



OUTDOOR WRITERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

OUTDOORS UNLIMITED

THE VOICE OF THE OUTDOORS

FALL 2025

EXCELLENCE IN CRAFT AWARDS

See who took home the
coveted awards | p. 6



Backpacking beside the Baltic
Sea, Q&A with Steve Duda,
women members through
OWAA history, outdoor gear
spotlight AND MORE.

OUTDOORS UNLIMITED

FALL 2025

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The cycle begins again...

By just about every account, the Chattanooga convention went incredibly well. It garnered a 98% approval rating from attendees, who all said the speakers were impactful and impressive. Everyone I spoke with was overwhelmingly positive about the flow of the event, the hotel, the pre- and post-conference tours, (most of) the food, and our host, Chattanooga Tourism Co., and their primary partners, Outdoor Chattanooga and the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development.

As we bid adieu to "The Scenic City," many attendees wished us all well and hoped that we'd get some well-deserved rest. Well, there's no rest, not yet at least.

Once the conference wraps, there's the website to update with award winners, a post-conference summary to post, a new webpage to create for next year's host and quite a bit more to do. There are issues to deal with around the virtual auction, misplaced items, final invoices, reimbursements, thank yous to sponsors, a post-event survey to get out, a review of our final bill from the hotel, a final budgetary review of the event as a whole and so much more.

And once those things are all (eventually) finalized, it's on to the next conference! We already have our first meeting planned with Destination Madison, Travel Wisconsin and their respective agencies. We've also got a long list of things to improve for next year to make the event even better for our members, more efficient for everyone and, ultimately, more profitable for OWAA. (BTW, as announced in Chattanooga, one of the improvements we're seeking to make is to work with NSSF to bring back a range day for our members who cover shooting sports.)

Instead of the work dropping off, as so many attendees (understandably) assume, it actually picks up. But, that's a good thing. After all, we want to get a jumpstart on next year's conference as soon as possible to make it the very best that it can possibly be.

So we hope you'll save the dates (if you haven't already) to join us in Madison, Wisconsin, next year, August 22-24, where we'll be celebrating our 100th year (since our "100th year" starts in 2026, while our actual 100th anniversary is in 2027). While the work on it has just begun, we know it will be an event you won't want to miss!

— *With more than 25 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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Colleen Miniuk, Arizona

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ON THE COVER

BY DERRICK Z. JACKSON | 2nd place, Photo Essay | "Seal Island sees record number of breeding puffins" | 2025 Excellence in Craft Contest

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

All forward paddle



OWAA President Colleen Miniuk is a full-time photographer, author, publisher, instructor, speaker, stand-up paddleboarder, river rafter, bubble lover and pie eater from Chandler, Arizona. Her work has appeared in National Geographic calendars, Arizona Highways, AAA Via and other outlets. She authored the new adventure memoir "So Said the River: Life, Loss, and Pie on the Colorado" as well as multiple guidebooks. She pens the "Dear Bubbles" advice column, leads photography workshops (including Sheography™ all-women's trips) and speaks with organizations across the United States. She's been a member of OWAA since 2010 and received the 2019 J. Hammond Brown Memorial Award for her service to OWAA. Through all her ventures, she aims to inspire adventures in the Great Outdoors, help others express their authentic voices and encourage others to live their most fulfilling lives, "the big Life with a capital L," with or without a camera in hand.

Colleen J. Miniuk

Colleen Miniuk
OWAA President

I start my photography workshops with a saying: "The plan is the plan, until the plan changes, and the plan changes often, so plan on it." My groups begin with a tidy, carefully constructed printed itinerary in hand. Then fog rolls in. River otters pop out of the water. A sun flare spikes, and the aurora borealis starts dancing overhead. Plans be damned! Our most meaningful memories (and photographs!) seem to transpire from these unplanned moments.

I haven't always embraced this attitude. For the first 40 years of my life, I planned almost every aspect of my existence believing it would pay off with happiness. I clung to spreadsheets, Gantt charts and action-item lists to help me tame my fear of the unknown. This approach brought plenty of achievement — but also discontent.

Then, in 2015, a jarring and unanticipated left-hand turn in my life threw me headfirst into uncertainty. I jumped on my stand-up paddleboard and headed to the Colorado River to settle the sediment. Like life, that trip did not go according to plan.

Instead, the Colorado's waves taught me how to let go of the illusion of control and how to revere the undiscovered view around every bend in the canyon's cliffs. I started swimming into spontaneity and discovered a richness, fulfillment and freedom that no plan ever has, or could, deliver. I still paddle through life to the best of my abilities, but now I welcome the unexpected.

So, when I heard the news of the unforeseen vacancy of OWAA's incoming president, I saw it as a fortuitous chance to continue contributing to an organization that has played a significant part in my journey. Serving as OWAA's president this year wasn't my plan, but I am honored and thrilled to take on this role.

Thanks to Amy Kapp, Jill Rohrbach, Ashley Stimpson, Bill Powell, Suzanne Downing and Chez Chesak, the transition occurred quickly and smoothly. Thanks also to Erin Merrill for her outstanding contributions throughout her vice presidency terms over the last two years.

Like all who step up to support this organization, I hold an unwavering dedication to enabling OWAA's continued success. I grab onto these oars aiming to facilitate OWAA's growth by:

- Assisting in increasing our revenue streams.
- Continuing to expand the recruitment and retention value for individual members and supporting groups.
- Guiding tactical and strategic efforts via the Board's roadmap. (After all, I still love a good spreadsheet!)
- Welcoming fresh ideas from the Board, staff, committees, individual members, supporting groups and sponsors to further the organization's best interests.

But! The plan is the plan until the plan...well, you know. OWAA, like other nonprofit organizations, faces a challenging and uncertain environment: economic insecurity for individuals and businesses, threats to natural resources and public lands, decline in traditional communications gigs and more.

Our mission is more important than ever. Facing the unknowns ahead will require curiosity, creativity and courage. OWAA has all three in abundance. The time and effort put forth by this diverse and talented group can — and will — keep the organization afloat through any rapids.

In challenge sits opportunities. Let's make the most of it together. Let's see where this river takes us. As we say on the river, all forward paddle!



OUTDOOR WRITERS
ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

Save the date!



Individual media can:

- Network with top professionals
- Get exclusive access to newsmakers and stories critical to conservation and the outdoors
- Find new markets to sell your work
- Attend seminars to sharpen your professional skills
- Meet with America's best in outdoor communication
- Hear from editors and industry leaders

And much more!

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

2026 CONFERENCE

Join OWAA in
Madison, Wisconsin

AUGUST 22-24

owaa.org/conference

Excellence in Craft Contest

OWAA's annual Excellence in Craft (EIC) Contest allows the association's members to enter their best works from the previous year. There are multiple categories for various media and subject matter, and each category is judged by an independent and expert panel. Winners are announced during the annual conference and receive certificates and cash prizes.

BLOG

CONSERVATION OR NATURE

1st—Why Are Amphibians the Most Endangered Class of Animals?, Christine Peterson (Cool Green Science)

2nd—From Moose to Marmots, Micro-climates Could Provide Climate Buffer, Christine Peterson (Cool Green Science)

3rd—Wetland Protections Remain Bogged Down in Mystery, Derrick Z. Jackson (Union of Concerned Scientists)

FAMILY PARTICIPATION/ YOUTH OUTDOOR EDUCATION

1st—Brown Bears, Alaska Bear Camp and Being There, Candice Andrews (Good Nature Travel Blog, The Official Blog of the World Wildlife Fund and Natural Habitat Adventures)

2nd—The Anxious History of the American Summer Camp, Ashley Stimpson (Atlas Obscura)

3rd—Big fish, bigger fish story!, Brent Frazee (Wired2Fish)

FISHING

1st—50 Fish, 50 States: Rise of the Red-eye, Matthew Miller (Cool Green Science)

2nd—Record carp caught on crankbait, Brent Frazee (Wired2Fish)

3rd—50 Fish, 50 States: Pier Review, Matthew Miller (Cool Green Science)

GEAR/TECHNICAL

1st—John Cox's tips for catching fish without forward-facing sonar, Brent Frazee (Wired2Fish)

2nd—How to use jerkbaits to catch giant trout, Brent Frazee (Wired2Fish)

3rd—Tough Flip-Flops for Tough Girls: OluKai Ohana Review, Brandy Hastings (Gear Junkie)



2nd place, Fauna | "Puffinuzzle" by Derrick Z. Jackson

HUMOR

1st—The bigger the lens, the better the photographer ... true or not?, Michael Hodgson (HI Travel Tales Subscriber Club)

2nd—Not Today, Edgar Castillo (Field Ethos)

3rd—Root Doctors, Cecil Cherry (The Southern Voice)

HUNTING OR SHOOTING SPORTS

1st—On Killing Animals, Nicole Qualtieri (The Westrn)

2nd—No Time Wasted, Nicole Qualtieri (The Westrn)

3rd—That's the Breaks: The Novice, Katie Hill (The Westrn)

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

1st—Extreme Birding: Gull Watching at the Landfill, Matthew Miller (Cool Green Science)

2nd—Bird Alert: The Search for Local Rarities, Matthew Miller (Cool Green Science)

3rd—Brown Bears, Alaska Bear Camp and Being There, Candice Andrews (Good Nature Travel Blog, The Official Blog of the World Wildlife Fund and Natural Habitat Adventures)

BOOK

1st—So Said the River: Life, Loss, and Pie on the Colorado, Colleen Miniuk (Analemma Press)



1st place, Family Participation/Youth Outdoor Education
"Paddle Superior 1" by James Smedley



2nd place, Illustration
"The Perception of the
Reflection of Life at
Death" by Raymond
Lanfear



ABOVE: 3rd place, Action
“Opportunistic Heron” by
Heather Physioc



LEFT: 3rd place, People
“Islay and Mario” by
James Smedley

RIGHT: 2nd place, Action
“A Perfect Retrieve” by
Eric Kallen





ABOVE: 1st place, Action | “Winged Jewel” by Nancy Sorrells

2nd—A Cast Away in Montana, Tim Schulz (Lyons Press)
3rd—Birding for Boomers—And Every-one Else Brave Enough to Embrace the World’s Most Rewarding and Frustrating Activity, Sneed Collard (Mountaineers Books)

COLUMN

1st—A New Measure for Weather: Outdoor Days; Animal Academics: Interspecies Teachers; Brown Bears, Alaska Bear Camp and Being There, Candice Andrews (Good Nature Travel Blog, The Official Blog of the World Wildlife Fund and Natural Habitat Adventures)
2nd—Aging, Happiness and Access to Nature; The Revelations of Animal Songs; Wild Conservation Ideas: Currency Images and a Moon Vault, Candice Andrews (Good Nature Travel Blog, The Official Blog of the World Wildlife Fund and Natural Habitat Adventures)
3rd—Wetland Mysteries & Puffin Miracles: Conservation Commentary by Derrick Z. Jackson, Derrick Z. Jackson (Union of Concerned Scientists, The Maine Monitor)

