10th Biennial Northern Rockies Conservation Symposium

Formerly the Jackson Hole Wildlife Symposium

Thursday, April 30, 2026
Center for the Arts, Jackson WY

NORTHERN ROCKIES
CONSERVATION
COOPERATIVE

Quicktalk Presentation Abstracts & Biographies

Moderator Biographies

Cameron “Cami” Burke | Program Coordinator, Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative

Cameron “Cami” earned a B.A in Environmental Studies from Boston College in 2024. Her senior honors thesis examined barriers to utility-scale renewable energy development for Tribal Nations in the western United States. In the winter of 2025, Cami served as an AmeriCorps member with Teton Science Schools (TSS), supporting both TSS’s Field Education and the Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative (NRCC). She is thrilled to return to NRCC as Program Coordinator, where she plays a key role in planning the 10th Biennial Northern Rockies Conservation Symposium and supports a range of programmatic, partnership, and organizational initiatives.

Mike Tercek | Research Associate, Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative | Founder, Walking Shadow Ecology

Mike Tercek is the founder of Walking Shadow Ecology, a scientific consulting company based in Gardiner, Montana. In the past, his projects focused on landscape-level plant ecology, rare plant species, and trophic cascades. His recent work includes forecasts of climate change impacts, big data problems, and data visualization. He holds a B.A. in Philosophy and a Ph.D. in Biology.

Quicktalks Session 1

Building Networks for Conservation

12:45 - 2:20 p.m. MT

Quicktalks Session 2

Building Networks for Conservation

2:40 - 4:15 p.m. MT

Session 1: *Adapting to a Changing Democracy*

The Future of the American West

Robert Frodeman | Independent Researcher

Our image of the American West is of a place of rugged, unending landscapes and boundless opportunities. But we are learning that the land is more fragile and resources more finite than popular perceptions acknowledge. A book I recently co-edited, titled A Watershed Moment, consists of a series of essays that discuss the growing tensions between a culture rooted in economic growth and personal freedom and the ecological, economic, and social constraints represented by community values and the land itself. Each chapter focuses on a place and a problem, in towns large and small and across river drainages and animal migration routes. The authors explore zoom towns and jammed roads, conservation easements and rewilding beaver, second homes and housing shortages, ranchland management and ungulate behavior, overtourism and environmental decline, wildfire, drought, and climate change. This brief talk will discuss the overarching theme of the volume that links all these essays: the idea of limit. Having long assumed endless space and resources, the American West must now contend with constraints both physical and cultural in nature. How do we navigate this new reality? Water is the most obvious example. Drought is forcing changes in the Colorado River Compact, and the State of Arizona is flirting with limiting residential construction because of a lack of groundwater. But similar points hold for wildfire and for tourism: until last week, Rocky Mountain and Arches National Parks require a timed entry permit much of the year, and at Zion the Angel's Landing hike now involves entering a lottery. The question is whether we can adjust our stories to harmonize with the social and environmental conditions of a new era.

ROBERT "BOB" FRODEMAN

Robert Frodeman writes on environmental philosophy and public policy, the theory and practice of interdisciplinarity, and the future of the university. He has held academic positions at the University of North Texas, the University of Colorado, and the Colorado School of Mines. He is the author and/or editor of 15 books, including Geo-Logic: Breaking Ground between Philosophy and the Earth Sciences (2003) and A Watershed Moment: The American West in the Age of Limits (2024). Frodeman has lectured at and consulted for universities and science agencies worldwide and was a Fulbright Fellow at the University of Uppsala, Sweden in 2025.

Assessing Climate Change Priorities and Projects in the GYE

Sierra Harris | Climate and Water Conservation Manager
Organization: Greater Yellowstone Coalition

The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem is vast, spanning more than 22 million acres, and encompassing a diverse landscape that includes three states and six watersheds. This ecosystem is managed by a wide range of people that work for federal and state agencies, Tribes, and non-governmental organizations. Given the many agencies, political entities, and the wide array of landownership types, it is very challenging to enact widespread and unified action on climate change impacts to this region. The Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee's (GYCC) subcommittees (native fish, hydrology, and climate change adaptation) are working with the Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC) to develop ecosystem-wide, climate adaptation and resilience goals that are both ambitious and attainable within the next ten years (2035). The concept came about following the publication of the Greater Yellowstone Climate Assessment in June 2021. The GYCA details current and future impacts on the GYE, and this report provides insight into climate work in the GYE and identifies real-time climate change impacts occurring across this diverse landscape. This report synthesizes the concerns and current actions of resource managers and begins the process of developing attainable goals framed within a climate adaptation plan that are in direct response to the conversations and outreach that occurred during the interviews with 36 natural resource managers in the GYE.

SIERRA HARRIS

Sierra is helping to build and manage a cohesive climate program throughout the Greater Yellowstone region by working closely with Tribal, federal, and state agencies as well as a variety of stakeholders. Her work will focus on projects that address the impacts of climate change on land, water, and wildlife in the region. Sierra brings over 30 years of conservation experience from a variety of agency and nonprofit positions. She previously worked as a freshwater conservation manager in the High Divide Headwaters region of Montana and was excited to be a stakeholder in the Greater Yellowstone Climate Assessment. She enjoys the collaborative conservation process and looks forward to continuing this work across the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

Building a Movement to Save Our Roadless Forests

Ellen "Len" Montgomery | Great Outdoors Campaign Director
Organization: Environment America

