WESTERN ASPEN ALLIANCE

TREMBLINGS

NEWSLETTER & BULLETIN BOARD

Vol. 16(4), November 2025

Partnering to preserve and restore healthy aspen ecosystems

MEMBER PARTICIPATION: The WAA is a virtual science-based community. Send us aspen-related publications, management plans, and media mentions and we'll help spread the word. Contact Paul Rogers, Director: p.rogers@usu.edu.

Share *Tremblings* with your friends and colleagues.

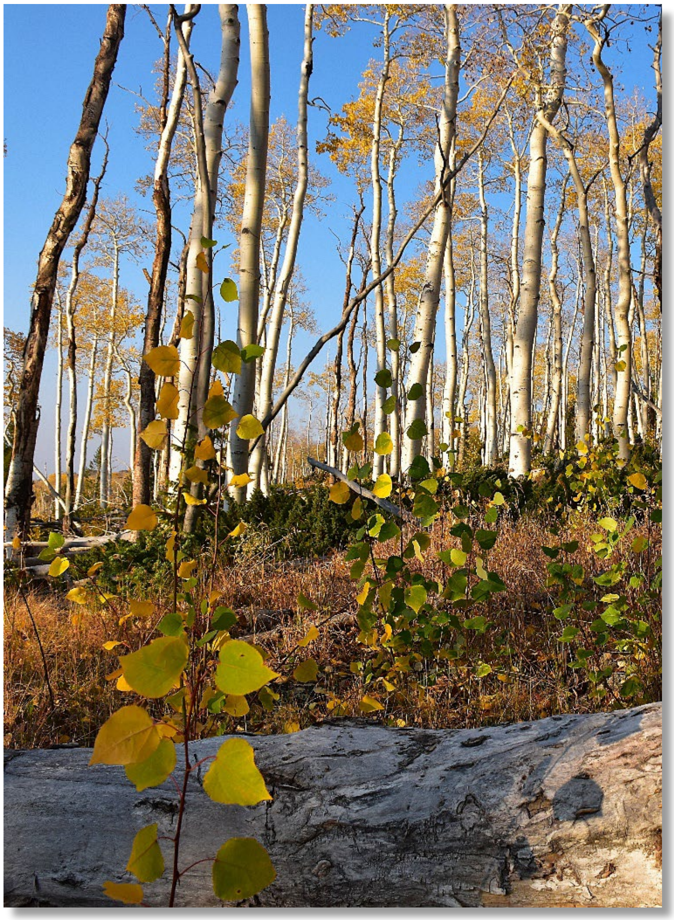
New members welcome! Sign up here

WAA HAPPENINGS

***Tremblings* Takes a Pause**—This quarterly newsletter, now completing 16 years, will go on hiatus while we map out the next chapter of the WAA. With the retirement of Director Paul Rogers, we are looking at maintaining base functions, such as the website, Facebook page, and Aspen Bibliography, until funding and a new Director can be secured. In the meantime, we request your assistance in the form of donations (within your means) and suggestions for potential larger funding sources. If you value applied aspen science and have ideas about how to continue the WAA, please contact Paul Rogers.

WAA Supports U.S. Federal Employees—Throughout the history of this organization we have worked closely with colleagues from numerous federal agencies. The WAA values those institutions and individuals for their collective knowledge, experience, and contributions to aspen communities. Without them we would not exist and, critically, our natural landscapes would suffer. We salute and support federal workers during these challenging times and wish them the same resilience they strive to impart on aspen communities across the continent!

Are Wolves Influencing Colorado Aspen—Seth Boster of the *Denver Gazette* takes a deep dive on whether the burgeoning Colorado wolf population will promote healthy aspen communities statewide in the long-term. The article, titled "Link Between Wolves and Aspen a Point of Debate Beyond Colorado" addresses the idea of trophic cascades from wolves to elk to aspen, allowing time for some juvenile aspen stems to survive to maturity, thereby revitalizing these challenged forests. With a nascent wolf population in the state it is clearly too soon to know how this will play out, but experts weigh in on likely scenarios given the current state of the science.



