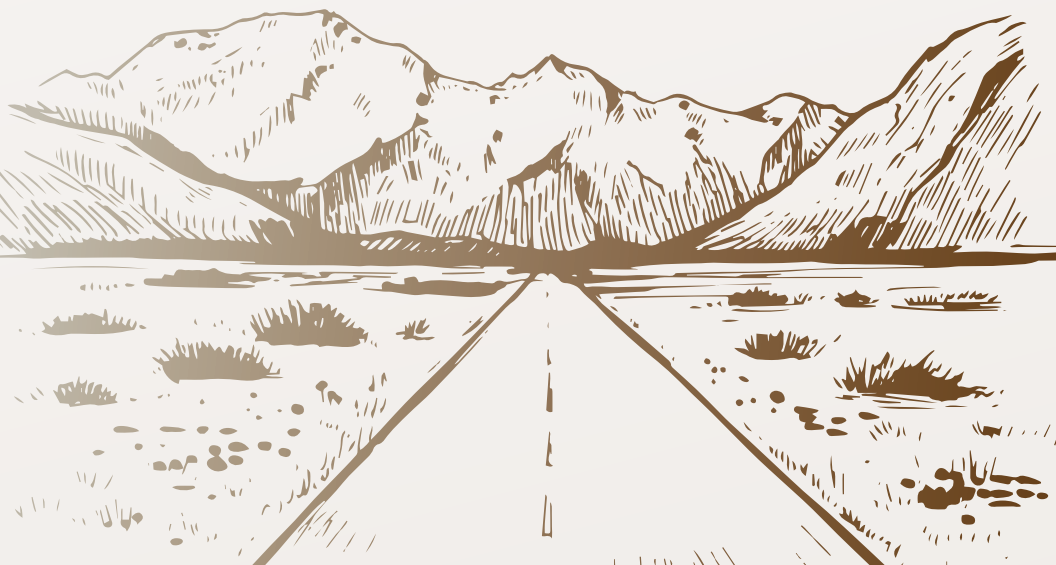


Imagining
**WYOMING'S
FUTURE**

A YOUTH VISION FOR 2030

Winners of the 2021 Multimedia and Writing Contest



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Ruckelshaus Institute of Environment and Natural Resources
University of Wyoming Honors Program
Wyoming Afterschool Alliance
Wyoming 2030
Wyoming Humanities Council
University of Wyoming Creative Writing Program

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INTRODUCTION

When I joined the University of Wyoming as a new faculty member in 2019, Wyoming was at a crossroads. I found it beautiful and welcoming, rich in recreation opportunities and natural wealth. Yet some people seemed anxious about the future. Coal company bankruptcies had resulted in hundreds of layoffs statewide; the mineral wealth the state depended on to fund education, healthcare, and other services appeared at risk. All of this came on the heels of a period of population decline between 2014-2019. My students at UW explained that while they wanted to remain in Wyoming after graduation, they were unsure what opportunities awaited them. Many were concerned about issues like jobs, affordable housing, climate change, and resources for mental health. In response, I joined colleagues Corrie Knapp and Emilene Ostlind in UW's Ruckelshaus Institute of Environment and Natural Resources to start a project to better understand how Wyoming youth were responding to change, including how their values and experiences contributed to their perceptions of their communities and the place of Wyoming in the world.

Then, the COVID-19 pandemic reached Wyoming, and everything changed. It became difficult to meet with people; hospitals filled with sick people, schools met virtually, travelling to communities became riskier. Energy markets teetered, further imperiling the state's economy. The future looked even more uncertain.

In the Ruckelshaus Institute, we decided to change our focus from doing research about Wyoming youth to offering them a platform to express their hopes for the future of the state through storytelling. We realized that often, discussions about the future of communities – about what kinds of places they have been, are, and can become – take place in city council meetings, legislative sessions, executive board rooms, and on the airwaves during political races. While these are important venues where key decisionmakers exchange ideas and debate paths forward during challenging times, they are not always accessible to all community members. This is especially true for young people, who are often most affected by economic, political, and environmental change.

Why storytelling? Because storytelling is a universal language that helps us make meaning and sense of the past, our place in the world, and to imagine possible futures. Storytelling also has a pragmatic element, linking individuals to collectives and revealing shared values and goals despite differences. And stories come in many forms. While the focus of *Imagining Wyoming's Future* is creative expression, inviting submissions in a range of media genres, stories also emerge in conversations with neighbors on front porches and sidewalks and in city council meetings, churches, and other public forums. Telling stories is something we do every day. It shapes who we are, and in turn has the power to shape our communities and help us imagine better, brighter, more equitable futures.

The goal of *Imagining Wyoming's Future* is to elevate the voices of Wyoming youth and support their participation in high-stakes debates about what comes next for our beautiful state. We feel that the winning entries featured in this anthology offer a diverse array of creative, compelling, moving, and brilliant visions for what Wyoming might look like by the year 2030. We invite you to read, sit with, contemplate, learn from, and enjoy each of them.



Matthew S. Henry
University of Wyoming Honors College

WYOMING 2030

As director of the Wyoming Afterschool Alliance, it is my privilege to work alongside many others to cultivate conditions in our state that will enable all young people in Wyoming to grow and contribute. This aspiration prompted us to join other statewide organizations and launch Wyoming2030, a statewide effort that asks each of us to consider: What do children and families need today so Wyoming communities can thrive tomorrow?

Wyoming2030 seeks a holistic approach to developing flourishing communities that benefit all. I define long-term success as seeing self-sufficient young people who believe in themselves mature into healthy, productive contributors. Youth are our state's most important natural resource. As such, we seek opportunities to improve how Wyoming cares for and educates young people throughout the state. What better time to invite a broad community of young people to share what they want 2030 to look like and to help us set a vision?

On January 26th 2021, Governor Mark Gordon welcomed a panel of young people from across Wyoming to share their perspectives as part of a virtual series hosted by Wyoming2030. The Governor invited participants to talk about *what they hoped for communities in 2030 and what they needed to get there.*

Following on that powerful event, Wyoming2030 is delighted to collaborate with the Ruckelshaus Institute and the Wyoming Council for the Humanities to invite young people to express their aspirations in another form here.

I found all the submissions to be both hopeful and searingly honest. I was moved by the deep love of place and the common desire to find a way to remain here. The pieces in this collection reminded me that young people's perspectives belong in our civic discourse today and into the future.

Their vision can help us build something long-term and enduring that will sustain healthy and productive communities. The more we make space for the authenticity and genius of young people, the more our communities will flourish.



Michelle M Sullivan
Director, Wyoming Afterschool Alliance

WYOMING HUMANITIES COUNCIL

Wyoming Humanities is proud to be part of this anthology of Wyoming's youth solving Wyoming's economy through storytelling.

Let me explain.

It is often difficult to wrap one's mind around something as complex as "the economy." We generally understand that it affects many aspects of our lives, but the concept of an economy feels far removed and theoretical, not up close and personal. It is something for economists and policy makers to figure out. The economy is something that happens *to us* rather than *by us*.

We know that the economy is made up of jobs, taxes, and pie charts—but we know that there is more to Wyoming than those. The wealth of the state is measured not just in economic terms, but also in terms of its intellectual wealth, social and personal well-being, community strength, and the wealth of our natural world.

The word "economy" is derived from the Greek word *oikonomia* which is a combination of the Greek words for house (*oikos*) and manage (*nemein*). Combined, the original words meant "household management."

In this sense, the economy is how we take care of our home—Wyoming.

Our state's economy is going through significant changes right now. What we traditionally relied on is being shaken. Changes are caused by shifting and declining markets, land use and regulations, COVID, and even events happening on the other side of the world.

To best create the conditions for improving our economy and increasing our wealth, we need two things. First, we need to create an environment of inspiration, creativity, wisdom, idea-sharing, and understanding. In short, we

need vision, and storytelling is key to creating that environment. Second, we need to hear the stories of those who will eventually take over the household management of Wyoming: the youth of our state.

Please enjoy this anthology of Wyoming's youth creating an environment, through storytelling, which will help us manage our home and ultimately increase our collective wealth.



Shawn Reese
Executive Director, Wyoming Humanities Council

Grand Prize

BRIGHT FUTURE



ETHAN CEARLOCK

Age 17

Powell, Wyoming

Fiction

An inconsiderate ray of sun shines across my closed eyes. A bird begins its opera. My cat leaps onto my stomach and then onto the window for a listen. I sit up in bed, not even close to being wide awake but with no chance of going back to sleep. Why did I even bother to buy an alarm clock? A look out the window reveals pine trees with little drops of dew still dripping down. Rugged, purple, snow capped mountains loom in the distance. Not another person in sight. An introvert's dream come true.

I've barely been up for a minute when the angst hits. Today's the big day, the day that a year's worth of work boils down to. I look around my room, hoping to distract myself by noticing old things for the first time. My framed statistics degree is slightly askew, along with several desk toys and baubles. No doubt the cat's doing. As I put everything back in place, I reflect on these objects I often overlook. The degree that allows me to work where I please and not be constrained to a single field of science, the little model rocket I was gifted as a child that sparked my fascination with space, a Rubik's Cube that's almost solved but not quite completed because I'm too stubborn to look up how to do it, a copy of *Hamlet* with a bookmark in the middle right next to a *Calvin and Hobbes* comic book that I've read a dozen times, a rook serving as a paperweight, holding down my ambivalent invitation to speak at the Theodore Roosevelt Space Center today, it's as much an honor as a burden. You can learn a lot about a person by their decorations and shelves. You can learn a lot about yourself by pretending to be a stranger in your own home, asking questions and making observations. A sort of environmental

psychoanalysis. After completing this particular morning ritual, I move on to the next.

I use the time while brushing my teeth and showering to brainstorm projects, my ideas fluid like the water running down me, no constraints on what I may think of or about. Any subject, any time, reality or fantasy. These few minutes in the realm of wonder are where I find inspiration, inspiration that will encourage me to think outside the box, that will foster my ideas for the day. If you ask your brain a question, it will spit out an answer. This is the time I dedicate to finding the right questions.

Tea and breakfast in hand, I sit outside and orchestrate my plans for the day. The morning should be similar to yesterday, but come afternoon I've got a conference at the new Theodore Roosevelt Space Center followed by another meeting with the Department of Energy.

When I'm finally ready to head to work, I step off my porch and walk ten steps to my little office. Built from logs, it's just as cozy as the cabin I live in. I've dedicated my professional life to playing my small part in the advancement of humanity, but I truly love living in such a quaint place and wouldn't want to be anywhere else on this planet. I chuckle to myself at the irony of living in the middle of nowhere yet spending my days working on space projects and nuclear power initiatives.

Just yesterday I completed a deep dive analysis of the benefits and costs of building another nuclear power plant, and I did it all right from the comfort of the forest. I'll present my analysis and give a speech during my meeting with the Department of Energy today. Our innovative nuclear plants have made electricity our most profitable export, and we provide the nation with massive quantities of it. Wyoming adapts, from oil and coal to thorium and uranium, our economy and our pride are illuminating the United States. Solar and wind are no strangers to our lands either. This state may no longer be so carbon based, but we remain the bona fide battery of America.