GRAPHIC/ILLUSTRATION

1st—Klamath Watershed, Obi Kaufmann (California Fly Fisher)
2nd—The Perception of the Reflection of Life at Death, Raymond Lanfear (Scholastic Art Awards on display in the Detroit Institute of Arts)
3rd—Working Alone; It Never Happened;

Yet Worth Every Step, Raymond Lanfear (Scholastic Art Awards on display in the Detroit Institute of Arts)

MAGAZINE

CONSERVATION OR NATURE

1st—A teeny tiny problem of epic proportions, Matthew Crossman (Johns Hopkins Alumni Magazine)
2nd—Why Did the Spider Cross the Road?, Karuna Eberl (Atlas Obscura)
3rd—Capturing data in a harp trap, Bob Frye (Pennsylvania Game News)

FAMILY PARTICIPATION/YOUTH OUTDOOR EDUCATION

1st—The Table That Dad Built, Allen Crater (Michigan Out-of-Doors)
2nd—A Walk in the Wild: A father-daughter duo takes on a stretch of the famed Appalachian Trail, Dan Oko (AAA Explorer)
3rd—Man-Fishing, Bruce Ingram (Blue Ridge Country)

FISHING

1st—The Stars in Our Eyes, Joel Martin (California Fly Fisher)
2nd—Out of the Ashes, Sage Marshall (Field & Stream)
3rd—Charter Boats are my Weakness, David Zoby (Gray’s Sporting Journal)

GEAR/TECHNICAL

1st—Canoe review: The Radisson by BW Marine Products, Jesse McEntee (Paddling Magazine)

2nd—Staying Grounded While Hunting, Mike Zlotnicki (Wildlife in North Carolina)
3rd—Fishing, Up Close, Phil Bloom (Outdoor Indiana)

HUMOR

1st—Lucky Hats, Allen Crater (Michigan Out-of-Doors)
2nd—The Unachievable Post-Hunt Nap, Christopher Midgette (Strung Magazine)
3rd—Nebraska Anyone?, Lisa Ballard (Appalachia)

HUNTING OR SHOOTING SPORTS

1st—The onX Effect: Digital Mapping Apps Have Changed the Way We Hunt. Now What Will They Do With All Our Data?, Christine Peterson (Outdoor Life)
2nd—Hawking, Lisa Ballard (Colorado Outdoors)
3rd—From Grouse Feathers to the Holy Grail, Robb Moore (The Virginia Sportsman)

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

1st—Ultra Running for Beginners: What It’s Like to Run a 52-Mile Mountain Race, Christine Peterson (Outdoor Life)
2nd—Antler Madness, David Zoby (Big Sky Journal)
3rd—The Redside Foundation: Addressing the Mental Health Challenges of Being a Guide, Hilary Hutcheson (Fly Fisherman Magazine)

NEWSPAPER

CONSERVATION OR NATURE

1st—Florida State Parks Scandal, Max Chesnes (Tampa Bay Times)
2nd—Grizzly Bear 399, Mother of 18 Cubs, Is Killed by Driver, Christine Peterson (New York Times)
3rd—They’re baaaack: Mayfly madness returns to Oneida Lake, Steven Featherstone (Post-Standard)

FAMILY PARTICIPATION/YOUTH OUTDOOR EDUCATION

1st—Bird Scouts: Local troop gets banding lesson from legend, Roy Heilman (Shoreview Press)
2nd—In quest to stay active, 100-year-old WWII veteran Betsy Jeffords takes on salmon fishing, Bill Monroe (The Oregonian/Oregon Live)



ABOVE: 3rd place, Fauna | “Red-Eyed Frog” by Nancy Sorrells

BELOW: 1st place, Graphic/Illustration | “Klamath Watershed” by Obi Kaufmann

KLAMATH WATERSHED FACTS

- 9.4** million acres - size of the watershed
- 6** federally recognized Indian Tribes - Yurok, Karuk, Hoopa, Shasta, and Klamath tribes, plus Quartz Valley Indian Reservation and the Resighini Rancheria
- 6** National Wildlife Refuges within watershed
- \$600** million/year in revenue from the Basin's agricultural industry
- 70k+** number of adult salmon that died in the 2002 fish kill
- 253** miles of mainstem river
- 4** species of salmon and steelhead in the watershed

BEFORE DAM REMOVAL

- 420** stream miles of access cut off to salmon and steelhead
- 22** number of years the dams were in the FERC relicensing process
- \$434** million—agreed cost to remove four dams
- 163** megawatts of energy generated by the four dams
- <2%** electricity generated from the four dams in PacifiCorp's portfolio

AFTER DAM REMOVAL

- 4** dams removed
- 0** gallons of water that went to irrigation from the four dams that were removed
- 2,200** acres of formerly submerged ground revegetated
- 98** species of plants revegetated
- 17** billion seeds collected
- 40+** number of organizations, agencies, states, etc. involved

Public 60% Tribal 10% Private 30%

Land ownership in basin

"Big things happen when committed people decide that failure is not an option."

— Brian Johnson
Senior Policy Advisor,
Western Water and Climate, Trout Unlimited

The Klamath Watershed

ON AUGUST 28, 2024 THE KLAMATH RIVER FLOWED FREE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OVER A CENTURY.

THE REMOVAL OF FOUR PACIFICORP DAMS REPRESENTS THE LARGEST RIVER RESTORATION PROJECT IN U.S. HISTORY. REVITALIZING NOT JUST THE RIVER, BUT THE CULTURE AND ECONOMY OF THE BASIN'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND ALL WHO RELY ON A RESILIENT KLAMATH RIVER.

Illustrations by Obi Kaufmann

FISH FACTS

Spring-run Chinook 100,000 historically, 2,000 today

Fall-run Chinook 300,000 historically, 150,000 today (hatchery supported)

SONCC coho 300,000 historically, 5,000 today

Winter steelhead 220,000 historically, 5,000 today

Summer steelhead 2,000 today

1st place, Fauna | "Critically Endangered Bali Starling Pair" by Heather Physioc



1st place, People
"Golden Hour Fishing"
by Chris Paparo



ABOVE: 2nd place, Family Participation/Youth Outdoor Education
"Family Hike" by James Smedley

LEFT ABOVE: 3rd place, Family Participation/Youth Outdoor Education
"Canoeing with kids" by Corey Hunt

LEFT BELOW: 2nd place, Outdoor Adventure
"Paddle Superior 3" by James Smedley

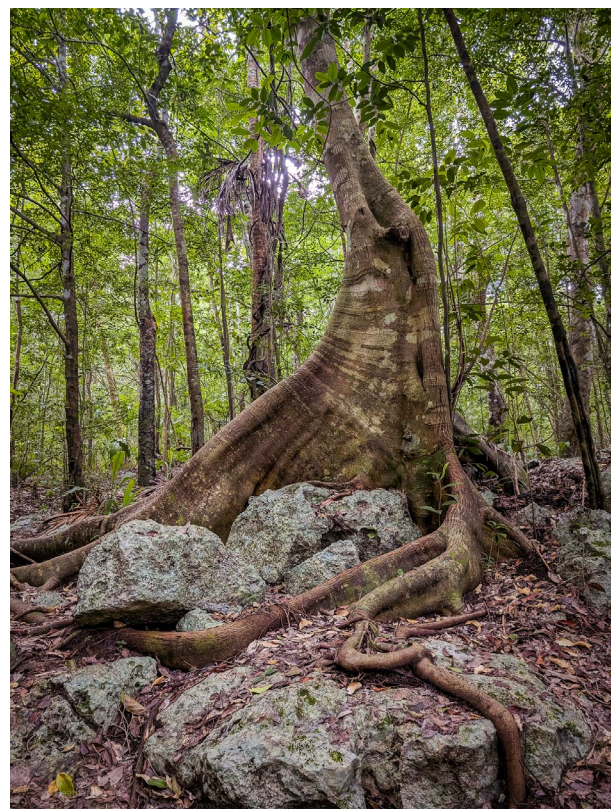


3rd place, Outdoor Adventure
"Murre-acious" by Derrick Z. Jackson

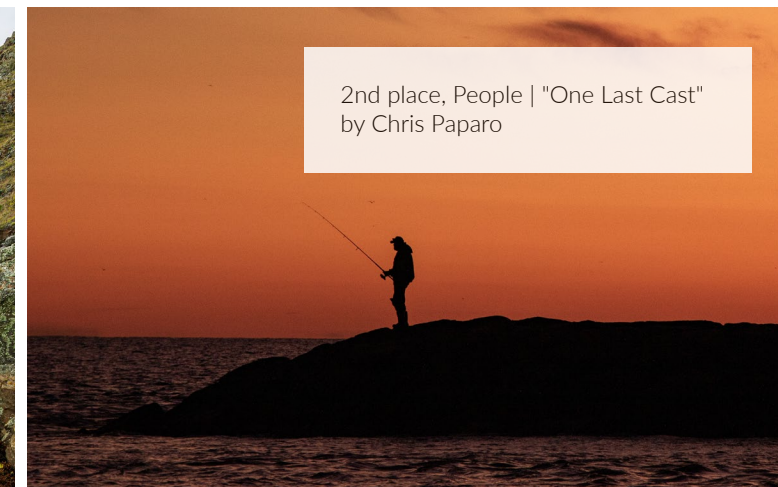


LEFT: 1st place, Flora | "Scorpionweed" by Colleen Miniuk

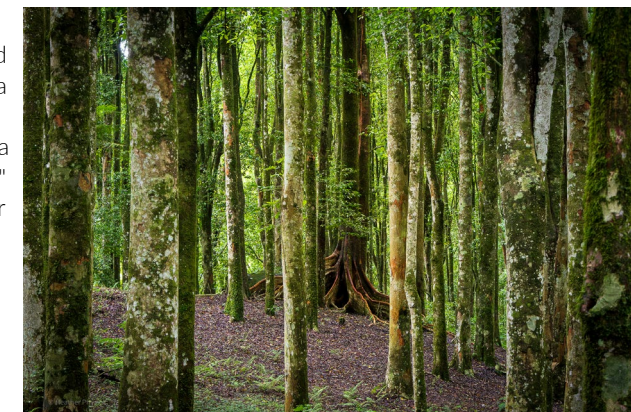
BELOW: 2nd place, Flora | "Mighty Roots of the Klapok Tree" by Heather Physioc



3rd place, Scenic | "Echoes of the Inca at Pinkuylluna Ruins" by Heather Physioc



2nd place, People | "One Last Cast" by Chris Paparo



RIGHT: 3rd place, Flora
"Hidden Banyan in a Bali Forest" by Heather Physioc

3rd—The quest to save Syracuse's last Boy Scout troop, Steven Featherstone (Post-Standard)

