



RISE DECLARATIONS

Sharing the experience & insights of **Recent Involuntarily Separated Employees** working in place-based conservation

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AN ENORMOUS LOSS OF KNOWLEDGE AND CAPACITY

The federal government has been undergoing dramatic cuts since President Trump took office in January 2025, with ripple effects through partners in state and local government, academia, and the non-profit and private sectors. These changes are affecting all aspects of government, including the place-based conservation roles of agencies like the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), US Fish and Wildlife Service, and US Forest Service. The Center for American Progress estimates that due to layoffs, buyouts, and hiring freezes, the number of employees at public land agencies has dropped by 20% since January 2025. This represents an enormous loss of institutional knowledge and capacity, with no plan to backfill these staff.

In response, the George Wright Society (GWS) has launched a new program to support conservation colleagues who have recently lost their jobs due to actions by the current administration: people we refer to as **Recent Involuntarily Separated Employees** (RISEs).

The Society recognizes that government service, non-profit civil society, and unfettered academic inquiry are foundational to the well-being of the American nation. While the current administration's policy and budgetary decisions are designed to undermine these values, the Society continues to support them in our focal area—parks, protected/conserved areas, cultural sites, and other forms of place-based conservation.

RISEs can result from outright firings, layoffs, or RIFs (reductions in force); early retirements taken under duress; terminations or disruptions of grants, fellowships, or contracts; or unplanned resignations for any number of reasons resulting from the current climate of uncertainty and antagonism, including the

planned politicization of the civil service. The common factor is that RISEs are leaving conservation-related government service, academia, non-profit employment, or for-profit contractor positions for reasons unrelated to their job performance. Losing the wisdom, experience, and service of RISEs is doing incalculable damage to American society.

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The George Wright Society would like to contribute to stemming this loss by providing a platform for RISEs who worked in place-based conservation to share their insights and experience as part of a permanent repository that will be made available to the public: the RISE Declarations.

WHAT IS A RISE DECLARATION?

A RISE Declaration is a written or oral statement that lets RISEs summarize in their own words the most important aspects of their career in place-based conservation, along with lessons learned. Doing this will ensure that their

Find RISE Declarations at the PSF website <https://escholarship.org/uc/psf> and at <https://www.georgewright society.org/rise-declarations>

achievements and record of public service/benefit are not lost. Collectively, RISE Declarations will be a powerful affirmation of the value of public service and free academic inquiry and a rebuke to the current administration's claim that they are of little or no value.

GWS invites anyone in the place-based conservation community who is a RISE to participate. Anyone in field or administrative roles is welcome. It includes people who are looking for, or have found, new jobs, whether in place-based conservation or some other field. It includes people who were working in government, academia, and the non-profit sector, as well as contractors in the for-profit sector, on anything related to parks, protected/conserved areas, cultural sites, and other forms of place-based conservation.

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To be clear: when we say a separation is “involuntary,” we mean that it occurred earlier than the person intended. For example, people who retired early against their wishes are, from our perspective, RISEs because their separation was truly involuntary — even if they signed official paperwork saying they chose to retire.

To make a RISE Declaration, participants fill out a form found on the GWS website (<https://www.georgewrightsgociety.org/rise>). RISE participants can choose to remain entirely or partly anonymous. The RISE program will only publish information from submitted declarations that have been fully reviewed by the participants.

RISE participants also have the option to answer the questions in an oral interview format. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed, and submitters will have an opportunity to review and correct them as needed. Regardless of whether participants submit their RISE Declaration in writing or via oral interview, all requests for anonymity will be respected. Interested parties who want to submit an oral interview should email RISE@georgewright.org.

HOW WILL RISE DECLARATIONS BE SHARED?

GWS will create a permanent repository of RISE Declarations by publishing them as individual articles in this open-access journal, *Parks Stewardship Forum*. PSF is co-published by GWS and the University of California, Berkeley, on the University of California's eScholarship platform. Because PSF is open access, these important Declarations will be freely available to people everywhere. We will encourage academic analyses of the Declarations so that researchers can share their findings within the academic community and the broader public. We will also share Declarations on our website (<https://www.georgewrightsgociety.org/rise-declarations>) and develop outreach products (including stories and syntheses) to highlight the importance of government service, non-profits, and academia in place-based conservation. With the permission of RISE Declaration submitters, we will also explore outreach through social media.

The Society believes these RISE Declarations, representing years of experience and wisdom gained from working in the protected area field, will prove to be increasingly valuable to current and future place-based conservation practitioners, researchers, managers, and the public.