This poem is about a hike with my best friend of 33 years, in Millcreek Canyon up to the top of Gobbler's Knob. From there, on a clear day, you can see Pilot Peak in Nevada.

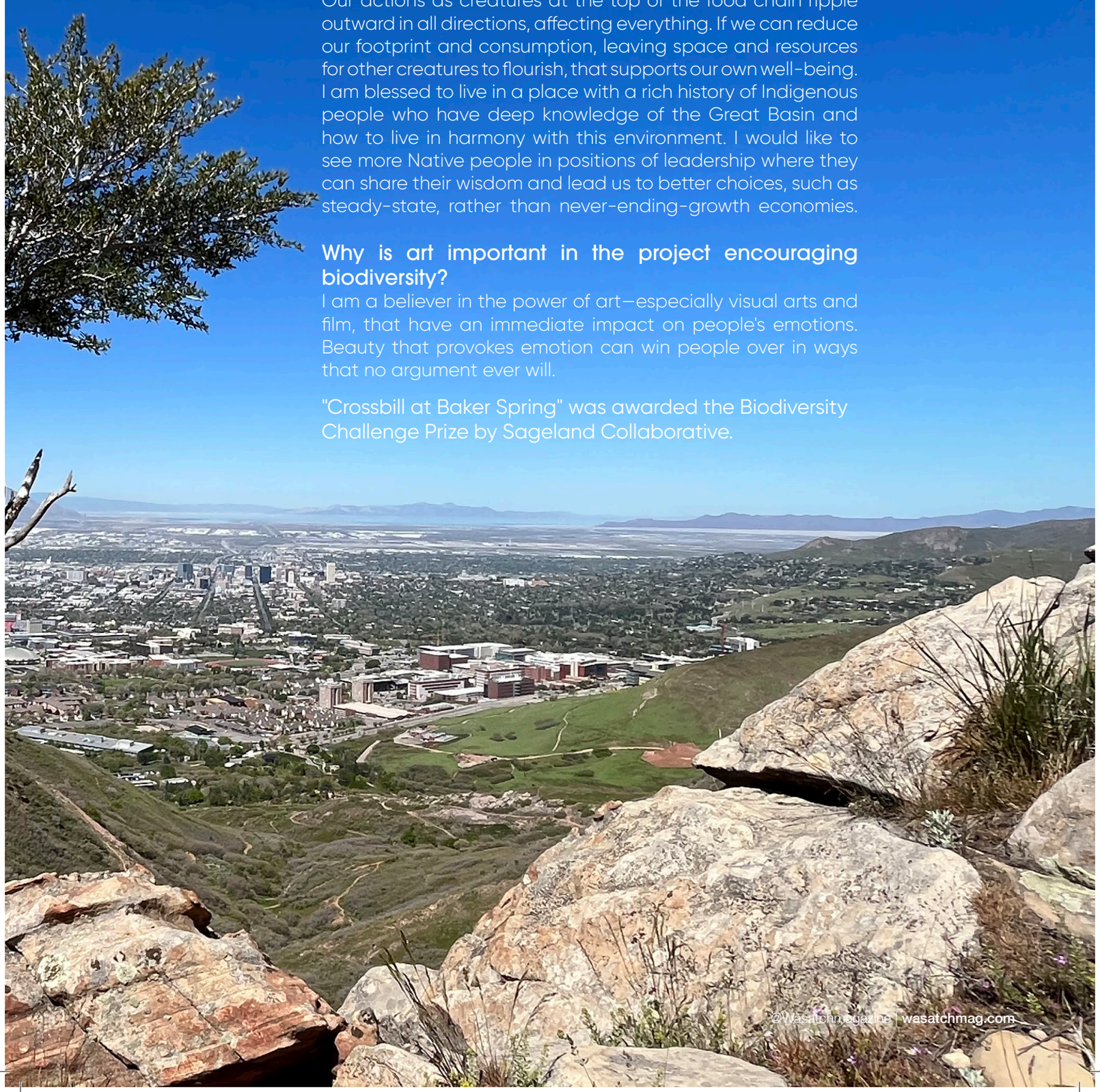
What does biodiversity mean to you?

Human beings are part of the miraculous web of living things, all connected in ways we are barely beginning to understand. Our actions as creatures at the top of the food chain ripple outward in all directions, affecting everything. If we can reduce our footprint and consumption, leaving space and resources for other creatures to flourish, that supports our own well-being. I am blessed to live in a place with a rich history of Indigenous people who have deep knowledge of the Great Basin and how to live in harmony with this environment. I would like to see more Native people in positions of leadership where they can share their wisdom and lead us to better choices, such as steady-state, rather than never-ending-growth economies.

Why is art important in the project encouraging biodiversity?

I am a believer in the power of art—especially visual arts and film, that have an immediate impact on people's emotions. Beauty that provokes emotion can win people over in ways that no argument ever will.

