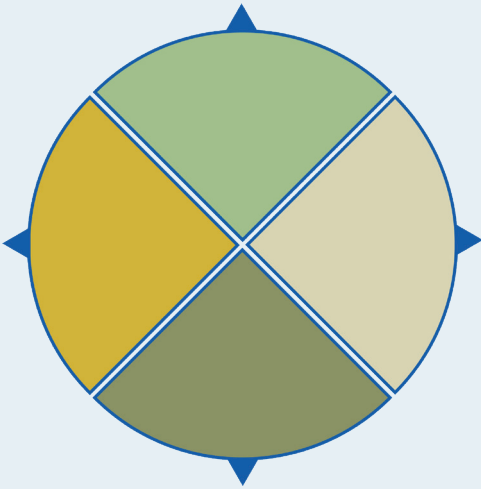


# Strategic Directions 2023–2025



Advocate for the expansion of place-based conservation

Provide opportunities for people to connect to diverse cultures and to the environment

Foster conservation leadership

Sustain the GWS mission and vision into the future

## OUR INSPIRATION: GEORGE MELÉNDEZ WRIGHT

George Meléndez Wright (1904–1936) was an American biologist who conceived of, then conducted, the first scientific survey of wildlife for the US National Park Service. Among his many attributes, Wright pioneered a holistic approach to conservation in the national parks and beyond. The GWS honors the vision of this pioneering thinker and doer.



## OUR VISION

To be the premier organization connecting peoples, places, knowledges, and ideas to foster excellence in cultural and natural resource management, research, protection, and interpretation in place-based conservation.<sup>1</sup>

## OUR MISSION

The George Wright Society supports parks, protected/conserved areas, cultural sites, and other kinds of place-based conservation by encouraging communication among and convenings of researchers, managers, educators, practitioners, and the public to facilitate informed decisions and actions that embrace our values.

## OUR VALUES AND IMPACT

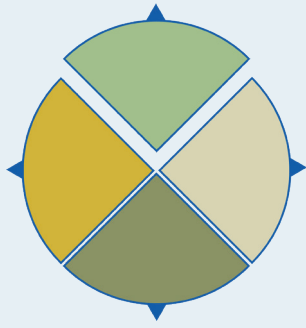
Drawing on core values of integrity, respect, inclusion, and collaborative curiosity, we unite diverse communities<sup>2</sup> around a common passion for protecting Earth’s natural and cultural heritage, creating the sustainable stewardship needed to meet today’s greatest conservation challenges.

“But our national heritage is richer than just scenic features; the realization is coming that perhaps our greatest national heritage is nature itself, with all its complexity and its abundance of life, which, when combined with great scenic beauty as it is in the national parks, becomes of unlimited value. This is what we would attain in the national parks.”

— George M. Wright, Joseph S. Dixon, and Ben H. Thompson,  
*Fauna of the National Parks of the United States*, 1933

Wright’s “vision of national park management was truly revolutionary, penetrating beyond the scenic façades of the parks to comprehend the significance of the complex natural world.”

— Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*, 1997



## Advocate for the expansion of place-based conservation

### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Climate change, biodiversity loss, and the changing perceptions of the need for and value of conservation are driving a top-to-bottom reconsideration of why and how we do place-based conservation. Linked to these environmental and demographic trends is the need to forward socioenvironmental justice.

### PRIORITIES / ACTIONS / BENCHMARKS / RESPONSIBILITIES

**Priority 1.1.** Make GWS a thought leader in reconsidering the rationale and practice of place-based conservation.

**Action 1.1.1.** Through our communications platforms, examine how climate change and biodiversity loss are calling into question the basic tenets of place-based conservation theory and practice.

*Benchmarks of success:* GWS communications consistently provide opportunities to reconsider and debate how place-based conservation should be carried out.

**Action 1.1.2.** Through our communications platforms, examine how 21st-century demographic trends (intergenerational, socioeconomic, racial/ethnic) are reshaping the practice and value of place-based conservation.

*Benchmarks of success:* GWS communications consistently consider the effects of changing demography on place-based conservation theory and practice.

