



Western Heritage Awards Seek 2026 Entries Honoring Excellence in Film, TV, Books, Music and Magazines

The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum invites creators across film, TV, literature, music and journalism to submit works that capture the American West.

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK, UNITED STATES, November 7, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum is now accepting submissions for the 2026 Western Heritage Awards, honoring the year's most outstanding storytelling about the American West in film, television, literature and music.

For more than six decades, the Western Heritage Awards have recognized landmark works and creators across every medium. Film and television winners have included "Lonesome Dove," "Dances With Wolves," "Unforgiven," "Geronimo: An American Legend," "Hatfields & McCoys," "Longmire" and, most recently, "Yellowstone: 'Desire Is All You Need.'"

In literature, the awards have honored Western novels such as Cormac McCarthy's "All the Pretty Horses" and Barbara Kingsolver's "Pigs in Heaven," as well as influential nonfiction and magazine work including Dan Flores' "Bringing Home All the Pretty Horses," published in "Montana: The Magazine of Western History."

Music honorees include Red Steagall for "Born to This Land," Riders in the Sky for "Always Drink Upstream From the Herd," "The Line Rider" and "The Shelter of the Wildwood," and Michael Martin Murphey for "Corn, Water and Wood," along with many other traditional Western and cowboy recordings.

Every winner receives the museum's bronze Wrangler sculpture, one of the most respected symbols of achievement in Western storytelling. Designed by renowned Western artist Harold T. Holden, the Bronze Wrangler depicts a cowboy on horseback holding his hat high in triumph.

Since its introduction in 1961, it has become a coveted emblem of excellence in portraying the West's people, landscapes and values. Each Wrangler is individually cast and inscribed with the recipient's name, signifying both creative achievement and enduring contribution to Western heritage.

The awards ceremony is held each April at the museum in Oklahoma City, welcoming artists,

producers, authors and musicians from across the nation.

Submission deadlines

****Literary categories:**** Works must be originally copyrighted between Dec. 1, 2024, and Nov. 30, 2025, and submitted by Nov. 30, 2025.

****Music categories:**** Albums and compositions must carry an original copyright date between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2025, and be submitted by Dec. 31, 2025.

****Film and television categories:**** Western productions must be originally released or aired between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2025, and be submitted by Dec. 31, 2025.

There is no limit on the number of different works an individual or organization may enter, but the same title may not be submitted in multiple categories. Each entry requires a \$75 submission fee. Entries are accepted digitally via the museum's online submission portal at entries.nationalcowboymuseum.org.

Award categories

Film and television

Theatrical motion picture

Television feature film

Fictional drama

Docudrama

Documentary

Western lifestyle production

Literary

Western novel

Nonfiction book

Photography or art book

Juvenile book

Magazine or journal article

Poetry book

Music

Original Western composition

Traditional Western music album

Eligible works must relate to the American West or the Western experience. Literary entries are evaluated on scholarship, organization, interpretation, presentation and quality of writing, with fiction, juvenile and poetry entries also judged on originality, creativity and faithfulness to Western history, legend and mythology.

"The Western Heritage Awards celebrate the storytellers who connect audiences to the heart of the American West," said Pat Fitzgerald, president and CEO of the National Cowboy & Western

Heritage Museum. "From novels and magazine features to films, series and traditional cowboy music, these works shape how people around the world understand our past, our landscapes and the people who call the West home."

By honoring everything from major films and prestige television to deeply researched books, magazine articles and original Western music, the Western Heritage Awards help preserve the voices and visions that define Western culture and introduce new generations to the stories of both the historic frontier and the contemporary West.

Call to creators

Studios, networks and streamers producing Western-themed films, series, documentaries and lifestyle programming.

Publishers, editors and writers whose books, photography and art volumes, juvenile titles, poetry collections, and magazine or journal articles explore Western subjects.

Musicians, songwriters and record labels working in traditional Western and cowboy music and Western-themed composition.

Full guidelines and category descriptions are available at nationalcowboymuseum.org/western-heritage-awards/call-for-entries-2026.

About the Western Heritage Awards

Presented annually at a black-tie ceremony at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, the Western Heritage Awards honor the finest creative works interpreting the American West. Each Bronze Wrangler marks a significant creative achievement and a lasting connection to the land, people and stories of the West.

About the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum

The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City is America's premier institution of Western history, art and culture. Founded in 1955, the museum preserves and interprets the evolving history and cultures of the American West and shares that story with millions worldwide. Its internationally renowned collection of Western art and artifacts is complemented by dynamic educational programs that celebrate the enduring legacy of the West. A recent RegionTrack economic impact study projects the museum will contribute \$313 million to Oklahoma's economy through 2028, including \$170 million in direct impact and \$143 million in ripple effects, affirming its role as both a cultural cornerstone and a vital economic engine. For more information, visit nationalcowboymuseum.org.

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