

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

BIODIVERSITY INSTITUTE

ANNUAL REPORT 2025



UNIVERSITY
OF WYOMING

Biodiversity Institute

MISSION:

The Biodiversity Institute fosters the understanding, appreciation and conservation of biological diversity by engaging a broad audience in the scientific process. We work with scientists, resource managers, educators, and the public to offer a unique service to Wyoming, our nation, and the world by facilitating collaborative research projects, synthesizing and disseminating research, distributing grants, and providing educational, outreach, and community science programs for students and the public.

FOLLOW US:

-  Facebook: @TheBiodiversityInstitute
-  Instagram: @BiodiversityInstitute
-  Website: www.wyobiodiversity.org

SUPPORT OUR MISSION:

Donations accepted at www.wyobiodiversity.org

ON THE COVER:

UW Ph.D. student Alexis Hollander is studying the White heelsplitter mussel and received a grant from the Biodiversity Institute. Read more about our grant on page 10.



THE BIODIVERSITY INSTITUTE TEAM:



Dr. Brent Ewers,
Director



Erin Bentley,
Associate Director



Mason Lee,
Senior Project Coordinator



Abbey Morales Eggener,
Communications & Marketing
Specialist



ONLINE GIFT SHOP

Visit our online store for books, field guides, original stickers, coloring books, plant flashcards, and more - each purchase supports Wyoming biodiversity research and outreach.

 www.wyobiodiversity.net



ERIN BENTLEY APPOINTED NEW ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR



Erin Bentley was appointed Associate Director of the University of Wyoming Biodiversity Institute in January 2026. A UW alumna, Bentley earned her undergraduate degree in animal science and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in ecology and evolution, where her research focuses on the evolution of rarity in

Penstemon wildflowers and the conservation of Wyoming's endangered *Penstemon haydenii*.

Bentley brings extensive experience in science communication, education, and outreach, including leadership on NSF-funded projects and art-science collaborations that connect research with public audiences. As Associate Director, she is excited to strengthen the integration of teaching, outreach, and creative communication across the Biodiversity Institute and the Haub School, expanding opportunities for students and communities to engage with Wyoming's ecosystems.

THE LAST YEAR BY THE NUMBERS: 2025

8 Field Trip visits from K-12 classrooms

13 Graduate Student Enhancement Grants awarded

9 Communities visited in WY

\$47,500
Awarded to 13 UW master's and Ph.D. students

9 Community science programs managed

900+
New social media followers and email subscribers

27 New Wyoming Naturalists trained

40 Public events hosted throughout WY

3,500+
People engaged at BI programs and events

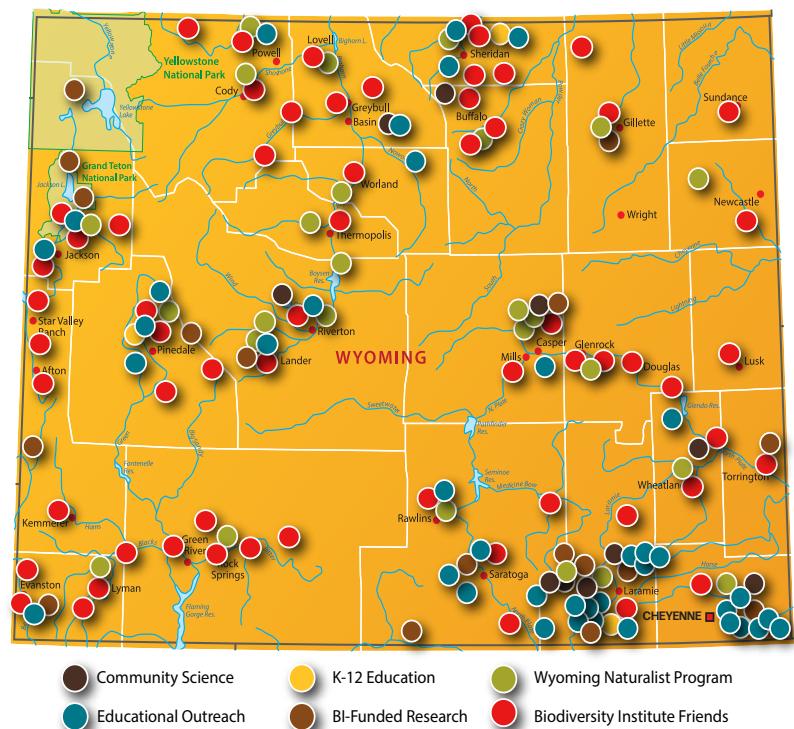
33%
of events and programs in 2025 were dedicated to **K-12 education.**



