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THE GHOST OF THE HILLS By Chace Larsen – Hill City

I cut his tracks early— huge, dinner-plate paws punched into the mud beside a back road I'd never bothered with before. Fresh. Confident. The kind of sign that makes your pulse jump and your plans unravel all at once. From that moment on it turned into a month-long humiliation ritual: always a day late, always a snowdrift short, always watching those hand-sized prints vanish on the first bare south slope like the cat had stepped off the face of the earth just to spite me.



The winter didn't help. Warm days. Rotten snow. Just enough white left in the bottoms and north slopes to show me what I was missing. Time and again I'd cut two- or three-day-old tracks, follow them until hope crept back in... then lose him again. He stopped being just a lion. He became a problem. A riddle. A pale ghost that followed me home and paced around in my sleep.

Then yesterday, something changed.

I picked up his trail again on a north slope dropping into one of his favorite drainages. Old tracks, sure—but wrong in a way that mattered. He wasn't traveling. He was hunting. Back and forth across the bottom, checking cover, slipping upslope only to drift back down again like he owned the place. Deer tracks. Elk tracks. All of it funneling through that west-to-east drainage. And then, right on schedule, he vanished onto a sunny south slope—the same cursed kind of luck that had beaten me all season.

That's when the Lord finally reached down and tapped me on the noggin. Use your brain, dummy.

A cat hunting that hard doesn't leave the country. He kills. He feeds. And then he beds where the sun can warm his blood. I set up below a finger off that south slope, backed into a spruce with juniper bushes brushing my shoulders, call out front, rifle loaded. Logic said face



where you think he's coming from. Experience said let him walk past you before he ever knows you're there.

Calling lions is a study in madness. The first fifteen minutes every nerve is screaming—every bird, every twig, every breath of wind is death coming in on padded feet. After that, boredom tries to kill you instead.

He saved me the trouble.

Just short of thirty minutes later he materialized to my right like smoke turning solid. Twenty yards. Big. Thick. Moving with that liquid, unfair smoothness only cats have. Locked onto the call, blind to everything else. I shouldered the rifle. He floated forward a few more steps, pausing behind a low bush, his top half still visible and I put the crosshairs where shoulder meets bad decisions.

The 45-70 spoke, the recoil, unfelt in my focus, jarred the crosshairs from my target and at the shot he dropped out of sight. I rose to my feet, madly working the lever, a finger-sized cartridge gliding smoothly into the breech, and stayed on him. I closed the twenty or so yards to him, my heart racing, every step closer revealing just how big he was. Then, at fifteen feet, his head came up—and I finished it right there. Later I learned the first round had already wrecked both shoulders clean through. Still, I've never met a mountain lion worth trusting.

He weighed 162 pounds, with a head the size of a pumpkin, and paws big enough to shake hands with. A whole lot of teeth and murder wrapped in tawny fur.

The drag out, the truck, and the misery can keep their secrets. All that matters is I'd finally settled the ghost—and this one's going to be hard to beat.

I didn't get here on my own—and anyone who tells you they did is either lying or dangerously confused.

Every bit of success I've had come from
continued on page 2

The Ghost of the Hills - continued from page 1

older, sharper people grabbing me by the collar and hauling me uphill, handing over hard-earned lessons, stories soaked in failure, and knowledge you don't get out of books. The kind that only comes from cold mornings, long tracks, and things that bite back.

That's exactly what the **Black Hills Mountain Lion Foundation** is about—hunting and conserving lions in the Black Hills, with people who actually know what they're doing. I've been proud to count myself a member for the past few years.



Their annual **Cougar Classic** keeps that tradition alive. Every dollar raised goes straight back into making sure hunts like mine are still possible—and into backing **South Dakota Youth Hunting Adventures**, helping bring the next generation up the right way, with mentorship instead of mythology.

Join us next year. Come swap lies that happen to be true, talk lions, have a drink and a meal, and enjoy the company of people who understand that good hunting—and good hunters—don't happen by accident.



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President,
Brad Johnson

President's Column *by Brad Johnson*

The South Dakota Wildlife Federation is poised for growth in the coming year, and we face that opportunity with both optimism and realism. We have challenges ahead, and we have work to do.

But we also have a clear path forward — one that strengthens our mission, broadens our reach, and ensures that the next generation of South Dakotans carries our conservation legacy forward.

Broadening our membership is a top priority. If we want to remain a strong, statewide voice for wildlife, habitat, and outdoor traditions, we must build a younger and more diverse coalition of outdoorsmen and women.

The truth is simple: younger Americans aren't drifting away from the outdoors — they're drifting away from traditional outdoors organizations that haven't adapted to their expectations.

Across the country, the organizations that are attracting younger members are doing two things differently:

- They are moving from “programs for youth” to “programs shaped by youth.”
- They are modernizing their communication, technology, and storytelling.

This is the direction we must go.

To help chart that path, I've asked SDWF First Vice President Emmett Keyser to lead a Visioning Committee that will guide our next steps during the next 90 days.

Emmett is also our delegate to the National Wildlife Federation's annual convention, held June 14–17 in Providence, RI. Emmett, Executive Director Dana Rogers, and I will attend the conference together, where we will meet with state affiliates and NWF leaders that have successfully attracted younger members and built durable youth pipelines.

We don't need to start from scratch. We already have a powerful foundation: our Youth Conservation Camp, held June 7–13 at Camp Bob Marshall in the Black Hills.

This camp is one of the longest-running programs of its kind in the nation. Since 1964, thousands of South Dakota teens have spent a week learning hunting, fishing, resource management, shooting sports, hiking, and hands-on conservation skills in one of the most beautiful places in the state. They stay in rustic cabins, eat together in the lodge, and spend long days outdoors with instructors who care deeply about passing on the knowledge and ethics that define our outdoor traditions.

But as proud as we are of this history, we're at a moment when the camp can — and must — become something even bigger.

Right now, the camp is an under-leveraged asset. It should be the center of gravity for every youth engagement strategy we build. But to do that, we must stop treating it as a once-a-year program and start treating it as a year-round youth pipeline, a leadership incubator, and a story engine.

At the moment, camp ends when the campers head home. But the energy, friendships, and curiosity we see at Camp Bob Marshall shouldn't fade after one week. We need to capture that momentum and carry it through the entire year.

That's why one of the Visioning Committee's first tasks will be to design a Youth Leadership Corps made up of camp alumni and other interested young people ages roughly 16–30. This group could be empowered to:

- Review SDWF policy positions
- Shape youth-facing communications
- Lead at least one statewide conservation project
- Build a program that turns one week of camp into twelve months of engagement

And we can harness what nearly every camper already carries in their pocket — a phone. We want these young people to submit photos, create shortform videos, and document their yearlong outdoor experiences. Their stories can be shared on our social media channels, helping us reach new audiences and amplify youth voices.

When young people tell the story of South Dakota's outdoors in their own voices, other young people listen. And parents listen. And policymakers listen.

We also need to engage parents. Parents who send their kids to camp already care about the outdoors. They are natural allies, and we want to bring them into the SDWF family — as members, volunteers, and advocates.

This is the direction we must go if we want SDWF to remain strong, relevant, and effective for the next generation.

But we cannot do this without your support.

Building a year-round youth pipeline, launching a Youth Leadership Corps, expanding our storytelling efforts, and strengthening our camp infrastructure will require new resources — both financial and organizational. If you believe in the future of SDWF, if you believe in the next generation of South Dakota conservation leaders, I'm asking you to consider a contribution to help us build this vision.

Your support today will help ensure that the young people who gather at Camp Bob Marshall this June become the conservation leaders who will carry our mission forward for decades to come.

Thank you for your commitment to South Dakota's wildlife, waters, and outdoor heritage. The work ahead is big — but so is the opportunity. And together, we can seize it.



“The conservation of natural resources is the fundamental problem. Unless we solve that problem it will avail us little to solve all others.”
Theodore Roosevelt in an address to the Deep Waterway Convention, Memphis, TN, October 4, 1907

SDWF Executive Directors Column *by Dana R. Rogers*

The year is 2026 and is certainly moving along quite quickly. I'll be planting my food plots soon at the farm and we just completed another successful annual board of directors meeting, banquet and fundraiser. I certainly appreciate all the donors we got to support the event and those that took the time to travel to Huron and participate. The day is long with meetings all day and the banquet with raffles and auction to close out the evening. My lovely "Smokin Hot Bride" Michele once again kept things running smoothly as possible, setting up the packages, raffles and silent auctions. She's amazing and I must give her all the credit.

Huge thanks to Ms. Sharon Reno and her staff at the Beadle County Sportsmen club kitchen for their great meals and support! Also, to Ken Schoultz the President of the Beadle County Sportsmen club for all the help and participation Friday and Saturday as delegates during the business meeting. Also, a thank you to my friend Aaron Rogers of Huron for setting up the trap shooting Friday afternoon for the Directors that enjoyed some trap shooting time.

I continue to ask for thoughts and ideas to improve our events to garner much better attendance. We had some outstanding prizes, raffle items and silent auctions. The food and fellowship were great but I continue to struggle to get and generate what I'd hope would be better attendance. If you have suggestions, I'm all ears.

The Out of Doors newsletters have been looking better and I'm happy and appreciate of the submissions and support. The assistance of Brad Johnson, Emmett Keyser, Chuck Dieter, Bill Antonides, Maggie Lindsey, Charlie Rokusek and others that helped by putting articles together for submission is very much appreciated. We've received some very good feedback on the issues the last few years. If you have photos, articles or ideas, please send them to me and we'll work to further improve the issues.

SDWF Raffles. Working with Bob Bucholz during a visit my first year, he took me to SoDak Sports where they came up with a 21-gun raffle stylized after what the Sportsmen Club of Brown Co. does with their fundraisers. We are still running these raffles and thus far have sold over 600-gun raffle tickets. At the annual meeting we drew for the 5th and 6th gun on the raffle. Mark Cundy and Joanne Runge were the winners and have been notified. The cash raffle ticket online sales finally became solvent earlier this year so we drew for the \$3,000 in Cash in Huron as well. The lucky winner was Kerry Stiner.