In June 2025, USDA Secretary Rollins announced plans to roll back the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. If USDA follows through on their plans to rescind the rule, this move will open up these thriving wildlife habitats and recreational areas for logging and roadbuilding. Thousands of miles of new roads could crisscross our national forests. The trees where songbirds nest could be chopped down. Beloved trails could be clearcut and clean water could be contaminated by waste from logging and mining operations. New roads will create new opportunities for human-caused fires. The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem has a number of roadless areas covering more than half a million acres surrounding the park. Working with leading environmental groups, Environment America's Ellen Montgomery coordinates the efforts of more than 200 organizations and activists working together across the country to defend our roadless forests. Wyoming is well represented with a diverse coalition including Wyoming Wilderness Association, Trout Unlimited, Sierra Club Wyoming Chapter, Council for the Bighorn Range, Wyoming Wildlife Federation, Wyoming Outdoor Council, Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Teton County Backcountry Horsemen and National Outdoor Leadership School as well as small business owners and individual activists. This coalition joins with state-level coalitions across the country to share best practices, successes, challenges and resources and materials. Our goal is to conserve our last remaining intact forests across the National Forest System. Our primary targets are Governors, members of Congress, and state legislators from the 36 states with roadless areas protected by the 2001 roadless rule. We are asking them to make public statements and to use any opportunity they have to push back against the USDA's plans. We will also ask all of our targets to commit to defending these areas going forward, regardless of the status of the Rule. We will also work to win hearts and minds across the country and engage a broad base of the public. We want both breadth and depth of public support which means we need supporters in all 50 states and voices from specific constituencies.

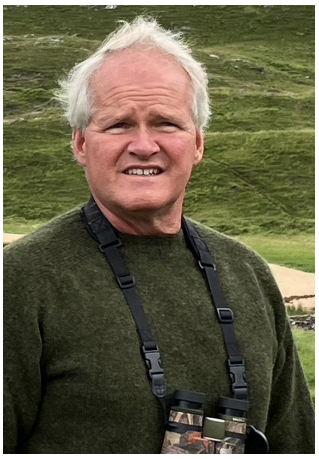
ELLEN "LEN" MONTGOMERY

Ellen has been working to protect the environment fulltime since 2001. As Environment America's Great Outdoors Campaign Director, she runs campaigns to protect America's beautiful places, from local beachfronts to remote mountain peaks. Ellen previously worked as the organizing director for Environment America's Climate Defenders campaign and has managed grassroots campaign offices across the country. Ellen lives in Denver, where she likes to hike in Colorado's mountains.

On Consilience: Humboldt's Naturgemälde and a Metacognitive Approach to Growing Committed Environmental Scientists and Managers

Eric C. Atkinson | Professor & Biology Dept. Coordinator | Research Associate |
Organizations: Northwest College | Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative |

Over two centuries ago, Alexander von Humboldt's Naturgemälde visually integrated geology, climate, vegetation, and human perception into a single relational system. Though the term did not yet exist, Humboldt practiced consilience — the convergence of independent lines of measurement into unified understanding. Many teachers and mentors are familiar with Bloom's Taxonomy in which learning and learning objectives develop through increasingly progressive levels of thinking, valuing, and doing. Fewer are familiar with William Perry's study of college students and how their development is guided by Bloom's Taxonomy but more importantly may ultimately lead students into transformative identity beyond the final (creativity) Bloom's level. Viewed through William Perry's model of intellectual and ethical development, Humboldt exemplifies advanced "commitment within relativism": rigorous measurement paired with integrative, reflective synthesis—the highest level of self-identity in a complex and often antagonistic world. Modern environmental, ecological, and biological education often emphasizes analytical reduction, yet conservation challenges demand systems-level thinking that integrates biological, geological, and human dimensions. Furthermore, with college students even those inhabiting the rural West disconnected from Nature, authentic and transformative experiences with wild places and communities working to promote conservation, preservation, and democracy, radical changes to pedagogy need be exercised with guidance gained from investigating historic conservationists, scientists, and thinkers. To cultivate this developmental shift in first- and second-year undergraduates, I employ a metacognitive pedagogy in introductory courses such as General Biology and Introduction to Environmental Science, both General Education classes, as well as sophomore or even above classes like General Ecology, Field Ecology, and Research Problems in Biology. I deploy Place-Based-Learning in Field Ecology, Project-Based Learning in Research Problems, and in General Ecology I challenge students to transform primary ecological research into original Graphic Novels designed for middle school audiences. This translation across scales and audiences requires synthesis, perspective-taking, and ownership of knowledge.



ERIC C. ATKINSON

Currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Zoology/Physiology at the University of Wyoming, Eric C. Atkinson is Professor of Biology at Northwest College (NWC), Biology Coordinator, and Project Lead of NWC INBRE (IDeA Networks for Biomedical Research Excellence).Eric grew up in the Gallatin Valley of southwest Montana where he developed a strong commitment to the wildlands and wildlife of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. He shares this passion with undergraduates via research centered upon the disease community affecting the songbirds of the Bighorn Basin and adjacent southcentral Montana. Beyond his avian research, Eric utilizes Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to model hazards for wind power

deployment and has developed conservation strategies for vulnerable species across the continent while collaborating with others on rare species research, disease investigation, and the importance of place in the development of scientific and conservation ethics. Eric is committed to guiding hands-on exploration of native systems by students inspiring future conservationists, biologists, biomedical researchers, and health workers, as well as educated and grounded citizens. His commitment to conservation extends to his personal life as he and his wife, Melonie, raise Galloway cattle in an 'ethecological' manner on their farm near Belfry, Montana. They can often be found hiking the sagebrush/juniper draws of the Pryor Mountains with a dog and a pair of binoculars.

