

## WIND RIVER COALITION: RECOMPETE PLAN

### Executive Summary

The Wind River Coalition’s “Creating a Sustainable, Indigenous-Based Economy in Wind River” Recompete Plan will serve two overlapping eligible geographies in west-central Wyoming – the Riverton Micropolitan Statistical Area, which shares the same footprint as Fremont County, and the Wind River Indian Reservation. The area is abundant in assets, including Indigenous culture, wide open spaces, a thriving agricultural sector, a myriad of tourism and ecotourism opportunities, and a strong spirit of entrepreneurship. Although it is located adjacent to the wealthiest county in the country, the designated service area has a Prime Age Employment Gap of 5.21 and lags behind the state of Wyoming and the nation across several economic indicators. Even within the Wind River region itself, data reveals deepening inequities where populations of Indigenous people are more concentrated.

The design of the Recompete Plan is based on the Wind River Coalition’s Indigenous Sovereignty Framework, which creates a path for Indigenous people to reclaim their sovereignty and rebuild equitable economies based on their cultural values. The Recompete Plan is composed of nine component projects that strategically align the Indigenous Sovereignty Framework with regional and statewide economic development initiatives, while leveraging current market trends in order to channel investments into underserved communities within the designated service area. The component projects each dismantle institutionalized systemic barriers that prevent Indigenous communities from building thriving economies. Implemented collectively, this group of cohesive projects complement and mutually reinforce each other, together closing the prime age employment gap, raising per-capita wages, and promoting long-term economic development.

### Understanding Wyoming’s Wind River Region

#### Abundant Assets

The “Creating a Sustainable, Indigenous-Based Economy in Wind River” Recompete Plan will serve the tribal area of the Wind River Indian Reservation and the local labor market of the Riverton Micropolitan Statistical Area, which shares the same footprint as Fremont County in Wyoming. According to the Recompete Eligibility Mapping Tool, the designated service area has a Prime Age Employment Rate Gap of 5.21. These two overlapping geographies, located in west-central Wyoming, span an area roughly the size of Vermont. With the west side of the service area adjacent to the Bridger Teton National Forest and in close proximity to national treasures such as the Grand Tetons and Yellowstone National Park, the region is abundant in assets, including:

**Indigenous Culture** – Home to the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes, the Wind River region is rich in unique culture, art, and traditions. Second only to “Yellowstone,” the “Wind River Indian Reservation” is one of the most searched terms by travelers wanting to visit Wyoming, demonstrating the intense desire to learn and experience Indigenous culture by people from around the globe.

**Land Base** – Comprising about 9,500 square miles, the area is as large or larger than several states in the country. With a 180,000-acre conservation area established on the Wind River Indian Reservation in the 1930’s there are large swaths of pristine, untouched land and breathtaking natural beauty. Even outside of the conservation area, much of the land is undeveloped, making this one of the region’s largest untapped resources.

**Agriculture** – Agriculture is Wyoming’s third largest economic sector, contributing \$1.7 billion to the state’s economy. According to a study conducted by Central Wyoming College, four core industries – food, beef, equine, and agritourism – can have a catalytic impact to transform communities to be more vibrant and to attract and retain tourists and entrepreneurs.

**Tourism & Ecotourism** – The Wind River area is comprised of millions of acres of wilderness, thousands of miles of streams and rivers, hundreds of lakes, and robust wildlife populations. The region boasts some of the best fly fishing and hunting in the world, along with hiking, mountain biking, rafting, and camping. At the recent Intertribal Tourism Summit, representatives recognized the opportunity to develop an ecotourism strategy to leverage these natural resources while carefully protecting them.

**Entrepreneurship** – It is a well-known fact that small businesses are mighty economic drivers and generate 64% of all new jobs in the United States every year. Revealing a promising trend, over 10% of the workforce in the designated service area, compared to 6% nationally, is self-employed. This fact demonstrates an eagerness and determination by the residents of this area to generate income through nontraditional methods.

