

# BACKCOUNTRY JOURNAL



The Magazine of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers Spring 2024





TIME TO RETIRE THE

**.30-06**



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# Showing Up

**Hunting and fishing often provide** the ultimate escape from the rest of our responsibilities. But sometimes we must step into this part of our lives from another angle, moving from gleeful participant to determined advocate. It's a requirement of giving a damn, even when it's inconvenient.

So, I am stepping into this message from another angle. I had fully intended to write this first column as the new president and CEO of BHA about something else entirely, perhaps an introduction of how I found my way to this inspiring role. But that will have to wait. Because the public wildlife grab of our generation is on, and Backcountry Hunters & Anglers has a key role to play.

There is a growing trend across the country to undermine over a century of successful wildlife management built on a foundation of sound, peer-reviewed science. Along with nefarious tactics of special interests to subvert – and even manipulate – the spirit and intent of the public trust doctrine that wildlife is managed for all, we are facing an unprecedented threat to our public wildlife resources. These efforts chip away at the very underpinnings and successful conservation outcomes of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.

These increasingly common attacks take on a variety of forms: state ballot initiatives that can sabotage effective wildlife conservation, commoditization of fish and wildlife resources, transfer of wildlife jurisdiction to other agencies, privatization of public wildlife resources by special interests, ideologically motivated changes to the composition of state wildlife boards and commissions, and appointments to these bodies of agenda-driven activists with little regard for serving the public interest.

It's important to identify challenges where they exist – and where they don't. Anti-hunting and animal rights activists pose the most obvious threat. On the other hand, ranchers, farmers and other private landowners often contribute to successful wildlife management, provide access for hunting and fishing and in many cases can be counted among our friends. But in certain states, however, factions of those groups are also attempting to seize power from state wildlife agencies.

Would you want elk and pronghorn in your state managed by animal rights activists?

Would you want bear hunting seasons decided by a legislature?

Would you want the deer herd managed as a commodity under the jurisdiction of an agricultural agency?

Would you want private landowners to determine how many tags the rest of the public gets to share after they're done taking a handful?

All of these nightmare scenarios have already happened, are currently in motion or can be seen threatening on the horizon. It's



not just the twisted and selfish view of wildlife by special interests that's so damn galling. It's the result. Chipping away at hunting and fishing opportunities will ultimately lead to a cascade of either unintended or ill-intended consequences.

As the readers of these pages know from education, experience or just gut instinct, hunting is conservation. Through the sustainable and scientifically guided harvest of wildlife, hunters help maintain the ecological and social carrying capacity of diverse wildlife populations at a landscape scale.

As a larger community of hunters and anglers, we contribute the vast majority of conservation funding, provide critical on-the-ground knowledge to resource managers and often rely on sustainably harvested game as an important food source. For many families, the deer in the freezer is how they get through the winter. The efforts to subvert sound fish and wildlife management not only cuts hunters out of our own conservation legacy and how we provide for our families, but it also ultimately compromises the integrity of the natural systems that support all wildlife.

It's important to acknowledge this challenge is not new in many states. Some BHA chapters have been navigating these challenges for years, sometimes supported by the contributions of peer organizations and trade groups along the way. As BHA chapters across the country face the unprecedented elevation of attacks on the effective management of public wildlife resources, unifying our collective efforts into an organization-wide initiative is paramount. This clearly has become a national issue.

BHA has a history steeped in giving a damn, and an impressive attendance record when it matters. There's a saying that "the world is run by people who show up," and when it comes to taking up the mantle as the voice for public lands, waters and wildlife, the BHA faithful show up. It's time to leverage the full strength of BHA's distinctive community and culture to ensure the enduring health and shared value of our public wildlife resources. 🐾

-Patrick Berry, President & CEO





"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better."