We will draw for a gun for every 100 tickets sold. Brad also generously donated a private land pheasant hunt near Watertown and Terry Wiczorek was the winning ticket drawn. Mr. Charlie Rokusek once again set up an original Mark Anderson portrait "Chickadees" and that raffle can be purchased online or on the back page and mailed in. That's a 50/50 split pot basis.

Conservation Awards for four outstanding conservationists were presented in Huron and we greatly appreciate the efforts of the winners. You'll see each of those winners highlighted in this issue. Rep. Tim Goodwin championed the Aquatic Invasive Species bill; Rep. Krystin Wittman has been a stalwart of conservation on the House Ag and Natural Resources Committee and certainly listens to the SDWF and her constituents. We had the pleasure of hearing from Madison Grimm on her conservation efforts and her work as a three-time Federal Youth Duck Stamp winning artist. Her father, Adam Grimm, was our keynote speaker. He is a three time Federal Duck Stamp contest winner and is the current Ducks Unlimited Artist of the Year. One of my friends and mentors Mr. Charlie Rokusek was honored as the SDWF Lifetime Conservation Achievement Award winners. Please consider nominating a local member, farmer, rancher, conservationist or great legislator in the future.

Mr. Charlie's award certainly brought out support from our fantastic Youth Conservation Camp staff. Our campers will once again be heading to Camp Bob Marshall just west of Custer State Park the first week of June. I continue to be absolutely amazed at the opportunities and information provided to the campers. The work Bob Schaefer, Jayden Halsey, Kemari Blumhardt, Mike McKernan and the rest of the volunteer counselors is incredible. Huge thanks to Lacy Elrod and Kaycee Smith of the Education Services Staff from the SD GF&P. This is truly a phenomenal program the SDWF that our affiliates and members should be very proud of and champion.



Social media and Web outreach – Big thanks to Brad Johnson and Jayden Halsey for suggested changes and fresh ideas for updates. Jon from 360 made it happen and has been responsive. Jayden has started putting several "Did you Know" posts to generate interest and discussion. Brad has provided some great articles and posts to add to the FB page as well. These types of outreaches have certainly generated a lot of traffic and interest. I try my best to answer pertinent questions and private messages. Of particular note most recently were dialogue on the East River Unlimited Elk permits and the Deer Management tag system and changes.

Membership. I've received updated membership lists and checks have been mailed in to Pierre by several affiliates. Communication and advertisement are primarily using social media (Facebook) and the occasional mass e-mail from Jon at 360. The affiliates typically get me their lists and mail in their checks in a trickle and I have had to reach out on occasion as a reminder. Much of that is dependent on affiliates getting me their updated lists. Recruitment and renewals are definitely down. I've tried e-mailing expired members IF we have an e-mail. Over the past year I even bought reminder cards for mailing post cards to get hold of former members that we don't have e-mail for. PLEASE PLEASE get e-mail addresses and phone numbers from your affiliated members. That's the quickest and cheapest way for me to contact them with updates and renewal notices.

Affiliate visits. Over the past year, I've visited Beadle Co. in Huron, the Sportsmen Club of Brown Co. in Aberdeen, Jerauld Co. Sportsmen in Wessington Springs, Brookings Wildlife Federation, Dakota Sportsmen in Watertown, High Plains in Pierre and the Black Hills Sportsmen Club in Rapid City. I want to get out to every affiliate that will have me and give my presentation. I believe this is absolutely critical to getting affiliates re-energized and engaged to move forward. Talking about what we do as an organization and our plans to work for them on issues they care about. I often hear concerns and despair about issues such as access; out of state \$\$\$ and tourism being perceived as more important than residents; commercial hunting; habitat; public land, management practices etc. Sportsmen have many valid concerns and it's up to us to show them that we can help make an impact to help improve things in my personal opinion.

Marshall Co. and Webster – Several Directors met with local Marshall County sportsmen in Britton last year. After much discussion and several meetings, they recently decided to re-affiliate and bring in 50 new members. We are ecstatic to welcome them back. We've been in contact with a few of their leaders and look forward to working together. The Waubay visit hasn't yet panned out but hopefully in the future the sportsmen in that area decide to form an affiliate. If you have a sportsmen club, shooting club or conservation group in your area that would like to consider becoming an affiliate, please let me know and I'd be happy to visit with them.

Camo Coalition– Brad Johnson and George Vandell got Camo up and going again with the help of Rich Widman and new Camo President Noel Chicoine of Pierre. A meeting was conducted via zoom for meeting minutes to consolidate the previous checking accounts to Pierre.

Legislation – George, John Simpson and I were giving it our best but it was another tough go with the 3 guide and outfitter bills all getting killed or pulled in committees. We highly encourage each of you to relay your concerns

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to your area representatives. This is very much where the rubber meets the road with concerns and issues. Our current race for Governor is also the most important piece. When I was hired, the number ONE issue we heard was concern for commercialization and privatization of our public trust issues. If you want to see changes in who is prioritized. Residents, Non-Resident Tourism, Commercialization of our Public Trust Resources, land and water conservation and access issues, this is where the decisions are actually made... the voting ballot box.

I was able to attend the Affiliate Chief Executive Meeting in Spokane Washington January 2026. Great Plains Working Group and Hunters and Anglers Working Group Zoom attendance to engage and dialogue with peers and learn what's happening with NWF and our similar interests. The Farm Bill and increases in acreage and payments continue to be an issue of concern to bring back the great habitat we once had. National issues like Public Land Sales, CRP, AIS, ESA, Boundary Waters mining, oil and gas exploration etc. are hot topics. Brad Johnson, Emmett Keyser and I will be attending the National Wildlife Federation meeting in Providence Rhode Island the second week in June.

The most recent Game Fish and Parks Commission meeting was held at Custer State Park just down the road from me. These are very important engagement opportunities for sportsmen and I highly recommend going. We have the opportunity to speak with our Game Fish and Parks staff members

and Commissioners and visit on issues and concerns. Vice President Jeff Olson, Black Hills Sportsmen member Paul Vinatieri and I were on hand and all testified on the plan to increase our Elk Management Objectives. Some lively discussion also ensued on Buck Only Deer permits and Doe harvest. Those issues should be shaking out in the near future so keep tabs on those discussions.

I also want to take a moment to express my sincere thank you to Ryan Roehr and Larry Lewis for their time serving on our board of directors. It's not an easy task being a volunteer, but we certainly appreciated the passion and dedication they offered over the years to the South Dakota Wildlife Federation. You'll also see some new Director biographies and photos in this issue. Bob Brown of Chamberlain, Greg Hoftiezer of Watertown, Jeff Olson of Rapid City and Anpotowin "Anpo" Jensen have volunteered to serve going forward and we thank them for their willingness to serve.

I did have some time to be able to get out and do a bit of Turkey hunting in the Black Hills and enjoyed that for the brief time I had. I'm currently working on reinvigorating our pond after the recent years of drought with some dredging, bentonite treatment and GCL bentonite infused fabric in hopes I can get the old farm pond holding water and re-stocked with fish this summer or fall. I wish you all some fantastic fishing this summer, draws in your applications and great days afield ahead. As always when afield, please remember to Respect the Land, Respect the Landowners and Respect the Wildlife!

YOUTH CONSERVATION CAMP NOTICE

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"Promoting the wise use of our natural resources."



The 2026 SDWF Youth Conservation Camp is now in the planning stage, and this year proudly marks the 62nd year of camp. For more than six decades, this camp has played an important role in shaping future conservation leaders. Once again, we are partnering with the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish & Parks, along with naturalists and dedicated volunteers from Custer State Park, to provide an inspiring, hands-on learning experience for youth. At the heart of the Conservation Camp are the young people who attend—and that is where you and your organization make a meaningful difference. Your support helps open the door for students to explore the outdoors, develop leadership skills, and gain a deeper understanding of conservation and environmental stewardship. By sponsoring a camper, you are investing in the next generation of hunters, anglers, conservationists, and community leaders. We would also like to extend our sincere thanks to the organizations that sponsored campers for the 2025 camp! Those campers were an exceptional group of young people with a strong passion for conservation and the environment. They represented their communities with pride, and your generosity helped make their camp experience both impactful and memorable. The 2026 SDWF Youth Conservation Camp will be held June 7–13 at Camp Bob Marshall in Custer, South Dakota, located in the beautiful Black Hills. The cost of camp is \$600 per camper, which includes round-trip transportation to and from the camp, all meals while at camp, and activities. We ask that the \$600 camp fee be submitted with the camper's application. The camp fee has been adjusted this year due to rising costs. Applications should be submitted by May 1, if possible. An application form is included—please make copies as needed. Applications can also be printed from the SDWF website at www.sdwf.org/camp. Reservations may be canceled and the camp fee refunded in full until May 15; after that date, no refunds will be issued.



Girls and boys entering grades 9, 10, and 11, as well as students finishing 8th grade, are eligible to attend. Campers should demonstrate leadership potential and have an interest in hunting, fishing, outdoor activities, and conservation. Buses will run from the eastern part of the state to transport campers to Camp Bob Marshall in Custer, SD. Camp programming will focus on conservation and environmental issues, game management, forestry, and fisheries, along with fishing and shooting skills. While the camp is primarily educational, it is also designed to be fun, engaging, and unforgettable for anyone who enjoys wildlife and the outdoors. Campers will participate in hands-on instruction in small groups and have opportunities to choose subjects that interest them most. Reservations will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.

Reservations will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. All camp business will be handled at the address below.