I've spent countless hours in this room, hunched over my desk, standing in front of the wall-encompassing white board, refreshing my memory from the bookshelves opposite it, hanging upside down for a change in perspective. It's home. It's not easy, not always fun, and I'm not always happy, but it is deeply satisfying seeing a problem resolved. That's the Wyoming way, we are forced to persevere through the tough, harsh, and inhospitable

circumstances, and we have discovered that there is satisfaction and beauty on the other side. The key to making it here is to understand that what is enjoyable, beautiful, and easy seldom overlap. That pain and pleasure aren't, in fact, mutually exclusive opposites, but two aspects of emotion that may coexist with one another. This idea isn't hidden, you can find it in any athlete at the gym or problem solver deep in thought, it is the principle that has forever pushed humanity forward, and the principle that is pushing Wyoming forward now. From pioneers on the plains to pioneers in space, from oil to thorium, from old to new, from challenge to challenge, Wyoming perseveres.

A few hours have passed. I've typed up and printed off all the notes I'll need for the day and head out of my retreat and towards civilization. The Theodore Roosevelt Space Center is relatively new and very hot in the press, being one of the most exciting things happening in the nation let alone Wyoming. The University of Wyoming pulled a CalTech and bought some land, built a center run joint with NASA. Poised to be a burgeoning force in the realm of asteroid mining, today is its first official day of operation. Given that I was a lead advocate, I am expected to give a brief speech and I may well be questioned by the press. There's no point in dreading over what I can't control, so I prepare. I rehearse a few key points under my breath, just to be certain I'm ready.

I use the commute time to calm my nerves. If the public won't support this, it could all go to waste. Upon arriving I find a relatively small crowd compared to what politicians speak before, but still there are numerous cameras and at least a dozen dozens of people. A small podium and a microphone are soon in front of me. I can't remember how I got here but I know what to do. My palms are sweaty but my voice is strong.

"A hundred years ago, Wyoming was a mining state. A hundred years from now we still will be, but we're moving away from the Earth and towards the

Wyoming adapts, from oil and coal to thorium and uranium, our economy and our pride are illuminating the United States. Solar and wind are no strangers to our lands either. This state may no longer be so carbon based, but we remain the bona fide battery of America.

stars. The potential had been tantalizing for years, mountain sized hunks of metal and rock just out of our reach, we've been like small children on tippy toes with outstretched arms trying to reach a cookie jar on top of the fridge; but no longer. We will innovate. We will climb. We will seize our fantasies. We will no longer watch the future from the past, we refuse to be buried by the sands of time, we will succeed where others have only dreamt. We will reach beyond this earth, beyond the moon, beyond mars, and we will grab the iron, platinum, and titanium that will build our future societies.

“This facility was named after one of our nation's greatest presidents, Theodore Roosevelt. He was a man that believed in a strenuous life, that satisfaction comes from pushing your boundaries and expanding your horizons. We are now not only pushing the boundaries of our state, but of humanity itself. We will go to places darker, colder, and more isolated than the deepest mines, and we will return richer for it. For most of human history, wealth has been defined by the natural resources a state holds within its borders. This is no more. Our borders now stretch for millions of miles, containing incomprehensibly vast amounts of material. We have pushed our boundaries further than any conqueror, we no longer need to fight over access, we will traverse hardship and find satisfaction, surplus and prosperity unparalleled in history. From our doorsteps we get to watch the next age rushing in one shuttle at a time. It is my honor to welcome in this new age as I welcome you all to the Theodore Roosevelt Space Center. Thank you.”

I step down from the podium. A blur of applause and questions wash over my ears. I answer as best I can, grateful for the prep work I did earlier. The talking lasts far longer and is far more stressful than the speech itself, but if it raises support, it's worth it. After the excitement has calmed, hours have passed, I barely have time to eat a bagel before my appointment with the Department of Energy.

The appointment arrives. I begin.

“Oil is a relic of the past. Nuclear has managed to keep this state afloat, but Wyoming deserves not just to survive, but to thrive. That is why it is paramount we construct more reactors, reactors that advance with the times, that are safer than oil by the metric of pollution, cheaper by the watt, and able to provide more stability to the state. Electricity now flows out of this state like oil used to, but as populations and demand grow, we must keep pace...”

I give another presentation, far longer than the previous and to a much smaller and more scrupulous audience. Despite the slide show, graphs, and esoteric jargon, the speech I give here requires more passion and rhetorical finesse than I used earlier, simply delivered in different forms.

I feel as though I've succeeded in securing the development of more reactors, but the process is slow and tediously bureaucratic. It'll be months before I know if Wyoming can continue to keep pace with a rapidly advancing society. My job is to make sure it does.

My work is finally done for the day. The culmination of a year's worth of work is over. There will certainly be more to do tomorrow, but for now I may relax. I stroll downtown as the sun hangs low, reminding myself why I work so hard to keep this state great.

There are people meandering about, looking for someplace to eat or something to do. Parents with precious little tikes holding their hands, their hands barely big enough to wrap around a finger, new couples going for a stroll; I look through a restaurant window and see a first date going well, nervous and awkward but smiley. Nearby a group of friends is celebrating something or other, glasses raised high; three generations of a family gathered around a table, leaned in close to hear the eldest tell a tale. A little further and I pass a cafe and a bookstore. At this hour, they're remarkably similar, with college kids sipping coffee, typing on laptops, studying, finishing up homework. Before I know it, my hand is pulling out my phone and calling up an old friend. Soon I'm in one of the cozy little restaurants, tucked away in a corner, marshmallows bobbing in my hot cocoa, the sight of a passerby through the window, an epic tale being woven by the person sitting across from me about the previous month of her life. We sit and talk as old friends do, picking up right where we left off on year old conversations, speculating about where we'll be a year from now, joking, laughing, eating, enjoying each other's company. By now it's gotten dark, it seems about time to head home, but she invites me to one of the best things you can do in Wyoming.

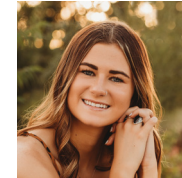
We head up into the mountains, far away from city lights, which takes less than 30 minutes in our part of Wyoming. The mountains are surprisingly lively lower down, with large groups gathered round campfires and families that dragged their kids camping, singing and drinking, s'mores, beers, stories, a very unique kind of nightlife. We hike a little further up, past giant boulders, past a babbling brook, past a foul pile left by a horse, and to a

little alcove in the mountain. We pull out maps on our phones, set up the telescope, and star gaze. We see the little dots surrounding Jupiter, the craters of the crescent moon, the thousands of worlds we will never know. It's peaceful and nostalgic. Lying there, observing the heavens, seeing the same beauty in the sky that people all around the globe have been enchanted by throughout time.

After the moon had long passed its peak and the sky had swirled and I had drifted off once or twice, it was finally time to head home. I had been exhausted by the day. The weight starts in my legs, every step coming slower. It fills me like lead poured into a mold. By the time I get to the front door, reaching for the doorknob feels like curling 20 kilos. Brushing my teeth takes all the strength I have left. The weight reaches my eyelids as I fall into bed. My cat curls into a ball beside me. I can't wait to do it again.

Second Place

YOUTH VISION FOR 2030



KELLI FRIMML
Age 18
Worland, Wyoming
Essay

When I was little, I remember picturing the future to consist of flying cars and transparent toasters. As I have gotten older, I realize things do not really work out that way or that quickly. Now, after living in Wyoming for 18 years, I can better picture and understand what I imagine the state and communities look like in the year 2030. Not only would I see a clean, beautiful land, but there would be healthy communities with better education, economics, and more. As a positive person, I envision positive things for the years to come.

Right off the bat, I see 2030 Wyoming built off of dedicated people who strive to better their communities. While communities today are strong, there is always room for more. Not only will these self-sufficient civilians seek to better their surroundings, but they will also be driven to better themselves. This will lead to better educating each other on how to care for yourself. Everyone will have everyone's back. Mental health will be stronger than it has ever been, with the idea that the majority of young people will mature into strong, healthy, productive adults. Right now, in 2021, the state of Wyoming has the highest suicide rate in the nation with 31 deaths for every 100,000 residents. Obviously, something in our state and communities needs to be improved to help and support those struggling with mental health. For the future, I see that improvement, I see that number dropping, and I see more connections between people. No one will be looked over or looked down on.

In addition to that topic, the future of our state is in the hands of the youth. While many adults and elders can easily come up with the ideas, the youths are the ones to take action and start making these differences. This is why caring for and supporting us now is so important. Without the guidance we need, our paths will not get very far. Regarding people, I believe there will be great population increases across the state. During the year 2020, once lockdown had lifted due to the pandemic, Wyoming's famous tourist attractions saw their busiest days on record. This is mostly because Wyoming's restrictions were a lot less than bigger states which attracted more people than normal. Because of this, I see more people moving to Wyoming. Looking at numbers increasing in neighboring states such as Colorado, I see most of our population growth occurring first in Laramie and Cheyenne. These two cities would probably hold about 38 percent by then which would be a strong advantage for our government system. Also relating to population, I would imagine that smaller towns would lose population to larger towns and cities as they have over the past few years.

Moving onto a separate subtopic, the way to further guide and enhance the knowledge of the youth is going to come from education. Just seeing the changes that have been made from 2018 to now, I can make the quick assumption that technology will continue to grow and change the way education is handed to students. From chalkboards to touch screens and from having to walk to a computer lab to carrying your computer with you from class to class. Things are different now and honestly, it is hard to imagine how greater change is going to look in the future, but here is what I have come up with. While most might think that technology is largely impactful, others might see it as a negative effect on learning and mechanisms. From what I can imagine, bringing in more technology can possibly take away from teachers, turning them into more a facilitator who is there to help with questions instead of doing the overall teaching. Ever

since the pandemic began and quarantine took place in 2020, more students found that they preferred online teaching and chose not to attend in-person school when the opportunity opened. From a personal perspective, seeing how many students didn't attend my school this year and chose to continue their education online, I can

The future of our state is in the hands of the youth. This is why caring for and supporting us now is so important.

assume that number will only increase in the future. While there are a lot of somewhat negative effects from enhancing technology in schools, there can also be positive looks on the idea. For example, new programs can be made for teachers to better see a more real-time data chart showing their students' performance to help them seek the individuals who need tailored help. Technology can be used to help students improve at their own pace, but this could affect the spot-on curriculums. I picture students in a science class, but while one is working on chemistry, another is looking into human psychology. If everyone is going at different paces, I do not see why they all need to be meeting the same standards. When thinking about school subjects, I also see large differences being made and new things being brought in. I know that in today's schools, things like coding are already being taught to elementary students. With the future holding such strong technology, I do not think it would hurt to continue teaching more advanced subjects starting at a young age. When imagining the future of school subjects, I perfectly picture more useful subjects being brought into the classroom. For example, mathematical and interpersonal skills such as economics, health tech, and management analysis will all be put on the table for students to educate at some point before reaching college.

