



ECOCAREERS SUMMIT

Sep 18, 2024

NWFEcoLeaders.org/Summit

Virtual



Summit Program 2024



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Introduction

Thank you for participating in our seventh annual [National Wildlife Federation EcoCareers Summit!](#)



Photo by Appalachian State University

The EcoCareers Summit is a vital part of advancing the National Wildlife Federation's strategic goals of supporting and providing educational resources to help millions of young people build conservation and sustainability career and job skills into their higher education and professional lives.

The annual EcoCareers event helps prepare students and young professionals for sustainability careers by providing information on green economy trends, examples of career paths across varying sectors and employment types, and ideas for academic pathways and student-led projects on campus.

The goals of the conference are as follows:

1. Discover careers and career paths available in the clean economy, career preparation strategies, and career development opportunities across various economic sectors.
2. Enhance understanding of effective career plans including degree programs and project-based learning credentials, while becoming familiar with programming offered through the NWF EcoLeaders and EcoCareers.
3. Explore online sustainability career skill resources that can help high school and college instructors and counselors enhance academic offerings and career support for sustainability for students across all disciplines and departments.
4. Meet other students and professionals across fields interested in leading for a green economy including, students, faculty and employers to build professional networks and learn about ways to support one another.



Photo by Tom McGrath

We hope you enjoy your experience and learn a great deal on how to prepare yourself and/or your students to participate in the green workforce of the future!

National Wildlife Federation's EcoLeaders and EcoCareers Team,
Courtney Cochran, David Corsar, Kristy Jones, and Isabella Killius

Agenda

EcoCareers Summit – September 18, 2024

Time (EDT)	Title	Featured Speakers
1:00 – 2:00 PM	Opening Keynote and Announcements	Peter Gros Dr. Rae Wynn-Grant
2:00 - 3:15 PM	Panel: Many Paths to Conservation Careers	Braeli Hardt Cheffy Thomas Em Donahoe Silas Gilklay
3:30 - 4:45 PM	Panel: Stepping Stones: Internships and Fellowships	Julia Jeanty Matt Nakaya Natalie S. Brown Riley Egger
5:00 - 6:00 PM	Closing Keynote and Announcements	Dr. Erim Gómez

Special Thanks

The National Wildlife Federation would like to offer our sincere thanks to this year's sponsor, Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom. The support of sponsors makes the exciting and impactful work of preparing the emerging green workforce possible!



Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom pioneered nature documentaries for generations to come. Premiering in 1963 on NBC, the series featured hosts Marlin Perkins, a naturalist, and Jim Fowler, a zoologist. Wild Kingdom has won numerous awards and has broadcasted in more than 40 countries. Mutual of Omaha, an insurance company, sponsored the series, showing the link of protection from the human kingdom to the animal kingdom.

Wild Kingdom stood apart from other nature programs, featuring the hosts in the wild animals' natural habitats. The show used innovative camera techniques to capture these habitats including hidden and underwater cameras. Throughout the years, the show has covered many topics including animal behavior, migration, conservation and environmental issues.

Wild Kingdom has had a significant impact on the public's understanding of wildlife and conservation. The show's popularity raises awareness of endangered species and their habitats. It also inspires new generations of viewers to protect wildlife and their kingdoms. With the premiere of Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom Protecting the Wild, the show continues to educate and inspire audiences around the world to take action in conservation.

Join all of the Wild Kingdom action on wildkingdom.com and follow us on social media!

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<https://www.instagram.com/wildkingdomtv/>

<https://www.facebook.com/wildkingdomtv>

Biographies

Opening Keynote Speakers

Peter Gros

Co-Host; Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom

Television and Digital Content Host

As co-host of Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom Protecting the Wild and the original Wild Kingdom series, Peter Gros shares his love for wildlife and wilderness with families and children throughout the country.

The original Wild Kingdom series – a program honored with 41 major awards, including four Emmy Awards and an endorsement by the National PTA for television programming recommended for family viewing – was one of the best known and longest-running series on nature and the animal world. The series currently airs on Sunday nights on RFD-TV with updated introductions from Gros and is available to stream on the RFD app.

Gros hosted the Saving the Wild series on The Dodo and is a frequent guest on LIVE! with Kelly and the CBS Early Show. In addition, he appears on numerous national and local talk shows.



Active Conservationist

On behalf of Mutual of Omaha, Peter Gros is intimately involved in conservation education programs with local zoos, nature centers and wildlife refuges to create new content on social media and digital channels.

