

"It's Time to Meet the Moment"



GWS ParkForum 2026 A conservation solutions workshop

THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE



October 19–22

Program

as of 05/21/26 • Subject to change

Welcome to GWS ParkForum 2026

The George Wright Society and the University of Tennessee welcome you to Knoxville for the 2026 GWS ParkForum! We're glad you're here! If you need assistance, see us at the Registration Desk anytime. • Download this Program and the complete presentation Abstracts at georgewrightssociety.org/parkforum-2026-program • See last two pages of this program for a list of Posters and Field Trip descriptions

Monday, October 19 8:45a–noon URBAN WILDERNESS FIELD TRIP • 10:00a–5:00p REGISTRATION, POSTER SET-UP

1:30–5:00p OPENING PLENARY SESSIONS

Plenary Session I

Ballroom 413AB, 1:30–3:30p

Format: Panel Discussion

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

Fred Herling, GWS President; Others TBA

Tennessee RiverLine: A Strategy for Restorative Recreation

Moderator: **Ryan Sharp**, Professor, University of Tennessee

Panelists: **Brad Collett**, Executive Director, Tennessee RiverLine; **Clay Guerry**, Land Manager, Tennessee Valley Authority; **Ryan Sharp**, Professor, University of Tennessee; **Panelist #4** TBA

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.



Brad Collett is the Executive Director of the Tennessee RiverLine. Under his leadership, a team of UT Extension professionals collaborates with a consortium of partners across the region to realize the Tennessee RiverLine vision and the economic development, public health, resource stewardship, and access benefits it promises future generations. As a full professor in the UT School of Landscape Architecture, his teaching, research and creative activity centered on regional water resource stewardship through landscape planning and high-performance landscape design.

Panelist #4 bio to come



Clay Guerry grew up on the coast of South Carolina and attended Francis Marion University where he received a BS in Biology. After a few years as a primate biologist on the coast, he moved to the foothills of the Appalachians for graduate school at Clemson University, where he earned an MS in Zoology as well as an MS in Parks and Protected Area Management. He has worked as an outdoor guide, instructor, naturalist, and for the past 21 years as a public land manager for the Tennessee Valley Authority focusing on recreation and natural resource management.



Ryan Sharp is an Associate Professor in the Outdoor Recreation and Conservation Lab within the Outdoor Recreation and Park Management program at the University of Tennessee. He has had the opportunity to assist parks and protected areas managers internationally and domestically. Much of Dr. Sharp's work provides managers with tangible and legally defensible data to ensure experiential and ecological resources are maintained for quality visitor experiences while still protecting the integrity of the natural resources.

REFRESHMENT BREAK 3:30–4:00p Cold beverages

Plenary Session II

Ballroom 413AB, 4:00–5:00p

Format: Panel Discussion

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.



Dr. Sarah Weicksel is executive director of the American Historical Association. She has previously worked as the Association's director of research and publications and as a project historian at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. Her book, *A Nation Unraveled: Clothing, Culture, and Violence in the American Civil War Era* (Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2026), is an object-based history that explores how making, wearing, saving, and destroying clothing was central to how people waged war and acutely experienced war's costs.



As NPCA's senior director for cultural resources, **Alan Spears** serves as an advocate for the interpretation, management, and preservation of cultural and historic resources and programs within the National Park Service's inventory. Alan helped win the designation of Fort Monroe, Harriet Tubman, Birmingham Civil Rights, and Emmett Till & Mamie Till-Mobley National Monuments. He is currently working to secure a new national park commemorating Julius Rosenwald and the Rosenwald Schools.



Dr. Anne Mitchell Whisnant is a historian with thirty years' experience working on the history of the U.S. national parks (especially Blue Ridge Parkway and other southeastern parks). She was lead author on the 2011 report, *Imperiled Promise: The State of History in the National Park Service*, co-sponsored by the NPS and the Organization of American Historians. She is currently on the faculty at Duke University, where she is Director of the Graduate Liberal Studies Program.



Led by a call to action, **Dr. Eboni Preston Goddard** is a management professional with a background in non-profit administration, program operations, partnerships, and workforce development. She currently serves as the Southeast Regional Director and National Park Service Diversity Lead for the National Parks Conservation Association. She also works as an adjunct professor and lecturer at the Georgia Institute of Technology, Georgia State University, and Southern New Hampshire University.

WELCOMING RECEPTION 5:00–6:00p Light hors d'oeuvres, non-alcoholic beverages

Tuesday, October 20 8:30–9:45a PLENARY SESSION Coffee & tea

Plenary Session III

Ballroom 413AB

Format: Invited Speakers + Audience Participation

Protecting Karst Resources in Tennessee and the Greater Southeast: The Physical, Biological, and Cultural Elements

Moderator: **Chris Groves**, Western Kentucky University • *Speakers:* **Chris Groves**, “The Physical Setting: Karst Hydrogeology of Tennessee”; **Matt Niemiller**, Professor, University of Alabama in Huntsville: Endangered Cave Species of the Southeast; **Jan Simek**, Professor, University of Tennessee Knoxville: Ancient Native American Art in Caves of the Southeast

The term “karst” refers to landscapes formed when rocks such as limestone and dolomite dissolve, forming unique above-ground features as well as caves and other subterranean features. Large karst areas are found in Tennessee and beyond in the Southeast, and are extremely significant in terms of ecology and biodiversity, as well as being highly important culturally. This session will feature three experts who will walk us through the key physical, biological and cultural elements of these fragile and beautiful landscapes.



Chris Groves is University Distinguished Professor of Hydrogeology and Director of the Crawford Hydrology Lab at Western Kentucky University. He earned a PhD in Environmental Sciences from the University of Virginia in 1993 and since has led an international research program in hydrogeology and water resources, with fieldwork in 26 countries. He has been exploring and studying caves and karst landscapes in Tennessee since his first cave trips and groundwater studies there in 1982.