www.wyobiodiversity.org

BIODIVERSITY IN ACTION: WYOMING'S 2025 OUTREACH

In 2025, the Biodiversity Institute hosted and participated in nearly 40 events across Wyoming, engaging more than 3,500 people in communities statewide. While our work is deeply rooted in Wyoming, its reach extends well beyond state borders. BI-supported research, partnerships, and educational programs span local, national, and global scales - from studying white-nose syndrome impacts on bat populations in the Black Hills to investigating rainforest squirrels as indicators of ecosystem change in Malaysian Borneo. Together, these efforts reflect the breadth of the Biodiversity Institute's outreach and its commitment to advancing biodiversity science in Wyoming and beyond.



CONTINUED SUCCESS WITHIN THE HAUB SCHOOL



As part of the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources, the Biodiversity Institute continues to expand its reach, relevance, and impact across campus and beyond. Being embedded within the Haub School has strengthened connections between research, education, and real-world application, creating new opportunities for students to engage with biodiversity science in meaningful ways.

Environmental studies students are increasingly seeking out the Institute to learn what careers in conservation,

community science, science communication, and applied biodiversity research can look like in practice.

Through internships, volunteer opportunities, and hands-on projects, students gain professional experience while contributing to programs that serve communities across Wyoming.

Looking ahead, we are developing new initiatives including certifications and training opportunities that will further equip students with practical skills and credentials to support their future careers. Together with the Haub School, the Biodiversity Institute is helping prepare the next generation of environmental leaders through applied, community-connected biodiversity work.





RECORD NUMBER OF GRANTS AWARDED IN 2025 TO UW GRADUATE STUDENTS

In 2025, the Biodiversity Institute awarded a record number of Graduate Student Research Enhancement Grants, investing directly in the next generation of biodiversity scientists at the University of Wyoming. **Thirteen master's and Ph.D. students received competitive grants ranging from \$2,500 to \$7,000, totaling \$47,500 in direct research support.** These funds allowed students to expand the scope of their work, collect critical field data, and advance cutting-edge research addressing some of today's most pressing biodiversity questions.

This year's funded projects reflect both the depth and reach of UW biodiversity research. Student work spans Wyoming, South Dakota,



Pictured: Ph.D. student Meredith Journey is studying zooplankton in Wyoming's high alpine lakes. She received the Graduate Student Research Enhancement Grant and Don and Judy Legerski UW Teton Graduate Scholars in Biodiversity Fellowship in 2025.



Montana, Alaska, and Malaysia, tackling topics such as white-nose syndrome impacts on bat populations in the Black Hills, rainforest squirrels as indicators of ecosystem change in Malaysian Borneo, and an extensive floristic inventory of more than 5,000 specimens in Montana's Kootenai National Forest. Together, these projects contribute new knowledge with local relevance and global significance, strengthening conservation science, natural resource management, and public understanding of biodiversity.

Since 2012, the Biodiversity Institute has awarded more than 80 graduate research grants totaling over \$350,000. This sustained investment is made possible entirely through private support, and its impact continues to ripple outward through student training, scientific discovery, and community engagement. We are deeply grateful to the donors who have made this program possible for more than a decade.

To learn more about the Graduate Student Research Enhancement Grant and the remarkable students supported in 2025, visit our website.

