

# BACKCOUNTRY JOURNAL

The Magazine of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

Summer 2018

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## THE REVOLUTION IS LIVE

I'M STILL RIDING THE BIG WAVE that was Rendezvous. The people, the food, the beer, the conversations and, of course, the stories run through my mind and not only make me smile; they inspire me. The movement that is BHA was captured to a T in Boise, Idaho, back in April.

The people. Thirteen-hundred members from all 50 states and seven Canadian provinces and territories descended upon the City of Trees in grand fashion. Some drove all the way from Florida and Nova Scotia, others flew in from Alaska and Hawaii, and all of them were met with great representation from the host state of Idaho. More than 200 chapter leaders came to learn and engage. To put that in perspective, the Rendezvous five years ago – also held in Boise – drew just over 200 people total. And those who came to Rendezvous in 2018 embodied the diversity of BHA: folks who just hunt or just fish. Folks who do both. Seasoned veterans and brand-new hunters and anglers. Corporate partners and backcountry celebrities. Candidates in the Idaho gubernatorial race from both sides of the political aisle. Our ability to combine youthful exuberance with sage wisdom is attractive – and infectious – and it all starts with the people.

The food. Starting with our third annual Field to Table Dinner on Thursday night, the bar was set high for the rest of the weekend. Six chefs prepared amazing wild game dishes, ranging from lynx appetizers to seared mallard breasts entrées. Neither the food nor the atmosphere disappointed. (Side note: This year's Field to Table Dinner sold out in 72 hours, so if you want to go next year, stay tuned.) On Saturday, 14 chapters and college clubs participated in the third annual Wild Game Cookoff brought to you by Camp Chef. The champions from Arizona won over the judges with butter-poached desert bighorn sheep testicles served with a chile-verde sauce. Yummm! It drove home the fact that food is woven into the stories of why we hunt – and why we are driven to protect our treasured wild public lands and waters.

The beer. Friday night we continued with tradition and hosted our Beers, Bands & Public Lands brewfest in the heart of downtown Boise. With over 18 craft breweries and two wineries on hand, 5,000-plus locals and Rendezvous attendees celebrated together. A major benefit of this event is the opportunity to expose a whole new crowd to BHA, one of whom was Boise Mayor Dave Bieter. As quoted in the Idaho Statesman, Bieter said, "I was stunned. I had no idea they would have that kind of a crowd. I also was surprised by the demographics."

The conversations. This was by far my favorite part. The high fives, bear hugs and introductions were electric. Hearing where folks were from, why they are members and why they had traveled from across North America confirmed for me the integrity of what we are building. We may come from different backgrounds, but we are cut from the same cloth. One conversation stuck out for me, and that was with two college club members who had traveled from Missouri. One had never hunted on public lands but was attracted to the democracy of those places. The other is interning for us this summer in Missoula. Two quality young people who give me confidence that the legacy we are working to



J.D. Miller of Boise holds up his daughter, Jordyn, to add their pin. BHA members from all 50 states and seven Canadian provinces showed up for the Seventh Annual North American Rendezvous in Boise. Rocky Barker photo.

uphold will be carried forward.

The stories. While stories were told late into the night throughout Rendezvous, the pinnacle was Saturday at Campfire Storytelling Night, sponsored by Filson. Tales of love, mishaps with grizzly bears, fishing dogs, mule deer, ticks and big ol trees, the storytellers didn't disappoint, and the audience was captivated from start to finish. What started at Rendezvous has spawned other Campfire Stories events across the country from Detroit, Michigan, to Vancouver, British Columbia. The connection to our past through stories can't be overlooked.

For those who couldn't make it to Rendezvous, I hope you were able to follow along and experience the event through social media. For those who aren't into the Facegram and the Twitterbook, check out pages 12-13 for photos and testimonials.

Storyteller and Patagonia founder Yvon Chouinard said it best when he arrived on stage to a standing ovation of 1,300 backcountry badasses from all walks of life: "This is the most amazing group of people I have ever seen."

I couldn't agree more. And we are just getting started! Stay tuned for an exciting announcement about next year's Rendezvous. In the meantime, attend a local event, make a phone call, write a letter, give the gift of BHA membership to a friend. What you are a part of is something real and special – but only if you continue to stand up for public lands. Thank you! We have much yet to do together! 🐾

Onward and upward,

Land Tawney  
President and CEO

# WHAT IS BHA?

## BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS & ANGLERS

is a North American conservation nonprofit 501(c)(3) dedicated to the conservation of backcountry fish and wildlife habitat, sustaining and expanding access to important lands and waters, and upholding the principles of fair chase. This is our quarterly magazine. We fight to maintain and enhance the backcountry values that define our passions: challenge, solitude and beauty. Join us. Become part of the sportsmen's voice for our wild public lands, waters and wildlife. Sign up at [www.backcountryhunters.org](http://www.backcountryhunters.org).

