



# Cooperative Institute for Research in the Atmosphere affected by NOAA layoffs

Katie Fisher, Science Editor  
March 26, 2025

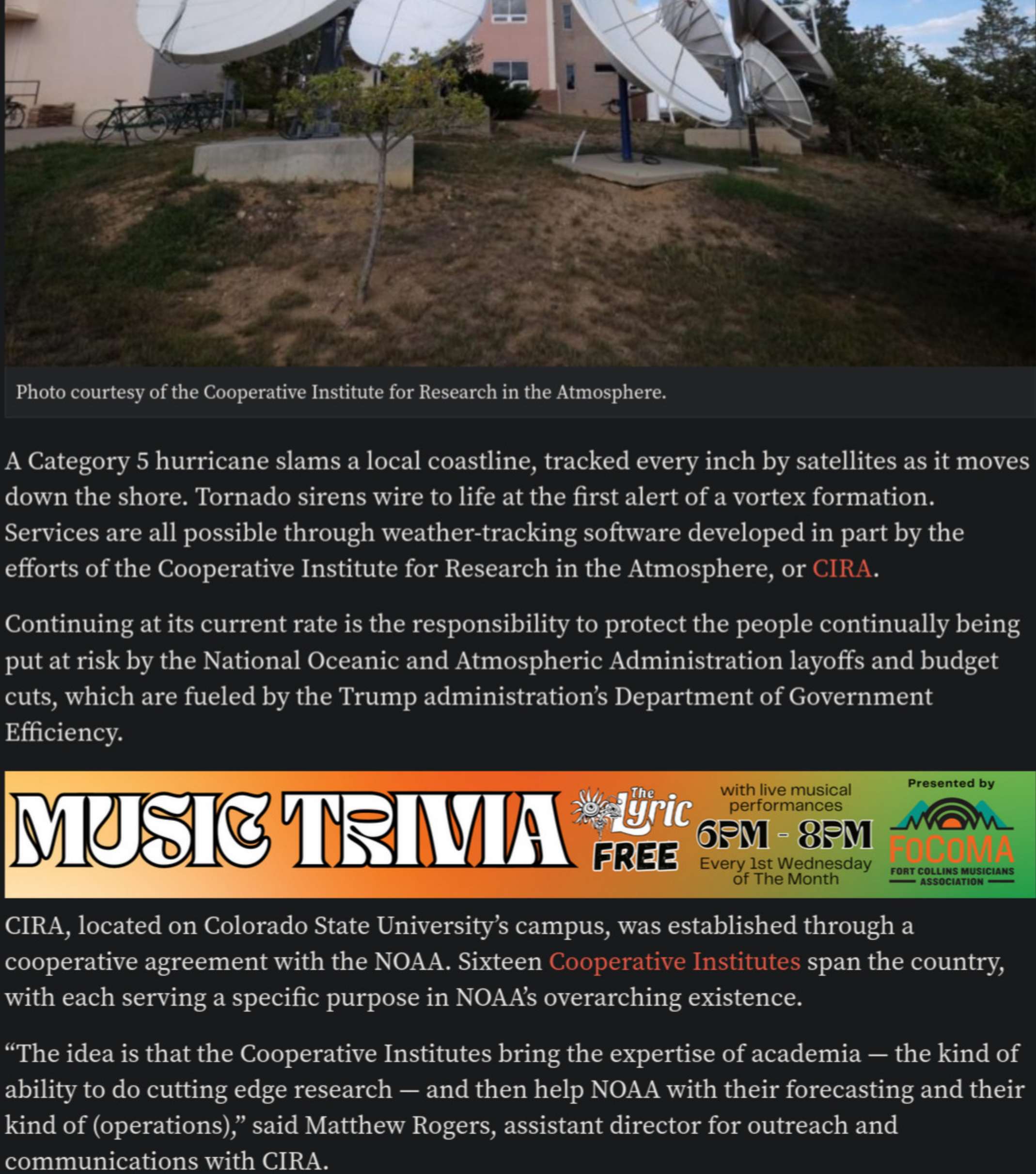


Photo courtesy of the Cooperative Institute for Research in the Atmosphere.

