



Featured Speakers

October 1, 2024



MARC BEREJKA has served as REI's lead for government affairs and philanthropy for over a dozen years. In the advocacy realm, Marc has guided the co-op's engagement in federal, state and local government issues. In recent years, he has worked with teammates to expand their coverage by rolling out the co-op's new grassroots Cooperative Action Network. Marc also has overseen the co-op's community grants program, which over the past 50 years has reinvested more than \$125m in nonprofit partners across the country. Most recently, the philanthropy program has been relaunched as the REI Cooperative Action Fund. This is a public charity that allows members, vendors and others to co-invest alongside REI in efforts to make the outdoors more equitable. Annually, the co-op's philanthropic efforts support hundreds of organizations of various types with cumulative support exceeding \$10m.



STEPH BERTAINA is a Senior Policy Analyst with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Community Revitalization in Washington D.C., where she helps communities build economically vibrant, healthy, sustainable, and inclusive neighborhoods and downtowns. Steph manages the Recreation Economy for Rural Communities program, where she works with rural communities and small towns to help them leverage outdoor recreation to diversify local economies and revitalize main streets. She has also managed other EPA programs including the Local Foods, Local Places program that supports local food systems and downtown revitalization and the Healthy Places for Healthy People program that works with cities, towns, and healthcare facilities to create walkable, healthy, and economically vibrant downtowns and neighborhoods.



CURAN BONHAM is a Program Officer at the Richard King Mellon Foundation in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where he is responsible for managing a portfolio of investments that advance the protection, restoration, and activation of America's natural heritage. He has more than 20 years of experience working in 20 countries and is a published author with expertise in conservation finance, natural resources management, and impact evaluation. Bonham's work has accelerated conservation efforts using innovative financial approaches. He founded and directed a conservation-focused impact investment fund at Conservation International and has previously held positions at research and development organizations including Cornell University, United States Forest Service, Bioversity International and the Fulbright Program. He holds a B.S. in natural resources from Cornell University and an M.S. in forestry from the University of Montana.



ALEXANDRA CALLOWAY-NATION is a fellow at the Economic Recovery Corps, focused on preserving Wind River Reservation's beauty and cultural significance. Her background growing up in the Blackfeet Nation along Montana's Rocky Mountains led to her professional journey promoting environmental sustainability and using economic development as a catalyst for community transformation. The ERC's Wind River Reservation project aspires to establish a sustainable ecotourism model on Wyoming's Wind River Indian Reservation. Encompassing 2.2 million acres of pristine wilderness, the reservation offers unmatched opportunities for ecotourism, including fly fishing, hunting, climbing, and hiking. The Intertribal Tourism Summit identified the need for an aligned vision that expands ecotourism businesses while safeguarding tribal interests and the environment. Calloway-Nation's work supports building a comprehensive vision, developing a strategic plan, and coordinating the execution of the ecotourism project. The ultimate outcome is a well-established ecotourism model, delivering economic and financial benefits to the reservation, tribes, and enrolled members while carefully protecting tribal interests and managing sustainable tourism volumes. This initiative blends economic development with the preservation of indigenous culture and natural resources, ensuring a lasting impact on the Wind River Reservation.



DR. SILAS CHAMBERLIN has championed work at the intersection of economic development and the environment for over fifteen years. He is the principal of Firefly Outdoor + Economics as well as the Chief Strategy Officer and VP of Economic Development at the York County Economic Alliance. Chamberlin is chairman of Pennsylvania's Conservation & Natural Resources Advisory Council and chairs the economic development division on the national board of the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives. He holds a PhD in environmental history and is the author of *On the Trail: A History of American Hiking* (Yale University Press) and *Wild Profits: Exploring America's \$1 Trillion Outdoor Economy*, forthcoming from Island Press.



RYAN CHAO is President of the Rails to Trails Conservancy, with significant expertise in trail development and community economic development. He previously served as Vice President of civic sites and community change at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, where he led initiatives that tied together economic, educational, and housing programs to strengthen communities. Chao also previously served as the Executive Director of the San Francisco Bay Area-based Satellite Housing, where he led the development of affordable housing communities and created innovative partnership models combining housing with supportive services.



MATT DUNNE is the founder and Executive Director of the Center on Rural Innovation, which focuses on growing the rural opportunity gap and creating economic prosperity for rural residents across the country. Dunne, a lifelong Vermont resident, served four terms in the Vermont House of Representatives and two terms in the Vermont State Senate, focusing on broadband policy and downtown redevelopment efforts. He started Google's Community Affairs division and was appointed the director of AmeriCorps VISTA under President Bill Clinton.



