



OUTDOOR WRITERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

OUTDOORS UNLIMITED

THE VOICE OF THE OUTDOORS

SPRING 2025

CHATTANOOGA CONFERENCE

Tennessee story leads | p. 20



What editors want, field notes
from Croatia, conservation
feature, board candidate profiles
AND MORE.

OUTDOORS UNLIMITED

SPRING 2025

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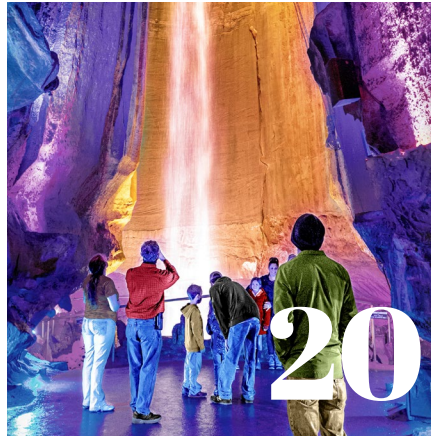
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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Take the pre-tour

I hope that by now you're well aware that our conference will be in Chattanooga, Tennessee, August 19-21. I also hope that you're making plans to join us there and perhaps have already registered (along with some 100 other OWAA members thus far). And I also hope that you've seen some of the amazing pre- and post-conference tour options that are listed in the schedule on our website (owaa.org/2025-conference), which offer a myriad of different adventures around Chattanooga and across the state.

If you are planning to join us, definitely also consider taking one of the pre-tours. Almost all of the ground costs are covered for Active members, they all offer up an array of new story ideas for you to cover and, perhaps best of all, you'll get to connect with other OWAA members before you even step foot in the conference hotel.

One of the great things about a pre-tour (in addition to the amazing hosted hospitality, new discoveries and active outdoor adventures) is connecting with other OWAA members. After all, on a tour like these, you're not simply networking. You are BONDING over shared outdoor experiences, laughing around the campfire, tipping back a cool beverage after a busy day in the backcountry or even just chatting in the shuttle to your next activity.

If you're a longtime member, you're bound to meet someone new (maybe even someone new to the organization who you can help direct on how to best navigate the conference). If this will be your first time attending a conference, or if it's been awhile since you attended, then a pre-tour is an outstanding way to break through into our community. After all (and as noted above), you'll be bonding with four or five or possibly 10 other members over

multiple days. And then you roll into the conference itself with a whole posse of new best friends, ones who will surely introduce you to more attendees during the event!

I mean, it's truly win/win/win. The destination will love to have active media members there to cover their great stories, you get your own wins via new connections and new stories to tell and OWAA wins because, well, we just like making all of our members and partners happy (I mean, it's just what we always try to DO here, everyday).

There are conservation tours, fishing trips, hikes, opportunities to go bouldering, native plant tours, (HELLO!) hang gliding and a bat cave sunset kayak tour? Sign me up! (I kid about signing me up as my pre-tour will be hanging out with our awesome directors and officers during a board meeting. But, by all means, sign yourself up!)

So add a little more time to your investment in OWAA's conference. You'll certainly reap many returns, across numerous fronts.

Oh, and while you're at it, sign up for a post-tour as well. (And hopefully I might be able to join you there too!)

— *With more than 20 years of experience in the outdoor and travel industries, Chesak is the 17th executive director of OWAA.*



Outdoor Writers Association of America

Our mission: improve the professional skills of our members, set the highest ethical and communications standards, encourage public enjoyment and conservation of natural resources, and mentor the next generation of professional outdoor communicators.



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ON THE COVER

COURTESY OF CHATTANOOGA TOURISM | *The sun sets in Chattanooga, Tennessee.*

What we can do



OWAA President Amy Kapp tells the story of America's trails as the editorial director of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and the editor-in-chief of Rails to Trails magazine and the TrailBlog. While at RTC, she has helped edit and produce more than 15 trail guidebooks featuring different U.S. regions. Other professional experiences include serving as a communications strategist and content creator for various entities, including the National Recreation and Park Association, Parks & Recreation magazine and YouthBuild.

Amy D. Kapp

Amy Kapp
OWAA President

I grew up in rural Pennsylvania on a 24-acre wooded property just north of Pittsburgh. It was a privilege, though I took it for granted as a kid, to walk outside each day and immerse myself in nature, explore the creek, spot the wildlife, do campfires and cookouts, have snowball fights with my brothers (one particularly hard snowball to my face still haunts me) and “help” my dad saw downed trees to feed our wood-burning indoor furnace.

It was also a way to embrace the community. We held endless picnics. My parents, not hunters themselves, often welcomed friends eager to catch a turkey or a buck in season. And of course, the land made the perfect sports field for the neighborhood kids. During the day — soccer, capture the flag. At night — a hide-and-seek game with flashlights, colloquially known as, ahem, “bloody murder.”

It was this exposure that first made me understand how impactful the outdoors can be, that shaped my education and life direction and that continues to inspire me as an editor and storyteller. And as we navigate great change to our industry and in America, I’ve been asking myself how I can effectively further support the outdoors, our parks and our public lands. Right now, I have more questions than answers; still, the popular saying “Now more than ever...” doesn’t feel overused. It feels true.

Now more than ever, we must communicate and share the joy and impact of being outside. Adventure, adrenaline, beauty, nature, living off the land, catching our own food, personal challenges, mental respite, physical health, spiritual renewal — they are things we seek outside, and our personal experiences will continue to inspire those new to nature, as well as the next generations. We must aggressively continue to engage them and invite them to participate.

Now more than ever, we need to elevate the outdoor industry’s impact on our communities to decision-makers. A report released in 2024 by the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable stated that hunting, fishing, bicycling, boating, canoeing and kayaking, skiing, RVing and other pursuits collectively generated \$1.2 trillion in economic output and accounted for some 5 million jobs, surpassing many other American industries.

A recent Australian study posed that access to green space could be worth \$140 million a year in reduced health-care costs, and a report by Rails to Trails Conservancy in 2019 found that if America’s trail and active transportation networks were built out, it could result in \$138 billion+ annually in economic activity while making it significantly safer for children and families to walk and bike.

Now more than ever, we must stay connected. When I am with my colleagues, I am constantly learning, constantly inspired by their work, constantly motivated. By staying connected, our industry will be stronger. In a speech at a recent OWAA conference, I called everyone in the audience superheroes. I meant it. You are all superheroes with a “pen,” with a camera, with a recorder, with a mission.

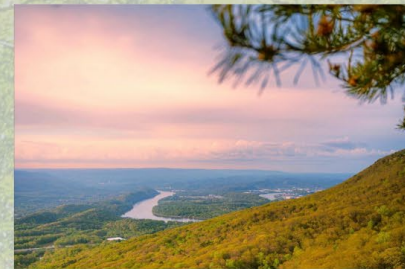
To engage others in the things we love most — to support and defend the things we love most through our work: It’s a true privilege of our profession. I look forward to continuing this journey with you.

P.S. If you haven’t yet, be sure to register for OWAA’s 2025 conference in Chattanooga (owaa.org/conference)! Come connect with hundreds of your peers!



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ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

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Individual media can:

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- Hear from editors and industry leaders

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Brands (such as gear companies, destinations, accommodations and service providers) have ample opportunities to connect with media as attendees, exhibitors and/or sponsors.

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OVERGRAZING AND SAGE GROUSE DON'T MIX

Grass for the grouse

BY CHRIS MADSON

On the morning of May 29, 1843, John Fremont rode out of the little village of Kansas City, Missouri, with Tom “Broken Hand” Fitzpatrick as his guide and 38 other hard-bitten veterans of the frontier, bound for Oregon and California on a mission that was part exploration and part empire-building. After reconnoitering along the Front Range of the Colorado Rockies and recruiting, on the way, his friend and deeply knowledgeable mountain man, Kit Carson, Fremont turned north toward the Platte River and South Pass, the gateway to the Pacific.

On August 5, his party had found its way into Wyoming’s Shirley Basin, a broad sage-covered plain north of what is now the little town of Medicine Bow.

“The surrounding country appeared to be well stocked with buffalo,” he wrote in his report, “which it was probable, after a day or two, we would not see again until our return to the Mississippi waters. I determined to make here a provision of dried meat, which would be necessary for our subsistence in the region we were about entering, which is said to be nearly destitute of game.”

**Photos by Chris Madson*



Fremont was only repeating what Carson and several of the other experienced mountain men in his party had told him — that the country west of the Great Divide was short on buffalo. As the party continued into Idaho, Utah, Oregon and California, Fremont was to discover the truth in their observations. After many adventures and several brushes with starvation, the expedition headed back east the following spring. On June 11, 1843, they had come as far as the Continental Divide in what is now central Colorado.

“In the course of the morning,” he recorded in his journal, “we had the first glad view of buffalo, and welcomed the appearance of two old bulls with as much joy as if they had been messengers from home ... The hunters killed two fine cows near the camp. On the opposite river-plains herds of buffalo were raising clouds of dust.”

The question of where the buffalo roamed in early America has occupied generations of academics. Much has been written about the easternmost range of the bison, but remarkably little attention has focused on bison in the Intermountain West. It’s clear that the heart of buffalo country lay in the prairie fastness between the Mississippi River and the easternmost ramparts of the Rockies, but reports like Fremont’s have led some ecologists to assume that there were no bison much west of the Continental Divide.

Dr. Donald Grayson, ecologist and archaeologist with the University of Washington, has a more nuanced view based on concrete evidence from the past.

“Archaeological and paleontological records document that bison were widespread in the eastern and northern parts of the Great Basin, particularly after 1600 yr BP,” he writes.

“The relatively small numbers of bison specimens that are generally provided by these sites suggests the existence of small herds of these animals, as opposed to the huge agglomerations that characterized the Great Plains during early historic times.” Grayson’s research suggests that bison were relatively recent arrivals in the Great Basin, that they weren’t found everywhere in the Basin, and that they weren’t very abundant anywhere.

Ecologists Richard Mack and John Thompson have pointed out that weather patterns in the Great Basin encourage

most range plants to grow in early spring and become dormant during the drier summer months, which would deprive bison of nutritious forage at a time when calves are starting life. The two researchers also considered the strange difference in distribution of native dung beetles on the plains and in the basin — it seems there were always plenty of dung beetles east of the Continental Divide where there have always been lots of buffalo ... and no dung beetles in the Intermountain country. No buffalo, no dung, no beetles.

“Perhaps small herds persisted in the steppe west of the Rockies only by withdrawing to sites of permanent water during the summer,” they conclude. “Nevertheless, bison herds in recent times certainly did not reach the numbers seen in the Great Plains in the early nineteenth century.”

The distinction between bison on the Great Plains and bison in the Great Basin has a practical corollary far beyond the lack of fresh meat for explorers like Fremont: The grasslands on the Great Plains were adapted to periodic heavy grazing by huge wandering herds of cattle-sized ungulates; the grasslands of the Great Basin were not. From a strictly ecological point of view, the introduction of cattle on the Great Plains after wild bison herds had been wiped out was little more than the substitution of one heavy-footed grazing animal for another. In the Great

Basin, the arrival of cattle and sheep was an entirely new ecological phenomenon.

Before cattle, the dominant grasses growing alongside the Great Basin’s sagebrush were bunchgrasses that depended on establishing new plants by seed. The bare ground surrounding these tufts of grass was generally covered by a living crust of lichens, mosses and cyanobacteria. As cattle grazed, they nipped off the tops of the grasses, destroying the seed heads, reducing reproduction, and often uprooting the plants themselves. At the same time, they trampled the soil crust into dust, encouraging erosion, decreasing the supply of fixed nitrogen and exposing the soil underneath to increased evaporation. Sheep added to the grazing impact by browsing on shrubs as well as eating grass. By 1909, there were more than 6,000,000 sheep on the range in Wyoming alone, more than 700,000 cattle and 153,000 horses. The effect on rangeland was predictable.

By themselves, the vast herds and flocks of livestock reduced the amount of food and shelter the native plants offered wildlife, and, as native vegetation weakened, the advent of farming along with ranching brought another ecological sledgehammer to the Intermountain West — cheatgrass. The ecological impact of cheatgrass is a huge topic in itself. Here, it’s enough to say that cheat was introduced accidentally and, occasionally, on purpose. It probably arrived in contami-

nated lots of small-grain seed, in straw bedding for livestock shoveled out of rail cars and in the guts and manure of cattle and sheep themselves. It was even planted on purpose to produce fast-growing livestock forage. It was well adapted to the winter rains and summer droughts of the Intermountain West and probably would have gained a foothold even in the absence of grazing, but the massive range abuse inflicted by cattle and sheep from the 1870s well into the 20th century created ideal conditions for its spread.

In the history of invasive weeds, few plants have achieved such total domination of entire landscapes in so short a time. In 1992, it was estimated that 3.3 million acres of rangeland in the Intermountain West had been overrun with cheatgrass and associated invasives, and another 62 million acres were at risk of invasion. Since then, new invasions have been occurring at the rate of more than 500,000 acres per year.

So what does all this have to do with sage grouse? If there is one common denominator in four generations of sage grouse research, it is that sage grouse need sage. The birds depend on sagebrush and the native grasses and other plants underneath for cover and much of their food — they are, in the parlance of the ecologist, sagebrush obligates. Eliminate sagebrush, and you eliminate sage grouse. By 1900, much of the sagebrush that remained on the landscape was hardly fit to support livestock, let alone the wildlife that depended on it. In 1904, Wyoming’s wildlife officials estimated that there were only 5,000 pronghorn on the state’s primary antelope range. Sage grouse numbers had collapsed. According to the Wyoming state game warden at the time, “Sage grouse have decreased at an alarming rate ... The destruction of sage hens may justly be charged to excessive shooting and destruction of eggs and young broods by the large bands of range sheep.”

A generation later, the pioneering Wyoming sage grouse researcher George Girard saw the situation in about the same way.

“Many sections of the state, at one time favorable for the production of sage grouse, have been converted through agricultural development into areas of intensive farming and grazing,” he wrote in 1937. “The effect of this competition in its natural range, combined with the lack of protection from hunters, has resulted in the depletion of this game bird to a level which will require drastic measures for insurance of its restoration.”

Sage grouse hunting was controlled by the late 1930s — several states closed their sage grouse seasons entirely, and when they were reopened, wildlife agencies had the enforcement personnel to make seasons and bag limits stick. At the same time, the Taylor Grazing Act imposed strict new limits on grazing in the public domain. The combination led to a renaissance in sage grouse numbers, at least where sagebrush cover still existed. Still, the birds never rebounded to the astonishing densities the sage had supported before settlement. George Bird Grinnell, an eminent naturalist with long experience on the western frontier, was never fond of exaggeration. In the fall of 1886, he was camped in Wyoming’s Shirley Basin, the far eastern edge of sage grouse range. He woke one morning to the sound of wings.

“Looking up from the tent at the edge of the bluff above us, we could see projecting over it the heads of hundreds of the birds, and, as those standing there took flight, others stepped forward to occupy their places. The number of Grouse which flew over the camp reminded me of the oldtime flights of Passenger Pigeons that I used to see when I was a boy. Before long the narrow valley where the water was, was a moving mass of gray. I have no means whatever of estimating the number of birds which I saw, but there must have been thousands of them.”