A Category 5 hurricane slams a local coastline, tracked every inch by satellites as it moves down the shore. Tornado sirens wire to life at the first alert of a vortex formation. Services are all possible through weather-tracking software developed in part by the efforts of the Cooperative Institute for Research in the Atmosphere, or **CIRA**.

Continuing at its current rate is the responsibility to protect the people continually being put at risk by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration layoffs and budget cuts, which are fueled by the Trump administration's Department of Government Efficiency.

CIARA, located on Colorado State University's campus, was established through a cooperative agreement with the NOAA. Sixteen **Cooperative Institutes** span the country, with each serving a specific purpose in NOAA's overarching existence.

"The idea is that the Cooperative Institutes bring the expertise of academia — the kind of ability to do cutting edge research — and then help NOAA with their forecasting and their kind of (operations)," said Matthew Rogers, assistant director for outreach and communications with CIRA.

All CIRA employees are directly employed through CSU and collaborate with the NOAA on various projects to design and implement research initiatives. The center exists to foster "multidisciplinary cooperation" between the NOAA and CSU research faculty and staff, as stated in the center's **mission statement**.

"Our mission is: to foster additional collaboration with national and international agencies who are developing related capabilities; to affect the fundamental research conducted at the university towards NOAA's operational needs; and to communicate our research and its practical implications to the scientific community and the public," CIRA's mission statement reads.

Research projects and technology developed through this missionary lens have real-world impacts, as CIRA Director and Professor of Atmospheric Science Steve Miller explained.

"We are the 'high risk, high reward' research arm of NOAA, making sure our nation's forecasters remain on the cutting edge of technology and techniques for observing and forecasting weather hazards that impact our commerce, air, land (and) sea transportation, agriculture, coasts (and) fisheries and ecosystems," Miller said.

The institution has operated a Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite Earth Station since 1980. This technology is utilized in major news weather broadcasts across the United States.

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Other research areas include computer science, artificial intelligence and machine learning, data processing and distribution, Miller explained. The institute's technology also helps other organizations that serve the general public, including the National Weather Service's Aviation Weather Center, which assists the Federal Aviation Administration in guaranteeing safe commercial aviation, as well as NASA, the National Park Service and the Department of Defense. All public-facing services come at a low cost to taxpayers.

"CIRA helps NOAA fulfill its mission for societal benefit by connecting forecasters from the NWS, (National Hurricane Center and) AWC with tools critical to their jobs," Miller said. "It is a 6 cent, per American, per day investment, with a huge return on investment."

Yet the NOAA has found itself at the center of DOGE's scrutiny, headed by Elon Musk. Created by an **executive order** issued Jan. 20, DOGE was created to "implement the president's DOGE agenda by modernizing federal technology and software to maximize governmental efficiency and productivity."

One thousand and twenty-nine of the 12,000 total NOAA staff members were **laid off** Tuesday, March 11. More than 880 probationary employees were also fired in **late February**. In total, the terminations are heading to eliminate nearly **20 percent** of NOAA's total workforce.

Federal Judge James Bradar of the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland has ordered federal agencies to temporarily **reinstate fired probationary workers**, but the Trump Administration is **actively appealing to the Supreme Court** to halt the rehiring orders.

"There may indeed be places in government where efficiency needs improvement, but NOAA and especially its unique partnership with the top research universities in the nation is not one of them," Miller said.

While the lasting outcomes of DOGE's termination directives are yet to be cemented, the uncertainty of NOAA's funding and the potential of further descaling of the organization is already being felt by its partners.

"If the NOAA budgets are cut, as indicators suggest, external partners such as CIRA and the 15 other NOAA Cooperative Institutes risk going down immediately," Miller said. "We are almost completely reliant on NOAA funding."

With the layoffs and budget constraints only occurring in recent weeks, CIRA has continued to work with funding that the institute was previously authorized to spend, Miller said. However, the institute's hiring practices have already been affected.

"We are already putting pauses in hiring as we wait to see what the NOAA budgets will be," Miller said. "The moment those cuts happen, we are affected almost immediately ... and potentially in an existential way."