- Albert Einstein

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**On the Cover:** Full draw on a Montana backcountry turkey, photo by Don and Lori Thomas

**Above Image:** Jordan Lefler, 2022 Public Lands and Waters Photo Contest

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*Backcountry Journal* is the quarterly membership publication of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, a North American conservation nonprofit 501(c)(3) with chapters in 48 states and the District of Columbia, two Canadian provinces and one Canadian territory. Become part of the voice for our wild public lands, waters and wildlife. Join us at [backcountryhunters.org](http://backcountryhunters.org)

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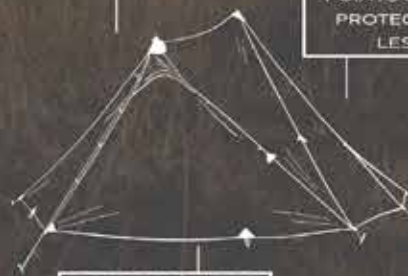
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# Saving the Southern Serengeti



*"As you approach ... from the east, there opens unexpectedly to view an extensive prairie, which contains several thousand acres, and which appears to be without a single tree, or fence, except now and then a small cluster of trees at great distances, like the little islands of a sea. Casting your eye over the prairie, you discover here and there, herds of cattle, and horses and wild deer, all grazing and happy ... The grass, which soon will be 8 feet high, is now about 8 inches, and has all the freshness of spring. ... The oak ... with the sycamore and mulberry, borders the prairie on all sides. Flowers of red, purple, yellow and indeed of every hue, are scattered, by a bountiful God, in rich profusion." -William Goodell, 1822, Alabama-Mississippi Border.*

BY JEREMY FRENCH

**Close your eyes** and imagine for a moment that you were one of the first explorers to step foot in the southeastern United States or one of the first long hunters to cross the Cumberland Gap in search of game. Imagine the smells, sights, sounds, animals, and ecosystems. What did you imagine? Did you imagine traipsing through old-growth forests of giant trees and vast expanses of forested wetlands? If so, you may have fallen victim to one of my least favorite myths.

## *The Myth of the Squirrel*

People all across the country are taught the same old tall tale while growing up, what I affectionately refer to as "the myth of the squirrel." The story goes something like this: Before European settlement, the entire southeastern United States was a rich, dense, old-growth forest. This forest was so vast that a motivated squirrel could theoretically go through the treetops from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River without ever touching the ground. This tale paints visions of deep, dark forests of towering trees, big squirrels, giant tulip poplars and mosses. But this myth is exactly that – a myth! The idea that the southeastern United States was and should be one vast deciduous forest is simply incorrect, unsupported by both science and the facts of American history. In fact, it is believed that only 40% of the southeastern landscape was made up of closed canopy forests.

So, what was the other 60%? It was the Southern Serengeti.

## *The Southern Serengeti*

Millions of acres of savannas, open woodlands, prairies, canebrakes, glades, marshes and barrens made up this complex and biodiverse mosaic of grassland and open woodland ecosystem which depended on fire, bison grazing and elk browsing. These ecosystems were also home to numerous Tribes that relied on them for foraging, hunting, fishing and agriculture. The grasslands were so vital to Indigenous life that Tribes often used prescribed fire to help maintain the grassy components of the mosaic.

It is another common misconception that these ecosystems are characterized as "early successional habitats." Many of our southeastern grasslands have been open and evolving since the Miocene Epoch – between 23 million and 6 million years ago – to form some of the most complex and biodiverse ecosystems in the world. Many were old-growth grasslands that took millennia to assemble.