Fall colors ablaze in an iconic recovering forest, nicknamed Pando, near Fish Lake, Utah. Across aspen's broad circumboreal expanse we have focused on the critical indicator of aspen health: successful recruitment of juveniles. This sounds simple, but many locations continue to experience chronic browsing which interrupts this key component of thriving aspen ecosystems (Photo: Paul Rogers).

Wildfire, Ungulates, Aspen in the News—Brigham Young University scientists examined the effects of elk, deer, and cattle on post-fire regeneration of several species and found ample recruitment rates despite active browsing. An article in Phys.Org titled, "When Megafires Can Actually be a Good Thing" highlights some positive results from their post-fire study in Utah. According to the study's authors, if fires are large enough and of mixed severity the resultant aspen recruitment may overwhelm the pace of browsing.

UPCOMING EVENTS

North American Forest Ecology Workshop: NAFEW is coming to the beautiful Northern Rockies! The conference will take place June 23-26, 2026 in Missoula, Montana and will be hosted by the U.S. Forest Service and the University of Montana. This conference will host plenary talks, scientific presentations, and field trips exploring how to create and maintain resilient forest ecosystems alongside human communities. Focusing on innovative science, partnerships, and management, NAFEW 2026 will explore ways to foster forest communities that are resilient to climate stress, disturbance, and societal change. See details on conference themes or submit session proposals here. All topics related to forest ecology and management are welcome.

Conservation Biology & Restoration Conference: The North American Congress for Conservation & Restoration (NACCR) 2026 in partnership with the Society for Ecological Restoration will host their biennial conference from July 12-16, 2026 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The conference theme, "Conservation & Restoration for Nature & People," will examine the latest conservation research and practice to address today's conservation challenges. NACCR 2026 will promote interdisciplinary collaboration at a critical time for conservation and restoration science. Attendees will have the unique opportunity to engage with local and global experts, share best practices, and contribute to shaping a more sustainable and equitable future for ecosystems and communities alike. NACCR serves as an open platform for sharing unique perspectives and adapting emerging ideas, technologies, and methods in conservation and restoration science.

Aspen Workshops: There are no additional workshops scheduled for 2026 at this time. If your group is interested in scheduling an aspen workshop, contact WAA Director Paul Rogers.

COMMENTARY

An Aspen Community: Roots, on Roots, on Roots

Paul C. Rogers, Director, Western Aspen Alliance; Dept. of Environment & Society; Ecology Center; Utah State University

In a flicker of foliage, a glimmer of light, time passes and a career senesces. Dappled highlights alongside stochastic frustrations, bureaucratic pathologies, and unforeseen opportunities tremble across the forest floor of one's vocation. We call that an occupation, but it could be seen as a succession of disturbances, recoveries, and, well, growth. I have been fortunate to spend the bulk of my career focused on the aspen sciences and spending time with many of you, collectively unraveling some of the messy restoration issues in these charismatic landscapes. Under the canopy of the Western Aspen Alliance we have made some strides, but there is much more to accomplish.

Like a thriving aspen forest, recruitment of new researchers, questions, findings, and counter-findings will continue to drive this field. Some exciting new prospects include further understanding of the role of true aspen seedlings, which we now know commonly occur. For instance, how do new genotypes, and the disturbances that spawn them, affect long-term and broad-landscape resilience. Moreover, research on clonal characteristics, such as allocation of defense mechanisms, will help forest and wildlife managers focused on reducing browsing of aspen. There are also key questions surrounding "aspen as firebreaks" near home sites. Can active management promote aspen to arrest wildfire at the development fringe? Can we place an effectiveness probability on such tactics? Finally, numerous social science matters remain unexplored: aspen economics, recreational decision-making, aesthetic/visitation preferences, and base societal