Matt Niemiller is a Professor at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. Full bio forthcoming.



Jan Simek is a Professor at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. Full bio forthcoming.

REFRESHMENT BREAK & NETWORKING TIME 9:45–10:30a (45 minutes) Coffee & tea

10:30a–12:00p BREAKOUT SESSIONS

<p>Session #1 Ballroom 413AB</p> <p>Information Sharing Session Format: Panel Discussion</p>	<p>Science for Stewardship: Visitor Use Monitoring in the National Wildlife Refuge System <i>Chair: Matt Brownlee, Professor, Clemson University</i></p> <p>This organized session highlights collaborative research with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to advance visitor use management (VUM) across the National Wildlife Refuge System. As visitation grows, refuges must balance quality visitor experiences with conservation goals. Presentations include national efforts to improve visitor monitoring and survey programs, a case study applying the VUM framework at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, and research on how visitor surveys inform management decisions. The session also examines system-wide visitor trends. Together, these papers demonstrate how survey data, modeling, and applied frameworks support evidence-based, defensible decision-making for sustainable visitor use on refuges.</p> <p>Matt Brownlee (Clemson University) - Advancing Visitor Use Management on National Wildlife Refuges: Insights from USFWS Research Jessica Henry (Clemson University) - Giving Merit to Decisions at Merritt NWR: Application of the VUM Framework at a High-Visitation Wildlife Refuge Kale Wernsing (Clemson University) - Data in Decision-Making: How Public Lands Use General Visitor Surveys to Inform Management Practices Mark Gorman (Clemson University) - Rec on the Refuge: Examining Visitor Trends in the National Wildlife Refuge System</p> <p><i>Attendees will learn how monitoring, surveys, and frameworks support data-driven decisions and sustainable management on refuges.</i></p>
<p>Session #2 Room 400A</p> <p>Core Workshop Session Format: Hands-on Activity</p>	<p>Project Worthy: An Interactive Exploration of Redlining and Preservation <i>Chair: Ariel Kimberley, Executive Director, Park Institute of America</i></p> <p>Project Worthy examines how historic redlining continues to shape which places are deemed “worthy of preservation.” Using GIS analysis across more than one hundred U.S. cities, the project reveals that National Historic Districts are systematically underrepresented in formerly redlined neighborhoods. This work highlights how cultural heritage designation, investment, and storytelling remain uneven—and why integrating cultural and natural resource stewardship is essential to more holistic, place-based conservation. This interactive workshop will guide participants through the data, invite them to interpret patterns in their own regions, and codevelop strategies to address disparities in preservation practice. Together, we will identify pathways to more equitable, integrated conservation outcomes.</p> <p><i>Attendees will gain tools to identify redlining-linked preservation inequities, analyze their communities, and plan more equitable futures.</i></p>
<p>Session #3 Room 406 The Stone Room</p> <p>Information Sharing Session Format:</p>	<p>PENDING</p>

Session Title & Chair	10:30–10:50a	10:50–11:10a	11:10–11:30a	11:30–11:50a	Q&A
<p>Session #4 Room 413C</p> <p>Information Sharing Session Format: Contributed Papers</p>	<p>Economic Values Levi Tenen / Should Parks Be Profitable?</p>	<p>Yun Liang / Understanding the Perspectives on Nonresident Fee Policy in U.S. National Parks</p>	<p>Ryan Sharp & Justine Cucchiara / Tearing Down Silos: The Tennessee Outdoor Partnership as a Driver of Economic Opportunity</p>	<p>Nate Valentine & Steve Rowland / Assessing the Potential for Geotourism at the Great Unconformity at Frenchman Mountain</p>	

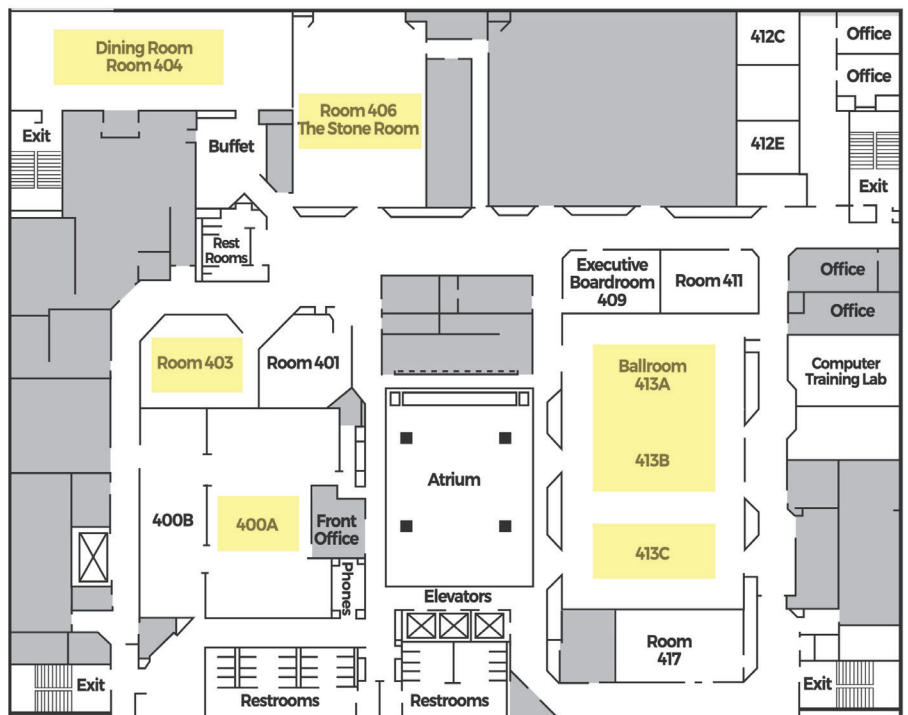
LUNCH BREAK 12:00–1:30p (90 minutes)