CIRA's research theme of artificial intelligence and machine learning is illustrated by its **role** within the National Science Foundation's Artificial Intelligence Institute for Research on Trustworthy AI in Weather, Climate and Coastal Oceanography, coined AI2ES. **Housed** within the University of Oklahoma, CSU is one of its founding members. CIRA's efforts in AI2ES have had direct impacts on NOAA's research into AI, as Research Professor Imme Ebert-Uphoff explained.

"CIRA's AI group is helping NOAA advance the use of AI for NOAA applications," Ebert-Uphoff said. "It is easier for us at CSU to recruit AI experts than for NOAA, so we are adding significantly to NOAA's AI expertise."

These AI experts who were previously hired were impacted by the DOGE-headed layoffs, including two of CIRA's colleagues at NOAA's Global Systems Laboratory, who were terminated Feb. 27.

"NOAA has worked hard to recruit AI talent through its NOAA AI Strategic Plan 2021-25," Ebert-Uphoff said. "Many of these AI experts were hired in the past year, and unfortunately, those were among the first people to be terminated. Thus, NOAA is losing much of its AI workforce and talent."

This reality came as a shock to many of their colleagues.

"Furthermore, the impact of the remaining workforce to see these colleagues terminated has been quite a shock," Ebert-Uphoff said. "The perceived lack of stability by the sudden termination, compounded by uncertainty of future funding, is demoralizing the workforce and leading some to look for jobs in the private sector. We still hope that these AI experts will be reinstated and that budgets will not be dramatically cut because that would make it impossible to keep the public safe."

Similar effects of budget cuts have also been felt in AI research, a cut that has placed the United States further back in the global ranks of weather-mapping technology.

"Hard-working, well-qualified people are being released. We are losing the coming generation of scientists who would have protected our lives and property." —Steve Miller, CIRA director

"Several of our grants that were in process to be awarded have been cut," Ebert-Uphoff said. "This resulted in a stop-work order for one of our projects, namely the development of AI-based weather prediction models. AIWP models is an area where Europe's agency, the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts, is far ahead of us, and the stop in funding will make this gap even larger."

U.S. Sens. John Hickenlooper and ((Michael Bennet)) and Rep. Joe Neguse of Colorado issued a **joint letter** to the deputy inspector general of the Department of Commerce Feb. 27, calling for an independent investigation into the dismantling of the NOAA, noting their deep concern over mass termination reports at NOAA facilities in Colorado.

"The work our scientists and civil servants do at NOAA is essential to U.S. national security, as well as the personal safety and daily lives of Americans," the letter reads. "Dismantling NOAA or compromising its capabilities would put Americans across the country at great risk."

Miller addressed the concerns outlined in the letter.

"We appreciate the efforts of our Colorado representatives and share their concerns about the damage that current actions to dismantle NOAA are doing to both the short and long-term infrastructure of our nation's weather enterprise," Miller said. "The connections and benefits across the agencies have been well articulated, as are the direct impacts to safety and property."

"The foresight of NOAA to link with the centers of academic excellence across the nation, in the form of its competitively selected Cooperative Institutes, is a prime example of government efficiency and a model that other agencies ... admire and seek to emulate. NOAA impacts in a very positive way the competitiveness and prosperity of our country, which makes the current attacks on it all the more ironic when coming from an administration that claims to have the country's best interests at heart."

As the future of CIRA and the NOAA stand at a limbo, the potential risk of current employees, faculty and researchers hangs in the balance, along with the future of atmospheric research and public safety.

"Hard-working, well-qualified people are being released," Miller said, "We are losing the coming generation of scientists who would have protected our lives and property."

Reach Katie Fisher at [science@collegian.com](mailto:science@collegian.com) or on X at [@CSUCollegian](https://twitter.com/CSUCollegian).