Colorful Collaboration: Creating Coloring Pages for Outreach and Engagement

A.M. (Ashelee) Rasmussen | Research Associate
Additional Author: Andrew Ray | Ecologist, National Park Service
Organization: Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative

Interdisciplinary collaboration can yield creative works that expand public engagement and support education and conservation goals. An ongoing partnership between a field scientist and a biological illustrator has produced coloring pages that focus on amphibians and their habitat in National Parks. This collaboration provides an interactive space to become familiar with focal amphibians and their habitats. Biological artworks, such as these, have lasting application and influence for outreach and conservation. We will address the value of the interdisciplinary process of creating these coloring pages, their purpose centered around outreach education for National Parks and native amphibians and park-focused conservation actions. Our coloring pages are ecologically accurate and artistic representations that have generated interest from younger and adult audiences—coloring pages encourage interactive, positive experiences centered around National Parks and nature, and feed further interest and support for nature and science.

A.M. (Ashelee) RASMUSSEN

A.M. Rasmussen grew up in Idaho where she learned to love nature and nurtured an interest in drawing. Her curiosity and respect for nature led her to university where she studied biology and used art to support her science training. During her doctoral studies, her focal research explored how illustration can facilitate science education and research. A.M. is an educator for informal and formal life-science education and participates in ecological research. As a biological illustrator and science communicator, she creates artwork for museum exhibits and materials for science education. She engages students, educators, and researchers in using drawing as a learning tool to observe, record, and communicate science and nature.

The Wolf as Compass: Restoring Our Kinship with Nature

Suzanne Asha Stone | Executive Director
Organization: The International Wildlife Coexistence Network

Wolves move through landscapes as both presence and principle. In their family packs, we glimpse a model of cooperation—elders guiding, yearlings apprenticing, pups held at the center of collective care. Their strength lies not in domination, but in cohesion. Their survival depends on communication, coordination, and fidelity to place. As apex predators, wolves reveal the deeper architecture of living systems. Where they are absent, imbalance often follows—ungulates linger too long, riverbanks erode, and diversity thins. Where they return, relationships recalibrate. The story of Yellowstone showed us that restoring a single species can ripple outward to willows, beavers, songbirds, and streams. Wolves remind us that nothing in nature stands alone.Yet their most urgent lesson may be about ourselves. When our use of shared landscapes exceeds ecological limits, conflict is often the first signal that balance has been lost. Wolves become lightning rods for deeper tensions over land, livelihood, and belonging. Our instinct may be to resist or control, but in doing so, we forfeit the opportunity to learn what they reveal about our own imbalance. The Wood River Wolf Project in Idaho's Blaine County offers another path. By pairing herders with strategically timed livestock guardian dogs, using sound and light deterrents that simulate human presence, and fostering close collaboration among ranchers, agencies, and conservationists, we chose to learn rather than react. Listening to what wolves were teaching us about behavior and territory, we adapted our practices—and livestock losses fell to the lowest levels in the West where dense livestock operations and resident wolves overlap. We achieved this not through lethal control, but through attentiveness, adaptation, and shared commitment—demonstrating since 2008 that coexistence can endure where wolves and working lands meet. Coexistence is not passive tolerance; it is active stewardship.

SUZANNE ASHA STONE

Suzanne Asha Stone is a leader in wildlife conservation and human–wildlife coexistence, serving as Executive Director of the International Wildlife Coexistence Network and co-founder of the Wood River Wolf Project in Idaho. She was a member of the U.S.–Canadian team that helped reintroduce wolves to Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho and serves with the IUCN Species Survival Commission's Canid Specialist Group. As lead researcher on Stone et al. (2017), she documented the effectiveness of proactive, nonlethal strategies for reducing wolf–livestock conflict—research that has informed coexistence policy and practice across North America and Europe. For more than two decades, she has advanced collaborative approaches that restore ecological balance while sustaining working lands.

Wolf Restoration, Livestock Conflict, and Political Backlash in Colorado

Matt Barnes | Research Associate | Rangeland Scientist & Wildlife Conservationist |
Organizations: Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative | Rocky Mountain Wolf Project
Project Partner: Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Colorado's wolf reintroduction extends the restoration that began more than three decades ago in the Northern Rockies to the Southern Rockies. While most of the arguments and debates are familiar, there are ways in which Colorado is trying to do it differently.
In 2020, Coloradans voted to reintroduce wolves: the first use of direct democracy to restore an endangered species. Despite herculean efforts by state agencies and NGOs, the backlash is severe and the restoration precarious. Colorado only has about 20 adult wolves and 4-5 packs. Conflict with one pack has been high, but mostly likely caused largely by human actions or lack thereof. Colorado Parks and Wildlife has created arguably the most robust livestock conflict minimization program in the nation with tools like range riders, flags, noise makers, and lights. These efforts are largely supported by voluntary purchase of the 'Born to be Wild' license plate, developed by the Rocky Mountain Wolf Project, which has already raised about $2 million for conflict minimization. Most of that money is being used on the Colorado range rider program, which is only the third state-led range rider program in the country. Moreover, the CPW Commission has created the most generous compensation program in North America for livestock losses attributed to wolves. Repeated demands for a "pause" in wolf releases have now been met by the federal administration, which is interfering by claiming that sourcing wolves from Canada is a violation of the experimental population designation, or the 10(j) rule. This is a blatantly political flip-flop from the federal opinion under the previous administration, when the US Fish and Wildlife Service actively supported Colorado in obtaining wolves from British Columbia. We continue to collaborate with agencies, other NGOs, and the ranching and hunting communities, to promote conflict reduction. One thing we know from the Northern Rockies: coexistence is a long game.