To learn more about student projects and how to support, visit



www.wyobiodiversity.org



SHARING SCIENCE STATEWIDE

Pictured: Over 40 people attended the Science on Tap event at Bond's Brewing in Laramie in November. Three students spoke about their research in short, engaging talks. Topics included native mussels, songbird migration, and bat parasites.

Science Cafés are one of the Biodiversity Institute's most effective tools for connecting people across Wyoming with cutting-edge research from the University of Wyoming. Hosted in accessible, informal venues, these events bring scientists and community members together to explore biodiversity topics that matter locally through conversation, questions, and shared curiosity.

In 2025, Science Cafés in Laramie and Lander filled rooms to capacity,

fostered meaningful dialogue, and inspired people of all ages to see themselves as part of Wyoming biodiversity story.

In the coming year, the Institute will expand Science Cafes to new locations in the state. Details will be shared on our social media.



CONNECTING KIDS AND FAMILIES TO WYOMING'S BIODIVERSITY

Pictured: A middle school student completes a worksheet while visiting the Berry Center. In 2025, we had eight field trips from K-12 schools, and more visits from homeschool students and UW undergraduate classes.

One of the things we're most proud of at the Biodiversity Institute is our K-12 education and outreach. In 2025, hundreds of elementary, middle, and high school students visited the Berry Biodiversity Conservation Center through school and homeschool programs. Through hands-on activities tied to what they were learning in class, students explored animal adaptations (turkey vultures can eat a quarter of their body weight in a single sitting!), pollinators, and native plants in our garden - bringing biodiversity to life in a meaningful way.

Our outreach also extends far beyond the Berry Center. This year, we reached more than 100 kids and their families through events like Aquatic Bug Day, crafts at the Medicine Bow Visitor Center, and a guided nature hike at Curt Gowdy State Park. We also joined larger community events, including the Wyoming State Museum's Family Day, connecting with over 2,000 people across the state. With the help of our ambassador animals, these experiences spark curiosity, encourage questions, and help young people build lasting connections to Wyoming's wildlife. Teachers interested in visiting the Berry Center can learn more and request a visit through our website.

SAVE THE DATES:

February 1: Teton County Library in Jackson Hole, WY

March 1: Sublette BOCES in Pinedale, WY

April 4: Cody Craft Brewing in Cody, WY

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends of the Biodiversity Institute,

The Biodiversity Institute is deeply grounded in Wyoming, carrying the University of Wyoming's biodiversity science beyond campus and into the communities, classrooms, and public spaces that define our state. From this foundation, we also help elevate Wyoming-based biodiversity science across the Rocky Mountain region and around the world.

In 2025, we focused on creating meaningful opportunities for people to engage directly with science. We hosted and participated in nearly 50 events across the state - from Science Cafés to hands-on K–12 programs - reaching more than 3,500 people. Whether through our 4th annual Salamander Migration Initiative or our popular nocturnal Bat Walks, these efforts make research accessible and foster a shared understanding of biodiversity and why it matters.

This year also marked continued integration into the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources, strengthening our connections to the university's academic mission. We work with students across disciplines, offering internships, research experiences, and professional development opportunities that connect learning to real-world biodiversity challenges.

Supporting student research remains an important part of this work. In 2025, we awarded a record number of Biodiversity Research Enhancement Grants, investing \$47,500 directly in the work of 13 UW graduate students. Over the past five years, your

private support has allowed the Biodiversity Institute to invest more than \$350,000 in graduate research, helping students advance critical projects that extend from Wyoming's high alpine lakes to the rainforests of Malaysian Borneo.

Across all our work, the Biodiversity Institute brings science and the public together. Your engagement and generosity are what make this work possible, and we are deeply grateful for your partnership in building understanding and appreciation of Wyoming's extraordinary biodiversity.

Sincerely,



Brent Ewers
Director, Biodiversity Institute



“

Your engagement and generosity are what make this work possible, and we are deeply grateful for your partnership in building understanding and appreciation of Wyoming's extraordinary biodiversity.