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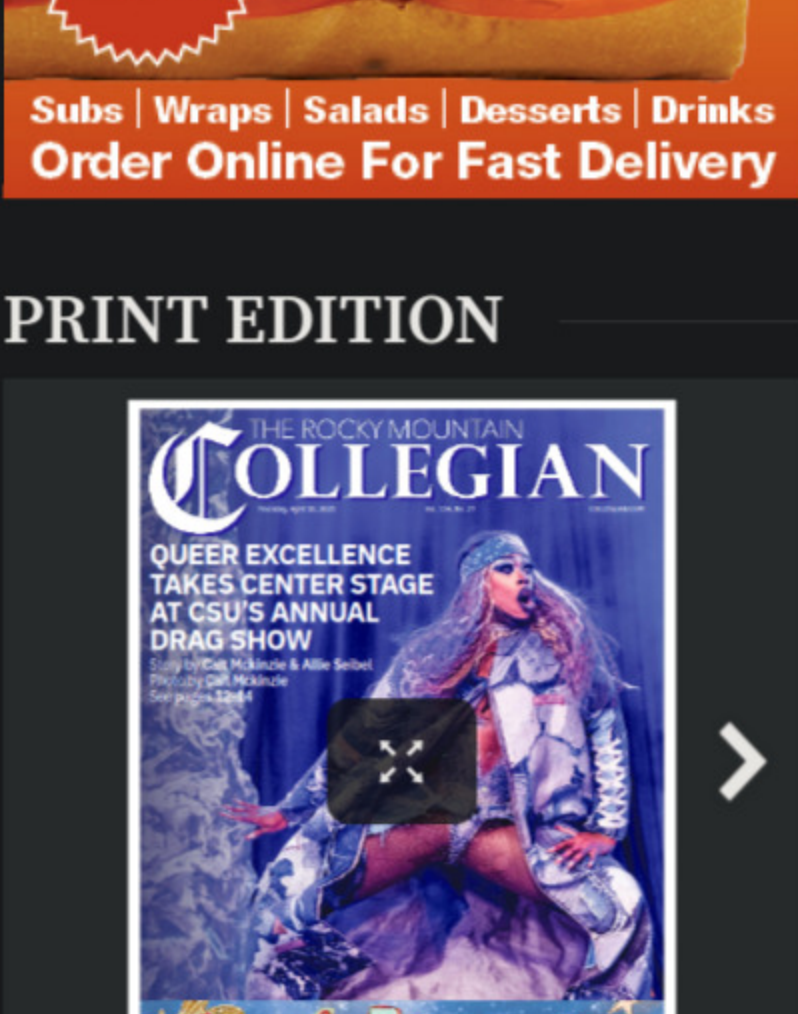


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## About the Contributor



**Katie Fisher, Science Editor**  
Katie Fisher is ecstatic to be taking up the position of science editor for *The Collegian*, a role she couldn't be more excited to step into. Having started as a reporter for the arts and entertainment, news and life and culture desks in spring 2024 after transferring to Colorado State University, Fisher quickly found a surprising love for on-campus research and science communications, which drew her to the desk. Currently in her sophomore year, Fisher is pursuing a Bachelor of Arts, double majoring in journalism and political science with a concentration in global politics and policies. Interested in a variety of political affairs and the impact that effective communication can make, she is hoping to pursue a career in print journalism, strategic communication or science communication. Fisher is originally from Aurora, Colorado, and enjoys writing, reading, photography, cooking and hiking. She can often be found with her nose in a local history book, at her favorite coffee shop haunts and rushing around campus. As a transfer student, Fisher was immediately drawn into the rich community of *The Collegian*, which has led to some of her strongest connections and relations on campus. From researching asbestos abatement and pulling together permits to speaking with industry experts and analyzing research publications, she has enjoyed every second working for this amazing outlet. Fisher is excited for another great semester at *The Collegian* and the learning opportunities born from the fantastic journalism it produces.



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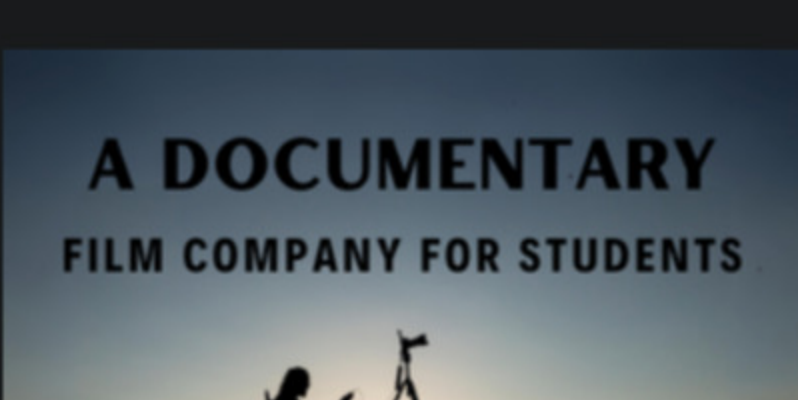


