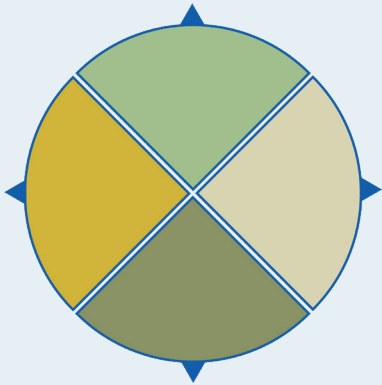




# Strategic Directions 2026–2028



Advocate for the effective management and expansion of place-based conservation

Provide opportunities for all people to better connect with each other and with our shared natural and cultural resources

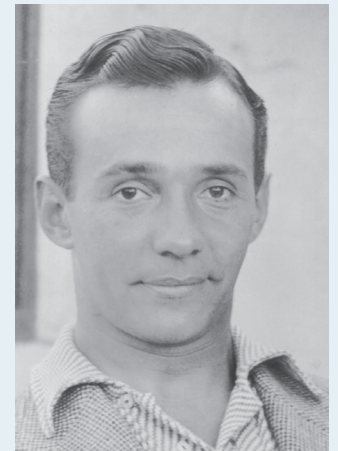
Foster leadership and resilience to meet the fast-changing dynamics of place-based conservation

Sustain the GWS mission and vision into the future

This three-year Strategic Directions for the George Wright Society (GWS) describes the organization's focus and priorities. The document provides the framework and set of achievements the GWS intends to reach through its own work, and through partnerships/cooperative initiatives that build on the GWS's longstanding commitment to collaborative conservation.

## 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 contributions, 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 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.

## OUR MISSION

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

"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."

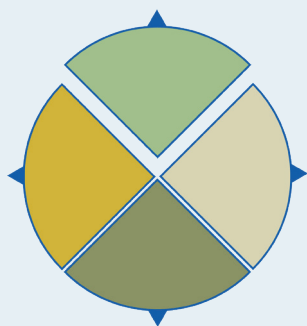
— Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*, 1997

## HOW WE WORK

GWS is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors, supplemented by staff and other volunteers, who carry out our mission collegially through a set of committees, working groups, and affinity groups:

- The **Finance/Development Committee** is in charge of fiscal oversight and audit coordination, and leads fundraising and financial planning.
- The **Awards Committee** runs the GWS Awards program.
- The **Publications/Communications Committee** oversees our journal, *Parks Stewardship Forum*, as well as the website, social media, and all other publications/communications.
- The **Nominating / Governance Committee** leads on all GWS governance-related activity, such as overseeing Board elections and Board recruitment, long-range capacity-building, organizational development, and strategic planning (e.g., ongoing staff succession transition, and updating and tracking progress on this *Strategic Directions* document).
- The **Workshops Committee** is responsible for the overall GWS ParkForum Workshop Series, including evaluating and selecting sites and appointing a Program Team to oversee each workshop.
- The **Membership Services Committee** is in charge of increasing GWS membership, developing GWS Student and early-career professional support initiatives, and other member services.
- The **Indigenous Involvement Working Group (IIWG)**, convened by GWS but self-directed by its Indigenous participants, is a forum for Indigenous people interested in place-based conservation to meet and discuss a wide range of topics, providing input into GWS policies and activities.
- The **LGBTQIA2S+ Affinity Group** functions in the same way as the IIWG, providing a self-directed forum for members of this community, as well as allies, to share information and experiences and convey them to, and through, GWS.
- The **International Conservation Working Group** is a member-led forum that advises the Board on how GWS can best contribute to place-based conservation around the world.

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1. The term “place-based conservation” includes diverse designations applied to defined geographic spaces in broadest terms, from large land- and seascapes to small historic and other cultural sites, including all their resources and elements that contribute to Earth’s natural and/or cultural heritage. Examples include protected and conserved areas managed by governments, Indigenous Peoples, and private entities, such as 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 sites, and areas protected by land trusts. The “place-based” term contrasts with more general forms of conservation, such as concern about air and water quality.
  2. “Diverse communities” means the full range of communities represented in the populace at large, including Black, Indigenous, Latina/o, LGBTQIA2S+, and other communities regarded as minorities. The term implies that necessary steps to proactively include all these groups will be taken.



## Advocate for the effective management and 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 advance socioenvironmental justice.

### PRIORITIES / ACTIONS / BENCHMARKS / RESPONSIBILITIES

**Priority 1.1.** Make GWS a thought leader in the theory and implementation of place-based conservation.

**Action 1.1.1.** Through our communications platforms, examine how place-based conservation theory and practice can best address the linked crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, engagement with Indigenous communities, and a range of challenges facing cultural heritage stewardship.

*Benchmarks of success:* GWS communications consistently provide opportunities to discuss and debate how place-based conservation can best be carried out with both whole-of-society and rights-based approaches.

**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.

Leadership responsibility: GWS Board

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

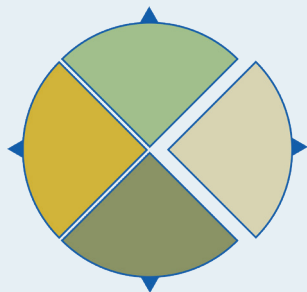
**Action 1.2.1.** Indigenous Knowledges and perspectives are consistently represented in all GWS activities.

*Benchmarks of success:* Center Indigenous Knowledges and perspectives in carrying out the GWS mission through the IIWG. Indigenous Knowledges and perspectives 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 knowledges and perspectives of other People of Color, LGBTQQIA2S+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Two-Spirit, Allies, and +), and additional communities regarded as minorities in carrying out the GWS mission.