# STATE CHAPTERS

**BHA HAS MEMBERS** across the continent, with chapters representing 39 states, the District of Columbia and two Canadian provinces. Grassroots public lands sportsmen and women are the driving force behind BHA. Learn more about what BHA is doing in your state on page 27. If you are looking for ways to get involved, email your state chapter chair at the following addresses:

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# WEMINUCHE WILDERNESS, COLORADO

BY DAN PARKINSON

**I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED.** They just vanished. Doyle and I were glassing two full-curl rams laying in the shade beneath a purple-grey rimrock bench high in an alpine cirque. Three days into our search, we'd decided to take a mid-morning break. As luck and persistence would have it, I finally spotted those beautiful, dark-bodied sheep. Alan, who'd drawn a highly coveted ram tag for the Vallecito Creek herd in 2004, was soon moving toward the bighorns. But in a distracted moment, we took our eyes off the sheep and they were gone.

We were hunting in Colorado's largest wilderness, the Weminuche, named for a band of Ute Indians – meaning “people who keep to the old ways.” The wilderness, located northeast of Durango, covers almost 500,000 acres. Most of the terrain is extremely rugged with remote, colorful, volcanic mountains, spruce-fir forests and picturesque cirques. Numerous small streams make up the headwaters of the Florida and Pine rivers. Mountain grasslands dotted with fens and small lakes add to the diversity of this landscape – historic home to one of the state's most valuable, true native, Tier 1 bighorn herds. The population consists of three distinct but interconnected herds that include around 425 animals.

U.S. bighorn population estimates range from 1.5 to 2 million in 1900. Populations declined with settlement, market hunting, introduction of domestic sheep and overgrazing. Conservation efforts have allowed them to recover from an estimated 25,000 in 1955 to nearly 70,000 now. Yet recently bighorn population recovery has stagnated in much of the West despite continued restoration efforts. Herds in Colorado reflect this trend, increasing from 2,000 in 1955, to a peak of 7,500 in 2002, to 6,800 today.

Current scientific consensus is that bighorn populations fail to thrive due to recurrent herd-level respiratory disease outbreaks associated with exposure to domestic sheep. Tragically, a single outbreak can kill most bighorns in a herd. In addition, according to Colorado Parks & Wildlife research published in the *Journal of Wildlife Diseases*, significant lamb mortality can occur for many years in a herd following a single exposure. According to a statement from The Wildlife Society and American Association of Wildlife Veterinarians in 2015: “It is now apparent that disease transmission from domestic sheep to wild sheep is a significant risk factor for the conservation and restoration of wild sheep populations... Effective separation of domestic sheep from wild sheep is the only currently available management solution for preventing or minimizing disease transmission.”

Young bighorns often will foray in search of new breeding and foraging opportunities. Bighorns are attracted to their domestic cousins and vice versa, so contact between domestic and wild sheep in close proximity in areas with active grazing eventually will happen – with consistently deadly results. Bighorns exposed to domestic sheep – even on national forest historic and core

home range – are culled by CPW in a desperate effort to prevent further disease spread. Whether due to disease or other factors, the Vallecito herd has declined from 125 animals in 2004 to 70 now. Lamb recruitment is half of levels reported in 2000. Hunting has been reduced from three ram tags to one. In addition, because Vallecito is interconnected with the Cimarrona and Sheep Mountain herds, a virulent form of respiratory disease in the Vallecito herd could easily spread to this greater meta-population, resulting in the potential loss of *all* the bighorns in the Weminuche.

Active domestic sheep grazing allotments in the Weminuche, operated by a single permittee, are located in the heart of bighorn habitat and are considered by the Forest Service's Risk of Contact Model to be “high risk” for disease transmission. Yet, the permittee says he has never seen a bighorn in or near his allotments in 30 years – although there are other credible reports to the contrary.

If separation of the species is key, documentation is essential. In the Weminuche Wilderness and throughout the West there is a lack of data documenting foray activity near active allotments and possible expansion of bighorn home ranges. Separation also is influenced by grazing practices that may result in domestic sheep straying out of allotments and coming in contact with nearby bighorns. Collaring bighorns for the collection of GPS data can be expensive and dangerous for the biologists and the bighorns. But sportsmen and conservationists can help.

In 2017, in an effort to assist the Forest Service and CPW with public education and the collection of more observation data points, BHA spearheaded a volunteer bighorn observation program to post information signage at trailheads and look for bighorns near active allotments. In 2018, we will recruit and train volunteers to act as citizen scientists to better document the range and foray activity of bighorn sheep. We are working on ways to use smartphones to easily and verifiably record observations, including gathering and storing embedded date, time and GPS coordinates from digital photos. Hopefully our efforts will help land managers and biologists make decisions based on the best available science and will be duplicated in other regions in the West.

