

Find stewardship opportunities as a volunteer

Do you enjoy recreating in Wyoming? Have you ever wondered about how to give back to the wildlife and natural areas in this great state? If so, here are a few opportunities to consider.

Join the Wyoming Naturalist Program

Most of my volunteer experience began with the Wyoming Naturalist Program. The program was created in 2020 by Audubon Rockies, UW Biodiversity Institute, Wyoming State Parks, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, and UW Extension. Since the program's inception, Wyoming Naturalists have contributed more than 2,000 volunteer hours toward conservation projects.

Once accepted via application, the program consists of weekly virtual classes with subject matter experts and culminates in a weekend field day. To help develop well-rounded naturalists, the classes cover a wide variety of subject matter, including geology, ecology, ornithology, botany, invasive species, and mammalogy.

In order to achieve Certified Wyoming Naturalist status, participants must complete the

training and 40 hours of volunteer work that directly impacts natural resources. Volunteer work typically involves stewardship, education and outreach, community science, or program support.

To maintain Certified Wyoming Naturalist status, you must complete 40 volunteer hours and 8 hours of advanced training in subsequent years. Early on, I challenged myself to complete 100 hours in my first year (which I did); what I wasn't expecting was the genuine passion I developed for community science, data collection, and simply giving back.

To learn more about the Wyoming Naturalist Program, visit <https://bit.ly/wy-naturalist>.

Become a birder

Before participating in the Wyoming Naturalist Program, I knew nothing about birds. Now, I incorporate bird watching into all of my outdoor activities. It's also fun to share with kids. Just this week at dinner, my two-year-old pointed out the window when he spotted a turkey vulture in the sky. Observing birds is fun, and a little addictive, for everyone.

If you're interested in the airways, Audubon Rockies leads

community science projects such as the Intermountain West Shorebird Survey and pinyon jay surveys, which monitor bird populations experiencing severe decline. Audubon Rockies also connects volunteers to ongoing monitoring efforts such as breeding bird surveys, bird-banding stations, and Christmas bird counts. To learn more, visit rockies.audubon.org.

You can also participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count (birdcount.org), which doesn't have to specifically take place in your backyard, or Project FeederWatch (feederwatch.org). These are accessible opportunities to support bird research through monitoring and reporting close to home—or farther away.

All of these initiatives take time of year and location into account, providing snapshots of the bird world at specific dates and times all over the globe.

Volunteer with the UW Biodiversity Institute

The University of Wyoming Biodiversity Institute offers many community science opportunities, including the Laramie Salamander Migration Initiative, Moose Day, Vulture Watch, and the Rocky



Surveying for amphibians in the Snowy Mountains. Photo by Abby Perry.

Mountain Amphibian Project (RMAP).

The Rocky Mountain Amphibian Project samples populations of different amphibian species and investigates the presence of chytrid fungus, which is devastating amphibian populations across the U.S. Through RMAP, the Biodiversity Institute is surveying amphibian populations in three national forests in Wyoming. Before I started volunteering with RMAP in the Snowy Range, I knew nothing about chytrid fungus and that we were losing amphibious species at such an alarming rate.

This volunteer opportunity requires training for handling and sanitation, and at least one day of commitment at a specific time of the year. To learn about RMAP and other opportunities to volunteer with the Biodiversity Institute, visit <https://bit.ly/wy-biodiversity-sci>.

Participate in the Wyoming BioBlitz

Participating in the annual BioBlitz is another way to help with data collection and tune in to the world around you. The Wyoming BioBlitz is a one-of-a-kind opportunity for families, students, and all nature lovers to learn about plants and wildlife and help scientists survey them.

One of the goals of the BioBlitz is to document as many species as possible. Experts are available to answer questions and help attendees with identification. The event's location rotates around the state; in 2024, it was held on the Wind River Indian Reservation.

In addition to the in-person event, anyone can participate in the Wyoming Statewide BioBlitz from anywhere in the state. This year, the dates were July 19

through July 22. To learn more, visit <https://bit.ly/state-bioblitz>.

Construct wildlife-friendly fencing

Every year, wildlife organizations and land management agencies across the state convert livestock fencing that restricts wildlife movement to fencing that facilitates safer travel. Wildlife-friendly fencing is easier for animals like pronghorn to go through and for animals like deer and elk to jump over without entangling their hind legs.

In spring 2023, I helped with the Grizzly Wildlife Habitat Management (WHMA) fencing project in south central Wyoming. During the workday, our group converted approximately one mile of fence in the area, contributing to the conversion of almost 17 miles of fence over multiple years. If you



Wood frog sampled during RMAP survey. Photo by Abby Perry.

want to help with fence conversion efforts, reach out to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department or the Wyoming Wildlife Federation.

At the fence conversion workday, I was introduced to the Wyoming Wildlife Federation Conservation Ambassador Program. The WWF's mission focuses on conservation, science, and education around both policy and conservation. I soon joined their conservation ambassador program and learned about additional opportunities for natural resource volunteer work. To learn more about volunteering with WWF, visit wyomingwildlife.org.

Help protect Wyoming waterways

If you are interested in helping protect aquatic species, the Wyoming Game and Fish Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) certification program is a great opportunity. Through this program, you can volunteer at AIS check stations and help safeguard Wyoming waters from aquatic invasive species that haven't entered the state yet. This opportunity requires additional training but will make a big difference in preventing invasive aquatic species from entering Wyoming waterways.

Indoor opportunities

Some volunteering efforts are physically intense, while others require additional training to set up both participants and organizations for success. But you can also help the natural world by helping people.

Many organizations raise money for research; some even fund full-time graduate students at UW. These organizations often need volunteers to lend a hand at events, staffing registration tables, setting up and tearing down tables and chairs, organizing silent auctions, or taking tickets for raffle drawings.

Have fun

As a volunteer, you are sometimes afforded opportunities to see wildlife in a way that isn't available to the general public. Volunteering is also a great way to learn from and work with passionate professionals in their respective fields.

In many cases, you'll get to chat with subject matter experts you can ask just about anything, and they'll know the answer. You may even meet people who can identify eight different bird sounds happening simultaneously!

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In addition to being a Certified Wyoming Naturalist and WWF Conservation Ambassador, **Tyrell Perry** also volunteers on the Old Pen Joint Powers Board in Rawlins to support preservation of the Wyoming Frontier Prison. Perry's favorite organism to see while volunteering and recreating is *Xanthoparmelia wyomingica*. You can find him on iNaturalist @reddesertrambler.

Contribute to international data collection

Outside of the BioBlitz, I post in the iNaturalist app year-round. It's fun to contribute data and strengthen our knowledge about species that inhabit Wyoming. In my job, I work with invasive plant species and often utilize iNaturalist to virtually investigate where species have been reported within my management area.

There is a whole world of discovery on iNaturalist and other mobile apps that provide access to specialists for assistance with plant and animal identification. These interactive resources can help you learn about what plants and wildlife occur in your backyard, state, and even around the globe. Personally, I enjoy challenging myself to find new species and be more aware of my surroundings.