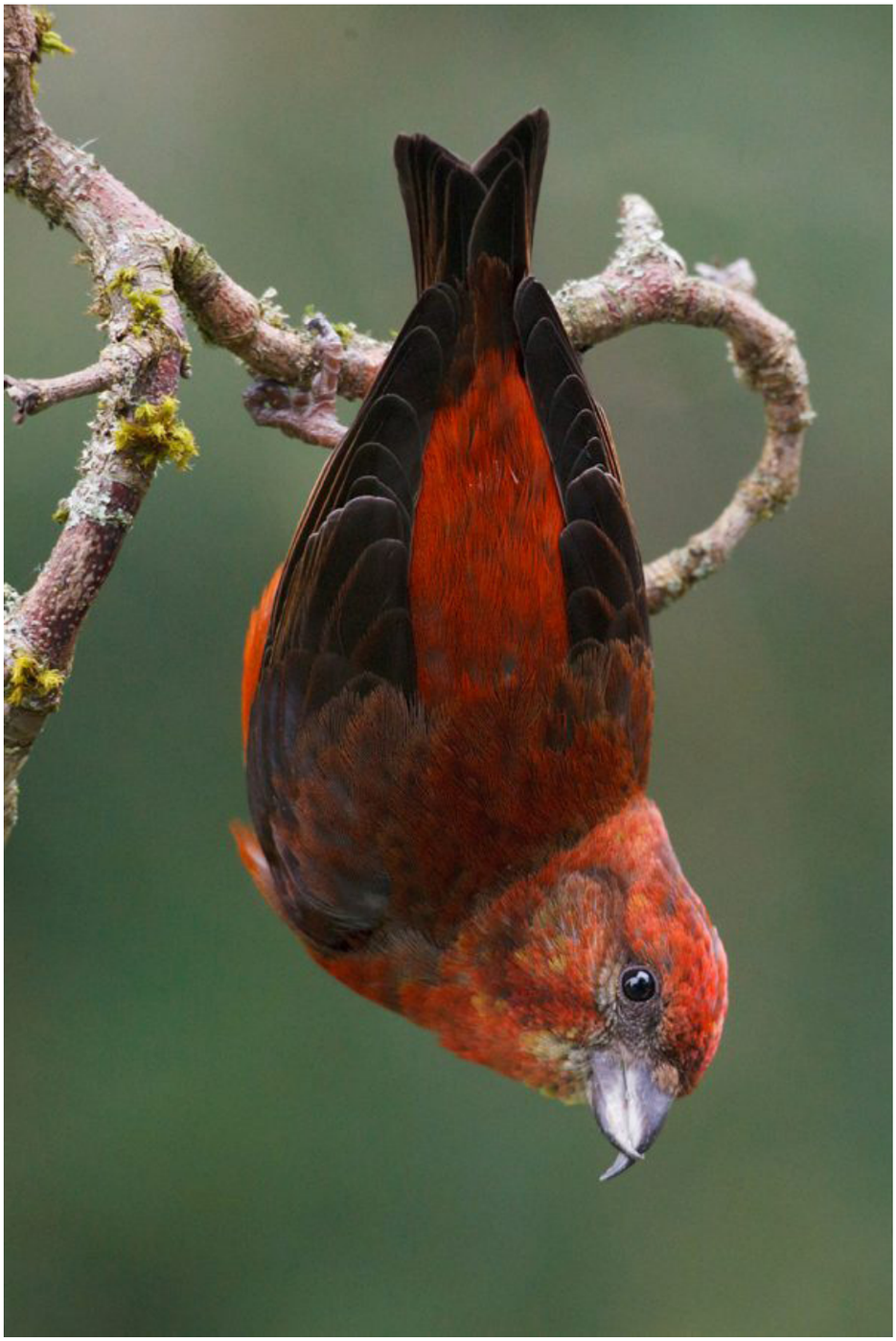
"Crossbill at Baker Spring" was awarded the Biodiversity Challenge Prize by Sageland Collaborative.



Crossbill at Baker Spring

In quiet calm, the peace
of bones tired from steep-hilled
heat, no need to speak
with you, who could sit still and see
silver-green light inside a grove
of Engelmann spruce, a sparkle
trickling out an inch of metal pipe
at height of summer, deep-earth
gift
cold and clear, where a rare bird
came to drink, feathers mottled red,
fat black bill with long tips crossed
like a lobster's pincer
like nothing before, or since
(gone now, my dear friend)

& for once then I wasn't focused
inward
on the past, or thinking far ahead;
there was a silence like the seconds
following exquisite music,
as though the world held its breath
to begin again as we walked
across the face and up a shoulder
to the peak; on the way back,
in near-dark, we passed the
boulder shape
of a moose with velvet rack, laid
down
in purple lupine, pink painted cups
and white geranium, each
coneflower
topped by sleeping bumblebee;
he didn't stir as we left his mountain.



Mountain Mahogany

Solitary specimen
ascends from quartz heart
pink and streaked with gold
like a summer sky at dusk
distilled in sunbaked stone,
some invisible crevice
splitseam through the center

it seems to need nothing
clutching rocky slope
for ten unslaked centuries
woody evergreen
exposed on wind-gnawed crag
of ridge in view high above
miles of range and valleys

varietal relative of rose
resinous fragrant leaves
breathe of crumbled earth damp
old leather and honey
cercocarpus seeds
curlicued as kite tails
disperse in longer arc

germinate rarely
blown to feathered bonebeds—
its asymmetrical trunk
like a dancer over arched—
a limber windformed shape
in sculpted healing bark,
a whip that cracks and pitches back.

"Mountain Mahogany" was part of an art exhibit entitled Tree Stories at the Utah Cultural Celebration Center.