

Introduction and Acknowledgments

David Harmon, George Wright Society, PO Box 65, Hancock, MI 49930-0065; dharmon@georgewright.org

THE GEORGE WRIGHT SOCIETY CONFERENCE ON PARKS, PROTECTED AREAS, AND CULTURAL SITES has been held regularly for over 30 years. In 2015, for the first time in our history, we brought the meeting to the San Francisco Bay Area—the boyhood home of our namesake, George Melendez Wright. GWS2015 took place March 29–April 3 in downtown Oakland, and was the eighteenth in this series of conferences whose origins date back to 1976. That year saw the first US National Park Service science conference, and another followed in 1979. Beginning in 1982, the GWS became the organizer and primary sponsor of the conferences, expanding them to include all fields in natural and cultural resources—not just science—and all kinds of parks, protected areas, and cultural sites—not just U.S. national parks. The GWS biennial has become the USA’s largest interdisciplinary conference in the field. It is the only such conference to actively seek participation from across the entire spectrum of disciplines and activities that are necessary for successful protected area management.

I am pleased to say that, in terms of attendance, GWS2015 rebounded nicely from the unique challenges that affected the previous meeting. GWS2013 had been significantly affected by mandatory budget cuts and U.S. federal travel restrictions that went into place just days before the start of the conference. Happily, none of that was in play this time, and we returned to our usual mix of public agency employees, tribal members, professionals from the for-profit and nonprofit sectors, professors and students, and independent conservation practitioners.

Having mentioned our namesake, here are a few words about him for those who are not familiar already. George Melendez Wright was the first scientist to work for the U.S. National Park Service. He was active in the late 1920s and early 1930s. He founded the agency’s scientific programs in a short but effective career that was ended by a tragic automobile accident. Known for his keen ecological insights and winning personality, Wright was a strong proponent of putting “resources first” in parks and fought for ecological integrity in protected natural areas. More than this, as a Hispanic American he respected the value of cultural diversity, and understood the importance of marshaling natural and cultural resource disciplines in concert to achieve park management goals. Today, the GWS’s work advances Wright’s visionary principles.

In bringing these biennial meetings off the George Wright Society is always in the debt of a capable conference steering committee, co-chaired this time by Melia Lane-Kamahele and Jer-

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ry Mitchell, The other committee members were Matthew Browning, David Graber, David Parsons, Ryan Sharp, Chris Spence, Jenn Thomsen, and Lynn Wilson. The members of the GWS Board of Directors are Nathalie Gagnon, president; Jerry Mitchell, vice president; Ryan Sharp, treasurer; David Parsons, secretary; and David Graber, Barrett Kennedy, Armando Quintero, Chris Spence, Jan van Wagtenonk, and Lynn Wilson, at-large members. Matthew Browning was the graduate student representative to the Board at the time of the conference, succeeded later in 2015 by Gina Depper.

Our principal organizational sponsor was once again the U.S. National Park Service, and we were grateful to have VHB, Hitachi Consulting, and the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians as conference supporters. Special appreciation goes to several people who were instrumental in helping obtain sponsorships for GWS2015. From the National Park Service: Ray Sauvajot, Stephanie Toothman, and Julia Washburn. From the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians: Freddie Romero and Veronica Sandoval. From VHB: Rosemary Morris. From Hitachi Consulting: Francis Priznar. Thanks one and all!

We also thank the members of our Indigenous Involvement Working Group for their many hours of discussion and planning of activities to engage Indigenous people at GWS2015: Nathalie Gagnon and Melia Lane-Kamahele (co-chairs), Freddie Romero, and Angela Mooney D'Arcy. Once again Fawn YoungBear-Tibbetts curated the Indigenous Film Night. The GWS also thanks Timia Thompson for coordinating on-site activities related to the George Melendez Wright Student Travel Scholarships. Last but not least, we thank Samantha Weber for once more bringing her editorial talents to the service of these proceedings.

The next conference will be held April 2–7, 2017, in Norfolk, Virginia.