A topic that has taken some research and further understanding is economics and what it will look like in ten years. From what I have learned, I can assume that for our state that sales tax rates, property tax rates, tax on capital gain earnings, or all of the above will increase. The idea is that whatever system takes place will gain additional revenue as the population increases, which is likely to happen in our state's future. Without this idea, the state could have what's called a backward incentive that would discourage the growth simply because we couldn't afford to pay the government operations we would need to support a population increase. Pushing people out of the state because we cannot afford to support them is an abrupt way to become a failed state. Taking this idea even further, I imagine that small business growth occurs over the course of ten years. With that being said, I also believe that small businesses should be given the same resources as larger businesses. A business in Thermopolis has access to the same businesses that might be starting in Cheyenne or Laramie. In doing so, the decline in smaller communities will come to a stop. With the economy comes employment. In 2020, the unemployment rate reached 6.1 percent and dropped to 4.9 percent in 2021. My hope for the future in 2030 is that the rate will continue to drop. While it is perfectly normal for the rate to go up and down over the next couple of years, I would imagine that by 2030 it is at a healthy, low percentage.

Where would I see myself? I have been asked this question multiple times lately now that I am a senior and my own future is really in my hands and my hands only. Ten years seems like a long stretch to me, but I already have a few things in mind. I know I plan to have graduated from the University of Wyoming at this point and I should be moved into my own home debt-free. I see myself living in a larger community than I grew up in and being a big part of it. With all these ideas I have for the future of our state, I see myself being one of the many to actually put these ideas into reality and do things to make a change. Career-wise, I know for a fact I am going to be making a difference in people's lives. I want to help people in ways others cannot. Something I have always been passionate about is mental health and how it works. When attending college, I plan to study human psychology and learn about human behavior. By 2030, I see myself slowly working towards becoming a criminal psychologist. Growing up, I remember always watching crime shows and documentaries with my grandma. They always scared me, but also left me thinking why? Something I would be so fascinated by is interrogating a criminal and diagnosing them. In a way, it relieves them to have an answer. Moving past my career, I also see myself married by the time 2030 rolls around. We would be living in a hard-working community that can easily be called a family, where everyone feels the importance of taking care of each other and our surroundings. I see Tuesdays spent out on the streets eating tacos with my friends and Friday night bowling and pizza with the neighbors. The second Sunday of each month will be spent out in the backyard with everyone from church that morning. The guys are grilling, the girls are gossiping, and the kids are playing games. Although I picture date nights occurring often, I also know I will plan evenings for myself. I know that in the future I will make sure to put myself over others at times because my mental health is just as important as anyone else's. I can picture me and my significant other being financially comfortable and traveling as much as we can before permanently settling and having kids. This beautiful future will be one where I, personally, am the happiest I have ever been in my life.

Another quick thing I picture in the future of our state is clean land and property. Not just sidewalks and curbs, but along highways, interstates, and badlands I see the ground free of trash and litter. In the future, I imagine a system or program that provides the resources and tools needed to clean trash continuously. This idea also ties back to having a community that sees the issue and takes control of it. People who want to keep things clean and healthy. So many harmful things are thrown out of the car window or simply just dropped during a walk and most of the time, these items take years and years to decompose. The build-up of trash is so unhealthy and unpleasant for tourists

or locals to see. In addition, I see more recycling centers spread out across the state. I know in the town I grew up in, that was not offered to us, and it led to a build-up of trash in dumps. Offering this would allow for the state to be cleaner and more productive when it comes to trash. So in ten years, I hope to see cleaner lands and more people who want to keep it that way.

Lastly, I want to talk about the things that I want to stay the same. Starting with the natural beauty of our state. Personally, I do not think bigger buildings need to be built or land needs to be taken for unnecessary projects. The land of the state should remain untouched for as long as possible. When 2030 rolls around, I hope to continue to see colorful, breathtaking landscapes. Another idea is the regulated public education which should continue for the next ten years and more because education is so important, and I would hate for it to be taken from anyone.

In conclusion, what I truly see in the future of Wyoming is beauty and improvement. The state has a lot to work on over the ten-year time period but there is so much potential in each community. After looking at trends over the past, I can see a bright future for Wyoming and its people. With driven civilians, enhanced education, a stronger economy, and cleaner lifestyles, the state will be one of the finest in the country. I see myself being more involved and figuring as an inspiration to others to be the same way. In 2030, all I picture is happiness and health for everyone and every place.

Third Place

POEMS FROM THE WYOMING LANDSCAPE



HAYLEY PEARSON-HORNER
Age 16
Cody, Wyoming
Poetry

RIVER

(blank verse)

The shadow of whispering reeds blocks me
sun shines energizing my particles
my pure waters stay untouched of evil
I provide clean nourishment to all life
I'm the snake of the snake, a windy wind
I twist, bend, and turn because I am free

WIND

(limerick)

I run through the turbines' blades
a second is spent for the worlds' aid
my days are filled with generating power
I am at service to the land I scour
the air stays clean with the energy I made

CANYON

(ballad)

I stand against the elements
holding boulders to me
those who pass by are always safe
I'm spread for all to see

the destroyers have gone at last
people once marked my walls
now they just admire my beauty
nature brings them with calls

I am no longer a passage
people stay for glory
suddenly everyone listens
as I tell my story

MOUNTAINS

(terza rima)

The clouds engulf the top of me
I sit on top of the brilliant show
looking upon the wonderful world I get to see

The small towns and cities cascade just below
skirting around my base staying at the brink
they respect my boundaries and my natural flow

Humans explore me, scouring every part they think
they hike to the top of forests and ridges
I stay afloat avoiding what makes me sink

The land counts on me to be a bridge
I add texture to the earth, keeping it from being bland
without me, Wyoming would decimate to a smidge

I break barriers as I stand
leaving the state nothing but grand

OIL RIG

(elegie)

My days of use are over
sitting empty and alone
I am surrounded by clover
so I will carry on my own

I've been emptied of my controller
my demise cannot be atoned
better options came, like solar
the only memory I hold is a tombstone

YELLOWSTONE

(haiku)

YELLOWSTONE LAKE

The cutthroat returned
their numbers are at full force
Yellowstone is pure

OLD FAITHFUL

I am a symbol
dependable as always
shooting my waters

BUFFALO

I stand strong as ever
the land is filled with us, we're
spirit of the west

TOURISTS

We flood the entrance
numbers stay strong with our will
the park stays alive

WYOMING

(sonnet)

We have become a fully equal state
everyone has matched opportunities
Wyoming is now almost free of hate
together we're one big community

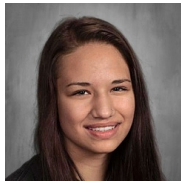
Every person has a uniform say
democrat, republican doesn't matter
our state makes the decisions either way
all dividing barriers are shattered

Our focal includes hunting and fishing
we are still farmers and people of land
but now things get done without the wishing
and several get the chance to take a stand

Finally, nothing else needs to be done
Wyoming has come together as one

Honorable Mentions

GROUNDWORK FOR THE FUTURE



JENTRY SIMS
Age 15
Rock River, Wyoming
Fiction

As I cross the state line into Wyoming, I think about when I left this place. It was 2024, six years ago, and I chose to go to college in another state to see a state besides boring old Wyoming. I had become tired of Wyoming, of the lonely, howling wind, of the barren, never ending landscape, of the surrounding ranches that constantly reminded me that my dream was never to live here and be a rancher like the rest of my family. Ranching just isn't for me. While I do enjoy the opportunity to be around animals and my family, it's not a job I ever wanted to do; I felt I was meant for something different. It was always something I felt bad about, like I was disgracing my family by not connecting with their way of life. I had become tired of feeling the guilt of being the lone person to truly want to leave the family ranch, so I decided the best thing I could do is live my own life and not worry about how different it could have been if I stuck around. But as I get further into the state of my youth, I realize that it's not as bad as I remember it. The ground I once thought of as barren and monotonous, I can now see is one of the most extraordinary places anyone could ever be blessed enough to lay eyes on. I now see how quickly the landscape changes, how it goes from prairie to mountain range in an instant. One moment the sagebrush covers all within sight, then suddenly there's willows and creeks everywhere you look. Now, the ranches I see all around do not instill in me a sense of guilt as they once did, but of nostalgia as I think back to my childhood growing up on one. I still hate the wind though. It doesn't matter how homesick I get, I can't stand

the constant blowing of our Wyoming wind; the cold, dry air rushing past, taking away your breath and making hearing the person next to you near impossible. But that's part of what makes Wyoming what it is, so I wouldn't trade it for the world.

I decide to take some time to myself and detour through the rest of the state to see more of the great beauty and diversity that is Wyoming. Instead of heading east, as I would to get to my family's home, I continue along Highway 189. I notice how many of my surroundings have changed. I see pastures, more diverse and resilient than ever, the grass luscious and the soil thriving. I notice the lack of trash that so frequently lined the sides of highways, disrupting the integrity of terrain. I see renewable energy sources such as wind turbines (which were around ever since I can remember) but also some new ones, such as nuclear plants which were just moving in as I was graduating. However, I know that within the state there are the coal power plants that Wyoming is so well known for, still providing revenue and thousands of jobs for our residents, but now improved by carbon capture technology. I remember my parents telling me about the new rules regarding septic systems and recreational activities on lakes and rivers to improve the water quality. I ponder all of these changes and feel even more hopeful for the future of our already great state. We are truly becoming the clean, environmentally safe place everyone wanted us to be when I was in high school.

Soon, I feel the need to stretch my legs. I park in the nearest pull-out and go for a walk. I look at the ground beneath me and feel sudden joy as my inner ranch-kid notices the health of the ground; more specifically the disappearance of invasive species such as cheatgrass, ventenata, and medusa-head grass. The ground that was once strangled by weeds and ruined by frequent fires has now bounced back, no longer under the reign of terror of invasive species. Such plants constantly plagued the ground meant for grazing by out-competing edible plants, fueling wildfires in drought years, and reducing the diversity that is so important to maintaining a stable environment. These grasses created a positive feedback loop for themselves by fueling fires, which they were the first to recover from, reducing the abundance of natural grasses that could survive within the area. Looking down, I think of all the ways to eradicate invasive species. The first is through mechanical methods such as pulling and digging and suffocation. Next is the chemical control method, which uses herbicides. The biological method includes introducing diseases or insect predators that target the specific plant. Lastly, cultural control methods are human oriented and focus

on preventing the spread of species by being diligent about cleaning shoes before leaving an infected area or not moving firewood around. Herbicides were always used to kill off invasive species when I was younger, but they aren't always environmentally friendly. They could contaminate soil and groundwater, but they were also the easiest method for killing weeds. The other three methods can effectively get rid of invasive species safely, but it does take more effort than herbicides. Thankfully, it seems that everyone decided to put in the extra work to protect the soil. I think of how much effort everyone must have put into eliminating these terrible plants and reflect on what a wonderful change this is for the rangeland; how it betters the land for cattle to graze on and can prevent more fires in the dry years. As I walk back to my car, I continue to appreciate what good land management can do for a landscape. Now, driving once again, I eagerly look for further environmental changes Wyoming citizens have made to better their home.