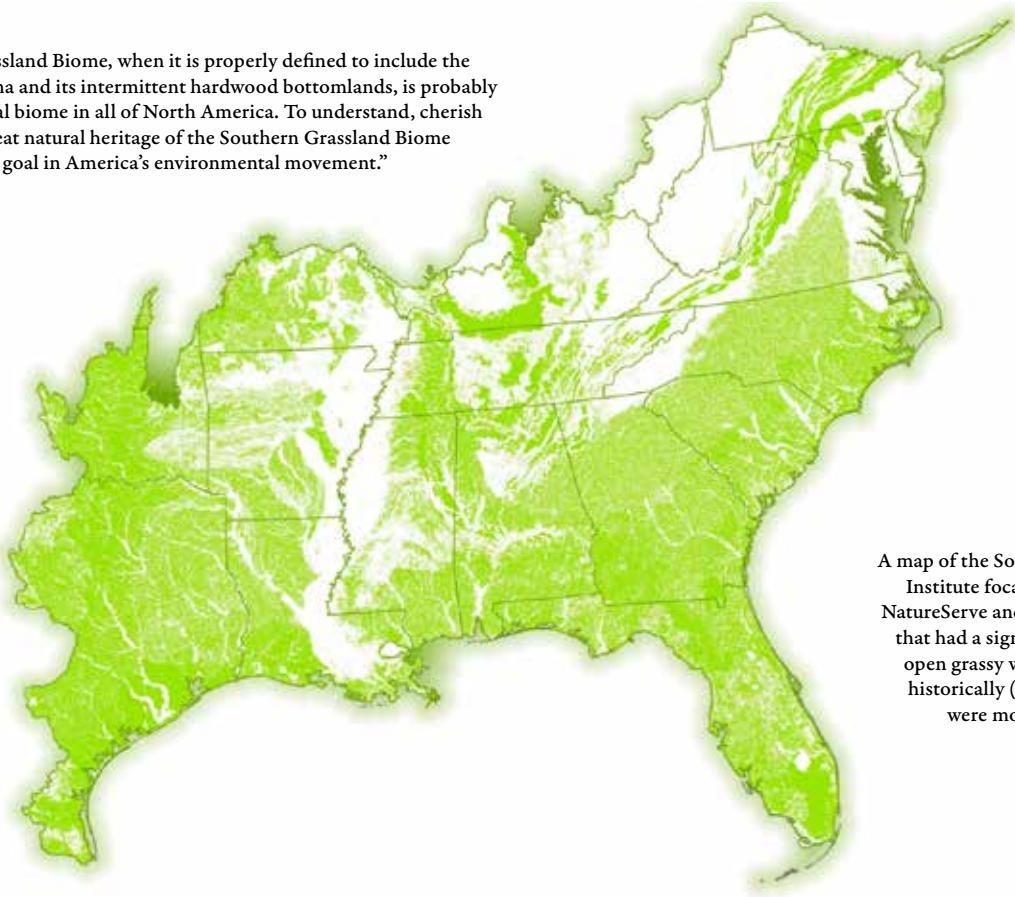
## *Savannas and Open Woodlands*

It is important to note that while savannas, woodlands and forests are all ecosystems with trees, savannas and open woodlands are very different from forests.

Forests are shaped by closed canopies and moist soils. This creates a moist, low-light environment often dominated by spring ephemeral wildflowers, shade-loving shrubs, mosses and more.

Savannas and open woodlands have fewer trees, with an open understory that is dominated by sun-loving grasses and wildflowers.

“The Southern Grassland Biome, when it is properly defined to include the longleaf pine savanna and its intermittent hardwood bottomlands, is probably the richest terrestrial biome in all of North America. To understand, cherish and preserve the great natural heritage of the Southern Grassland Biome should be a priority goal in America’s environmental movement.”  
- E.O Wilson



A map of the Southeastern Grassland Institute focal region produced by NatureServe and SGI depicting areas that had a significant grassland and open grassy woodland component historically (green) and areas that were mostly forested (white).

These were likely the most common ecosystems across the Southeast, ranging from the longleaf pine-wiregrass savannas of the Atlantic Coastal Plain, to the oak-pine savannas of the Gulf Coastal Plain, to the oak-dominated savannas of the Interior Plateaus. They are also among the richest terrestrial ecosystems in North America. This assemblage of over 200 million acres of savannas and open grassy woodlands in the Southeast created a biodiversity hotspot. Every aspect of life in the Southeast was impacted by these ecosystems, whether you were an Indigenous person, early settler, long hunter or just a mussel in a creek bed.

### *Prairies*

In addition to expansive “wooded grasslands,” the Southeast had about 20 million acres of prairies – nearly treeless, rolling plains dominated by wildflowers and grasses. Some prairies had small clusters of trees here and there, along with embedded wetland marshes, ponds and seeps, which supported entirely different species of plants and animals than the drier uplands. The prairies of the Southeast were once home to roaming herds of bison, elk and deer, prairie chickens, bobwhite quail and even waterfowl like sandhill cranes, whooping cranes and all manner of ducks.

Pennyroyal Plain was one of the largest prairies east of the Mississippi – over 3 million acres in modern-day Kentucky and Tennessee. This once-vast prairie is believed to be how Kentucky got its name. (The word “Kentucky” is likely derived from the Indigenous word “kentake,” meaning “big meadows” or “meadowlands.”) The Pennyroyal was also covered in sinkhole pond marshes due to the karst limestone geology beneath it, and these wetlands undoubtedly served as magnets not only for pioneers crossing the inhospitable prairie but also for migrating waterfowl. (Sadly, of the many prairie

sinkhole ponds in the Pennyroyal Plain, we currently know of just one that still exists in an intact prairie.)