By the early 20th century, the unrelenting intensity of grazing had prepared the way for outright loss of huge tracts of sage to cheatgrass and devastated the sagebrush habitats that remained. Half the original habitat of the sage grouse was simply erased. It’s a legacy of ignorance and greed left to us by the generations of stockmen and farmers who first tamed the Intermountain West.

I think it’s fair to say that many modern ranchers share a concern for the sage



and the wildlife it supports. For some, their only reason is the lingering threat of a federal listing of the sage grouse and/or another denizen of the sage, like the pygmy rabbit or Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, as threatened or even endangered. Others have a stake in the land that transcends business. Either way, they want guidance on grazing practices that provide for sage grouse. The question then arises: What sort of grazing regime suits sage grouse? Is it even possible to keep healthy populations of sage grouse and profitable numbers of cattle on the same landscape, and, if it is, how?

Even after decades of research, the shocking answer seems to be: We don’t really know.

In 1937, Girard wrote: “An ideal sage grouse refuge would also necessarily have to be protected from grazing of any sort,” but he added, “if deferred grazing were practiced, giving the grass and other forage an opportunity to develop, it would furnish food and cover and consequently nesting areas.”

In his 1952 monograph on sage grouse, Bob Patterson made a distinction between grazing and overgrazing. “As a result of overgrazing by sheep, a small parcel of land at the lower end of Eden Valley lost its attractiveness as a nesting area for sage grouse,” but “there is no indication that moderate utilization of the range in the upper Green River Basin by sheep had created any conditions seriously detrimental to sage grouse.”

In 1994, a group of Oregon researchers monitored 124 sage grouse nests. Only 18 of the nests escaped the notice of predators, and these successful nests had “greater cover of tall, residual grasses and medium height shrubs” than nests that had been destroyed by predators. Our data indicated the value of residual grass cover at sage grouse nests.”

A 1998 study in southern Wyoming found that “areas with greater shrub cov-





erage, taller grass and residual grass, and greater litter cover were used for nesting.” The researchers went on to observe that “our results suggest that grazing management practices that promote increased height and coverage of grass will increase chick survival.” They recommended “maintaining residual grass heights of more than 10 centimeters to provide nesting sage grouse with suitable concealment and screening cover.”

In 2005, yet another group of researchers found that sage grouse preferred to nest in places that had more shrub canopy, residual grass cover and grass height. They concluded that “management strategies that protect dense sagebrush stands and enhance residual grass cover and height within those stands should be used to increase nesting success of greater sage grouse.”

Other studies have reached the same conclusions. The evidence is overwhelming — sage grouse prefer to nest and raise broods in stands of sage that have a thriving understory of grasses and broad-leaved plants. This makes intuitive sense. Grass cover helps hide a nesting hen from predators, provides escape cover for chicks after they hatch, and supports a smorgasbord of insects, seeds and foliage to feed the growing brood. If a little grass/forb cover is good, it would seem that more would be better. In ecosystems that evolved with no significant herds of large grazing animals, the science suggests that the way to produce the most sage grouse would be to eliminate herds of

large domestic grazing animals entirely. Two long-term studies, one in Idaho and one in eastern Montana, have tried to quantify the effects different grazing regimes have on sage grouse. After a decade of research in each place, neither study offers much guidance for a rancher interested in supporting the birds. Is it better to rest a sagebrush pasture first thing in the spring when sage grouse are nesting, or is it preferable to leave some forage standing at the end of the growing season so there will be cover before the forage starts to grow the next spring? These studies provide little insight. Is it better to rest a pasture for a year or more? What about rest-rotation grazing? Is there some optimum level of grazing that supports livestock and grouse at the same time? The studies offer few answers, except to imply that, when managed “responsibly,” grouse and grazing seem to go together without much problem.

That’s a convenient conclusion, since it relieves ranchers and land managers like the BLM of any responsibility for the ongoing decline in sage grouse numbers. But it flies in the face of a huge body of research at the scale of the individual nesting hen and ignores the history of livestock’s impact on grouse in the early 20th century. The apparent contradiction is troubling.

It’s worth noting that stricter control of grazing on the public domain, beginning in the late 1930s, combined with effective regulation of hunting, gave sage grouse a boost that lasted more than 30 years. The

renewed decline in the last decades of the 20th century seems to be due, at least in part, to another influence. We know that sage grouse do better when the sage gets more precipitation, and a quick look at the data on drought shows that the last 50 years have been much drier than the 50 years that preceded them. A lack of moisture takes a toll on everything in the sage, from grass and forbs to livestock and wildlife like pronghorn and grouse. So maybe we can blame the decline on climate change.

But that doesn’t relieve us of our responsibility as managers. We can’t make it rain, but we can adjust livestock grazing pressure as conditions change, especially on the public domain. A recent analysis shows that 56,000,000 acres of range under the aegis of the Bureau of Land Management have failed to meet the agency’s own standards for ecological health, which are not known to be overly stringent. On at least 37,000,000 of those acres, overgrazing is the cause, and on much of the rest, a long history of range abuse has almost certainly encouraged cheatgrass and contributed to the problem. Whatever effect well-managed grazing might have on sage grouse, we know from history that persistent range abuse is bad for grouse and other wildlife and no better for ranchers in the long haul.

There’s a lot we still don’t know for certain about the interaction between sage grouse and livestock in the Intermountain West. The best way to change that is with long-term peer-reviewed research. Until we have dependable answers from that effort, we should pay attention to what science already tells us and leave more grass for the grouse.

— An OWAA member since 1978, Chris Madson is a certified wildlife biologist and has had more than 30 years of experience in wildlife conservation and management.

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FIELD NOTES FROM CROATIA AND FOUR PRESS TRIP TIPS

BY EMILY LOUINA COOK | ALFRED, MAINE

Croatia may not be on your radar as an eminent travel destination. This is the case for most American travelers, although the Croatia Tourism Board reports an increase in recent years. When it is in the consciousness of Western travelers, credit usually goes to Game of Thrones film location notoriety ... shame. But Croatia has more to offer than CGI dragon backgrounds. I'm here to place "the land of 1,000 islands" in the forefront of your vacation cortex, especially if you want a watery adventure.

Croatia boasts a coastline of more than 3,600 miles (5,800 kilometers) in the Adriatic Sea. As part of the Mediterranean, the mild winters and dry summers make Croatia a comfortable destination even in winter months. From December through February, the average high is 45 degrees Fahrenheit (7 degrees Celsius). During the peak tourist season of June through August, count on temperatures in the 80s F (upper 20s and lower 30s C).

Croatia has more than 1,000 islands, many of which are uninhabited and make for pristine views. Populated islands offer a blend of active excursions and restful beach days. Between dips in the sea, sip Pošip (the best white wine you've never had) on the island of Korčula, or beguile your tastebuds with an olive oil tasting on Brač Island. Both islands are home to indigenous and rare grape and olive varieties.

Croatia's Dalmatian coast is a good spot to island hop from whilst immersing yourself in a culinary hot spot. Strolling the streets, you will be mesmerized with the blend of old and new.



ABOVE: Grapevines on Korčula. Photo by Emily Louina Cook



ABOVE: Map replica at the Marco Polo Museum in Korčula. Photo by Emily Louina Cook

A traditional fishing dinghy may be moored next to neon jet skis for rent in the Makarska Riviera, while renovated historical buildings house restaurants, shops and hotels. There is even a hostel in Diocletian's Palace in the city of Split, which will help you stretch your budget for all the delicious regional and international food to fuel your activities.

Lucky observers may see an endangered Mediterranean monk seal or a periska, a giant clam.

Sea temperatures average a range of 60-80 F (15-26 C), and the pebbled beaches make for surprisingly clear water. Open-water swimmers, scuba divers and snorkelers will rejoice in this destination with unique species and history. Lucky observers may see an endangered Mediterranean monk seal or a periska, a giant clam reaching 47 inches (119 centimeters) in width. Remarkably, Korčula is the only place in the world where you can swim over a 7,000-year-old neolithic site.

Dive into history even more on Korčula at the Marco Polo Museum. The notorious explorer is thought to hail from the island. It is no coincidence that water polo is so popular in the region. You can watch games or practices off select piers, some of which conveniently create competition pool dimensions. An indoor community pool is also available for lap swimming and group training, making the island a suitable location for swimming groups.

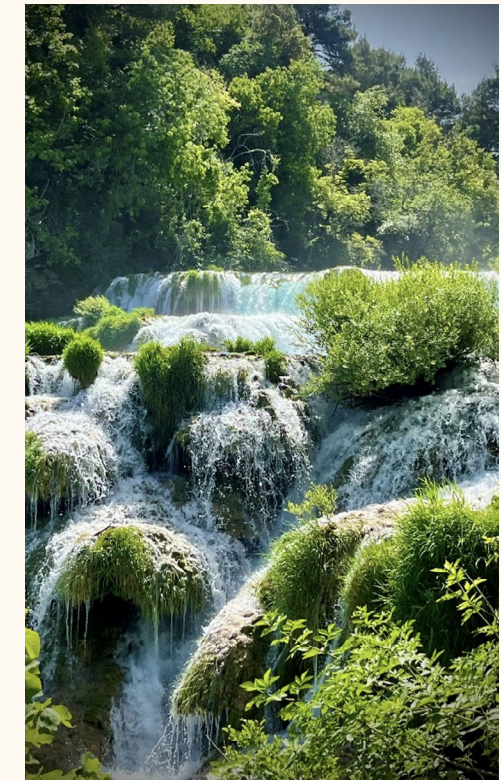
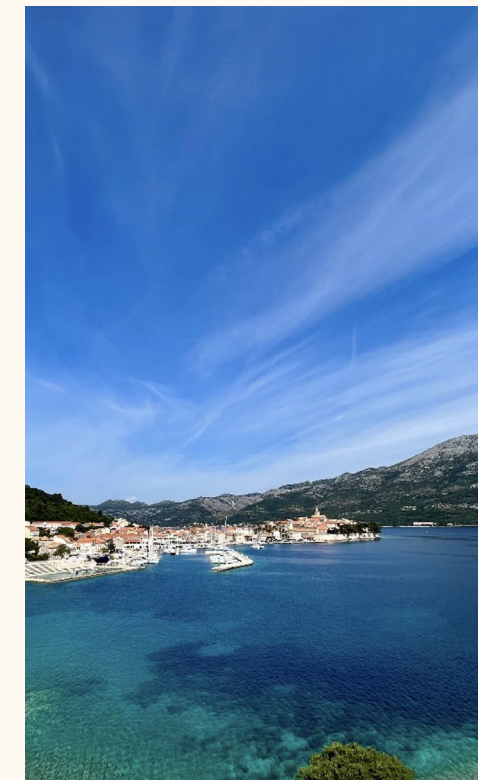
Despite the impressive coastal offerings of "Tomato Croatia," freshwater fanatics will find options from the northern "Potato Croatia" to the southern islands. With approximately 50 lakes and rivers to choose from, fisherfolk and those who get salty about salt water will be placated. Fly-fishing notables include grayling, Danube salmon and multiple trout species, including the native soft-mouthed trout.

Contact: Croatia Tourism Board, info.US@croatia.hr

BELOW LEFT: Kayaking Korčula. Photo by Steven Schwartz

BELOW MIDDLE: Korčula's water polo pier from a distance. Photo: Emily Louina Cook

BELOW RIGHT: Waterfalls in Krka National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Photo by Emily Louina Cook



PRO TIPS

1. Bring an adapter to charge devices — don't count on USB ports.
2. Trains offer discounts for members of the press but are notoriously unreliable. My six-hour trip did not have Wi-Fi or charging stations.
3. Don't limit yourself to a round-trip ticket. Fly in and out of different airports to see the most. Ferry service is available for most of the islands and major ports.
4. To avoid crowds, visit during the shoulder seasons of May or October. The ocean water will be warmer in October.

— Emily Louina Cook is a freelancer with an inordinate fondness of travel and aquatic. An author, artist and environmental educator, her work spans cultural and biogeographical limits.

CRAIG BIHRLE | PARK RAPIDS, MINNESOTA

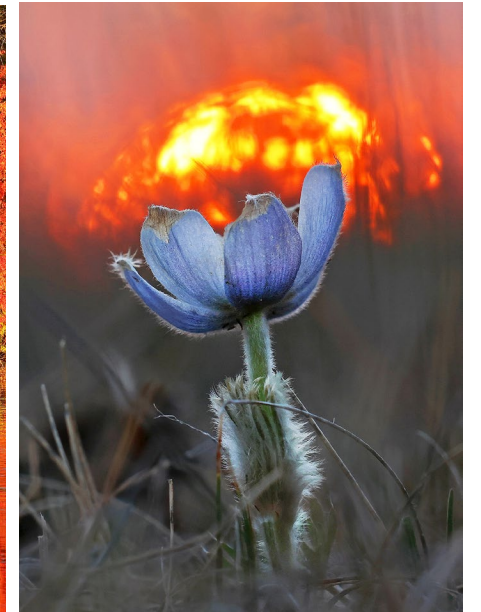
Craig Bihrlé got his start in journalism as a weekly newspaper reporter and editor in central Minnesota. That experience, along with a love for hunting, fishing and the outdoors, transitioned into a long career as a writer, photographer and then communications supervisor for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department in Bismarck. He retired in summer 2020 and has since moved back to Minnesota, where he still writes and photographs from his home near Park Rapids.