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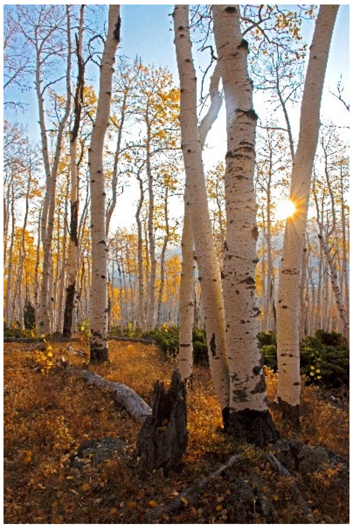
values of these landscapes. Of course, this list only scratches the bark of inquiry pathways.

As I often suggest, regeneration without recruitment inhibits resilience. Likewise, aspen management without active research transfer limits effectiveness. How do we continue to impart new findings to field practitioners? This has been the central mission of the WAA, but it doesn't happen without vigilance. Basic research is crucial, though we have often made the mistake of letting it molder where it could otherwise be useful. We will need new investigators to take on the role of a healthy root network; such "nodes" will continue to work shoulder-to-shoulder with those on the ground engaged in sustainable aspen stewardship. These professional connections, currently under fire and underfunded, will make or break aspen sustainability and the biodiverse systems they uphold.

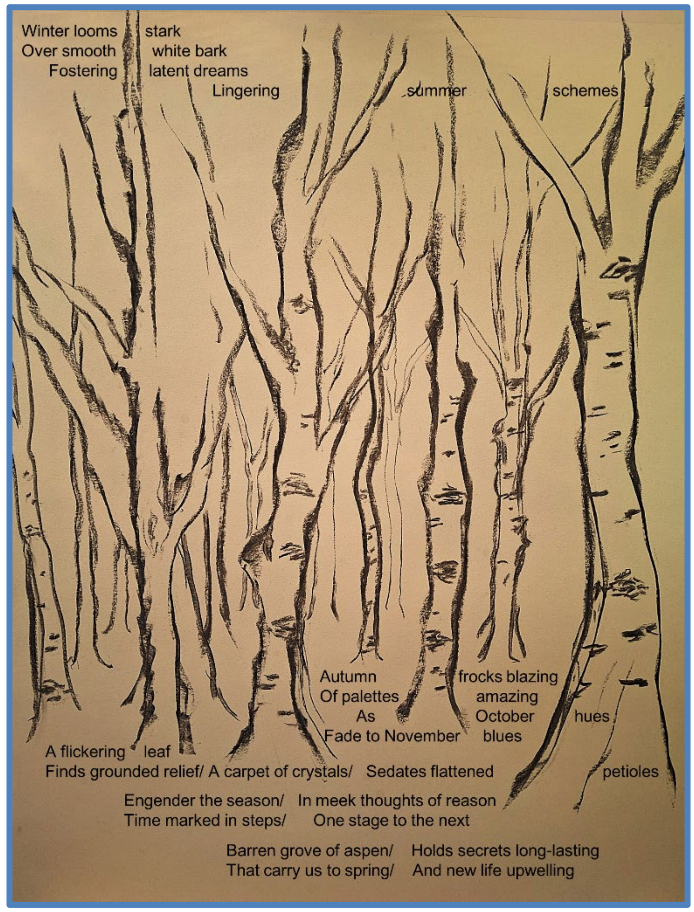


So, what does the future of the WAA and, by extension, the applied aspen sciences look like? To be blunt, these are challenging times for ecosystems at-large. Aspen communities, with apparent and hidden linkages abounding, are emblematic of broader societal interactions with our planet. When we began the WAA there was a clear void; an absence of a concerted aspen research program in the U.S. Forest Service alongside a dearth of clear science communication surrounding these topics. We believe linking disparate research programs with outreach to practitioners facilitated greater system functionality. Maintaining this formula, obviously, requires funding—the carbohydrates, if you will—and community. Thus, it will be you all and the emerging "ramets" (I avoided "suckers" here!) that will boost this noble pursuit we call aspen resilience.