In addition to the Pennyroyal and other large grasslands in Kentucky, there were many other prairies in the Southeast: the Black Belt Prairies of Alabama and Mississippi, which formed an archipelago of prairies in a sea of savannas and woodlands; the enigmatic Piedmont Prairies east of the Appalachian Mountains, which stretched across parts of the Carolinas, Virginia, Maryland and southeastern Pennsylvania; the Cajun Prairies of southern Louisiana; the Blackland Prairies of Texas; the Grand Prairie of Arkansas, sweeping prairies of the Everglades; and even prairies on Long Island, which were once home to the now extinct heath hen.

### *Canebrakes*

In addition to prairies, savannas and woodlands, the Southeast had hundreds of thousands of acres of canebrakes. Canebrakes are grasslands that consist almost entirely of our native bamboo species called cane. They historically dominated many riparian zones across the Southeast. These dense groves were critical habitats for many animal species, like the extinct Carolina parakeet, black bears and bison, which also ate the cane. Cane seeds would have fed species like passenger pigeons when they produced millions of seeds at once following mass flowering. Canebrakes were and are still significant to Indigenous people, being used for everything from baskets to weapons and food. The canebrakes of the Southeast were often derided by early settlers because of how thick and tough to travel through they were, and because horses would often gorge themselves on the cane and become ill.





Pine-Oak Savanna, Black Belt, Sumter County, Alabama  
Photo: Dwayne Estes

### *Glades and Barrens*

In addition to the landscape-scale grasslands, the Southeast is also home to a variety of glades and barrens – smaller grasslands formed on thin, rocky or chemically extreme soils. Glades are usually flat with exposed bedrock at the surface and very shallow soils. They have distinct wet and dry seasons, with wetland conditions often present in the winter and spring but very dry, desert-like conditions in the summer and early fall. This creates unique habitats with a high concentration of endemic species that occur in particular types of glades and nowhere else in the world. Barrens are similar to glades but have somewhat deeper soil and often occur on slopes. These harsh ecosystems often occur together in complexes and support desert-adapted flora like prickly-pear cactus, yucca and succulent plants like widow's cross and rock pinks, along with animals like tarantulas, scorpions and rattlesnakes. Some of the highest concentrations of glades and barrens are in the Nashville Basin of central Tennessee and the Ozarks of Missouri and Arkansas. Sadly, the majority of glades and barrens have been degraded by littering, development, fire suppression and encroachment by woody plants like eastern red cedar. (The cedars are a natural component of the ecosystems but were much less common before the widespread grassland degradation, habitat fragmentation and fire suppression that followed settlement.)

### *The Wildlife*

Countless species inhabited and shaped the southeastern grasslands. Most of these species have declined or been extirpated entire-

ly from the region— species like red wolves, mountain lions, bison, beavers, elk, and prairie chickens.

Millions of bison and elk used to roam the region side by side. These two iconic species that today bring to mind pictures of the West were once a staple of the southeastern grasslands and played a large role in the ecology of the region. In addition to these icons, beavers played an integral role by damming rivers, flooding riparian zones and creating lush wet meadows dominated by sedges and wildflowers. The Southeast also supported multiple species of prairie chickens, including the heath hen, which lived in grasslands on Long Island's Hempstead Plains until its extinction in 1932. The greater prairie chicken was once common in the Pennyroyal Plain of central Kentucky but was eradicated around the 1810s.

I would like to say that we have learned our lesson from these losses and that grassland species are no longer declining. But even today we are watching as beloved species like bobwhite quail are rapidly declining due to habitat degradation. Grassland birds as a whole are in freefall, with estimates of a 53% decline since 1970. That's a decline of 720 million birds in 50 years. Pollinators, likewise, are in steep decline with the American bumble bee now missing from multiple states.

### *The Destruction*

The grasslands described above are some of the most endangered ecosystems in North America with 0-5% remaining, depending on the type and region.

How could the existence of such vast grasslands, so rich with history, wildlife and game, not be common knowledge?