Tuesday, October 20 1:30–3:00p BREAKOUT SESSIONS

<p>Session #5 Ballroom 413AB</p> <p>Core Workshop Session Format: Hands-on Activity</p>	<p>Mapping the Motivations and Impacts of NPS Heritage and Nature Volunteers <i>Chair: Thomas Bryer, Professor and Director, Old Dominion University, Center for Civic Lands and Democratic Stewardship</i></p> <p>This interactive workshop addresses the workshop theme of Integrating Natural and Cultural Heritage Conservation. It explores how volunteers in the National Park Service experience, interpret, and connect motivations and impacts across both natural and cultural heritage. Drawing on research with more than 200 NPS volunteers and rangers, participants will map volunteer motivations (e.g., stewardship, identity, community) alongside multi-level impacts (self, place, and democracy). Through facilitated small-group activities, attendees will co-create integrated “motivation–impact maps” that dissolve traditional silos between nature and culture. The session centers inclusive dialogue to identify practices that unite conservation and heritage work.</p> <p><i>Participants will leave with tools to engage new partners, broaden participation in volunteerism, and advance boundary-spanning conservation outcomes.</i></p>												
<p>Session #6 Room 400A</p> <p>Core Workshop Session Format: Book Talk</p>	<p>Book Talk— National Parks and the Supreme Court: Groundbreaking Legal Battles <i>Presenter: Carla Mattix, Author/Former NPS Attorney</i></p> <p>My book talk will highlight the role that courts and lawyers play to achieve the mission of the National Park Service. “National Parks and the Supreme Court,” published by the University of Nevada Press, America’s National Park Series, examines five landmark Supreme Court cases involving national parks—Gettysburg, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Death Valley, and the National Mall. Each chapter blends legal analysis with historical context, tracing the origins of the parks and the disputes that brought them before the nation’s highest court. Spanning nearly a century, these cases reveal how the Court has shaped park policy, land use, Native American rights, water law, and free speech.</p> <p><i>Attendees/audience members will better understand how court decisions can influence the trajectory of the National Park Service.</i></p>												
<p>Session #7 Room 406 The Stone Room</p> <p>Information Sharing Session Format: Talks + Panel Discussion</p>	<p>Voices of Experience: Insights from Veteran Leaders Mike Tranel / Four Foundation Lessons Kevin McNamee / Protected Area Establishment: Retrospective and Lessons Learned (1983-2023) Others TBA</p>												
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Session Title & Chair</th> <th>1:30–1:50p</th> <th>1:50–2:10p</th> <th>2:10–2:30p</th> <th>2:30–2:50p</th> <th>Q&A</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> <p>Session #8 Room 413C</p> <p>Information Sharing Session Format: Contributed Papers</p> </td> <td> <p>Conservation Solutions I: Biosphere Regions John Kupfer / Mapping Stakeholder Perceptions of Conservation Benefits & Opportunities in the Congaree Biosphere</p> </td> <td> <p>Guilherme Silva et al. / Socio-environmental Vulnerability in US Biosphere Regions</p> </td> <td> <p>Tom Gilbert / How the Great Smoky Mountains Region Served as an Example in the Creation of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves</p> </td> <td> <p>OPEN</p> </td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Session Title & Chair	1:30–1:50p	1:50–2:10p	2:10–2:30p	2:30–2:50p	Q&A	<p>Session #8 Room 413C</p> <p>Information Sharing Session Format: Contributed Papers</p>	<p>Conservation Solutions I: Biosphere Regions John Kupfer / Mapping Stakeholder Perceptions of Conservation Benefits & Opportunities in the Congaree Biosphere</p>	<p>Guilherme Silva et al. / Socio-environmental Vulnerability in US Biosphere Regions</p>	<p>Tom Gilbert / How the Great Smoky Mountains Region Served as an Example in the Creation of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves</p>	<p>OPEN</p>	
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REFRESHMENT BREAK 3:00–3:30p (30 minutes) Cold beverages

**UT Conference
Center 4th Floor
GWS ParkForum meeting rooms
highlighted in yellow**



Tuesday, October 20 3:30–5:00p BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Session Title & Chair	3:30–1:50p	3:50–4:10p	4:10–4:30p	4:30–4:50p	Q&A
Session #9 Ballroom 413AB Information Sharing Session Format: Contributed Papers	Multiple Values of Parks & Protected Areas Jason Wong / Understanding the Economic, Environmental, and Health Benefits of Canada's Protected Areas	Annabelle Mayes et al. / International Perspectives on the Values of Antarctic Wildernes	Lincoln Larson et al. / Mental health promotion via North Carolina State Parks	PENDING / Soward KUW	
Session #10 Room 400A Core Workshop Session Format: Hands-on Activity	Beyond the Breadlines: Research, Interpretation, & Contemporary Lessons Regarding New Deal Programs Chair: Brian Forist, Senior Lecturer-Parks, Recreation, & the Outdoors, Indiana University This session features research on New Deal employment programs for women and others on Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula. Indiana University students assisting the research needed hands-on work relevant to their location The project now includes research on New Deal activities at the university and across Indiana. Research results are being used to inform site interpretation and consider contemporary lessons on the Keweenaw Peninsula and in Indiana. Participants will engage in sample primary source research with archival materials and will propose ways to interpret New Deal programs. Lessons from the New Deal applied to the present day will be discussed and examples provided by participants. Ways that New Deal programs demonstrate the integration of natural and cultural heritage conservation and their economic values will be discussed. Participants will learn about New Deal programs, engage in study of archival materials, and apply lessons to interpretation and contemporary concerns.				

