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Trip report from the GWS President

The 2019 Canadian Parks Conference

David Reynolds

Canada's protected area practitioners have long been in the forefront of innovation in the field of park and protected area management. George Wright Society publications and conferences have been enriched by contributions of our Canadian members over the decades. At least one Canadian has been on the GWS Board since 1994 and one served as President. Our biennial conferences have had small but significant Canadian participation and First Nations representatives have helped plan the program through the GWS Indigenous Involvement Working Group.

So, when I was invited to represent the GWS as a participant in the 2019 Canadian Parks Conference, October 7–11 in Quebec City, I jumped at the chance. I looked forward to seeing old friends, making new ones, and informing participants about new developments in the Society. All my expectations were exceeded.

The Conference featured concurrent sessions focused on best practices, creative initiatives and the latest research related to strengthening relationships with Canada's parks and protected area community. I was able to exchange information with a wide range of participants affiliated with municipal, provincial, territorial, and national parks, trails, corridors, urban greenspaces, Indigenous protected and conserved areas, private protected areas and conservancies, and biosphere reserves. The conference included presentations, posters, and booths at all levels of government and private partners in the tourism, education, health and industry sectors. Keynote speakers were inspirational and informative. Florence Williams, journalist and author, spoke about how being outside makes people happier, healthier, and more creative. Sheila Watt-Cloutier, an Inuit author, lecturer, and Nobel Prize nominee, talked about the impact of global climate change on human rights. Alan Latourelle, former Parks Canada Chief Executive Officer, provided interesting insights on the achievements of Parks Canada and the challenges it faces.

I was also asked to participate in a one-day pre-conference meeting on a proposed Pan-Canadian Parks Research Network. There is interest in establishing a broader research network to address current issues and opportunities in parks and protected

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areas across Canada. A group of about 40 practitioners, academics, Indigenous organizations, and community partners met, shared ideas, and agreed on ways to move forward on the idea. Since the purpose of this Canadian network overlaps with the GWS mission, I informed the group that the Society would be happy to collaborate with the new organization once it is established through a formal or non-formal agreement. The planning for this is ongoing, so stay tuned.

Attending the Conference was a great way to network with Canadian park practitioners and to promote the George Wright Society. There was considerable interest expressed in contributing to the Society's new *Parks Stewardship Forum*. There was also interest in some of our other programs such GWS Student Chapters, Park Break and planned workshops. I look forward to working on continuing and expanding our close, and mutually beneficial, relationship with our Canadian colleagues.

John Kauffmann, veteran NPS planner, also recognized

Land acquisition honors Ben Thompson, colleague of George Melendez Wright

Howie Thompson, Philip Selleck, and JT Horn

If you've seen the pristine waters and lush terrain at Maine's Bald Mountain Pond, you would understand why National Park Trust (NPT) worked with The Trust for Public Land (TPL), National Park Foundation (NPF), Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), The Conservation Alliance, and Elliotsville Foundation on the acquisition of an adjacent 1,495-acre parcel of old-growth woodland to benefit the National Park Service's Appalachian National Scenic Trail (AT).

The remoteness and scenic views make the property an iconic destination for backcountry adventures that combine paddling and hiking on the AT into a single day's outing. Preserving this land from development also protects the nearby Bald Mountain Pond, which is one of the few bodies of water in the lower 48 states that holds landlocked Arctic char. The Canada Lynx, listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act, also roams nearby, along with moose, fisher, and black bears. A pond and stream on the property that have never been stocked are home to a population of native eastern brook trout. The newly acquired parcel is one of the largest blocks of 150-year-old forest in central Maine.

On September 20, 2019, National Park Trust and its partners held a dedication ceremony in Monson, ME, to unveil a new display that is now in the AT visitor center there to honor the contributions of two career National Park Service employees, John Kauffmann and Ben Thompson, to the agency's science program. Thompson is particularly significant to the George Wright Society because he was a close friend and working partner to Wright himself.

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Thompson family members view the display

John Kauffman had a career in the diplomatic service and as a reporter before becoming a National Park Service planner assisting in the establishment of Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park and Cape Cod National Seashore. In 1972 he was assigned to Alaska and helped study which areas of that state would become national parks, monuments, and preserves. His efforts helped preserve more than 100 million acres.

In addition, he found time to write two books, *Flow East: A Look at Our North Atlantic Rivers* and *Alaska's Brooks Range: The Ultimate Mountains*. Kauffmann served on a number of conservation-related boards, including those of Friends of Acadia, the Wilderness Society, and the National Parks and Conservation Association.

Benjamin Hunter Thompson grew up on his grandfather's ranch in Arizona and entered Stanford University in the fall of 1924. To help pay for college, he waited tables in the summers at the recently completed Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite National Park. Ben developed a love of the national parks during his summers at Yosemite. The grandeur of the park and the deep friendship he developed with Wright, then the park assistant naturalist, were the origins of that lifelong pursuit.