I begin to notice that there is not a single piece of trash on the ground. While being litter-free has always been a goal for every town regardless of state, it never happened around here when I was a kid. I remember the highway cleanup my 4-H club did every year. Every member grabbed a trash bag, some gloves, and a bright orange vest and set to work, walking up and down the highway until it was clean. And let me just say, back then people were absolutely disgusting. We found pages from burned books, single socks, innumerable cigarette butts, beer bottles, chew cans—even a gun—and many more repulsive trash items. While I had no problem with the actual clean-up and was happy to help my community, the community didn't seem to really care. Sometimes people were downright rude. They wouldn't slow down when they passed us, and one person even threw out a glass bottle as they went by. And every year, it was either just as bad or worse than we left it the year before. We truly did work hard to clean up our town, but there was next to no reward, or at least there wasn't when I was around. Evidently, everyone finally decided it was time to care for their surroundings in the time that I've been gone. I have a hard time getting my head around how spotless the highway is. There's no longer items on the ground that shouldn't be there. There's no longer plastic sacks or bottles that were so common to see during my youth. Now, after glimpsing the cleanliness of this road, I know that the notion of throwing trash from a car is unfathomable in this day and age. Once again, I see how the year 2030 instilled in an entire state a want to be clean, safe, and to prolong our surroundings.

I pass through Kemmerer, home of the first nuclear plant in Wyoming. I remember being a sophomore in high school when I first learned of the

upcoming installation of this plant set for the year I was to graduate, 2024. I then wondered what this meant for our coal industry. How would it affect the employees of coal-fired plants? What would it mean for our economy? What could it do to the stability of the environment? Could it endanger us in any way? After having been reassured that it would not, in fact, explode and kill us all, I was still concerned for the job stability of coal industry workers. One day I had the realization that just because nuclear power was moving in didn't mean that coal was immediately heading out. Sure, we will one day deplete the resource but that was, and still is, far into our future. The question then was how we as a state were going to reduce the carbon footprint of relying heavily on coal. It turned out that Wyoming alone was responsible for 40 percent of the nation's coal, which also meant we were responsible for 69.2 percent of the carbon emissions—seven times the national average of CO₂ emissions per person. But that was nine years ago when I learned of that, and that is no longer a major concern for our environment. Since then, all power plants have installed carbon dioxide removal systems such as blue hydrogen. Blue hydrogen splits hydrogen and carbon dioxide apart, leaving hydrogen to be released and the carbon to be compressed, transported, and stored in the ground, otherwise known as geological sequestration. Generally this compressed carbon is stored in unmineable coal seams or depleted oil or gas reserves. Another method currently in use is carbon air capture. While this doesn't prevent our carbon footprint, it does reverse it by sucking air in, compressing the carbon dioxide, then injecting it into the ground. We have greatly improved our technology to make coal a safer industry for our environment, but it by no means implies that we are carbon-free. However, there has been a zero emissions initiative set in place, which should be in effect by 2050. While that is 20 years into the future, I realize for the first time today that we are on the right track, and that we may actually be emission free in my lifetime. One day, with the help of carbon air capture, maybe we can even hope for a negative-emissions initiative. The very thought of this is huge for our environmental health.

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PICTURE THIS, THE FUTURE OF WYOMING IN NINE YEARS

(An imagination of what Wyoming will look like in 2030)

After traveling along Highway 189 for a while longer, I was soon in the town my grandparents lived in when I was a kid, Pinedale. I remember visiting there for a couple weeks every summer and sometimes on holidays. I remember spending hours and hours exploring Fremont Lake on my grandparents' boat. We'd swim, fish, and have picnics on the shore, always careful to clean up after ourselves, a simple task that not everyone was always conscious of. There was almost always trash around, and some boats would even dump their grey and black water in the lake. This makes me think of the many water regulations intact to maintain our water quality today. About nine years ago, Wyoming hit a peak by being among the worst states in the nation for water quality due to poor septic systems, nitrate pollutants, the lack of any sort of wastewater plan, and as I mentioned, the desecration of water sources by the people around them. A plan was formulated, and by the time I left high school it was already taking effect. Officials began requesting that homeowners attach any existing sewer lines and created mandatory septic system inspections any time land was bought or sold. Laws were put in place for those using lakes and rivers recreationally. Now, everyone knows and is careful to not dump wastewater in lakes, and to pick up after themselves. Finally, after the eternal struggle against pollution and toxins in water sources, the year 2030 brought with it the motivation to keep clean. My pride continues to grow as I view my surroundings and think of the old ways, the ways that were detrimental to our environmental health. But not anymore. Already, I am so grateful to be back in my home state as I get to see the improvement of the rangeland, water sources, and man-made carbon emissions. How much better could it possibly get?

Well, a lot better actually. We still have a long way to go in regard to improving our water quality and reducing carbon emissions, but this is a great start. For the first time in, well, ever, we actually have plans for the future. Suddenly, we have a place to start. Our carbon emissions are lower than ever, we are no longer amongst the worst in the nation for water quality, we have totally eliminated all of the invasive species that so long ago overran native grasses and created impeccable environments for unnecessary fires, and our roads and communities are spotless in regards to litter, but we have so far to go still. There can always be work done to further better the state concerning environmentalism, but as I finally turn toward my childhood home in the southeast corner of the state, I feel content in knowing that Wyoming has changed for the better, and that we all can expect nothing but greatness for the future.



SHAELYN WHITLOCK

Age 14

Cody, Wyoming

Essay

It's hard to imagine what Wyoming would be like in nine years, it seems such a short amount of time and there are many changes that could affect the future. Now, Wyoming is a majestic place, and an outdoor state. It presents a small-town feel and provides easy access to nature, through our state parks, the Rocky Mountains, or the absolute natural beauty Wyoming contains. I see it as a place of adventure and love hiking, fishing, going to rodeos, enjoying the snow in the wintertime, and finding pleasure in all of the outdoor activities. These are many aspects that will hopefully stay true to Wyoming within the next nine years, and that I would like to see stick around. Some ways that I feel we can achieve these things, to make Wyoming the state I imagine to see in nine years, would be to:

- hold true to Wyoming's core values,
- managing wildlife,
- providing good opportunities for youth to keep them in Wyoming,
- having a sufficient driving economy,
- and providing new opportunities besides just oil and gas.

Through doing these five things, I believe that Wyoming could become even more resilient, and affluent than it is now.

Some of the core values in Wyoming include service, collaboration, leadership, excellence, and integrity. As we follow these already, you can find

that anywhere in Wyoming, a lot of people live by these standards. We need to continue to progress in these values and hold true to them so that by 2030 we can provide a wonderful place to live. A place where people are honest, and friendly, taking action and helping each other when needed.

Wyoming has many natural beauties and sights, not just including mountains and lakes, although many of them, but also wildlife. These are some of the many reasons I love and enjoy Wyoming and that I would like to stay. One of the aspects that plays into this would be managing wildlife and conserving it. In doing this, we are, “ensuring that future generations can enjoy our natural world and the incredible species that live within it” (The National Wildlife Federation, 2021). Keeping up with the wildlife management currently and on into the future can ensure that people that live here and those that pass through can continue to enjoy the wildlife available. This wouldn't be possible without our current resources such as the Wyoming Wildlife Foundation. In nine years, I imagine progression with this program and others, whether it is adapting to new situations or just keeping these management in place. Not too many people can argue that seeing wildlife on the side of the road isn't cool. Just the other day as I was heading home, near Jackson my family and I were able to see two mountain goats, and later that day three bull moose just off the side of the road. This experience was not my first time seeing wildlife just off the side of the road, as there are many times I have seen bears and once even a wolf. The fact that wildlife is so plentiful that you can see wildlife off the side of a busy road is truly amazing and is one of the reasons I love Wyoming so much. For this reason, I would like to see upkeep of wildlife management, as well as progression with it and adaptations as needed, so I can still enjoy it in the year 2030.

Another aspect that I would like to see within Wyoming building up to the next nine years, would be providing better opportunities for the youth. Wyoming is not a very big state according to the number of people that live here, the population peaks at 581,075 as of this year. Many big cities in the U.S. have much over the number of people in a much smaller area. Clearly, Wyoming has a small population. I'm not saying this is a bad thing, but I think one of the reasons Wyoming is such a small state is that a lot of youth that grows up here, end up leaving after college to get a job and pursue a career whether it's in Colorado, Arizona, or someplace else. This is not to say that some youth don't stay in Wyoming, but I do believe that one way we can provide better opportunities for youth would be by providing more job opportunities. To do this, we would probably have to see more businesses

that make Wyoming their home. And through the school program create innovative thinkers who can introduce more innovative jobs.

Wyoming is definitely a tourist destination, consisting of several parks, geysers, hot springs, mountains, wildlife, and many outdoor activities and destinations that are awesome! One thing that I would like to remain in the year 2030 would be to keep tourism thriving which greatly affects Wyoming's economy. Wyoming's tourism presents many job opportunities and welcomes millions of people into Wyoming each year. Tourism allows for small businesses to thrive and succeed more and is a driving factor of Wyoming's economy. Upkeeping and progressing the tourism industry could play a big role in Wyoming in nine years to come and by 2030, I could even imagine those numbers going up! Although tourism plays such a big role in our economy, having self-sufficient businesses would also be handy and could be improved upon for the future. Not having to rely on investments and loans but purely customers. In 2030 I would like to imagine seeing small businesses thriving more. Like any other state, there are small businesses that don't do so well, in 2030 I would like to see fewer small businesses closing. For example, in my town, a lot of downtown is empty buildings where small businesses have opened and closed, and it is sad to see them close every time. By having more self-sufficient businesses in the next nine years we might be able to prevail against this problem and see a change in small businesses failing. Along with having more self-sufficient businesses having more diverse businesses could play a part in this as well. For example, there are probably 10 beauty salons in my town, which is not a bad thing, but having more variety in businesses all across Wyoming could benefit Wyoming's economy in the future greatly and help small businesses as they try to stay afloat and well.

For years, ever since the first oil well was drilled in the year 1884 which lies close to Lander and is still active today, the oil and gas industry took lift-off and became increasingly popular after this. Oil and gas are heavily relied on also for the economy, supporting 28,270 jobs in Wyoming as of

One of the reasons our teachers are paid so well and we have such a strong education in Wyoming is because of oil and gas and the money it is producing, but because this is declining we need to find more diverse ways to help support the economy.

2019, but the numbers have been declining since. The oil industry produced 102.16 million barrels of crude oil, and in 2020 declining to 89.02 million barrels of crude oil. The gas industry was also at 1.6 billion Mcf in 2019, then decreasing to 1.47 billion Mcf. Obviously, the numbers are declining, schools that are funded by the oil and gas industry have less of a budget, because of regulation and new policies. One of the reasons our teachers are paid so well and we have such a strong education in Wyoming is because of oil and gas and the money it is producing, but because this number is declining we need to find more diverse ways to help support the economy besides just relying on oil and gas. While still keeping oil and gas, I also think having more renewable energies such as solar and wind. Not too many people can argue that there isn't wind always blowing in Wyoming, and most days the sun always shining! Along with this providing new business and even exporting more goods outside of the state and on a bigger scale the U.S. Also expanding our technology and advancing it, which is already happening in Cheyenne opening many job opportunities. Again, there is also expanding and progressing tourism more and more which is also a driving force of the economy of Wyoming. I am not saying that we drop oil and gas, but if we kept it and had another outside-of-the-box idea to also help support the economy, then we would have more to rely on and more support. I believe it could lessen budget cuts in schools and provide more of a backbone for the economy, which seems increasingly more possible, especially by 2030.

