

STATE of the ROCKIES

**2026 Conservation in the West
Student Photo Contest**

To VOTE with QR Code:

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2. From the website, choose the avatar and name of your favorite image for which you wish to vote from the list of images.
3. Only one vote per person.
4. WINNERS posted Thursday April 23, 2026, by noon.



THANK YOU!

Among the Clouds

Ten Mile Range, Colorado

Along the decent from Mount Lincoln on the Decalibron Loop, Mount Cameron emerges from the clouds on an early winter storm-ridden day in the Ten Mile Range. Unpredictable storms like these remind us of the power of the Rockies, our place among them, and the respect they deserve.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT **Clouds**



Black Lake

Rocky Mountain National Park,
Colorado

This photo of Black Lake reflects the need to protect public lands, water quality, and address climate impacts on mountain ecosystems. The still, glass-like surface mirrors the surrounding jagged peaks, dense alpine forests, and rocky slopes of Rocky Mountain National Park with striking clarity, creating near-perfect symmetry. The reflection captures the rugged beauty of the high country, towering granite ridges, patches of lingering snow, and crisp alpine air. It also connects to concerns about changing snowpack, warming temperatures, and increased recreational pressure across western mountain environments.





To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT ***Bison Jam***

Bison Jam

Yellowstone National Park

He huffs out steam from a dripping nose, hooves clacking in 1,000 pounds of weight shifting back and forth on July's heat hazed pavement. In a silver-dollar-sized eye, I can see my own reflection, as the bison tramps by only a few feet from my place in the passenger seat. I am reminded of how bison were nearly eradicated from the West by the 1880s, leaving only a few hundred of them left in Yellowstone; the final lineage. It was partially human advancement, such as the construction of the transcontinental railroad, developing commercial hunting industry that led to the population decline of bison. But more grievously, it was the U.S government that encouraged the destruction of bison herds to further force indigenous communities on to reservations. This individual in the photograph is a generational product of immense conservation efforts to preserve and reestablish healthy populations of bison in both Yellowstone and the Rocky Mountain West.

The Bridge

Summit County, Colorado

This photo was taken on the 7th segment of the Colorado trail on the westward side of the Tenmile range. Sandwiched between Breckenridge and Copper Mountain, owned by the two behemoth corporations of modern skiing, this photo represents the many boundaries one faces exploring Colorado.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT ***Bridge***



Private lands continue to infringe on public ones that many have taken for granted, and many are witnessing the industry and consumerism that has taken over the area. Despite its proximity to this ever-consuming culture, this trail remains unbothered and quiet, a sanctuary for personal reflection. This photo captures my hope that this bridge will never burn.

Stone Spires

Bryce Canyon National Park, Utah

Taken on film in Bryce Canyon National Park, Utah, this image captures stone spires rising through fresh snow, their red surfaces softened into pale tones. Light moves gently across the canyon, revealing layers of color and texture carved over millions of years. Each formation stands as a record of time, shaped by water, ice, and wind into delicate structures that feel both intricate and immense. The beauty of Bryce Canyon lies in this balance between fragility and endurance. Though the stone appears solid and permanent, it is constantly being reshaped by the natural cycles that formed it. The snow resting on the spires adds a sense of stillness but also reminds us that this landscape is part of an ongoing process, not a finished one. Across the West, people increasingly recognize that places like this depend on the health of the natural systems that sustain them, a concern reflected in the 2025 *Conservation in the West Poll*. The canyon's beauty is inseparable from those conditions, temperature, water, and time, and as those begin to shift, so too does the future of the landscape itself. In this moment, Bryce feels timeless. But its history is still being written, shaped by forces that continue to evolve.



To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT ***Bryce Canyon***



Aspen Trees

Maroon Bells, Colorado

I took this on the Crested Butte to Aspen hike through the Maroon Bells - Snowmass Wilderness. Aspens are highly sensitive to drought and warming temperatures, and the 2025 Conservation in the West Poll flagged climate change as one of the top concerns for people across the region. Standing in these woods, that's easy to believe.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT

Aspen Trees



Cedar Mesa

Bears Ears National Monument,
Utah

This area is known for its canyons and Ancestral Puebloan cliff dwellings. As visitation increases, permits help limit damage to fragile ecosystems and cultural sites. This reflects the need for conservation efforts to protect public lands and preserve these landscapes for future generations.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT ***Cedar Mesa***

Worth Protecting

Maroon Bells, Colorado

This image was shot on a KODAK EKTAR H35 half frame toy camera on a hike through the Maroon Bells - Snowmass Wilderness. The 2025 poll found that residents of the west strongly value public lands; for recreation, wildlife habitat, and simply having wild places that still exist. This trail is a good reminder of what that actually looks like and why it's worth protecting.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to **SELECT**
Worth Protecting



To **VOTE** for this photo use
the QR code to **SELECT**
Challenger

Challenger Point

Crestone, Colorado



Open spaces like in this photo taken from the top of Challenger Point, are crucial for keeping clean air. When there are large tracts of conserved land, developments have less of an impact on the quality of air allowing others to experience fresh air and beautiful open spaces.