Ben graduated from Stanford in 1928 with a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy and received a Master's degree in Vertebrate Zoology at the University of California at Berkeley in 1932. While at Berkeley, he began working part time for the National Park Service in the newly established Wildlife Survey Office on campus that was bankrolled, organized, and supervised by Wright. After graduating from Berkeley, he joined the Wildlife Survey Office and supplemented those efforts as a park ranger-naturalist at Yellowstone National Park.

George Wright, Ben Thompson, and a third member of the Wildlife Survey Office, Joseph Dixon, were the first biologists to work for the Park Service. They researched and wrote the first two installments of NPS's well-known Fauna series, which was continued by them and other scientists. The Fauna publications focused on wildlife status in the parks, their ecological role within and adjacent to the park units, and any urgent animal problems, along with proposed solutions. The approach taken by these studies placed the authors, including Ben, at the cutting edge of ecological park research. They advocated revolutionary policies and practices, such as maintaining predators in the parks, supporting the positive role of fire in park ecosystems, and including all critical wildlife habitats within park boundaries.

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The display now hangs in the AT Visitor Center in Monson, ME

In 1934, Ben was transferred to the NPS Washington Office to continue the same work and to head up the Land Planning Division. In 1936, George Wright's life was tragically cut short by an automobile accident. This was a major loss to Wright's family, to Ben personally, and to the Park Service's biological branch. The NPS science program would not fully recover for a couple of decades.

From 1951 to 1961, Ben was chief of the Division of Recreation Resource Planning, where he was responsible for NPS's programs of national park system planning, recreation surveys, and cooperating with the states. His planning and legislative oversight greatly assisted in the addition of over 60 units to the national park system. Other significant accomplishments during this period were the expansion of the funding, size, and role of the biology branch; enhanced coordination and communication between the various federal agencies and state parks and NPS; and the formulation, promotion, and oversight of the Mission 66 program. At that time the national park system was in a precarious condition brought about by the lag in appropriations during and following World War II. Park facilities and infrastructure were in a state of disrepair and obsolescence. The Mission 66 program was well received by President Eisenhower, Congress, and the public, which resulted in significant annual increases in appropriations for NPS during its duration (1956–1966).

In December 1963, Ben was named Assistant Director of Resource Studies. In December 1964, Ben Thompson retired from the National Park Service after 35 years of public service. He passed away peacefully in March 1997 at the age of 92.

This land protection of the Bald Mountain Pond and adjacent land was made possible thanks to an extraordinary bequest from John Kauffmann to NPT and the National Park Foundation and wind mitigation funds received by TPL, a generous gift from The Conservation Alliance, and grassroots work by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. TPL bought the land in December 2017 and in June 2019 officially transferred ownership to the National Park Service.

Like his father Ben, Howie Thompson had a long career with NPS. Phillip Selleck is with National Park Trust. JT Horn is with Trust for Public Land.

GWS Tallgrass Chapter at Kansas State University cleans up, gets recognized

The Tallgrass Chapter of GWS, based at Kansas State University, has been very busy this fall. Faculty Advisor Ryan Sharp shared their news with us, headlined by a \$500 parks and recreation marketing grant received by the club from the Sunflower State Games Association, along with a service activity at Milford Lake State Park. Congrats to all the Tallgrass members, and

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thanks for carrying the GWS banner in the good work you are doing!



Policing the grounds at Milford Lake State Park

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The Tallgrass Chapter clean-up team

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Promoting the club back on the KSU campus

Announcements & opportunities

Harris, Thomas win seats on Board of Directors. Rick Harris and Terri Thomas were elected to the Board in the 2020 round of voting. The two new directors are both retired National Park Service employees. Harris' goals on the Board are to broaden the diversity of the membership, evaluate and update current programs, and continue efforts to support the professionalism of GWS. In her service on the Board, Thomas wants to promote dialogue within the professions and other groups who make up the GWS community, prioritize climate change as a GWS focus, and reach out to new audiences. Harris and Thomas will serve three-year terms beginning January 1, 2020.

We already know you love parks. IUCN would like you to share your reasons. As a GWS member, it goes without saying that you love parks. Now, in celebration of the 60th anniversary of its World Commission on Protected Areas, IUCN is asking park supporters around the world to share why they love these places so much. The [I LOVE PARKS survey](#) is open to anyone. Share your top 3 reasons, and your favorites parks too. IUCN will highlight the survey at next year's World Conservation Congress (WCC) in Marseille, France.

GWS-backed motions accepted for debate at WCC. Speaking of the World Conservation Congress, two motions co-sponsored by GWS have been accepted by the organizers for debate in Marseille. One is on connectivity conservation, and the other is on halting biodiversity loss on Caribbean islands. We keep you posted on how they fare at the 2020 WCC next June.

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