**Please send applications and camp fees to:
SDWF – Youth Conservation Camp
PO Box 1175 Aberdeen, SD 57402**

Affiliated with the National Wildlife Federation

ANNUAL MEETING 2026



Adam Grimm Artist



The WILDMAN Brothers - Rich and Mark Widman



Backcountry Hunters and Anglers Chris Gukeisen and his Son Owen having fun at the SDWF annual banquet



Madison Grimm Receives Scholarship Checks from Ken Schoultz of Beadle County and Brad and Carol Johnson



Charlie Rokusek Gun Winner with Kemari Blumhardt and Mark Widman

VICE PRESIDENT JEFF OLSON

Jeff is a recently retired Dentist from Rapid City. The co-President of the Black Hills Flyfishers'; program chair and treasurer of the Black Hills Sportsmen Club. He's the founder and President of the South Dakota Sportsmen Against Hunger program

As past chairman of the SD GFP commission, he continues to work with them on many projects. Sitting on the elk working group is one of those tasks. He's also a mentor with the South Dakota Youth Hunting Adventures program. No, he's not hunting and fishing as much a retired sportsman should but Jeff very much enjoys working with these great conservation organizations.

Editors Note: I've had the pleasure and privilege of knowing Jeff Olson the past several years. There are dozens of involved, informed conservation minded sportsmen in our great state of South Dakota. None that I know are involved in more projects, programs and efforts in the Black Hills and West River issues facing our wildlife and sportsmen here. SDWF is extremely lucky that he's agreed to move up from his previous Director At Large position into the role of one of our Vice Presidents. When Jeff was a commissioner, I discussed several issues from Elk to Mountain Lion to Deer license



issues, habitat, access, management and the politics of Pierre. He's done a great job helping to lead the Rapid City affiliate the Black Hills Sportsmen Club. From his contacts to his involvement, Jeff will do a phenomenal job as one of our Vice Presidents.

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT CANCELS BISON GRAZING LEASES FOR AMERICAN PRAIRIE

MICAH DREW

The Bureau of Land Management has issued a final decision canceling a series of permits that allowed bison grazing on federal land by the nonprofit conservation organization American Prairie.

The move, which came after American Prairie and multiple other organizations formally protested a preliminary decision earlier this year, was condemned by conservation groups but praised by elected officials in Montana, who have sought the cancellation of bison grazing leases for years.

“This final decision is a victory for the rule of law and the generations of Montanans who have stewarded our lands with care,” Gov. Greg Gianforte said in a statement. “For far too long, the Biden administration ignored the clear language of the Taylor Grazing Act in favor of an ideological experiment. I’m proud of our administration for leading the fight to reach this decision and I thank Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum and BLM for putting Montanans first.”

American Prairie has a mission to conserve prairie land in Montana to create one of the largest nature reserves in the country, abutting Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge and Upper Missouri Breaks National Monument. The nonprofit owns and leases more than 500,000 acres in the state.

Across some sections of that leased acreage — specifically six allotments comprising around 63,000 acres of federal land, according to the group — American Prairie grazes around 900 bison under the authorization of the BLM, with some leases stretching back two decades.

“American Prairie has lawfully grazed bison on BLM lands for more than 20 years, complying with every rule, regulation, and permit requirement,” said Alison Fox, CEO of American Prairie. “BLM lawfully issued these permits and recognized that bison are qualified to graze on federal lands under longstanding practice and law. Reversing course now under political pressure undermines trust in the agency’s decision-making and threatens the future of bison restoration across the West.”

The decision by BLM focused on the 1934 Taylor Grazing Act, which is the legal framework that created grazing districts and governs leases on federal lands.

According to the BLM decision, the Act allows permits to be issued “to graze livestock,” and under a new interpretation of federal statutes, bison do not meet the definition of livestock.

Citing a legal dictionary, the decision states that livestock refers to domestic animals “used for production-oriented purposes.”

“The BLM lacks statutory authority to issue grazing permits under the TGA where the animals to be grazed are treated as wildlife and intended for conservation purposes and will not be managed for production,” the decision states.

It goes on to state that American Prairie’s bison operations are not domestic nor production oriented.

“This decision affirms what livestock producers have long argued for in the compliance of governing law,” Montana Stockgrowers Association President Lesley Robinson in a statement.

BLM terminated all bison or combined cattle/bison grazing permits for American Prairie and reissued cattle-only grazing permits on six federal allotments. The permit terminations will be effective on Sept. 30, to allow American Prairie to remove its bison herd from the land parcels.

A spokesperson for American Prairie told the Daily Montanan the organization plans to appeal the decision.

“This final decision by the BLM makes it clear that this is an all-out attack



on conservation. It is a textbook example of the government moving the goal posts and changing the rules in the middle of the game to reach a predetermined outcome,” said Mary Cochenour, attorney for American Prairie. “There have been no grazing violations, and the administrative record contains objective evidence showing that rangeland conditions have improved over the last two decades with bison on the landscape.”

In addition to the protest lodged by American Prairie, BLM said that the agency

received 34 other protest letters that “contained nearly 200 unique protest points,” including many from tribal governments and organizations.

In response to concerns the decision could impact dozens of tribal nations that retaining rights to hunt and manage bison across traditional lands, the BLM notes that its decision is specific to “this particular non-tribal permittee” and the agency is “not adjudicating grazing rights of any tribal governments or representatives.”

According to a 2025 BLM infographic about the agency’s grazing program, there are 41 grazing permits for bison issued by the bureau, alongside 18,000 permits and leases overall (including eight for reindeer.)

The state of Montana originally protested a series of permits issued to American Prairie in 2022, arguing that replacing production livestock with non-production bison damaged the local economy and ignored the statutory requirements for federal grazing permits.

Gianforte and the entire federal delegation, all Republicans, had sent letters to the Trump administration urging the repeal of the bison leases.

Members of the state’s delegation also praised the decision in statements to the press.

“Nobody makes better beef than Montana ranchers. This decision is a return to the original mission the BLM was created for,” said Rep. Ryan Zinke in a statement to the media. “The Taylor Grazing Act made clear these lands play a critical role in feeding our nation and sustaining rural communities, they are not meant to be locked up to satisfy the latest Washington political agenda. In Montana, working lands support ranching families who help put food on America’s tables.”

Montana’s senior Sen. Steve Daines thanked Interior Secretary Doug Burgum and President Donald Trump for “restoring common sense land management.”

Attorney General Austin Knudsen, who worked on behalf of the state to cancel the bison leases, called the decision a “huge victory” for Montana farmers and ranchers.

“As someone who grew up farming and ranching in Northeast Montana, I know how important this decision is to protect the hardworking livestock and ranching communities in that region and keep the elitists from destroying their livelihood,” Knudsen said.

Montana is also looking to restrict leases on state land for bison grazing, with a recent proposal by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, at the behest of the state Land Board —comprising Gianforte and Montana’s five statewide elected officials including Knudsen — seeking to give preference for bidders involved in “production livestock operations.”

The decision was signed by Bill Groffy, acting director of the BLM.

A vote to confirm President Donald Trump’s nominee to lead the BLM, Steve Pearce, is also expected soon.

NINETY YEARS OF CITIZEN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION IN BROOKINGS

In 1936, Professor Ed Binnewies attended the first organizational meeting of a group of Brookings sportsmen interested in conservation. He wrote "At this, the first meeting of sportsmen interested in conservation problems within Brookings County and for the purpose of forming an organization given to that work..." Binnewies became a charter member of the newly incorporated Brookings County Conservation League.

For 90 years, the Conservation League and its successor, the Brookings Wildlife Federation (BWF), have kept wildlife conservation in the news in Brookings County. The history includes many major successes including establishing a gun club, running a conservation park, purchasing land for public hunting, giving birth to the pheasant restoration group, and hosting the first Trout Extravaganza.

The local members have extended their influence statewide and even nationally. The BWF is an affiliate of the South Dakota Wildlife Federation and the National Wildlife Federation. Local members have served as officers at both levels.

Soon after the Conservation League was formed, Elmer Sexauer gave the League about eight acres of land where the Big Sioux River crosses Rt 77 south of town. The area was named Conservation Park. The nearby Lake Campbell Sportsmen's Club asked the Department of Transportation to improve access to the new Park, but the DOT declined because of "the coming of the "super highway." Activities at the Park have come and gone through the years as it serves as an outdoor classroom.

Long-time Brookings resident Dave Mitchell wrote about the early years saying "I grew up with the SDWF and the BCCL. My father, E. R. "Mitch" Mitchell was very involved with the local club...our vacations often were scheduled with the state conventions."

Dave recalled a vibrant and active club in the 1950s that installed boat ramps in Lake Poinsett (then undeveloped state-owned land). At the outlet of Lake Campbell, they installed a fish wheel to stop upstream migrating carp. When Lake Goldsmith went dry, the club worked with the National Guard and Boy Scouts to make an island in the lake bed.

In the late 1950s the League opened a small trap range near the current airport. Participation in trap shooting grew to the point that land was purchased east of town for a larger trap range and club house. Trap shooting slowly became the focus of the club, which became the Brookings Gun Club.

The Club's conservation focus was reawakened by Mitchell and Wildlife Professor Dr Ray Linder. The voice for conservation in Brookings got a boost by a merger of town and gown interests. Here's the story of today's Brookings Wildlife Federation.

Linder and other Wildlife Professors, e.g., Alen Wentz and Lester Flake, were holding student discussions called "brown bag lunches" on campus. Mitchell's gun club members were holding evening meetings at their new club house. Linder and Mitchell decided to join efforts.

They approached Tom and Gwen Yseth, owners of a popular downtown restaurant called the Ram Pub, about hosting monthly meetings for outdoor enthusiasts. Tom's wife, Gwen, was a wildlife advocate, and member and avid supporter of the National Wildlife

Federation. Tom and Gwen backed the idea of "info-lunches" that would be held monthly at noon in the Sioux River Yacht Club, which was upstairs above their restaurant.

In March 1985 the downtown group was calling themselves the "Club" in post cards that Tom sent out announcing luncheons and speakers. An invited speaker, named Roger Pries of the South Dakota Wildlife Federation, suggested that the locals get organized and join the State-wide Federation. The Brookings Wildlife Federation was born.