An Everyday Family Backyard

Glacier National Park, Montana

A short hike off the Going To the Sun Road in Montana's East Glacier National Park, a family of goat roams Logan Pass, taking in the same view day after day. Surely, I wouldn't get sick of it either. Hidden Lake sits in the shadow of the towering Clements Mountain. A vacation spot for a group of teenagers is home for this furry herd, and it is imperative that we treat it as such.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT ***Family***





Dawn Undisturbed

Page, Arizona

The sun slowly rises over a campsite near Lake Powell. This scene reflects the quiet resilience of desert landscapes in the face of growing stress. Hidden behind the pixels, these arid ecosystems are increasingly challenged by prolonged drought and climate change. While desert flora and fauna have adapted to survive with minimal water, rising temperatures place an additional strain on these delicate systems. Our brief interactions with these ecosystems, like sleeping under the open sky, give us a newfound respect for landscapes that are starkly different from our ever-expanding cities and towns of cement, glass, and steel. With our appreciation for the beauty around us must come a responsibility to maintain its sanctity.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to
SELECT ***Dawn***

Delta Lake

Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming

What they don't tell you about hiking Delta Lake in Grand Teton National Park is that it is possibly the most breathtaking glacial lake one may ever witness in their lifetime, and it is also the most populated hike in the park. After a four mile stretch along Lupine Meadows Trail and passing by a plethora of tourists on a thin, wildflower lined path, I reached a sight that made the long hours of sweat beading down my forehead entirely forgettable. The water perched below the snowcapped Middle Teton was a shade of aquamarine I was unaware came in natural form, and pikas peaked their heads in and out of granite boulder fields.



As I walked along Delta Lake, attempting to take in the serenity, I could not help but notice the amount of discarded trash besides the trail, and in the frigid crystal water too. Although I was incredibly grateful to be able to visit this place, I too felt guilty that the amount of access to the public not only put Delta Lake at risk of disturbance, but spaces like this across the Rocky Mountain West. It is reminders like these that show us the invaluable importance of Leave No Trace principles, and environmental ethics surrounding outdoor recreation.

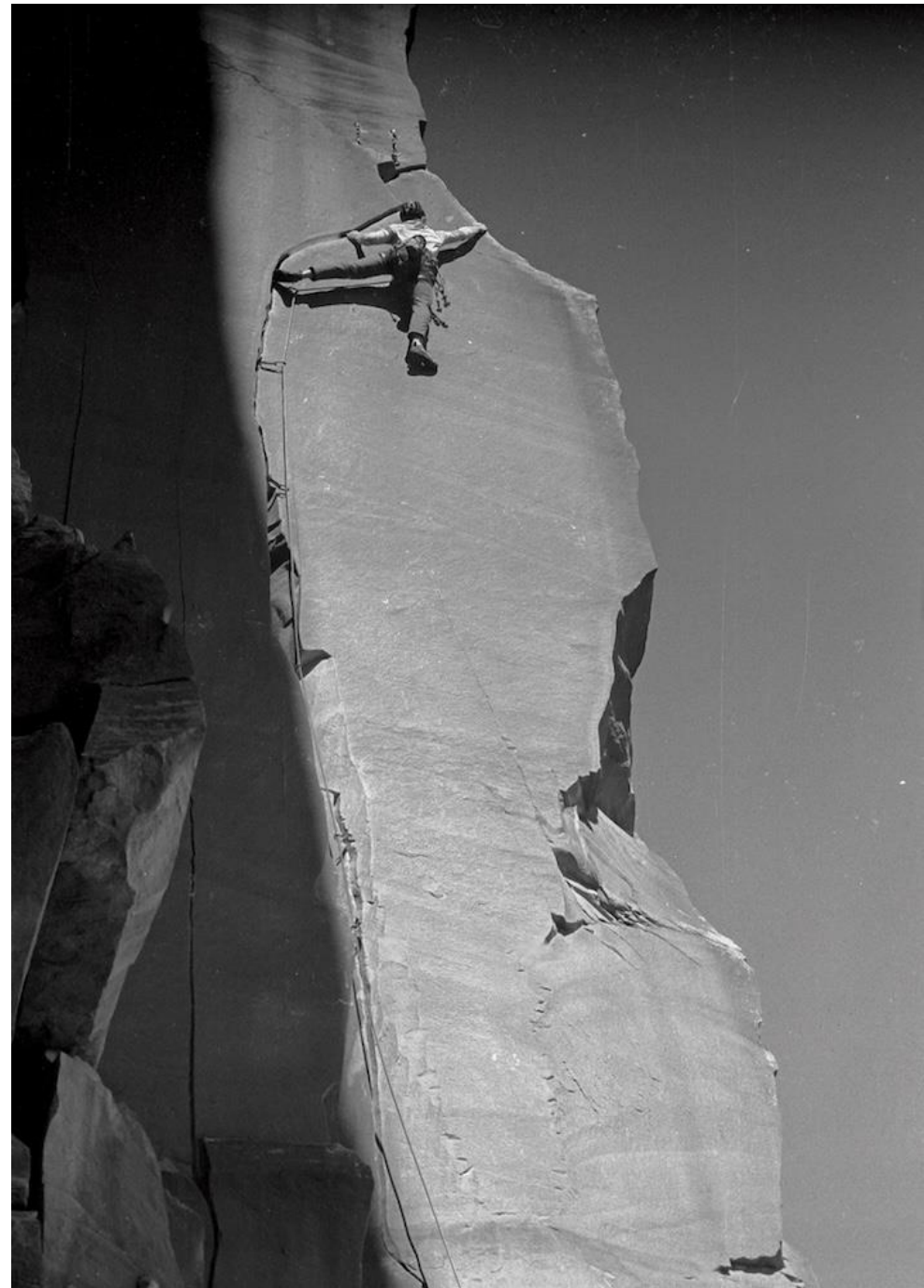
To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT ***Delta Lake***