Ice fishing in western Minnesota

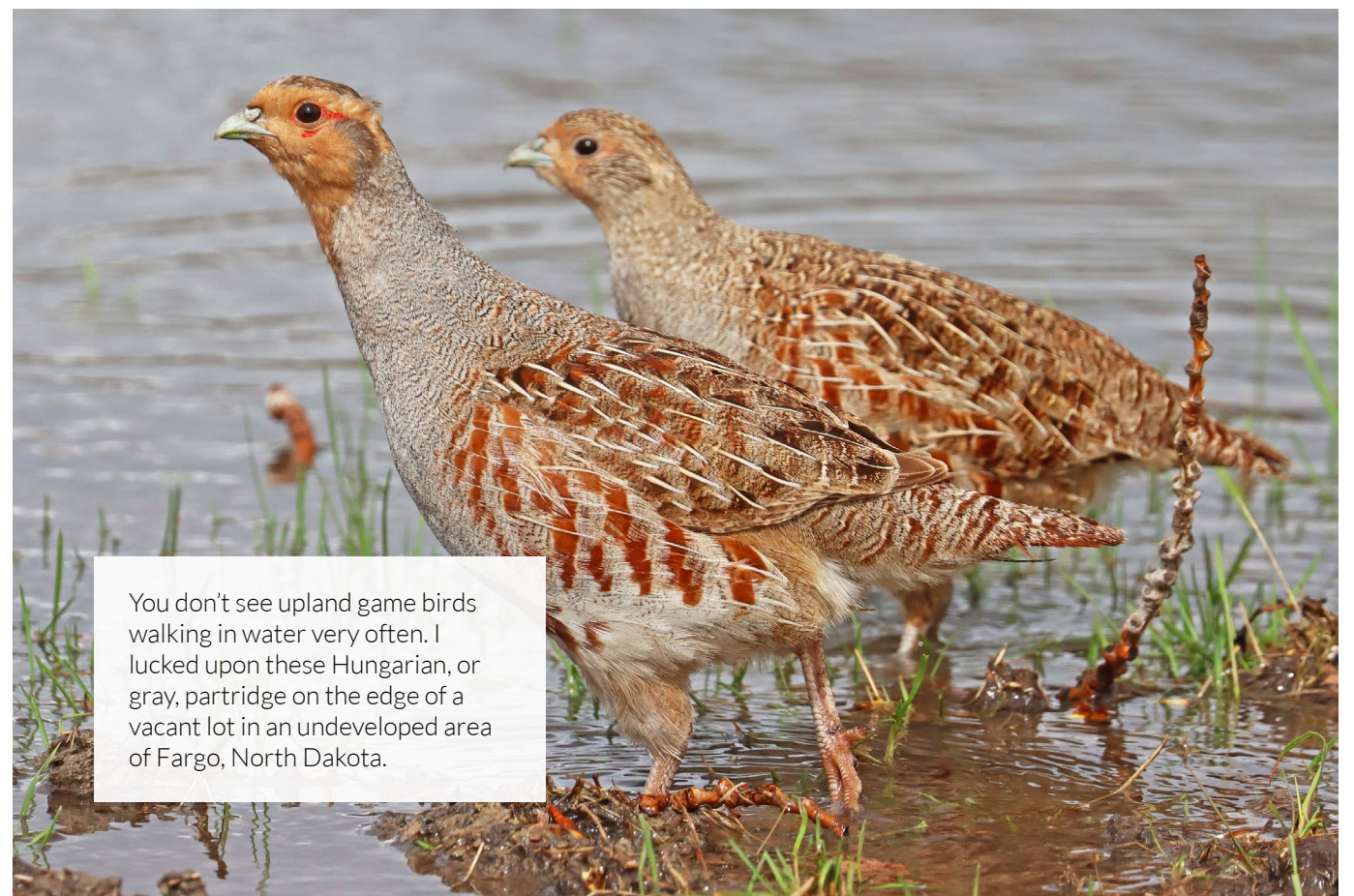
When I was working for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, our business card featured the phrase “Variety in Hunting and Fishing,” and as such, I had the opportunity to photograph many subjects in all seasons. These days, I still have that “variety” mindset and photograph just about anything related to the outdoors, either on planned outings or things I run across by random luck. The photos in this portfolio, all taken within the past couple of years, reflect that variety.



ABOVE LEFT: Kayakers enjoy a colorful October morning along the Mississippi River running through Anoka, Minnesota.



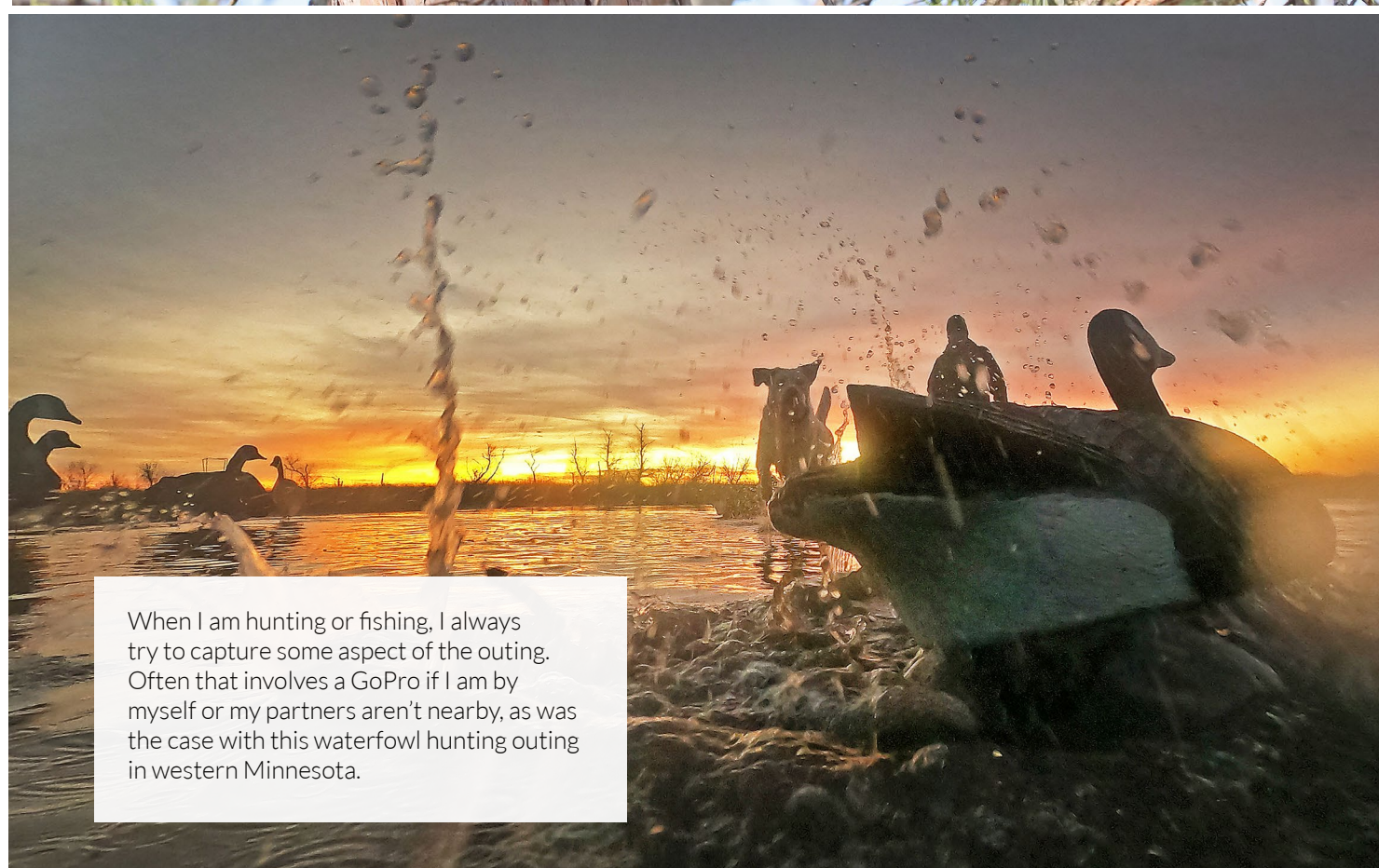
ABOVE RIGHT: Living in central North Dakota, I found readily accessible native prairie that sprouted crocus or pasque flowers in spring. On this shoot, I was looking for a hilltop that had some flowers blooming in just the right spot so I could line them up with the setting sun. I found the spot, and in the second year of visiting it, I got about 30 seconds to frame this shot before the sun went back under the clouds.



You don't see upland game birds walking in water very often. I lucked upon these Hungarian, or gray, partridge on the edge of a vacant lot in an undeveloped area of Fargo, North Dakota.



A call from a neighbor alerted me to the presence of a black bear and two cubs near our cabin. It took some maneuvering to get a clean shot through the tree branches, but the bear didn't seem too concerned.



When I am hunting or fishing, I always try to capture some aspect of the outing. Often that involves a GoPro if I am by myself or my partners aren't nearby, as was the case with this waterfowl hunting outing in western Minnesota.

Outdoor gear spotlight

EDITOR PICKS

BY SUZANNE DOWNING | ALBERTON, MONTANA

The outdoor gear featured in this section is field-tested gear that I recommend. I've also added PR contacts for people I've had positive experiences working with, and these gear representatives are looking to connect with more outdoor writers. So, if you're interested in field-testing any of the items in this article, or you have an assignment or gear round-up coming up that might be a good fit, send these reps a note. Reach out and start building relationships.



OPINEL NOMAD OUTDOOR CAMPING FOLDING KNIFE AND UTENSIL KIT

This kit has sharp 12C27 stainless-steel blades and classic beechwood handles. The Yatagan-style blade (shaped like a Turkish saber) slices smoothly. Made in France, this compact kit can be used for chopping veggies and slicing steak. The set includes a 5-inch serrated folding knife, a 4-inch folding corkscrew knife, a 2.25-inch pocket peeler, an 8-by-4.75-by-0.5-inch beechwood cutting board and a 16-by-16-inch microfiber cleaning cloth. (MSRP: \$89)

PR Contact: Tyler Sims
tyler@jamcollective.net



NOCS PROVISIONS X BIRD COLLECTIVE FIELD ISSUE 8 X 32 BINOCULARS

These binoculars are great for tracking wildlife before you unclip your camera. They have crisp Porro Bak4 prisms (which means high-quality glass) and fully multicoated lenses (special layers that reduce glare and scratches) to give you a super clear, wide view — like looking through a clean window at wildlife 387 feet away, without any blurriness or distortion. They're also lightweight at just over a pound with a rugged, nonslip housing. They'll hold up in rain and unpredictable terrain. The oversized focus wheel is nice when you're juggling gear and trying to capture movement fast. The grip also feels nice in your hands and you can choose from a couple of color options. Waterproof, fogproof and backed by a "No-Matter-What" warranty, these are built for the long haul. (MSRP: \$195)

PR Contact: Tess Barker
tess@echoscomm.com

TETON SPORTS SIERRA 16-FOOT CANVAS TENT

If you need a waterproof tent for your basecamp for a week or two, this bell-style tent is great for those extended stays. And you can set it up easily on your own. The outside is 100% cotton (waterproof-coated) canvas and the tent has a zip-away floor so you can turn it into a canopy. It's 16 feet in diameter and will easily fit your camp furniture through the extra-wide door — think cots, tables and chairs. It also has a zippered "e-port" if you need power access. The four interior gear organizers help stow gear off the floor, the four windows give you nice ventilation and the reinforced floor seams are sealed to keep out water. Overall this tent vents well and is made with high-quality fabric that's built to last. It's an investment for sure, but if you're looking to upgrade your basecamp tent, this tent is a good choice. (MSRP: \$899)

PR Contact: Diana Risetto
diana@thatcherandco.com



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ADVENTURE SCIENTIST

BY BRITTANY KIMMER | BOONE, NORTH CAROLINA

Recently, I hiked the Hawksbill Mountain Trail in Linville Gorge, part of Pisgah National Forest in North Carolina, where I had the opportunity to monitor the health of eastern hemlock trees, a conifer species native to the region. I thoroughly enjoyed taking in the stunning views from the summit as well! Here's a recap of my experience and the meaningful impact this project brings to the trail.

FEBRUARY 20, 2025 Golden hour among the hemlocks: 5:30 p.m.

The air is crisp as I set out on the Hawksbill Mountain Trail, the fading sunlight casting long shadows through the trees. Unlike most hikes that begin with a climb and end with a descent, this one has a different rhythm: an evening ascent timed for the sunset at the summit! The trail winds through Pisgah National Forest, where towering eastern hemlock trees stand as silent sentinels along the path. Once thriving across the Appalachians, these trees now face an uncertain future. This is due to the hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA), a tiny but destructive invasive insect that feeds on the sap of eastern hemlock trees, slowly weakening and killing them by preventing essential nutrient absorption.

Tracking the trees on the climb up: 5:45 p.m.

Tonight's hike is about more than just the view. As a volunteer for the Adventure Scientists 2025 Tracking Eastern Hemlock Project, I'm here to monitor these trees. That entails tracking their health and presence in this rugged landscape.

The golden light filters through the canopy as I hike deeper into the forest. The hemlocks here vary, some still lush and full, while others show thinning nee-

dles and white woolly clusters that signal an infestation. I pause at one particularly large eastern hemlock and press my hand against its rough bark. It's holding on, but for how long? I document my findings, noting the location and signs of HWA in the TreeSnap application. This data will help scientists better understand eastern hemlock distribution and response to hemlock woolly adelgid infestation to guide future conservation efforts.

The trail continues upward, its rocky switchbacks revealing glimpses of the Linville Gorge through the trees. The climb is steady but manageable, allowing time to reflect. These trees provide critical shade for streams, shelter for wildlife and stability for the forest floor. Without them, the landscape would change in ways we can't fully predict. That's why volunteering for this project and carefully observing my surroundings truly matters.



Reaching the summit: 6:15 p.m.

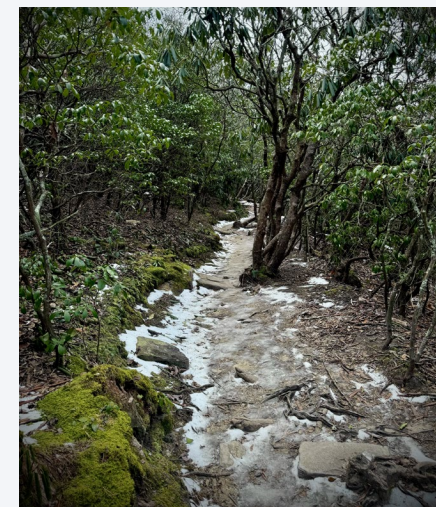
The trees begin to thin, and the sky opens up ahead. A final push leads me to the summit, where the view stretches endlessly across the Blue Ridge Mountains. Layers of rolling ridges fade into the horizon, bathed in hues of orange, pink and deepening blue. I find a quiet spot on the rocky outcrop, unpack my small camping stove and heat water for tea.

Steeping reflections: 6:20 p.m.

As the sun dips lower, I sip slowly, letting the warmth spread through my hands. The world feels still in this moment. It's just me, the mountains and the hemlocks standing silently below. I think about the generations of hikers who have stood here before me, looking out over the same landscape, unaware of the quiet battle happening in the forest below. Will future visitors still see these hemlocks standing strong?

Descending in the twilight: 7:00 p.m.

The stars begin to emerge as I start my



descent. The trail feels different in the fading light. It's quieter and the atmosphere is more introspective, which I find blissful. I pass the same hemlocks I tracked on the way up, their silhouettes standing tall against the twilight. They've weathered centuries of change, and yet their future remains uncertain. As I make my way down, I remind myself that even small efforts, such as tracking, documenting and raising awareness, can help protect these ancient trees. Conservation starts with observation, and any amount of effort to help is a positive step toward a future where these forests endure.

To learn more about Adventure Scientists and how you can get involved, visit adventurescientists.org.

To apply to become a volunteer with Adventure Scientists, complete a brief online training that prepares you for the experience and outlines how to collect high-quality observations. Every project with Adventure Scientists has these components and ongoing team support as you head out into the field.

— Brittany Kimmer is a trained Adventure Scientist volunteer.

OWAA PROPOSED 2025 BYLAWS REVISIONS

Bylaws Amendment Proposal 1

To allow appointment to serve on the nominating committee after three rather than five years of not serving on it, in order to alleviate recent difficulties in filling this committee.

The first sentence of the paragraph in section 9.2 of the bylaws that begins with the words "The Nominating Committee" shall be reworded by replacing the second occurrence of the word "five" with the word "three," so that as amended the sentence shall read:

The Nominating Committee shall be comprised of the Directors in the second year of their terms, one of whom shall be designated as committee chair by the President, and five other members nominated by the President, none of whom has served on the committee within the prior three years.

Bylaws Amendment Proposal 2

To require membership meetings to occur during July and to make all officer and director terms begin and end at a board meeting in August.

Paragraph 5.1 shall be amended by replacing "around mid-year" with "during July."