MATT BARNES

Matt Barnes is a rangeland scientist who has dedicated the last dozen years to human-carnivore coexistence on working landscapes. He is a Research Associate with the Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative, where he works on Regenerating Wildness: an integral approach to land stewardship, coexistence with large carnivores, and public safety. At the time of the field work, he was Field and Research Coordinator at People and Carnivores, where he worked with ranchers in Montana and Wyoming. He is also owner of a rangeland consulting business, Shining Horizons Land Management, and previously ran a custom grazing operation in Colorado. More at reintegratingwildness.org

WYldlife for Tomorrow: Building a More Resilient, Tourism-Powered Funding Network for Wyoming Wildlife

Taylor Phillips | Founder | Owner|
Organization: WYldlife for Tomorrow | Jackson Hole EcoTour Adventures |

Wyoming's world-class wildlife is both an ecological treasure and a foundational asset for the state's visitor economy. Yet as habitat pressures increase and long-term conservation funding becomes less certain, the resource that supports both biodiversity and community vitality faces growing risk. WYldlife for Tomorrow responds to this challenge with a practical, business-forward model that engages tourism, recreation, and ancillary businesses in voluntary, conservation investment. This quick talk will show how the initiative builds resilience for both humans and nature by broadening the network of conservation participants beyond traditional funding sources. Through partnerships with businesses and the visitor economy they serve, WYldlife for Tomorrow connects private-sector participation directly to on-the-ground wildlife and habitat needs. The model is grounded in evidence showing that wildlife viewing is a primary driver of visitation and that visitors broadly support paying more to conserve the wildlife they come to experience. The presentation will also explore how this Wyoming model could inform surrounding states facing similar challenges. By aligning tourism success with conservation investment, WYldlife for Tomorrow offers a scalable framework for diversifying funding and building more resilient conservation networks for the future.

TAYLOR PHILLIPS

Taylor Phillips is an outdoor enthusiast, avid hunter, and angler who has built a career at the intersection of conservation and Wyoming's visitor economy. He is the founder of EcoTour Adventures, creating authentic experiences that connect guests with Wyoming's wildlife, landscapes, and communities. Taylor also helps lead WYldlife for Tomorrow, advancing a new, business-engaged funding mechanism to sustain wildlife conservation for future generations. He serves on the Wyoming Office of Tourism board and is a board member of the Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Business Alliance, supporting a thriving, responsible outdoor recreation industry statewide.

Using Ecosystem Management as a Tool to Unlock Funding on Tribal Lands

Delane Atcitty | Executive Director
Organization: Indian Nations Conservation Alliance

As Tribal land managers, we have a new tool in our toolbox, which will allow us the opportunity to access ecosystem management compensation that falls in line with our cultural beliefs. Up until recent years, our management has been primarily reliant on the Department of the Interior and Tribal nations grant funding. But, through strategic partnerships with non-profit and for profit companies we have found an alternative to tackle conservation issues. Addressing this issue is leading to benefits in soil health, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, watershed and erosion, and air quality.

DELANE ATCITTY

Delane Atcitty has 33 plus years' hands-on experience in agriculture and natural resource management as well as a Bachelor of Science degree in Agri-Business and a Master of Science Degree in Ranch Management/Agri-Business. Past employers in agriculture include Poky Feeders, Hitch Enterprises Inc., King Ranch Inc., Navajo Nation Agriculture Program, and various ranches in the Southwest. Delane's other employers include the Bureau of Indian Affairs-Natural Resource Specialist, Bureau of Land Management-Rangeland Management Specialist, the Nature Conservancy-Rangeland Specialist, Natural Resource Conservation Service-Interim Rangeland Specialist, and as a private consultant at Arrowhead Resource Management, LLC on various projects. Delane also serves as a past Board of Director for Navajo Agricultural Products Industry, a 110,000-acre tribal farm located in Farmington, New Mexico. He currently serves as a Board of Director for the Society for Range Management, Holistic Management International's Board of Directors, and is on the Native Seeds Needs and Capacity Committee for the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, as well as being on the National Grazing Lands Coalition Advisory Council.

Power to Protect: Local Government's Role in GYE Conservation

Cindy Riegel | Founder/CEO
Organization: Project Greater Yellowstone

What if the future of one of the wildest landscapes on Earth was decided not in distant capitals, but in city halls, county courthouses, and public utility boardrooms? Across the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE), local elected officials hold the power to protect wildlife, water, and working lands, but rising development pressures, limited planning capacity, and lack of community support make those decisions challenging. This isn't your typical conservation talk. We'll explore how informed voting, empowered leadership, and bipartisan coalition building can turn everyday civic processes into powerful engines for safeguarding community and ecosystem values across the GYE. From research and education to grassroots advocacy and policy wins, this presentation will focus on how local elections and civic engagement are critical conservation strategies in the GYE. Project Greater Yellowstone's approach is unique and includes research, education, and collaboration between communities across the GYE, as well as advocacy, organizing, and participation in local government decision-making and elections.

CINDY RIEGEL

Cindy Riegel has over 30 years of experience at the intersection of science, policy, and community planning in the GYE. She holds a BS from St. Lawrence University and MS from the University of Vermont's Field Naturalist Program. Cindy has always strived to translate expertise into action. Her graduate thesis helped the Jackson Hole Land Trust identify priority properties for conservation. She was instrumental in founding what are now Mountain Academy and Mountain Roots, two institutions that have shaped education in Teton Valley for decades. As an elected Teton County, Idaho Commissioner for ten years, Cindy championed land-use reform, housing policy, and conservation - demonstrating what thoughtful local leadership can accomplish in places under intense development pressure. Cindy currently leads Project Greater Yellowstone (PGY), working to ensure that the communities and elected officials within one of the world's most iconic ecosystems have the tools, voice, and vision to protect it from unplanned growth and irresponsible development.