Climber in the Desert

Bears Ears National Monument, Utah

This is a photo taken of a climber in Bears Ears National Monument. Without the protections that come with federal national monument designations, climbing areas and environments like these are at risk of being damaged by development and unregulated use. These fragile sandstone cliffs tower over a valley rich with biodiversity, specifically the cryptobiotic soil that prevents erosion, holds the soil together, fixes nitrogen for plants, and holds water. Without the federal protections that voters in the west support, the ecosystems of Bears Ears are at risk.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to
SELECT ***Climber***



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Desert Moon

Bears Ears National Monument, Utah

The moon rises through periwinkle skies, peering its face behind the desert's sun-warmed sandstone. It's January in Bears Ears, Utah, although the sun still relentlessly beats down during the Sun's hours. Ravens' deep iridescence reflects as they glide above, occasionally letting out a distant croak. We breathe in the juniper and breathe out in introspective condensation. As the night begins to fall, illuminated now by waning light, we are reminded of our place as a part of nature, as opposed to a human manufactured assumption that places mankind in a position that disconnects us from the environment.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT ***Desert Moon***

Fenced from Beauty

Saguache County, Colorado

This photograph was taken in Saguache County, Colorado, under a vast night sky. The star trails were created by stitching together nearly 500 images, capturing the passage of time in a way that mirrors how our relationship with land and conservation has shifted over the years. In the foreground, a small shed marked with “No Parking” and “No Trespassing” stands against an otherwise open landscape. That contrast connects to a major conservation issue about who has rights to certain lands and where the line is drawn between protection and restriction. Across the west, many people are concerned about losing access to public lands and strongly support keeping these places open rather than sold or restricted. In this image, the signs represent those growing boundaries and stand out to the viewer as a barrier to the open sky beyond.



To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT ***Fenced***

Havasupai Falls

Grand Canyon, Arizona

Set against red canyon walls, the falls' blue-green water is one of the most visually stunning landscapes in the American Southwest. The water gets its color from high concentrations of dissolved minerals picked up as it flows through limestone before emerging from springs. This photo of Havasupai Falls in Grand Canyon National Park highlights conservation issues like water scarcity, climate change impacts on desert ecosystems, and protection of tribal lands. The falls depend on groundwater in an arid region, making them vulnerable to drought and overuse, while increasing tourism also raises concerns about preserving the area's natural and cultural resources.

To **VOTE** for this photo **TEXT *Havasapai***
to (320) 335-7473





Hidden Tetons

Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming

Fresh from its journey through the Tetons, the Snake River twists and turns its way into the forest as the sun begins to rise. This is the 37th driest year in Teton County over the past 132 years, with water levels nearly two inches below normal. What appears to be timeless is quietly shifting under the pressures of drought and climate change. This landscape has drawn visitors to its trails and overlooks from around the world, but its beauty disguises delicate ecological balances. Waters like the Snake River not only support the iconic wildlife of the Tetons, but also the human communities that rely on their flow. Even small changes can ripple through the entire system. This image calls us to reflect on our role in sustaining these waterscapes. We are reminded that conservation is about preserving life and resources that are increasingly stressed. This beautiful sunrise encourages awareness, action, and a commitment to preserve the waters and mountains around us, along with the life they support.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT ***Hidden Tetons***



Labyrinth Canyon

Utah

To **VOTE** for this photo use
the QR code to SELECT
Labyrinth



Funding cuts to BLM lands affect the amount of outdoor education possible on these lands. It also can allow these places to become overused without maintenance. This photo was taken in Labyrinth Canyon on an outdoor education trip.