The first officers were Mark Kelsey, Barry Keal, Dave Dotson, Lee Kratchovil, Spencer Vaa, and Lucinda Zilverberg. Lucinda, an artist, designed a decal that is still used. The 36 charter members paid \$5 dues.

One of the first big success stories of the new group was increasing pheasant numbers through habitat improvement. At the time, the pheasant population was low. The State's travel bureau slogan was "a pheasant for everyone" but locals joked "it's more like a pheasant for every other one."

Yseth recalls: "When we announced an organization meeting for pheasants, people came out of the woodwork...we tried to organize the group at a banquet, but it was too huge...then the Pheasants Forever folks said they would help, but they wanted money."

Bob Wakeman, a charter BWF member said "we'll do our own thing and keep the money," and the local pheasant restoration group was formed. Later they did join the national organization. The Brookings County Pheasants Forever Chapter just held their 41st annual banquet with over 700 attendees and 240 sponsors.

In 1995, the BWF started another event that would take off like gang-busters. It was known as the Trout Extravaganza. Ginger Scalet, was the first woman president of the BWF when Matt Pieck, a Board Member suggested a kid's fishing weekend at Indian Hills Pond.

The idea was to teach kids about fishing – the equipment, techniques, and how to care for the catch. Volunteers were assigned to one of three duties, 1) fishing equipment maintenance (much needed), 2) pond-side helper (much needed), and 3) fish cleaners, who also passed out cooking recipes. The Game, Fish and Parks Department (GFP) stocked 2,000 rainbow trout and about 1,000 kids showed up!

Ginger wrote in the Brookings Register, "Ken Quirk tried to get into the Guinness Book of World Records for the most fish cleaned in a two-day period while carrying on a running commentary with each young angler."

This year, the event in May will be organized by the Outdoor Adventure Center with help from the BWF and Optimist Club. More about the Trout Extravaganza in a future article.

Another notable BWF program is securing public lands for wildlife conservation and hunting. Working with GFP, they have helped develop GPAs (Game Production Areas) that memorialize former members. Examples are the Bob Wakeman GPA near Lake Campbell, the Barry Keal GPA and the Carolyn Errington Memorial near Oakwood Lakes, the Gene Mehagen GPA just north of Brookings, and the Bob Roe GPA in Beadle County.

Today, the BWF supplies conservation information and activities to the Brookings community. Through the years, their Infolunches have

Ninety Years of Citizen Wildlife Conservation in Brookings continued from page 8 moved from the Ram Pub, to HyVee, to the Mission Coffee House, and now appropriately to the Outdoor Adventure Center.

The Infolunches are an opportunity for members to talk about their outdoor adventures, and for SDSU students and faculty to present the results of their research in layman's language. The BWF funds a partial scholarship for an undergraduate wildlife student.

Bob Kurtz, current BWF President sums up the group as "fifty percent hook and bullets and fifty percent conservation and ecology...our Infolunch talk might be a fishing trip to Alaska or a summary of new wildlife research."

The Federation meets twice annually with Game, Fish and Parks biologists, and every January with District 7 Legislators. The biologists talk about the status of fish and game populations; the Legislators listen to the Federation's thoughts on conservation legislation.

The BWF is one of 15 local affiliates of the South Dakota Wildlife

Federation, a 3,000 - member statewide organization founded in 1945. A controversial deal among national politicians regarding South Dakota's ducks and Missouri River dams and nonresident hunters instigated the State Federation's formation – but that's another story.

The parent society is the National Wildlife Federation, which is the oldest (1936) and largest conservation organization in the US. Much of their attention is on conservation policy at the national level. Their "gardening for wildlife" program has brought wildlife habitat into cities and towns. For example, the property of St Paul's Episcopal Church on 6th Street is Certified Urban Wildlife Habitat.

There are other impactful citizen groups in Brookings that support specific game species e.g., Ducks Unlimited, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Pheasants Forever, National Wild Turkey Federation, Whitetails Unlimited. But the Brookings Wildlife Federation has the longest historical roots and is "ecumenical" in that it focuses on outdoors enthusiasts, habitat conservation, and all wildlife species.

YOUTH CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR MADISON GRIMM

Madison Grimm, a 19-year-old wildlife artist from Wallace, SD, successfully navigated the South Dakota legislature this year bringing attention to the challenges waterfowl face during nesting season.

Madison, who is an award-winning wildlife artist in her spare time, established Second Chance Flight, a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of waterfowl.

Through this program, she collects waterfowl eggs from nests mostly damaged during farming operations. Producers who are aware of her program have contacted her and she and her father, Adam Grimm, have been gathering eggs under a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service permit.

Collecting eggs from state-protected birds was illegal in South Dakota until Madison convinced the legislature to pass House Bill 1265. That legislation allows someone who holds a federal migratory bird special purpose salvage permit to collect eggs.

SD Game, Fish and Parks had allowed Grimm's egg collection because of her federal permit, allowing it to supersede state law.

Madison then hatched the eggs, raised the waterfowl to adulthood and has released about 200 birds back into nature.

In addition to her conservation work, Madison is also a nationally recognized wildlife artist. Among other honors, she has won the Federal Junior Duck Stamp Competition three times and holds national records for both youngest winner and most wins in the history of the program.

Her father, Adam Grimm, is likewise no stranger to accolades in the world of waterfowl art. He is one of the most recognized names in contemporary wildlife painting, having won the prestigious Federal Duck Stamp contest three times, including the most recent 2024 competition. He has also twice been named Ducks Unlimited Artist of the Year. His work is featured in museums, private collections, and galleries nationwide.

Here are Madison's words about her work.



"In a world filled with so much loss, it's easy to feel like one person can't make a difference. But when I hold an egg in my hands that wouldn't have hatched or release a duckling that would have otherwise died cold, alone, and forgotten in the dust, I'm reminded of the power of saving just one life. It creates a ripple that lasts far beyond what we can see - because even in the smallest lives, we find a reflection of something bigger. A reminder that the work we do with our hands can echo the work of His."

NEW DIRECTOR GREG HOFTIEZER

Greg was born and raised in Watertown, South Dakota, later graduating from SDSU in 1984. Like many local sportsmen, his love for the outdoors began in childhood, hunting doves and ducks alongside his father. He still vividly remembers harvesting his first green-winged teal on Pelican Lake at a young age. Today, Greg remains an avid hunter with a particular passion for chasing deer across both the East and West River regions.

Beyond the hunt, Greg is deeply committed to habitat creation and preservation. He actively supports CRP initiatives, grassland restoration, and water protection efforts. On his family property in Hamlin County, Greg put his conservation values into practice by fencing off a creek to exclude livestock, keeping the water clean and creating a thriving sanctuary for wildlife. He views this land as a true blessing, constantly reminding family and friends never to take their time together on the property for granted.

For years, Greg has been an active leader with the Dakota Sportsmen affiliate in Watertown, dedicating his time to fighting the commercialization of hunting that threatens local access. He strongly believes that while private landowners are fortunate, the future of the sport depends on ensuring public access for every everyday hunter.

Frustrated by how often the “powers that be” ignore the community, Greg has actively voiced local concerns at regional stakeholder meetings in Northeast South Dakota. He continues to fight so that his grandchildren can inherit the same outdoor heritage that he and his children enjoyed. When he isn’t advocating for sportsman rights, Greg can be found bird hunting over his pointing dog, taking summer prairie dog trips, and spending quiet hours at his reloading bench.

His message to fellow hunters is clear and urgent: “If you are passionate about something, get involved. If you love to hunt and fish, speak up. Our opportunities are disappearing, and we all need to help.”



SDGFP WALLEYE SPAWNING AND BLUE DOG HATCHERY IMPROVEMENTS

SDGF&P Fisheries Staff

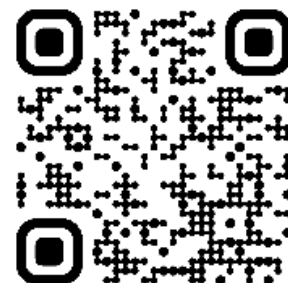
Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) spawned walleyes the last half of April from eight lakes in eastern South Dakota. Lynn, Alice (Deuel), Blue Dog, North Drywood (Roberts), and Middle Lyne provided most of the 97 million eggs collected to meet the 2026 stocking request of 43 million fry and 4 million fingerlings. All the eggs were incubated at Blue Dog State Fish Hatchery, which produces most of the small walleye juveniles and fry for South Dakota public fishing waters. Using fertilized eggs generously shared by the State of Nebraska, Cleghorn Springs State Fish Hatchery and Gavins Point National Fish Hatchery also produce walleye fry and larger juveniles for stocking primarily in western South Dakota. Fry stockings from all three hatcheries were completed by May 15th, large spring juveniles from Cleghorn recirculating systems will be stocked by May 22, with small juveniles from ponds at Blue Dog and Gavins Point stocked in by mid-June. Fish stockings in the last 14 days can be found on the GFP website at Stocking Last 14 Days and a complete list of fish stockings, to date, is available at Fisheries Reports .



The goal of this project is to not only maintain the ability of Blue Dog to produce fish but also expand production to allow it to meet all of Eastern South Dakota’s stocking needs. A major priority of this project is to provide fish for the 55 community fisheries supported by GFP in the eastern part of the state. Using RAS technology, fish like largemouth bass, bluegill, and catfish can be grown to catchable sizes in a year or less. Blue Dog will also use flow through water to grow all of the catchable trout for Eastern South Dakota. RAS at Blue Dog benefits walleye and musky anglers as well. With approximately 75% of the walleye fisheries in SD dependent on hatchery production, the use of RAS at Blue Dog is essential. Walleye production

will increase, particularly for larger sizes of walleye fingerlings. These improvements will increase rearing efficiencies and decrease long-term operating costs, providing a very favorable and positive return on this investment.