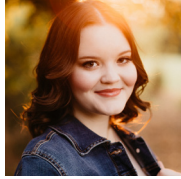
In 2030 I can imagine myself living in Wyoming with a good job where I can be outdoors. On the weekends during summer, I'll be taking small road trips down to Yellowstone and seeing animals on the way. And during the winters heading up to a close ski resort to ski and snowboard with my friends. I will live in a small town where everyone knows each other and are friendly, honest, and helps others when needed. This community would be located in a beautiful spot where the mountains surround, and farms lie in the countryside. I imagine people having a good relationship with the wildlife, respecting them, and keeping their environments clean while still being able to hunt. I imagine being able to take in a big breath of fresh air, and they're still not being much pollution in Wyoming, just crisp air. Along with the glassy lakes, I imagine seeing plentiful amounts of fish and a nonpolluted environment for this habitat too. The roads leading up to the mountains and lakes would be smooth and well taken care of, for the many tourists who would be coming in and out of Wyoming. I imagine the oil and gas industry is still in place, but now more windmills, solar panels, and clean renewable energy to rely on. I imagine what it would take to build this future, but nothing tough Wyoming can't take. I first think that by holding true to

Wyoming's core values, such as integrity and responsiveness, Wyoming can remain and build on a place where people are truthful, sincere, and ready to take action. I also believe that another aspect that could build on my imagination of 2030 would be the upkeep of wildlife management and an ongoing progression and adaptations to it so that the beauty of wildlife can remain plentiful in Wyoming. Also providing better opportunities for youth, plays a part in my vision for 2030, making sure to have job opportunities for people when they graduate so that they stay in Wyoming instead of going to places like Colorado and Arizona. Another thing would be to keep tourism thriving, which is a driving factor of Wyoming's economy, and to produce more self-sufficient and diverse businesses so as to slow down small businesses closing down in the next nine years. Also not just relying on oil and gas to support schools and communities but finding other diverse ways to help support the economy. Through doing all of this thing, I imagine a future attainable in my mind to a more tough and hardy Wyoming. A state where we aren't branded as a same old, same old state, which is why in the next nine years I would like to see it as a more diversely enriched state which is open to new thoughts and ideas.

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SEE IT IN WYOMING



JENNA HOOBLER
Age 17
Cheyenne, Wyoming
Song

I wanted people to take pride in this state
And kindness to erase all the hate
Change is never too late
It seems it was worth the wait
And now I see in Wyoming

See Jenna perform her song at wyoming2030.org/youth-voice.

Looking back on all those years
Feels like my youth has disappeared, oh oh
Drive through the town where I grew up
Wow things have changed so much, oh oh

I look back at the future I wanted to see
And now I see it in me
I wanted a world full of love and creativity
And now I see it in Wyoming

I felt we had a way to go
Acceptance here is a no show, oh oh
Hard work is great but we had to understand
Some people need an extra hand, oh oh

I wanted equality for all the minorities
For every one to feel pride in this country
I wanted a world full of pride and creativity
And now I see it in Wyoming

We saved the forests and the animals
And we started putting Mother Earth first
People feel safe to be who they really are
And our teen suicide rate was reversed
We've got better health care and cleaner air
And we still value hard work and grit
The change took conviction in our own hearts
But it was to everyone's own benefit

2030 DREAMS FOR WYOMING



RACHEL STEPHENS
Age 16
Laramie, Wyoming
Essay

People underestimate how important animals are to the development of humans. They can teach us compassion, understanding, and much more. Understanding that we are not above animals but living alongside them is to keep Earth's ecosystems in their perfect balance. Wildlife has always been an extremely important part of my life. I have always loved learning about the creatures we share this planet with. Anything I could get my hands on, from documentaries to books to educational essays, or simply anything that could expand my knowledge. The best way to understand things, though, is by seeing. By witnessing the natural habits of animals, you can gain a better understanding of them. This has led me to become extremely grateful to be able to live in Wyoming. Driving to school I see antelope grazing on a golf course, at sunset a family of deer wander into my neighborhood, and when we go on road trips, I get to see bison up close. These close and personal experiences with animals are extremely important to helping us understand why wildlife matters so much. Within this essay, I will be showing how the protection of wildlife and land in Wyoming matters. With a huge fear of my future children and grandchildren not having the opportunity to experience wildlife the way I have been able to, my biggest wishes for Wyoming coming true would put that fear to rest. These wishes include protection of natural wildlife, leaving animal habitats untouched unless necessary, and ensuring responsible acquisition of natural resources.

Wyoming has a unique amount of vast, nearly untouched landscapes, all over the state. These landscapes are vital to the ecosystems of wildlife throughout the state, and it is necessary to ensure their protection. These places don't just support vital ecosystems, though, they also provide vast historical and cultural importance. One example of a place that has these things is the Red Desert

in southern Wyoming. The Red Desert is one of the last high-desert ecosystems in North America and is home to both the largest migratory herd of pronghorns in the lower 48 states and one of the world's largest herds of elk. This amazing part of our state also holds impeccable historical significance, with rock art from Native Americans dating 11,000 years found across the region. It's also a source of many natural resources, such as oil, natural gas, coal, coalbed methane, and minerals such as uranium. This area of southern Wyoming is mostly unprotected by any legal means and is thereby vulnerable. The lack of legal protection over the basin leaves room for natural resources exploration and development, which could damage the natural ecosystems of the area. While energy sources are important to us, protecting the vast wildlife and unique species within our state is just as necessary.

The Red Desert is home to over 350 species and plant species that have adapted to survive in its uniquely harsh conditions. These species range from small shrimp in little springs to mountain lions and elk. This special basin in central Wyoming is also home to Wyoming's only population of one of the world's endangered species, the black footed ferret. With the protection of natural wildlife, this includes endangered species such as the black footed ferret. The black footed ferret may seem like an insignificant or unnecessary animal when they are actually an essential part of many natural ecosystems. In Wyoming, the black footed ferret helps to manage prairie dog populations and is an essential natural source of food for owls, coyotes, and badgers. Animals like this are vital to maintaining the populations of other species, meaning if we lose one, we are at higher risk of losing other species. Wyoming is known for its beautiful landscapes and wildlife, and by protecting these things, we are protecting our state.

Animals other than the ones found in the Red Desert also need to be protected just as passionately. As a state, we are commonly known for our beloved state animal, the bison. Bison, after going from a dominant land mammal in North America to nearly extinct due to mass over poaching in the 1800s, are still defined as one of the most resilient species on earth. After surviving the Ice Age, bison had a population of between 30 and 60 million roaming the plains until human interference nearly wiped them

Wyoming is known for its beautiful landscapes and wildlife, and by protecting these things, we are protecting our state.

out. Bison are massively important to Wyoming's natural ecosystems, just as any other species native to the state. Bison spread native seeds and aerate grasslands as they graze across the plains, helping continue the cycle of vast ecological diversity within our state. Since their near extinction, many Native American groups have been working to increase bison populations all over America. This includes Wyoming, with the largest continual herd of bison under protection in Yellowstone National Park. Though bison populations are still only just over 500,000, the work to grow their population is still at work. Yet, this hard work will be for nothing if the areas in Wyoming are left unprotected and destroyed.

The interest in oil and gas developments all over the world also includes Wyoming. While our state has been known as an amazing source of coal for energy, it is also a hot spot for other natural resources. The other resources found in Wyoming include oil, natural gas, coal bed methane, and minerals such as uranium. The Red Desert is at risk yet again because of its abundant amount of these natural resources. Yet, the acquiring of these resources would likely affect the things that are most native to the area. The removal of these resources could not only destroy the vast and unique natural ecosystems of the area, but also the history that encapsulates the area. In avoiding this, we can also further develop new, more climate friendly, forms of acquiring energy. Wyoming has major potential when it comes to geothermal energy. The vast hot springs across Wyoming are currently very beneficial to the tourism industry in the state. Yet, these same hot springs could be used to also provide a new source of energy for the state. Hot springs being used for energy and heating, rather than coal or petroleum, would utilize Wyoming's natural resources without damaging its other ecosystems if done responsibly. The important history of Wyoming started long before it became the first state to allow women the right to vote. The geological history of the Red Desert is also extremely valuable.

Geologically, we are able to see the remnants of the past through carved out badlands, sandstone towers, deep canyons, and sand dunes. Throughout Wyoming there are also two large ancient seas, leaving fossilized remains of ancient species in the sedimentary rock for us to find millions of years after the animals lived. The fossils found in areas all over Wyoming have been extremely valuable to our understanding of our past, and the creatures that lived so long ago. Personally, I recently had the privilege of recovering fossils from a fossil lake near Kemmerer, Wyoming. This ancient lake had been home to various species of fish and other sea creatures, some of which I was able to recover which now sit in my room. These fossils are pieces of the past

I get to see every day, and I would never have been able to do that if the vast fossil lakes had been destroyed for the retrieval of natural resources. This is why it is important to carefully regulate how our state's resources are acquired.

Though all these important parts of Wyoming need protection, that does not exclusively stop any form of economic growth or activity in our state. While important ecosystems and areas all over the state should be legally protected, there are also places where natural resources should be utilized. Wyoming produces an immense amount of energy through coal production and fuel through petroleum production. Both these resources are vital to Wyoming's infrastructure, and though they are not the most environmentally kind forms of energy, they are still necessary. This means we must find a balance between the areas that should be left untouched and conserved, and ones where we can make use of the abundant natural resources.

Areas such as the Powder River Basin provide much of the nation's coal. Sixteen mines across the Powder River Basin provide over 40 percent of the United States coal. This area is vital to our coal production as a state, but also has very important natural wildlife. The projects within this area have brought thousands more roads, pipelines, electrical lines, and wells all across the basin. While these things may be necessary to complete the extraction of fossil fuels, they can affect the natural ecosystems of the area. There are organizations attempting to ensure that harnessing of these resources is done safely and efficiently, as best they can. This included the National Wildlife Federation holding a summit to unite ranchers, conservationists, and officials from multiple Native American tribes in finding ways to promote responsible energy development. Yet, coal demand is dropping dramatically in the United States, due to less expensive natural gas, wind and solar energy, and increased energy efficiency. So, the National Wildlife Federation continues to work with ranchers, conservationists, and Native tribes to protect the sacred land within the Powder River Basin, and the animals that inhabit it.

While the use of fossil fuels has helped to grow Wyoming's economy for an extremely long time, now wind, solar, geothermal and hydropower have become more common. While Wyoming has counted on the sale and use of fossil fuels very heavily, this leaves the state at risk as things change. This is why it is important to start preparing our state to be more accessible to other types of energy. The fossil fuels we have used so consistently are not perfect. From loss of animal diversity and habitats, to abandonment of wells and oil spills, the slow transition from fossil fuels is becoming clearer as time goes

on. A federal economic stimulus program that aims to plug over 500,000 abandoned wells across the country could provide up to 120,000 jobs to former oil and gas workers. This is a smart way to help stop abandoned wells from causing oil spills and from polluting local communities. The key part in all of this is finding a balance between all of these issues.