La Veta

La Veta, Colorado

A photograph of one of the twin Spanish Peaks in La Veta, Colorado. A road winding to seemingly nowhere is easily overshadowed by the looming mountain in the background. The natural radial dyke parallels the manmade road, raising the thought of man vs nature. In rural La Veta, residents prioritize the natural world around them, emphasizing conservation and preservation of resources. As water runs scarce in the West, voters continue to struggle with how to conserve resources so we may remain faithful supporters of the outside world.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT **La Veta**



Lifeline of the Rockies

Gothic, Colorado

When we think of the beauty of the mountains, we often think of water as well – even if it is indirect. Whether looking at the snowcapped peaks of the Rocky Mountains, alpine lakes, rushing streams, or wildflower meadows, snowmelt plays a huge role in the beauty of the West. Working at Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory over the past summer taught me how much nature’s cycles depend on consistent water. Without it, plants and animals are forced to quickly adapt to uncharacteristic dry seasons, resulting in a much shorter time that we can research them and numerous dangers for the organisms as well. This photo speaks to both the necessity of water as well as the beauty it creates.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT ***Lifeline***

Dusk in the Tetons

Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming

This is a photo taken from an alpine meadow on Mt. Moran of the Northern Face of the Grand Teton. Voters in the west overwhelmingly support protection for our public lands, like Grand Teton National Park. Without the National Park Service that is currently being gutted by the Trump Administration, these places are subject to environmentally destructive development.



To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT ***Mount Moran***



14,429 Feet

Mount Massive, Sawatch Range, Colorado

In the Conservation in the West Poll, 58% of people agreed that loss of habitat for fish and wildlife is an extremely or very serious problem. A new reorganization measure of the US Forest Service from the Trump administration threatens to close dozens of research stations and field offices, threatening various protections for public lands and potentially opening them up for private acquisition. A majority of Colorado's 14ers exist on US Forest Service land, and thereby much of the habitat for the Rocky Mountain Goat and other alpine species. By opening up this land to private businesses and extractive industries, crucial habitat for species in the alpine tundra is threatened all across the state by potential development.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT **14429 Feet**

Crested Butte to Aspen Trail

Snowmass, Colorado
Half-frame shot

These mountains feed into the Colorado River watershed, which supplies water to a huge part of the West - and the 2025 Conservation in the West Poll found that water supply is one of the most pressing issues for people in this region. Black and white felt right here.



To **VOTE** for this photo use
the QR code to **SELECT**
Crested Butte



Landmarks

Garden of the Gods, Colorado Springs, Colorado

This photo was taken in Garden of the Gods, where towering red rock formations rise against a winter sky. The structures resemble cairns—stacked stones often used by hikers to mark paths—blurring the line between natural formation and human interpretation. The contrast between the deep red sandstone and the soft blues and whites of the sky captures a sense of stillness within a constantly changing landscape.

Spaces like this highlight the importance of public lands in the American West—not only as places of recreation and exploration, but as ecosystems and landmarks worth preserving. If we look to these formations as natural guides, what path are they pointing us toward in how we care for the landscapes around us?

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT **Landmarks**

Powell

Lake Powell, Arizona

This photo represents one of the greatest conservation dilemmas of our time. Lake Powell, continually being diminished as one of the most important water sources in the West, is also a hotspot for recreation. The 2025 poll showed voters wanted to prioritize conservation while also providing opportunities to visit and recreate responsibly. The duality of the light and dark highlights this issue. As sunlight hits the red rock, illuminating water lines from bygone climates, dark storm clouds roll in. We continue to grapple with conservation, water usage, and recreation, as we no doubt will for years to come.





Navajo Peak

Indian Peaks Wilderness, Colorado

This photo of Navajo Peak in the Indian Peaks Wilderness captures the quiet beauty of being high in the alpine. The sharp peaks rise above fields of loose talus and open sky, where every step feels intentional and carefully placed. The campers moving in a single-file line reflect a growing awareness of responsible recreation, minimizing human impact by protecting sensitive high-elevation terrain.

This scene connects directly to the 2025 *Conservation in the West Poll*, which highlights strong public concern for protecting public lands from overuse, preserving wildlife habitat, and balancing increasing outdoor recreation with long-term stewardship. It shows conservation not just as a policy idea, but as a lived practice, visible in the careful movement through a landscape that is easily damaged.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT **Navajo Peak**

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THANK YOU!

