



COMMUNITY SCIENCE IN WYOMING

Interested in nature and science? There are community science projects occurring across Wyoming where you can contribute. These types of projects allow community members to not only observe how scientists gather data for research, but also provide

opportunities to participate in project activities.

The best part about these projects is that you do not need to be a scientist to participate and most projects provide training. Community science is a great way for people with an affinity

for science to contribute their expertise and skills. These types of projects are key to gaining a better understanding of how management decisions are made and an appreciation for the process. Projects can be big in scale and long running, such as the Christmas Bird Count, which has been taking place all over the U.S. and other parts of North America to track winter bird populations since 1905. Others can be local and short term, such as a stream monitoring project conducted by an elementary school class.

There are a growing number of meaningful, interesting projects organized by agencies, colleges and universities, and non-profits that can benefit from participation by community members. Many of these organizations may be short-staffed and under-funded, which can hinder projects that need data collected from multiple locations or occur throughout the year. Data collection can exponentially increase when organizations receive help from those hiking, fishing, hunting and recreating, who see species and conditions in remote locations



that may be hard to glimpse on a scheduled research trip. It is also beneficial for these organizations to be able to share their work with others to help the public understand why they are working on their projects.

Projects for you!

Some projects can prevent loss of life and property. A community science program with nearly 290,000 trained severe weather spotters is **SkyWarn**, where volunteers help keep their local communities safe by providing timely and accurate reports of severe weather to the National Weather Service in real time. You can put your weather watching skills to use by attending spotter training courses offered in person and virtually each spring. To learn more, go to: <https://bit.ly/WyoSkyWarn>. The **CoCoRaHS** program, where volunteers collect precipitation data across the state, is another great program that benefits

weather forecasters, ranchers and farmers, emergency managers, municipalities and more. Read more about it in our Spring 2016 Barnyards and Backyards article “Collecting Precipitation Data Provides Information for Public Good”.

If you’re looking for a real family adventure, look no further than the annual **BioBlitz**. This multi-day event brings together teams of scientists, teachers, families and other community members to find, identify and learn about as many local plant, insect and animal species as possible in a given area. This is a great opportunity to learn from local experts and participate in biological surveys. This year, the event will be held at Guernsey State Park June 10–12. A statewide virtual BioBlitz will take place June 15–18. For information on how to join visit <https://bit.ly/WyoBioBlitz>.

If getting out to the National Forests is on your summer to do list, consider adding a meaningful

project to those plans. The **Rocky Mountain Amphibian Project** focuses on gathering as much information as possible about amphibians in Wyoming. Frogs and toads are often overlooked and are very sensitive to changes in their habitat. Populations can disappear without anyone knowing. Your role is to adopt a catchment in the Routt, Bridger-Teton or Medicine-Bow National Forest, then visit that catchment at least once during the summer to survey for amphibians and submit your observations. Training (online or in-person) is required. Sign up for a catchment at <https://bit.ly/RockyMntAmphibianProject>.

Looking for a project you can do while on your lunch break? Check out the **Neighbors to Nature game camera project**. This project is mapping wildlife observations south of Jackson and seeks volunteer help identifying animals in the images captured by the 27 game cameras placed in the area. This project will inform management decisions to improve human-wildlife coexistence. From mule deer to skunks, black bears to coyotes, there are lots of critters to spot. To get started visit <https://bit.ly/NeighborsToNature>.

If you prefer to explore the state following your own timelines and interests, you may enjoy using one of the many platforms created to record and identify observations. One of the world’s most popular nature apps is **iNaturalist**, which helps you identify the plants and animals you see without the need to carry



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around a field guide. Anyone with a computer or smartphone can use iNaturalist to keep track of observations, get help from the community in identifying what you observed and share your expertise by adding identifications. Start by creating an account at: <https://www.inaturalist.org> For bird lovers, transform your bird sightings into science and conservation by submitting your observations at <https://ebird.org>. You can also use <https://www.eddmaps.org> to report and map invasive plant species so land managers have a heads up on emerging problems.

The bottom line is that there are many ways your time, expertise and curiosity can benefit your community. While the main objective of these projects is

to help contribute to scientific research, these projects often bring people with shared interests together, they introduce new skills, and create meaningful stewardship of our communities. Consider contributing to a project today; it is a great opportunity for you and your family.

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Jacelyn Downey is the Education Programs Manager for Audubon Rockies. She manages the Keyhole State Park Bird Banding Station where volunteers help to track bird populations in the state and is part of the team that organizes the Wyoming Naturalist Program. She is addicted to using iNaturalist to keep track of all the living things she comes across and wishes she were better at using eBird. You can reach out to Jacelyn at Jacelyn.Downey@audubon.org.

Did you know? The Wyoming Naturalist Program is in its second year! This program provides volunteers with training on Wyoming plants, animals, geology, hydrology and more. These volunteers then donate their time to conservation education projects and service work within their communities. It is a great program for community science enthusiasts who want to learn more from experts. Visit <https://bit.ly/WyoNaturalists> to learn more and to apply for the 2023 cohort this fall.