Previously, public lands in Wyoming were leased for less than two dollars per acre, which allowed large oil companies to buy extensive amounts of land in Wyoming. Most of this land only has low fossil fuel probability, but is still under the control of large oil companies. Meaning, this land stays tied up in leases that threaten and prevent the public lands from being used for conservation or recreation efforts. In addition to this, oil and gas companies are not required to maintain clean-up for things like abandoned wells, due to outdated federal bonding rates. If we can work to ensure that oil companies within Wyoming must be responsible for themselves and their own mistakes. Given that America has a political system that allows states to make their own choices based on the needs of the citizens, this should be utilized to keep those mining fossil fuels from exploiting our state.

All of these things, from maintaining Wyoming's landscapes and wildlife, to ensuring the safety of communities, and sacred lands, are vital pieces of our state. We are known for being the equality state, and that equality should be evenly distributed. The uniquely untouched wildlife in Wyoming is something that must be protected, as well as the rest of the history within the state. The close encounters I and many others have had the privilege to experience all over Wyoming are ones I would wish for anyone to be able to take part in. While I may only be sixteen, and I can safely say I don't know as much as a well educated scholar, I know Wyoming. I know that what drew my family to this state is the uniquely untouched lands, wildlife, people, and sense of individuality from other states. Before moving to Wyoming, I hadn't necessarily felt like I truly understood the places I was living. Yet, as soon as I moved here, there was a sense of community and love for the state from everyone, that felt comforting. I've seen people defend this state so intensely, because they genuinely care. I truly do care about what this state will be when I complete college, start a family, start working to conserve wildlife, and hope the changes brought up in this essay can see that through and my wishes for Wyoming come true.

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MY VISION FOR WYOMING'S FUTURE



LUKE CONDIE
Age 19
Powell, Wyoming
Essay

Wyoming is a confusing place. I have lived here all my life, and I see the beauty of the state, both in nature and in the culture. It's a land of hard work and close-knit communities, where the people are determined, friendly, and good-natured. Education is a high priority, and one well-supported by the law. It's a land of bountiful resources and spectacular landscapes, possessing the oldest national park on Earth. Wyoming is home to a diverse set of wildlife, world-renowned hunting grounds, and a love of the outdoors. And yet, we have far too many faults. Lately, they have been put on full display. Our state's conservatism is holding it back, and it has fallen victim to the culture of hate spreading throughout America. Despite the benefits immigration brings to an agricultural region like ours, Latinx immigrants are often unwelcome, simply because politicians say they are, and Wyoming, die-hard beacon of conservatism that it is, listens. The LGBTQ+ community is persecuted, shown open hostility, and told that we are not welcome. Even the funding of education is threatened by the new wave of far-right politicians influencing current events.

Despite all these struggles, I believe that Wyoming has a bright future ahead of it, if we can only reach out to grasp it. The problem is that our determination also rears its head as stubbornness, and all too often we fight change instead of embracing it. We are a region that values our landscapes, yet we don't care about pollution, and many openly deny climate change. Still, there is a chance for this state. Our full potential is, as of yet, untapped, and were we to achieve it, we could be a force for progress and economic might in this country.

I am a native of Powell, Park County, in the northwest corner of the state. Its main industries are farming and education, but it could be something much more than a farming community with a local college. The land is fertile when irrigated, and despite some rough years, the farming industry is going strong. If the local farmers and co-op expanded and diversified, it could attract workers and bolster the economy. As for the second largest employer, the college, they are currently expanding their reach to become a global university; one of their most notable graduates last year was from Central Asia, and one of my friends, another graduate, is a Muscovite. They have also taken the next step from community college to university by opening up their first four-year degree. The school is easily affordable, with a high quality of education, is possessed of excellent facilities, and has the potential to become a center of learning in the region. With the right planning and outreach, Northwest College could become a diamond in the literal rough: a global university in the middle of a desert in a hidden corner of the Northwest. Lastly, Powell, like much of the state, is blessed with over 300 days of sunlight a year. As fossil fuels die, renewable energy is rising to take their place. If Powell were to harness solar energy, it could see an economic boom, and an influx of new workers to fill the jobs, bringing with them families to bolster the economy and grow the town into a small city, while retaining its rural roots. My hope is that Powell will be able to grow, keeping its culture while losing its hard-line conservatism, and become an amalgamation of the "hard-work" environment and the new age of liberal progressivism and technology.

Powell is situated in a valley in the north of the Bighorn Basin. We are enclosed by Polecat Bench, a flat mesa, and neighboring hills to the north, the McCullough Peaks to the south, Heart Mountain to the west, and more hills to the east. Beyond that are the majestic peaks of the Absaroka and Bighorn ranges. In the ideal future of Wyoming, this natural beauty, inhabited by many species, including the endangered sage grouse, would be preserved for future generations and the benefit of all. As a farming community, we would dedicate ourselves to making the industry more efficient, with research led by a coalition of experienced farmers and scientists from the aforementioned university. Pollutants would be minimized or eliminated through renewable energy and responsible living

Our full potential is, as of yet, untapped, and were we to achieve it, we could be a force for progress and economic might in this country.

practices, and children would be taught from a young age, in school and at home, to respect and nurture the land, and to value nature in all its wonder.

In terms of infrastructure, Wyoming has few, if any, large buildings, simply because they are not needed. However, if my dreams for the state became a reality, the new Wyoming would require apartment complexes and possibly even skyscrapers for people to live and work in. These new structures would be designed by master architects capable of creating things of beauty, while following the tenets of environmental design. Wyoming's power would continue to be tied to that of neighboring states, but would rely more on the sun, wind, and nuclear energy. Our roads would be well-maintained, with new designs put forward for greater comfort, convenience, and harmony with the environments they cross through. Meanwhile, new airports, again built with the environment in mind, would spring up in the major cities to better connect Wyoming with the world.

Most importantly, however, Wyoming must enact its own cultural change. We, like much of the nation, have fallen in line to the culture of intolerance, lies, and persecution put forth by the modern Republican Party. Over 70 percent of the state voted for Trump in 2020, not because he was the Republican candidate, but because he has come to be seen as the Republican Party itself. Any dissent from him is scandalous, and any action against him is treasonous. Just ask Liz Cheney, formerly the third-highest ranking member of the GOP, now a pariah because of her impeachment vote. Beyond Trump's cult of personality, Wyoming refuses to enact any positive legislative change, and has in fact joined the tide of Republican-led state governments in restricting voting (albeit not to the same degree as, say, Georgia). The LGBTQ+ community is treated as unwelcome and hated, and lately anti-trans legislation has been gaining new steam. This doesn't have to stay the reality for Wyoming, however. We see ourselves as a no-nonsense, common-sense people, so if actual discussions were held, and the people of Wyoming were made to understand marginalized ethnic, religious, and subcultural communities, the hatred would vanish, replaced by love and acceptance. As for other cultural changes, they simply need someone to start a movement and get some momentum. This will become easier and easier in the future, as people are moving in from other, more liberal regions year by year. In addition, if the changes listed in previous paragraphs were put into place, this process would rapidly accelerate. As for Trump's pollution of the conservative populace, I believe that all we can do is simply wait for him to be cut off from office long enough to be an irrelevance.

As for my place in this new Wyoming, my ambitions and desire for change lead me to believe that a governorship would be in order. After all, someone has to push for change, and pull it to the forefront. My nativity, talent for business, intelligence, status as a public figure, and willingness to reach over to the other side and talk would be useful tools in climbing the political ladder to the highest office in the state. From that position, I could reshape Wyoming into a beacon of advancement and economic strength, and, as a liberal governor of a staunchly conservative state, begin to bridge the gap between the two parties.

Were I to end up in my ideal life situation, I would hold several simultaneous careers. Most of the time I would be writing, mainly novels and short stories, and managing my planned business, an association of writers pooling their resources and talents. Ideally, I would be able to do some light acting (mainly vocal, but possibly some visual performances) on the side, as a sort of paid hobby. I would also love to be a professor of history, but writing, acting, and my business would leave no time for that. Instead, I may occasionally hold lectures and seminars, and possibly speak at conferences if I have time apart from my career and family. In my free time, I would spend my days exercising, reading, watching my favorite shows and films, and, most importantly, spending time with my family. We would take trips together, watch our favorite TV shows and movies, and discuss our favorite topics. During the summer, we would take trips all over the world, to the most beautiful and historic places on the planet. For the holidays, we would gather with relations, and reinforce the bonds of family. Of course, I'll always need my personal time. For that, I'll have books, exercising, and business trips.

To build this future will take determination, cooperation, and a willingness to accept progress and change; no mean feat in such a stubborn region. Old grievances will need to be put aside, along with outdated notions and the struggle against the modern age that too often plagues conservative states. However, all the ingredients for change and progress are already here; we need but come together to bring those concepts to fruition. Once we do, the quality of life and reputation of Wyoming will increase dramatically, as will our influence and position. We will be an example of progress and an ideal for other states to model themselves off of, as opposed to the old-fashioned, stubborn state we are now; one stereotyped as backwards and far-right. Unfortunately, it is a label that we do little to overcome. That can all change, however, if we are only open to the possibility. Wyoming was once a beacon of equality, as the first territory and state to grant women's suffrage in the midst of systematic sexism. Now, we can be a beacon of progress in the midst of legislative gridlock and division.

THE GREATEST CHANGE IN WYOMING EDUCATION



NAOMI MOORE
Age 16
Rock River, Wyoming
Fiction

I wake up like normal every day to get ready for work at the Albany County police station, where I have wanted to work forever. I was finally able to become what I have always wanted to, my forever dream job. The year is 2030 and I am still living in Wyoming with my family where I have lived since I was 8 years old. Now I am not worrying about what life was back then because it is good now. Never having to worry about very much in the school system as a police officer makes my day so much easier. It is my patrol day. I get to go to the high school today and see all the students. The world has changed so much from when I was in high school from 2020 to 2024 and for the best, because it was not very good when I was in school then. When I went to school it was during the whole Covid-19 pandemic. It was at the end of my eighth-grade year that we were first put into the very first quarantine. It was very hard to stay at school when we were always getting quarantined never knowing if I was going to be the next one to be sent home. Nowadays we never have to worry about very much in the school system because the teachers and staff are always there for the students to let them have the best education they deserve to have, even more than when I was in school. It was hard for the teachers to always help us learn because they were still learning how to teach us through a pandemic. Now the students and teachers are hardly even stressed with everyday life and school because the teachers have all the materials they need to teach their students. But today the students and teachers don't have to worry about getting quarantined. They are able to learn at home with free wifi, getting all necessary school resources, getting hot meals, not getting stressed, teachers always being there for their students and school, they are never having to worry about missed schoolwork or late work, and students are finally enjoying school for the first time in a long time.