Days Like This

Platte Gulch, Park County, Colorado

Admittedly, this photo was taken last winter in the Platte Gulch. Then, while beautiful, it didn't strike me as anything too spectacular. It wasn't until this winter when a scene like this only came to me in my dreams that I realized just how lucky I was to get to spend that day out there with my dear friend, and how scary the prospect of getting to have fewer and fewer of days like this is. I don't think I know anybody who claims that being in nature stresses them out, and I think this is why conservation is on everybody's minds. The only place where humans can really find peace is at risk of disappearing forever. This isn't just a crisis for the planet it's a crisis for us as well.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT **Days**



Leadville Railway

Sawatch Mountain Range, Colorado

Overlooking the Upper Arkansas River Valley and the Sawatch Mountain Range. Roads, rail lines, and nearby mining operations, including the Climax Mine, highlight the region's history of development and resource extraction. While this infrastructure supports economic activity, it can also fragment habitats, increase erosion, and impact water quality. According to the State of the Rockies Conservation in the West Poll, many western residents are concerned about balancing development with environmental protection. This image emphasizes the need for responsible land use and conservation to protect these landscapes.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to
SELECT ***Railway***



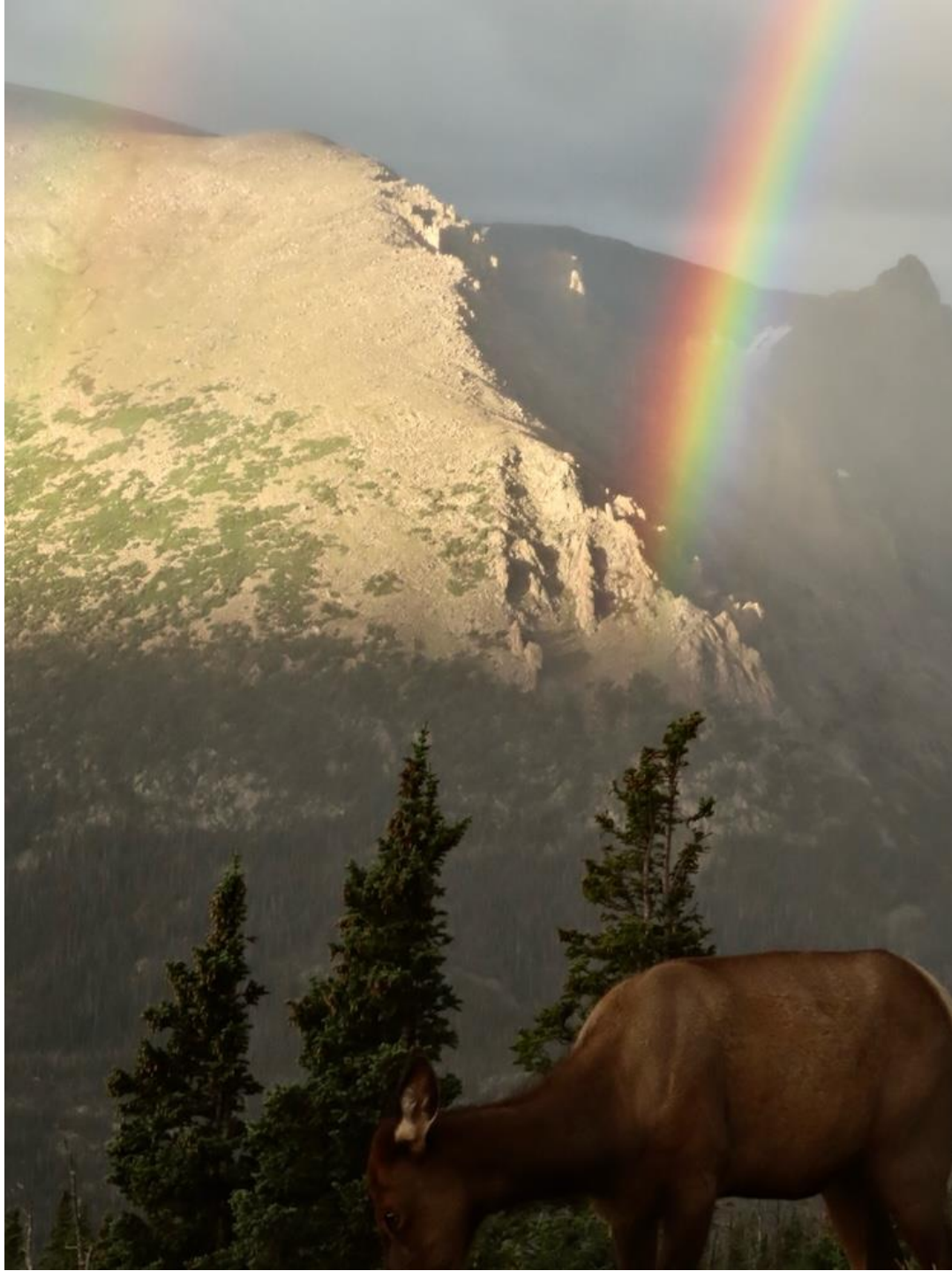
Still Life: Sawtooth's and Aspens

Stanley, Idaho



This image frames the Sawtooth Mountains through a pair of aspen trees, living, shifting, and imperfect against the jagged permanence of stone. The grain of film holds the moment softly, giving weight to the stillness, as if the landscape itself is pausing to be remembered. Yet this stillness is increasingly fragile. Across the West, wildfire has become a defining force, reshaping forests, altering watersheds, and testing the resilience of ecosystems that once felt enduring. Aspen trees, like those in the foreground, are among the first to return after fire, symbols of renewal, but also reminders of how often the land is now asked to recover. In this way, the image reflects the growing concerns captured in the 2025 *Conservation in the West Poll*: that the landscapes people value most are also the ones under the greatest strain. What appears untouched is, in truth, part of a changing system where heat, drought, and fire are no longer occasional, but expected. The photograph holds a quiet tension, between permanence and change, resilience and loss, and asks what it means to protect a place that is already beginning to transform.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to **SELECT TEXT** *Still Life*