Session 2: *Building Networks for Conservation*

For the Love of Whitebark: Networked Conservation

Nancy Bockino | Research Associate| Whitebark Pine Ecologist |
Organizations: Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative, For the Love of Whitebark
Project Partners: USFS, NPS American Forests

The whitebark pine is a critical foundation for alpine ecosystems across the American West, regulating essential snowmelt cycles and sustaining regional biodiversity. However, this keystone species currently faces a "perfect storm" of existential threats: climate-driven mountain pine beetle outbreaks and the spread of invasive white pine blister rust. Federal land management agencies are increasingly hampered by unstable funding, staffing shortages, and the political targeting of climate-focused initiatives. "For the Love of Whitebark" provides assistance and support to face these ecological and agency challenges through a networked conservation model. By uniting the public, private donors, NGOs, academic researchers, ski resorts and federal agencies, this team has built a collaborative ecosystem that provides the long-term stewardship these slow-growing trees require. They strive to provide financial resilience, effective and efficient task completion and to serve as a buffer against shifting political landscapes. With 25 years of experience in whitebark conservation, a credentialed crew featuring Master's degrees in Forest Ecology, Botany, GIS, and Environmental Science and a strong mentorship program, this team is science-led. This team assists with the identification of rust-resistant "Elite" trees, collection of seed for rust resistance testing and restoration plantings and protection of mature seed sources from beetle infestations across the West. They also plant thousands of seedlings across the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Beyond these physical metrics, the project emphasizes educational outreach through digital media and peer-reviewed research to build broad public awareness. Operating at the intersection of government frameworks and urgent ecological realities can present friction. The team must navigate the complexities of agency mandates, the challenges of shared successes and manage the risks of polarization that can alienate essential partners. Ultimately, "For the Love of Whitebark" serves as a scalable proof-of-concept for ecosystem and community-led conservation in a changing democracy. As the federal footprint potentially shrinks, this networked blueprint offers a viable strategy for managing other regional challenges—by empowering an interconnected community of professionals and citizens to safeguard the shared future of both nature and humanity. For more information, visit fortheloveofwhitebark.org

NANCY BOCKINO

Nancy Bockino is a research associate with NRCC, leading The For The Love of Whitebark Team and dedicated ecologist and mountain guide who has spent over 25 years protecting the whitebark pine across the West. Often called the "Teton Lorax" she spearheads conservation efforts to protect critical seed source whitebark from mountain pine beetle, collects seed and replants blister rust resistant seedlings. Nancy holds a M.S. in Botany and Forest Ecology from the University of Wyoming, where her research specialized in these very forest disturbances. Whitebark pines are her kindred spirits and teachers. She blends scientific rigor with the intuition gained from traveling the alpine for decades.

Rooted in Community: Building Civic Power for Conservation in an Eroding Democracy

Jenny Fitzgerald | Executive Director
Organization: Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance

Conservation outcomes across the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) increasingly depend not only on ecological science and policy, but also on the resilience of social networks and the strength of civic relationships. Current societal trends marked by increased political polarization, declining trust in institutions, and waning civic participation challenge an already geographically complex and administratively fragmented GYE. To adequately address threats to landscape-scale conservation and underlying governance problems, conservation organizations must build resilient civic ecosystems that can withstand democratic volatility, bridge divides, and sustain long-term stewardship. Effective community organizing depends on durable civic relationships that sustain collective action. Utilizing 47 years of applied experience from community-based initiatives in Teton County, Wyoming, the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance (JHCA) is an example of a conservation non-profit that has expanded its focus and tools from issue advocacy to network resilience. This presentation outlines core strategies for building durable civic and social networks that strengthen conservation effectiveness as democratic norms evolve. The JHCA has operationalized these strategies through community organizing initiatives, which illustrate that network density, trust, and cross-sector collaboration increase policy durability, reduce backlash, and create adaptive capacity under conditions of democratic stress. JHCA's initiatives will demonstrate the value in actively building civic networks, strengthening democratic participation, and empowering Teton County residents to take collective action to advance wildlife protections, responsible land-use planning, and community conservation values. By strengthening the social and civic fabrics that underpin collective action, conservation non-profits can safeguard both landscapes and the democratic processes that protect them.

JENNY FITZGERALD

Jenny Fitzgerald has served as Executive Director of the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance for the past two years. She holds a degree in Natural Resources and Animal Science from Cornell University and began her career in wildlife field research. Her work focused on mountain lions with Panthera in Wyoming's Gros Ventre Mountains and alongside Mexican gray wolf reintroduction efforts in Northern Chihuahua, Mexico. She later worked with the National Park Service in the Santa Monica Mountains. These experiences shaped her focus on human-wildlife coexistence and led her into conservation policy leadership today. She leads JHCA's team in advocating for wildlife, wild places, and responsible planning in Jackson Hole.

Bear Wise Jackson Hole Elevates Conservation Through Collaboration

Kate Gersh | Associate Director
Additional Authors: Cody Pitz (1), Chris Colligan (2), Tanya Anderson (3), Michael Boyce (4), Rebecca Lyon (5), Ashley Egan (6), and Justin Schwabedissen (7)
Organization: Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation
Affiliation: Teton County

With a mission of 'keeping bears wild and people safe', Bear Wise Jackson Hole (BWJH) is a collaborative partnership between Wyoming Game & Fish Department, Bridger-Teton National Forest, Grand Teton National Park, Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Teton County, and the Town of Jackson. Established in 2006, BWJH works across jurisdictional boundaries to minimize human-bear conflicts and educate visitors and landowners about wildlife stewardship. BWJH engages audiences ranging from short-term visitors to long-term residents by leveraging a comprehensive approach – including tailored educational materials, public service announcements, HOA presentations, bear spray demonstrations, and community events. In 2021, Teton County and the Town of Jackson expanded their wildlife feeding regulations to curb the accessibility of unnatural attractants to bears and other wildlife. BWJH provided technical guidance as these regulations were amended and enhanced community outreach endeavors to bring a substantially higher proportion of private lands into compliance. As bear dynamics and human use patterns evolve, BWJH adapts by refining on-the-ground strategies while demonstrating measurable reductions in human-bear conflict. Now in its twentieth year, this partnership highlights the value of cross-jurisdictional collaboration in achieving durable, community-centric conservation outcomes.