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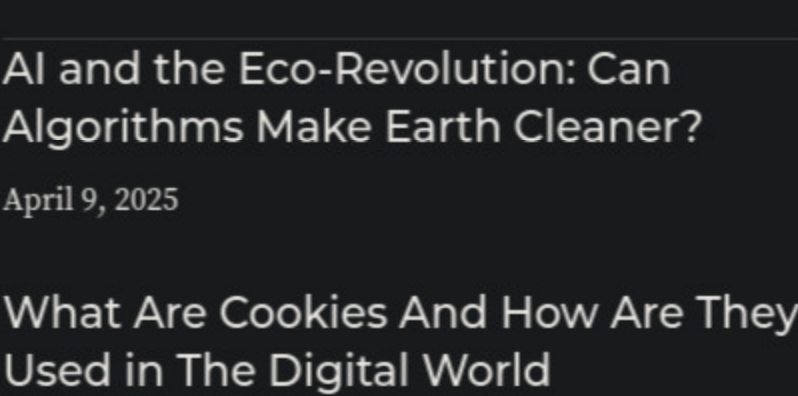
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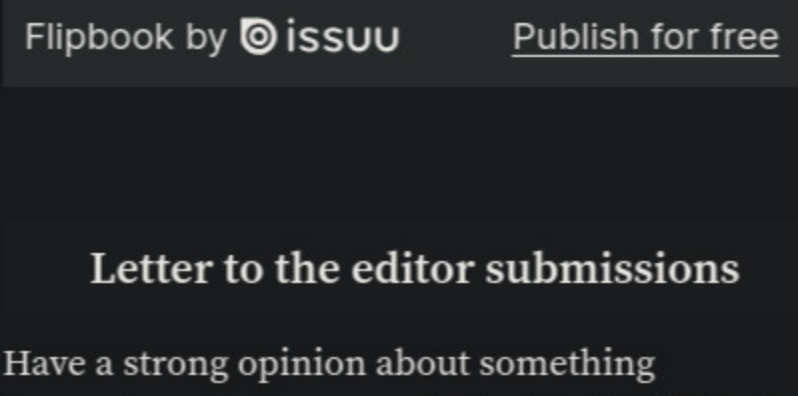
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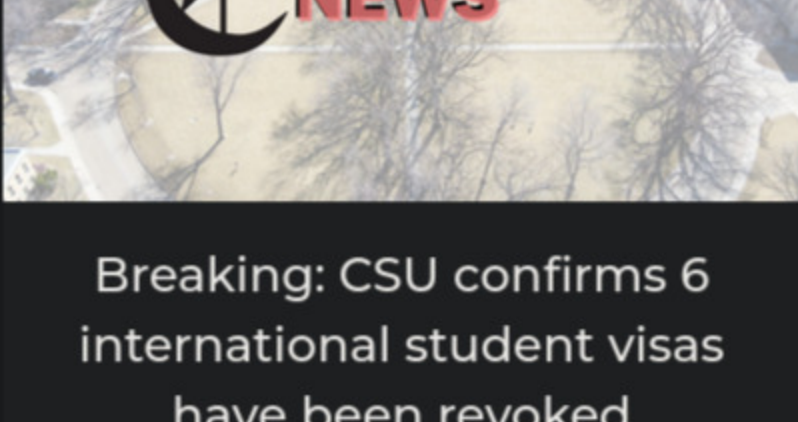
