

# “This Land Open”

A Poetic Exploration of Wyoming's Environmental History

Katherine Indermaur

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## Pronghorn Antelope

*"It is ranching that has kept this land open. So, ranching and wildlife are not a contradiction." -Anonymous rancher from Daniel, WY, 2004*

Open:	what allows access and freedom    available
Open:	vulnerable to irrevocable destruction    exposed
Open, of the arms:	spread out    embracing
Open, of land:	required by pronghorn antelope for migration    One herd numbers hundreds summers in Grand Teton    migrates south over 170 miles    Over 170 miles of public land    of private land    of land made optimal for development
Open, of land:	without fencing    what land wasn't in Wyoming <i>in 1983 when several hundred migrating pronghorn died as the result of newly erected fence and deep snow conditions</i>
Open, of business:	conservationist NGOs successfully raising funds whenever natural gas development wreaks negative effects    several hundred pronghorn dead
Open, of archaeology:	to inspection    to sun and air    bonebeds for pronghorn long dead    evidence of projectile points    or club-induced cranial depression fractures    or butchery cut marks    or hammerstone impact marks    all body made bone
Open, of land:	what allows white settlers to homestead    to build railroads    to hunt    to make marks
Open, of land:	what allows Wyoming's pronghorn population to drop from over 1 million before 1850 to 2,000 by 1912
Open, of business:	cattle ranchers and shepherds who need property rights physically reinforced by containment    by barbed wire    by electricity    parcels fenced
Open, of land:	what allows pronghorn to speed across sagebrush steppe at 60 MPH
Open, of view:	uninterrupted horizon    Red Desert sunset    endless prairie
Open, of the heart:	receptive    accessible
Open:	what allows
Open:	without end

Gray Wolf

Extermination methods—

DogMouth

PoisonMouth

TrapMouth

Gun

WolfMouth must've had both upper  
&lower jaws—hide with all 4 paws  
for Wyoming to pay out the bounty

County clerks punched one hole  
through the pelt

WolfScruffNeck

to count the killing

All these connected  
animals    connective  
tissues cut    cattle  
&bison    both  
serve the teeth  
of wolves as well  
as any other meat

Ranchers hired

wolfers    ran

wolf drives

combed the country

for signs    combs

have teeth—

sharp line

of canines

the goddamn varmint

survives

Out in the valley

wolves vow

to howl through teeth out

of mouths    catch it

cut out that almost-voice

silence that SnarlMouth

SnowMouth clear polish dried teeth

GlossMouth taxidermied mount

MouthHowl Gun

Lodgepole Pine

I.

Anchor trunk sluice  
spliced a long flume V  
to tie the rails  
cross rock country  
white water down  
the mountain the  
country a line always  
westward all these  
hand-hewn  
pine chunks thick  
splinters stuck  
in fleshy palms  
sunlight a stream down-  
hill toward town  
bow from mountain  
to nexus of civilization  
a city of sunburned necks  
lodgepoles stripped of bark  
became mechanism to ship  
more lodgepoles down  
and flat with sunburn

II.

The rhythm of lodgepoles in a forest  
is how the light gets in  
between needles fine, how snow  
drifts a limb or wells a trunk  
or frosts the bark's edges soft.

The rhythm of lodgepoles under  
train wheels is quick mechanization,  
a dead tap, tap, tapping to echo  
the chop of broadaxes, a labor song  
of sappy logs stacking the back  
of a go-devil like forest backbones  
gone to sleep. This is how they got  
a forest out to the prairie, how we  
skim over dead trees not looking down.

Big Sagebrush

wind whips its    whispers  
                 silence sibilant  
with camphor  
& turpentine  
                 hisses threats  
starvation            this airy heft

the cattle the beasts-  
of-burden's bellies  
growl for grass  
but            pristine sage  
                 acres across  
this prairie            scarce  
a tree or blade  
scarce a single  
                 straight thing

greasewood warps  
                 wended low  
& wired fierce  
only wholeness out  
here is sky            its air  
                 impregnated  
waft of herbs  
emptied            by wind

close up the  
open    country  
parches thin  
naked    spaces  
                 where clay            glares  
its red shine  
                 artemisia paled  
to unblinking crown

what it takes  
                 wicker spine  
sunbleached tongue  
                 to live off  
& get past  
this big            out here  
                 land