Sadly, their decline began early, almost immediately following European contact, as early as 1700 in eastern coastal states. The wave of grassland loss from east to west across the Southeast tells a story similar to that of the American bison and passenger pigeon – even things we think are inexhaustible resources can disappear before we even realize they are disappearing.

The decline of grasslands in the East can be attributed to a few primary drivers. First, fire was removed from the landscape. Second, large grazers and browsers such as elk and bison were extirpated from the region. Third, open lands were the first areas to be converted to crops, improved for pastures and covered by towns.

These changes led to savannas changing to closed-canopied unhealthy forests dominated by mesic species. Post oaks, short-leaf pines and blackjack oaks were shaded in and, in some cases, replaced by species such as maples, sweetgums and cedars. These mesic species, which can't tolerate fire, shaded the understory, depositing dense leaf litter that not only covers and chokes out all the wildflowers but also holds in moisture, making it harder for natural fire to return. Couple this with the removal of large mammals like elk and bison, which would have kept shrubs and saplings at bay by grazing and browsing, and by the 20th century, our once beautiful savanna-woodland communities were degraded to closed canopy second-growth forest.

The degradation and disappearance of prairies is different than that of the savanna but just as devastating. The vast majority of the prairies of the Southeast have been plowed under and turned into crop fields. The more arable lands were converted into what is now cotton, corn and soybeans, or similar crops. This is the case for places like the Pennyroyal Plain of Kentucky, the Loess Plains of Tennessee and the Black Belt Prairies of Alabama and Mississippi.

This same story can be told across the South. The agricultural industry was built on top of prairies. In addition to the plowing of the prairies, we saw the conversion of our bison and beaver-maintained lush meadows converted to non-native Eurasian pastures dominated by detrimental grasses like fescue. The prairies, savannas and woodlands that Daniel Boone once hunted were destroyed. Only tiny fragments remain with a few people and organizations trying to restore them.

*“The physical features of Washington County have undergone a very decided change in the last sixty years. When the pioneers first made it their home there were large areas of prairie which are now covered with a more or less dense growth of timber. The site of Fayetteville and several of the surrounding elevations, as well as the intervening valleys, were bare of timber, and were covered with a luxuriant growth of grasses, which afforded excellent pasturage for buffaloes and other herbivorous animals.”*  
-History of Washington County Arkansas, 1889

### *Forgotten History*

These grasslands are at the very core of what it means to be from the Southeast, yet their place in American history has largely been forgotten. Because these grasslands began disappearing before the United States ever became a country, many Americans don't realize the impacts they had on the patterns of human migration and settlement in the region.



Dolomite glade, Missouri  
Photo: Theo Witsell

For example, let's take the booming city of Nashville, Tennessee – full of giant skyscrapers, tour buses and bars. Every day thousands of people commute in and out of the city and have no idea that the reason Nashville exists is that before it was known as Nashville it was known as French Lick. Bison, elk and deer would congregate to lick the natural mineral deposits and graze the rich meadows and savannas. The highway system surrounding Nashville was built upon old bison trails leading to and from French Lick in modern-day downtown Nashville. Stories like this play out all over the Southeast.

The longleaf and shortleaf pine trees that built the South were foundational pieces of the region's savannas and woodlands. The lumber from these trees can be found in many historic buildings and historic ships. The resinous sap of these trees was processed into turpentine, pitch and tar, which were used for waterproofing wood and many other applications of shipbuilding vital to the economy and the American Navy during the early settlement period. These trees, which require fire and open stand structure to thrive, shaped the very settlement and economy of the southeastern United States.

### *Restoration*

Whether you are a sportsman or sportswoman, a bird watcher, a researcher or just a conservationist at heart, grassland conservation in the Southeast is one of the most important fights in our lifetime. When we talk about restoring species like elk in the Southeast, declining bobwhite quail numbers or declining wild turkey numbers, we are only hinting at the true problem: the loss of grassland and open woodland species of which 99% of the grasslands are gone.

If we want our children's children to have the opportunity to go afield and enjoy not only these wild places but the creatures that inhabit them, the first step is to acknowledge the existence of the southeastern grasslands. The second step is to decide as a community that we have seen enough loss and step in and save these special ecosystems.