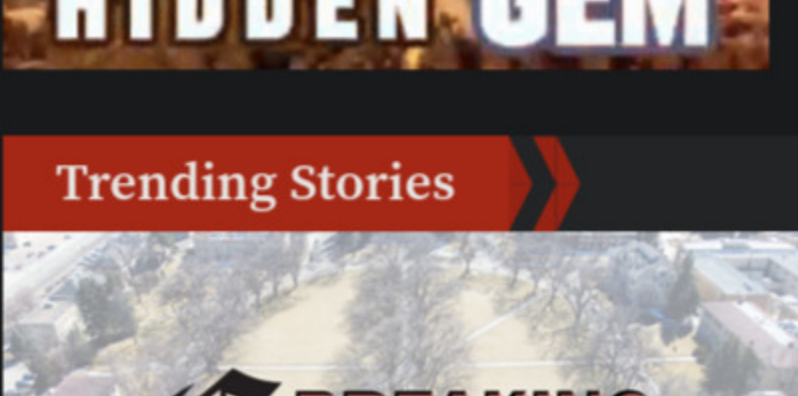
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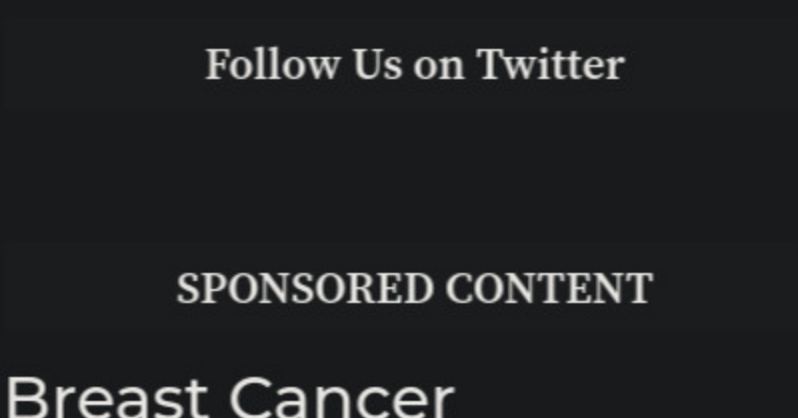
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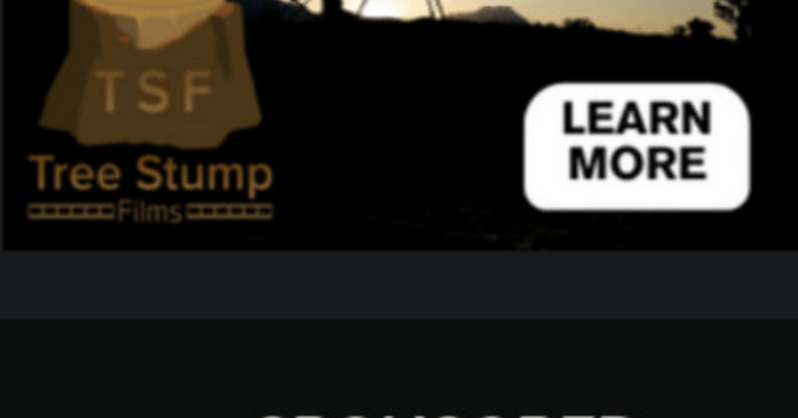
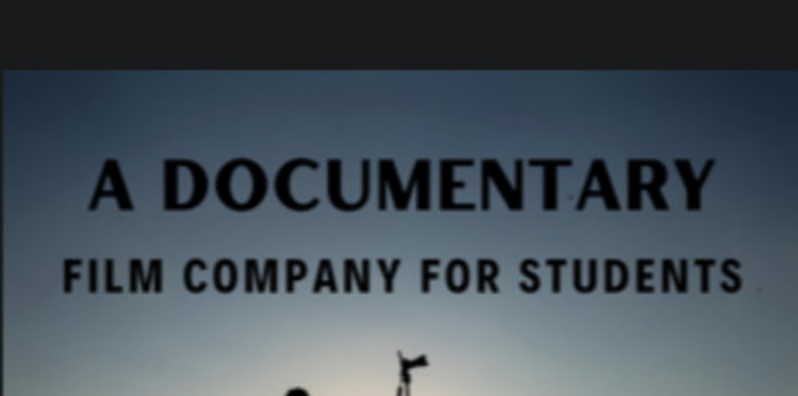
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