GFP cannot do this project on its own using just license dollars and sport fish restoration funds. Donations are critical! GFP is actively fundraising to ensure the future of Blue Dog Hatchery and the fisheries supported by its production. To learn more about how to contribute to ensuring the state’s ability to continue to meet fish stocking needs into the future, visit gfp.sd.gov/blue-dog-hatchery-improvements/ or scan the QR code.



SOUTH DAKOTA HAS A CONSERVATION PRIORITIES PROBLEM

By Brad Johnson

Gov. Larry Rhoden stood in Watertown on May 26 asking South Dakotans to help raise \$3 million for upgrades to the Blue Dog State Fish Hatchery.

The request itself is reasonable. Blue Dog is aging infrastructure, and fish production remains foundational to South Dakota’s outdoor economy. Hatcheries are among the few state programs that simultaneously support tourism, local recreation and rural communities.

But the fundraising campaign exposes a contradiction state leaders would prefer not to confront: Would South Dakota even need private donations if the Noem–Rhoden administration had not spent years directing hunting and fishing license dollars into a \$500,000-per-year predator bounty program that wildlife biologists warned was unlikely to deliver meaningful results?

This is not a question about one hatchery. It is a question about how South Dakota governs.

The Nest Predator Bounty Program, launched in 2019 by former Gov. Kristi Noem, was marketed as aggressive wildlife management — paying bounties for raccoons, skunks, foxes and other nest predators in an effort to boost pheasant and waterfowl production. Supporters called it bold. Critics called it political theater.

By the 2025 and 2026 legislative sessions, skepticism had turned into open doubt. Lawmakers questioned whether the program produced measurable biological results. Opponents noted the state had stopped conducting the brood-count monitoring needed to demonstrate improved pheasant production in the first place — a striking omission for a program claiming biological success.

Wildlife experts were even more direct. Broad bounty systems rarely suppress predator populations enough to improve nesting success across large landscapes.

George Vandel, retired senior wildlife biologist with Game, Fish and Parks and vice president of the South Dakota Wildlife Federation, summarized the issue during legislative testimony:

“Bounty programs can’t work, never will work.”

Research largely supports that conclusion. Predator removal can help in small, intensively managed areas, but statewide bounty systems have shown limited long-term results.

And by 2026, even the state appeared to recognize the program’s political vulnerability. Rather than defend the original structure, the GF&P Commission split the initiative into separate trapping and coyote programs while preserving essentially the same overall spending level.

The structure changed. The spending — and the lack of evidence — did not.

And that spending choice carries a second, less discussed cost: predator bounties are not eligible for federal Dingell-Johnson matching funds. If the same \$500,000 in license dollars were directed toward eligible fisheries work — including hatchery upgrades — South Dakota could draw down an additional \$1.5 million in federal matching dollars. That is a 3-to-1 return the state is currently walking away from. Blue Dog is exactly the kind of project that qualifies. The bounty program is not.

Which brings us back to Blue Dog.

At no point during legislative testimony was there any indication that the hatchery’s future depended on the department raising another \$3 million in donations. Legislators appropriated \$8 million because Blue Dog is core fisheries infrastructure — precisely the kind of investment that directly supports South Dakota’s outdoor economy. Healthy hatcheries do not just produce fish; they sustain the tourism, guiding, bait shop, campground and small-town business ecosystems that help keep rural communities alive.

Yet the state now finds itself struggling to modernize essential hatchery infrastructure while continuing to spend \$500,000 annually on predator bounty programs whose biological effectiveness remains disputed.

The opportunity cost is not abstract — it is measured in potentially lost federal dollars, delayed infrastructure and a hatchery now forced to rely on private fundraising to cover basic modernization.

That is not a funding problem. It is a priorities problem — and a costly one.

Predator bounties fit neatly into modern political messaging. They generate headlines. They create the appearance of immediate action. They allow conservation to be framed as a simple battle between “good” wildlife and “bad” predators.

Real wildlife management is not that simple.

Habitat quality, wetland conditions, grassland preservation, drought cycles and landscape fragmentation consistently play far larger roles in pheasant and waterfowl production than statewide bounty systems. Wildlife professionals understand this. But habitat work is slower, less dramatic and politically less rewarding than announcing another predator-control initiative.

South Dakota’s outdoor economy deserves better than conservation by press release.

If the state truly believes that hatcheries like Blue Dog are essential infrastructure — and they are — then lawmakers should fund them directly and transparently instead of continuing to defend programs with uncertain biological returns.

Because conservation credibility matters.

Hunters and anglers will support serious investment when they believe license dollars are being spent strategically. Public trust weakens when those dollars appear increasingly tied to political branding exercises instead of measurable outcomes.

And that may be the larger lesson behind the Blue Dog fundraising campaign:

South Dakota does not lack the money to do conservation right. What it lacks is the political discipline to stop chasing symbolic victories and start funding the work that produces measurable results.

Every year the state pours \$500,000 into a program with no federal match, no measurable biological return and little credible scientific support while projects like Blue Dog — which do qualify for a 3-to-1 federal match — are left to pass the hat.

That is not stewardship. It is a political choice.

South Dakotans deserve an explanation for why state leaders continue prioritizing political symbolism over measurable conservation results.

2026 SDWF Annual Meeting/Banquet Donors

Thank You to all these wonderful businesses that donated prizes for the event!

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SMALL MOUTH MISSOURI RIVER TRIP CREATES BIG FISH STORY

By Brad Johnson

The wind calmed for a few hours on the morning of May 13 to allow us a couple of hours to fish small mouth bass with fly rods on the Missouri River.

John “Coop” Cooper had offered a fly fishing adventure on an auction at the 2025 Black Hills Fly Fisher’s banquet in Rapid City and I was not to be outbid.

This was our second attempt to catch Small Mouth Bass on fly rods, the first being a year ago in mid-May when the bass are close to shore, ready to spawn. Small mouth are Coop’s favorite fish given their exceptional fighting ability.

Wind prevented us from using fly rods that year, although we caught numerous fish ranging from 3.5 to slightly over 5 pounds.

The wind on the first day of our trip this year forced us to use spinning rods, but the forecast was for lighter wind on Wednesday morning followed by a brisk pick up of wind around noon.

Along with us was SD Wildlife Federation member Milt Carter of Watertown. Carter, who is a strong SDWF supporter, also is an avid fly fisherman. Coop, as he is known in wide circles, was Secretary of SD Game, Fish and Parks for 12 years under Gov. Bill Janklow and Gov. Mike Rounds.



His passion for the outdoors is perhaps only matched by his love of small mouth bass. He understands the habits of small mouth almost as well as the fish themselves.

SD Wildlife Federation member Milt Carter of Watertown poses with a 14.4 pound Northern he caught on a fly rod while fishing with Coop on the Missouri River on May 13 north of Pierre. The northern was released back into the river for further growth.

The landing target for our flies was about where the water meets

the Missouri River shoreline. A water temperature of at least 50 degrees was essential.

Milt’s fly landed perfectly between a rock and the shore. A sudden woosh and the fight was on.

It was quickly evident that this was a trophy, as the fish took off and the rod bent. As the fight brought the fish closer to Coop’s boat, we got a quick glance as the fish made a run beneath the boat.

That’s a big fish was all we knew.

Milt’s fly rod bent under the boat to the point one might think it would break.

“Let the fish work and tire itself out,” Coop said, thinking it was a big bass. “They’ll always have one last big run before the fight is over.”

Finally, we saw that it was a big northern pike as it was finally netted.

Its mouth full of teeth required Coop to work carefully as he removed the fly and weighed the fish, which came in at 14.4 pounds. After a couple of quick pictures, it was released back into the water.

Soon the wind forced us back to spinning rods, but the bite was on until a wind shift cooled the water and shut off the bite.

Then, it was the camaraderie, the banter and the surrounding wildlife that occupied our attention.

It is these moments that make our work to preserve and enhance the great outdoors all the more important.



SD Wildlife Federation Board president holds a 4.1 pound small mouth bass caught during a catch and release fly fishing trip with John “Coop” Cooper in mid May.

JENSEN JOINS SDWF BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Anpotowin “Anpo” Jensen has been appointed by SDWF Board President Brad Johnson to a Region 1 Director-at-Large position to replace Jeff Olson, who accepted the 2nd Vice President position.

Anpo was born and raised on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota and earned her B.S. in Environmental Systems Engineering and her M.S. in Civil and Environmental Engineering from Stanford University, where she was the first Native woman to serve on Stanford’s Student Global Health Board.

As a writer, author, and poet, she interweaves her experiences as an Oglala Lakota woman, engineer, tribal college adjunct instructor, and advocate for Indigenous-led solutions in global health and climate change across her creative and professional work.

Anpo’s advocacy extends into Indigenous sovereignty and culturally grounded STEM education. She collaborates with youth globally to design projects integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern science and has led community-based water quality studies, training over 30 youth to collect and analyze samples to protect Lakota sacred sites.

Through this work and her ongoing environmental engineering efforts, she addresses pressing climate and environmental health challenges facing Indigenous communities.

Her advocacy roles have included serving as an Environmental Health Specialist for the International Indian Treaty Council, a Youth Representative of the Black Hills Sioux Nation Council, and the North

American Focal Point of the UN Global Indigenous Youth Caucus.

She has delivered UN testimony influencing policy on Indigenous languages and health, represented youth at global environmental conferences, and currently serves as focal point for the Chemicals and Waste Youth Platform.

She also is a poet.

Her poetry has been featured in Lakota Times, Rapid City Journal, Napkin Poetry Review, and the Oxford Climate Review.

At the core of Anpo’s community impact is Hero Dreams Shine, a poetry book and initiative she created that supports empowerment through mentorship and storytelling and has amplified youth voices from countries including Canada, Iran, Zambia, and Syria.

She also co-designed the Youth4Nature: Biodiversity Challenge for the Global Youth Biodiversity Network, a program being piloted in Kenya and South Africa that empowers youth to address biodiversity loss worldwide.

