

Program

The George Wright Society and the University of Tennessee welcome you to the UT Conference Center in downtown Knoxville for the 2026 GWS ParkForum! We're glad you're here! If you need assistance, see us at the Registration Table in the Atrium anytime.

All workshop sessions are on the 4th floor. All breaks are served in the Atrium.

Monday, October 19

8:45a–noon

Urban Wilderness Field Trip

Meet at Registration Table, Atrium, 8:45a

10:00a–5:00p

Registration & Poster Set-Up

Poster presenters:
check-in at
Registration Table,
Atrium

Plenary Session I

1:30–3:30p

Ballroom 413ABC

**Welcome from the
George Wright
Society and the
University of
Tennessee /
Indigenous Land
Acknowledgment /
Introduction to
Today's Plenary
Sessions**

- Fred Herling,
GWS President
- Dr. Adam Ahlers,
Director, UT
School of Natural
Resources

Tennessee RiverLine: A Strategy for Restorative Recreation

- Moderator: Ryan Sharp, Professor, University of Tennessee
- Panelists: Brad Collett, Executive Director, Tennessee RiverLine
- Carrie Barske Crawford, Professor, University of North Alabama
- Clay Guerry, Land Manager, Tennessee Valley Authority
- Ryan Sharp, Professor, University of Tennessee
- Lt. Col. Mike Walker, Co-Chair, Bridgeport Local

Leadership Team

Reframing the Tennessee River, adjacent public lands, and river communities as a 1.2 million acre 'River Park,' Tennessee RiverLine is an initiative of UT Extension that advances a novel concept of restorative recreation along the 652-mile Tennessee River. Join this session to learn how the RiverLine is leveraging the power of partnerships to inspire new generations of Tennessee River stewards in RiverTowns communities in four states through recreation programming, environmental education,

infrastructure design and implementation, and tourism development.

Refreshment Break •

3:30–4:00p

Plenary Session II

4:00–5:00p

Ballroom 413ABC

The State of History and Preservation in Our National Parks and Public Lands

- Sarah Weicksel, Executive Director, American Historical Association
- Anne Mitchell Whisnant, Professor, Duke University
- Alan Spears, Senior Director for Cultural

Resources,
National Parks
Conservation
Association

- Moderator: Eboni Preston Goddard, Southeast Regional Director, National Parks Conservation Association

The year 2025 saw unprecedented assaults on cultural resource management at the federal level. Research and programmatic grants were frozen or eliminated. Staffing levels for cultural resource professionals, already low, were drastically reduced in the name of government efficiency. And the administration's push to restore truth and

sanity to American history began a process by which the National Park Service was forced to first list then, in some instances, sanitize or erase accurate and inclusive stories at park sites across the country. Although the jury is still out on the impacts that bad policy and stiffening resistance to censorship are having on our parks and preservation generally, now is a good time to examine where we all are. This panel will draw upon the expertise of four leading advocates for national parks and historic preservation practitioners to share their views on what's happened, the impact over the last 15 months on

preservation, and
where historians,
preservationists, and
public lands
advocates need to go
now.

Welcoming Reception

5:00–6:00p

Atrium

*Light hors d'oeuvres,
non-alcoholic
beverages*