FISHING

1st—Fishing saved his life, Paul Smith (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)
2nd—In 'River Songs,' Steve Duda recounts fly-fishing joys and struggles, Gregory Scruggs (The Seattle Times)
3rd—In quest to stay active, 100-year-old WWII veteran Betsy Jeffords takes on salmon fishing, Bill Monroe (The Oregonian/OregonLive)

GEAR/TECHNICAL

1st—Streamers, choose your color, Michael Salomone (Vail Daily)
2nd—Learn to levitate over Seattle's waters on an eFoil, Gregory Scruggs (The Seattle Times)
3rd—Accessories for winter fly fishing, Michael Salomone (Vail Daily)

HUMOR

1st—Lost in the Woods Again, Dan Small (Wisconsin Outdoor News)

2nd—Good In-vestment, Roy Heilman (Mankato Free Press)

3rd—Boat Ramp Research, Roy Heilman (Mankato Free Press)

HUNTING OR SHOOTING SPORTS

1st—First turkey hunt "one of the best days" for 88-year-old Marine vet, Paul Smith (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)
2nd—The Airgun Revolution Hits Wisconsin, Dan Small (Wisconsin Outdoor News)
3rd—Functional art: How Dan Wittenberg makes turkey calls that last, Michael Wright (The Spokesman-Review)

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

1st—Meet the skeet-shooting, ax-throwing women of CNY's Women in Nature Event, Steven Featherstone (Post-Standard)
2nd—Jackpot, Roy Heilman (Mankato Free Press)
3rd—After 80 years of bird watching, local Audubon seeks more inclusive, youthful name, Joseph Dits (South Bend Tribune)

PHOTOGRAPHY

ACTION

1st—Winged Jewel, Nancy Sorrells (2024 Calendar)
2nd—A Perfect Retrieve, Eric Kallen (The Richmond Scout Guide Volume 12)
3rd—Opportunistic Heron, Heather Physioc (KCTRVLR.com)

FAMILY PARTICIPATION/YOUTH OUTDOOR EDUCATION

1st—Paddle Superior 1, James Smedley (Algoma Country Travel Guide 2024)
2nd—Family Hike, James Smedley (Algoma Country Travel Guide 2024)
3rd—Canoeing with Kids, Corey Hunt (Rethink Rural)

FAUNA

1st—Critically Endangered Bali Starling Pair, Heather Physioc (KCTRVLR: "My top 24 photographs of 2024")
2nd—Puffinuzzle, Derrick Z. Jackson (The Maine Monitor)
3rd—Red-Eyed Frog, Nancy Sorrells (2024 Calendar)



1st place, Scenic | "Badwater Salt Flats, Death Valley National Park" by Colleen Miniuk

FLORA

- 1st**—Scorpionweed, Colleen Miniuk (Arizona Highways)
2nd—Mighty Roots of the Klapok Tree, Heather Physioc (KCTRVLR: "My top 24 photographs of 2024")
3rd—Hidden Banyan in a Bali Forest, Heather Physioc (KCTRVLR: "My top 24 photographs of 2024")

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

- 1st**—Dune Buggies in the Samalayuca Dunes, Heather Physioc (KCTRVLR: "My top 24 photographs of 2024")
2nd—Paddle Superior 3, James Smedley (Algoma Country Travel Guide 2024)
3rd—Murre-acious, Derrick Z. Jackson (Union of Concerned Scientists)

PEOPLE

- 1st**—Golden Hour Fishing, Chris Paparo (Ward Melville High School Saltwater Expo & Fundraiser)
2nd—One Last Cast, Chris Paparo (Ward

Melville High School Saltwater Expo & Fundraiser)

- 3rd**—Islay and Mario, James Smedley (Destination Ontario)

SCENIC

- 1st**—Badwater Salt Flats, Death Valley National Park, Colleen Miniuk (Smith Southwestern's 2024 National Parks calendar)
2nd—Lake O'Hara, Alec Sills-Trausch (explorewithalec.com)
3rd—Echoes of the Inca at Pinkuylluna Ruins, Heather Physioc (KCTRVLR: "My top 24 photographs of 2024")

PHOTO ESSAY

- 1st**—Off the Beaten Path, Eric Kallen (Gray's Sporting Journal)
2nd—Seal Island sees record number of breeding puffins, Derrick Z. Jackson (The Maine Monitor)
3rd—Indiana's National Natural Landmarks, Brent Drinkut (Outdoor Indiana)

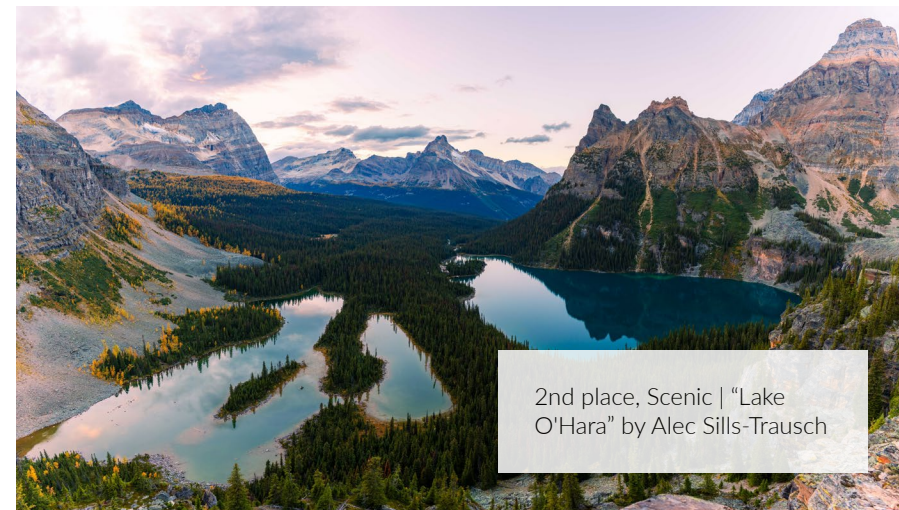
RADIO/PODCAST

CONSERVATION OR NATURE

- 1st**—Ed The Diver, Bill Sherck (Spotify/Apple Podcasts)
2nd—Recovering Arizona's Apache Trout, John Kruse (America Outdoors Radio Network)
3rd—Split Oak: Florida Conservation Land Under Siege, Chris Stevens (The Florida Madcaps Podcast)

FAMILY PARTICIPATION/YOUTH OUTDOOR EDUCATION

- 1st**—The Adventure Detour: A Guide to Full-Time RV Living, Howard Fox (Outdoor Adventure Series)
2nd—Outdoor Lifestyle Helps Cancer Battle, Richy Harrod (We are Outdoorsmen Podcast)
3rd—Collecting Critical Field Data for Conservation with Adventure Scientists, Howard Fox (Outdoor Adventure Series)



2nd place, Scenic | "Lake O'Hara" by Alec Sills-Trausch

FISHING

- 1st**—The Evolution of an Athlete: Andy Mill's Path to Fishing Greatness, Marvin Cash (The Articulate Fly)
2nd—Salmon Fishing at Buoy 10 on the Columbia River, John Kruse (Northwestern Outdoors Radio Network)

GEAR/TECHNICAL

- 1st**—Phil Bourjaily's Best Duck Loads for 2024, John Kruse (America Outdoors Radio Network)
2nd—Camp Like a Girl — Empowering Women One Campfire At a Time, Heidi-marie Brandes (Untethered and Wander-wise: Women Travel Over 45)

HUNTING OR SHOOTING SPORTS

- 1st**—Hunting and Fishing Innovations to Empower Disabled Adventurers, Howard Fox (Outdoor Adventure Series)

BELOW: 3rd place, Graphic/Illustration "Working Alone; It Never Happened; Yet Worth Every Step" by Raymond Lanfear



- 2nd**—Highballs & BS Podcast: In the Blind with Amy Hall & Jessie Cole Walters, Shawn Swearingen (iTunes and Spotify)
3rd—Will Brantley's Take on Turkey Hunters, John Kruse (America Outdoors Radio Network)

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

- 1st**—Washington's Best Hikes for Whale Watching, John Kruse (Northwestern Outdoors Radio Network)
2nd—Grandpa, a Cane Pole, and a Catfish Bigger Than Me, Rick Saez (Outdoor Adventure Lifestyle Podcast)
3rd—Into the Wild: Exploring the Outdoors With UnCruise Adventures, Howard Fox (Outdoor Adventure Series)

TV/VIDEO/WEBCAST

CONSERVATION OR NATURE

- 1st**—Resilience — The Rise of Apache Trout, Joshua Duplechian (Trout Unlimited's YouTube channel)
2nd—Ed the Diver, Bill Sherck (Made For The Outdoors/Bally Sports North)
3rd—The Learning Ranch, Karen Loke (Texas Parks & Wildlife YouTube and PBS Show)

FAMILY PARTICIPATION/YOUTH OUTDOOR EDUCATION

- 1st**—The Learning Ranch, Karen Loke (Texas Parks & Wildlife YouTube and PBS Show)
2nd—A Dad's Dream Day, Grant McOmie (KGW 8 NBC)
3rd—A First Deer Camp, Bill Sherck (Minnesota Bound, KARE 11 NBC)

FISHING

- 1st**—Hoppers!, Bill Sherck (Minnesota

Bound, KARE 11 NBC)

- 2nd**—David Holmes River Guide, Pete Hermann-Franzen (KARE 11 NBC)

- 3rd**—50th Anniversary Opener, Bill Sherck (Minnesota Bound, KARE 11 NBC)

HUNTING OR SHOOTING SPORTS

- 1st**—SHT Flush!, Bill Sherck (Outdoor Channel)
2nd—Jonathan Laing Deer Opener, Kelly McDonnell (KARE 11 NBC)
3rd—The Reverend Hunter, Kelly McDonnell (KARE 11 NBC)

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

- 1st**—BWCA Nurses, Bill Sherck (Minnesota Bound, KARE 11 NBC)
2nd—Trout and Ramps, Pete Hermann-Franzen (KARE 11 NBC)
3rd—A Taste of Fall, Grant McOmie (KGW 8 NBC)

OPEN

- 1st**—The Onondagas' first mission: Heal the land, Steven Featherstone (Post-Standard)
2nd—Newsletter for Florida Keys Wildlife Society, friends group for the Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuges — Fall 2024, Karuna Eberl (Voice for Nature)
3rd—Newsletter for Florida Keys Wildlife Society, friends group for the Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuges — Spring 2024, Karuna Eberl (Voice for Nature)

PRESIDENT'S CHOICE AWARDS

- Blog**—On Killing Animals, Nicole Quattieri (The Westrn)
Magazine—The Stars in Our Eyes, Joel Martin (California Fly Fisher)
Magazine—Ultra Running for Beginners: What It's Like to Run a 52-Mile Mountain Race, Christine Peterson (Outdoor Life)
Newspaper—First turkey hunt "one of the best days" for 88-year-old Marine vet, Paul Smith (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)
Photography—Winged Jewel, Nancy Sorrells (2024 Calendar)
Radio/Podcast—Ed The Diver, Bill Sherck (Spotify/Apple Podcasts)
TV/Video/Webcast—Resilience — The Rise of Apache Trout, Joshua Duplechian (Trout Unlimited's YouTube channel)