WAA *Creates*

The "WAA Creates" section has encouraged aspen fiction, folklore, poetry, drawings, paintings, photography, and other artistic expressions. We hope it has provided inspiration.

Populus tempus
(charcoal on paper; falling words)



Emmon H. Rogers (graphic), Helena, Montana
Paul C. Rogers (lyric), Logan, Utah

From the graphic artist: *I wanted to see what would happen if I just let luck guide the charcoal instead of replicating a real aspen stand. What I got was much closer to how I see aspen in my mind's eye: dramatic, beautiful in a fantastical and ethereal way, a bit ghostly, and not at all troubled by questions of realism.*

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RECENT ASPEN PUBLICATIONS

A word on Open Access: The Western Aspen Alliance strongly supports open access publishing (CC-BY). Articles with hyperlinks below are available for download and sharing following Creative Commons rules for attribution.

Baker, S. D., K. M. Waring, D. Auty, and N. Wilhelmi. 2025. Influence of Increasing Fires on Mixed Conifer Stand Dynamics in the US Southwest. Forests 16:967.

Bizon, J. 2025. Ecological restoration and ecosystem memory of wildlife forage and understory diversity in a young pine monoculture plantation in central-interior British Columbia. University of Northern British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. [MS Thesis].

Cline, A. V., and C. P. Laroque. 2025. Native aspen carbon cache: quantifying carbon differences under copses in the black soil zone of the Canadian Prairies. Agroforestry Systems 99:245.

Kauffman, J. B., D. L. Cummings, R. L. Beschta, and W. J. Ripple. 2025. Where the buffalo roam: Ungulate influences on quaking aspen and willow communities in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Ecosphere 16:e70410.

Landry, S., B. Smith, E. Stuber, S. Espinosa, and D. Dahlgren. Dusky grouse seasonal resource selection in the Great Basin isolated mountain ranges of Nevada, USA. Wildlife Biology: e01462.

Man, R. 2025. Effectiveness of Silvicultural Options in Renewal of Trembling Aspen–Jack Pine Mixedwood Stands, 21 Years After Treatment. Forests 16:683.

MacNulty, D. R., D. Cooper, M. Procko, and T. J. Clark-Wolf. 2025. Flawed analysis invalidates claim of a strong Yellowstone trophic cascade after wolf reintroduction: A comment on Ripple et al. (2025). Global Ecology and Conservation 63:e03899.

Morso, I., L. Collins, M. Cox, and M. Schwan. 2025. Northern Arizona Ecological Conservation: Assessing Quaking Aspen Health in Northern Arizona Using Earth Observations. Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ. Develop Technical Report. 25 p.

Rieksta, J., B. J. Graae, K. Helsen, R. E. Kapás, R. Strimbeck, and B. W. Blonder. 2025. Relaxation of the leaf economics spectrum within and across quaking aspen Populus tremuloides genotypes. Oikos:e11279.

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Tanner, D. A., K. Kildew, N. Zenger, B. W. Abbott, N. Hansen, R. A. Gill, and S. B. S. Clair. 2025. Regeneration and Herbivory Across Multiple Forest Types Within a Megafire Burn Scar. Fire 8:323.

Wang, L., S. A. Billings, L. Li, D. R. Hirmas, K. Johnson, D. Kerins, J. Pachon, C. Beutler, K. M. Jarecke, V. Varikuti, M. Unruh, H. Ajami, H. Barnard, A. N. Flores, K. Williams, and P. L. Sullivan. 2025. Soil signals of key mechanisms driving greater protection of organic carbon under aspen compared to spruce forests in a North American montane ecosystem. Biogeosciences 22:6097-6117.

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Website: http://www.western-aspen-alliance.org/

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