

Taking a Chance Out West

Gabby Zaldumbide, Environmental Ethics '15,
Restoration Ecology '16



Gabby Zaldumbide is not afraid to take chances. In fact, she believes that before making a big decision, excitement can mask itself as fear, and that insight pushes her to make that decision confidently. When she was a first year at the University of Wisconsin Madison, those telltale butterflies were felt when a representative from WRFI gave a presentation in her Wildlife Ecology course. Though she had not visited the western United States, and did not grow up camping or backpacking, she knew this opportunity could change her life. Fast forward nearly a decade later, and that intuition proved to be true.

Gabby would go on to take not one, but two WRFI courses while in undergrad - Environmental Ethics in 2015 and Restoration Ecology in 2016. She fell in love with the Rocky Mountain West while exploring it on foot during each course, so much so that she moved to Gunnison, Colorado to earn her Masters of Environmental Management at Western Colorado University. She settled there and has no plans to leave. If taking these chances wasn't enough, she has made an unconventional living since graduation by being a freelance writer, a firearms instructor, a magazine editor, a cowboy, and more.

Recently, Gabby has put her passion for telling good stories and acquired knowledge of the landscapes she loves to launch the online magazine The Westrn with other femme + queer writers in the outdoor space. On taking this leap, she says: "We started The Westrn because we're fed up with what outdoor media has become and the type of stories people are being paid to write. It doesn't have any heart in it". She hopes to move beyond gear reviews and snappy articles that cater to a website's SEO value to share personal narratives, journalistic deep dives on ecological issues, poetry, and more.

"[My time on WRFI courses] allowed me to trust in myself and other people while feeling more confident in the world", she reflects now. We're honored that the confidence built on our courses has played a role in the impactful work she's doing in The Westrn and beyond!

To subscribe to The Westrn, visit www.thewestrn.com and make sure to read Gabby's introductory post at <https://www.thewestrn.com/p/hello-youve-reached-gabby-zaldumbide>.



After completing a Wildlife Ecology degree during her time in undergrad at the University of Wisconsin Madison, Gabby went on to earn a Masters of Environmental Management at Western Colorado University, deep in the Rocky Mountains. She has lived there since and credits WRFI for her falling in love with the region. Today, she works as a writer, firearms instructor, magazine editor, and a cowboy. She recently launched online magazine The Westrn with four other femme + queer collaborators.