

**Tuesday, October
20**

Plenary Session III

8:30–9:45a

Ballroom 413ABC

**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”;
- Matthew L. 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”

Karst Landscapes and groundwater flow systems, developed within especially soluble bedrocks such as limestone, are home to caves, sinkholes, underground rivers, and large springs. Tennessee’s karst systems, with more than 12,000 caves known and new ones still being explored, have fabulous diversity of ecosystems, in large part because of the “bonus” underground

landscape where cave-adapted aquatic and terrestrial organisms thrive in complete darkness, along with waters especially rich in calcium and carbon from limestone dissolution. Karst landscapes and their associated ecosystems occur within several of Tennessee's physiographic provinces. Human use in Tennessee also goes back some 5,000 years. This session will bring together three scientists with decades of experience in (and beneath) Tennessee to discuss the physical, ecological, and cultural worlds of Tennessee's karst landscapes.

Refreshment Break •

9:45–10:30a

Breakout Sessions

1–4

10:30a–12:00p

Session #1

Ballroom 413ABC

Science for Stewardship: Visitor Use Monitoring in the National Wildlife Refuge System

Chair: Matt Brownlee,
Professor, Clemson
University

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.

- Matt Brownlee
(Clemson
University) -
Advancing Visitor
Use Management
on National
Wildlife Refuges:
Insights from
USFWS Research
- Mark Gorman
(Clemson
University) - Rec
on the Refuge:
Examining Visitor
Trends in the
National Wildlife
Refuge System
- Kale Wernsing
(Clemson
University) - Data
in Decision-
Making: How
Public Lands Use
General Visitor
Surveys to Inform
Management
Practices
- Jessica Henry
(Clemson

University) -
Giving Merit to
Decisions at
Merritt NWR:
Application of the
VUM Framework
at a High-
Visitation Wildlife
Refuge

Session #2

Room 400A

10:30–11:15a

Book Talk — National Parks and the Supreme Court: Groundbreaking Legal Battles

- Carla Chung
Mattix, Author /
Former NPS
Attorney

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.

11:15a–12:00p

**Discussion &
Reading — Poetry
and Stewardship**

- Gary Machlis,
Clemson
University /
Editor, “Verse in
Place” section of
the journal Parks
Stewardship
Forum

Since 2020, Parks Stewardship Forum has published poems in each issue under a section titled “Verse in Place.” Poems from leading American as well as international poets, along with poetry by young, emerging poets, have been brought to the Forum’s readers. In this session, the Poetry Editor for the journal describes how

poetry and stewardship are intimately linked, and how poems, in the words of Tracy K. Smith are “tools for careful listening.”

Session #3

Room 406, The Stone Room

From Leave No Trace to Relational Stewardship: Social-Ecological Approaches

- Chair: Clara-Jane Blye, Assistant Professor, University of Utah

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. Attendees/audience members will explore how relational stewardship can expand LNT to address equity, connection to land, and social-ecological systems.

Session #4

Room 404

Contributed Papers

Economic Values

Fred Herling, chair

- Levi Tenen /
Should Parks Be Profitable?
- Emma Keinath-Lopez & Melissa Weddell /

Counting the
Uncountable:
Estimating
Visitation and
Visitor Spending
Across 1.5 Million
Acres with Eight
Traffic Counters

- Ryan Sharp &
Justine Cucchiara
/ Tearing Down
Silos: The
Tennessee
Outdoor
Partnership as a
Driver of
Economic
Opportunity
- Madison Janes /
Public Park,
Private
Investment:
Economic Value
Through
Partnership at
Lakeshore Park

Lunch Break

12:00–1:30p

Breakout Sessions 5–8

1:30–3:00p

Session #5

Ballroom 413ABC

Mapping the Motivations and Impacts of NPS Heritage and Nature Volunteers

- Chair: Thomas Bryer, Professor and Director, Old Dominion University, Center for Civic Lands and Democratic Stewardship

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.

Session #6

Room 400A

Which approaches to live interpretation lead to better participant outcomes?

- Chair: Robert Powell, Professor, Clemson University
- Presenters: Marc J. Stern, Virginia Tech
- Kelley Anderson, Virginia Tech
- Jess Henry, Clemson University

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.