Rainbow Elk

Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado

Driving back over Trail Ridge Road in Rocky Mountain National Park, a perilous journey even on a much milder day, a herd of elk crossed the road. Almost simultaneously, a rainbow appeared. While perhaps simply serendipitous, this coincidence seemed a gentle reminder to protect both the parks and sacred spaces in the West and everything in it, like this vulnerable elk. Overwhelmingly, voters in the West support measures to protect public lands and prevent development. While the recent spate of attacks against conservation and public lands seems discouraging, this rainbow represents the hope that now, more than ever, is essential.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT ***Rainbow Elk***

A Dip in the Dolores River

Cortez, Colorado

This picture was taken outside of Cortez, Colorado, to capture the beauty of the Dolores River next to the sprawling desert landscape. Our film crew decided to play in the water and enjoy the scarce resource when seeking to understand its importance to the surrounding community for farming, recreation, and everyday life. With less snowfall in the winters, the Dolores is drying up, which raises the question: What does the future hold for ecosystems tied to a river that is slowly drying up?

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to
SELECT ***Dip in Dolores***

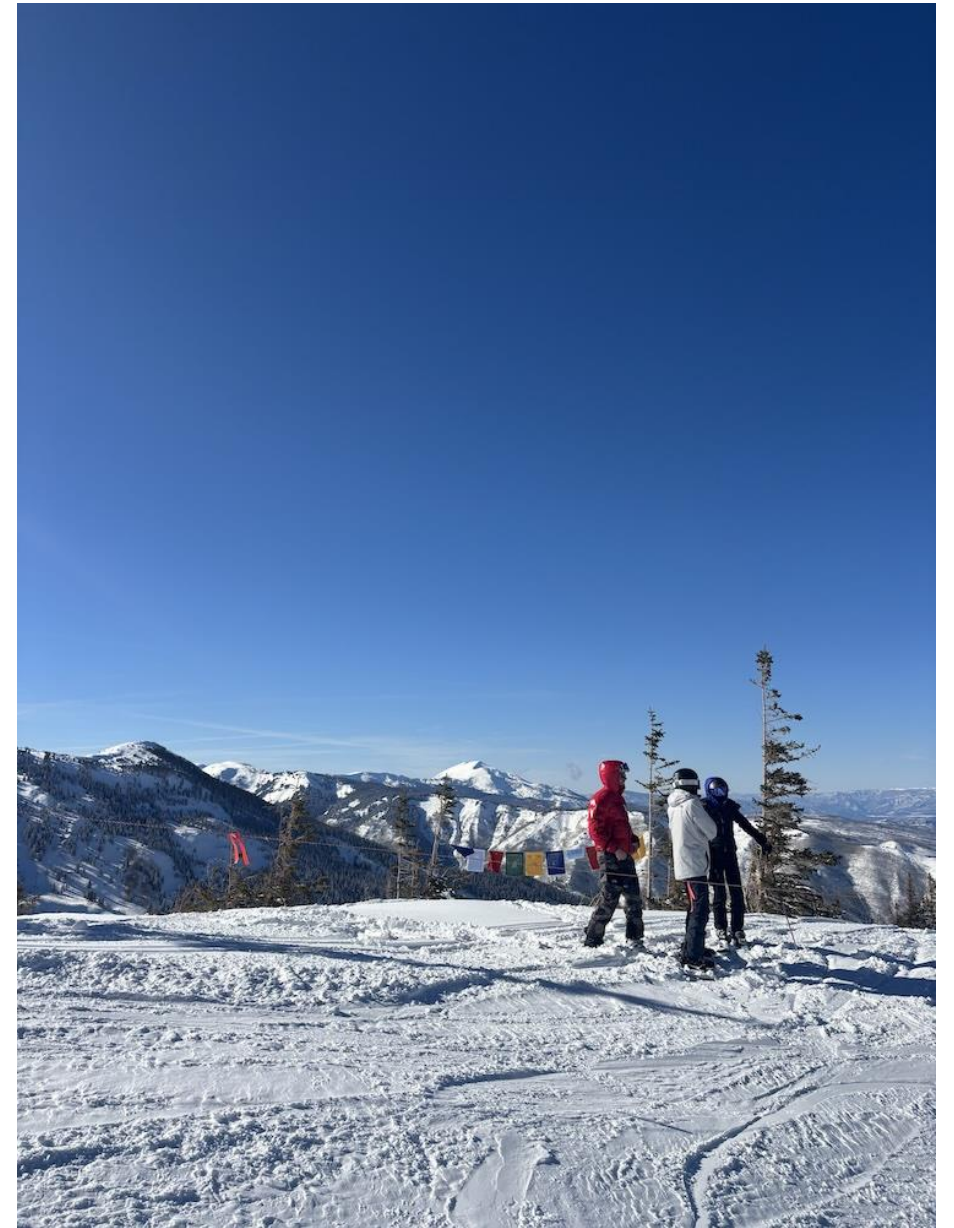


Scattered and Tattered

Aspen, Colorado

This past semester, I spent a month in Nepal studying climate change and environmental justice.

Nepal holds a large portion of the Himalayas, which is often referred to as the “third pole” in terms of its freshwater reserves. However, this region is warming about two times faster than the global average, leaving millions in an increasingly precarious position. To me, prayer flags have come to symbolize both this incredible vulnerability and the hope the Nepali people hold onto in the face of danger and uncertainty. Prayer flags are believed to spread blessings as the wind blows through them—the more tattered the flags, the more the prayers are being spread. Seeing this symbol of resilience and hope on top of a mountain in one of the wealthiest places in the country, let alone the world, brings up mixed emotions. Many of the people that live in and experience Aspen are at best not drastically affected by climate change, and at worst directly contribute to the problem. However, no place or peoples are immune from the catastrophic impacts of climate change—like the Himalayas, the Rockies function as a critical water source, and their vulnerability carries consequences for downstream communities and the world. The hope these flags symbolize has been scattered across the world, but the people with the power to impart real change stay silent—the winds of change unblown, the flags untattered.





To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT ***Sediment***

Sediment at Sunset

Canyonlands National Park, Utah

The deserts of Utah seem to stretch on forever. Canyons and arches snake around each other and it's easy to let the layers of rock blend together, years of sediment compiling and compressing, slowly forming something solid, an illusion of permanence. A closer look reveals each fissure and crack. Thin layers held together by time and pressure. Dusty grains of sand that easily crumble under hiking boots. Despite its grandeur, the great mountains of the Rockies and high desert plains of the Southwest rely on these tiny building blocks. While it's easy to let each layer blur together, in the quiet moments before the sun sets, I'm reminded how long it took just one rock arch to form and how long it could last if we work together to protect these landscapes.