Currently across the Southeast, we are watching as the last precious remnants of the grasslands, the seed sources needed to restore large areas of these habitats, are disappearing forever. We are watching as seed and rootstock banks of keystone wildflowers die under heavy leaf litter, prairies are plowed under and glades are developed. The chances to turn back the tide of grassland loss are diminishing by the day.



But we have an opportunity to have one of those rare moments in conservation history – where we decide to save something before it's too late. Sportsmen and sportswomen saved species like white-tail deer, wild turkeys, sandhill cranes and more. Here we have an opportunity to decide to save grasslands in the Southeast. The good news is that currently, seed sources still exist, savannas can be revived by fire and selective tree removal, and the remnants that still exist can be used to replant millions of acres. If we act strategically, elk could again roam expansive savannas, deer can bound through plentiful prairies, and we can enjoy the whistle of bobs and the thunder of turkeys on a spring day. It starts with a decision to save Southeastern Grasslands. 🐾

*Jeremy French is the director of stewardship at the Southeastern Grasslands Institute and an ecologist, author, historian and avid outdoorsman and wilderness explorer. He spends most of his time working but enjoys wilderness trips, hunting, fishing, botanizing, wandering and rockhounding when not working to conserve biodiversity.*

*If you want to learn more about saving the Southern Serengeti visit [www.segrasslands.org](http://www.segrasslands.org) and follow The Southeastern Grassland Institute on social media.*



"The buffaloes were more frequent than I have seen cattle in the settlements, browsing on the leaves of cane, or cropping the herbage of those extensive plains."  
-Daniel Boone, 1775, Kentucky (Photo: Dr. Pete Eyheralde, PhD)

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Photo: Colten DeSpain,  
2022 Public Lands and Waters Photo Contest

## BHA SUPPORTS PUBLIC LANDS IN PUBLIC HANDS ACT

As the leading voice for the protection of public lands, waters, and wildlife, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers shared its support for the Public Lands in Public Hands Act, a bill that would help protect publicly-owned land from privatization. Introduced in February in the U.S. House of Representatives by Reps. Ryan Zinke (R-MT) and Gabe Vasquez (D-NM), this bipartisan legislation recognizes the irreplaceable value that public lands have for hunters and anglers.

The Public Lands in Public Hands Act would require congressional approval for the sale or transfer of publicly accessible tracts of federal land greater than 300 acres, or greater than five acres if accessible by public waterway. This is a critical improvement from current law in which federal land management agencies have broad discretion to sell or transfer publicly owned parcels that provide valuable habitat, public access and recreational opportunities. Limiting lands previously identified for disposal by the Department of the Interior and U.S. Forest Service will greatly reduce the threat of privatization for valuable public resources owned by all Americans.

“Core to the BHA mission is the sanctity of public lands and waters, resources cherished by hunters, anglers and outdoor enthusiasts, and valued as an irreplaceable part of our natural heritage. Without publicly accessible places to recreate, many Americans who share a love for hunting and fishing would be excluded from the opportunity to pursue their passion,” said Patrick Berry, BHA’s President and CEO. “We thank Reps. Zinke and Vasquez for introducing the Public Lands in Public Hands Act, which would help to ensure our hunting and angling traditions can continue for future generations.”

## RECENTLY ON THE PODCAST & BLAST

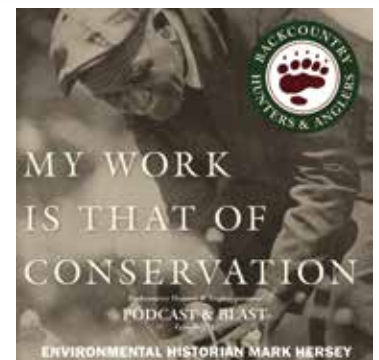
### The Conservation History of George Washington Carver:

Join Hal Herring and Mississippi State University environmental history professor and author of *My Work is that of Conservation, An Environmental Biography of George Washington Carver* Mark Hersey

for a fantastic American conservation story that has never been more relevant than it is right now.

Carver was also one of America’s pioneers of the science of ecology and a cutting-edge conservationist who advocated for the restoration of whitetail deer, quail and fisheries, long before such ideas became mainstream. His conservation vision was forged in the fire of his own history and in his life’s work in Alabama’s post-slavery Black Belt and along the Fall Line, known then as “the most destroyed land in all of the South,” a place where poverty, injustice and hunger were closely tied to the abuse and collapse of the systems of the earth.