1ST PLACE, PHOTO ESSAY
"OFF THE BEATEN PATH"
BY ERIC KALLEN
(Gray's Sporting Journal)

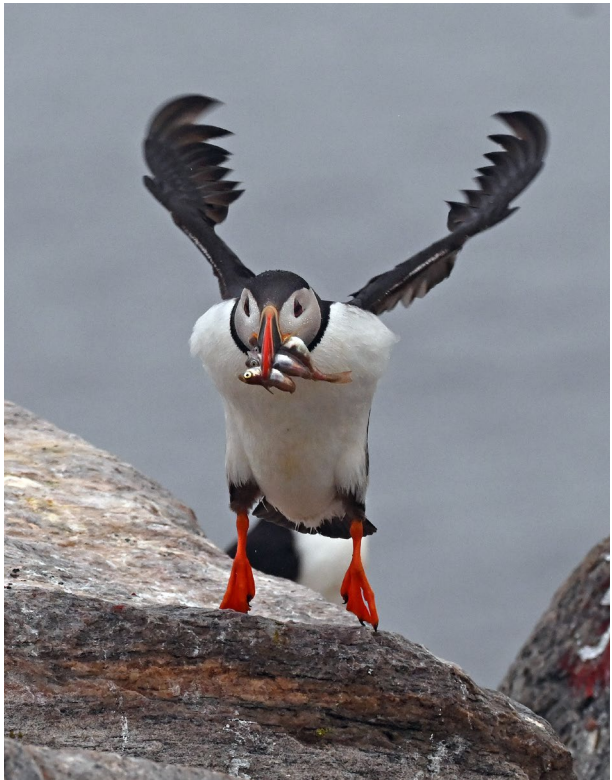
Photos continued on page 19.

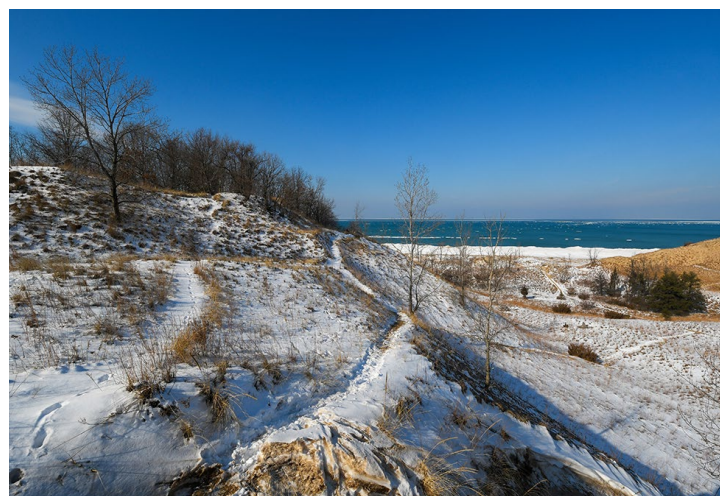
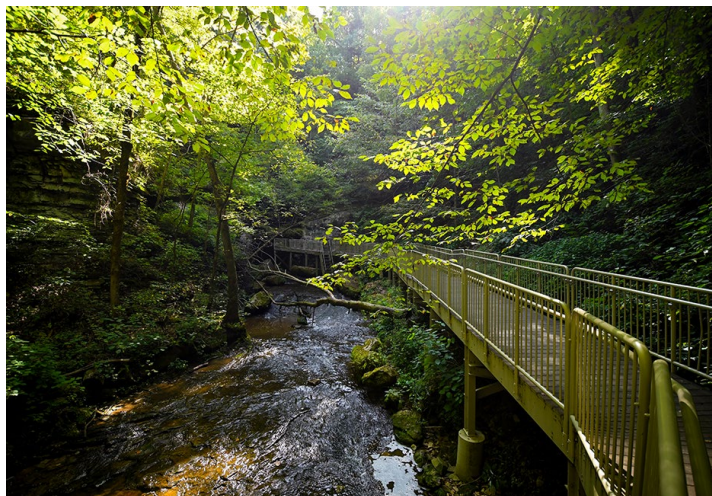




2ND PLACE, PHOTO ESSAY
"SEAL ISLAND SEES RECORD
NUMBER OF BREEDING PUFFINS"
BY DERRICK Z. JACKSON
(The Maine Monitor)

Photos continued on page 21.





3RD PLACE, PHOTO ESSAY
"INDIANA'S NATIONAL
NATURAL LANDMARKS"
BY BRENT DRINKUT
 (Outdoor Indiana)

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BACKPACKING BESIDE THE BALTIC SEA

BY ROB ROGERS | WINTER GARDEN, FLORIDA. PHOTOS BY ROB ROGERS.

Sweden is known for the archipelago near Stockholm that most visitors tour only by boat, and although many guidebooks also list nearby day-hiking destinations, precious few describe places in the Stockholm Archipelago to backpack. But a gem of a backpacking destination that can be reached easily without a rental car lies less than an hour from Stockholm — and it is free to camp there.

If you're looking for a great place to backpack in the Stockholm Archipelago during a short trip to Stockholm, there may be nowhere better than the Bogesundlandet Nature Reserve. I was lucky enough to do a pair of one-night backpacking trips there during a recent family vacation, and my experiences there were spectacular.

About the Bogesundlandet Nature Reserve

Rarely mentioned in American travel guides, Bogesundlandet Nature Reserve sits on the island of Bogesund only 8.5 miles northeast of Stockholm, across a short causeway from Vaxholm, a popular stop on most boat tours of the Stockholm Archipelago.

Covering more than 7,000 acres of forest and 3,000 more acres of fjords and lakes, Bogesundlandet surrounds the 17th-century Bogesund Castle and has been used as farmland since the late Iron Age. The island was eventually converted to recreational use, and the nature reserve was founded in 2015. It is now managed by the Statens fastighetsverket (SFV, Sweden's National Property Board).

The island is an outdoor playground full of attractions for outdoor enthusiasts, including campgrounds, equestrian trails and a golf course. It also contains 10 hiking trails ranging in length from 2 to 7 miles, many of which intersect and can be combined for longer hikes.

Although several trails surround the castle, many dive deep into rocky forests or hug the boulder-strewn coasts, offering the same beautiful views of the Baltic that most tourists only get to see from the water.

Greatest of all, trailside primitive campsites are sprinkled throughout Bogesundlandet, many with camp shelters. Most campsites are equipped with fire pits thoughtfully stocked with firewood by the SFV. All are free and need not be reserved.

Many of these campsites, like the Varmora campsite where I camped, lie beside the Baltic Sea; some are even accessible by kayak.

The nature reserve's ideal proximity to Vaxholm

Bogesundlandet is also tantalizingly close to Vaxholm, considered the gateway to the Stockholm Archipelago. Tourists exploring other islands typically take larger ferries to Vaxholm to connect to boats that stop at smaller islands.

Steps from Vaxholm's harbor on the island of Vaxon is a bus stop that connects to destinations around the island, and the



nature reserve can be affordably reached by downloading the app for the bus system and paying when you board.

If you prefer to hike there instead, the Blue Trail that begins at the harbor in Vaxholm crosses through the island, then over a causeway to the nature reserve, before meandering through many of the most beautiful sites in the reserve.

My one-night adventures

When my family and I spent several nights in Vaxholm, I improvised a one-night hiking adventure by taking a bus from the Vaxholm harbor to the Frosvikhagen bus stop in the middle of the nature reserve, then backpacked 3.5 miles along the Blue Trail to the seaside Varmora campsite. After spending the night there, I hiked the remaining 5 miles back to our rental apartment near the harbor in Vaxholm the next morning.

I enjoyed the experience so much that when our flight home the following week was canceled, I returned to Bogesundlandet and hiked the hilly 5-mile Nasseldalsrundan loop and connected back to the Blue Trail for 2.5 more miles to spend the night again at the Varmora campsite before hiking out again the next morning.

My experiences backpacking at Bogesundlandet left me awestruck.

Miles of well-blazed trails meander through pine and oak forests, over glacier-carved hilltops and along the shores of tranquil fjords and lakes. Even though trailheads are easy to find and

maps with English translations are simple to use, many trails feel as wild as scenic trails where I live in North America.

Even more breathtaking are the seaside campsites. Although I might comfortably have opted for the shelter, I could not pass on the opportunity to set my tent beside the sea.

Facing north, the Varmora campsite afforded the unique opportunity in late June to face both the rising and setting sun. With the summer solstice approaching, I enjoyed a campfire in fading sun after 11 p.m., as ducks serenaded me while diving for morsels in the bladder kelp. I was even treated to swans and a rainbow.

Don't overlook Vaxholm

Known mainly for its nearby fortress that for centuries guarded the main waterway to Stockholm, Vaxholm itself is a quaint seaside town that caters to the summer sailing set. It is also a great place to spend several days and is approximately one hour's drive from Arlanda International Airport.

Vaxholm sits on the island of Vaxon, which lies across a short one-lane causeway from the island of Bogesund containing the nature reserve. Vaxholm's harbor lies just 1.5 miles south of the causeway on the Blue Trail, a popular hiking and biking trail that runs through both islands.

A popular summer stay for Swedes, Vaxholm's quaint downtown has ample dining options, as well as colorful shops and galleries and even plenty of playgrounds for families. Its well-appointed grocery store has all you need if you prefer to dine at home or picnic by the harbor, and the north side of the island even sports a seaside boardwalk leading to a swimming spot for those prepared for chilly dips in the Baltic.

There are also plenty of other outdoor activities near Bogesundlandet Nature Reserve for those who prefer to sleep indoors. While I was backpacking, my wife and daughter enjoyed the beach and the Sky Park ropes courses at Erikso, another natural area on the island of Vaxon that is also a short bus ride from Vaxholm's harbor.

Other hiking options near Vaxholm

Bogesundlandet is not the only place in the Stockholm Archipelago to hike and camp.

My family and I also hiked on Grinda, a forested island that has camping areas and a historic hotel. Later the same day, we also hiked through surprisingly secluded woodlands on Sandhamn, an island known more for the party scene at its harbor.

Both can be easily reached on ferries that stop multiple times daily at Vaxholm; Sandhamn is also a popular endpoint for longer ferries departing from Stockholm. But those islands are small and better suited for shorter family hikes — I hiked on both the morning before my second backpacking adventure in Bogesundlandet.

Bogesundlandet is perfect if you're looking for a little adventure with enough convenience to avoid having to adjust vacation plans. More information about Bogesundlandet Nature Reserve (in English and other languages) can be found on bogesundlandet.se.