It's so great everywhere in Wyoming. I walk into the school and see all the kids there and none of them are quarantined. I can still recall the first-ever quarantine. I was fourteen years old. It was after my sister's basketball state tournament where they placed fourth. We just got into spring break, and everything started to change. Covid-19 had made it to the United States. It was around our third day of spring break where our parents got the call that we were not going to go back to school for another week. We were so excited to have another week off, but soon we would all lose that excitement. Then a few days later our parents got the call where we were not going to go back to school at all for the rest of the year. We all had to learn online for the very first time. It was my freshman year where everything was different. We all had to wear masks all the time unless we were eating. Even if we had our masks on and if we were by someone, less than six feet away, for more than fifteen minutes we would have to get quarantined. In late March, earlyish April, my dad got the Covid-19 virus and the next day my brother and I went to go get a test, and as you would thought, yes, we got the virus as well. However, students don't have to leave school ever only when they have sports events, field trips, any other school event, or when they get sick and choose to stay home and or get snowed in at home. It helps the teachers so much because they are not worried if the student is getting the work done or has questions on the schoolwork. With the students always being at school and not getting quarantined schools have gone up in educating their students since the students are never having to quarantine and stay at home. And always being there to learn and stay focused on their education and get good grades. Being able to continue to be a better student and never worrying if they will be the next one to get quarantined. So students will always stay tuned in at school with never being stressed about the quarantine.

Students are never worried about not getting their online work done at home because they are not able to have the access to any internet connection. The hardest obstacle for me during my many quarantines was being able to get all my online work done. It was hard for me to always be able to have an internet connection of some sort. Most of the time I only had the access to my phone's hot spot. But now students are able to access free internet. They are able to stay caught up with their homework unlike when I was in school. Now Wyoming has the ability to help students by giving them free wifi wherever they live. Students have free wifi on busses so while they are on their way home they have the opportunity to work on their school work. So, when they are sick they can always stay caught up and never have to be stressed about falling behind in their school work because they always have the resources provided for them no matter what. Or if the weather gets really

bad and students get snowed in, they do not have to worry about not having internet. So, for the kids that live far out from their school away from a good internet connection, they don't have to worry about not having internet because they will always have a wifi connection to always be able to do their schoolwork and stay caught up with everything no matter the situation.

In 2030 every school is able to get all the necessary resources for students. No student has to pay for school supplies. When I had to do my school shopping it was hard sometimes to have my parents take me to the store to get me school supplies. For most of my elementary and junior high years, my dad was very sick and out of work. During that time period, I had to get my own job just to pay for all the school supplies I needed for the upcoming school year. But now they are all provided by the school. Pencils, pens, notebooks, and computers. All the resources the students need to have a proper education are given to them, so students don't have to worry about not having time to get school supplies, not having parents that have time to take them, or not having the money to pay for all the school supplies. They will never have to worry about not having the supplies they need. Students will just be able to work on their schoolwork with all the supplies that the school has given them. So, they are not stressed and are able to never get behind with schoolwork because they have all the supplies they need to work.

I used to love to eat school lunch when I was in elementary and junior high. I would always try to get to the front of the line on Thursdays because that's when they served the best pizza. They used to make the best lunches. Our lunch ladies were the best. But as I got into my high school our old lunch lady moved away and we got a new one and we would just be going back to in-school learning again. The lunches were never good. Always cold, never warm. The students never wanted to eat the school lunch like we used to. However now that so much has changed students are able to always have hot meals no matter what day it is. Meals are always provided to students no matter what. I remember that the school would always hand out meals if students needed them. But when I got older, I never knew if they kept doing that for the students but they do now. They are able to have a good and healthy meal. Having the necessities for a lunch—warm food, vegetables, fruit, juice, milk, and healthy meat. Students never have to worry about not having a warm lunch because the lunchroom will always serve a hot healthy meal. Students are always able to get a meal no matter what day it is because the school provides the students that need meals over the weekend. They will give the meals to last them over the weekend until they make it back to school the next week. Never have to worry when they will get their next meal because the school will always

provide it for the students that need them. Students will always be provided a hot meal that everyone deserves to have. So that students never have to worry about where their next meal will come from.

School was always so stressful. I would always get so stressed from all my online schoolwork, regular schoolwork in person, sports, and everyday life. I always felt like I was falling behind in my everyday life. I feel so good for the students now because they don't have to worry about the stressful experiences I was worried about during the pandemic. Now students and teachers are hardly even getting stressed now because they don't have to worry about the pandemic like the students and teachers did back when I was in high school. The students don't have to stress about school supplies, homework, internet connection, hot meals, and the stress of schoolwork. By being provided with all the resources students need, their stress is hardly even there because they do not have to think about what they need or need to do for their classes. Teachers are hardly even stressed because their students are doing their work because they have the resources provided by them from the school. So, teachers are never having to be stressed that their students do not have their work done. They are never having to be stressed about school because all the opportunities are there for the teachers and students. Therefore, they are always able to be there and get their schoolwork done no matter what happens in their day. They all have a way to stay caught up and not stressed by how the school is there to help them with the supplies they need to do their schoolwork. Never having a stressed day, so they are able to learn and teach even better than before because of not being stressed about what they have to do.

My teachers always tried to be there for me or any student always in school. They would try to help me with anything I ever needed. Whenever I needed help with schoolwork or just personal stuff, I know I could always have my teachers there to help and support me. It felt like having parents at school to always try to lead you in the right direction in life and make me the best I could be. Now teachers are always there for their students even more than before, never leaving their students in the dark with their education. Always there for what their students need if that is being there for them mentally, emotionally, or staying after school to help students. Teachers are able to make bonds with the students to truly understand how to help their students with whatever they need. To help the student any way they need help so they can be the best students they can be. Teachers are able to help the students, to help them be able to always understand the work they are learning and never be stressed about what they do not understand because the teachers

Now students have all the resources they need, teachers that are dedicated to helping them, free wifi to do their work. Students are never stressed about the little things and are able to always have a hot healthy meal. They can just enjoy school for what it is, the right to a free education that they deserve.

can tell when students are feeling stressed and are able to help them.

Now students are never worried or stressed about missing schoolwork. Because they have all the resources they need to never have missing work. They have the computers, pencils, pens, notebooks, teachers, and internet to always be there to help them with the schoolwork. They never need to worry because they always have the teachers there to help them with whatever they need. Because the teachers are there to truly understand what every single student needs to not make them have missing work or late work. Teachers are never angry or upset about being late or missing work because they want what is best for their students

so they help them with what they need if that may be more time on an assignment or needed to redo the assignment to get better at it. Teachers will always understand why a student does not have their work because they will always know what their students need. No matter what students will never get penalized if they have late work or miss work.

I can feel the warm in the hallways, the warmth like being hugged by your grandma. You can feel the happiness in the school again as if you're sitting outside on a warm sunny day and feeling the sunshine warm your cheeks, the feeling of acceptance and happiness every. Something that was hard to feel in my school. But now students are finally happy to be at school again. I remember sometimes I would like school because I did have fun. But what made me not like it was the drama like a knife in the back from people you thought were your friends, that stabbing pain of betrayal and how hard the schoolwork could be and not having the resources like my other classmates had. Now they have all the resources they need, teachers that are dedicated to helping them, free wifi to do their work, never being stressed about the little things, and are able to always have a hot healthy meal. They can just enjoy school for what it is. Being able to have the right to a free education

that they deserve. Being able to learn without being worried about failing or messing up. Students are finally able to enjoy going to school because they are not stressed about schoolwork, or teachers getting mad at them. They are just enjoying being able to go to school without the stress.

It's 3:33. The school bell rings and children fill the halls. I wait for all of them to leave. I get in my patrol car and make my way home and take off my uniform. All I can think of is how good my life is, how my family's life is good, and how everything in Wyoming is perfect. Wyoming 2030 is a great year to be living in with all the opportunities for everyone living here. I finally got the dream job that I've wanted to become since I was a little girl. I was able to have that opportunity because of how Wyoming has become. How everyone had the best opportunities to become whatever they wanted to be. Everything is perfect, every single society is perfect, no misunderstandings. The environment is great, so much water and green grass, the agriculture is doing great by how well the animals are doing. And the schools are doing great with everything about them. They have great teachers that are always dedicated to the school and their students to help them become the best they can be with their education. The students are being to stay in school and not worry about being quarantined and missing weeks of school. They are able to enjoy school for the first time in a long time. They are getting hot meals every day even when students are not in school because the school wants to help students with whatever they need whether that is in school or out of school. Students have the access to free wifi no matter where they are in the state, so they are able to always work on schoolwork wherever they are so they never get behind in their studies. And by having wifi on the busses they have the opportunities to work on their schoolwork going to sports games or going home from school if they live far away from the school they are never having to be stressed about not having internet because they can always access it no matter where they are so they can do their work no matter what. Students and teachers are never getting stressed because students need what their teachers need and the teachers know what their students need. And students are never getting penalized for missing or late work because their teachers understand why it is missing or why it is late so they are always able to help them. I could not think of a better place to live than Wyoming in 2030. Everything here is just perfect, no worries about what bad is going to happen next. We just all live our lives to the fullest. We just know we are living our best lives in Wyoming because we have the opportunity to make our lives great. I finished my thoughts of how great life is and prepare my day for tomorrow. Getting ready to go back to the job and life I truly love.

A COWGIRL'S QUEST TO KEEP THE WEST WILD



—
AVERY LEWIS
Age 16
Basin, Wyoming
Fiction
—

As I open the front porch door, a crisp fall breeze hits me. I tighten up my wild rag and pull on my hood, then head to my old 2017 Chevy truck, with a rusted tailgate that doesn't close anymore, to go feed and check my cows. I turn the radio dial to 100.3—it's been my favorite radio station since I was a kid. I will admit it does make me a little sad to hear more pop than actual country on the station. The radio host pops on. "Good morning, folks. It's November 3rd 2030 and it is a beautiful autumn morning here in northern central Wyoming." My truck beats down a narrow dirt road as I watch my two dogs, Tucker the border collie and Dally the Australian shepherd, jog in front of me. I make my first stop at the boarding corrals, where I have separate pens for horses I'm training for clients or boarding for the winter. I open another bale and toss some hay into their feeders and make sure their waters aren't frozen and don't show any signs of frost. I hop back into my pickup and head out to check my cows. I check to make sure the spring is still clear and the feeder is full. I make a mental note to watch a few cows for symptoms of disease. I move on to my horse corrals, where I then feed them and clean their corrals. After I load the dogs up, I head into town.