Leadership responsibility: GWS Board

**Priority 1.2.** Make GWS a champion of socioenvironmental justice as it relates to place-based conservation.

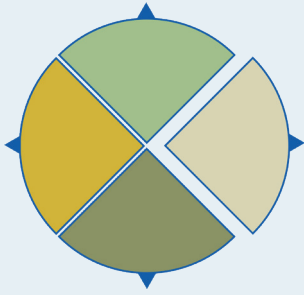
**Action 1.2.1.** Indigenous perspectives and Knowledges are consistently represented in all GWS activities.

*Benchmarks of success:* Center Indigenous perspectives and Knowledges by means of the IIWG (Indigenous Involvement Working Group) in carrying out the GWS mission. Indigenous perspectives and Knowledges are consistently represented in all GWS activities. The result is that we advocate a place-based conservation that is inseparable from socioenvironmental justice.

**Action 1.2.2.** Center the perspectives and knowledges of other People of Color, LGBTQQIA2S+, and additional minoritized communities in carrying out the GWS mission.

*Benchmarks of success:* The perspectives and knowledges of other People of Color, LGBTQQIA2S+, and additional minoritized communities are consistently represented in all GWS activities. The result is that we advocate a place-based conservation that is inseparable from socioenvironmental justice.

Leadership responsibility: GWS Board



## Provide opportunities for people to connect to diverse cultures and to the environment

### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Parks, protected areas, and their associated ecosystems and cultural values are dependent on ways of knowing that include Indigenous Knowledges, work, research, and science. That critical work may be shared in the academic community or among practitioners, but often does not reach the public. Sharing and communicating professional work and research is fundamental to provide opportunities for people to connect to natural and cultural heritage resources and building stewardship for these special places to protect and sustain them.

### PRIORITIES / ACTIONS / BENCHMARKS / RESPONSIBILITIES

**Priority 2.1.** Strategically develop a program of publications centered on our flagship, *Parks Stewardship Forum*.

**Action 2.1.1.** Continue to expand and raise the profile of *Parks Stewardship Forum*, including exploring a greater role (both editorially and financially) for our publishing partner, the University of California, Berkeley, Institute for Parks, People, and Biodiversity (IPPB).

*Benchmarks of success:* PSF registers 10% year-to-year increases in the number of requests for articles. IPPB expands its involvement with PSF by developing more journal content and initiating financial support for the journal.

Leadership responsibility: Publications Committee

**Priority 2.2.** Strategically develop a program of interdisciplinary workshops, trainings, and conferences.

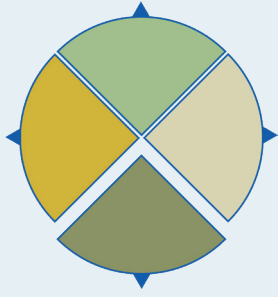
**Action 2.2.1.** GWS leverages its convening experience to develop an annual calendar of in-person and virtual workshops and trainings to advance our Strategic Directions.

*Benchmarks of success:* GWS convenes, or is a major partner in convening, at least one in-person workshop or training each year that significantly advances the GWS mission, supplemented by virtual workshops, webinars, and online trainings.

**Action 2.2.2.** GWS leverages its convening experience to address the gap in which North America is the world's only region without a regular regional-scale parks conference.

*Benchmarks of success:* By 2028, GWS convenes, or is a major partner in convening, a recurring (annual, biennial, triennial) parks conference at the North American level that builds on the interdisciplinary legacy of the former GWS Biennial Conferences.

Leadership responsibility: Conference Committee



## Foster conservation leadership

### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Carrying out our Strategic Directions not only will require a new generation of conservation leaders, it will require a new conception of what conservation leadership means. In the decades to come, “success” in place-based conservation will be measured not only in the number of protected or conserved sites, but in the extent of public support across diverse communities.

### PRIORITIES / ACTIONS / BENCHMARKS / RESPONSIBILITIES

**Priority 3.1.** Develop the next generation of diverse, ethical conservation leaders by creating a robust set of Student Chapters linked to a program (including existing GWS efforts such as Park Break and Student Summits) that supports early- and mid-career professionals, bolstered by mentoring from members of the GWS community.

**Action 3.1.1.** Create a well-governed network of Student Chapters that delivers value to Student Chapter Members.  
*Benchmarks of success:* By 2024, four Student Chapters are operating under governance documents developed by the Board. By 2025, additional chapters in Canada are explored, and ones serving diverse students (e.g., at HBCUs, Tribal Universities/Colleges, Hispanic-Serving Institutions), are operating. By 2028, at least 20 Student Chapters are operating. All these chapters are bolstered by mentors drawn from members of the GWS community.