If you go...

Because Vaxholm is a small island without a backpacking store, you should bring tents, sleeping bags and backpacks from home (I packed mine in my oversized checked luggage). But some essential supplies, including food and cooking fuel, can be found in downtown Vaxholm.

The Coop grocery store on Hamngatan two blocks from the harbor has all the food you may need. I was also pleased to find canisters of isobutane/propane fuel for my camp stove at Waxholms sport och fritid (Vaxholm Sports and Leisure) on Hamngatan across from Coop.



If you plan to reach the nature reserve by bus, you'll take the 681 bus, which leaves several times per day from Vaxholm's harbor. I recommend downloading the SL public transportation app and purchasing tickets in advance if you plan for a single person to pay for multiple riders. More information about the SL app can be found at sl.se/en/getting-around/how-to-travel-with-sl.

Free maps and brochures for Bogesundlandet Nature Reserve are available at most hotels and many stores (including Waxholms sport och fritid), as well as at the tourist office in Vaxholm's Town Hall, which also provides bus schedules. A map of the nature reserve's trails can also be found at karta-med-vandring-sleder-i-bogesundlandet.pdf.

— Rob Rogers is an attorney and author of *Finding My Way Home: Fighting Depression Backpacking in Central Florida*. He also writes a blog, the *Central Florida Backpacking Desk Jockey* (backpacking-deskjockey.blog), and his articles have been featured on floridahikes.com. Rob and his family have also traveled to more than 15 European countries. Links to Rob's essays and other articles he has written about backpacking can be found on his website, robrogerswriter.com.

WHO'S GONNA FILL THEIR SHOES?

BY TERRY CREEKMORE | LIVERMORE, COLORADO



You know this old world is filled with writers, but just a few are chosen to be the oracles of a generation. Everyone has their heroes, I suppose. Mine painted the vast outdoors with just a phrase, a grand adventure woven by a mere collection of words, each landscape unique to the mind's eye of the reader, and I'm sure the visions fashioned in my preadolescent intellect differed greatly from those conjured by people more worldly, but damned weren't they grand just the same. They were the outdoor writers of my youth, heroes all, but during the intervening six decades, from sandlot ball to Social Security, one by one they fell silent. To quote that immortal bard George Jones, "Who's gonna fill their shoes? Who's gonna stand that tall?"

I reckon heroes are easier to come by when you are young. As a lad in northern Montana, I had a Louisville Slugger with Harmon Killebrew's name stamped on it, always on display since one of the mantras of my youth was "keep the label

up." Never mind that I had about as much chance of watching "Hammerin' Harman" in person as I did of becoming one of the Mercury Seven — that bat made him my idol.

"The aught-six was the gold standard of my father's generation ..."

Not all my heroes plunked an Underwood Standard. A few graced the grainy black-and-white TV screen. I grew up in Montana, and Kurt Gowdy was a westerner like me. We spoke the same language, and I wiggled in anticipation when at 5 p.m. every Sunday his booming voice introduced "American Sportsman." And there will never be another Grits Gresham, but it was those tales huddled between the covers of outdoor

magazines that provided a scrawny kid the opportunity to travel the world, and to me, the musings of those men were gospel.

I suppose my window to outdoor writing was opened by gun writer Jack O'Connor back when I first learned my letters in the early '60s. Cactus Jack replaced the bumbblings of "See Dick Run" with a world of adventure, of rifles, and wild sheep and the venerable .270 Winchester. The aught-six was the gold standard of my father's generation but, as Bob Dylan opined, "the times they are a changin'." Camelot had fallen, and in late November of 1963, I recall a smoky, tight-packed Ford F-100 cab and the spirited discussion among the grown men regarding the merits of that newfangled cannon, the .300 Win Mag.

I was genetically predisposed to the 30-06, and when I finally plunked my hard-earned downpayment on the counter of Walmart in Rogers, Arkansas, in '73, the shelf was lined with all manner of ballistic splendor; lever-action 30-30s, turnbolt rifles caliber .243, .308 and aught-six, but my money was on a shiny new Remington 700 .270, the purchase made on payments. Such is the influence of a hero. A half century on, that rifle still jumps to my cheek like a high-school sweetheart.

Then there was that back page. How many Ninas did Hirschfeld hide this month? I perpetually read Outdoor Life backwards, flipping to the back-page world of Patrick McManus, to that north Idaho wonderland of Rancid, and Retch, and Crazy Eddie and the Troll. How I longed to see Tuttle Lake, but I suppose I

did. Tim Christie once told me he hated to go to meetings with McManus because he would have to tell Pat to shut up so everyone would quit laughing and they could continue their business.

There will never be another Ruark and his old man, bobwhites to Cape buffalo, or Hemingway and the Green Hills of Africa, or Aldo Leopold, who, as every budding wildlife student learns, is the father of wildlife management. A dog-eared copy of Leopold's "A Sand County Almanac" occupies a special place on my bookshelf. Buckingham, Spiller, Nash and Havilah Babcock, such a melodious moniker, and Corey Ford's "The Road to Tinkhamtown" still echo through the years. Those men, my heroes, were storytellers on a grand scale.

Then there was Roger Pinckney, forever skating the thin ice on the deep end of a Gopher State duck pond. "He was a full-grown whitetail buck, corn fed, and cattail hid, pushing 250 pounds, so fat he jiggled when he walked." Unlike my childhood heroes, I came upon Pinckney's tales later in life. No star-struck adolescent hero worship, I became fascinated with his wonderfully descriptive prose, "a snarl of pin oak ridges," or "brush so tight a dog had to back up to bark." It was a dark day when I opened Sporting Classics in anticipation of his latest (I always

turned there first), only to be greeted with the sad news of his passing.

I am no longer that starry-eyed kid and I suppose, for me, nostalgia renders the rejoinder to George's query impossible, but there most certainly is a new crop of outdoor writers navigating a world quite different from that of my youth. Another O'Connor or Ruark? Pshaw! But Chris Madson, like his father before him, weaves a tale smooth as mulberry silk, and there is a youngster who is doing a fine job of carrying on the tradition of those heroes of my bygone youth.

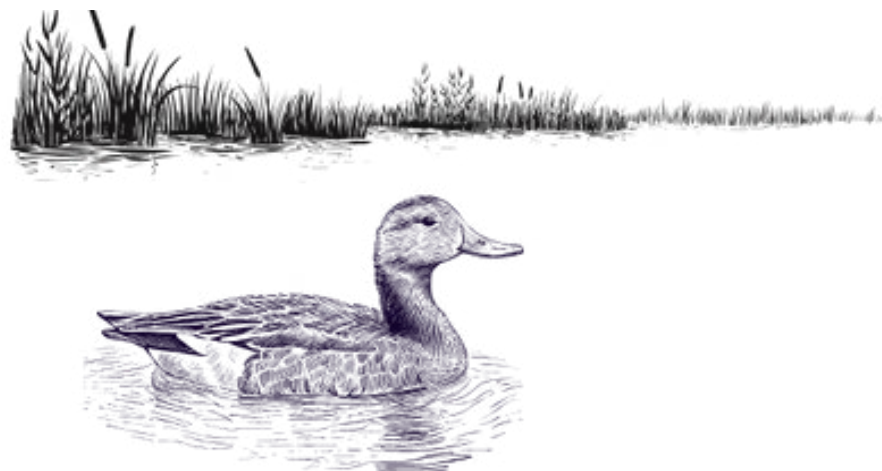
I was a senior in high school when he was born so I will forever view him as a pup, but without a doubt, Steven Rinella is the standard bearer for this generation of sportsmen and women. Well versed in the intricacies of wildlife and the habitat in which they dwell, the young Mr. Rinella is articulate, charismatic and portrays our world of hunting and the outdoors in a manner to which those persons nonconsumptive can relate.

Over the past three score and eight, I have morphed from a moonstruck kid into a gray-haired old curmudgeon, but I still find comfort in the written word. Fine companions, a good book and the warmth of the hearth are tonic for an old man's soul. But I shudder at the thought of sharing the fire, coddling a dram of

the Highlands' finest with an AI bot or anyone who requires such technology to write a passable tale. Harrumph! In this world awash with how-to journalism, the grand storytelling of my youth is but a fading reminiscence. But my heroes will forever be there, lurking on musty bookshelves, awaiting the next generation to discover their magic. Sing it again, George.

Reading list: "The Old Man and the Boy" by Robert Ruark, "A Sand County Almanac" by Aldo Leopold and "A Fine and Pleasant Misery" by Patrick F. McManus.

— Terry Creekmore retired after a 36-year career as a wildlife disease biologist. He lives at the end of a Colorado dirt road with his wife, Lynn, and Jitterbug the mule.



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RENEWABLE ENERGY PROTECTS OUR ATMOSPHERE AND PUBLIC LANDS

BY RICH PATTERSON | CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA

Several years ago, I sat in a window seat as the plane took off from the Newark, New Jersey, airport. Looking downward, I spotted solar collectors on the tops of many buildings. Two hours later, I gazed at similar buildings while descending into Charlotte, North Carolina. When I mentioned to the guy sitting next to me that I didn't see any solar there, he responded, "Solar is just a bunch of liberal mumbo jumbo. It doesn't work."

That afternoon as my wife, Marion, drove me home from the Cedar Rapids, Iowa, airport, she said, "Our monthly electric bill came in today. It was \$5 and change." That was our utility's connection fee for our net-metered solar system. Solar panels on our barn roof silently produce much of the electricity we need. The return on our financial investment in the system yields about 11% a year in reduced electric cost. That's hardly mumbo jumbo.

In the few years since we enjoyed a \$5 bill, we've added a battery-fueled car and replaced gas lawn mowers, trimmers and a chainsaw with battery models. Our May 2025 electric bill was a whopping \$32.92, augmented by \$65 worth of electricity generated by our solar panels. So we produced about two-thirds of the electricity needed to drive our car around town, recharge our tool batteries and power our home's appliances and lights. We just replaced a gas kitchen range with an induction electric one in our effort to reduce petroleum consumption.

Iowa stands as an example of renewable energy's potential. In 1983, political and business leaders, supported by citizens, began encouraging renewable energy production. Iowa now boasts 13.91 gigawatts of clean energy capacity, enough to power 10 million homes. Today, 62% of the state's total electricity is generated from wind turbines and solar. Solar increased by 92% between March 2024 and March 2025. Coal-generated electricity has dropped from 45% in 2018 to 23% five years later. These trends continue. Our utility, Alliant Energy, recently announced that it plans to add another 1000 megawatts of wind generation. That's enough to power 350,000 homes.

From mostly private land, Iowa produces more electricity than it needs and exports the rest to other states. Its citizens enjoy among the lowest energy rates in the country, in part because utilities don't need to buy fuel. Wind and sunshine come free.