*Benchmarks of success:* The knowledges and perspectives of other People of Color, LGBTQQIA2S+, and additional communities regarded as minorities are consistently represented in 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 all people to better connect with each other and with our shared natural and cultural resources

## WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Parks, other protected and conserved 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 providing 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 (UCB).

*Benchmarks of success:* PSF registers 10% year-to-year increases in the number of requests for articles and the number of articles downloaded. UCB 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, training events, and conferences, and share information from those events with GWS members and the public.

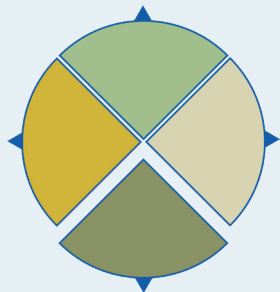
**Action 2.2.1.** GWS leverages its convening experience and past success to develop an annual calendar of in-person and virtual workshops and training events to advance our Strategic Directions and the associated actions described herein.

*Benchmarks of success:* Beyond the annual GWS ParkForum workshop, GWS convenes, or is a major partner in convening, at least one other in-person workshop or training each year that significantly advances the GWS mission, supplemented by virtual workshops, webinars, and online training events. Information from these events is shared through the GWS website, social media, and elsewhere online; published in *Parks Stewardship Forum*; and disseminated through other publications, as appropriate.

**Action 2.2.2.** GWS leverages its convening experience to help address the gap in which North America is the world's only region without a regular regional-scale conference on protected and conserved areas, while also working to convey ideas and proposals to help support existing major international conferences such as the World Protected and Conserved Areas Congress (WPCAC) and the International Marine Protected Areas Conference (IMPAC).

*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. As an organizational member of IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), GWS will coordinate this conference with IUCN to ensure it reflects international goals and leverages major global parks conferences in 2027 (WCPAC and IMPAC).

Leadership responsibility: Workshops Committee



## Foster leadership and resilience to meet the fast-changing dynamics of place-based conservation

### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Carrying out our Strategic Directions will require not only a new generation of conservation leaders, but 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 network of Student Members linked to a program 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 that delivers value to Student Members.

*Benchmarks of success:* By 2028, a robust network serving at least 100 GWS Student Members is operating under governance documents developed by the Board. The network may consist of Student Chapters at universities, a virtual community of practice, or some combination of the two. The network will serve diverse students (e.g., at HBCUs, Tribal Universities/Colleges, Hispanic-Serving Institutions) in the US, Canada, and Mexico. The network is bolstered by mentors drawn from members of the GWS community. Students are consistently provided with opportunities to publish in *Parks Stewardship Forum*.

**Action 3.1.2.** Create a program that supports early- and mid-career 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 Members who, upon graduation, enter the profession (or continue as advocates for place-based conservation), retain their GWS membership, and find opportunities within GWS to expand or apply their conservation leadership skills. Early- and mid-career professionals are consistently provided with opportunities to publish in *Parks Stewardship Forum*.

Leadership responsibility: Membership Services Committee.

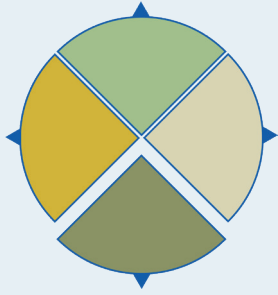
**Priority 3.2.** Explore and develop innovative ways to connect diverse communities with place-based conservation.

**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 2028, 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 LGBTQIA2s+

**Action 3.2.2.** Ensure that the membership of the Board of Directors and of all committees aligns with the 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 LGBTQIA2S+ communities.



## Foster leadership and resilience to meet the fast-changing dynamics of place-based conservation (cont'd)

**Action 3.2.3.** Promote diversity through Parks Stewardship Forum and other publications by featuring articles by authors from the Black, Indigenous, Latina/o, and LGBTQIA2s+ communities.

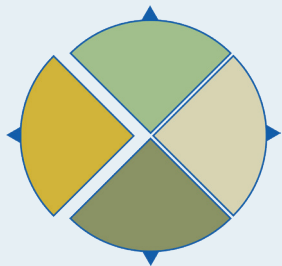
*Benchmarks of success:* At least 10 articles per year from such authors are published.

Leadership responsibility: GWS Board

**Action 3.2.4.** Support resilience in the practice of place-based conservation by defending the value of government and other public service, non-profit civil society, and unfettered academic inquiry through The Stewardship Archive, the RISE Declarations project, and similar initiatives as the Board deems necessary, either as organizer or collaborator.

*Benchmarks of success:* The Stewardship Archive receives at least 50 inquiries for holdings per year, and at least 50 RISE Declarations are published.

Leadership responsibility: GWS Board



## Sustain the GWS mission and vision into the future

### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

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

### PRIORITIES / ACTIONS / BENCHMARKS / RESPONSIBILITIES

**Priority 4.1.** Create and implement an organizational framework for GWS in 2028 that is responsive to changing demographics, information technology, and how knowledge is created, accessed, and shared to effectively deliver place-based conservation.

**Action 4.1.1.** Calculate the funding gap and develop a funding plan for the organizational framework.

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

Leadership responsibility: Joint responsibility of the Nominating/Governance and 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 March 2026, including timeline and steps to achieve full implementation no later than March 2028.

Leadership responsibility: A new committee will be established in 2026 focused on this priority, including volunteers from the current membership who are not already volunteering on the Board or on other committees.

Subcommittee(s) will be established as necessary to develop the numerous elements required (e.g., position descriptions, financial and operational needs, governance policies) that foster the complete succession planning effort.

<https://www.georgewrightssociety.org>

*Parks Stewardship Forum* <https://escholarship.org/uc/psf>