Our goal for this program is to raise awareness of the presence of bighorns in the Weminuche and the challenges they face. Management decisions regarding bighorn-domestic interactions on public land, especially wilderness areas, always will be difficult. It is easy to get frustrated by politically charged decision-making processes. Bighorns have been around since the time of the woolly mammoth and were once at the brink of extinction. Now, after recovering somewhat, they again may be at a critical point for their survival. We must be persistent and keep our eyes on what's happening to this iconic species or they, like the two dark-bodied rams we saw that September day in 2004, may vanish. 🐾

*Dan is a veterinary doctor, CO BHA's southwest regional director, BHA life member and passionate advocate for public lands.*

Barry and Cathy Beck photo



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# BHA LAUNCHES NEW STATE CHAPTERS

**FOUR NEW BHA CHAPTERS** – Missouri, North Carolina, North Dakota and Ohio – officially launched in April at the North American Rendezvous in Boise, Idaho.

“This BHA energy, growth and youthful exuberance is unprecedented,” said Ty Stubblefield, chapter coordinator and new chapter development lead. “The people stepping up to lead this organization are top notch conservationists who recognize exactly what’s at risk. I couldn’t be more impressed with their dedication, and the newest chapters joining our ranks are no exception.”

**Missouri** is deeply rooted in the public lands tradition. Chapter Chairman Brett Thorne said the chapter is committed to representing sportsmen, outdoor enthusiasts and all public land users across the state.

**North Carolina** contains a higher percentage of public lands and waters than most other states on the Eastern Seaboard. NC BHA is committed to being the voice for those lands and waters,

supporting opportunities for residents and visitors to hunt, fish and recreate in perpetuity, said chapter chair Luke Weingarten.

**North Dakota** public lands and waters are under attack and sadly under-appreciated, said Adam Leitschuh, chapter chair. The state has wildlife management areas, BLM lands and national wildlife refuges, in addition to icons such as Theodore Roosevelt National Park. ND BHA’s first initiative is an OHV signage project in the Little Missouri National Grasslands.

**Ohio** BHA members plan to promote the mission of BHA within the state through education, volunteer work and legislative engagement, committing to a life outside through recruitment of sportsmen young and old. Chairman Tony Ruffing noted, “Public lands are not a left issue or a right issue: They are an American issue.”

See page 27 for more news from our state chapters.

## BIGGEST BHA D.C. FLY-IN, EVER

Thirty BHA members from across the nation gathered in Washington, D.C., to advocate for the reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, America’s most popular and successful conservation program, by educating decision makers about the importance of the LWCF to hunting and fishing access and large-scale conservation. BHA members met with 42 Senate and House offices and told their compelling LWCF stories, asking legislators to permanently reauthorize and dedicate funding to LWCF before the program expires on Sept. 30.

BHA will continue to work with Senate and House appropriators to find ways to include permanent reauthorization of the LWCF in must-pass legislation. One possible solution was adding an amendment to the House version of the 2018 Farm Bill, H.R. 2. Congressman Lee Zeldin (R-NY) offered the amendment, but it was not included in the final package considered in the House.

Help BHA efforts by urging your congressional representatives to reauthorize the LWCF. Go to [backcountryhunters.org/take\\_action](http://backcountryhunters.org/take_action) to voice your support.

## NEW STAFFERS JOIN THE BHA TEAM

Over the last quarter, BHA brought on five new staffers to help protect our public lands and waters. **Todd Barton** is BHA’s new development director and an avid public lands bowhunter and fly fisherman. Todd’s role at BHA is to recruit affluent public lands enthusiasts seeking to assist BHA’s mission through tax efficient, major donations.

**Russell Kuhlman** is BHA’s California and Nevada chapter coordinator. He received a wildlife science degree from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. He enjoys backcountry fly fishing for trout in the High Sierras and multi-day hunting trips after elk or deer.

**Julia Peebles** is BHA’s government relations manager. Julia’s passion for political science led her to work in Washington, D.C., as a government relations representative. Outdoor recreation, like red snapper fishing and whitetail hunting, keeps Julia committed to fighting for hunters and anglers on Capitol Hill.

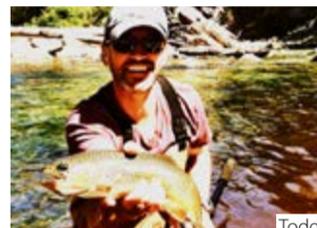
**Brien Webster** is the Colorado and Wyoming chapter coordinator. For as long as he can remember, his family has come together for reunions timed around hatches, hunts and favorite landscapes. Brien is thrilled to be working with BHA, and as a chapter coordinator he’s committed to supporting and amplifying the efforts of the Wyoming and Colorado chapters.