#### Contrasting Demographic & Economic Indicators

The “Creating a Sustainable, Indigenous-Based Economy in Wind River” Recompete Plan’s service area has a population of about 40,000 people, 20% of which are of Indigenous descent. The area presents a unique mix of wealthy, prosperous sectors contrasted with severely distressed, poverty-stricken sectors. Fremont County’s two major towns are Riverton, with a population of about 10,500, and Lander, with a population of 7,500. Although Riverton is actually located within the boundaries of the Wind River Indian Reservation, the town was ceded in 1905 by an Act of Congress and is not considered part of the Reservation. The town of Lander is located a few miles outside of the Reservation boundaries. Substantial economic and infrastructure investments have been channeled into each of the towns, resulting in a full range of transportation, education, housing, dining, shopping, and banking opportunities for residents, as well as several lodging and entertainment options for visitors. The strategic efforts focused on these two towns have resulted in growth in population, income, and businesses, with decreases in unemployment and poverty levels.

While Riverton and Lander have experienced economic growth over the last several decades, Fremont County, as a whole (which includes the Wind River Indian Reservation), lags behind the state of Wyoming and the United States on various economic and demographic indicators. Table 1, containing the latest Census data, paints a picture of the level of economic distress and quality of life residents in the Recompete Plan’s service area are currently experiencing.

**Table 1: Comparing Designated Service Area to Wyoming and the United States**

INDICATOR	UNITED STATES	WYOMING	FREMONT COUNTY (INCLUDING WIND RIVER)
<b>Indigenous Population</b>	1.1%	2.4%	20.8%
<b>Population Under 18</b>	21.7%	22.3%	24.8%
<b>Median Age</b>	39.0	39.1	38.9
<b>Average Family Size</b>	3.11	2.91	3.35
<b>Median Household Income</b>	\$74,755	\$70,042	\$60,030
<b>Per Capita Income</b>	\$41,804	\$38,114	\$30,414
<b>Poverty</b>	12.6%	11.8%	13.9%
<b>Bachelor’s Degree or Higher</b>	35.7%	29.6%	24.3%
<b>Employment Rate</b>	60.3%	62.5%	56.2%
<b>Government Workers</b>	14.3%	22.4%	29.2%
<b>Homeownership Rate</b>	65.2%	72.7%	70.7%
<b>Median Housing Value</b>	\$320,900	\$292,300	\$236,700
<b>Disabled Population</b>	13.4%	14.7%	14.7%
<b>Without Health Care Coverage</b>	8.0%	11.5%	19.4%

Although 65% of the service area’s population lives on the 2.2-million-acre Wind River Indian Reservation, the region is rural and remote. Few significant economic investments have been made into the Reservation since it was established about 150 years ago. As a result, the three main population centers of the Reservation – Fort Washakie, Arapahoe, and Ethete – all small towns with around 1,500 residents, are experiencing declining populations, have underdeveloped infrastructure, limited housing options, and few local businesses. Many residents shop and work in border towns (Riverton and Lander), creating an economic drain. Greater levels of economic distress are disproportionately experienced in communities with higher levels of Indigenous populations. Table 2 below drills down on these specific geographies and compares them to the broader region with the most recent Census data. For reference, Census Tract 9401 covers the entire western half of the Wind River Indian Reservation. Fort Washakie is where the Eastern Shoshone Tribe is headquartered, and Ethete is where the Northern Arapaho Tribe is headquartered.

**Table 2: Examining Segments of the Service Area with Higher % of Indigenous Populations**

INDICATOR	FREMONT COUNTY	CENSUS TRACT 9401	FORT WASHAKIE	ETHETE
<b>% Indigenous Population</b>	20.8%	81.2%	90.7%	90.6%
<b>Population Under 18</b>	24.8%	29.6%	34.0%	35.4%
<b>Median Age</b>	38.9	33.1	31.8	26.7
<b>Average Family Size</b>	3.35	4.52	4.79	5.61
<b>Median Household Income</b>	\$60,030	\$59,286	\$40,000	\$80,000
<b>Per Capita Income</b>	\$30,414	\$22,722	\$17,814	\$16,713
<b>Poverty</b>	13.9%	21.6%	27.1%	15.6%
<b>Bachelor’s Degree or Higher</b>	24.3%	12.7%	10.1%	9.5%
<b>Employment Rate</b>	56.2%	45.8%	45.1%	45.0%
<b>Government Workers</b>	29.2%	65.2%	72.9%	71.6%
<b>Homeownership Rate</b>	70.7%	73.3%	61.9%	65.4%
<b>Median Housing Value</b>	\$236,700	\$113,800	\$160,700	\$116,300
<b>Disabled Population</b>	14.7%	15.0%	12.7%	9.5%
<b>Without Health Care Coverage</b>	19.4%	32.9%	34.1%	38.6%