Her work also has been featured in Forbes, the Native American 40 Under 40, Grist, the UN Youth Envoy, The Lancet, and more.



LAND, WATER AND OUTDOOR HERITAGE CONCERNS DESERVE ATTENTION IN GOVERNOR RACE - BY BRAD JOHNSON

South Dakota doesn't lack defining issues in the race for governor. Property taxes, economic growth and landowner rights dominate the debate — as they should.

Yet a far more urgent crisis is being ignored: the accelerating collapse of our land, water and outdoor heritage.

Wildlife habitat, water quality and public access form the bedrock of South Dakota's economy, culture and quality of life. Ignore them, and we mortgage our children's future for short-term convenience.

Grasslands are vanishing at breakneck speed. Native prairie across eastern South Dakota is relentlessly plowed under for row crops. Grassland bird populations have declined more than 40% since 1970.

Monarch butterfly populations have plunged dramatically since the 1990s. The web supporting pheasants, waterfowl, pollinators — and agriculture itself — is unraveling.

Prairie pothole wetlands are disappearing even faster. More than half the state's original wetlands have been drained, with losses exceeding 90% in some eastern counties.

These are not expendable puddles. They are the nurseries for ducks, the filters for our waters, and the last strongholds for birds and butterflies clinging to survival.

The 2023 Sackett v. EPA ruling stripped federal protections from 93% of wetland acreage and 99% of individual wetlands. With zero state safeguards in place, this green light for unchecked drainage threatens the nurseries for ducks and natural filters for our waters.

Water quality is in free fall. The 2026 Integrated Water Quality Report is damning: A crushing majority of assessed lakes and streams fail to support fishing, swimming or aquatic life. Only 27% of streams and 17% of lakes meet all standards.

Agricultural nutrient runoff — excess nitrogen and phosphorus — fuels toxic algae blooms and oxygen-starved water. Vanishing wetlands only worsen the pollution. This isn't handwringing; it's a direct assault on public health, tourism, lakeside property values and downstream communities forced to pay the cleanup bill.

Aquatic invaders are spreading rapidly and inflicting irreversible harm. Zebra mussels, first detected in 2018, have now infested 32 water bodies, with five new detections in 2025 alone. Broader aquatic invasive species plague more than 50 lakes, sloughs and rivers. Invasive carp muddy waters and destroy vegetation.

Shockingly, once zebra mussels establish in a lake or river, South Dakota has no effective mitigation plan. Studies show zebra mussels increase the concentration of mercury in our prized walleye and perch, and the clear water they create results in massive plant growth because of excessive agricultural pollution.



Big Sioux River floodwaters flow over farm fields, sending sediment downstream toward Lake Kampeska and beyond on April 13, 2023. (Brad Johnson/For South Dakota Searchlight)

Last legislative session, the Department of Game, Fish and Parks, under the leadership of Gov. Larry Rhoden, opposed calls for developing a more comprehensive strategy. When these pests take hold, damage to fisheries, infrastructure, recreation and water quality becomes permanent. Half-measures equal surrender.

Public access also faces growing challenges. In our private-land state, most habitat relies on voluntary landowner partnerships.

Out-of-state hunters and anglers fund roughly 33% of the Game, Fish and Parks wildlife budget — nearly double resident contributions. This tilts priorities toward tourism revenue and commercialized

hunting over local families.

Meanwhile, out-of-staters are snapping up or leasing farmland for private hunting retreats, pulling land from public access programs and squeezing opportunities for South Dakotans. Without bold action to protect resident priorities, our hunting and fishing traditions will wither.

These threats are linked. Plowing grasslands and draining wetlands strips nature's filters, flooding waters with pollution that feeds algae and invasives. Dirty water weakens fisheries. Shrinking access locks families out. Every land-use decision either accelerates the damage or begins the repair — especially with federal wetland protections now gone.

What's shocking is the silence by our political leaders.

These measurable, worsening crises have barely surfaced in the governor's race. Voters are left guessing where candidates stand on the issues that will define South Dakota's livability for generations.

This is not about ideology. It's about honest leadership — now.

How will South Dakota balance intensive agriculture with the clean water, healthy grasslands, and remaining wetlands our wildlife and economy desperately need?

What aggressive action will confront aquatic invasives — including a real mitigation plan for zebra mussels — and replace lost wetland protections?

How do we incentivize habitat conservation on working lands without punishing producers?

And how do we secure genuine public access so every South Dakotan — not just out-of-state interests — can enjoy our outdoor birthright?

South Dakota residents demand stewardship of land, water and wildlife. It's time candidates prove they share that commitment. Bring these issues into the race. Give voters the clarity they deserve.

Our lakes, streams, birds, butterflies, wetlands and current and future generations of South Dakotans deserve it.

BLACK HILLS FLYFISHERS PRESENT JOHN COOPER WITH A LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

The Black Hills FlyFishers presented John Cooper with a Lifetime Achievement award at their annual fund raising auction in March.

As is always the case with Coop, the bar has been set that will be very hard to beat.

The BHFF was a group formed in the late 80's and Coop has been a member for a long time, recently becoming a life member.

He taught me and many of my friends how to fish for small mouth bass on the river. More importantly he also taught me about protecting resources.

I sat on the GFP commission when he was Secretary of the GFP.

However, this award has to do with all the things he has done for trout in the Black Hills.

He sided with the BHFF on the difficult task of creating catch and release fisheries. The BHFF and the GFP worked together on many habitat projects that have improved the fishery.

The fisheries team was great to work with because of his outstanding leadership qualities.

How a kid from Orange Count, CA, working at his family orchard, playing division one baseball, two tours as a navy seal in Vietnam, working for the US Fish and Wildlife Service on undercover stings, Secretary of the GFP under Gov. Bill Janklow and Gov. Mike Rounds becomes the guy who make trout fishing in the Black Hills exceptional is an amazing story. The award is well deserved.

Jeff Olson - Co-pres BHFF

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SD WILDLIFE FEDERATION LEGACY DONORS FROM APRIL 2024 – MAY 2026

Thank you to the following donors for their contributions to the SDWF. Please consider becoming a member of the Wildlife Legacy Council. SDWF is a 501(c)3 non-profit, all donations are tax deductible. These tax-deductible contributions will speak volumes for the future of the SDWF's Wildlife Legacy Council! Please consider your donation today. Donations can be sent to SDWF, PO Box 7075, Pierre, SD 57501.

The Legacy Council consists of five different donation levels. These donation levels were revised October 2011 to: Level V Eagle \$1,000 & above; Level IV Buffalo \$401-\$999; Level III Elk \$301-\$400; Level II Deer \$201 - \$300; and Level I Pheasant \$100-\$200.

APRIL 2024 – MAY 2026

LEVEL V EAGLE

29-90 SPORTSMAN'S CLUB - SD
BEADLE CO SPORTSMAN CLUB - SD
BLACK HILLS SPORTSMEN - SD
BRAD JOHNSON - SD
BROOKINGS WILDLIFE FEDERATION - SD
CAROL JOHNSON - SD
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DAKOTA SPORTSMAN INC - SD
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JONES COUNTY SPORTSMAN'S CLUB - SD
MILT CARTER - SD
NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION - VA
SOUTH DAKOTA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
SOUTH DAKOTA CONSERVATION OFFICERS ASSOC.
SPORTSMAN'S CLUB OF BROWN CO - SD
YANKTON AREA PHEASANTS FOREVER - SD
YANKTON AREA PHEASANTS FOREVER - SD

LEVEL IV BUFFALO

BLACK HILLS SPORTSMEN - SD
BLACK HILLS SPORTSMEN - SD
CHUCK AND GINGER SCALET - KS
CODY WARNER - SD
HECLA COMMUNITY SPORTSMEN - SD
HERBERT WISWALL - SD
HIGH PLAINS WILDLIFE ASSOCIATION - SD
JEFF OLSON - SD
JERRY SOHOLT - SD
JOHN COOPER - SD
MARLING STAMMER - SD
MILT CARTER - SD
NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION - VA
NIK LIPP - SD
SE SD QUALITY DEER - SD
SOUTH DAKOTA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
SOUTH DAKOTA CONSERVATION OFFICERS ASSOC.
SPORTSMAN'S CLUB OF BROWN CO - SD
WHETSTONE SPORTSMEN - SD
YANKTON AREA PHEASANTS FOREVER - SD

LEVEL III ELK

29-90 SPORTSMAN'S CLUB - SD
BIG SIOUX APPRAISALS - SD
BLACK HILLS FLY FISHERS - SD
DAN LIMMER - SD
DICK & SUE BROWN - SD
JAMES FREDRIKSON - SD
JEFF OLSON - SD
LAKE CAMPBELL WILDLIFE - SD
RICHARD MILLER - SD
STEVE BERBERICH - SD
TERRY & LAREE MAYES - SD

LEVEL II DEER

ARLO LEVISEN - SD
BILL CLAYTON - SD
CHARLIE ROKUSEK - SD
CHUCK DIETER - SD
CHUCK LABEDA - SD
DICK AND SUE BROWN - SD

APRIL 2024 – MAY 2026

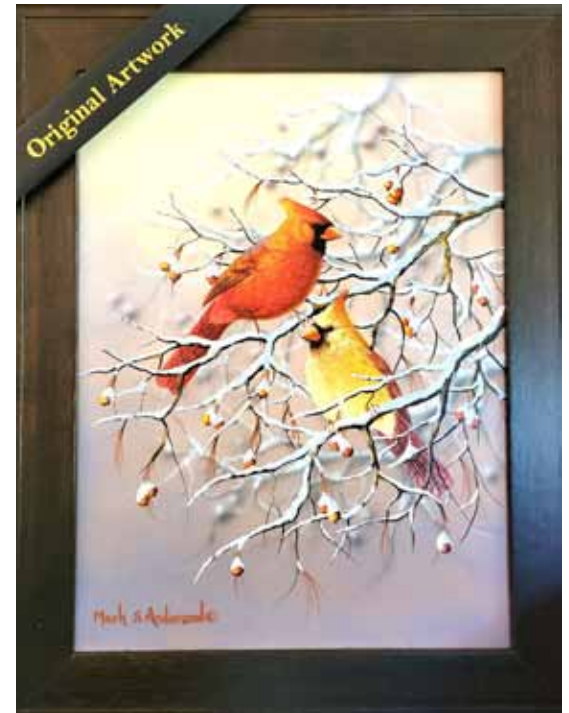
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DON BARTHOLOMEW - AZ
FRED WHITING - SD
GERALD WICKSTROM - SD
GRASS LAKE CONSERVATION - SD
HECLA COMMUNITY SPORTSMEN - SD
HERBERT WISWALL - SD
JAY'S BODY SHOP - SD
JERAULD CO FISH AND GAME - SD
JOHN GORS - SD
JOHN PRANGER - SD
LYNN D BENNETT - SD
MIKE DOUGLAS - SD
MINNEHAHA CHAP. #73 - SD
PHEASANTS FOREVER Inc - SD
RON PESEK - SD

