Oil companies built “camps” next to their wells to house employees. Some camps developed into towns with businesses, civic institutions, and entertainment. The Midwest Refining Company turned Home Camp into the respectable company town of Midwest, which survives independently today with rows of identical houses, playing fields, and community buildings. Nearby Edgerton provided the nightlife that Midwest lacked, and its good eats still draw crowds.

In the early years, Salt Creek oil wells flowed naturally—some of them being gushers. By 1924, however, underground pressure decreased, and wells had to be pumped. To power the pumps, a massive, gas-fired, steam-turbine electric plant was built near Midwest. Salt Creek was one of the first and largest electrified fields in the U.S. Still coaxing oil from century-old wells, Salt Creek remains a leader today as the world's largest carbon-dioxide flooding operation.

While the region's first oil strike dates to 1889, 1908 marks the gusher that attracted thousands of prospectors and jobseekers, resulting in Wyoming's first oil boom. By the 1920s, Salt Creek was producing its maximum output, making it one of the most important oilfields in the U.S. Its oil was even shipped to Europe. Connecting Salt Creek to Casper and the nation were many pipelines, a railroad, and a paved highway that still stretches north from Casper along Interstate-25 and Highway 259.

Located in a mineral-rich region called the Powder River Basin, Salt Creek and Teapot Dome oilfields are classic “anticlines.” They are hills that are flat on top where impermeable shale is ringed by an escarpment of soft, porous sandstone, a remnant of what eroded from the top of the domes. Geologists know that oil and gas accumulate under anticlines. You can drill anywhere in the Salt Creek field and hit oil.

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Visible from Highway 259 is the outcropping known as Teapot Rock, named for its shape in years past. Its namesakes are the Teapot Dome Oilfield, which neighbors Salt Creek on the southeast, and the Teapot Dome Scandal, which emotionally charged the nation during the 1920s. This event led to the fall of President Warren G. Harding’s administration and placed his Secretary of the Interior, Albert Fall, in prison for accepting bribes and illegally leasing Navy property. The scandal nearly caused a Democratic victory in 1924.
Black Gold Byway takes visitors through the Salt Creek Oilfield and alongside Shannon and Teapot Dome oilfields. The intertwined development of these fields spurred Casper's growth and the founding of Wyoming's energy industry. Known for many years as "the Greatest Light Oil Field in the World," Salt Creek launched Wyoming onto the national scene of energy producers. Meanwhile, Teapot Dome shook the nation with the biggest political scandal of its time and has impacted corporate law since the 1920s.

Of greatest significance to the local community, however, is Salt Creek's social history, still much alive in the memories of residents. Many of their families moved to this area in response to the oil boom in the early 1900s. Although only about 600 people today live in the two oilfield towns of Midwest and Edgerton, in the 1920s–30s the field supported 10,000 or more residents in eight towns and hundreds of camps. Serviced by a railroad and highway, the towns had shops, banks, theaters, dance halls, a heated swimming pool, tennis courts, ball fields, eateries, hotels, community halls, local newspapers, an American Legion Clubhouse, libraries, schools, car dealerships, garages—and, of course, saloons, gambling houses, and brothels. The wind-swept sage prairie seen today belies the lively society that flourished here from 1908 to 1929.

Black Gold Byway belongs to the Wyoming Historic Mine Trail and Byway Program, which was created in 2005 by the Wyoming legislature to identify and designate historic mine locations and trails within the state. The program objectives are: 1) to provide a precise history of mineral development in Wyoming; 2) to interpret the role of mining and minerals in the development of Wyoming's economy; 3) to identify and describe Wyoming's mining and mineral development heritage.

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See beyond the windblown sage, jack rabbits, and few remaining pump jacks of the Salt Creek Oilfield to the bustling community of 10,000 people that used to call this now sparsely inhabited land “home.” This rich field made an impact of historic proportions on the economy and society of Wyoming, and its century-old wells continue to produce oil today.