While there have been some more recent economic development initiatives, sustainable growth on the Wind River Indian Reservation has remained elusive due to the systemic economic barriers put in place by historic federal policies.

### A Historical Context

The Indigenous tribes of the Great Plains region were once a self-sufficient, nomadic people who operated within dynamic, thriving economic systems based on complex trade routes spanning the North American continent. Today, the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes, although historic enemies, both reside on the Wind River Indian Reservation. Wind River is the only reservation in the country that is home to two tribes. Reservation policies disrupted Indigenous trade ecosystems, while trust land policies and expropriation of land and natural resources continued to strip Indigenous communities of assets. Under the guise of treaties, tribal members were forced into dependence upon the federal government for basic necessities, such as housing, food, education, and health care services. The delivery of these substandard programs has resulted in overcrowding, health disparities, and generational trauma that has kept Indigenous people in a state of oppression, fighting for the right to survive.

### Wind River Today

The consequences of these structurally-induced disparities, still prevalent in today's modern society, are evidenced through several data points. Table 2 above reveals several economic inequities experienced by Indigenous people:

- Substantially higher rates of unemployment, over 10% more
- Poverty up to double the rates of non-Indigenous communities
- Generally lower income, sometimes up to 33% lower
- Approximately 50% reduced value of homes, typically a family's greatest asset

Table 2 also shows how lack of access to capital and limited lending to small, emerging, and non-traditional businesses has effectively stunted the growth of the private sector. Nearly three-quarters of all employed persons in Fort Washakie work for the government. A deeper examination of these issues, historic root causes, and solutions for today's Indigenous communities, is presented in the component project narratives of this application.

### Introducing the Wind River Coalition

Led by the Wind River Development Fund, an Indigenous-led nonprofit community loan fund, the Wind River Coalition aims to reverse the trends described above and create a more equitable economy in the Recompete Plan's service area. The Coalition's unique strength is bringing diverse voices, resources, and knowledge to the table to foster cross-sector collaboration and increase economic impacts equitably throughout the service area. The Coalition has engaged a diverse cross section of over 50 partners from tribal, public, private, and philanthropic sectors that are uniquely poised to develop new and innovative solutions.

### An Equitable Governance Structure

The Coalition is reorganizing traditional systems to create an Indigenous-led equitable economic development strategy where benefits are experienced by all community members. A thorough explanation of this strong, effective, and resilient governance structure is provided in the Wind River Coalition Governance component project narrative.

### A Model for Sustainable, Indigenous-Based Economic Development

The design of the Wind River Coalition’s proposed Recompete Plan is based on the Indigenous Sovereignty Framework, which not only reduces the root causes of the prime-age employment gap in the designated service area, but also is a path for Indigenous people to reclaim their sovereignty and rebuild an economy based on their cultural values.

### Indigenous Sovereignty Framework



Developed by Wind River Development Fund, and embraced by the Wind River Coalition, the Indigenous Sovereignty Framework shown above is a multi-dimensional holistic model for economic and community development. This layered approach, essential to addressing the complex issues and unique circumstances experienced by Indigenous populations, impacts three dimensions:

**Integrated Assets.** While today’s modern economy views environmental assets as a means to profitability, Indigenous people think of themselves as one – or integrated – with these assets. Revitalizing and strengthening these assets is foundational to healing historical trauma and reclaiming Indigenous sovereignty. Indigenous culture is the north star in the sovereignty framework, instilling hope within underserved geographies.