A solar field near Cedar Rapids, Iowa, shows nesting habitat in the buffer that rings the field. Photo by Rich Patterson

It's tragic that American energy production has become politically polarized. Republicans generally support expanded fossil-fuel production, including on public lands. Democrats favor expanding wind and solar generation, also on public lands.

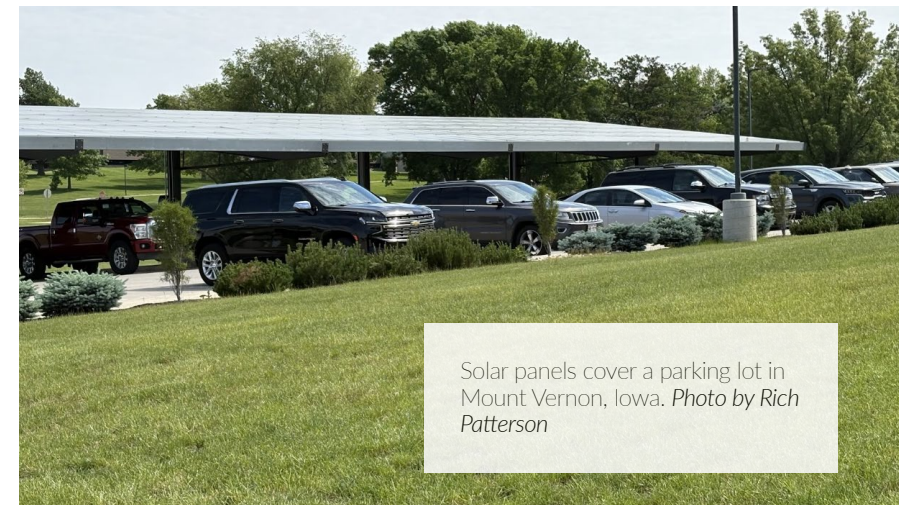
Who's right?

Well, neither. It's nuts to politicize energy production. With climate change becoming increasingly obvious to seemingly everyone but high U.S. government officials, the trend toward renewables makes sense. It can be done without sully public lands with any type of energy development.

Solarizing parking lots makes more sense than coating public land with panels or drilling for petroleum.

Oil and gas rigs on public lands mar their scenic beauty and threaten native plants and wildlife. So do solar fields and wind turbines. Fortunately, technology, if not political will, enables the production of much more of America's electricity from wind and solar. How so?

Our roof generates power quietly as it transforms sunshine



Solar panels cover a parking lot in Mount Vernon, Iowa. Photo by Rich Patterson

into electricity. Some of the electrons our panels capture recharge our car's battery. When we need more electricity than our panels produce, we buy it from our utility, which generates it mostly from the wind and sun. It costs about half as much per mile driven to buy electricity versus gasoline.

Millions of American roofs could do the same, and locations for additional solar installations are abundant. Consider the enormous warehouses sprouting like weeds along highways. Those immense roofs offer ideal solar platforms. My neighboring town of Mount Vernon

erected a carport over a parking lot. It's topped with solar collectors, allowing cars to park underneath in the shade and out of the snow. Solarizing parking lots makes more sense than coating public land with panels or drilling for petroleum.

Some people cling to the fantasy that climate change isn't happening and society can go merrily along burning fossil fuel. They fail to recognize that every gallon of oil or pound of coal burned is gone forever, with its released carbon destabilizing our climate. At some point fossil fuels will be exhausted and society

will be forced to transition to other energy sources. Better to make the switch now.

Tax credits help make the change to renewables faster. By removing those credits, President Trump's shortsighted "big, beautiful budget bill" will fuel more severe storms and the degradation of public land.

We can choose to transition to an energy base that offers clean air and perpetual power or continue to "drill, baby, drill" and accept the consequences. Most federal tax credits for installing renewable energy devices and efficiency end on December 31. Now's the time to harvest them and transition every home and business into an electric generator, helping keep both fossil fuel and renewable development off our public lands and carbon out of our atmosphere. It's not mumbo jumbo.

— Rich Patterson is a member of OWAA's Circle of Conservation Chiefs and a former OWAA board president. He and his wife, Marion, also an OWAA member, own Winding Pathways LLC (windingpathways.com), a business helping create wondrous homes and yards. His thoughts are his own.



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Ask an author

Q&A WITH STEVE DUDA

BY DAVID ZOBY | CASPER, WYOMING

In June 2022, Steve Duda arrived at OWAA's annual conference with just enough time to drop his bags and head to the main room. He was our keynote speaker. With his platinum ponytail, blue-black tattoos and relaxed air, you'd think he had made his living as a front man for a punk band. Indeed, he hails from the music and art scene.

At one point, Duda was the editor for The Rocket, an independent music magazine that covered the Pacific Northwest. He's been a newspaperman, a music critic for magazines such as Rolling Stone and, of course, a rising voice in fly-fishing literature. Like so many of us, Duda was introduced to fly-fishing later in life. While working for an alternative newspaper in Boise, his editor took him out. He often recounts his first voyage into a cold stream to cast for trout. He didn't own waders, and his legs went numb, but he refused to quit.

OWAA courted Duda as a speaker for his editorial work at The Flyfish

... it's pleasant to listen to Duda, his raspy, genuine voice, describe fly-fishing buddies, mixed-breed dogs, fishing days that don't quite turn out and his lifelong love for the Detroit Tigers.

Journal, a conservation-minded publication that burst onto the fly-fishing scene nearly a dozen years ago. With Duda as its editor, the journal grew in popularity for its gritty, no-nonsense stories that drove at the core of the sport. Duda published stories that celebrate the beauty of fly-fishing, but he didn't shrink from the pieces that lamented what once was.

The journal provided many new writers, like me, a platform to flourish. Now, at



Patagonia, Duda is "Head of Fish Tales." He curates work that advocates for clean water and wild fish. He readily admits that Patagonia is an activist company with one client: the planet.

Duda delivered an honest, compelling speech that reinforced that we, as writers, are not impostors. "You belong," he said. He allowed that to sink in.

His life has changed a lot since that talk in Casper. He published a collection of essays, "River Songs: Moments of Wild Wonder in Fly Fishing," in 2024. The book is receiving great press, winning awards and taking on a life of its own. I have the audiobook, and it's pleasant to listen to Duda, his raspy, genuine voice, describe fly-fishing buddies, mixed-breed dogs, fishing days that don't quite turn out and his lifelong love for the Detroit Tigers. Driving across, say, Wyoming's Red Desert after a not-so-great trip to fish the Hoback River, these essays celebrate fly-fishing culture in a gritty, poetic style that seems, finally, honest.

Since the release of River Songs, Steve has been on a whirlwind of podcasts, public readings and book signings. I

caught up with him last summer to ask about his recent success and how that OWAA conference in Wyoming played a role.

Q. Tell me about "River Songs." How did it come into the world?

A. I had been writing about fly-fishing for more than 20 years, so I had a large backlog. I was lucky enough to have OWAA invite me to chat at one of their annual conferences. I was super nervous about it because I had never really done something like that before. But I walked off stage and I thought, I did OK, I guess. And a woman walked up to chat with me, and her name was Kate Rogers.

Kate is the editor-in-chief at Mountaineers Books. And she said, "I loved your presentation, I love your writing and I want to publish a book [of yours]." And I looked around for hidden cameras, because I thought I was being pranked.

But honestly, I didn't know if the offer was serious or not. And sure enough, she followed up with me and offered to publish a book of my collected writings. And, to make a long story short, I believed her. And we got the ball rolling. A year later, "River Songs" was published, was out in the real world. I was holding a copy in my hands.

Q. Can you describe how you approach public speaking events, because I know you do readings all of the time now?

A. My girlfriend is an attorney, and I see her prepping for trials all the time. That's the key — preparation. Just be prepared, right? Even with reading events — which I've done a hundred times — I practice. I rehearse. There's no substitute for preparation. There's no shortcut. It's like writing. You can't fake your way through it.

Q. You had a mixed group in the room that day in Casper. You had people who had never published, people who want to publish and some seasoned writers. But you had to deliver a talk to fit everyone.

A. People are hungry for real talk, for wisdom. People pay more attention when the message is authentic and real,

and not sugar coated. Not encased in corporate-speak. It's just relevant to what they deal with day to day. And that's what I tried to get to in that talk. You know, what are the issues that real working writers face? And what are real working editors looking for?

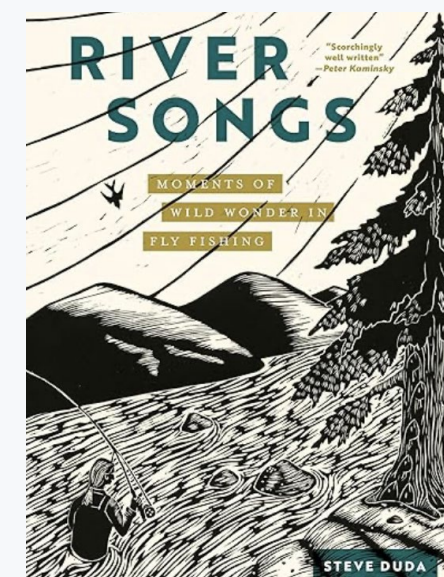
Q. Can you tell me how "River Songs" has changed your life?

A. I think that every writer, whether they write features, obituaries or real estate listings, wants to be the author of a book. It's the thing we all aspire to. And once you have that book in your hands, that's YOUR work, that YOU put so much time, effort, energy, thought and emotion into — it says, "I am a writer with a capital W."

I think one of the things we deal with as writers and artists is impostor syndrome. And I think having an actual, real-life book in your hands validates the notion that your work is important, that your work matters and that your work is real.

Q. The definition of an essay is changing, isn't it?

A. One of the cool things about writing essays is that there's not really a rule book. At least to me, it's open to interpretation. And I really like playing with form, playing with structure. I truly believe that good writers can tell the story from A to



B. Where the real skill and uniqueness comes in is manipulating that structure. So, many times, I think, we don't really deal with words; we mess with time.

Q. You begin the book with the essay "Ghosts." Why did you decide to begin there?

A. You know, the book is about the notion of wonder, standing in the light of nature, appreciating the planet that allows us to do this thing we call fly-fishing. Central to the notion of wonder is having a place to be wonderful about. If we don't protect that place, we don't have the sport of fly-fishing. Ultimately, how we treat nature comes back to us. Fly-fishing is the dividend we receive from our conservation efforts. And that story, "Ghosts," is basically a reminder of the abundance we once had versus the ghostly returns of wild salmon and steelhead now.

Q. Would you consider coming back and addressing the OWAA now that your life has changed so much?

A. I would love it because the exchange of knowledge, especially for people in our position, is really important. One of the most gratifying things for me as an editor has been the mentoring role. Seeing writers I've worked with have success, and seeing them get published. See them go — and this has happened—from the pages of The Flyfish Journal to The Atlantic. That's just great. And I think we have a duty to do that.