Session Title & Chair	3:30–3:50p	3:50–4:10p	4:10–4:30p	4:30–4:50p	Q&A
Session #11 Room 406 The Stone Room Information Sharing Session Format: Contributed Papers	Resiliency in the Face of Rapid Change Kate Jones et al. / Land cover, community trajectories and disaster resilience near protected lands	Ariel Kimberley / Coastal Resiliency in Practice: Bridging Science, Policy, and Partnerships	Michele Remer / Understanding the risk of introducing new species from cruise tourism to Alaska's changing coasts	OPEN	

	3:30–3:35p	3:35–3:40p	3:40–3:45p	3:45–3:50p	3:50–3:55p	3:55–4:00p
Session #12 Room 413C Three-Minute Research (3MR) Competition for Emerging Researchers Chair: Ryan Sharp Judges: TBA	Isabel Haake / Understanding Barriers and Facilitators to Appalachian Trail Thru Hiker Food Storage Behavior	Kyla Knauf / Can historic seed collection and climate data inform future restoration in Glacier National Park?	Mike Miller / From Image to Experience: Social Media Photography and Visitor Behavior at an Iconic Viewpoint	Vishal Kennedy / Assessing the Representation of U.S. Terrestrial Ecosystems in Protected Areas	OPEN	OPEN
	4:00–4:05p	4:05–4:10p	4:10–4:15p	4:15–4:20p	4:20–4:25p	4:25–4:30p
	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
	4:30–4:35p	4:35–4:40p	4:40–4:45p	4:45–4:50p	4:50–4:55p	4:55–5:00p
	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	WRAP-UP	
Student and early-career researchers have three minutes to convey the key points of their work in a friendly competition designed to hone presentation skills.						

Poster Reception & Stand-by Time 5:00–6:00p Dry snacks, non-alcoholic beverages (Location TBA)

AFFINITY MEETING 5:30–6:30p

Ballroom 413C • **The Stewardship Archive: A Discussion and Demo**
 Convenors: George Wright Society

Wednesday, October 21 8:30–10:00α PLENARY SESSION Coffee & tea

GWS Awards Ceremony
Ballroom 413AB (8:30–8:45a)

Presentation of George Wright Society Awards

Plenary Session IV
Ballroom 413AB
Format: Invited Speaker
(8:45–10:00a)

Names Are Never Just Names: Reconciliation, Revanchism, and the Struggle for Democratic Place-Making

Moderator: **Seth T. Kannarr**, PhD Graduate, University of Tennessee
Speaker: **Derek H. Alderman**, Professor, University of Tennessee

Place names are not innocent labels on maps or signs. They are civic resources that have become flashpoints in struggles over identity, memory, power, and harm. Drawing on decades of scholarship and public engagement with place (re)naming in America, as well as service on the Federal Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names, Derek Alderman examines two competing futures: renaming as reconciliation and renaming as revanchism. Centering the committee's Place Name Reconciliation Principles, he advances a participatory, research-driven, reparative framework accountable to communities. Alderman warns against top-down revanchist naming practices that settle political scores and grievances, advance personal branding, weaponize symbols, and restore racial, colonial, and nationalist hierarchies. At stake is the integrity of the shared American landscape and the democratic making of place.



Derek H. Alderman is Chancellor's Professor of Geography at the University of Tennessee. His cultural geography scholarship examines the racial justice dimensions of place naming and commemorative landscapes. Over a 28-year professional career, he has partnered extensively with civil rights organizations, educators, museums, journalists, and government officials. Alderman is a Fellow and Past President of the American Association of Geographers and served from 2022 to 2025 on the U.S. Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names.



Seth T. Kannarr is a PhD Graduate from the Department of Geography and Sustainability at the University of Tennessee. His research specialties are in critical parks geographies, place naming studies, and geography education. He is a passionate teacher who loves to share his experiences visiting national parks and outdoor spaces with others.

REFRESHMENT BREAK & NETWORKING TIME 10:00–10:30α (30 minutes) Coffee & tea

10:30α–12:00p BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Session #13
Ballroom 413AB

International Park and Protected Area Issues Dialogue: Institutions, Networks and Opportunities

Chairs: Jonathan Putnam, US National Park Service (retired) and Lauren Wenzel, NOAA (retired)

Information Sharing Session
Format: Panel Discussion

This interactive panel discussion will highlight some of the key current issues in international park and protected area management, including the 30x30 initiative, Indigenous-led conservation, and the status of U.S. involvement in international conservation through IUCN, World Heritage and the U.S. Biosphere Network. We will share examples of how participants can engage in the international protected area community, including through the World Commission on Protected Areas, the International Ranger Federation and other organizations, and major international events scheduled for 2027 (the World Congress on Protected And Conserved Areas, the International Marine Protected Area Congress and the World Ranger Congress). Participants will be engaged in the dialogue to share their questions, experiences and insights.

Session Title & Chair	10:30–10:50α	10:50–11:10α	11:10–11:30α	11:30–11:50α	Q&A
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Session #14
Room 400A

Connecting with and Delivering Benefits to Diverse Groups

Jennifer Thomsen et al. / Wildlands relevance: Fostering relationships between public lands and underrepresented groups

Shanasia Sylman / Focusing on the Relationship: Indigenous Engagement at Tijuana River NERR and beyond

Sweta Dixit / Comprehensive Overview of Protected Area Benefit-Sharing Policy Impacts in Local Livelihoods in Asia

OPEN

Information Sharing Session
Format: Contributed Papers

Session #15
Room 406 The Stone Room

Collective Capacity: Building Strength in Small Conservation Nonprofits

Ariel Kimberley, Park Institute of America

Information Sharing Session
Format: Affinity Group

This session convenes an affinity group for small conservation nonprofits to exchange strengths, strategies, and practical skills for increasing impact. Relevant to all Workshop Themes, this session takes a step back to understand not only what work is accomplished by small nonprofits, but also how that work is carried out. It centers peer learning to discuss strengths, such as capitalizing on flexibility, alongside challenges of funding and staffing. Participants will share tools, map their networks, and co-develop approaches for collaboration, resource-sharing, and resilience. Additionally, there is potential to incorporate voices from larger nonprofits, helping to identify blind spots and opportunities for collaboration. The interactive session will produce actionable takeaways and a framework for ongoing connection beyond the Forum.

