing a modest assortment of small businesses on the reservation and have been tenacious in pressing for their share of the oil and gas bounty through a tribal tax on production.

In the face of all these challenges, there has been a concerted effort on the part of both the Shoshone and Arapaho to keep their traditional cultures alive. Language classes at the Wyoming Indian High School, the creation of tribal cultural centers, and an active ceremonial life are just some of the measures taken by the tribes in working toward this end.

### GOVERNMENT

Both the Shoshone and the Arapaho have their own separate General Councils which meet about three times a year. The General Councils are composed of all tribal members 18 years of age and older. Both the Arapaho and the Shoshone tribes are governed by



MINING

The tribes have jointly leased their land for oil and gas production for nearly a century. In late 1978 the Joint Business Council enacted an ordinance imposing a small tax on all oil and gas production on the reservation. Not until 1986 did the tribes begin receiving any revenues from the ordinance, after the U.S. Federal Courts effectively upheld tribal rights to collect such a mineral tax. Since that time, the JBC and the Wind River Tax Commission have collected millions of dollars to support and finance tribal services. Though the fields currently under production are aging and thus diminishing in output, some new gas exploration and drilling of deep wells is planned for 1995. Aside from this, significant deposits of gold were once mined on reservation lands, though little if any gold mining is currently going on.

SERVICES

There is a variety of businesses on the reservation, including the R.V. Greeves Art Gallery, specializing in stone and bronze sculptures, and Warm Valley Arts and Crafts. Additionally, the Shoshone Tribe operates an auto repair business, Morning Star Manor for senior citizens, and the Shoshone Utility Company, a for-profit enterprise. The Arapaho Tribe operates a gas station along with two grocery stores, a laundromat, a printing business, and a truck stop.

TOURISM AND RECREATION

The Shoshone-owned Rocky Acres RV Facility features RV hookups and showers, along with fishing access and permits. Summer fishing and winter snowmobiling are the main revenue-producing recreation activities on the reservation. Tours of the Fort Washakie Historic District are quite popular with visitors. The proximity of the reservation to the Rocky Mountains and the Continental Divide, as well as to Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, places it at the center of one of the country's most enticing tourist areas. The tribes sponsor a number of special events open to the public, including Treaty Recognition Day and Shoshone Indian Days and Rodeo, both in late June.

TRANSPORTATION

The tribes have operated a public transit system since 1989 which serves both off-reservation towns and population centers on the reservation. Its main purpose is to enable tribal members to get to and from their jobs. The system is currently supported through federal and tribal subsidies.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Road access to tribal headquarters at Fort Washakie is provided by U.S Highway 287. Highways 20, 26, and 133 also run through portions of the reservation. Commercial air service is available at the Riverton Regional Airport at the southeast corner of the reservation. Commercial bus lines serve Riverton and Lander, just south of reservation boundaries. Commercial truck lines serve Fort Washakie and other parts of the reservation directly. The primary waterway is the Wind River, which provides water for the BIA irrigation system as well as for fisheries and recreation.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Electricity is provided by the Rural Electrical Cooperative and by Pacific Power and Light. Natural gas is furnished to residential communities by an area distributor, while outlying areas receive propane through local companies. The reservation maintains its own water and sewer systems, with assistance from the IHS and federal grants. Health care is provided through Public Health Service/Indian Health Service clinics at Fort Washakie and Arapaho. There are also several off-reservation hospitals in the area. Additionally, the Shoshone Tribe has just begun participating in the operation of a dialysis center in Lander, 14 miles south of Fort Washakie. The Wyoming Indian High School is located on the reservation, its curriculum focusing in part on traditional languages and culture.