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRIVATE SUPPORT

GIVING DAY

In October, 55 Friends of Biodiversity from all over the country contributed over \$6,800 to our campaign during UW's Giving Day. Thanks to your generosity during this 24-hour campaign and your support throughout the year, *we can support 100% of our events and projects through private donations!*

MAJOR GIVING

Major gifts secure a strategic role for excellence in the advancement of biodiversity research, along with naming rights. Donors receive exclusive invitations and contribute to our strategic vision.

DONATIONS

Gifts, of any size, improve our ability to solve grand societal challenges of how biodiversity is generated, maintained, restored, and its impact on ecosystem services and human well-being.

To learn more about donor opportunities, please email beewers@uwyo.edu. To make a gift, please visit our website at www.wyobiodiversity.org

SUPPORT OUR CORE PRIORITY AREAS:

COMMUNITY SCIENCE, EDUCATION & EVENTS:

- Wyoming BioBlitz
- Summer Bat Walks
- K-12 Programs and Tours
- Winter and Summer Moose Day
- Rocky Mountain Amphibian Project
- Wind River Reservation Outreach
- Laramie Salamander Migration Initiative
- Mullen Fire Initiative
- Biodiversity Gallery Exhibitions
- Science Cafes and more

PUBLICATIONS:

Publication grants provide funds to translate research into books, field guides, and other printed material that communicate the value of biodiversity and its positive societal impacts.

GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH ENHANCEMENT GRANT:

Competitive grants awarded annually to multiple UW graduate students who demonstrate excellence in student-driven biodiversity research and communicate their research to diverse audiences. Since 2012, we've awarded 80 grants totaling over \$350,000.

EARLY CAREER RESEARCH:

This post-doctoral scholar and early career researcher program accelerates biodiversity discoveries, elevates the national and international reputation of UW, and contributes critical insights to solving grand challenges in Wyoming and beyond.



FRIENDS OF BIODIVERSITY

RECENT FUNDRAISING SUCCESS

Generous donors make it possible for us to maintain and grow our programs. We cannot say it enough - Thank you! Below are the donors from December 19, 2024 through December 19, 2025.

MAJOR GIFTS

Michael and Edith Allen
Richard and Ann Boelter
Bridget Hardy
Patrick and Nora Ivers
Michael Erpino
Donald and Judy Legerski

DONORS AND FRIENDS OF BIODIVERSITY

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Lawrence Todd
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Elizabeth & Joseph Waner
Nancy Weidel
Donald Whittaker
Tom Whittle
Dusty Wissmath
Elizabeth Wommack
Nelson Wong
ML Wright
Wyoming Interfaith Network

and several anonymous donors

MEET CASEY BLACK

*UW Ph.D. Student,
BI Grant Recipient, and
Certified Wyoming Naturalist*



Casey Black received a BI grant in 2023 to assess the integration of stakeholder knowledge into caribou conservation and management in Alaska.



“My name is Casey Black and I am a Ph.D. student in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Wyoming. When I first moved to Wyoming in 2022 to begin my master’s program... I wanted to get more involved in my new Wyoming community, which led me to the Biodiversity Institute. I’ve had the opportunity to snowshoe on moose surveys, help salamanders during migration nights, monitor invasive plant growth in wildlife recovery areas, and so much more.

The BI helped me find a home in Wyoming.

- Casey Black



All our projects and events are funded by private donations. Scan to donate!



BUILDING A STATEWIDE NETWORK OF WYOMING NATURALISTS

The Wyoming Naturalist Program (WNP) continues to grow as a statewide network of engaged community members dedicated to learning about and caring for Wyoming's diverse landscapes. Since its launch in 2021, the program has graduated 114 naturalists across annual cohorts, including 25 graduates in the 2025 cohort. Collectively, Wyoming Naturalists have contributed more than 5,500 volunteer hours to conservation education, outreach, and service projects throughout the state.

Coordinated by a collaborative team of state agencies and nonprofit partners, including the Biodiversity Institute, Audubon Rockies, Wyoming State Parks, and others, the program provides participants with in-depth training in biodiversity, ecology, conservation, and interpretation, and more. As we look ahead to future cohorts, we encourage individuals who are interested in also becoming leaders

and stewards within their communities, to join the waitlist at the program's new website: wyomingnaturalists.com.