KATE GERSH

A Minnesota native, Kate holds a Master's in Sustainable Destination Management and a Graduate Certificate in Nonprofit Management from George Washington University. She previously managed a multi-million dollar USAID sustainable conservation grant for the African Wildlife Foundation and began her career with the Jane Goodall Institute's Roots & Shoots program. Before her current tenure, she served as Associate Director at The Murie Center. An alumna of the Emerging Wildlife Conservation Leaders program, Kate has also co-led an international campaign on bat conservation recognized by the IUCN. Since joining JHWF in 2016, she has been instrumental in driving community-science programs, habitat restoration, and human-wildlife conflict mitigation.

Protecting the Call of the Cranes

Niah Pennington | Stewardship Coordinator
Organization: Teton Regional Land Trust

Teton Valley, Idaho supports one of the most significant breeding and pre-migration staging areas for the Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) of Greater Sandhill Cranes. Its unique combination of protected wetlands, expansive agricultural fields, and open space produces ideal habitat conditions that annually attract fall staging concentrations of cranes in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Although decades of conservation efforts have helped the RMP recover from historic lows, rapid residential and commercial development in Teton Valley is now fragmenting habitat, altering wetland hydrology, and increasing potential for crop depredation conflicts. The Greater Sandhill Crane Initiative is a multi partner effort led by the Teton Regional Land Trust (TRLT) to sustain the Valley's ecological integrity while supporting working lands and community values. Core strategies include securing and restoring critical foraging, roosting, and nesting habitats through conservation easements and targeted land protection; implementing a cost share "Grain for Cranes" program that provides supplemental energy resources while reducing agricultural damage; and expanding science based monitoring through annual staging surveys. Recent monitoring has documented sustained high crane concentrations in the Valley. Public engagement is also at the core of the crane initiative goals. Through events such as the Greater Yellowstone Crane Festival, school programs, guided viewing, and community science, partners are building knowledge and appreciation of the region's wildlife heritage and the importance of conserving agricultural landscapes that sustain both people and cranes. These efforts work to offset habitat loss, reduce depredation conflicts, and secure the long term viability of Sandhill Cranes in one of their most important pre-migration staging areas. The Initiative is an example of how collaborative conservation and community involvement can protect a significant migration area of an iconic species while strengthening the resilience of a rural working landscape in eastern Idaho.

NIAH PENNINGTON

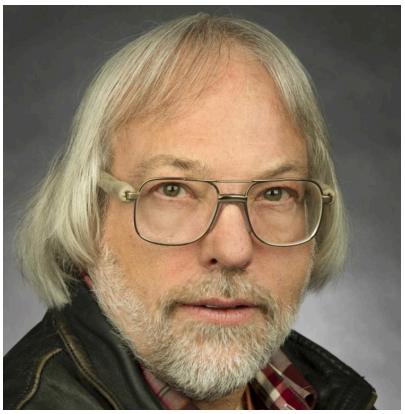
Niah Pennington holds a M.S., Wildlife and Conservation Biology from Colorado State University and a B.S. in Wildlife Biology from the University of Montana. She has worked in wildlife and habitat assessment, monitoring and related data collection across Montana, Wyoming and Idaho since 2015. Her professional experience includes academic research, federal land agencies, and nonprofit conservation organizations. Niah started working for Teton Regional Land Trust in May 2024 where her position focuses on long-term habitat protection and stewardship of conservation easements.

Amphibian Connectivity in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem

Charles "Chuck" R. Peterson | Research Associate | Professor Emeritus |
Additional Author: Matt Lucia, Idaho Conservation Manager. Greater Yellowstone Coalition |
Organizations: Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative | Idaho State University |

The heightened awareness of the importance of migration corridors to ungulates in the GYE needs to be extended to other groups of organisms, including amphibians. Since widespread amphibian declines were detected in the 1980s, there has been increased attention to amphibian conservation problems in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Research has included community science projects; amphibian and wetland surveys; spatial distribution modeling; occupancy analyses; long-term mark-capture studies; radiotelemetry movement studies; landscape genetics analyses; and disease investigations. Radiotelemetry has revealed the extent and complexity of amphibian movements and their relationships to a variety of habitats (e.g., overwintering areas, breeding sites, seasonal migration corridors, and suitable dispersal and migration habitat). The field of landscape genetics has given insight into the effects of landscape characteristics (e.g., topography, hydrology, land cover, and fire history) on amphibian population structure, dynamics, gene flow, and habitat connectivity. Although most of these amphibian studies have taken place on public lands, private lands make up about 27% of the GYE and are important in the areas surrounding the national parks and wildlife refuges because they make up much of the lower elevation, wetland habitats. These habitats are especially threatened by development, consequent loss of population connectivity, and increased chance of extinction due to smaller population sizes and decreased genetic diversity. Land trusts can play an important role in maintaining amphibian gene flow by connecting wetland habitats on private and public lands through conservation easements. Maintaining habitat connectivity to conserve amphibian populations is going to require collaboration among private landowners, government agencies, conservation organizations, and academics. A landscape genetics study of Northern Leopard Frogs (*Lithobates pipiens*) in the Blackfoot River watershed could provide a system for studying the effect of various land uses on amphibian connectivity and supply land trusts with information helpful to prioritizing future conservation easements and restoration efforts.

CHARLES "CHUCK" R. PETERSON



Chuck Peterson is an Emeritus Professor of Zoology in the Department of Biological Sciences and the Affiliate Curator of Herpetology for the Idaho Museum of Natural History. His current teaching responsibilities include Herpetology, Nature Photography, and a seminar on the role of land trusts in biodiversity conservation. His research interests include the spatial, physiological, and conservation ecology of amphibians and reptiles. Chuck is also using place-based photography exhibits to promote the appreciation and conservation of amphibians and reptiles. His photography can be viewed at: https://www.flickr.com/photos/petechar/.