**Action 3.1.2.** Create a program that supports early- and mid-career parks professionals by (a) identifying common challenges faced by people in these career stages, and (b) developing solutions to meet these challenges.

*Benchmarks of success:* GWS Student Chapter Members who, upon graduation, enter the profession (or continue as advocates for place-based conservation) retain their GWS membership.

Leadership responsibility: New committee focused on this priority

**Priority 3.2.** Explore and develop innovative ways to connect diverse communities with place-based conservation.

**Action 3.2.1.** There are already effective organizations that are focused on and connected to diverse communities—often led by community members themselves. GWS will reach out to such organizations to explore potential complementary ways to collaborate in order to develop meaningful partnership programs with groups representing a range of diverse communities.

*Benchmarks of success:* By the end of 2025, establish six partnerships with conservation-minded organizations that focus on providing opportunities for specific diverse communities, including but not limited to Black, Indigenous, Latina/o, and LGBTQQIA2S+.

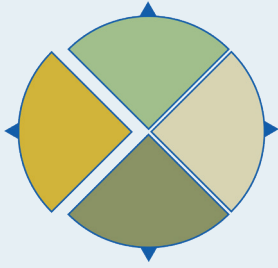
**Action 3.2.2.** Ensure that the membership of the Board of Directors and of all committees aligns with the target membership and diverse populations associated with the Society, and supports the next generation of GWS leadership.

*Benchmarks of success:* By 2028, at least 50% of the Board and committees are represented by members of the Black, Indigenous, Latina/o, and LGBTQQIA2S+ communities.

**Action 3.2.3.** GWS promotes diversity through Park Stewardship Forum and other publications by featuring articles by authors from the Black, Indigenous, Latina/o, and LGBTQQIA2S+ communities.

*Benchmarks of success:* At least 10 articles per year from such authors are published.

Leadership responsibility: GWS Board



## Sustain the GWS mission and vision into the future

### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

In the next five years GWS will be transitioning to a new chapter of its existence while continuing to sustain its mission and vision. To do this, and to remain relevant to future generations, staff and volunteers must anticipate and plan for change. The transition consists of two parts: envisioning what the GWS will look like in 2028, in terms of financial and operational stability; and staff and volunteer succession planning to take the practical steps needed.

### PRIORITIES / ACTIONS / BENCHMARKS / RESPONSIBILITIES

**Priority 4.1.** Create a vision of GWS in 2028 that is responsive to changing demographics, information technology, and how knowledge is created, accessed, and shared.

**Action 4.1.1.** Decide on the need for GWS to continue as an independent organization, or whether it makes strategic sense to foster alliances, partnerships, or mergers with like-minded organizations. The process will engage members, other supporters, and funders, and will address specific questions of staffing and funding needs.

*Benchmarks of success:* Process determined by mid-2024 with a final decision by 2028.

**Action 4.1.2.** In conjunction with Action 4.1.1, develop funding plan for the option selected.

*Benchmarks of success:* By 2028, at least 10 institutional donors are supporting, or have supported, Priority 4.1.

Leadership responsibility: GWS Board / Finance/Development Committee

**Priority 4.2.** Create and carry out a staff succession plan.

**Action 4.2.1.** Create a succession plan that targets staff size, responsibilities, and funding requirements.

*Benchmarks of success:* Plan is in place by 2025, including timeline and steps to achieve full implementation no later than the beginning of 2028.

Leadership responsibility: New committee focused on this priority, including volunteers from the current membership who are not already volunteering on the Board or on other committees. Create a subcommittee to develop job descriptions and governance policies that foster succession planning.

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1. The term “place-based conservation” covers many other designations applied to a defined geographic space or a particular location or building and that contribute to the safeguarding of Earth’s natural and/or cultural heritage. Examples include Indigenous sacred sites, OECMs (“other effective area-based conservation measures,” as defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature), community-conserved areas that are not formally recognized by governments, historic house museums, and areas protected by land trusts. The term contrasts with more general forms of conservation, such as concern about air quality.
  2. “Diverse communities” means the full range of communities represented in the populace at large, including Black, Indigenous, Latina/o, LGBTQIA2S+, and other minoritized communities. The term implies that necessary steps to proactively include all these groups will be taken.