The Beauty of Aspens

Crestone, Colorado

Entire groves of aspen trees die every year because of overuse of water in the areas, and lack of care to the ecosystem. Conserving land with aspen groves will allow that ecosystem to thrive supporting biological diversity and protecting the beauty of Aspens. This photo was taken near the town of Crestone Colorado in fall.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT ***Beauty***



Selectively Logged

Turquoise Lake, Colorado

This photo was taken on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land near Turquoise Lake in Leadville, Colorado. As climate change continues to intensify, wildfires in the Rocky Mountain West are becoming more frequent and severe, with Colorado among the states most affected. According to the State of the Rockies Conservation in the West Poll, more than nine out of ten western residents view uncontrollable wildfires as a serious problem in their state. The image highlights an area of forest that has been selectively logged, a management strategy sometimes used to reduce wildfire risk. This photo illustrates the ongoing challenge of balancing human intervention with conservation efforts to create more resilient forests in a changing climate.





Under the Tree Line

The Barr Trail, Colorado Springs, CO

Named Tava, meaning “sun mountain,” by the Ute people, this morning snapshot on Colorado Springs’ beloved mountain reflects a growing question across the West: how do we continue to access the landscapes we love without altering them for the worse? Paradoxically, our appreciation and use of our public lands only intensifies the pressure of human presence. We turn to nature for connection, but these places quietly absorb the impact. What once felt untouched gradually becomes changed through human movement. Conservation, then, is not only about setting land aside, but about rethinking how we exist within it. This image then represents how the preservation of these spaces is not only about protection, but also about restraint. We must recognize the privilege of access to our natural beauties and ensure their continuation.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to SELECT ***Tree Line***

Wondering Goat

Quandary Peak, Colorado

This photo was taken on the summit ridge of Quandary Peak near Summit, County, during a late summer hike in August 2025. As I admired the rocky alpine terrain at the peak, this young mountain goat wandered confidently toward me, seemingly unbothered by my presence. The moment felt surreal—the goat’s curiosity and calmness stood in contrast to the rugged, high-altitude environment. The sharp rocks, expansive sky, and close-up perspective capture the quiet calm existing within an often harsh and rugged alpine world.



We share this state with so many other animals and organisms, it is important to conserve these ecosystems so magnificent creatures can continue to call Colorado home for centuries to come. Moments like this serve as a reminder that preserving these environments is essential to ensure wildlife can continue to thrive in places they have long called home.