**Equitable Systems.** Throughout history, as federal policies continued to undermine Indigenous sovereignty, traditional systems were dismantled and forcibly replaced with programs designed by Congress. Through the sovereignty framework, these systems are redefined through an Indigenous lens. To achieve sustainable change, it is essential to build equitable systems that extend to every end of the community.

**Human Capital Investments.** At the center of everything in the Indigenous Sovereignty Framework is the concept of past and future generations. The wisdom of past generations must

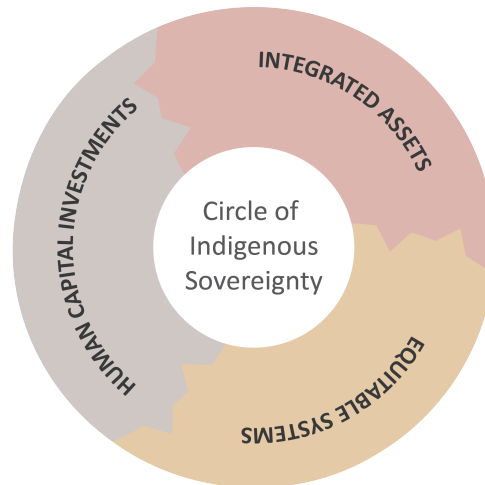
guide today’s choices. Once part of a healthy and thriving society, Indigenous ancestors knew how to leverage integrated assets in a mindful way and build equitable systems. Potential consequences for the next seven generations must also be carefully examined with every decision.

### A Self-Sustaining Cycle: The Circle of Indigenous Sovereignty

Each layer of the Indigenous Sovereignty Framework is connected to the other. When improvement is realized in one dimension, it strengthens the others. Working within the three layers of the Indigenous Sovereignty Framework creates a self-sustaining feedback loop, each layer gaining strength from the other in perpetuity. For example, revitalizing Indigenous culture through the restoration of integrated assets sets a foundation upon which equitable systems can be built. With access to equitable systems, individual community members experience personal transformations. Stronger individuals and families are better equipped to nurture integrated assets, and the circular pattern continues moving toward true Indigenous sovereignty.

Members of Wind River Development Fund believe they have been led to an apex point with the wisdom of seven generations behind them and the hope of seven generations before them. The Recompete Plan is a jumping off point to think big, be bold, reclaim Indigenous sovereignty, inspire a new future, create hope, and change lives. As one Coalition member put it:

*“Our ancestors didn’t fight so hard to survive to live in mediocrity. At some point, we need to fight to live the way we were intended to live.”*








### Component Projects

The “Creating a Sustainable, Indigenous-Based Economy in Wind River” Recompete Plan is comprised of nine component projects that strategically align the Indigenous Sovereignty Framework with regional and statewide economic development initiatives, while leveraging current market trends in order to channel investments into underserved communities within the designated service area. The component projects each dismantle institutionalized systemic barriers that prevent Indigenous communities from building thriving economies. Implemented collectively, this group of cohesive projects complement and mutually reinforce each other (as explained in the Circle of Indigenous Sovereignty above), together closing the prime age employment gap, raising per-capita wages, and promoting long-term economic development.

The table below provides a high-level overview of the proposed component projects by indicating the primary Indigenous Sovereignty Framework focus area in the left column and then project name, requested amount, project lead, brief description, and key outcomes in the

right column. Also included is an iconographic guide to demonstrate how each project is braided into the other sectors of the Indigenous Sovereignty Framework.