Gros' research expeditions have taken him to Lake Baikal in Siberia to explore the wonders of the world's largest, oldest and deepest lake, and to the Amazon Basin where he led an expedition of 39 six-graders from Zeeland, Michigan, to study the Peruvian rain forest. He has also studied the effects of ecotourism on wildlife in Venezuela, Costa Rica, Belize, Mexico and the Galapagos Islands.

In addition, Gros has served as the U.S. representative on the Citizen Ambassador Program's research study of tigers and rhinos in the Chitwan National Forest in Nepal. In his travels throughout the world, Gros and his animal friends help teach about the importance of caring for the world around us.

Nationally Recognized Authority

Peter Gros has nearly 30 years of field experience with captive wildlife. In his former position as director of Land Animals and vice president at Marine World/Africa USA, he established breeding programs for hundreds of endangered animals. He also developed a rehabilitation program for birds of prey, as well as the largest captive breeding colony of ostriches in the United States.

He is a licensed Exhibition & Animal Educator for the U.S.D.A. and an active member of the American Zoo and Aquariums Association, Association of Wildlife Educators and Zoological Association of America. Gros is also on the Board of Directors of the Suisun Marsh Natural History Association and a trustee for the Cheetah Conservation Fund.

He is a frequent lecturer on conservation and preservation at universities, zoos, nature and science centers and theaters around the United States and Canada. His mission is to excite people about wildlife and teach them to understand and care about the natural world. “My goal is to advance the understanding of our planet and its inhabitants while inspiring stewardship for our natural world,” Gros said. “It is possible to use our natural resources in a sustainable manner. We simply need to educate our nation’s youth about the importance of wildlife conservation.”

Dr. Rae Wynn-Grant

Co-Host; Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom

Conservation Scientist, Large Carnivore Ecologist, Nature Storyteller

Dr. Rae Wynn-Grant is the co-host of NBC’s Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom Protecting the Wild. She is a renowned wildlife ecologist who focuses on the impact of human activities on carnivore behavior and ecology. She has studied mountain lions on the California coast, grizzly bears in the Northern Great Plains, black bears in the Western Great Basin, African lions in rural Kenya and Tanzania, and lemurs in Madagascar.



Dr. Wynn-Grant attributes her interest in wildlife and conservation to the television shows she watched as a child, including the iconic original series Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom, and aims to use science media to inspire other future scientists. In addition to Rae’s role co-hosting Wild Kingdom, she is the creator and host of award-winning podcast Going Wild with Dr. Rae Wynn-Grant produced by PBS Nature, and author of the memoir Wild Life, published by Zando and Get Lifted Film Company.

Dr. Wynn-Grant received her B.S. in Environmental Studies from Emory University, her M.S. in Environmental Studies from Yale University, and her Ph.D. in Ecology and Evolution from Columbia University. She is currently a Research Faculty member at the Bren School of Environmental Science and Management leading carnivore research on the Jack and Laura Dangermond Preserve. She is a National Geographic Explorer, and maintains a Visiting Scientist position at the American Museum of Natural History.

Dr. Wynn-Grant serves on the Board of Directors for numerous environmental non-profit organizations, where she largely guides equity, inclusion, and diversity strategies.

She is a scientist, storyteller, author, professor, and public speaker. She envisions a near-future where leadership in the environmental field and access to nature is safe and equitable for all. Rae lives in Santa Barbara, California with her husband and two young daughters.

Closing Keynote Speaker

Dr. Erim Gomez

Assistant Professor of Wildlife Biology; University of Montana

Dr. Erim Gómez is an assistant professor of wildlife biology at the University of Montana, where he runs the Charismatic Minifauna Lab. Gómez holds a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Studies from Southern Oregon University and Masters and Ph.D. in Natural Resource Sciences from Washington State University. Gómez considers himself a conservation biologist. His more recent research work aims to understand the habitat occupancy of charismatic minifauna; from crayfish and amphibians to butterflies and song birds.

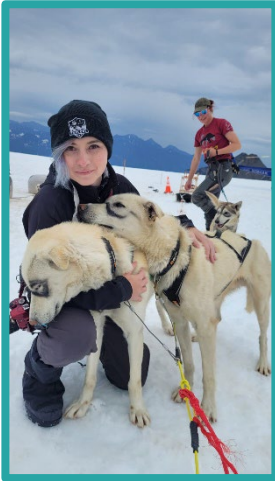


Gómez is a first-generation American and is proud of his parent's farm working and immigrant roots. He spent a decade as advisor to the largest Latinx college student organization in Washington, MEChA de WSU. He is devoted to encouraging students from under-represented groups to pursue higher education, sciences, and the conservation profession. In service of this goal, he teaches Careers in Wildlife Biology at UM, and nationally gives workshops, keynotes, serves panels on the DEI in STEMS and conservation profession. Gómez is founding Advisor of UM's Chapter of the Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (largest STEM diversity organization in the country).

