

The Laramie County Library in Cheyenne (acronym “LCLS”), is unlike any other in Wyoming, perhaps unlike any other in the country. Its airy, welcoming, and eco-friendly atmosphere invites young and old alike. Its second-floor interactive center features expansive areas that encourage play, reading, and fun-filled learning. This month, LCLS features the Discover Earth Exhibit, a joyful way of learning for visitors of any age.

LCLS is one of only ten libraries nationwide to be awarded the Discover Earth exhibit. Now the library showcases the exhibit on the first and second floors, providing a fun way to learn new information about our dearly loved—though oft-abused—home planet to all who take the time and curiosity to look and linger.

I asked Jennifer Rife, the library’s Design and Humanities Coordinator, which points favored the selection of LCLS for Discover Earth in this very competitive selection process.

“Our application stressed the rural nature of our state and the fact that Cheyenne is its capital, the arena of our state’s legislative decisions,” said Ms. Rife. “A big plus was that NCAR (the National Center For Atmospheric Research) selected our city as the site for its new supercomputer center.”

In fact, on October 23, at 6:30 PM, Tim Sheitlin from NCAR will be on hand for a tour of NCAR’s earth systems science. The software engineer plans to show computerized animations of our oceans, and he’ll explain global chemistry, weather, and climate with the help of computerized images. The event is offered for adults and teens.

The portion of Discover Earth on the second floor is truly impressive. My ten-year-old granddaughter loved playing “You Decide,” which allowed her to be mayor of a large city who is faced with decisions from dealing with an approaching hurricane to the possible building of a hospital in an earthquake-prone fault line. The mayor gets help from three advisors but must make the decision on her own.

In the teen room a quiz game offers a series of numbers to help youngsters guess the tallest trees on earth, the age of our planet, our biggest mountain ranges, and how many lightning strikes hit the earth every day. Elsewhere a display illustrates disasters suffered in Wyoming: the rainstorm of 1985 that killed 12 people and injured 70, the “most watched tornado” of 1979, the flashflood in Medicine Bow of July 17, 2011.

On the first floor, a portion to Discover Earth explains how animals and people adapt to harsh or changing environments, displaying anything from Mukluk sealskin boots to bison thick winter fur. It includes picturesque information about the geology of Wyoming and Cheyenne.

Laurel Shelley-Reuss is LCLS’s Adult Programming Specialist, in charge of sessions from the popular “Classic Conversations” with Cheyenne Symphony’s Maestro Intriligator to writing workshops for National Novel Writing Month to Law Night (volunteers from the Wyoming State Bar give free legal advice). Last year she entered a

unique partnership with Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival that continues this year. The Festival provides particular films for a rental fee. “Last year we showed four of its most outstanding films,” says Ms. Shelley-Reuss. “This year we selected three that complement our Discover Earth programs.”

Jackson Hole draws film submissions from all over the world. With the help of a Festival librarian, the LCLS specialist selects films that are winners or finalists at the Festival. Her criteria include local interest and conservation.

The film shown September 25 concerned the work of a Wyoming native, Joe Hutto, protagonist of “My Life as a Turkey” and naturalist extraordinaire. The highly articulate Hutto spent 18 months in a secluded Florida forest, raising (and, as time went on, merely following) wild turkeys that had imprinted on him as hatchlings. In the film, he narrates the birds’ intelligence and emotional lives, and he demonstrates that wild turkeys have little in common with commercially-raised fowl. The film features outstanding footage of the region’s wildlife as well as the joys and hardships—and, yes, the sorrows—occasioned by his devotion to the flock. He has since returned to Wyoming, where he “lives with” with mule deer.

The showing on October 9 will be “Radioactive Wolves,” a saga of wolves in an area affected by the explosion of the Chernobyl reactor in April 1986. The so-called exclusion zone of Chernobyl, stretching from Ukraine into Belarus and Russia, displaced 340,000 people. Since then, uninhibited by the presence of humans, a profusion of wild species has spread over a territory of roughly 3,000 square kilometers.

LCLS’s Discover Earth has welcomed busloads of Wyoming students from schools far and near. Having visited the exhibit repeatedly myself, I encourage everyone to drop in and make friends with it through the month of October. Further, as devotee of the wildlife film series, I urge our residents to avail themselves of this marvelous opportunity, offered entirely free of charge—with hot drinks and popcorn to boot.