— David Zoby is a freelance writer from Wyoming with features appearing in many of the glossy outdoor magazines.

HISTORY PROJECT

A LOOK INTO OWAA'S PAST

Part VI

BY PHIL BLOOM | FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

What hasn't Lisa Ballard done? Award-winning writer and photographer, winner of dozens of OWAA Excellence In Craft Contest awards. Three-time Emmy-winning television host and field producer. Book publisher and author. World-champion skier and ski instructor. Eight-time winner of the North American Snowsports Association's Hirsch Award and recipient of the Society of American Travel Writers' Lowell Thomas Award and Bill Muster Photo Award.

She served on OWAA's Board of Directors before climbing the leadership ladder to become the group's president in 2015.

In back-to-back years (2023 and 2024), OWAA bestowed on her its two highest honors — the J. Hammond Brown Award for continuous service to the organization and the Joan Wulff Enduring Excellence Award for lifetime achievement.

By all accounts, Ballard is a luminary in an industry once dominated by men.

Although Hazel Clements signed OWAA's founding document in 1927



Lisa Ballard. Photo courtesy of Lisa Ballard

under her pen name "Mrs. Hal Kane Clements," women waited decades to gain traction in leadership roles for the organization, in part, perhaps, because there were so few of them in the outdoor writing field in those early years and, arguably, chauvinistic attitudes of some of their male counterparts.

Early OWAA membership records are sketchy, but when Eastern Shore (Maryland) Times fishing editor Elizabeth Henry joined in 1940, OU editor J. Hammond Brown wrote, "So far as I can find out [she] is the only woman outdoor editor in the country."

In 1947, OWAA threw support to women with a formal resolution stating: "In view of the increasing participation in outdoor recreational sports by women, that their interest in the out-of-doors be recognized and that the OWAA endorses their request for more recognition in the national outdoor magazines."

A year later, OWAA tried forming a woman's advisory group, but Mary Ainslee spoke against the resolution. Despite a 19-13 favorable vote, Brown scuttled the idea because he thought the margin "undesirable."

The idea resurfaced in 1953. OWAA established a division for women members and the spouses of men members with Florence Byerrum as its chair and the automatic title of OWAA vice president.

It wasn't until 1970 that another woman — Katie McMullen — was elected an OWAA director. Of OWAA's 1,207 members that year, only 71 were women.

Sheila Link and Rae Oetting were elected directors in 1974 and 1975, respectively, and Link became OWAA's first woman president in 1981.

Four decades later, women are on an historic roll — Christine Peterson (2022), Katie McKalip (2023) and Amy Kapp (2025) have served as OWAA president,

Colleen Miniuk is the current president and Ashley Stimpson and Ashley Peters are the vice presidents next in the line of succession.

"They are rocking it," Ballard said. "It's very exciting to have women's voices amplified."

Kapp said: "The impression I get when anyone talks about who might be good in a leadership position, you hear men's and women's names being thrown around. And I think that is fantastic. I don't get the vibe that anyone thinks women can't hold leadership positions in OWAA because it's been proven so much. There are so many women who have stepped up, so yeah, I personally get this vibe that there is an equal respect now for leadership skills that both men and women can bring to the table."

"OWAA is a great model of giving women a seat at the table."

For 34 consecutive years, at least one woman has been on the board. For the past four years, women held half of the 14 officer or director seats, and the current board roster boasts a record eight.

"It's very exciting to see so many women feel confident and comfortable in this industry," Miniuk said, who has filled every OWAA leadership role — secretary, treasurer and interim executive director while being voted Outstanding Board Member of the Year a record five times.

"We don't want extra credit," she said. "We just want equal seating. OWAA is a great model of giving women a seat at the table. I would give credit to men in the business who have been very supportive to women interested in being successful."

There are many examples of women finding success in outdoor media.

Osa Johnson and her husband, Martin, chronicled exotic adventures to Africa and Borneo in books and films until he died in a plane crash in 1937. She was severely injured in the accident but recovered to produce more films, design a line of animal toys for the National Wildlife Federation and write several books, including her best-selling autobiography "I Married Adventure."

Mary Land, whose Louisiana's ancestry predates the Louisiana Purchase, wrote poetry and feature stories on topics from outdoors to folklore and New Orleans cuisine. She co-authored a weekly syndicated column, wrote for local, regional and national magazines and was a staff writer for the Louisiana Department of Conservation. She won numerous awards for her writing and contributions to conservation.

Francesca LaMonte was a noted ichthyologist and pioneer in marine research whose expertise gained Ernest Hemingway's admiration. She co-founded the International Game Fish Association in 1939, and was the first woman elected to IGFA's Hall of Fame. She wrote the authoritative guidebook "North American Game Fishes" and was assistant curator at the American Museum of Natural History for 42 years.

Joan Wulff became world famous for her fly-fishing prowess after being intro-

Joan Wulff. Photo courtesy of the American Museum of Fly Fishing



Osa Johnson. Public domain image

duced to the sport at age 10 by her father, Jimmy Salvato, also an OWAA member. She won her first national casting championship as a 16-year-old and beat an all-male field for the national fly-casting distance title in 1951. She authored multiple books and regular magazine columns for Outdoor Life and Fly Rod & Reel. She married Lee Wulff in 1967, and they started the Wulff School of Fly Fishing. She currently has the longest tenure in OWAA, having joined in 1954. OWAA renamed its award for lifetime achievement in her honor in 2024.

Ann and Edna Skinner didn't start out as outdoor writers. Ann was an in-demand model in New York and California, and Edna was an actress who gained notoriety as nosy neighbor Kay Addison in the CBS TV series "Mister Ed" featuring a talking horse. The sisters quit those careers to pursue a childhood love — fishing. They quickly landed a role with Western Outdoors magazine, and over a five-year period, drove 300,000 miles and flew 50,000 more chasing fish of all sorts in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Anne LaBastille is possibly the most widely decorated — and educated — member of OWAA. She received a bachelor's degree in natural resources conservation and a Ph.D. in wildlife ecology from Cornell, and a master's in wildlife management from Colorado State. She collected honorary doctorates from three colleges and two outstanding alumni awards and was honored by The Explorers Club, the Society of Woman



Anne LaBastille. OWAA file photo

Geographers and others, along with the Nature Educator of the Year Award from the Roger Tory Peterson Institute. She wrote for Sierra Club and National Geographic magazines and authored two dozen scientific articles, five trade books and four children's books. She served 17 years on the Adirondack Park Agency Board of Commissioners and lived in the Adirondacks in a log cabin she built herself. In 1988, LaBastille became the first woman to receive OWAA's Jade of Chiefs Award.

Sylvia Bashline found her writing niche in outdoor cooking, a topic for which she authored seven books and regular columns as food editor at Field & Stream



Sylvia Bashline. OWAA file photo.



Sheila Link. OWAA file photo

and Outdoor Life. Her husband, Jim, also was a prominent member of OWAA, but she made her biggest mark in the organization when she became its executive director in 1984 and served in that capacity for a decade. She brought stability to OWAA after a turbulent period of three EDs in a span of three years. During her tenure, OWAA ranks peaked at 1,944 members. She was the first woman to receive OWAA's J. Hammond Brown Award in 1996.

Kay Ellerhoff and Paula Del Giudice served two terms each on OWAA's Board between 1991 and 2005. Ellerhoff was editor of Montana Outdoors for 20 years and executive editor of Wild



Colleen Miniuk. Photo courtesy of Colleen Miniuk

"All of the women active in OWAA are conservation minded. They really care about the outdoors, wildlife, clean air and clean water."

Outdoor World (W.O.W.), a magazine for 8- to 12-year-olds. She had a hand in two OWAA books ("Freelancer's Guide to Business Practices" and "Outdoor Reference Manual"), served on at least 20 OWAA committees and received the J. Hammond Brown Award in 2002. Del Giudice's multifaceted resume details her work as an English teacher, freelance writer, editor of American Shotgunner magazine and volunteer with several organizations. She was the first woman to chair the National Wildlife Federation's Board and received OWAA's Jade of Chiefs Award in 2007 for her contributions to conservation.

Others had significant roles with OWAA headquarters staff, beginning with Ham Brown's long-time secretary Mary Sachs. Eileen King and Jessica Seitz both had long runs managing member services and conference planning, and Katie McMullen, Dorothy Deer, Carol Kersavage, Katie McKalip, Ashley Schroeder, Kelsey Dayton and Suzanne Downing all served as editor of Outdoors Unlimited.



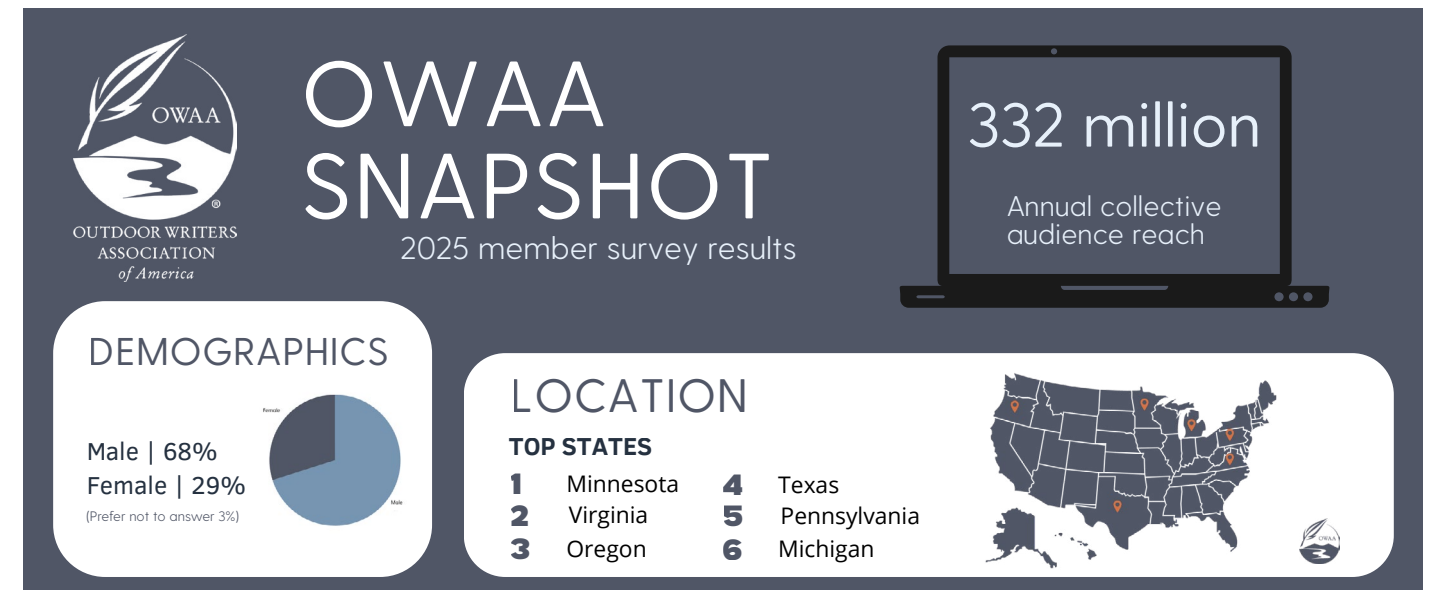
Francesca LaMonte. Photo courtesy of IFGA

Like them, Ballard found a home in OWAA as well as a shared conservation ethos with others.