Squeezing Through: Handbook for Big Game Movement Across the Built Environment

Sonya Gimon | Founder, RLA, ENV SP
Additional Authors: Matthew Kauffman, Leader. Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit | William Rudd, Project Manager and Co-founder. Wyoming Migration Initiative| Organization: 3FWILD

Over a decade of research in Wyoming has shown that many ungulate herds migrate to access distinct seasonal ranges with some traveling more than 100 miles between their summer and winter ranges. However, mule deer, pronghorn, and elk migrate through many areas of Wyoming that are experiencing development pressure that will likely sever or constrain these movements in the coming decades. During migration, animals frequently move through developed landscapes where they must navigate roads, fences, and other human-made obstacles. One of the most significant impacts has occurred along Interstate 80, which has effectively severed most north–south migrations. High traffic volumes have truncated many modern migrations at the Interstate. Residential and commercial expansion, including in and around Jackson and Cody, WY is another example of built conditions that can constrain wildlife movement. However, trail camera monitoring and GPS tracking studies show that some animals are "squeezing through" these barriers. At the Interstate, they are doing so at crossing structures that, for the most part, were never designed for wildlife, such as machinery underpasses constructed to move ranching equipment, bridges spanning streams and rivers, and even the occasional interchange. In residential areas, factors such as density and topography contribute to wildlife's ability to continue to move through, with some examples showing their ability to successfully navigate these built environments. A collaboration between wildlife biologists at the Wyoming Migration Initiative and 3FWILD, a landscape architecture and community engagement practice based in Teton County, this project seeks to understand how these successful examples can inform the design of future and retrofitted development. The handbook will establish design criteria to support a wide range of wildlife permeability goals and will serve as a practical reference in the design process, assessment, and recommendations concerning wildlife permeability.

SONYA GIMON

Sonya Gimon is a landscape architect and founder of 3FWILD, a landscape architecture and community engagement practice designing infrastructure to serve both residents and the environment. 3FWILD's work spans public realm and open space design, multi-modal transportation & neighborhood planning, waterfront resiliency, and climate adaptation. Its "Nature + Infrastructure" practice focuses on sustainable infrastructure for wild places. Sonya lives between Grant Village in Yellowstone National Park and Brooklyn, New York. She is a certified ENVISION Sustainability Professional and a Visiting Assistant Professor at Pratt Institute's Graduate Center for Planning & the Environment in Brooklyn, NY.

Can Indigenous Management Reshape Federal Policies?

Kaycee Prevedel | Partnerships Director
Additional Author: J. Dallas Gudgell, Vice-President. Buffalo Field Campaign |
Organization: Wind River Tribal Buffalo Initiative

For over a century, federal land management has intentionally excluded Indigenous perspectives. This failure is epitomized by Mt. Tenabo in Nevada, where the BLM permitted mining on the origin mountain of the Temoak Western Shoshone. Other failures include the 1908 seizure of the Bison Range in Montana and the long-term exclusion of Southwest Tribal management in Bears Ears, Utah. A big contributor is the "Wilderness Myth", the idea that nature was untouched by man. This ignores millennia of human stewardship that shaped the land and wildlife. Co-management, or collaborative stewardship, serves as the critical corrective. By sharing decision-making, it integrates Indigenous ways of knowing into ecosystem strategies. The Bears Ears model demonstrated the move beyond nonfunctional consultation to active co-governance. Other models include Navajo National Monument and the Pacific Northwest salmon fisheries. Co-management is a transitional step toward the ultimate goal: Tribal Management and land restitution. Buffalo Restoration on the Wind River Reservation proves that Tribal sovereignty is the most effective path forward. The Wind River Tribal Buffalo Initiative (WRTBI) focuses on land rematriation through buffalo restoration. Supporting the WRTBI and other Indigenous orgs is an actionable step anyone can take. Looking forward, this model must be applied to the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE). The GYE can support 50,000 or more buffalo, but success requires Tribal management across all land jurisdictions. Restoring buffalo to these ancestral scales is the most effective path toward reconciling colonial wrongs and ensuring the ecological integrity of the American West.

KAYCEE PREVEDEL

Kaycee is passionate about land protection and wildlife restoration. In college, she graduated with an advanced degree in American Studies with a focus on Indigenous Land Rights. Before WRTBI, she worked for the Sierra Club Wyoming Chapter as a wildlife and public lands advocate, as well as for the Bureau of Land Management, the US Forest Service, and the National Park Service at Mesa Verde National Park. Her expertise is in public/ancestral land protection and Tribal co-management. Kaycee is a Land Back advocate and is driven to amplify the efforts of Native-led organizations, especially WRTBI.

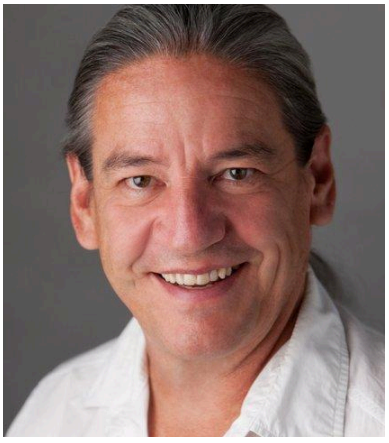
“The restoration of Buffalo, one of the last remaining keystone species, is an incredible and historic project led by Tribes that will benefit future generations. I am happy to be a part of it!”

Can Indigenous Land and Species Management Save Us?