CULTURE	<p><b>Eastern Shoshone Cultural Center   \$9,750,000</b>  <i>Eastern Shoshone Tribe</i></p> <p>Development of a 7.55-acre site and construction of a new 14,591 square foot cultural center that will directly support 6 full-time and 8 part-time jobs, as well as the establishment or expansion of 15-20 ancillary businesses resulting in approximately 25 full-time jobs.</p>
	
	<p><b>Tribal Buffalo Center   \$9,750,000</b>  <i>Wind River Tribal Buffalo Initiative</i></p> <p>Development of a 4.29-acre site and construction of a new 14,441 square foot buffalo museum that will directly support 15 full-time and 6 part-time good jobs, as well as the establishment or expansion of 3-5 ancillary businesses resulting in approximately 5-10 good jobs.</p>
	
	<p><b>Culture Centers Incubation   \$ 2,209,120</b>  <i>Wind River Development Fund</i></p> <p>Implementation of an incubation program for the Eastern Shoshone Cultural Center and the Tribal Buffalo Center, resulting in the creation of 7 new full-time good jobs.</p>
	
	<p><b>Bringing Ecotourism to Wind River   \$6,500,000</b>  <i>Eastern Shoshone Tribe</i></p> <p>Development of a 3.53 acre-site and construction of an ecotourism complex comprised of a 5,915 square foot museum and administrative offices and a 7,200 square foot storage facility. The project will create or retain 16 full-time good jobs, as well as establish or expand 3-5 ancillary businesses, resulting in the creation or retainment of approximately 5-10 good jobs.</p>
	
LAND	<p><b>Creating a Path to Land Sovereignty   \$1,200,000</b>  <i>Wind River Development Fund</i></p> <p>Development of an innovative model that will support Indigenous communities in overcoming barriers to trust land status, access to capital, and limited master planning so that they may implement leading, highly impactful economic development strategies. The project will result in the establishment of 3-5 new businesses and the creation or retainment of approximately 5-10 good jobs.</p>
	

<b>FOOD</b>	<p><b>Growing Resilient Food Systems   \$4,200,000</b>  <i>Wind River Food Sovereignty Project</i></p> <p>Will expand a business accelerator program to build the capacity of and create additional market access points for small-scale ag producers. The project itself will create or retain 10 full-time good jobs, as well as support the start-up or expansion of at least 80 Indigenous-owned ag operations.</p>
<b>HEALTH</b>	<p><b>Building a Healthier Workforce   \$3,000,000</b>  <i>Eastern Shoshone Tribe</i></p> <p>Expansion of targeted health services to ages 25-54 specifically related to diabetes and substance abuse, resulting in the creation of 6 full-time good jobs for project implementation and increased employment or income for at least 500 patients.</p>
<b>HUMAN CAPITAL</b>	<p><b>Investing in Human Capital   \$5,000,000</b>  <i>Central Wyoming College</i></p> <p>Creation of pathways for workers, ages 25-54, to access good jobs by expanding a strategic group of educational programs with wraparound services into underserved areas, resulting in the graduation of 772 students who are ready to enter the workforce.</p>
<b>GOVERNANCE</b>	<p><b>Wind River Coalition Governance   \$5,390,880</b>  <i>Wind River Development Fund</i></p> <p>Creation of an equitable governance structure and a robust system to manage Recompete Plan activities and ensure performance measures are on track for success, resulting in the creation or retention of 11 full-time good jobs for project implementation and the addition of 20 new good jobs in the region.</p>

### Planned Achievements

Through an integrated, “bottom up” approach the Wind River Coalition’s Recompete Plan will leverage energy of local talent, networks, institutions, and ecosystems to create renewed economic opportunity in communities that have for too long been forgotten. Although there will be significant progress in closing the prime age employment gap, the achievements will go beyond the job numbers. Economic inequities will be leveled. Impacts will be wide reaching, shifting fundamentally the way assets are integrated into economic development strategies, and redesigning systems with equity-based principles – all for the benefit of future generations.

### Data Collection

The Wind River Coalition has integrated a comprehensive management and performance measurement strategy into the Recompete Plan to ensure component projects are implemented within specified timeframes and budgets and that overall objectives are achieved.



The group will work with a professional evaluator to establish streamlined data collection, management, and analysis procedures throughout the project. Depending on outputs and outcomes that are being monitored, data will be collected through various methods, including stakeholder and employer surveys, participant sign-in sheets and surveys, service contracts, published documents, revenue or financial reports, and other custom localized reports on income, employment, and job gains.