Attendees will gain practical strategies, shared tools, and peer connections to strengthen small nonprofit impact and collaboration.

Session Title & Chair	10:30–10:50α	10:50–11:10α	11:10–11:30α	11:30–11:50α	Q&A
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Session #16
Room 413C

New Approaches to Displacement and Crowding

Jeffrey Hallo & Louis Santiago / Addressing Visitor Displacement as a Critical Component of Protected Area Management

William Rice et al. / Communities, Crowding, and a new paradigm in Visitor Experience: Evidence from two national forests

Santiago Brevan / Rethinking Park Capacity: Cultural Differences in Visitor Perceptions and Management Actions

Min Kook Kim & Jessica Leahy / How Much Is Too Much? Agent-Based Modeling for Recreation Resource Management in NetLogo

Information Sharing Session
Format: Contributed Papers

LUNCH BREAK 12:00–1:30p (90 minutes)

Wednesday, October 21 1:30–3:00p BREAKOUT SESSIONS

<p>Session #17 Ballroom 413AB</p> <p>Information Sharing Session Format: Panel Discussion</p>	<p>Beyond Boundaries: Air, Energy and Ecosystem Threats to Parks through Landscape and Policy Lenses <i>Chair: Ulla Reeves, Director, Clean Air Program, National Parks Conservation Association</i></p> <p>Panelists: Olivia Porter, Southern Appalachian Landscape Project Director – Session Co-Organizer and Co-Presenter [CONFIRMED] Sara Cawley, NPCA's Energy Director in Conservation Programs [CONFIRMED] Phil Francis, former Superintendent of Blue Ridge Parkway (clean air experience in Smokies/BRP) [INVITED] Appalachian Trail Conservancy, perhaps Matt Drury to speak about the Appalachian Trail Landscape Partnership's strategic conservation work to protect viewsheds [INVITED] Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation George Ivey to speak about the protection of visual resources and biodiversity along the parkway [INVITED]</p> <p>From energy and human development to air and water pollution and climate change, national parks face daily threats that undermine their integrity, ecosystems, wildlife and visitor experiences. Air pollution from outside park boundaries causes hazy views, harms human and ecological health and fuels the climate crisis that stresses nature. Development in and around park landscapes fragments habitat, disrupts wildlife movement and food security along natural corridors, increases runoff that degrades water quality, and allows invasive species to spread. At the same time, policies that have protected parks from air and climate pollution are being repealed and weakened; varied land use regulations governing development around parks exacerbates landscape fragmentation. Join us to learn from advocates working to address these myriad challenges.</p> <p><i>Our audience will learn that parks aren't isolated. Pollution, development and policy decisions beyond their borders threaten ecosystems and wildlife.</i></p>											
<p>Session #18 Room 400A</p> <p>Information Sharing Session Format: TBA</p>	<p>Report on the Unified Vision for Conservation Summit Gary Machlis, Clemson University</p>											
<p>Session #19 Room 406 The Stone Room</p> <p>Core Workshop Session Format: Presentation + Audience Participation</p>	<p>Supporting Outdoor Youth Leadership Programs: Cultural Density Model <i>Presenter: Alexandra Heida</i></p> <p>This workshop focuses on supporting outdoor leadership youth programming through the lens of Social and Environmental Justice in urban areas. The Cultural Density model is designed to help further the scope of barriers to youth inclusion of outdoor leadership programs by offering alternative paths of participation for youth who otherwise would not meet the necessary requirements to safely participate in structured outdoor group activities of mainstream programming. This model attempts to combine aspects of place based programing, relational building, accountability, organizational culture, to create more opportunities for a wider range of youth to participate in outdoor programs. Rather than assessing youth readiness for experiences, this model attempts a youth centric approach to risk management and purpose of program.</p> <p><i>Attendees/audience members will better understand more avenues of youth retention in their organization's outdoor youth programming.</i></p>											
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<p>Session #20 Room 413C</p> <p>Information Sharing Session Format: Contributed Papers</p>	<p>Conservation Solutions II: Coexisting with Wildlife</p>	<p>Kushaga Meshram & Lincoln Larson / Spatial Gradients of Development in the Peripheries of Tiger Reserve in India</p>	<p>Isabelle Staph / Coexisting with mountain lions in rural Nevada</p>	<p>Abhinaya Pathak / Spatiotemporal dynamics, risk patterns, and impacts of human-wildlife conflict in Nepal</p>	<p>OPEN</p>							

REFRESHMENT BREAK 3:00–3:30p (30 minutes) Cold beverages

Wednesday, October 21 3:30–5:00p BREAKOUT SESSIONS

<p>Session #21 Ballroom 413AB</p> <p>Information Sharing Session Format: Panel Discussion</p>	<p>Refoundation: Does Place-Based Conservation in America Need to Start Over? A Report from a Special Issue of the Journal Parks Stewardship Forum Rolf Diamant? Dave Harmon, Rebecca Conard</p>
<p>Session #22 Room 400A</p> <p>Core Workshop Session Format: Hands-on Activity</p>	<p>From Silos to Systems: Training Guides to Integrate Natural and Cultural Heritage in Practice <i>Chair: Jon Kohl, Executive Director, PUP Collaboratory</i></p> <p>Integration of natural and cultural heritage often focuses on dismantling disciplinary silos and building partnerships. While essential, these efforts overlook a less visible but equally important barrier: how guides and guards are trained. Training remains largely reductionist and fragmented, focusing on individual competencies rather than the broader conditions that shape performance. As a result, even well-designed integrative strategies struggle to translate into practice. A holistic training approach addresses this gap by aligning psychological, behavioral, cultural, and institutional domains, enabling guides to operate across nature-culture boundaries and contribute to conservation solutions. This session presents a framework for domain integration and practical steps to design holistic training interventions.</p>
<p><i>Attendees will understand that integration fails not only due to institutional silos and weak partnerships, but because frontline training remains reductionist and fragmented.</i></p>	
<p>Session #23 Room 406 The Stone Room</p> <p>Information Sharing Session Format: Sharing Circle / Affinity Meeting</p>	<p>LGBTQIA2S+: Fostering Community by Sharing Faced Challenges and Successes <i>Chairs: Cait Henry, Board Member, George Wright Society; and Brian Forist, Affinity Group Co-Lead, Indiana University</i></p> <p>This sharing circle will be the second in-person LGBTQIA2S+ affinity meeting, where the co-leads will discuss the challenges and successes from the inaugural year of the group. Most of the time will be spent welcoming current and new folks into the fray to discuss personal challenges and successes navigating spaces as an LGBTQIA2S+ person or an Ally.</p>
<p><i>Attendees/audience members will feel refreshed by joining a community of folks with shared living experiences and feel welcomed in the Affinity Group.</i></p>	

