

INSIDE THE GWS: Why Should I Join?

I am often asked two questions: the first by my fellow retirees who wonder why I serve on the Board of Directors of the George Wright Society since I am no longer an active National Park Service employee. The second question comes from rangers, the profession into which I entered when I began my career with the NPS. Why serve on a board whose members are primarily resources managers, researchers, and academics, and what does it have to do with the interests of rangers?

My answer to these questions is related to what I feel about the protected areas of the USA. As an employee, I always said that I owed my loyalty, not to an agency, the National Park Service, but to an idea, the National Park System. Remember how the Congress described that idea in almost poetic language?

Congress declares that the national park system, which began with establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872, has since grown to include superlative natural, historic, and recreation areas in every major region of the United States, its territories and island possessions; that these areas, though distinct in character, are united through their inter-related purposes and resources into one national park system as cumulative expressions of a single national heritage; that, individually and collectively, these areas derive increased national dignity and recognition of their superb environmental quality through their inclusion jointly with each other in one national park system preserved and managed for the benefit and inspiration of all the people of the United States....

I joined the George Wright Society and serve on its Board because I

believe that it is an organization dedicated to giving life to these words. Its mission statement reads, *The George Wright Society advances the scientific and heritage values of parks and protected areas. The Society promotes professional research and resource stewardship across natural and cultural disciplines, provides avenues of communication, and encourages public policies that enhance these values.* I like the phrase “protected areas” because it demonstrates the inclusiveness of the Society. The Society aims to accomplish its mission, not just in the U.S. National Park System, but also within those systems managed by our partners in world conservation.

I also like the Society’s stated goal: *The Society strives to be the premier organization connecting people, places, knowledge, and ideas to foster excellence in natural and cultural resource management, research, protection, and interpretation in parks and equivalent resources.* This ambitious goal takes direct aim on preserving and protecting the world’s patrimony. This is a goal that we can all support, active employees, rangers, or retirees alike. It’s a great reason to join the Society. I know it’s why I did.

Rick Smith has served on the GWS Board since 1999.

***INSIDE THE GWS** is a new regular feature that highlights communications from the Board of Directors. The idea is to open up another channel of communication with GWS members and the Forum's readership. We are always interested in hearing from you—tell us how we can serve you and your profession better. Contact the GWS executive office or any Board member; details are on the inside front cover.*

