

Words from the GWS Student Summit

Jennifer Palmer

Dear GWS members and friends,

ONE OF THE REASONS I WAS SO INSPIRED to step into the role as new executive director of the George Wright Society is because I sincerely believe in the next generation of leadership in parks, protected areas, and cultural sites. Recently, I was fortunate enough to come together with a selection of these emerging leaders at this year's GWS Student Summit: Human Dimensions of the Wildland–Urban Interface.

Our GWS Student Summits are truly special events that bring together various GWS Student Chapter members from across the country. The event is entirely planned and designed by students to help cultivate strong professional ties, exchange best practices and science, and work specifically on real-world issues faced by protected area managers.

To tell you the truth, I wasn't quite sure what to expect. Imagine twenty graduate and undergraduate students from six different universities roadtripping from Kansas and Montana, flying coast to coast from North Carolina, South Carolina, and California, trekking to a mountain top at 10,000 feet near Salt Lake City, Utah. We even had three international students representing India, Ecuador, and Brazil! Throw in the leadership of Dr. Matthew Brownlee and Dr. Kelly Bricker, special guest lecturers and mentors from the US Forest Service, local municipalities, businesses, and nonprofits, and let's just say—nothing short of magic happens.

In just three days' time, the students assisted in an impactful service project of cleaning up a mountain top, worked with a videographer to develop a GWS outreach reel, spotted moose and other wildlife, exchanged knowledge of social and natural sciences, and created five new research initiatives and future publications that focus on the theme of the summit.

During our time together, I thought a lot about the spirit of George Melendez Wright. As students engaged in hard conversations about controversial issues that put pressure on parks and protected areas management, I quietly reflected on the fact that many of these students were the exact same age George Melendez Wright was when he became the first chief scientist

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for the Wildlife Division of the National Park Service. At one point, under the light of the full moon above an alpine silhouette, I imagined how proud and encouraged he would be if he were still alive today, standing side by side with these students. To me, that is the spirit of the George Wright Society.

Personally speaking, the summit was a chance to witness a shared vision for a united effort across disciplines, generations, and cultural differences, through sincere connection and care. Every student at the summit held such a deep passion for protecting wildlife, wilderness, and culture. They expressed a common dream of protecting the integrity of these cherished places, nationally and internationally, for all people to explore and fall in love with.

To current and future GWS student members, the George Wright Society looks forward to supporting your vision for many years to come. Thank you for being such creative and outspoken leaders in our community!

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jm', written in a cursive style.

Jennifer Palmer, Executive Director
George Wright Society