	Session Title & Chair	3:30–3:50p	3:50–4:10p	4:10–4:30p	4:30–4:50p	Q&A
<p>Session #24 Room 413C</p> <p>Information Sharing Session Format: Contributed Papers</p>	<p>What Are They Thinking? Understanding Visitor Perceptions and Expectations</p>	<p>Katie Smith & Ryan Sharp / Sensory Condition Acceptability in Great Smoky Mountains National Park</p>	<p>Sophia Loureiro / Reading the Terrain: ORV User Characteristics and Site Perceptions</p>	<p>Elizabeth Perry & Hunter Lee / Navigating contested pasts: Heritage identity and interpretive shifts at Arlington House</p>	<p>Hardt Bergmann / Artist-in-Residence Programs and the Contemporary State of Art in U.S Public Lands</p>	

AFFINITY MEETINGS 5:00–6:00p

Thursday, October 22 8:30–10:00α BREAKOUT SESSIONS Coffee & tea

<p>Session #25 Ballroom 413AB</p> <p>Core Workshop Session Format: Presentations + Audience Participation</p>	<p>From Leave No Trace to Relational Stewardship: Social-Ecological Approaches <i>Chair: Clara-Jane Blye, Assistant Professor, University of Utah</i></p> <p>Leave No Trace principles have become a global standard for minimizing recreation-related impacts and shaping pro-environmental behaviours. While highly effective at influencing individual actions, current approaches often remain grounded in impact reduction and individual responsibility, limiting their ability to address broader social-ecological challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and inequitable access to outdoor spaces. This interactive workshop introduces relational stewardship as a framework that builds on the strengths of LNT while expanding its relevance for conservation. Drawing on Social-Ecological Systems thinking and Indigenous ways of knowing, relational stewardship positions people as embedded within dynamic ecological and cultural systems, emphasizing reciprocity, responsibility, and connection to place.</p> <p><i>Attendees/audience members will explore how relational stewardship can expand LNT to address equity, connection to land, and social-ecological systems.</i></p>											
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="99 499 332 541">Session Title & Chair</th> <th data-bbox="332 499 532 541">8:30–8:50α</th> <th data-bbox="532 499 732 541">8:50–9:10α</th> <th data-bbox="732 499 932 541">9:10–9:30α</th> <th data-bbox="932 499 1131 541">9:30–9:50α</th> <th data-bbox="1131 499 1331 541">Q&A</th> </tr> </thead> </table>							Session Title & Chair	8:30–8:50α	8:50–9:10α	9:10–9:30α	9:30–9:50α	Q&A
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<p>Session #26 Room 400A</p> <p>Information Sharing Session Format: Contributed Papers</p>	<p>Responding to Climate Change</p>	<p>Rachel Layko et al. / Forecasted development and climate change increase flood risk to Mid-Atlantic battlefield parks</p>	<p>Peizhe Li et al. / Gamification for climate adaptation planning of cultural resources and landscapes</p>	<p>Ann Gallagher / Climate, Management, and Collaboration: Applied Leadership in Extreme Conditions</p>	<p>OPEN</p>							
<p>Session #27 Room 406 The Stone Room</p> <p>Information Sharing Session Format: Panel Discussion</p>	<p>Rooted: An Ecology of Gullah Geechee Memory Along the Coast <i>Chair: Ariel Kimberley, Executive Director, Park Institute of America</i> Panelists: Joshua Jenkins (National Parks Conservation Association); Park Institute of America team; potentially other project collaborators (TBD)</p> <p>“Rooted” is a multimedia storytelling project supported by a 2024 National Park Foundation Inclusive Storytelling grant. Through a short film and interactive virtual exhibit launching in June, the project centers Gullah Geechee voices and explores themes of home and land, language and voice, environment, community and resistance, and art and craft. These stories illuminate the deep interconnections between cultural heritage and coastal ecosystems, while confronting ongoing challenges including climate change, land loss, and systemic inequities. This panel will share the project’s development, partnerships, and outcomes, and consider how storytelling can advance more just, integrated approaches to conserving living cultural landscapes.</p> <p><i>Attendees will learn how storytelling advances equitable conservation and deepen their understanding of the Gullah Geechee Corridor.</i></p>											
<p>Session #28 Room 413C</p> <p>Information Sharing Session Format: Affinity Group Meeting</p>	<p>Publishing for Beginners <i>Chair: Craig Shafer, US National Park Servic (retired); Respondent: Dave Harmon, GWS Executive Director & Co-editor of the open-access journal Parks Stewardship Forum</i></p> <p>Trying to publish an article in a professional venue can be a frustrating experience for first-timers. You may not have an experienced coauthor to help you along. This topic is often not taught in graduate schools, but is learned the hard way. Many questions arise. What type of paper to write for a journal: original research, review, case study, or essay? Which journal to submit to? Dealing with journal gatekeepers, reviewers, and editors? What are the publication alternatives to journals? How to publish a scientific paper will not be addressed, but a few tips will be offered. Come prepared to ask questions.</p> <p><i>Attendees will be less naive and intimidated when seeking to submit their work to publication venues.</i></p>											

REFRESHMENT BREAK 10:00–10:30α (30 minutes) Coffee & tea

Thank you

The George Wright Society acknowledges that the land upon which the University of Tennessee-Knoxville is built is part of the traditional territory of the Tsalagi peoples (now Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, and United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians), Tsoyahá peoples (Yuchi, Muscogee Creek), and Shawnee peoples. We thank them all for taking care of this place down the centuries. GWS also thanks our host institution, the University of Tennessee, for welcoming us to Knoxville.