LEVEL I PHEASANT

ANDREW O'CONNEL - MN
BOB BROWN - SD
CURT BISGARD - SD
DUANE DIVICH - TX
HARRY CHAPMAN - SD
JEFF SOHOLT - SD
SCOTT WEHRKAMP - SD
THOMAS TIEDEMANN - SD
AL THOMAS - SD
ARLO LEVISEN - SD
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CHUCK LEBEDA - SD
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LARRY MILLER - SD
LARRY MILLER - SD
LARRY O'RILEY TRUST - MO
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MICHAEL DOUGLAS - CA
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MYRON WACHENDORF MEMORIAL - SD
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2026 SDWF LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD: CHARLIE ROKUSEK

This award is presented to Charles “Charlie” Rokusek for a “lifetime” of dedication in helping to protect and conserve our state’s fish and wildlife resources and for his passionate advocacy for ensuring public access to the many outdoor recreational opportunities associated with these natural resources. Charlie has literally spent his entire adult life working on behalf of South Dakota’s wildlife and our state’s sportsmen and women and his efforts over the years to recruit and engage young people into the outdoors has been especially noteworthy.

Early in his career with SD Game, Fish and Parks, Charlie worked as a conservation foreman and then conservation officer, focusing on habitat projects, hunter and angler access, conservation law enforcement, youth hunter education and most importantly, building relationships with local sportsmen organizations and individuals in the Mitchell area. Later in his career, his efforts as a long-time educator in the Sioux Falls School District would also serve as important opportunities where Charlie could share his love of the outdoors with young people. As a high school teacher, Charlie was especially mindful of the chance to share his personal insights and experiences as an outdoorsman and his knowledge of fish and wildlife while delivering class lessons each day. In fact, he used those daily interactive opportunities as a means to help build future advocates for our state’s outdoor and natural resources.

His dedication to public service, love of our fish and wildlife resources and his passion for enjoying the hunting and fishing opportunities available in our state would endure long after his retirement from teaching as he has continued to serve as a leader, both formally and informally, within the 29-90 Sportsman’s Conservation Club since its inception. Over the past 20 years, in fact, Charlie has served as somewhat of a ‘conduit of communication and advocacy’, working with all of the Sioux Falls area outdoors and conservation organizations ensuring their awareness of important conservation legislation or GFP Commission policy issues. During this time, Charlie has also helped advocate for and assisted in raising funds for numerous area collaborative conservation and hunter and angler access projects. Through these combined efforts, he helped ensure positive outcomes



for our state’s natural resources and our citizens across a broad spectrum of conservation issues and challenges.

As a dedicated affiliate leader and delegate, Charlie has helped guide and assist the SDWF Board and leadership of the South Dakota Wildlife Federation through many projects and fundraising efforts over the past couple few decades as well. Perhaps most notably has been his outstanding work and support of the Youth Conservation Camp at Camp Bob Marshall. He’s personally been responsible for helping to raise thousands of dollars in funding support to ensure there were no financial barriers preventing attendance to the Youth Camp by Sioux Falls area young people. In addition, he has been a tireless advocate for the Camp by recruiting hundreds of camp attendees from Sioux Falls and the surrounding areas. Thanks to his work, dozens of young people have been able to share a memorable and enjoyable outdoor education experience.

Always with a vision for future generations and their opportunities to enjoy the outdoors, Charlie has dedicated his life to both educating and instilling the love for our great out-of-doors into hundreds of children, all the while striving to develop the next generation of South Dakota outdoor advocates and conservationists and we’re excited to recognize him with this Lifetime Achievement Award.

29/90 DONATIONS



*Jeff Clow 2990 \$250 to Travis Entenman
Friends of Big Sioux River*



*2990 Jeff Bickel \$500.00
donation for
Disabled Youth Deer
Hunt to Mike Costanzo.*



*2990 Emmett Keyser \$500.00
donation for Disabled Youth
Deer Hunt to Mike Costanzo.*



THE SDWF LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

Tim R. Goodwin is a Republican South Dakota State Representative (District 30) and retired U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel with 24 years of service. A conservative lawmaker first elected in 2016, he represents parts of southwestern South Dakota, including Custer and Fall River counties, and has worked extensively in sales.

Raised on a farm near Watertown, South Dakota. Tim Served 24 years in the U.S. Army, including time in the 82nd Airborne Division, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel. He served in the South Dakota House of Representatives from 2017 to 2023, and again from 2025. He served as a Majority Whip from 2019 to 2023.

Tim sits on the House Ag and NR committee and chairs the Veteran Affairs committee where we've worked with him on various wildlife, conservation, and Sportsman issues. He's also on the Transportation committee.

Tim often is found in the woods in the fall and winter and on or near the water in spring and summer. He loves to hunt deer, pheasant and especially mountain lions. He and his family are active in the Black Hills Mountain Lion Federation and the Cougar Classic event every winter near Hill City.

As an avid sportsman, he's aware and supportive of concerns over guides, outfitters, commercialization and aquatic invasive species. He's come to the legislative event held by the Black Hills Sportsmen each January and the Black Hills Sportsmen were happy to nominate him for Legislator of the Year.



EAST RIVER LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR NOMINATION

The 29-90 Sportsman's Club is nominating Representative Kadyn Wittman from District 15 for her work for the 220,000 licensed individual South Dakota citizens who hunt, fish or both. Representative Wittman was a watchdog at the Capitol for the average sports men and women of her district as well as for all of us throughout the state.

Representative Whittman has worked four Legislative Sessions and is serving her 2nd term. In her "day Job" Kayden is the Development Director for the Sioux Falls YMCA – a longstanding nonprofit organization dedicated to the youth of the greater metropolitan Sioux Falls area.

During her time in Pierre, Representative Wittman's votes have supported the beliefs of the South Dakota Wildlife Federation and the citizens of South Dakotan. Many times, she did an outstanding job on the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee and would ask the tough questions about a piece of legislation which would have a negative impact for resident sports men and women.

Representative Wittman also worked on the House floor on these issues and has been a strong supporter for the South Dakota Wildlife Federation and other conservation organizations including the SD Waterfowl Association, the SD Izaak Walton League and the SD Lakes and Streams Association. During her time on the House Ag & Natural Resources Committee she is one of the few who have always supported the SD Wildlife Federation. She also helped to explain to other legislators why positions of the SD Wildlife Federation were so important to average sports man or woman. Her conversations with other legislators encouraged their needed votes and support.

Representative Whittman was the primary sponsor of legislation to help fund school lunches for those who could not afford them. Despite a tough budget year, Kayden muscled the legislation through the Session using a "smoke out" to revive the bill. Due to her work and legislative skill, the Bill was recently signed into law by Governor Rohden.

In her spare time, Kayden loves oriental food and specifically Thai food. She loves the outdoors, loves to hike and visit our wonderful National Parks.

In summary, Kadyn was always willing to listen, visit and show her primary goal was to do good and positive things for the people of South Dakota. She was a joy to work with, always upbeat, friendly and willing to take time and visit about legislation. She wasn't a "talker", she listened. Unlike some legislators, Katyln did not have a personal agenda or went to Pierre to solely protect her specific vocation or special interest – she wanted to fairly serve all her constituents.

With that being stated, we the members of the 29 – 90 Sportsman's Club proudly nominate Representative Kadyn Wittman from District 15 for the Legislator of the Year.

MARSHALL CO SPORTSMAN UPDATE MAY 2026 - ALEX HARDINA

Club Activities: We just wrapped up the kids 4-H Archery season. Currently we have 4-H and Britton Area High School trap seasons underway. We are hosting 5 outdoor 3D archery shoots this summer. May 17, June 21, July 19, August 16 all 1-5pm. These are open to whomever. We have a special Harvest Days one running August 8 10am-3pm. We have been working hard to reclaim a nice outdoor archery course at Hickman Dam. At the last meeting in April, we amended the By-Laws so that you need not be a resident of Marshall County to be a member.

Habitat and Conservation: We went into Fall 2025 very wet and have kept a lot of that moisture this spring. The potholes are full and should create ample nesting opportunity for waterfowl. GFP is currently in the works on a multi-year plan to remove buckthorn from the Hickman Dam piece. By removing the buckthorn, it will create more opportunity for range use as well as better habitat for wildlife. The lakes are full which should help the fisheries boom this summer. We are coming off what most would call a "slow" ice fishing season.

Wildlife: Pheasant populations in the Northeast seem to be doing very well. They seem to be bouncing back nicely after the hard winter of 2022-2023. Deer numbers are mixed; there are some pockets of deer. In talking with many locals, I would feel comfortable saying that the deer population is right about 70% of where it was prior to 2022 winter. We have had nice open winters the past two years which has helped substantially. There have been quite a few more sightings the last couple years of fox as well as jackrabbits in Marshall County which has been a cool trend to witness. Turkey numbers seem to be down across 48A which a combination unit of Marshall and Roberts counties. Hunters I have been talking with are saying they would assume anywhere from 50-60% of the population that we had 2000-2022. Hunter numbers are definitely up for the Spring turkey season as well.