The second sentence of paragraph 6.3 shall be re-worded to say: "One such meeting shall be held during August, at which the newly elected Directors shall take office and any new Officers required shall be elected and take office, and if the annual conference occurs during August, such board meeting may be held at the conference."

Bylaws Amendment Proposal 3

To give the board greater flexibility in some circumstances for replacing directors who are absent from meetings.

The first sentence of paragraph 7.2 of the bylaws shall be reworded by replacing "or" with a comma and adding 10 words at the end so that as amended the sentence shall read: "A vacancy may be declared in the event a Director dies, resigns, is removed, loses status as an Active member, fails to attend two Board meetings without being excused by the Board or fails to attend a total of four Board meetings."

Explore the Members Area on our website today!

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CHATTANOOGA STORY LEADS ADVENTURE TOURISM IN A SUSTAINABLE HAVEN

BY CHATTANOOGA TOURISM CO. | CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE

Chattanooga has swiftly emerged as a sustainable travel hotspot, where rugged southern charm meets environmentally mindful exploration. Nestled between mountain ridges, winding rivers and lush forests, Chattanooga isn't merely a getaway; it's a thriving example of how sustainability, urban creativity and adventure tourism intersect, inviting travelers to engage deeply with nature and history without sacrificing environmental integrity.

With abundant natural resources and strong community-driven conservation initiatives, Chattanooga offers numerous opportunities for visitors to experience the outdoors responsibly. Here are five distinct narratives highlighting Chattanooga's commitment to sustainable adventure and exploration, providing writers with inspiring opportunities to dive deeper into these fascinating topics.

Preserving the past at Moccasin Bend

Moccasin Bend, deeply tied to Chattanooga's indigenous and early American history, offers travelers an inspiring journey through culture, resilience and renewal. Efforts to preserve this historical landscape — including the Trail of Tears, The Passage and nearby Audubon Acres and DeSoto State Park — invite visitors to respectfully experience history through guided tours and interactive exhibits. This unique angle ties conservation directly to cultural storytelling, blending ecological education with historical reverence, creating a compelling model for sustainable tourism.

Potential story ideas and interviews: Interview local historians or indigenous leaders about Moccasin Bend's cultural significance and the importance of preserving sacred lands. Spotlight ongoing archaeological digs that uncover artifacts, providing insights into historical daily life. Profile volunteers involved in habitat restoration, native species replanting and cultural education initiatives.

Chattanooga's subterranean wonders: Exploring sustainable caving

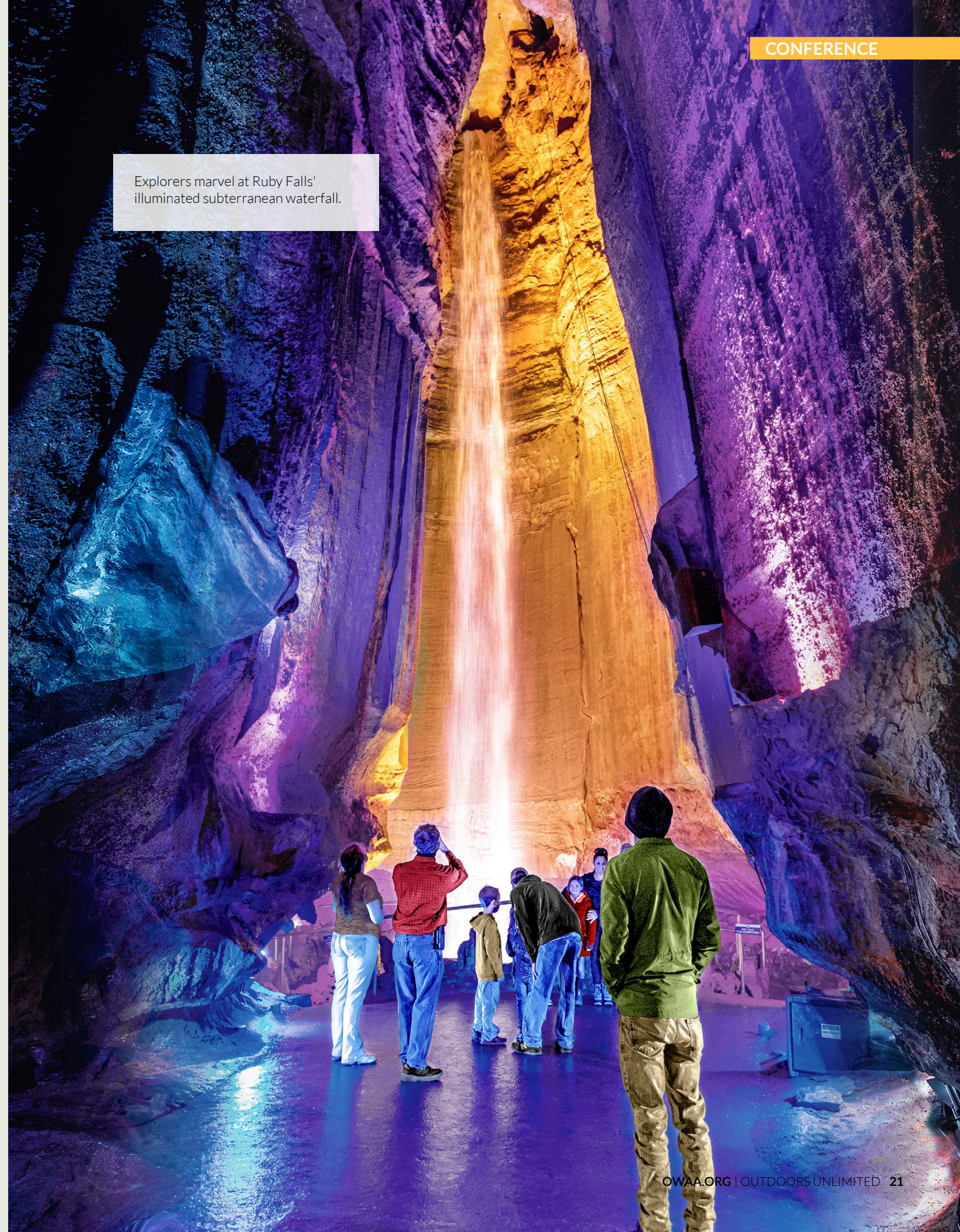
Home to spectacular underground sites like Ruby Falls, Nickajack Cave and Raccoon Mountain, Chattanooga offers adventurers the chance to discover hidden worlds responsibly. Sustainable caving experiences teach visitors about delicate karst ecosystems, fascinating geology and the importance of cave conservation. By partnering with scientists and sustainability advocates, Chattanooga ensures these stunning caverns remain intact for future generations, transforming thrill seekers into stewards of subterranean conservation.

Potential story ideas and interviews: Follow cave scientists documenting biodiversity at Nickajack Cave, spotlighting rare species and their conservation. Feature a guided tour operator emphasizing sustainable practices at Ruby Falls, detailing eco-friendly lighting, limited visitor numbers and educational components. Interview cave conservationists and park rangers about challenges and successes in protecting fragile cave ecosystems.

BELOW: A wide-angle view of Moccasin Bend, a peninsula located in Chattanooga along the Tennessee River.



Explorers marvel at Ruby Falls' illuminated subterranean waterfall.



New North Chick Creek Gorge State Park: Gateway to sustainability

Just minutes from Chattanooga, North Chick Creek Gorge — Tennessee’s newest state park — invites visitors to hike sustainably managed trails, explore vibrant ecosystems and appreciate Tennessee’s wilderness responsibly. The gorge, celebrated for its breathtaking views, rare wildflowers and diverse wildlife, is carefully managed to minimize ecological impact. Park rangers and local conservationists actively promote eco-friendly practices through guided tours, educational signage and habitat restoration initiatives, fostering stewardship among visitors.

Potential story ideas and interviews: Highlight a “day in the life” feature of a park ranger dedicated to conservation, covering daily sustainability practices and interactions with visitors. Cover volunteer trail-building days and ecological restoration events, emphasizing community involvement. Interview visitors about their experiences with sustainable hiking and wildlife viewing, and get their thoughts on conservation education.

Urban adventure meets conservation at High Point Climbing

High Point Climbing in downtown Chattanooga uniquely blends urban adventure with sustainability. Climbers literally scale the exterior of a downtown building, combining athleticism, breathtaking cityscape views and conservation education. This innovative attraction partners with local environmental groups to advocate for sustainable climbing practices, urban ecological responsibility and community environmental engagement.

Potential story ideas and interviews: Interview climbing instructors who educate climbers about environmental responsibility, combining urban adventure and eco-education. Profile climbers who regularly engage in “green climbs,” supporting conservation initiatives or clean-up efforts. Explore innovative collaborations between High Point Climbing and local environmental nonprofits, focusing on urban sustainability.

RIGHT: A climber scales Chattanooga’s iconic High Point building.



Hikers enjoy views along sustainably designed trails at North Chick Creek Gorge.

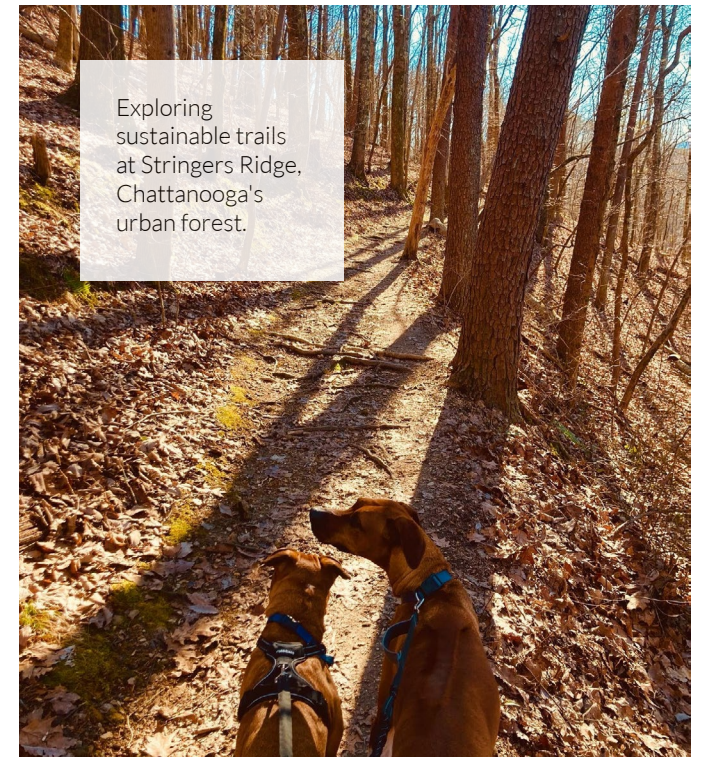


Stringers Ridge: Chattanooga’s Green Heartbeat

Stringers Ridge, a vibrant urban forest minutes from Chattanooga’s downtown, exemplifies how city planning and conservation can intersect. With sustainably managed trails, ongoing forest conservation and community-supported initiatives, this local haven offers diverse hiking, mountain biking and bird-watching opportunities while highlighting Chattanooga’s dedication to maintaining urban green spaces.

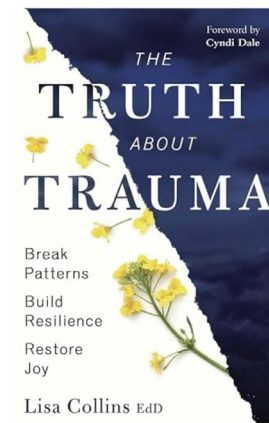
Potential story ideas and interviews: Profile community activists or volunteers who advocate for the preservation and enhancement of urban green spaces. Highlight wildlife observation opportunities, detailing encounters with native birds and animals, and feature local birding groups or citizen scientists. Interview city planners and conservationists about future initiatives for urban sustainability and environmental integration.

Chattanooga is not just embracing sustainability — it’s embedding it into the fabric of adventure tourism, creating meaningful experiences that inspire visitors to protect and celebrate nature. Through conscientious efforts in historic preservation, cave conservation, state park stewardship, urban adventure innovation and urban forest management, Chattanooga offers writers and visitors alike compelling stories of sustainable adventure.



Exploring sustainable trails at Stringers Ridge, Chattanooga’s urban forest.

BOOKSHELF



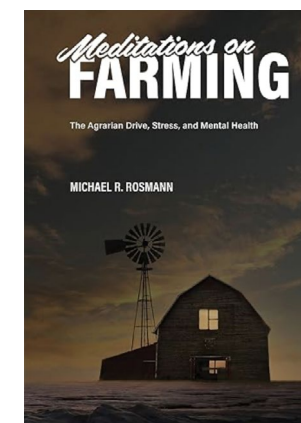
“The Truth About Trauma” by Dr. Lisa Collins

Dr. Lisa Collins’ new book, “The Truth About Trauma: Break Patterns, Build Resilience, and Restore Joy,” will be distributed worldwide by Llewellyn and is set for release on June 8.

Collins said recently, “As you know, nature has profound healing power, and connecting with the outdoors is a vital component of wellness. This book offers hands-on tools to help individuals navigate trauma, build resilience and reclaim joy.”

Demystifying trauma, Lisa Collins, Ed.D., teaches you how to identify and interrupt unhealthy responses through learning, discovery and reflection so you can reclaim your joy. With a variety of exercises and insights from the author’s own journey, you will learn how to address past experiences that unknowingly weigh on you. This book helps you foster a deep personal relationship with yourself and address emerging internal challenges. In no time, you will be skillfully navigating the often unacknowledged traumas we all face, transforming harmful energies into healing ones.

To request a review copy, contact Kat Neff Llewellyn: katn@llewellyn.com.



“Meditations on Farming” by Dr. Mike Rosmann, Ph.D.

Dr. Mike Rosmann, Ph.D., has improved the well-being of agricultural producers, especially their behavioral health, and promoted healthy land and other resources needed for agriculture, recreation and living sustainably. A clinical psychologist and farmer himself, he and colleagues undertook research that identified best practices to help farmers, ranchers, farm workers, their families and communities manage stress and deter suicide. Their findings became the foundation for the USDA Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network, which establishes farm crisis assistance, trains mental health professionals to serve the farm community, provides farm stress-management training and suicide prevention and expands research to advance the new field he began: agricultural behavioral health.

Dr. Rosmann has been a guest on NPR, PBS and BBC and has been featured in The New York Times, Forbes, The Guardian and Time. He is passionate about hunting and fly-fishing.

If you’d like to interview Dr. Rosmann or get an advanced copy of his book, reach out to him at mike@agbehavioralhealth.com.

To view other OWAA member books, visit the OWAA online bookshop: bookshop.org/shop/owaa.

BOARD CANDIDATE PROFILES

Six OWAA members are running for three seats on OWAA's board of directors. The candidates, listed alphabetically below, answered six questions approved by OWAA's board nominating committee. Their responses have not been edited and are presented here as they were submitted.

Cast your vote! All active, senior active and life members are encouraged to vote by May 31, 2025. Members will receive an email with a link to the online ballot. Winners will be announced in Outdoors Unlimited and on the OWAA website. New board members will start their three-year term at the summer board meeting.