GWS ParkForum 2026 was planned by a Program Team convened by the GWS. We are deeply grateful to the following Team members, who spent many hours over the past year putting the program together, including evaluating submissions, arranging field trips, and much more:

- Ashley D’Antonio • Chris Groves • Clay Guerry • Cait Henry • Fred Herling • Seth Kannarr • Lydia Kiewra • Linda Mazzu • Ryan Sharp • Alan Spears • Isabelle Staph

About the George Wright Society

GWS honors the legacy of [George Meléndez Wright](#), who founded the science program of the US National Park Service and was the first person of Hispanic heritage to hold a professional position in the agency. We strive to be the premier organization connecting peoples, places, knowledge, and ideas to foster excellence in cultural and natural resource management, research, protection, and interpretation in place-based conservation. Drawing on core values of integrity, respect, inclusion, and collaborative curiosity, we unite diverse communities around a common passion for protecting Earth’s natural and cultural heritage. If you aren’t already a GWS member, please consider joining! Visit us at georgewright society.org.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS & STAFF

- Fred Herling, President • Alan Spears, Vice President • Lara Jacobs, Secretary • Cait Henry, Treasurer
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 Lydia Kiewra & Russell Hicks, Graduate Student Representatives to the Board • STAFF: Dave Harmon, Executive Director • Emily Dekker-Fiala, Conference Coordinator

Thursday, October 22 10:30a–12:00p BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Session #29 Ballroom 413AB Core Workshop Session Format: Presentations + Audience Interaction	<p>Which approaches to live interpretation lead to better participant outcomes? <i>Chair: Robert Powell, Professor, Clemson University</i> Presenters: Marc J. Stern, Virginia Tech Kelley Anderson, Virginia Tech Jess Henry, Clemson University</p> <p>Our team collected data at 419 interpretive programs across 62 NPS units. We systematically observed 70 characteristics of each program related to context, the interpreter, and program design and delivery. We then administered short written surveys to program attendees ages 14 and older that measured three outcomes: (1) Quality Assessment; (2) Resource Connection; and (3) Social Connection. We conducted multiple analyses to determine which characteristics were most strongly associated with each of these outcomes. Key findings highlight the importance of traditional interpretive practices in addition to novel techniques associated with better storytelling, grappling with sticky problems, engaging audiences in meaning-making, and building positive relationships. We will discuss implications for enhancing program delivery and for training.</p> <p><i>Attendees/audience members will learn key principles for live interpretation that if implemented well consistently lead to better visitor outcomes.</i></p>
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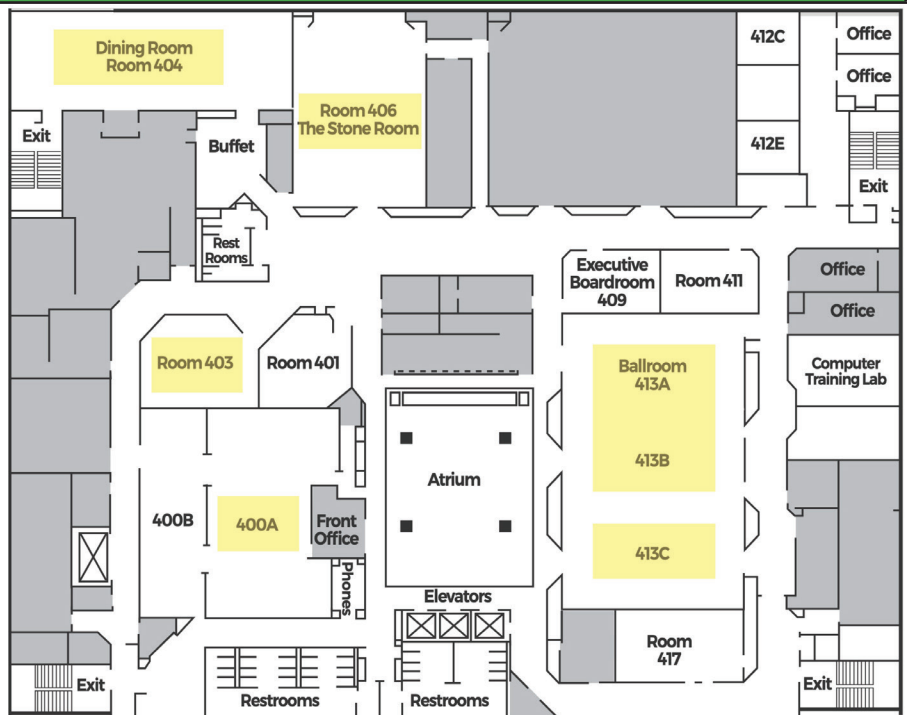
Session #30 Room400A Information Sharing Session Format: Sharing Circle	<p>We Need to Tell a Better Story: Reframing Global Issues Through a Local Lens Elizabeth Metraux, Director of Content Strategy for the UN Foundation Better World Campaign</p> <p>As skepticism toward global cooperation grows, the challenge is not only one of policy, but of language. For years, advocates have led with global impact—conservation wins, international partnerships and big-picture outcomes. That framing is increasingly missing the mark with domestic audiences. This conversation argues for a shift: translating global issues into what they mean closer to home, with a clearer focus on tangible value and economic return—from supply chain stability and disaster response to public health and environmental protection. Drawing on real-world campaign examples and message testing, we explore what resonates, what falls flat, and how reframing global work in local, meaningful terms can help build durable public support for international engagement to protect our shared spaces.</p> <p><i>Attendees will see why global framing falls short—and how local impact messaging can sway public opinion.</i></p>
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	Session Title & Chair	10:30–10:50a	10:50–11:10a	11:10–11:30a	11:30–11:50a	Q&A
Session #31 Room 406 The Stone Room Information Sharing Session Format: Contributed Papers	<p>Conservation Areas Managed by Colleges and Universities</p>	David White & Elizabeth Baldwin / Developing a Spatial Database for Signage Inventory and Management in a University Forest	Elizabeth Baldwin / Academic Forests in the US: building a database of understanding	OPEN	OPEN	