To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to **SELECT**
Wandering Goat

Water Tanks in the Desert

Bears Ears National Monument, Utah

This is a photo taken after a series of fall storms fell over Bears Ears National Monument. Pools of water like these are rare sights in red rock country and can mean life or death for animals scouring the desert for water. As climate change increases the number and severity of drought in the West, it is important that we listen to voters that are concerned about our dwindling water supply and over consumptive society. This photo is a metaphor for how water is valued and how we take it for granted.

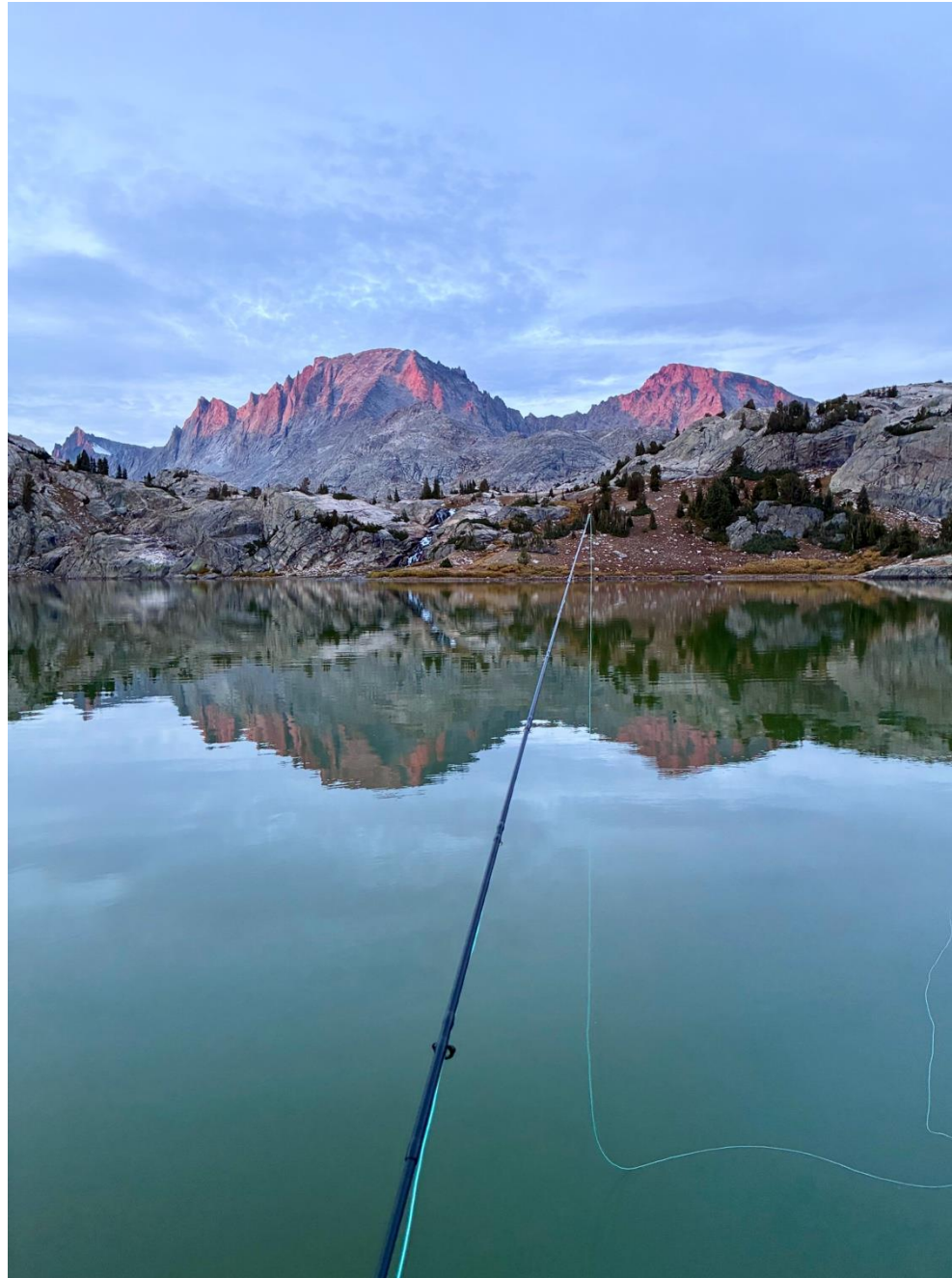
To **VOTE** for this photo use the QR code to **SELECT**
Water Tanks



A Cast of Colors

Wind River Range,
Wyoming

Thirteen miles off the trailhead in the Wind River Range of Bridger-Teton National Forest lies Island Lake. Overlooking some of Wyoming's highest peaks, the green glacial lake provides a stunning contrast against the pink sunset on the gray mountains. This capture of colors represents the unparalleled beauty of the Rockies.



To **VOTE** for this photo use
the QR code to **SELECT**
Cast

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