The town of Tensleep used to be a quiet place full of cowboys and cowgirls. Over the years the tourists brought more and more businesses to the once small mountain town. Tensleep has at least doubled in size since I was little. Tourists were in awe of the town's natural beauty so they all looked to move there. The new businesses as well as the new people have helped the town afford new structures, like the new Tensleep school. It was a bittersweet moment watching the school crumble to the ground but also promising a good educational environment for the upcoming students. I am assistant coach of the Tensleep High School rodeo and I love watching kids become

involved with the dying sport that raised me. While my ranching business has me in contact with all sorts of ranchers and farmers, I still do my best to interact with the newcomers. Not everyone was accepting of all the city folk moving in and I will admit it took me some time as well. I am pretty well known throughout the town by my horse businesses. People with problem horses, colts that need training, or need a place to hold their horses during the winter all come to me. Although the wild horse population has been growing at a rapid rate the lands can't be maintained, so the state encourages people to adopt them and when they take care of them and train them over the course of two years, they get paid \$2,000. I have trained many wild horses and sold them to ranchers and trail riders who all end up loving them. I also have had a lot more come to my business to train than I used to get in the past. I also have taught quite a few kids how to ride and have had some intern for me. In the summertime I guide horseback rides and fly fishing trips. I love my job because you get to meet so many people and show them the wonders of our state. I have trained and sold many horses and have found good homes for all of them. I have been all over the state for rodeos as well as training horses for people. My reputation is a good honest one, so I have many clients that trust me and tell their friends and family about my business.

My hometown, Basin, Wyoming, used to be a small town where everyone knew everyone but eventually I began to feel crowded. My family has hundreds of acres up on the Bighorn, where I spend most of my time to escape the heat as well as some of the people. Tensleep was a good town for my career as it is close to my family's land. Even with the new road from Hyattville to Deer Haven, there aren't as many people up there. However, the new road through our property has caused problems of trespassing, stealing, or littering. Which always made me feel sad because people had no respect for the wilderness or our property which they need to have if they want to keep Wyoming the special state it is. When I was little my family thinned out the pine trees because there were so many and they didn't have room to grow. Now the trees have at least doubled in size providing homes and grass for the wildlife. In 2025, the BLM finally found a chemical they could spray to help kill and stop the spread of the pine beetles. Years before, pine beetles had been decimating forest by infecting the trees causing them to die, these dead trees were very hazardous for wildfires. The beetle spray was a huge success for the BLM, Wyoming Game and Fish, as well as landowners of mountain and pine tree property.

As I drive into Tensleep, I pass by the campground and horse hotel. Then new owners have added in about ten more corrals. The place may steal a little business but usually hunters and people there for the famous Tensleep Rodeo

are the only ones that occupy it. I stop at the Tensleep saloon and admire how they never really change much—the place has been the same since as long as I can remember. The place does a good job at matching Tensleep's aura, quiet and western. There have been other businesses that have tried to take off, but Tensleep's atmosphere was just not for them. After getting my breakfast I go fill up on gas. The current price is \$7.49 per gallon, it's gone down. The state of Wyoming is one of the few states that still collects and uses gas, most places now use biofuel or electric cars. I haven't made the switch because my truck is working just fine and I'm too stubborn to go buy a new one. I don't think the biofuel and electric trucks have the power to pull trailer loads of horses and cows compared to the older gas and diesel trucks. Because many people have made the switch, there are not as many people using gas and the price has started to go down, but that depends on if Wyoming keeps making it. Tensleep has an old gas station where they sell gas and diesel, but it is only used by the other farmers and ranchers who refuse to accept the new vehicles. The bigger gas station down the road has biodiesel fuel pumps and charging stations for electric cars. In the summer many tourists driving through stop there to get their fuel or recharge so that the gas station gets lots of business.

Luckily people only live below the mountains and people haven't started to move up any farther, which I hope they don't. In my opinion the Bighorns deserve to stay wild and not be inhabited by the constant growth of the human race. Luckily the state of Wyoming has been amazing at keeping people from polluting our ecosystem and keeping a certain amount of space for our wildlife. With all the space, more wind turbines have been added as well as solar panels. I thought the solar panels were a great way to use up some of the endless badlands Wyoming seems to own. There are sections where they have solar panels out in the grasslands absorbing the sun and turning it into electricity. Most of these sections are miles away from towns so people don't have the desire to go out and visit them. The state has done a good job on still preserving the land for the wildlife out there as well.

After I arrive back home, I saddle up three horses and start lunging the fourth. Every day I try to ride and train a minimum of 15 horses, both the ones I'm training for myself so I can use them to guide on in the summer and the ones I train for other people. In the late fall things start to slow down for me. I don't have any trips to guide, there aren't many rodeos around, and I don't have to work cows on the mountain. So in the fall I mainly train my horses, work on projects, and hunt when I get the chance. I archery hunt as there are too many rifle hunters and once rifle season

opens the animals get smart and go nocturnal. Archery hunting allows me to work for the animal and is so much more rewarding if I succeed. I was blessed this year to get my first bull elk with my bow. I also am a waterfowl hunter who was raised in a goose field with my dad, who has been operating a successful goose hunting and duck hunting business for 28 years. In the winter he gets completely booked up and when he has a surplus of hunters I come out and help guide. Fortunately the number of geese migrating through Wyoming in the winter has at least doubled and the Game and Fish upped the limit from 5 geese per person to 7. Guiding out-of-staters who have either never come before or who have and absolutely loved it, is a challenge but is also very rewarding. About 10 years ago when me and my dad would go fly fishing, we would fish small creeks up in the Bighorns. Back then there were many trout but they were all small and got pretty used to people fishing them so they got smart. Two years ago a company bought out the Tensleep fish hatcheries. They stopped killing off brookies or other fish that got too populated and instead figured out how to manage their populations. They bred the fish so they were bigger and they planted trees alongside the creeks. This deterred many people who liked to catch a bunch of fish and keep them. But it made the fishing so much better for catch-and-release fishermen, like me and my dad.

I saddle up a dun 2-year-old colt who is pushing 15 hands, which is surprisingly big for a 2-year-old. He's gentle as a dog on the ground but completely flips out once you mount him. I've been working with him for about two weeks. I pull his nose around to where it is close to my leg then pull myself on in one fluid motion. I sit there for a few seconds and hold my nightlatch in my right hand and the halter rope in my left. I click my tongue to urge him forward, he takes three steps in a circle before he blows up. The colt lurches forward planting his front feet deep and kicking up the hind. He bucks in a complete circle before he gives to the pressure and bends his neck, touching his nose to my knee. I stroke him then click my tongue again and this time he just walks in a circle. I ride him for another 15 minutes, and when we end on a good note, I loosen the cinch and lead him back to the pen.

Fall and winter is my favorite time of the year because it's when Wyoming feels more like home. In the fall it feels like it's just me, my horses, and the Wyoming fresh air.

I then saddle up my barrel horse, ponying a 1-year-old filly and go out on a ride in the badlands. I ride up on top of a hill where I can see the town of Tensleep and part of Hyattville. I'm still getting used to the new highway that now connects the two. It used to be a washboard dirt road but with all the tourists the state decided to pave it. Fall and winter is my favorite time of the year because it's when Wyoming feels more like home. In the fall it feels like it's just me, my horses, and the Wyoming fresh air. In the summer there is the constant traffic of tourists venturing west and the sun baking down on your back. I trot along on a couple of pronghorn trails and catch sight of a small herd ahead of me, I stop and watch them for a few minutes. The expanding roads and traffic have pushed them farther into the hills, so you have to work harder to find them. As the sun begins to dim, I ride off back down to the corrals to check on the cows to make sure they haven't escaped or broken anything. As I head back, I ride past an old junk pile, full of old bed springs, TVs, couches, and skeletons of old rusted cars. When I was young, people used to take their trash out into the badlands rather than pay to take it to the dump. Nowadays if you are caught trash dumping you can be fined \$25,000. The state of Wyoming is trying their best to keep the ecosystem wild and free of human products.

I go check on the cows and feed them for the night. I hear a low buzz and a low whistle, the daily electric train comes rolling past my pasture. As I listen to the hum of the fading train, I see a red truck and white trailer head to my place. The Tesla Explorer parks in my yard and out jumps a newer generation cowboy. I tip my hat to him and say good afternoon. After explaining that he bought a draft colt from the local sale barn and he is wanting me to train it, I open up the back of the shiny trailer and see a wide eyed colt staring back at me. After running him into a corral, I grab my halter and rope and get to work. I rope the bay stud around his neck and pull the rope until he faces me then give him slack. It takes me about an hour for him to stop spooking and trust me enough so I can pet him. Once I halter him, I tie him to an inner tube on my fence, an older technique that is way more beneficial than modern day ones. Once he learns to give to the pressure, I lead him around then call it a day.

Inside my house the motion sensor lights flick on, and the automatic fireplace lights itself. I walk into my living room and turn on my TV to the WYOliflife channel. WYOliflife is a documentary-like news channel that updates residents about the current natural disasters, wildlife action, and ecosystem progress in Wyoming. The channel talks about the solar panels in the badlands and how the new source of energy has been boosting the electric

cars purchased in Wyoming. The channel also mentions the increasing number of deer and elk becoming nocturnal during hunting season, which I have been noticing the last three years when I was out scouting and hunting for deer. This makes me think to go look out at the winter wheat field across the river that's by my house. I stand up and grab my binoculars and head out onto my deck. I glass the field and see three turkeys, two hens and one tom, then I see five whitetails grazing on the green. I watch a 3-pointer challenge a 4-pointer for the three remaining does. Late November is usually the prime of the rut but there are always a few early birds that begin before then. I'm happy that not all deer are completely nocturnal as watching the wildlife has always been a hobby of mine. I look out, seeing the river rushing beneath me, the geese locking up on the river for the night, the deer and turkeys out grazing, and a sliver of the moon peeking out from behind the Bighorn Mountains. I breathe in a deep breath of the cool mountain air and I am so glad I am blessed to live in Wyoming.

CONTEST JUDGES

Thank you to the four judges, all of whom have deep connections to the state of Wyoming and their own interest in seeing the state succeed into the future. These judges reviewed over 50 submissions to this contest and worked through several rounds of judging to select the final winners.



BAILEY BRENNAN serves as the Wyoming County Commissioners Association's Natural Resource Counsel, supporting the state's county commissioners on federal natural resources issues. She received her Juris Doctor and Master's in Environment and Natural Resources from the University of Wyoming. Bailey lives in Lander with her husband, Pat, and their daughter, Frances. In her free time, she helps Pat run Second Street Farm, a small farm raising produce and pastured beef and poultry.



DON JONES was born and raised in Laramie. He attended Middlebury College in Vermont and now works as a research scientist for the University of Wyoming studying birds, small mammals, and amphibians. He is deeply interested in conserving Wyoming's wildlife and wild places, and in confronting the challenges of climate change. In his free time he can usually be found birding, hunting, fishing, hiking, skiing, or doing pretty much anything else in the outdoors.



JANISSA MARIE ANALISSIA MARTINEZ is a writer from Glendo, Wyoming, who loves to write quiet, visceral, character driven fiction about the rural spaces where she grew up. She writes from perspectives that try to change our understanding of Wyoming and what it means to live in rural spaces. She is currently pursuing her Master's of Fine Arts in creative writing at the University of Wyoming, working part time at a library, and fighting for time to spend with her husband and daughter.



SAM LIGHTNER, JR. is a renowned rock climber and author who grew up in Jackson and is a University of Wyoming alum. He has notched several first ascents around the world and has authored several guidebooks as well as a highly regarded history of Wyoming entitled *Wyoming: A History of the West*. He currently resides in Lander.

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