

Wyo still a place of discovery

Exploration — both outward and
inward — must coexist
for good of the state

The recent “opal rush” in Fremont County reminds us once again that Wyoming is truly a place of discovery.

Earlier this month, officials with the Wyoming State Geological Survey announced the discovery of a 34-pound opal and offered maps showing the site. Dozens of would-be opal prospectors, many of them from Colorado, headed for the Granite Mountains in central Wyoming. And while opals have garnered the most attention recently, they’re far from being the only gems out there. The WSGS Web site notes that 40 diamond deposits are found in a district south of Laramie, and have yielded 130,000 diamonds, including some bigger than 28 carats.

There’s still gold glittering in the historic mining areas around South Pass, and fossils to be found around Green River. There’s rubies, sapphires and jade in other parts of the state, too.

Of course, the biggest “finds” these days involve natural gas development. They’re reaping windfalls for developers — and for the rest of the state, through mineral royalties and severance taxes.

There’s yet another kind of discovery, though, and it’s as old as time and new every day. It’s the kind of discovery that happens when someone ponders the badlands of Adobe Town, the rocky peaks of the Wind River Range, the snow-capped Tetons or a star-filled sky over the Shirley Basin. Such “finds” are not just outward ones, but opportunities for introspection and self-discovery. And they’re worth every bit as much as the gems one can carry home in a bag.

Federal land managers are often put in the awkward position of weighing the value of one type of discovery against the other. Whether it involves dozens of opal prospectors on sage- and rock-covered hills or the prospect of thousands of gas wells in the Great Divide area, our land managers need to respect both types of discovery, and ensure that one doesn’t happen at the expense of the other.