### Outcomes & Outputs

By the end of the five-year project period, the Recompete Plan will produce the following **outputs**:

- Complete construction of three facilities in the tourism or ecotourism sectors.
- Create an economic development toolbox that will provide critical information to entrepreneurs or other economic development initiatives.
- Grow the local foods sector through agriculture training of 800 individuals and creation of additional market access points and distribution systems.
- Improve the health of approximately 1,000 people in the prime age workforce.
- Graduate 772 students from various education, certification, or degree programs in the food, health care, and tourism sectors.
- Create a robust system to manage the Recompete Plan activities.
- Build organizational capacity of Coalition partners by implementing an incubation program for two of the tourist attractions and two food sector entities and delivering targeted support services to five project leads.
- Conduct annual evaluations of the Recompete plan and component projects.

This will result in the following **outcomes**:

- Create or retain 71 full-time and 14 part-time good jobs for project implementation.
- Increase per capita wages by offering employment at rates higher than the current average per capita wages in the immediate area.
- Establish, expand, or support 104-115 businesses that will create or retain approximately 140-160 good jobs through multiplier effects.
- At least 540 students will connect with good jobs in the service area.
- At least 500 diabetes or substance abuse patients will increase employment or income.
- At least 15 Reservation-based leaders will build professional skills.
- Publish a best practices manual for Indigenous-led economic development.

By capturing a modest portion of tourism activity in the region, the Recompete plan will achieve growth beyond the project period, resulting in \$147-\$189 million of economic activity and the creation of 1,570-2,005 jobs. The component projects will lay the foundation for future economic growth – on the macro level through predevelopment, economic planning, and systems change; on the intermediate level through leadership development and capacity building; and on the micro level through shifts in mindset, educational attainment, and adaptation of healthier practices.

## Evolution of the Wind River Recompete Plan

### Commitments & Complimentary Activities

The Wind River Coalition has significantly increased regional coordination and planning activities between Phase I and Phase II of the Recompete Competition. The Coalition has facilitated over 70 meetings with nearly 50 tribal leaders, policy makers, institutions, funders, nonprofit organizations, other partners, employers, and community members to deepen the vision and build bridges between entities across the service area. The seven distinct project areas identified in Phase I evolved into nine grant applications. Still maintaining the original strategic direction of the Recompete Plan, the projects were divided for logistical reasons to ensure streamlined management, implementation, and long-term sustainability. Upon notice of the Phase I success, the Wind River Coalition launched an aggressive fundraising campaign and so far, has secured **\$550,000** in unrestricted funds to implement a Phase II award.

### Risk Mitigation Strategies

The challenges associated with implementing a large investment, such as a \$50 million Recompete Plan award, have become clearer. The Coalition has taken this opportunity to formulate critical risk mitigation strategies and ensure the project success.

**Intertribal Conflict** – As discussed in the narratives, the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho are historic enemies that have been forced into a shared geographic footprint. With bits of animosity remaining today, the Coalition has been deliberate in equally engaging both tribes. With utmost respect for their sovereignty, the Coalition welcomes their unique participation at levels best suited to their current circumstances.

**Existing and Potential Opposition** – The Coalition has recognized opposition to systems-change initiatives. Operating with transparency, openly communicating, and providing opportunity for feedback and engagement is how this will be overcome. Considering the five-year term of the Recompete Plan, leadership will continue to offer and be open to new partnerships that strengthen the Coalition and ensure an inclusive process.

**Investment Trends** – To date, economic investments have been concentrated in non-Indigenous towns within the Recompete service area. Less than a half of a percent of funding deployed by philanthropic foundations is dedicated to Indigenous communities within the U.S. Through their fundraising campaign, the Wind River Coalition has encountered hesitancy to invest in Indigenous communities. Reversing this trend will not happen overnight, but the Coalition is committed to this cause. Fundraising strategies designed to reach more and new funding sources, change mindsets, and attract capital to underserved communities will be carried out.

## Equity, Climate, and Environment

An explanation of how equity, climate, and environmental considerations are embedded into the Wind River Coalition's "Creating a Sustainable, Indigenous-Based Economy in Wind River" Recompete Plan and all of its component projects is in the Wind River Coalition Governance project narrative.