J Dallas Gudgell | Vice-President
Additional Author: Kaycee Prevedel. Partnerships Director, Wind River Tribal Buffalo Initiative|
Organization: Buffalo Field Campaign

Settler/post-colonial structures of land management and species conservation management have failed. The primarily transactional structures of commodity-based extraction and exploitation of the natural world as a dead or inanimate resource centers individualism and individual gain. Moreover individuals, communities and societies are viewed as separate from and have supremacy over the natural world. This management paradigm is not sustainable. Traditional Indigenous resource management structures like The Dish with One Spoon Treaty manage natural resources with overall ecological health at the center. As for terrestrial mammals and Tribal management, the best place for a Beta test is the Wild Buffalo of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Many Tribes currently manage their own herds on reservation lands. Why not expand that to Tribal management of wild herds of the GYE and/or other public lands adjacent to Tribal Reservations or federal/state conservation herds (e.g. conservation herds in Montana, Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah and more); creating a Buffalo Commons, restoring forests, arid grasslands, curbing climate warming, restoring biological diversity and overall healthy ecosystems. Imagine an Indigenous-led collaborative project to conserve, protect and restore free roaming wild bison of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and promote and expand genetically wild bison restoration locally on Tribal and other public lands. A project that bridges several disparate issue areas, which are historically stalling science-based solutions for the restoration and conservation of viable free roaming wild bison populations in the GYE. Finally, the blending of traditional Indigenous science and western science may serve as a key component to the success of wild Buffalo management using best available science-based approaches that hold Indigenous in equal regard.

J DALLAS GUDGELL



Dallas Gudgell collaborates with NGOs, governments, agencies, global indigenous communities and Tribal sovereigns to create radical systemic-structural change to protect and improve human health, the environment, and racial and environmental justice for future generations. He is vice-president of the Buffalo Field Campaign, which is restoring buffalo as a keystone species, protecting the natural habitat of free-roaming buffalo and other native wildlife. His work centers around holistic land stewarding practices led by indigenous people. It is a form of healing for the generational trauma suffered by Indigenous people, as well as a way to rebuild the biosphere and address climate change. Dallas is Yankton Dakota.

Building Networks Personally and Professionally to Amplify Conservation

Trevor Bloom | Research Associate | Forest Botanist |PhD Candidate |
Organizations: Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative| Bridger-Teton National Forest |
Affiliation: University of Wyoming, Program in Ecology and Evolution

Conservation doesn't happen in isolation. In a world of misinformation, communicating science and conservation best practices is as important as the research itself. In my experience, building and maintaining networks is the best way to do this, along with coordinated public outreach. Throughout my life I have explored many ways to build organic networks professionally and personally that have elevated my career and conservation impacts. My involvement through Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative as a Research Associate since 2016 has been core to this achievement, teaching me the value of networks, and providing a consistent homebase while the world around me continues to evolve outside of my control. In my quick talk I will highlight a handful of the most successful case studies I have had the privilege of being involved in, ranging from citizen science, collaboration with myriad partners through research, film-making, wildlife guiding, and most recently launching a coordinated Alpine Plant Monitoring program through the Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee. The central message is clear: the connections we cultivate are as vital as the work we do. Now more than ever, our collective networks are essential to conserving the natural world in the face of growing threats.

TREVOR BLOOM

Trevor Bloom is a botanist and ecologist who grew up in Teton County, Wyoming and has focused his career on the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. He has been a Research Associate for NRCC since 2016, and is currently the Forest Botanist for the Bridger-Teton National Forest. He holds a Master of Science from Western Washington University and is a PhD student at the University of Wyoming in the Botany Department under Dr. Brent Ewers. His research spans invasive species management, phenology, climate change impacts on vegetation, and rare plant conservation. In his spare time, you can find Trevor exploring the mountains with his wife and dog.

Operation Spider: Interweaving Insights Inspired by Invertebrates to Better Care for Our Interdependence

Sarah Karikó | Research Director
Additional Authors: Todd Stiles | Jackson District Ranger*| Alyssa Milo | Lands Specialist* |Mariah Radue |Environmental Coordinator** The United States Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture |
Organizations: Gossamer Labs LLC/Harvard University/IUCN Spider and Scorpion Specialist Group

Spiders have inspired cultures across time and geography, from Akan people's Anansi to Lakota's Iktomi, but remain part of the invertebrate gap in biodiversity teaching and research. A collaborative science-based interdisciplinary project transformed the effects of constructing a bridge across a canyon into bridgebuilding among human communities, while caring for some of the smallest animals in this ecosystem. When a spider population in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem faced tremendous impact from an infrastructure building project, Operation SpiderSave, was born. Their combined efforts brought together nearly every department of a US Forest Service Ranger District to move rocks holding spiders' shimmery egg sacs to create a "rock nursery" – letting spiders complete their life cycle and supporting overall ecological balance. Spiders play key roles in ecosystems especially with broader insect population health. Operation Spider was not just protecting a single species. The volunteers' actions were in support of our collective interdependence. Invertebrates like these form critical foundations of life and are experiencing dramatic global declines. Spiders can remind us that vibrating any thread affects the entire web. While we humans may not produce silk, we have imagination and capacity-for-care; combined, these can increase the beneficial role humans play throughout the web of life together. Operation Spider is a testament to how people can come together beyond politics and borders to share information to help unravel the mysteries of our world and put this knowledge exchange in service of our shared home. It also illustrates how sharing stories like this can inspire further actions. Our fates are intertwined.

SARAH KARIKÓ

Sarah Karikó, PhD, focuses on finding better ways to care for our interdependence, considering ecological and societal systems together. Her work takes many forms from peer-reviewed scientific papers to public art, including a large-scale installation honoring bison for NRCC's Buffalo Jubilee, an exhibition in recognition of the Centennial of the National Park Service and her spider mentors in Grand Teton National Park and the National Museum of Wildlife Art, as well as her current research interweaving insights from spidersilk to support the body's cancer suppression networks aiming to transform our understanding and care for cancer with colleagues at Harvard Medical School.