Don’t miss Hal’s fascinating conversation with Mark Hersey (episode 171) and more on the BHA Podcast & Blast wherever you get your podcasts.







## NEW STAFF

### BRIAN BIRD

*CHAPTER COORDINATOR (NJ, NY, NEW ENGLAND)*

Brian's first experience with the value of public land access was while earning his doctorate degree in geology from Western Michigan University. Although trapped in a small apartment, Michigan has abundant public land, and he was able to pursue deer and turkeys and expand his fishing to include Great Lakes salmon and steelhead.

Brian, along with his wife and daughter and pup, lives on a small homestead in Whitehall, New York, situated between the southeastern edge of the Adirondack Mountains and the Green Mountains of Vermont, right at southern tip of Lake Champlain with access to thousands of acres of public land and water.



### KYLEE BURLEIGH

*DIGITAL MEDIA COORDINATOR*

Kylee was born and raised in Hells Canyon. From the second she was able, she was learning to hunt, forage and fish. She obtained her bachelor's degree from Eastern Washington University in communications/public relations and has spent her career primarily providing communication services.

Kylee currently resides in central Washington with her husband, twin baby girls and black Lab, Bristol. When she's not behind the computer or wrangling the twins, she's spending as much time as possible outdoors, which includes frequent treks back to Hells Canyon and the Blue Mountains. Her passion for ancestral living, wild places and accessibility for all led her to BHA.



### ANDREW HAHNE

*HABITAT STEWARDSHIP COORDINATOR (MT, ID, WY)*

As a youngster, Andrew ran wild around military installations from the desert landscapes of Camp Pendleton to the intercoastal waterways of Lejeune. Over the years, he continued to fish, became an avid shooter and hunted whitetails along the East Coast.

Andrew moved to Montana in 2021, interned with BHA and now works full time in the conservation space. He spends his fall trying to fill the freezer with big game so that he can get back to the duck blind with his chocolate Lab, Lynyrd. He strives to be a good steward of the public lands and waters he feels blessed to make use of.



### MAX SIEBERT

*OPERATIONS COORDINATOR*

Max Siebert grew up in Missoula, Montana. After working a few jobs out of state, Max missed the mountains, family and friends in Montana and moved back (to a rented room in a house where he had the good fortune to meet his future wife).

When he's not at work, you're sure to find Max on one of his many bicycles, hiking, studying maps and conjuring his next backcountry adventure or lounging in a canoe with a packed cooler and a fishing rod. Max hopes that working with BHA will enable him to give back to the wild places that have raised and nurtured him.



### JOEL WELTZIEN

*CALIFORNIA CHAPTER COORDINATOR*

Joel grew up in a small town in southwest Montana, where his father taught him to hike, backpack and "be" in natural spaces.

After undergrad, Joel attended the University of Michigan's School for the Environment and Sustainability, earning an M.S. in environmental policy.

After finishing his masters in the spring of 2023, Joel moved with his wife to Berkeley, where she began attending law school last autumn. While he loves to hunt and fish, he's terrible at both activities and hopes to learn as much as possible in the coming years!



### BRIANT WILES

*CO HABITAT STEWARDSHIP COORDINATOR*

Briant's journey began in Wyoming, where hunting and fishing were woven into the fabric of his family life. The desire to be more involved with conservation brought him to Gunnison, Colorado, where he was awarded a fellowship and completed a Master of Environmental

Management. He developed a deep passion for public lands and wildlife from years spent outdoors in the mountains and high deserts. Working with BHA, Briant has poured his sweat into fence removal and modifications and knows the impact fences have on wildlife. 🐾





# KID'S COLORING CONTEST WINNERS!

*Here are the winners of the kid's coloring contest from the winter issue. (We had a record number of entries and couldn't choose just three.) Thanks to all who participated!*

Evelyn Montgomery  
(Age 14)



Wren Pittman  
(Age 9)



Avery Podoll  
(Age 9)



Nico Wuoti  
(Age 6)



Evren Boz  
(Age 12)



Maya June Murphy  
(Age 7)