EDGAR CASTILLO

RESIDENCE: Olathe, Kansas

YEARS OF OWAA MEMBERSHIP: 4

1. Tell us a little about yourself: where you live, how long you've been a member of OWAA, other outdoor organizations you belong to and which areas of outdoor communication or activity best represent your interests and expertise.

I reside in Olathe, Kansas a suburb of Kansas City. I am a retired law enforcement officer, who worked for a large metropolitan agency for 27 years. The majority of my career was spent assigned to special units and federal task forces. I also served in the U.S. Marines for a decade.

I joined OWAA and have been an active member since 2021.

A lifelong and passionate wingshoot-er, I found myself writing a gear review which opened the door to outdoor writing. I quickly made a name for myself, writing for several outlets about a wide array of bird hunting topics to include upland, waterfowl, and turkey hunting,

conservation, and public lands. I've written for over 30 magazines, publications, online journals, emagazines, and catalogs within the U.S. and Europe. This also includes writing a chapter for the "Mouthful Of Feathers" book in 2023.

I've served and been involved with Pheasants Forever, Quail Forever, and Duck's Unlimited for more than twenty-five years. I held various local and regional board positions, where I spearheaded recruitment, sought sponsors and donations, organized events, and networked collaborations with various outdoor companies.

2. Why do you want to serve on the OWAA board of directors? What strengths, experiences or fresh ideas would you bring to the role?

Using my past experiences in various leadership and training roles, I feel like now is the time for me to utilize those strengths and bring something new from a completely unique perspective. My decision-making skills along with a very high drive of self-initiative will help guide OWAA into a more initiative-taking role amongst the outdoors.

I would be a strong advocate for OWAA to improve its already known benefits to joining, but also do a better job at reminding members of the advantages of its wide array of available resources. Updating and adding more information to its members-only access (resources, craft improvement skills, webinars, podcasts, and informative articles from Outdoors Unlimited Magazine), as well as skill building articles (how-to's, tips, tricks) for non-members who are looking for information.

Thinking outside the box has worked very well for me and I want to carry over the same creative ideas and utilize unique methods to enhance the organization.

OWAAs membership is the core to its existence and holds the key to its continued existence and success. This means advocating members to go the extra-mile to plan and coordinate hosting small local and regional craft improvement events to further expand OWAA's reach and footprint. Since joining, I took it upon myself to host three workshops working with Orvis and several outdoor magazines that brought in over 75 individuals. I would also increase and improve OWAA's network and collaboration with outdoor brands and companies and conservation organizations. OWAA's strength is in its +600 members who are the voice for the outdoors that needs to be utilized.

Since joining OWAA I have been involved in several supporting groups to include, Membership Committee, 100th Anniversary Committee, and the newly formed Social Media Committee, and a participant in the OWAA/HOW — Hunting Outdoor Writers forum.

3. As communication shifts more toward digital platforms, what strategies would you use to recruit and retain outdoor communicators who use social and digital media as their primary outlets?

Since joining, social media has been the number one topic mentioned by almost every board candidate to improve, yet our platforms; Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn have remained relatively unchanged. OWAA has not utilized social and digital media to its full potential.

There is an untapped recruiting audience to include writers, new and established publications, photographers, podcasters, etc. that simply do not know OWAA exists. This needs to change. A membership recruitment initiative needs to be set in place and executed to grow our audience network.

I have found remarkable success in social media and its networking capabilities and will bring those two key elements into increasing OWAA membership as well as using it to promote and build upon the resources the organization already offers as well as expand its amenities for being a member. It's imperative we expand our scope to provide informative and engaging posts, tell of upcoming events, initiatives, and member profiles. It must serve our own constituents and potential members as a digital newspaper for OWAA to retain members, increase recruitment, engage, and collaborate with other outdoor entities, companies, organizations, as well as individuals to better develop our presence as the organization for outdoor communicators to join. Establishing regional "leads" to coordinate and promote such events can only improve OWAA's presence. Energy should also be focused on colleges and universities to provide journalism and communication students information on what OWAA has to offer. Look into expanding the internship program to temporarily increase staff and spread out the workload.

4. How would you help OWAA connect and collaborate with state, regional and activity-based outdoor organizations to expand our reach and relevance?

Networking and collaboration can be done through a variety of methods, and OWAA needs to rely on its members to make introductions and facilitate collaborations. The variety of OWAA "boards and committees" are there only to finalize an agreement and work out the details. It is up to our members to be motivated and seek out these connections and bring those opportunities to the table. As an avid bird hunter, I know personally how much influence and resources that major conservation organizations have. These relationships within the hunting and fishing community must be created, enhanced, and utilized.

This includes starting communication lines with state and regional entities on how OWAA can assist them in a variety of ways. Bolstering these connections hold many benefits and future possibilities for OWAA. The organization needs to sell, just as we writers pitch to magazines, why they should join and collaborate with this group.

5. What does DEI mean to you personally and professionally? How would you help foster a more inclusive and welcoming community within OWAA?

I was born in Guatemala and emigrated with my family to the U.S. as a young boy. Outdoor activities to include hunting and fishing was not something that was done or even present as leisure activities within our Spanish culture. They were unknown concepts to my family. However, through my father's curiosity and working past a language barrier, a relationship was established with our neighbor who introduced us to the outdoors. It was here where I learned that through mentorship, opportunities into the outdoors are made and the key to fostering outdoor opportunities to those that simply do not know.

For OWAA, this means doing a better job at introducing our organization, providing resources, and networking to reach a much broader community. It comes down to exposure of the outdoors and where OWAA falls into helping its expansion.

6. As OWAA approaches its 100th anniversary, how do you see the organization evolving? Where should we focus our efforts to honor our traditions while embracing progress in the world of outdoor communication?

At its roots, OWAA was derived from hunting and fishing, however it saw the potential to grow and expand into other outdoor disciplines such as hiking, camping, photography, snowshoeing, and the list goes on and on. We must continue to explore other outdoor activities and how they fit within the outdoor communication sphere. Therefore, OWAA must give equal value to all outdoor disciplines and make sure they have a place and voice within our organization. Recruitment must not be focused on one over the other. We have already brought a wide range of communicators into OWAA, and as trends in outdoor communication expands and evolves, we must also be open to see how these new areas fit into the organization. Being more driven in communicating our existence needs to be the focal point using an extensive network of marketing and promotional avenues.



KATIE HILL

RESIDENCE: Dillon, Montana

YEARS OF OWAA MEMBERSHIP: 3

1. Tell us a little about yourself: where you live, how long you've been a member of OWAA, other outdoor organizations you belong to and which areas of outdoor communication or activity best represent your interests and expertise.

I grew up in the Farmington Valley of Connecticut and attended Emerson College in downtown Boston for undergrad, where I majored in journalism and minored in environmental studies. I also spent three summers working on a dude ranch in the Bighorn Mountains west of Buffalo, Wyoming. After graduating, I relocated to Missoula, Montana for graduate school in the environmental journalism program at the University of Montana. My fiancé and I currently live in a remote cabin in Beaverhead County about 45 minutes from Dillon, and we plan on staying in western Montana, a stone's throw from world-class public land recreation and hunting opportunities, for the foreseeable future.

I have been a member of OWAA since April 2022, but I also had a few stints as a student member during graduate school. I've attended a handful of Off-the-Record gatherings in Missoula over the years and went to my first OWAA conference in Casper in 2022 as a member of the Meet the Editors panel. I worked at MeatEater as an assistant editor at the time, and took a job as a staff writer at Outdoor Life a few months later. At the end of 2023, I became the youngest and first

female recipient of the National Deer Association's Signpost Communicator of the Year award for my reporting on deer conservation issues.

In May of 2024, I left Outdoor Life after almost two years of daily news writing to try my hand as a freelancer. Since then, my work has appeared in Field & Stream, High Country News, Modern Huntsman, The Daily Yonder, Modern Farmer, Mountain Journal, Texas Wildlife, and other publications, in addition to further freelance work for MeatEater and Outdoor Life. I also got connected with Nicole Qualtieri, Kestrel Keller, and a few other freelance outdoor journalists and writers, and together we launched a collaborative outdoor writing project called The Westrn in June 2024. Less than a year later, we shipped the inaugural issue of our quarterly newspaper to outdoor and sporting audiences across the country and around the world.

In my free time, I love to run, hike, snowboard, paddleboard, and hunt. My favorite stories and projects come from the intersection of wildlife science, conservation, hunting, and modern society. I see an opportunity for more stories about hunting as part of the solution for some of our greatest challenges: climate change, food insecurity, bitter polarization, privatization of public resources, mental and physical health disparities, and a general fear about the future of North America's wildlife and wild places. These stories don't get much play in the modern media outside of hunting-specific outlets, even though hunting still receives overwhelming approval from folks across the political spectrum. This is a sign that hunting as a practice and lifestyle choice has a bright future; it simply requires more voices to tell its stories. OWAA plays a huge role in the success of these storytelling efforts and the people who consider those efforts their life's work, myself included.

2. Why do you want to serve on the OWAA board of directors? What strengths, experiences or fresh ideas would you bring to the role?

I'm not sure what my resume would look like without Off-the-Record meetups in Missoula or the Casper conference, but I can say confidently it wouldn't be what it is today. Now, I desperately want to advance those opportunities for young

and emerging writers and journalists coming up behind me. Every outdoor communicator needs some OWAA magic in their lives — especially some OWAA-at-100 magic! — and I want to be part of the crucial central body that works to deliver it.

More specifically, I want to carry a torch for written journalism — both print and digital — as a wholly necessary craft in outdoor communications. As we all know, niche written media is struggling to generate sustainable profit these days. Many outdoor journalists have experienced pain points associated with layoffs, industry consolidation, limited freelance budgets, and a job market flooded with competitive talent. As journalists and publications covering environmental and outdoor beats experiment with new revenue streams, a continued emphasis on journalistic ethics and integrity will be important for the future of trustworthy, effective outdoor media. I want to help OWAA continue to serve and support its journalism-first members as they continue tackling tough subjects in the outdoors and trying to make a living doing it.

Lastly (and rather selfishly), I want to sink my roots as a writer and journalist deeper into the OWAA community. I have so much yet to learn, and I truly believe I would benefit greatly from this opportunity. Accordingly, I would pour myself into the work of being an OWAA board member with the same fierce commitment I bring to my work as a journalist, writer, and editor.

3. As communication shifts more toward digital platforms, what strategies would you use to recruit and retain outdoor communicators who use social and digital media as their primary outlets?

As someone who entered the workforce as a remote employee amid the COVID-19 pandemic and whose resulting body of work is 99.9% digital, I'm quite familiar with the needs and desires of digital media employees and makers. What I hear from my peers and colleagues — a sentiment I share — is a desire for more emphasis on the humanity of the creators behind today's digital and social media. In the age of generative AI, it's becoming all too easy to conflate digital media with media void of human influence or creativity. This results in an increased

wariness among digital and social media consumers as to what's "real" and what's not, and while we'd like to believe that human originality has a competitive edge over the work of ChatGPT, that's not always reflected in what performs on modern algorithms.

This shift has also put a different population of outdoor media consumers — those who prefer campfires and books to screens — on the defensive. Thus, we must court the very-online digital workforce while staying true to other members who still prefer the analog world. We can do this by welcoming digital creators to OWAA as humans first and foremost — platforming their very human identities, passions, interests, ideas, and concerns — and building bridges between these two communities.

More specifically, we can:

- coordinate more in-person meetups for digital-first and digital-curious communicators, particularly those working in remote and hybrid settings
- leverage OWAA's social media platforms to spotlight more members doing digital work
- create a complementary mentorship program connecting digital and social media creators curious about traditional methods with traditional creators looking to advance their digital and social media skills
- improve access to pro deals on specialized equipment, including software and hardware, for social and digital media professionals.

Ultimately, digital outdoor media professionals and traditional outdoor media professionals can learn a lot from each other. By catalyzing those relationships, sweetening the OWAA deal for the digital and social media workforce, and humanizing the important work these members do, OWAA can bridge that divide and evolve with the industry it serves.

4. How would you help OWAA connect and collaborate with state, regional and activity-based outdoor organizations to expand our reach and relevance?

My experience in building relationships with story sources in government agencies, not-for-profit organizations, research institutions, and the private sector primes me for growing OWAA's network of partners and collaborators. Identifying good

fits for partnerships can be challenging, but I have a lot of practice researching organizations and the individuals within them to figure out how to break in and start a conversation on the right foot.

As a freelancer, I also have experience pitching stories and projects in ways that intrigue potential commissioning editors. Any creative knows that a winning pitch is often successful, at least in part, because it suits a publication's mission and aims to benefit that publication's loyal readership, following, or user base. The same would hold true when recognizing and trying to secure partnerships for OWAA that would benefit its members and their varied interests.

I am generally extroverted and embrace opportunities to strike up conversations with strangers. Some of the best friendships and working partnerships come from these exchanges, as do learning opportunities and successful business relationships. I would bring all these skills to the table as a board member of OWAA.

5. What does DEI mean to you personally and professionally? How would you help foster a more inclusive and welcoming community within OWAA?

I spent the first few years of my career in roles with both new and legacy players in the hunting media, a male-dominated sector that possesses a fair amount of compassion and desire to grow in some respects but is slow to change in others. I now realize how much I stood on the shoulders of giants as a young woman in these positions. I felt overwhelmingly respected and welcomed to the table every step of the way — a sign of progress from where the industry was 10, 20, or 30 years ago, when many women who came before me had more harrowing experiences. That's the best I can do at defining what DEI means to me; it means acknowledging that I have a platform that might not have been afforded to me in the past based on my identity, and working to expand that platform for others still facing systemic oppression based on their own identities.

Of course, we still have a long way to go. So how can OWAA continue to build on that progress? How do we move forward with an abundance mindset, to create a community where outdoorspeople of all races, ethnicities, religions, gender identities, sexualities, income

brackets, educational backgrounds, abilities, and political affiliations feel crucial and comfortable contributing to the greater whole? How do we keep up with the pace of global change and progress in these avenues?

We start by initiating tough conversations with a diverse roster of leaders and innovators, and then we invite anyone and everyone to the table to partake in those conversations respectfully. I really enjoyed watching OWAA's efforts in this subject matter play out during the Casper conference, where diverse leaders in shooting sports, fishing, adventure travel, and other sectors took center stage and delivered thought-provoking keynotes. Their presentations always led to engaging questions from audience members and resulted in educational, respectful exchanges. At the time, I sensed that I was witnessing a community moving forward, and the feeling was electrifying.

Ultimately, DEI efforts are something for OWAA to continue embracing and learning from, no matter how much certain folks in D.C. attempt to demonize the acronym. An action-oriented emphasis on widening the OWAA tent — more presentations, more relationships with diversity-focused outdoors organizations, more outreach in historically underrepresented communities — would benefit the whole by stoking curiosity, tempering fear, addressing discomfort head-on, and reinforcing our foundation as a future-proof organization. A bigger, more crowded table is always better than a smaller, sparser one.

6. As OWAA approaches its 100th anniversary, how do you see the organization evolving? Where should we focus our efforts to honor our traditions while embracing progress in the world of outdoor communication?