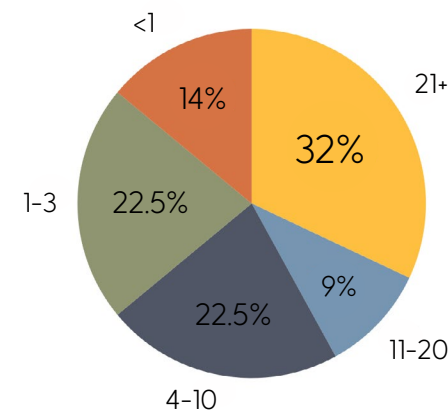
"All of the women active in OWAA are conservation minded," she said. "They really care about the outdoors, wildlife, clean air and clean water. I do feel that's a big piece of it."

"Not only do they have the skills as communicators and outdoor skills, but also that love of the whole environment and a willingness to be stewards of it. The women I see in OWAA hang their hat or helmet or visor on really caring about conservation ... It's a pretty important factor that has added to growth in the number of women in OWAA."

— *Phil Bloom is two-time president of OWAA and a lifelong resident of Fort Wayne, Indiana.*



YEARS OF MEMBERSHIP



TOP REASONS FOR JOINING OWAA

- Networking
- Craft improvement
- Professional development
- Community

TOP 3 MEMBER BENEFITS UTILIZED

Outdoors Unlimited Magazine

Excellence in Craft Contest

Annual Conference

PROFESSIONAL MEDIA **600+**

AREAS COVERED

TOP 5 GENERAL OUTDOOR MEDIA AREAS

Travel | 70%
Hiking | 51%
Camping/backpacking | 47%
Photography/videography | 34%
Cooking (indoors/outdoors) | 33%

TOP 5 ENVIRONMENTAL MEDIA AREAS

Wildlife conservation | 75%
Natural resources | 66%
Environment | 61%
Natural history | 48%
Ecology | 45%

TOP 4 HUNTING, FISHING & FIREARMS MEDIA AREAS

Freshwater fishing | 51%
Upland bird hunting | 36%
Fly-fishing | 35%
Big-game hunting | 34%

TOP 3 WATERSPORTS & BOATING MEDIA AREAS

Canoeing | 38%
Recreational kayaking | 35%
Rafting | 15%

TOP 3 SNOW SPORTS MEDIA AREAS

Snowshoeing | 23%
Cross-country skiing | 22%
Downhill skiing/boarding | 16%

TOP 2 CYCLING MEDIA AREAS

General cycling (family, rail-trail, etc.) | 24%
Mountain biking | 12%

Outdoor gear spotlight

EDITOR PICKS

BY SUZANNE DOWNING | ALBERTON, MONTANA

The outdoor gear featured in this section is field-tested gear that performs and gear I recommend. I've also added PR contacts. The contacts listed are 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 roundup coming up that might be a good fit, send these reps a note. Reach out and start building relationships.

ROCKY TALKIE MOUNTAIN RADIOS

If you're a professional outdoor communicator, heading outdoors beyond the reach of cell towers may be common for you. These Rocky Talkie Mountain Radios will give you a lifeline. They're reliable and have a good range (1-5 miles depending on terrain) so you can stay in touch with your crew in the backcountry. They're also cold resilient and have a long (lithium-ion) battery life of up to four days on a charge, even in extreme weather down to -20°F. These radios can help you with coordinating shots, scouting and (of course) safety without needing extra permits, and they also have shatterproof LED screens, so you can drop them without worrying about them breaking. (MSRP: \$110 each)



PR Contact: Elitsa Yaneva
elitsa.yaneva@purpleorangepr.com



HUK AIRWEIGHT HEATHER 1/4 ZIP MEN'S SHIRT

My husband tested this Huk Airtight Heather 1/4 Zip shirt from Huk's new Airweight collection here in our home state of Montana. The soft fabric lives up to the claim of being lightweight. It didn't restrict him when casting or paddling while out on the water. It has UPF 40+ sun protection and the shirt was quick to dry. The 1/4-zip styling is nice for venting heat on warm days, although if you have a beard, the tip of the 1/4 zip may catch in your beard or cause irritation when moving. (I promised the husband I'd put this beard warning in.) Overall, this shirt has a nice technical design, looks like a classic fishing shirt, protects you from the sun and feels good to wear outside. (MSRP: \$55)

PR Contact: Andrew Piasecki
andrew@obviouslee.com



NOC'S PROVISIONS LITE VIEW SPOTTING SCOPE & TRIPOD COMBO

The Nocs Provisions Lite View is more than just a scope. It's like carrying binoculars and a hunting scope all in one. You get a 9x-27x zoom with a 56mm objective lens, so whether you're watching warpspeed hummingbirds or scanning distant ridgelines, the detail comes through crisp. I use it for birding primarily to anticipate what's coming close. It weighs in at only about 1.2 pounds and fits comfortably in your pack (or in your hands) if you need to glass on the move. It's also water resistant (rated IPX4 — which is good), so you don't have to worry about drizzle, fog or light snow ruining it. The Nocs team also says there is a "No-Matter-What" lifetime warranty. And if you want to go hands free in the field, the Nocs aluminum tripod is sturdy and easy to use. You can easily adjust the height up to about 4 feet, 10 inches. For example, for a 6-foot-tall person, when fully extended, it will bring the scope close to eye level. (Lite View Spotting Scope MSRP: \$349, Nocs tripod MSRP: \$279)

PR Contact: Tess Barker
tess@echoscomm.com

TETON SPORTS 10'x10' MESA CANVAS TENT

This tent is easy for one person to set up and makes a good long-term base camp. The waterproof canvas holds up in rain and snow. It also has a durable "bathtub floor" and extra-wide doors to get your gear in and out easily. The front awning gives you nice shade, too. (MSRP: \$599)

TETON SPORTS NANDA 55L DUFFEL BAG

This bag is a duffel/pack hybrid built for base-camp life. You'll appreciate rugged coated nylon construction and heavy-duty zippers. The dividers help keep gear and clothing apart and a separate bottom compartment keeps you organized and certain gear accessible. The hidden backpack straps make hauling easy if you need to go hands free. (MSRP: \$99)



PR Contact: Mark Newman
mark@thatcherandco.com



ZENBIVY WINTER LIGHT BED -5°F SLEEP SYSTEM

I tried my first Zenbivy sleep system more than five years ago, and as a side sleeper (and someone who's known for getting cold at camp), I can confirm the fabric and the technology their engineers use in these sleep systems is impressive. I'm a self-proclaimed Zenbivy ultra fan and my Zenbivy sleep system is the first thing I grab when heading out to tent camp. And if you've camped with me, you know I've had you lay in it and told you all I know about the tech. Their stuff is just so cozy and warm! I interviewed the founder for a piece years ago and I've been lucky enough to test a handful of their gear. Their light gear is ideal for multi-day rafting trips. The key pieces of this winter Light Bed sleep system weigh in at under 3 pounds (the regular quilt [2.7 ounces], the 25-inch sheet [11 ounces] and the 20-by-72-inch light mattress [1 pound, 7 ounces]). The dry bag and end caps are nice if you need to keep your bedding dry or pack it down to save space, and the pillow system gives you a nice spot to rest your head at night. (MSRP: \$735 for eight-piece full sleep system in photo)

PR Contact: Ingrid Niehaus
ingridniehauspr@gmail.com

CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE 2025 OWAA CONFERENCE PHOTOS

PHOTOS BY PAUL QUENEAU, OWAA STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS





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Meet a member



NAME: Leah Judson

RESIDENCE: Maryland

OWAA MEMBER SINCE: 2025

Leah Judson is a photographer and filmmaker with 15 years of experience documenting land-connected stories around the world. Her work has carried her from Palestinian olive groves to Native American communities in the U.S., capturing resilience and heritage through the lens of food, culture, and the landscapes that hold them. Originally from Panama and raised as a military brat, she now calls a 60-acre homestead in southern Maryland home, balancing farm life with creating evocative content that helps brands connect audiences to deeper stories of land and belonging.

WHAT ARE YOUR AREAS OF OUTDOOR COMMUNICATION?

I work at the intersection of photography and filmmaking and have recently begun tapping into writing, mostly with brands and organizations that place land at the heart of what they do — whether that's food, people or culture. OWAA has cracked open new pathways for me — sparking curiosity around game-to-table narratives, where my background in agriculture now meets conversations about hunting and wildlife management.

WHAT DREW YOU TO THE FIELD?

As a military brat, travel was stitched into my childhood, but the turning point came when I left the city and stepped onto land of my own. After a head injury, walking the fields at dawn became my therapy, and from that quiet rhythm grew a devotion to stories rooted in land, soil and spirit. For 15 years, I've carried my camera across 25 countries and 39 states, documenting overlooked voices — farmers, craftspeople, changemakers — but it was homesteading on 60 acres in Maryland that gave me an embodied understanding of what it means to live with and from the land, and it's that depth of connection I now bring into my work.

WHAT ENTICED YOU TO JOIN OWAA?

Another member first introduced me to OWAA. I didn't use my membership for nearly a year. Then I showed up at a social gathering, sat at a table and realized this was a community that would not only challenge me, but also nurture me. In those conversations, I recognized the value of building

skills I'd left dormant and how vital it is to be surrounded by people who hold the same ethos.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE OUTDOOR ACTIVITY?

Homesteading roots me — raising a boisterous flock of poultry and three mischievous sheep, planting the beginnings of orchards, and tending 60 wooded acres in Maryland. Still, my favorite ritual is far simpler: walking the land at sunrise with my two Weimaraners and gathering warm eggs in the cradle of my shirt. Lately, private access to this land has opened a new chapter. I've begun learning to hunt. With mentors I met through OWAA guiding me, I'm documenting the process and exploring what it means to expand my relationship with food, shifting from farm-to-table toward game-to-table.

WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON?

I recently partnered with a 70-acre organic farm in Maryland focused on "food is medicine" initiatives and create content that uplifts their work of bringing nutrient-dense produce into local schools. I'm also collaborating with a leader in somatic healing who works at the intersection of nature and wellness, and beginning projects with hunting and shooting organizations to capture new layers of outdoor culture. On a personal level, I'm developing a body of work highlighting agritourism across the United States, and I'm looking to work with tourism companies who want to highlight these unique experiences for outdoor visitors and locals.