Session #7

Room 406, The Stone Room

1:30–2:15p

Four Foundational Lessons from Four Decades with the National Park Service

- Mike Tranel,
USNPS, retired

After a 41-year career with the NPS in 9 different parks and 3 central offices, including roles as park ranger, chief of planning, park superintendent, group superintendent, and finally deputy superintendent of

Yellowstone National Park, I will share 4 major lessons that are instructive for all levels of protected area management.

1. Success in protected area management requires building and maintaining relationships.
2. The NPS often underestimates the value of focusing on the enabling legislation for individual park units when dealing with controversial issues.
3. USNPS has much to share with the international community. At the same time, the agency can learn much from international partners.
4. Your team is critical to your success and the viability of the

protected area you manage. Successful managers recognize potential and enthusiastically invest in developing people.

2:15–3:00p

Smokies All Taxa

Biodiversity

Inventory:

Community

Scientists Informing

Conservation

Decisions

- Will Kuhn,
Director of
Science and
Research,
Discover Life in
America

Introducing the
Smokies ATBI,
highlighting how
community science
contributes to the
inventory, and talking
about a project where
we're crunching
baseline ATBI data

on bees in the Smokies to inform natural resource management.

Session #8

Room 404

Contributed Papers

Conservation

Solutions I:

Biosphere Regions

Chris Groves, Chair

- John Kupfer / Mapping Stakeholder Perceptions of Conservation Benefits & Opportunities in the Congaree Biosphere
- Guilherme Silva et al. / Socio-environmental Vulnerability in US Biosphere Regions
- Tom Gilbert &

Susan
Schexnayder/
How the Great
Smoky Mountains
Region Served as
an Example in the
Creation of the
World Network of
Biosphere
Reserves

- Chris Groves et
al. / 797 Very
Special Places
and Counting:
UNESCO's Man
and the Biosphere
Program Today

Refreshment Break •
3:00–3:30p

Breakout Sessions
9–12
3:30–5:00p

Session #9
Ballroom 413ABC
Contributed Papers

Multiple Values of Parks & Protected Areas

Lincoln Larson, Chair

- Annabelle Mayes et al. / International Perspectives on the Values of Antarctic Wilderness
- Lincoln Larson et al. / Mental health promotion via North Carolina State Parks
- Wes Soward / Knoxville's Urban Wilderness, Connectivity, Culture, Conservation
- Tatyana Feiner & Jason Wong / Understanding the Economic, Environmental, and Health Benefits of Canada's Protected Areas

Session #10

Room 400A

Toward a Unifying Vision of Collaborative Conservation

- Presenter: Gary Machlis, Clemson University

The branches of conservation—from natural resource protection, sustainability, indigenous knowledge, restorative agriculture, historical preservation, and more — work largely independently, often competitively, and sometimes at cross purposes. A more unified vision of conservation is needed to gain leverage and make

progress in the years ahead. A Unifying Vision of Collaborative Conservation “Summit” is being organized for 2027, with the George Wright Society’s assistance and engagement. This session, led by one of the summit organizers, is an opportunity to learn about the unifying vision concept and preparations for the summit.

Session #11

Room 406, The Stone Room

Coastal Resiliency in Practice: Bridging Science, Policy, and Partnerships

- Chair: Ariel Kimberley, Park Inst. of America

The Coastal Resiliency Research Symposium convenes researchers, park managers, policymakers, and community leaders to address urgent challenges facing coastal protected areas. The 2024 symposium highlighted emerging science, policy frameworks, and outreach strategies—from erosion and infrastructure loss to stakeholder-driven adaptation planning. A second symposium in 2026 will expand this work, deepening partnerships and advancing actionable solutions. This presentation will synthesize key findings across convenings,

emphasizing how interdisciplinary collaboration improves resilience outcomes. It will also explore how integrating cultural and natural resource management, alongside community engagement, strengthens long-term conservation in dynamic coastal landscapes.

Session #12

Room 404

New Perspectives from Emerging Researchers: Short Presentations

Ryan Sharp, Chair

- 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

Poster Reception & Stand-by Time

5:00–6:00p

Atrium/Poster

Session Hallway

*Snacks, non-alcoholic
beverages*