SOUTH DAKOTA'S SOUTHERN BLACK HILLS MOUNTAIN GOATS FACE AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

BY: NICOLE SCHLABACH

For more than 100 years, locals and visitors have enjoyed watching the animals; now, one population could be at risk of disappearing from areas around Mount Rushmore, Needles Highway and Black Elk Peak.

Daniel Milks, the founder and lead guide at My XO Adventures, has introduced many visitors in South Dakota's Black Hills to mountain goats.

"It's an eye-opener, and a jaw-dropper," he said. "I've had adults just lose their minds when they see a mountain goat."

Some wildlife photographers enjoy seeing the goats more than the bison on his tours. "They look like something out of a children's storybook," Milks said, "like little magical creatures from a fairytale land."

He sometimes asks his clients what they loved best about a tour. "And if they saw the mountain goats," he said, "I guarantee you it will be in their top three."

But mountain goats in the southern Black Hills haven't been doing so well in recent years. If the goats disappear from the area, it would be hard to estimate the impact on Milks and his business.

It probably wouldn't affect the number of tours he books. But "would it affect the way we feel as guides going through the Hills? Yes, big time," Milks said. "Would it decrease the experience of a guest in South Dakota, and leave less of a good impression? Absolutely."

To keep track of the goats, South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks counts the animals observed by helicopter at the same rock outcroppings roughly every other year. This helps officials estimate their population size, while using other variables including radio collar data.

The department counted 29 goats in the southern Black Hills in 2024 — a continuation of a downward slide since a peak of 106 in 2016. The low numbers led to the cancellation of the mountain goat hunting season for 2026, the fourth year in a row.

"That is not good. That is definitely indicating we are in a big-time decline," said Chad Lehman, senior wildlife biologist at the GF&P. "If they persist on that decline, that trajectory, my estimate would be that they would be gone in the core area by 2030."

The core area extends over 150 square miles from Custer to Mount Rushmore and north of Keystone.

Meanwhile, an isolated population in Spearfish Canyon, in the northern Black Hills, has been growing ever since a nanny left the southern Black Hills herd around 2014. Last year, there were up to 25 goats in the canyon, as reported to the GF&P by Spearfish residents.

If the Spearfish population continues to do well, Lehman said, the GF&P could potentially reinvigorate the southern Black Hills population with younger goats from the canyon.

"At least we have a secondary population that is keeping us from going completely extinct in the Black Hills," he said.

Yet the long-term outlook is uncertain for animals in a place they may not be built to thrive in.

Challenging environment in the southern Black Hills

In the 1920s, six goats from Alberta, Canada, escaped from a zoo in Custer State Park. Accustomed to mountainous regions, they headed straight for the area around Black Elk Peak. By the 1950s, the population

had grown to more than 300, and by the late 1960s, hunting seasons were underway.

The rest of their history is defined by periods of decline and recovery. Based on these fluctuations, the GF&P has both moved goats from the southern Black Hills to other western



Mountain goats run through the Needles Eye Tunnel, a popular place for visitors to see mountain goats in South Dakota's Custer State Park. In recent years, tour guides have reported fewer sightings in the area. (Photo by Nicole Schlabach for South Dakota Searchlight)

states and added goats from other states to the population.

The recent dip marks roughly the third time the population has declined.

There is no research on the recent numbers, but a 2006-2018 study led by the GF&P theorized that the goats' survival was connected to the pine forest in the southern Black Hills.

"It's important to note that survival was heavily tied to the vegetation up there. If you have a lot of vegetation, it seemed like their survival rates declined," Lehman said.

The forested Black Hills are different from many other mountain ranges where goats live, explained Greg Van Den Berg, the treasurer of the Rocky Mountain Goat Alliance, a conservation nonprofit.

Mountain goats thrive in exposed, alpine environments with grassy foraging areas where it's easier to see predators approaching. When the goats sense danger, they quickly escape onto steep terrain.

The Black Hills have less visibility. "The elevation is not super high. We have a lot of cliffs, for example in the Black Elk Wilderness, but a lot of those trees are right up against that mountainous area," Van Den Berg said.

Because mountain lions rely on stealth, they can use trees to stalk and attack. Mountain lion predation was the leading cause of death identified for radio-collared goats during the GF&P study.

Spearfish Canyon has more open areas leading to cliffs, Van Den Berg added, which might contribute to their growth in that area.

Although wildlife managers can't change the geography of the southern Black Hills to help mountain goats avoid predators, there are ways to create more open areas.

Natural and other ways to help the goats

The goats' survival in the southern Black Hills improved when a pine beetle epidemic, which peaked in 2012, killed many of the trees in their range.

"From about 2012 to 2018 we saw a huge resurgence in mountain goat survival," Lehman said. "The beetle essentially came in and cleaned out a lot of the trees around those precipitous terrain spires."

Over the last couple of years, pine beetle activity has increased a little bit. "It's hard to say. If they do come back, that could potentially have a big impact on the goats," Lehman said.

"One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds. Much of the damage inflicted on land is quite invisible to laymen. An ecologist must either harden his shell and make believe that the consequences of science are none of his business, or he must be the doctor who sees the marks of death in a community that believes itself well and does not want to be told otherwise." From *Round River* by Aldo Leopold

FEDS OFFICIALLY CANCEL CONSERVATION RULE FOR PUBLIC LANDS

BY: PATRICK LOHMANN

The United States Bureau of Land Management on Monday formally cancelled the so-called “Public Land Rule,” which required the agency to consider conservation and development equally in land-use decisions for millions of acres across the West.

The BLM, which manages 13.5 million acres of land in New Mexico, published a notice in the Federal Register finalizing its elimination of the 2024 rule, officially known as the Conservation and Landscape Health Rule. The agency first announced it was considering eliminating the rule in September.

The Biden-era rule provided guidance for ensuring conservation received due consideration along with mining, timber, grazing, recreation or other uses on public lands. It also allowed the BLM to issue leases specifically for conservation, though the agency never issued any.

The BLM’s notice said officials had received and responded to nearly 140,000 public comments in response to the proposal. Ultimately, officials said eliminating the 2024 rule was necessary because it “threatened to restrict productive use of the public lands and introduced uncertainty and unnecessary burdens in planning and permitting.” The rule’s elimination comes alongside executive orders and other actions by the Trump administration to expand drilling, mineral production and other commercial uses of public lands.

Michael Carroll, a campaign director for environmentalist group The Wilderness Society, told Source NM that the rule’s rescission, which officially goes into effect in 30 days, will leave millions of acres across the West newly vulnerable to oil and gas extraction and mining.

“They’re effectively saying, ‘We’re just going to prioritize extraction across BLM lands,’ Carroll said. “They’re going to be prioritizing industrial-scale development on those public lands. I think we’ll see that right away.”

He also noted that the BLM determined it did not need to consult with



The U.S. Bureau of Land Management on May 11, 2026, officially rescinded a federal rule requiring officials to consider conservation in land management decisions in areas such as the Valley of Fires in south-central New Mexico, pictured above in 2021. (Photo courtesy BLM)

Indigenous tribes in its decision to rescind the rule, which he called “shocking in terms of its disrespect to tribal nations,” many of which sit adjacent to federal lands.

The Wilderness Society was among many environmental groups that denounced the end of the “Public Lands Rule”. Several public statements from the groups mentioned the pending U.S. Senate confirmation of Steve Pearce, a former New Mexico Republican congressman, as BLM director.

If the Senate confirms him, Pearce, who has deep ties to the oil and gas industry, will oversee an agency that is no longer required to consider conservation as an acceptable use of public land, Carroll said.

“Today is a bad day for those people who care about public lands and care about the Bureau of Land Management,” he said. “But we’ll keep fighting and keep pushing back.”

BOB BROWN – DIRECTOR AT LARGE - CHAMBERLAIN

Our newest Director At Large is Bob Brown. Bob worked for SD GF&P for 37 years before he retired. Bob started in the department as a Conservation Officer then eventually moved up through the ranks to become a regional supervisor and boating law administrator, which he enjoyed. He started in Britton, then to Webster and Faith. Finally setting up in Chamberlain where he’s lived since 1978. One of our Directors, Dan Limmer is a good friend of Bobs and helped convince him to accept the Directors position.

Like many sportsmen around the state, Bob’s priority issue and concern is commercialization and privatization of our public trust wildlife resources. Next in line is the correlation with commercialization and Resident / Non-resident conflict and impacts. Family hunts often times don’t exist much anymore because of so many areas going commercial. Another issue of concern for Bob was the bill to increase the safety zone along right of ways during the 2025 Legislative session.

Shelter belts around the building site often hold birds. During Bobs tenure with GFP he helped implement the Hunter safety zone signs used to mark these areas to hunters. They discovered signs were often placed a bit further than the true 660’. While carrying a badge as a CO, Bobs primary focus was game laws/regulations and their enforcement.

Bob was a law enforcement trainer for over 20 years. That influenced his thinking a lot, as he saw situations where regulations are poorly written or poorly understood. Bob always tried handling issues in house with education but couldn’t always be successful. In Bobs retirement years, he enjoys gardening, fishes when he can but enjoys Big Game hunting most.

mdbrown@midstatesd.net



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2026 SDWF 21 Gun Giveaway Ticket

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**2026 MARK ANDERSON PAINTING
 "CHICKADEES"**

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2026 SDWF 21 Gun Giveaway Ticket

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2026 SDWF 21 Gun Giveaway Ticket

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2026 SDWF 21 Gun Giveaway Ticket

Name _____
 Address _____

 Phone _____

1 Mark Anderson Original Painting "Chickadees" @ \$20 Total \$ _____
21 Gun Giveaway Ticket @ \$25 ea..... Total \$ _____
6 Mark Anderson Original Painting "Chickadees" @ \$120 Total \$ _____
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