In 1927, when OWAA was founded, outdoorspeople experienced a pace of change that probably felt rapid and painfully slow all at once. Hilda Kurth, Catherine Robbins, and Kathleen Norris became the first women to thru-hike the Vermont Long Trail that year. The Lacey Act had been around for 27 years, but it would be another 10 years before the Pittman-Robertson Act would pass, and another 23 years before the Dingell-Johnson Act. The National Park Service was 11 years

old, and less than a quarter of today's 400-something national park units existed. The years that followed would see many more "famous firsts," sweeping land designations, innovations in gear and recreation styles, and policy changes that both benefited and harmed outdoor pursuits. For almost a century, the body of work produced by OWAA's members has documented these evolutions.

Today, many outdoorspeople sense that their favorite places and experiences are somehow imperiled, be it by climate change, urban sprawl, resource extraction, ballooning costs, privatization, political interests, or other roadblocks. Certainly, some of these challenges are becoming more severe with time. But outdoorspeople have always witnessed disruption to the status quo — and in some cases, we've even been the ones to cause it.

My point is this; outdoor writers and communicators have always been both survivors of and arbiters of change. OWAA can simultaneously honor these roots and evolve for an uncertain future by refusing to give up on the power of human storytelling to protect what still matters to us. Sure, storytelling takes many forms that it didn't in 1927: short-form video, social media, words and photos glowing on a digital screen. But the preservative effects of storytelling are just the same. (So are the growing pains of new methods; 1927 was the first time a feature film was aired in the U.S. with accompanying sound. Imagine the fear and division that stoked between silent film aficionados and sound film fans!)

By recognizing that disruption, discomfort, change, fear, and anxiety have always been part of loving the outdoors, and by playing to our strengths of curiosity and creativity, OWAA can chart a course that actively protects and advances the sheer necessity of the outdoor communications workforce. In doing so, it can make a significant impact on the future of the outdoors writ large. After all, the outdoors are where humans work, play, heal, exert ourselves in the pursuit of awe, and find common ground with folks whom we would otherwise consider adversaries. They are also the place where, for the last 100 years and longer, the push-and-pull between humans and the natural world

has played out in real time. We are constantly reminded that the lands, waters, and wildlife we love are part of the same national experiment that we are. That will always be a story worth telling.



KATE MORGAN

RESIDENCE: Richland, Pennsylvania
YEARS OF OWAA MEMBERSHIP: 5

1. Tell us a little about yourself: where you live, how long you've been a member of OWAA, other outdoor organizations you belong to and which areas of outdoor communication or activity best represent your interests and expertise.

I joined OWAA just after 2020's virtual conference, and the online get-togethers and camaraderie were a balm for being trapped in my home in rural Berks County, Pennsylvania. My life has changed a lot in the intervening years — most notably with the addition of two daughters — but my love for OWAA has only grown.

I'm a freelancer, and my work appears in The New York Times, The Washington Post, Vox, Grist, National Geographic, and many other publications. While I consider myself a generalist and write about a wide range of subjects, much of my work centers on science, conservation, and our connection to the natural world.

2. Why do you want to serve on the OWAA board of directors? What strengths, experiences or fresh ideas would you bring to the role?

This organization has given me a lot:

professional connections and opportunities, unique experiences, and some friendships I treasure. Put simply, I'd like to give back. My years of experience as a freelancer will benefit the group, especially as the proportion of freelancers among our membership grows. I have an understanding of the unique challenges of freelancing, and can offer thoughts and ideas for how to help our members navigate a media landscape that's growing bumpier all the time.

3. As communication shifts more toward digital platforms, what strategies would you use to recruit and retain outdoor communicators who use social and digital media as their primary outlets?

The best way to recruit a new generation of communicators is to meet them where they are. To that end, as a member of the board I'd propose and support initiatives aimed at amplifying OWAA's social and digital media presence, creating an even more relatable and recognizable "voice of the outdoors" that echoes across platforms and helps draw a new class of communicators and content creators.

4. How would you help OWAA connect and collaborate with state, regional, and activity-based outdoor organizations to expand our reach and relevance?

I'm eager to both leverage my existing relationships and to build new ones, especially through planning and helping to execute more in-person events that bring OWAA members together with state and regional tourism organizations and outdoor and adventure outfitters for mutual benefit.

5. What does DEI mean to you personally and professionally? How would you help foster a more inclusive and welcoming community within OWAA?

To me, DEI refers to efforts to ensure all voices are represented, particularly the voices of historically marginalized people and groups. In an organization like OWAA, that's especially important. The outdoors belongs to all of us, but when its "voice" is reduced to a single archetype of outdoorsman, so much nuance and understanding of the natural world and our place in it is lost. In recent years, I've been so heartened by OWAA's focus on

increasing diversity and inclusion among its ranks, leadership, and priorities. As a board member, I'd like to be a part of that work by helping to ensure we're not just including historically silenced voices, but centering them, and examining and embracing the ways they can shift our understanding of what it means to be an outdoor communicator.

6. As OWAA approaches its 100th anniversary, how do you see the organization evolving? Where should we focus our efforts to honor our traditions while embracing progress in the world of outdoor communication?

As OWAA approaches its centennial, there's much to extoll: outdoor communicators have always had an important job, and OWAA members have done it well. But now, what we do is more vital than ever. We've reached a tipping point in the fight for conservation, and there is no weapon more powerful than understanding. It's our job to help people understand what's at stake on our planet, help them love it as we do, and inspire them to protect it. Sometimes that's a fun job. Sometimes it's a taxing one. Often, I find, it's both. But as we maneuver through troubling and uncertain times, OWAA can help keep us united and upbeat — and that's critical work I'm eager to be a part of.



RYAN NEWHOUSE

RESIDENCE: Missoula, Montana
YEARS OF OWAA MEMBERSHIP: 8

1. Tell us a little about yourself: where you live, how long you've been a member of OWAA, other outdoor organiza-

tions you belong to and which areas of outdoor communication or activity best represent your interests and expertise.

I moved to Missoula, Montana, in 2002 to pursue an M.S. in Environmental Studies and have never found a reason to leave. I learned about OWAA in grad school and was nominated for a Bodie McDowell Scholarship. I became a member in 2009 and was active for six years. I rejoined in 2023 and presented at the last two conferences, making my total tenure eight years now.

Over the past decade, I was actively involved in supporting youth climbing, including serving on the Board of Directors for a local non-profit youth climbing organization. My other deep passions for the outdoors are rooted in hunting, fishing, boating, and camping. I believe my days in the field are what fuel my hours at the desk. It's the hands-on experience that helps me connect the dots and connect to my audience.

Currently, I work for onX Hunt as a Senior Content Marketing Manager. It's a job where I get to use my skills as a former full-time freelance writer, writing instructor, digital media agency copywriter, and outdoor specialist for REI.

2. Why do you want to serve on the OWAA board of directors? What strengths, experiences or fresh ideas would you bring to the role?

I want to serve on the Board of Directors because I can bring over two decades of outdoor writing experience to the table. The focus of my master's degree was environmental writing, and fresh out of school, I landed a role covering climate change for the National Wildlife Federation. That expanded into a 10-year career as a freelance writer working on every topic imaginable, from personal injury law to Ayurvedic yoga. I have penned hundreds of articles for print magazines and online outlets as well as three books on craft beer.

Having attended and presented at the last two OWAA conferences on writing for SEO (search engine optimization), I've had the opportunity to engage with both new and longtime members. Seeing firsthand how popular the Editor's Roundtable sessions are, and hearing directly from members that they want more connections and training to sell more content.

I think OWAA should be at the forefront of helping its members make those connections and receive that training. Whether that's done virtually throughout the year and/or more intensively at our conference, OWAA can strive to put writers, outlets, and its editors in more rooms together more often and promote (if not create!) relevant writing workshops when appropriate.

I propose bi-monthly virtual coffee chats with editors of leading outdoor print and online publications for our members. The goal is to network, ask questions, and understand that publication's upcoming editorial calendar.

The Workshops at the annual conference cover a myriad of important topics, but perhaps there could be a few tracks that are explicitly for writers, covering multiple genres from poetry to investigative journalism.

3. As communication shifts more toward digital platforms, what strategies would you use to recruit and retain outdoor communicators who use social and digital media as their primary outlets?

One tried and true pillar of marketing is to meet folks where they are. In that regard, OWAA needs to be showing up on the same platforms and in some of the same ways as the next generation they'd like to recruit. Is OWAA active and represented in those places?

Social media takeovers have been proven effective for many brands and organizations. Why not have an active OWAA member take over an OWAA social account while on a press trip?

To leverage the popularity of influencer culture, could the organization facilitate more connections between outdoors brands and influencers? Members could apply through the organization to test and promote a variety of outdoor gear provided by OWAA's Supporting Groups, sharing their experiences on their social channels. This visibility could attract new outdoor communicators to OWAA.

When I taught and presented "Write for SEO" at the last two OWAA conferences, these were popular, sell-out sessions. Clearly, we are at a junction where we must understand and leverage more than one digital "new school" of thought or else we risk getting left behind.

4. How would you help OWAA connect and collaborate with state, regional and activity-based outdoor organizations to expand our reach and relevance?

The place to start is fully understanding what OWAA can bring to the table that state, regional, and activity-based outdoor organizations would find valuable. The organization is a strong tool for networking and aims to improve professional skills and opportunities for outdoor communicators. That is, in fact, OWAA's mission. To that end, the organization must market this message to these outdoor organizations and show them opportunities where OWAA members can amplify an organization's voice and reach through storytelling.

Does OWAA extend free conference registrations to court select organizations? Could organizations be invited to virtual gatherings to share their own goals and missions with our members, exploring ways to collaborate? Does OWAA deliver curated press kits to organizations of interest, highlighting members whose professional writings align with those organizations? Knowing the answers to these questions is where I would start.

5. What does DEI mean to you personally and professionally? How would you help foster a more inclusive and welcoming community within OWAA?

Personally, I don't like being the loudest or only voice in a room. I much prefer to sit back and listen before speaking up. Professionally, when I share ideas or stories, I take care to present them in a way that says, "this is one way to look at it," leaving room for others to join the conversation.

The point is to always leave space for others to speak and others to show up. That is then followed by express invitations to do so. OWAA understands that the outdoors are for all. As an organization, it can foster this message by actively aligning with outlets where new voices are emerging. Where and who is telling stories from underrepresented viewpoints? OWAA must welcome those voices and media to our proverbial tables.

6. As OWAA approaches its 100th anniversary, how do you see the organization evolving? Where should we focus our efforts to honor our traditions while embracing progress in the world of outdoor communication?

I would start with answering these questions: In the last 100 years, where has OWAA been most impactful in telling stories that had the most positive impact on the outdoors? Where have OWAA members “broke the news” or had hands in saving places, rights, access, or ecosystems? Where have stories of connection actually made lasting connections? It is these stories that we share and share again. We circle back on these stories and places and document again what positive changes have lasted. We talk to the people who are benefiting from or still fighting to keep these changes alive. We show how our members made a difference. That’s how we honor our traditions.

But to evolve, OWAA has to become a leader as a tech-savvy and up-to-date resource for its current and potential members. The first order of business is to launch a much more robust website before 2027. It must look, feel, and have all the things that show OWAA is thriving in a digital age. Information intended for its members must be easily found and actively updated, and that information must be showcased frequently.

Secondly, OWAA’s evolution should involve having a stronger voice in issues that affect the outdoors and the related forms of recreation. No, OWAA does not need to become an activist organization, but writing letters of support where appropriate and alerting its member base about important topics or legislation should not be off the table.



HEATHER PHYSIOC

RESIDENCE: Kansas City, Missouri
YEARS OF OWAA MEMBERSHIP: 4

1. Tell us a little about yourself: where

you live, how long you’ve been a member of OWAA, other outdoor organizations you belong to and which areas of outdoor communication or activity best represent your interests and expertise.

I am based in Kansas City, Missouri, and I followed my grandfather, cartoonist and humorist Bruce Cochran, into the OWAA in 2021. I am a freelance feature journalist focused on conservation, outdoor, and travel topics, and nature, landscape and wildlife photographer. Much of my work can be found on my website, and I sell photography to raise funds for conservation causes like the Rainforest Alliance and Nature Conservancy.

2. Why do you want to serve on the OWAA board of directors? What strengths, experiences, or fresh ideas would you bring to the role?

I have observed from the sidelines for the last four years, and I am ready to get in the game! Mainly, you can just count on me to engage, contribute and add value. My colleagues say I collaborate and build consensus well, synthesize and communicate effectively, and connect people to maximize everyone’s potential. And more tangibly, I bring search and digital marketing expertise, data journalism, storytelling & visualization skills, essential design skills, and executive leadership and operations experience to the table.

3. As communication shifts more toward digital platforms, what strategies would you use to recruit and retain outdoor communicators who use social and digital media as their primary outlets?

I have had a 20-year career as a search and digital expert, and I currently serve as Chief Discoverability Officer at global enterprise marketing agency VML. I am active and networked on all major social networks, and my primary focus is on LinkedIn, Bluesky and Threads. I also lecture at the University of Missouri (undergraduate) and University of Kansas (graduate) Journalism schools annually, and have a consistent pulse on the next generation of communicators.

4. How would you help OWAA connect and collaborate with state, regional and activity-based outdoor organizations to expand our reach and relevance?

My advertising career has enabled me to work directly with brands across all verti-

cals and industries. My capability currently serves brands in the destination marketing organizations (DMOs), travel and tourism brands, hunting/angling outfitters, outdoor outfitters, and more. I believe I may be able to support the OWAA in securing more, stronger, and more lucrative partnerships for the organization in the future.

5. What does DEI mean to you personally and professionally? How would you help foster a more inclusive and welcoming community within OWAA?

For the OWAA to continue to cultivate a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community, it is essential that we also have board members who are representative of the outdoor communicator community. Without seeing people who have shared lived experiences who represent us in key roles, many may simply believe that OWAA is not for them. I hope that by bringing my perspective as a woman, avid outdoorsperson, and professional communicator, I can help facilitate connection and conversation that creates an inviting space for all.

6. As OWAA approaches its 100th anniversary, how do you see the organization evolving? Where should we focus our efforts to honor our traditions while embracing progress in the world of outdoor communication?

A few key areas I see potential for OWAA to embrace include diversifying and increasing the quantity and size of potential sponsors and partners, particularly supporting events like the annual conference. The 100th anniversary immediately sparks “celebration” and “event” ideas, as well — integrating unique experiences, surprise-and-delight moments throughout the year and especially at our tentpole events, which can celebrate our storied history, and perhaps most importantly of all, a strong vision for the next 100 years of our organization. Our organization’s resources and content have proved incredibly valuable, and I reference them often — but the landscape of how outdoor communicators earn money is fundamentally changing. I think we need to explore providing more expertise and resources on an expanded definition of things that may be considered “content” or “communication,” much like we had to evolve for podcasting and blogging in the not-so-distant past!



MEGAN PLETE POSTOL

RESIDENCE: Oneida, New York
YEARS OF OWAA MEMBERSHIP: 4

1. Tell us a little about yourself: where you live, how long you’ve been a member of OWAA, other outdoor organizations you belong to and which areas of outdoor communication or activity best represent your interests and expertise.