Panel: Many Paths to Conservation Careers

Braelei Hardt

Assistant Naturalist; National Wildlife Federation



Braelei Hardt, currently the Assistant Naturalist at the National Wildlife Federation, specializes in creating engaging wildlife conservation content and communications and ensuring the scientific accuracy and accessibility of educational materials distributed nationwide. With a Master's in Biology focusing on Evolutionary Ecology from the University of Northern Colorado, and an Honor's Bachelor's in Wildlife Sciences from Oregon State University, Braelei's expertise spans an array of intensive biological research and statistical analysis, environmental education, and diverse fieldwork experiences. Notably, they lead student experiential ecology trips in Colorado, Alaska and Iceland—emphasizing climate adaptation and science communication—and has published groundbreaking research on the evolution of stress responses and acoustic communication in animals.

A passionate educator and advocate for diversity in science, Braelei has developed and led numerous workshops aimed at fostering inclusivity and engagement in conservation efforts and is an avid proponent of the theory of Queer Ecology. They believe in storytelling as a powerful education tool, and are currently working to integrate conservation concepts into popular storytelling media such as Dungeons & Dragons. They are also working with the CLAWS lion conservancy to implement a World Lion Day community event in rural Botswana, alongside an educational trading card game.

Cheffy Thomas

Digital Media Specialist; Southeast Alaska Conservation Council

After graduating in 2014 from Ithaca College, Cheffy didn't know where he was going to end up. The degree in Film and Photography he'd just received meant starting in one of two places: Los Angeles or New York. Heading west, he pursued a career in the film industry for the first few years after college, working in many aspects of the industry, from assistant in talent management to Director of Photography for film.

Living in the city had its merits, but he often found himself driving hours to be anywhere in nature. In 2017, he traveled to visit Alaska, and his heart never left.



Like many transplants to Juneau, Cheffy came to Southeast Alaska for “just one season.” But in the last six years, he has worked with several guiding companies and continued his freelance videography and photography work. He simultaneously started a crash course in all things adventure and continued to create and capture the beautiful moments life has in store for all of us.

After several life-changing trips through Xúnaa Káawu (Glacier Bay), and many other wild locations, Cheffy seeks to combine his love for nature with his passion for the narrative to help give a voice to the things in life that cannot speak for themselves. With a re-ignited love of all things wild, he seeks new adventures as often as possible—his current adventure is pursuing a Master’s in Communication from the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Em Donahoe

Policy Specialist, Resilient Coasts and Floodplains; National Wildlife Federation



Em Donahoe (they/them, sometimes she) is a passionate advocate for environmental justice and climate resilience, currently working as a Policy Specialist for Resilient Coasts and Floodplains with the National Wildlife Federation’s (NWF) Water and Coasts Team. Based in Washington, D.C., Em focuses on disaster resilience, hazard mitigation, and climate change adaptation, working to shape policy that protects both ecosystems and vulnerable communities. With an interdisciplinary background, Em holds a J.D. from The George

Washington University Law School, where they concentrated on the intersection of land use law, environmental justice, and disaster policy. Their academic and professional work reflects a deep commitment to bridging the gaps between legal frameworks and community needs, particularly in addressing the disproportionate impact of climate change on marginalized groups.

Before and during law school, Em worked in a number of different roles with various organizations, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency as a legal extern, the Environmental Protection Agency as a research grantee, and Rising for Justice as a student attorney to uphold tenant rights in landlord/tenant court. Em also holds a B.A. in International Development and Social Change from Clark University, where they developed a global perspective on social and environmental issues.

Beyond their policy work, Em serves as Co-Lead of the LGBTQIA+ Employee Resource Group at NWF, advocating for a more inclusive workplace and organizing events that support community-building and education. In their free time, Em enjoys exploring the outdoors and learning new ways to contribute to climate resilience and community well-being. Em is dedicated to helping young people navigate careers in environmental advocacy, believing strongly in the power of youth voices to drive meaningful change.