	Session Title & Chair	10:30–10:50a	10:50–11:10a	11:10–11:30a	11:30–11:50a	Q&A
Session #32 Room 413C Information Sharing Session Format: Contributed Papers	<p>Building Mutual Support</p>	Zoey Crossley et al. / Scaled Place Attachment Across Campus Greenspaces	Niki Nicholas & Matt Hudson / Building Backyard Buy-In: Working to Ensure that Gateway Community Members are Park Advocates	Shelby Marocco et al. / People among Plants: Assessments of welcomeness and belonging at a Mid-Michigan Botanical Garden	David Huff / Trail Magic: The Cultural Infrastructure That Sustains Public Lands	

LUNCH BREAK, POSTER TEAR-DOWN 12:00–1:30p (90 minutes)

UT Conference Center 4th Floor
GWS ParkForum meeting rooms highlighted in yellow



Thursday, October 22 1:30–3:00p THE GWS STUDENT SUMMIT

Ballroom 413AB

Student Summit: Introduction & Organization (OPEN TO ALL REGISTRANTS)

Details to come.



REFRESHMENT BREAK 3:00–3:30p (30 minutes) Cold beverages

Thursday, October 23 3:30–5:30p THE GWS STUDENT SUMMIT

Ballroom 413AB

Student Summit: Working Session

Details to come.

POSTER SESSION Monday, October 19, 1:30p through Thursday, October 22, 12:00p

Poster Session

Room 404 Dining Room

Set-up: Monday, October 19,
10:00a–1:30p

Posters available for continuous
viewing between Set-up and
Tear-Down

Poster Reception and time for pre-
senter to stand by their posters:
Tuesday, October 20, 5:00–6:00p

Tear-down: Thursday, October 22,
12:00–1:30p

POSTERS WILL BE ARRANGED IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER BY LEAD AUTHOR'S LAST NAME

Crysler / Metropark delights today and tomorrow: Recreation and conservation draws in Southeast Michigan
Daniell/ From Dispatch to Data: Predictive Modeling & Trends in Search & Rescue in Grand Canyon National Park
Gary Davis & Dorothy Davis / The Photographer's Frame: Visual Stories to Promote National Park Stewardship(DOUBLEWIDE POSTER)
George Wright Society / The Stewardship Archive
George Wright Society/ The RISE Declarations Project

FIELD TRIPS Monday, October 19 & Friday, October 23 (advance registration required)

Monday, October 19 • 8:45a–Noon • Knoxville's Urban Wilderness (\$10) • Trip Leaders: Clay Guerry & Wes Soward

[Knoxville's Urban Wilderness](#) is a national example of how recreation, conservation, and economic development can successfully coexist to enhance quality of life. Envisioned in 2018 and completed in 2026, Urban Wilderness Gateway Park serves as the grand entrance and welcoming front door to the Urban Wilderness system. The park features playgrounds, a bike park, and traditional park amenities designed to serve visitors of all ages and abilities. Our tour of the Urban Wilderness begins here, setting the stage for the diverse outdoor experiences that follow. From the Gateway Park, we will head to Augusta Quarry to explore one of Knoxville's most striking examples of industrial reuse—reimagined today as a vibrant recreational destination that blends the area's industrial heritage with natural beauty and outdoor recreation.

Gather 8:45am at: the workshop Registration Table. We'll then proceed as a group by van to Gateway Parl. • **Bring:** Backpack or similar to carry your water bottle, snacks, other personal items • **Wear:** Appropriate attire/shoes for walking, including warm clothing and/or raingear as necessary • **Difficulty:** Easy. The walking tour will be punctuated with stops. • **Return:** The trip will be back at the Conference Center by 12:00 noon to give participants time for lunch before the Opening Plenary Sessions start at 1:30pm. *The trip will go rain or shine.*

Friday, October 19 • 9:00a–5:00p • Great Smoky Mountains National Park (\$25) • Trip Leaders: Ryan Sharp & Seth Kannarr

[Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#) (official map [here](#)) is one of the world's premier protected areas — and a very crowded place. Our trip to the Smokies will begin with a stop in [Townsend](#), one of the park's three principal gateway communities and least commercialized. We'll stop here for a discussion of their approach to mass tourism before proceeding to a local establishment for lunch (pay on your own). Then we head into the park for the afternoon. The in-park itinerary is still being finalized, but may include a stop at [Elkmont/Metcalf Bottoms](#). When we exit the main park proper via Wear Valley Road, we may stop at the historic [Little Greenbrier Schoolhouse](#) site, and then head back to Knoxville via the [Wears Valley to Walland section of the Foothills Scenic Parkway](#), which is part of the park.

Gather 9:00am at: the main entrance to the UT Conference Center • **Provided:** Transport by UT van • **Bring:** Backpack or similar along with your water bottle, snacks, binoculars, other personal items • We'll have **Lunch** as a group at a local establishment where you can order off the menu (pay on your own) • **Wear:** Appropriate attire/shoes for walking, including warm clothing and/or raingear as necessary • **Difficulty:** Easy. Once within the national park we will make some stops and provide time for participants to take short walks, all easy. • **Return:** The trip will be back at the Conference Center by 5:00pm. *The trip will go rain or shine.*