I have been involved with the outdoor industry for about a decade. I started my career in journalism and spent five years as a freelance outdoor writer before transitioning into my current role at the National Deer Association. I still freelance on the side. I have been a member of OWAA for a few years and I would like to be more involved. I have served on the board of directors for the New York State Outdoor Writers Association, the NY Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, and am a member of the Great Lakes Association of Outdoor Writers. My byline has appeared in several outlets, including Meateater, Outdoor News, Harvesting Nature, Trappers Post, Wide Open Spaces, Adirondack Explorer, and several more. Most of my outdoor writing centers on angling, hunting, conservation, and women in the outdoors.

2. Why do you want to serve on the OWAA board of directors? What strengths, experiences or fresh ideas would you bring to the role?

I want to serve on the OWAA Board of Directors because a role like this helps me contribute meaningfully on a national scale. Outdoor media is my passion and I love helping others thrive in this industry.

I am always coming up with ideas to help push the needle forward.

3. As communication shifts more toward digital platforms, what strategies would you use to recruit and retain outdoor communicators who use social and digital media as their primary outlets?

During my tenure at the NYSOWA, I spent a lot of time ideating ways to recruit and retain digital outdoor communicators. I came up with the Aspiring Outdoor Communicator Award as a way to recognize up-and-coming digital outdoor communicators. I also worked to revise the membership guidelines to include communicators that primarily use social and digital communication.

4. How would you help OWAA connect and collaborate with state, regional and activity-based outdoor organizations to expand our reach and relevance?

I believe that networking and relationship building is still the golden rule for growing reach and relevance.

5. What does DEI mean to you personally and professionally? How would you help foster a more inclusive and welcoming community within OWAA?

DEI is important, especially within the outdoors community and industry, which can sometimes lag behind. Through my body of work, I have continually worked to spotlight minorities in the outdoors and to tell stories that would otherwise be overlooked. I have also worked diligently to create safe spaces for women and other minorities to experience the outdoors through mentorship opportunities.

6. As OWAA approaches its 100th anniversary, how do you see the organization evolving? Where should we focus our efforts to honor our traditions while embracing progress in the world of outdoor communication?

We should continue to both honor our traditions and embrace the future by focusing on creating opportunities for our outdoor media folks to interact with each other and create amazing content.

Let’s connect

Join the OWAA Members Only Facebook group

- Calls for pitches
- Friday brag
- Media trip openings
- AND MORE

facebook.com/groups/owaamembers



What editors want

EDITOR Q&A: MONTANA OUTDOORS & THE WESTRN

BY SUZANNE DOWNING | ALBERTON, MONTANA

WHETHER YOU'RE A SEASONED FREELANCER or new to the freelance world, mastering the art of pitching your articles is crucial for your success. To help refine your skills, here are some valuable tips from the editors of Montana Outdoors and The Westrn.

MONTANA OUTDOORS BIMONTHLY MAGAZINE OF MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

Editors: Tom Dickson | Paul Queneau
Contact for queries: paul.queneau@mt.gov

Q. Montana Outdoors is known for its investigative, research-driven approach to conservation journalism. What types of underreported conservation or wildlife management issues in Montana are you most interested in covering in the coming year?

A. Public access continues to be an important topic, as is chronic wasting disease and the increase in wildlife diseases in general. We're also focused on efforts to stem the tide of invasive weeds and aquatic invasive species, how new technologies and scientific approaches are helping estimate populations of wildlife that have historically flown under the radar, stories about our state parks, profiles of species we haven't covered before and interesting new angles on outdoor recreation with a strong Montana hook.

Q. Given the magazine's commitment to skepticism and curiosity, what common mistakes do writers make when pitching stories, and what qualities make a pitch stand out to you?

A. Three main errors in pitching: 1. Writers who haven't taken the time to look through the past five years of back issues (all online) to see if we've recently covered their proposed topic; 2. Pitching stories in which the author has a clear editorial bent. This is Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' magazine, so articles need to convey the agency's main take on the topic; 3.

Thinking we are a "hunting and fishing" publication. Our readership is diverse, so our approach to hunting and fishing is tailored to a wider audience, and we also cover a wide array of other nongame, recreation and outdoor subjects.

Q. Montana Outdoors reaches a diverse audience, including hunters, anglers and general outdoor enthusiasts. How do you balance the magazine's editorial focus to engage such a broad readership while maintaining the scientific and journalistic integrity of the publication?

A. Montana Outdoors contains two major types of stories — science-based research and management activities by FWP staff and outdoor activities not seen in most commercial publications.

Q. You mention that the magazine frequently publishes natural history stories and is always looking for fresh



takes. What are some natural history topics or scientific research areas that you feel haven't been covered enough in recent issues?

A. Fish and other aquatic natural history, and fresh angles on outdoor recreation with a strong link to Montana culture. We've covered birds substantially in recent issues, and any stories on big-game species will need a fresh take. For large carnivores, we have very specialized, proven journalists to cover those controversial species for us.

Q. The editorial guidelines state that particularly contentious issues, such as wolf management and bison re-introduction, are written in-house

rather than assigned to freelancers. For outdoor writers interested in covering Montana's wildlife and conservation policies, what are some adjacent or overlooked topics that would still fit well within the magazine's scope?

A. If it's "adjacent" to a controversial topic then it likely still will be highly charged and would need to be done in-house or by a longtime contributor.

Q. Montana Outdoors features stunning photography that complements its in-depth reporting. What types of images or photographic styles are you most looking for, and what common pitfalls should photographers avoid when submitting their work?

A. We are always looking for new perspectives on wildlife — from above, from below, from unique angles. A major pitfall is a contributor who lacks the discipline to edit their own work down to the very best images. We don't like it when a photographer sends us dozens and dozens of similar shots with the hope that we will do that work.

Q. Many outdoor photographers aim to capture Montana's landscapes and wildlife, but competition is high. What unique or unexpected visual perspectives do you think are currently underrepresented in the magazine's photography?

A. Most underrepresented are pictures of FWP staff in action: working, talking to the public, especially in discussions with ranchers or farmers and the public in situations of conflict like crowded fishing conditions, hunters trespassing or littering or driving off-road, or inner tubers and kayakers crowding wade anglers.

Tips for sending your pitch to Montana Outdoors editors

Before sending a query to Editor Paul Queneau, search the Montana Outdoors archives to see if they have already published something like what you're proposing. If so, the odds of the publication accepting your proposal are slim and you should consider a different topic, one they haven't covered in the past seven or fewer years.

To submit your pitch, send a brief written query before you write the article or essay you have in mind. Editors at Montana Outdoors rarely buy finished written material without seeing a query beforehand.

A good query summarizes the proposed article in a sentence or two. They'd also like to know how this issue affects the lives of their readers (why they should care), how Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is involved (they rarely run stories that don't have something to do with their agency) and what sources you might consult.

Continued on next page ...

THE WESTRN

A QUARTERLY PRINT
NEWSPAPER

Editor-in-Chief: Nicole Qualtieri
Executive Editor: Kestrel Keller
Managing Editor: Katie Hill
Contact for queries: katie@thewestrn.com

The Westrn is a collective of professional writers and journalists focused on storytelling in the outdoor space.

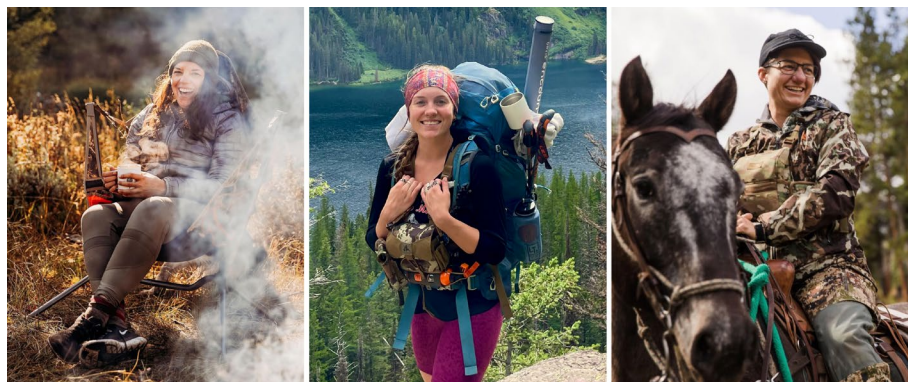
Nicole Qualtieri is the editor-in-chief of The Westrn. An award-winning freelancer, she has written for Outside magazine, USA Today, Men's Journal, GearJunkie, MeatEater, Modern Huntsman, Backcountry Journal and others. A lifelong horsewoman and DIY outdoorswoman, Nicole lives on the outskirts of Anaconda, Montana, with a full pack of happy critters.

Kestrel Keller is the executive editor of The Westrn. Their writing and reporting on science, conservation and rural culture has appeared in High Country News, Smithsonian, National Geographic, MeatEater, Outdoor Life, Outside and many others. Kestrel is a reverse transplant from Bozeman, Montana, to New York's Hudson Valley.

Katie Hill is the managing editor of The Westrn and a freelance outdoor journalist and writer. She has held writing and editing roles at MeatEater and Outdoor Life, and her freelance work has been published in High Country News, Field & Stream, The Daily Yonder, Modern Huntsman and other outlets. She recently moved from Austin, Texas, back to her chosen home of western Montana with her fiancé and their cat.

Q. What sets a standout pitch apart from the many submissions you receive? Can you share an example of a pitch that immediately caught your attention?

A. The perfect pitch for us serves up a unique source of tension or introspection with an authentic voice and a strong sense of place. This is necessary whether you're pitching a personal essay, a reported fea-



ture or anything in between. We recently received a stellar pitch from a seasoned fly-fishing writer whose source of tension was quite unique; he had burnt out on fly-fishing. What do you do when the core of your career — something millions

"We really want to capture the huge overlap in the sporting and non-sporting communities — the backpackers who hunt, the rock climbers who fish ..."

of people are completely consumed with — is no longer your passion? That really struck us as rare. It's the opposite of the classic, stoke-fueling, come-along tale that so many writers are cranking out these days. Here was a writer laying his inner turmoil and vulnerability on the line, rather than playing pretend. We ate it up immediately.

Q. Your guidelines emphasize the importance of a strong narrative with voice and tension. What are some common mistakes writers make when crafting outdoor adventure or conservation stories, and how can they avoid them?

A. What might be a mistake in our eyes could be the golden ticket for editors at other publications. With that said, we're a little tired of seeing the same leading voices, the same tropes, the same stories told over and over again. This is an especially common mistake for new outdoor writers

— just because something is new for you doesn't make it new for everyone. Writers interested in pitching us should really do their research first and ask themselves a few questions. Am I pitching a topic or a story? Has this story been written before? What am I uniquely positioned to say or report on? And really, we can typically tell if they've read the sort of work we're doing. We note when people subscribe and are active in our community. Since we're so niche, it really means a lot to us.

Q. The Westrn values independent, unique perspectives in outdoor media. What voices, themes or underreported topics are you hoping to see more of in upcoming pitches?

A. We definitely want to see more non-sporting pitches. We really want to capture the huge overlap in the sporting and non-sporting communities — the backpackers who hunt, the rock climbers who fish, the trail runners who are curious about shooting sports, etc. Often-times it feels like a publication is geared toward either-or, and that doesn't reflect the reality on the ground for so much of the outdoor community. We like when people in motion are working through internal conflict, especially if it interacts with a meaty conservation or cultural narrative.

The makeup of our own editorial team is also a bit unlikely for a sporting-heavy outdoor publication, so obviously we would like to amplify voices that might not fit in the traditional outdoor narratives. That said, we're excited to work with anyone with a great story to tell.

Q. Collaboration seems to be a key part of your editorial process. How involved

are you in shaping a piece after it's been accepted, and what does an ideal working relationship with a writer look like?

A. We run an in-depth editing process for everything we intend to publish, either internally or with hired writers. We're more likely to agonize over multiple rounds of edits, passing a piece around between the three of us, than to assume something is in good shape and hustle it down the chute. We want writers who are game to get weird with us and who know the power of a good edit. A writer submitting what they consider to be a sacrosanct piece of work is in the wrong place. Ultimately, we're trying to build long-term, sustainable relationships with writers who want to sell us some of their punchiest and most personal work.

Q. Given that The Westrn is a new publication with a selective approach to commissioning stories, how do you see its role evolving in the outdoor journalism space, and what impact do you hope it will have?

"Outdoor writing shouldn't have to be big business. It shouldn't have to fund the salaries of a C-suite or a roster of mergers-and-acquisitions experts just to exist and function properly."

A. We hope to provide a space for everyone who still believes in the power of storytelling — as a way to build community, to inform, to start and sustain hard conversations, and to broaden the tent of the outdoor and sporting worlds. Our audience is comprised of outdoorspeople who sense that something's missing from modern digital outdoor media, something artful and relatable and distinctly human that's been replaced by an insatiable need for growth and the singular type of sensationalism that delivers it. This is especially true in the wake of the Outside layoffs and the subsequent protest from dozens



of their contributors.

Outdoor writing shouldn't have to be big business. It shouldn't have to fund the salaries of a C-suite or a roster of mergers-and-acquisitions experts just to exist and function properly. We believe independent media can support itself by curating a niche community that is willing to pay to read great content and interact with responsible, thoughtful advertising. Substack is actually an excellent place to create a paid audience, and we're really happy with hosting our digital work through its platform. It allows us the freedom to take outdoor writing back for those who want to engage with it at the ground floor, where all the committed readers hang out.

And yes, you'll see advertisements in the newspaper from sectors that absolutely qualify as big business, namely gear and outdoor technology. Those brands just happen to like old-school outdoor writing too, as well as the community that gathers around it. Ultimately, our influence can't be bought, so you'll never

see those lines blurred here.

Editor's note: If you're interested in receiving a physical copy of The Westrn, you can purchase an annual subscription to all of their work at thewestrn.com or buy individual copies of the paper at thewestrnstore.com.

The Spring 2025 issue of The Westrn arrived in my mailbox with that fresh print smell. And it's a good read, covering topics like how hunting changes the gastronomical game, how to learn to be yourself in two different ecosystems and what new hunters actually want. There's also a calendar of events and a outdoor-themed crossword puzzle.

— Suzanne Downing is a freelance writer and the publications editor for Outdoors Unlimited.



ANNUAL REPORT

Mission

The Outdoor Writers Association of America: Improves the professional skills of our members, Sets the highest ethical and communications standards, Encourages public enjoyment and conservation of natural resources, and Mentors the next generation of professional outdoor communicators.

Board of Directors

Officers

Amy Kapp, President
Erin Merrill, First Vice President
Ashley Stimpson, Second Vice President
Ruth Hoyt, Secretary (through 2025)
Russell Roe, Treasurer (through 2026)

Directors

Terms expiring in 2025

Robert Annis
Ashley Peters
Drew YoungeDyke

Terms expiring in 2026

Chris Paparo
Jill Rohrbach
Sarah Borodaeff

Terms expiring in 2027

Jessica Baltzersen
John McCoy
Dave Zoby

Counsels

William Jay Powell, Legal Counsel
Grant S. Lipman, M.D., Medical Counsel
Dan Nelson, Supporting Group Liaison

Endowment Trustees

Endowment funds are accepted, managed and disbursed by the Endowment Trust. OWAA has five trustees: the OWAA treasurer and four people selected by the OWAA board.
Russell Roe (Chair) Phil Bloom (2027)
Brian Geiger (2025) Colleen Miniuk (2027)
Lisa Ballard (2026)

Board Meetings

Regular monthly calls were held via Zoom and two in-person meetings were held midyear in Las Cruces, New Mexico, and adjacent to conference in El Paso, Texas.