Silas Gilklay

Climate and Water Program Assistant; Prairie Rivers Network

Silas joined Prairie Rivers Network in 2024. Before Prairie Rivers Network, Silas worked briefly with World Relief - Quad Cities. During his time at Augustana College, he served as a Research Assistant on the Silver Creek Watershed Assessment Project, a Global Ambassador, a Sports Reporter at Augustana Observer, and the President of the African Students Association. Silas enjoys taking pictures, filming, playing soccer, and listening to music in his free time.

Silas is passionate about the intersection of public health and environmental issues. He is also dedicated to protecting the integrity of our waters and advocates for communities to have access to clean water and wetland protection.



Panel 2: Stepping Stones: Internships and Fellowships

Julia Jeanty

Program Manager, Community Science Fellows; American Geophysical Union



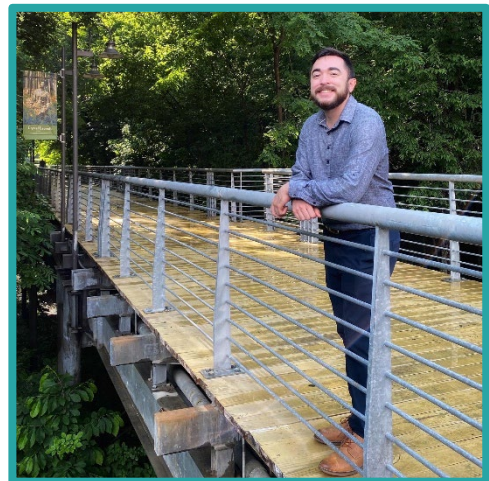
Julia Jeanty is the Community Science Fellows Program Manager for the American Geophysical Union's Thriving Earth Exchange program. Prior to AGU, Julia led community and stakeholder engagement for the Department of Energy's Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations, serving as a focal point for engagement across OCED's portfolio and leading community benefits negotiations for a subset of OCED programs. Julia was also the senior policy manager at Data for Progress, where she oversaw DFP's policy portfolio and worked to advance progressive policies via policy and data analysis and multi-stakeholder engagement, and also served as a Coordinator for Tropical Forests and Agriculture at National Wildlife Federation, where she supported multi-stakeholder efforts aimed at developing, strengthening and expanding zero-deforestation palm oil, soy, cocoa and cattle supply chains. She holds a dual degree in Sustainability

Studies and Environmental Geosciences, as well as certificates in Geospatial Information Analysis and Meteorology and Climatology from the University of Florida. Julia is from Miami, Florida originally but currently lives in Washington, DC, and she loves to read, travel, and go to concerts.

Matt Nakaya

Pacific Southwest Intern and Fellow Coordinator; US Fish and Wildlife Service

As the Pacific Southwest Intern and Fellow Coordinator for the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Matt Nakaya leads the coordination of all major internship programs in California, Nevada, and the Klamath Basin of Southern Oregon. His responsibilities involve recruitment and hiring, program management, and the coordination of career placement opportunities with USFWS. It's a broad job where every day is different, and he deeply enjoys the ability to innovate and support emerging professionals in conservation.



Prior to joining the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Matt received his bachelor's degree in environmental science from UC Irvine and served as a Peace Corps volunteer.

Natalie S. Brown

Environmental Policy Advocate; Planning and Conservation League



Natalie S. Brown is a dedicated Environmental Policy Advocate at the Planning and Conservation League in Sacramento, California, working in particular on water policy, land use, and transportation issues. As an Environmental Policy Advocate, Natalie urges beneficial environmental reform, assembles coalitions on key issues, and analyses legislation passing through the state legislature to understand its environmental and social impacts.

Prior to graduating in 2023 with her History B.A. and individually-designed Environmental Policy & Planning B.S., Natalie's academic work centered on the intersection of environmental and social justice issues. As an undergraduate at UCLA, Natalie fostered an interest and expertise in

environmental governance, completing intensive individual research on critical issues like the Colorado River crisis and the injustice involved in the construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct. Now, as part of the PCL team, Natalie applies this insight to her policy work, striving to rectify environmental hazards and inequities across California.

Riley Egger

Land, Water & Wildlife Program Director; Coastal Conservation League

Riley Egger joined the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League in 2020 as a project manager and now directs their Land, Water & Wildlife Program in Charleston, South Carolina. She primarily focuses on addressing water quality and habitat management issues affecting the coastal plain of South Carolina through advocacy, legal, and policy solutions.

Most recently, Riley has led projects that include safeguarding red knot critical habitat from horseshoe crab harvesting, restoration of habitat through beneficial use of dredged material, advocating for beach management practices and policies to protect wildlife, and working to address the use of rodenticides impacting bobcat populations.



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