**Ace Hess** is the High Divide coordinator. He worked for the

BLM for 16 years on invasive species management and habitat restoration. His family’s sporting heritage traces back 125 years on Central Idaho’s vast public lands, and he works hard to maintain those traditions for future generations.



Brien



Todd



Ace



Russell



Julia



## HIKE TO HUNT THREE-PART CHALLENGE

BHA’s Hike to Hunt is a competition that combines the quest by sportsmen and women to achieve physical fitness with the drive to support public lands and the outdoor experiences we love. BHA members and supporters across the continent have been starting Hike to Hunt groups as a way to get in shape, enjoy camaraderie and witness things that only those who hit the trail first thing in the morning get to see. Running from June 1 to Aug. 31, the 13-week challenge will include awesome prize packages, including gear from Kimber, Stone Glacier, Wilderness Athlete, onXmaps, Under Armour and Leupold for social media competitions, most

miles hiked and most funds raised.

- #1- Fundraising Challenge – Get pledges, hike hard, raise money, win prizes!
- #2- Most Miles Hiked Challenge – Hike the most miles and win!
- #3 - Weekly Social Media Contests – Tag yours with #hiketohunt

Raise money, get in shape for hunting season, support your public lands – and win awesome gear from our partners! Go to [backcountryhunters.org/hike\\_to\\_hunt](http://backcountryhunters.org/hike_to_hunt) to get started.

## AWARD RECIPIENTS AT RENDEZVOUS

An outstanding group of conservationists received BHA’s annual awards at Rendezvous. The **Jim Posewitz Award** for ethical hunting and fishing recognizes education of the outdoor public on the importance of ethical behavior. **Eric Nuse**, executive director of Orion – The Hunter’s Institute, received the 2018 award.

The **Ted Trueblood Award** is presented for exceptional communications work informing and inspiring people for the benefit of public lands, waters and wildlife. The recipient is **Kris Millgate**, a journalist, photographer, videographer and owner of Tight Line Media.

BHA’s **Aldo Leopold Award** is given for exceptional work and dedication to the conservation of wildlife habitat. The 2018 award was presented to **Bill Hanlon**. Hanlon has spent the last 30 years fighting for and advocating to preserve habitat for wildlife, including, notably, founding the Hornaday Wilderness Society as well as participating in numerous multi-stakeholder resource

management efforts as chairman of the BC BHA Chapter.

The **Sigurd F. Olson Award** recognizes outstanding effort in the conservation of rivers, lakes or wetland habitat. Stream and riparian biologist **Bill Platts** is the recipient of the 2018 award.

The 2018 **George Bird Grinnell Award** for outstanding BHA chapter of the year was presented to **BHA’s Minnesota Chapter**.

The **Larry Fischer Award** honors the memory and contributions of a longtime BHA board member by recognizing exceptional dedication by a business to BHA’s mission. RepYourWater is the recipient of the 2018 award. Owners **Garrison and Corinne Doctor** came to the stage to accept the award in Boise.

The **Mike Beagle-Chairman’s Award** is bestowed to an individual who shows outstanding effort on behalf of BHA. The award is named after Beagle, who launched BHA around a campfire in his backyard. The 2018 recipient of the award is former BHA national board chair **Ben Long**.

## MINING LEASES REINSTATED NEAR BOUNDARY WATERS

The Trump administration announced on May 3 that it had reinstated lease applications from Twin Metals, a subsidiary of Chilean copper giant Antofagasta to explore a copper-nickel mine in the Superior National Forest in Minnesota. BHA and our partner, Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters, are concerned that

sulfide ore removal in the same watershed and three miles from the border of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness could irreparably pollute pristine hunting and fishing grounds in the most visited wilderness area in the country.

## MORE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES TO OPEN FOR HUNTING

On May 21, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke proposed to expand hunting and fishing at national wildlife refuges across the United States. Under the proposal, more than 248,000 acres would be opened to new or expanded hunting and fishing in 30 units of the National Wildlife Refuge System. If finalized, this would expand the number of refuges open to public hunting to 377 and the number available for fishing to 312.

“Most sportsmen rely on public lands and waters to hunt and

fish,” said BHA President and CEO Land Tawney. “We sincerely appreciate Secretary Zinke’s recognition of this fact – and his hard work to open up new avenues for members of our community to enjoy the solitude and adventure that only our backcountry public lands can offer.”

The proposed changes will be open to public comment for a period of 30 days beginning with their publication in the Federal Register. 🐾