Staff

Chez Chesak, Executive Director
Suzanne Downing, Communications Manager and Outdoors Unlimited Editor
Emily MacGriff, Membership Services Manager
Amber Silvey, Event Producer

Accomplishments

The board, volunteers and staff worked in unison to achieve the following milestones in 2024.

Events

Conference

The organization convened in El Paso, Texas. We welcomed 150 attendees, including:

- 77 individual media members
- 61 people representing brands, agencies and organizations
- 9 spouses/partners
- 6 staff and volunteers

The most popular events were, in order:

- Keynote: Clearing the Crystal Ball: A Look at Current Travel Sentiment and Trends! (Amir Eylon)
- Breakout: Write for SEO (Ryan Newhouse)
- Breakout: Spilling the Tea: Journalists and the Tourism Office (Andi Jaspersen)
- Keynote: Meet the Editors Panel (Jenny Rogers, Lindsey Botts, Rose Cahalan, Russell Roe, Amy Kapp)
- Breakout: Bringing Bighorns to El Paso (Russell Roe, Froylán Hernández, Cesar Mendez, Ph.D.)
- Keynote: Media, Emerging Demographics, Mental Health and Revenue: The Outdoor Industry and Lifestyle are the Common Denominators (Earl B. Hunter Jr.)
- Keynote: Great Content Isn't Going To Cut It: 10 Tips for Navigating Fractional and Freelancing Markets During a Time of Disruption (Stephanie Puglisi)
- Keynote: Practical Storytelling (Michael Brown)
- Keynote: Take a Road Trip with Me: Dream Big With Strategy (Casey Hanisko)

22 brands, organizations and agencies sponsored the event and/or exhibited, including these major sponsors:

- Alabama Tourism Department
- Beaumont Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Chattanooga Tourism Co.
- Ducks Unlimited Inc.
- Friesens
- Go Big Bend/Big Bend Travel Company
- Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism
- Louisiana Travel Association
- New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
- National Shooting Sports Foundation
- Revelyst/Vista Outdoor
- South African Tourism
- Texas Outdoor Recreation Alliance (TxORA)
- Texas Parks & Wildlife Department
- Visit Big Bend
- Visit Central Florida

- Visit El Paso
- Visit Las Cruces
- Western Colorado University Graduate Program in Creative Writing

Further, the virtual auction raised more than \$8,751 for the organization.

Field Fest

We held our first ever Field Fest event in Johnson City, Tennessee. Thirty-seven people attended this new event, a hybrid of a conference, marketplace and regional familiarization tours. It offered:

- An Editors' Panel with editors from Covey Rise, Blue Ridge Country, Postindustrial and Tennessee Wildlife
- 12 half- and full-day tours in Carter, Greene and Unicoi Counties, Bristol, Kingsport, Morristown, Johnson City and "The Heart of Appalachia"
- A marketplace structured networking event
- A dine around
- A post-fest trip to Knoxville
- Presentations from Marvin Cash, Maayan Gordon, Howard Fox and others

Press Trips

Working with various Supporting Groups, the organization helped promote press trips to our members and secure media for these press trip hosts (among others):

- GLP Films
- Tourism Ireland
- Visit Keweenaw
- Zephyr Adventures

Virtual Membership Meeting

To make them as accessible to as many members as possible, OWAA continued to embrace virtual membership meetings.

- Held in June, the 2024 meeting included committee reports, a financial overview and other pertinent information for all engaged members
- 30 members attended

Staff continued to maintain and upgrade event materials, such as continual updates to the conference RFP document, the sponsorship presentation "deck" and membership flyers

Contest & Awards

- Chose nine winners of the Bodie McDowell Scholarship and awarded \$21,000 total
- Excellence in Craft Contest
 - 672 total entries
 - 147 total entrants
 - 133 total awards
 - 76 award winners
 - 75 EIC contest judges (who we thank profusely for their help!)
 - \$9,854 in total prizes
- Awarded \$700 and other prizes to six high school upper-class and college students via the Norm Strung Youth Writing Awards and OWAA Student Photo Contest

- Presented honorary awards to six outstanding volunteers and members:
 - Committee Volunteer of the Year: Howard Fox
 - Outstanding Board Member: Ken Keffer
 - Jade of Chiefs: Brett Prettyman
 - Ham Brown Award: Katie McKalip
 - Joan Wulff Enduring Excellence Award (formerly Excellence in Craft): Lisa Ballard

Content

- Maintained and updated our website, particularly the Members Area, to include:
 - Member benefits and resources
 - Online editions of the membership magazine and webinars
 - Updated "Get Involved" section
- Outdoors Unlimited (OU) magazine
 - Produced four issues (both print and digital versions) of a 40-page magazine full of articles on professional development, conservation issues, specific techniques and inspiration
 - Maintained an annual editorial calendar
- Produced these webinars for members:
 - Authentic Narratives: Enhancing Travel Stories through Indigenous Perspectives
 - Field Fest Drop-In Session
 - FriesenPress Presents: The Modern Publishing Landscape
 - How to get the most out of Muck Rack as a journalist
 - TRCP Presents: The Middle/Lower Rio Grande
 - TRCP Presents: The Upper Rio Grande
 - Writing for Travel Publications
- Sent approximately 50 eNews email newsletters to members, which included:
 - Critical organizational announcements (conference registrations, board candidates, dates of membership meetings, etc.)
 - Calls for submissions
 - New benefits and opportunities
 - Job postings
- Increased followers of our public Facebook page to 5,900 (up from 5,800 last year)
- Increased followers of our Instagram page (@owaa_official) to 1,275 (up from 1,060 last year)

Finances

The Development Committee continued its work on:

- Planning for major gifts
- Thanking donors
- Strategic and long-term planning

It also:

- Recognized these members of the Golden Quill Society who have included a gift to OWAA in their estate planning:

- Phil Bloom
 - Pat Wray
 - Lisa Ballard
 - Glenn Sapir
 - Matt Miller
 - Tom Wharton
 - Continued the promotions of and education about the Golden Quill Society
 - Sent fall appeal to all Life Members to further support the organization
 - Received \$10,059 in donations to the Operating and Restricted Endowment Funds
- The Supporter Relations Committee continued their work on developing more corporate support from the outdoor industry.

Membership

- Supported 603 members and 99 Supporting Groups
- Staff attended, planned and/or spoke at these conferences, shows and events, including:
 - International Media Marketplace (New York)
 - Travel & Adventure Shows (Denver, New York and Phoenix)
 - OWAA board meeting (Las Cruces, New Mexico)
 - Outdoor Recreation Executive Forum (Washington, D.C.)
 - Site inspections for board meeting (Greenville, South Carolina) and Field Fest (Johnston City, Tennessee)
 - Site inspection for 2026's conference
 - MATPRA Media Marketplace (Roanoke, Virginia)
 - OWAA conference (El Paso, Texas)
- Continued diversity initiatives, including:
 - Periodic DEAI committee meetings
 - Reached out to specific BIPOC outdoor media to invite them to join

- Continued outreach to BIPOC-focused organizations, groups and educational institutions, including the American Indian Alaskan Native Tourism Association (AIANTA)
- Increased the number of active members on our Members Only Facebook page to 555 (up from 504 last year) and kept the page relevant, active and engaging via regular posting of:
 - Calls for submissions
 - Job opportunities
 - Story ideas and concepts
 - New member introductions and connections
- Continued to maintain the Facebook group for directors and officers of state/regional outdoor writers' groups
- Continued our partnership with the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable with a few of their outdoor associations now OWAA Supporting Groups
- Continued our partnership with a public relations firm to expand marketing efforts/increase OWAA industry exposure

Operations

- Continued to work with our membership services coordinator as a part-time employee
- Staff worked with, managed and cultivated new skills for an intern
- Continue to refine and tweak membership database system to best serve the membership

In Memoriam

Last year, we said goodbye to these OWAA members:

- John A. Punola
- J. Michael Kelly
- Bodie McDowell
- Gary A. Engberg
- Howard "Wes" Bower
- Bill McRae

Rest in peace...

SOUTH AFRICA

The ultimate playground for outdoor adventures

BY SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM

Looking for your next great adventure? South Africa is a world-class destination for outdoor enthusiasts, offering a rich tapestry of activities to fuel both extreme thrill-seekers and those simply looking to immerse themselves in nature.

Garden Route: A natural wonderland with heart-stopping thrills

The Garden Route is a must-visit for anyone seeking both beauty and adventure. Home to the world's highest commercial bungee jump at Bloukrans Bridge, this region offers everything from canopy tours in Tsitsikamma National Park to exhilarating hikes along the Otter and Dolphin Trails. Golfers will also find top-tier courses like Pezula Championship and Simola Golf & Country Estate. In addition, the town of Knysna, with its annual oyster festival and dramatic cliffs framing the lagoon, is a perfect base for outdoor enthusiasts.

KwaZulu-Natal: Adventure, culture and the spirit of challenge

In KwaZulu-Natal, outdoor adventure and cultural heritage blend seamlessly. Experience the Comrades Marathon, the world's most famous ultra-marathon, or tackle the Big Rush Big Swing at Moses Mabhida Stadium in Durban. Nearby, the Midlands offers charming villages and the Nelson Mandela Capture Site, while the coastal region promises epic surf breaks and warm beaches perfect for water sports.

Cape Town: Iconic views, extreme adventures and scenic escapes

Cape Town is an adventurer's dream. Whether it's cycling the Cape Town Cycle Tour's challenging 109-kilometer route or hiking to the top of Table Mountain, there's no shortage of outdoor activities. Shark-cage diving in Gansbaai offers a close-up look at the great white shark, while a visit to the Cape winelands lets you combine outdoor exploration with some of the world's finest wines.



Limpopo: Extreme golf meets safari serenity

For golfers who crave a challenge, Limpopo's Legend Golf & Safari Resort offers the world's longest and highest par-3 hole, accessible only by helicopter. After your round, unwind on a safari in the Entabeni Game Reserve, home to the Big Five and a UNESCO World Heritage biosphere.

South Africa's A to Z of adventure

No matter your passion, South Africa has an adventure waiting. Explore the country's varied landscapes through:

Abseiling. Birdwatching. Boatsailing. Bungee jumping. Canoeing. Canopy tours. Caving. Clay-pigeon shooting. Crocodile cave diving. Cycling. Deep-sea diving. Deep-sea fishing. Elephant-back safaris. Fly-fishing. Free diving. Game viewing. Golfing. Hang gliding. Helicopter flips. Hiking. Horse riding. Horse racing. Hot-air ballooning. Kitesurfing. Kloofing. Meditation. Microlighting. Mountain biking. Mountain climbing. Ocean cruises. Photographic expeditions. Paragliding. Parasailing. Pony trekking. Power boating. Quad biking. Rapp jumping. Rhino tracking. River cruises. Rock climbing. Rowing. Running. Sand boarding. Scuba diving. Sea kayaking. Seal trips. Shark-cage diving. 4x4ing. Skateboarding. Skydiving. Snorkeling. Snow skiing. Spear fishing. Steam train rides. Star gazing. Sunset cruises. Surfing. Trout fishing. Tubing. Turtle tours. Walking safaris. Water-skiing. Whale watching. White-water rafting. Wine blending. Yachting. Zip-lining.

Your journey begins here

With such an extensive range of adventures to choose from, there's no better time to experience the wonders of South Africa. Whether you're seeking high-octane thrills or simply yearning for a scenic escape, this vast country has it all. The adventure of a lifetime awaits; grab your gear and head to South Africa for an unforgettable experience.

For more information about OWAA Supporting Group South African Tourism, visit southafrica.net.

Joining us in Chattanooga? Sign up for workshops to improve your craft!

Register today!

2025 OWAA
Conference
Chattanooga,
Tennessee
August 19-21

Workshops

- Scroll-stopping storytelling
- How to tell hunting and fishing stories with a deeper meaning
- Automating your creative workflow
- Using AI to brainstorm, research, outline and edit
- Applying for and benefiting from an artist residency
- AND MORE!

owaa.org/2025-conference



OUTDOOR WRITERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

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OUTDOORS UNLIMITED

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Meet a member



NAME: Mike McKenna

RESIDENCE: Hailey, Idaho

OWAA MEMBER SINCE: 2011

Originally from New England, Mike McKenna and his family live in the mountains of Idaho where he works on book projects, newspaper columns and magazine features and also edits the *Discover Wood River Valley Guide* — a 2024 Eddie Award winner for Best City & Regional Full Issue.

McKenna is also the author of “Angling Around Sun Valley,” named Best Book of the Year by the Northwest Outdoor Writers Association, and the recently released an expanded second edition of “Casting Around the Eastern Sierra.”

Find out more about Mike McKenna at CastingAroundAmerica.com and ValleyChamber.org.

WHAT ARE YOUR AREAS OF OUTDOOR COMMUNICATION?

The majority of my outdoor communication is writing and editing for newspapers, magazines and fishing books. I also manage a regional direct marketing organization, overseeing and creating marketing materials including short films, TV, radio, magazine, social media and newspaper ad campaigns.

WHAT DREW YOU TO THE FIELD?

I didn't know any better ... Just kidding, a love of writing and reading. Getting offered my first writing job while attending a brew fest seemed pretty fitting, too.

WHAT ENTICED YOU TO JOIN OWAA?

Some friends from OWAC (Outdoor Writers Association of California), where I was a longtime member, invited me to join OWAA.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE OUTDOOR ACTIVITY?

Whitewater rafting. When I was still a fresh-faced, “r”-dropping kid out of Boston, I moved to New Mexico. As the ski season came to an end, the guy who was couch surfing at our adobe, “Gunny,” got offered a job managing a whitewater rafting company on the Deschutes River. Gunny then offered me a guiding job. Since I'd never been rafting or to Oregon, and some homeless dude just offered me a chance to do both, I naturally agreed.

Gunny said I was “outdoorsy” enough to teach how to guide and that I could talk to anybody, an important skill for a guide. I caught on fairly quickly, although that first

season I became pretty well known for getting so lost in stories that I'd get rafts stuck adrift in eddies. In fact, the other guides started calling me “Eddy.”

Ultimately, it all worked out exceptionally well, except for the fact that people still call me “Eddy.”

WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON?

Keeping busy with writing and editing our nationally distributed *Discover Wood River Valley Guide*, trying to hit my newspaper and magazine deadlines and starting on my next book project covering fisheries in Idaho.

WHAT HAVE YOU GAINED FROM THE ORGANIZATION?

Inspiration, friendships, connection.

WHAT IS ONE PIECE OF ADVICE YOU'D GIVE TO SOMEONE THINKING OF JOINING OWAA?

Do it. Join and then find ways to become active.

ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO ADD?

Fellow outdoor writer and former OWAC president Jack Holder first inspired me to write a book about fishing the Sierra Nevada. It took a bit, but I finally did, and the first edition has now sold out. As a second, even larger edition hits shelves this spring, I'm still really thankful for the inspiration and support from other fellow outdoor writers like Jack, Chez Chesak, Matthew Miller and many others.