Pictured Left: Naturalists participate in a bird survey during the annual meeting. Pictured Above: Naturalists remove invasive trees during a service project.



Each year, families across Wyoming join us after dark for one of our most popular community programs - Bat Walks. These free events introduce participants to Wyoming's native bat species, the serious threats they face from disease, and why bats are

essential to healthy ecosystems. Led by Mason, Wyoming's only certified Bat Ambassador, participants use specialized acoustic equipment that records bat calls and translates them into sounds we can hear - sometimes even identifying the species flying overhead.

In 2025, Bat Walks filled quickly in Sheridan and Dubois, bringing communities together for a fun, hands-on science experience under the stars. These events are always free and made possible through public support. If you're interested in partnering with us to host a Bat Walk in your community, please email us at biodiversity@uwyo.edu.



Pictured Above: Children and their families attending a free bat walk and seminar work on bat crafts at a park in Sheridan, Wyoming.



EXPLORING WYOMING'S BIODIVERSITY

For more than a decade, the Wyoming BioBlitz has brought scientists, community members, and partners together to document the state's biodiversity and foster stewardship by empowering participants of all ages to contribute meaningfully to science. Now entering its 13th year, this community science weekend is led in partnership with Audubon Rockies and Wyoming State Parks.

The 2025 Wyoming BioBlitz continued to build on this legacy with 80 participants joining biologists and natural resource professionals for a weekend of hands-on discovery. Volunteers conducted bird surveys and documented mammals, amphibians, and a wide range of other species. The next BioBlitz will take place June 26-28 at the New Fork Lake Campground at the Bridger-Teton National Forest outside of Pinedale. Details will be announced on our website.

SAVE THE DATES:

June 26-28: Bridger-Teton National Forest, Pinedale, WY
July 17-20: Statewide BioBlitz, everywhere in Wyoming



POWERED BY GENEROUS DONORS

100% of our K-12 education, community science programs, and events are made possible by generous donors like you.

Every classroom visit, hands-on activity or family-friendly event we offer is fully funded thanks to individuals who believe in the power of biodiversity education. Your generosity ensures that students and adults across Wyoming can explore science in hands-on, engaging science experiences. We're connecting with researchers, engaging in real-world conservation, and building life-long curiosity about the natural world. When you give, you directly support meaningful learning experiences that inspire the next generation of scientists, our children's educators, and passionate adults. It's turning learning into action and inspires lifelong stewardship of our natural world.



Donate today at our website
www.wyobiobiodiversity.org or
scan the QR code



4TH ANNUAL SALAMANDER MIGRATION INITIATIVE

The 4th annual Salamander Migration Initiative once again brought the Laramie community together to support the city's population of barred tiger salamanders during their seasonal migration across local streets. In April, more than 60 community members attended a volunteer training. These volunteers gained skills to help salamanders safely cross Laramie roads while collecting data that deepens our understanding of this unique urban population.

Community members can sign up through our website to get involved and are encouraged to watch for spring email updates to join this growing effort to help Laramie's wildlife - right in our own neighborhoods.



ART MEETS BIODIVERSITY

In 2025, the Biodiversity Institute launched the Biodiversity Gallery in the UW Berry Biodiversity Conservation Center, creating a new, public-facing space where art and science come together. Throughout the year, the gallery hosts rotating exhibitions featuring biodiversity-inspired photography, film, paintings, mixed media, student work, and collaborative projects between artists and scientists. The gallery offers visitors a unique opportunity to experience conservation storytelling through creative expression in a space that is free and open to the public.

Community members are encouraged to stop by the Berry Center year-round to view new exhibitions, attend opening receptions, and engage with the stories behind the artwork. Artists of all ages and experience levels are invited to apply to exhibit their work through our website. New exhibitions and opening receptions are shared through our social media. Learn more and apply to showcase your work in 2027 at our website.





Biodiversity Institute
1000 E. University Ave., Dept. 4304
Laramie, WY 82071