TA ENOS is a visionary leader in rural economic development and conservation within the outdoor industry. As founder and CEO of the PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship, she has been instrumental in revitalizing the rural communities of the Pennsylvania Wilds region by focusing on the area's natural resources and cultural heritage. Enos has leveraged her background in journalism, public communications, and rural entrepreneurship to foster economic growth and opportunity while creating a sustainable model for asset-based rural development. A fourth-generation native of the Pennsylvania Wilds, Enos brings a deep understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities facing rural communities.



CHRIS ESTES is a leader in equitable, sustainable, and holistic approaches to national rural development. He is Co-Executive Director of the Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group and brings policy expertise related to poverty, housing and community development at the community, state and federal levels. Estes previously served as President and CEO of the National Housing Conference in D.C., focusing on affordable housing and community development issues. Prior to his time in D.C., Estes led the North Carolina Housing Coalition.



DONNA GAMBRELL is the President and CEO of Appalachian Community Capital, where she is responsible for attracting and directing investments to Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) and other mission-driven lenders in Appalachia to grant loans to small business owners and underserved communities throughout the region. She is on several CDFI boards, including the board chair of the African American Alliance of CDFI CEOs. Gambrell previously served as a Visiting Scholar for the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta and the Director of Community Development Financial Institutions Fund at the Department of the Treasury.



TOM GILBERT is President of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, an organization leading the development of trail networks throughout the state. Gilbert has spent three decades devoted to non-profit organizations working to protect natural resources throughout the Eastern U.S. He previously served as Co-Executive Director and Director for Energy Climate and Natural Resources at NJ Conservation Foundation and as Senior Conservation Finance Director with The Trust for Public Land, where he designed 20 successful state and local ballot measures in 7 states to finance parks and land conservation.



DR. BASIL GOODEN was confirmed by the United State Senate to serve as Under Secretary for Rural Development on Monday, February 26, 2024.

Prior to his confirmation as Under Secretary, Gooden served as Director of State Operations for Rural Development. In this role, he led and supported USDA's team of 47 Rural Development State Directors who extend USDA's state-level leadership and help ensure the department's investments reach all rural communities. From 2016-2018, he served as the 3rd Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry for the Commonwealth of Virginia. Prior to that, Dr. Gooden served as the Virginia State Director for Rural Development at USDA. He has previously held roles as the Chief Deputy Director of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, as a Cooperative Extension Specialist at Virginia Tech, and as a Farm Service Agency County Committee member. Dr. Gooden holds a bachelor's degree from Virginia Tech, a master's degree in social work from Syracuse University, and a master's degree in Public Health and a Ph.D. in Social Work from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is a native of Buckingham County, Virginia, where he and his family still own and operate a cattle farm.



MERYL HARRELL serves as the Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, where she works closely with the Forest Service to address wildfire risk, support climate resilience, expand workforce development, and increase equitable access to Forest Service lands and programs. Harrell previously served in NRE throughout the Obama-Biden Administration, leading work to develop the 2012 Land Management Planning Rule, expand conservation corps opportunities, and invest in the outdoor recreation



economy. Prior to returning to USDA, Harrell served as the Executive Director of the Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards, and has consulted for nonprofits, foundations, and government agencies dedicated to conserving America's public and private working lands. She can often be found on the trail with her husband and two children.



GLENN HUGHES is the president of the American Sportfishing Association (ASA), the trade organization representing the interests of the sportfishing industry and the entire recreational fishing community. The association is made up of almost 900 members, a majority are manufacturers of fishing and marine related products. The ASA focuses on fisheries policy that supports clean water, abundant fisheries and access to those fish. There is also much focus on commerce and trade issues, as well as increasing participation in fishing. The ASA produces the largest fishing trade show in the world called ICAST. Hughes also is an active board member for the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, the Center for Sportfishing Policy, the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and is the vice-chair of the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable.

Prior to joining ASA, Glenn worked for more than 20 years in Florida as VP/Group Publisher of the Bonnier Marine Group, where he led iconic brands such as Salt Water Sportsman, Marlin, Sport Fishing, Yachting and Boating magazines, along with related fishing tournaments, websites, tv show and social media.

Glenn lives with his wife in Annapolis Maryland and works from ASA's HQ in Alexandria, VA.



JANICE IKEDA is the founding Executive Director of Vibrant Hawai'i, whose mission is to dismantle silos and catalyze social mobilization within the state. She contributes to the Hawai'i Island Housing Coalition and provides guidance for the local economy, education, health, and community resilience strategies. She serves on the Punawai o Pu'u'honua Advisory Board, Aspen CSG's Rural Action Roundtable on Equity, ALICE Research Advisory Committee, and The Prosperity Agenda's Board. Janice is an Omidyar Fellow and received an honorary Doctor of Laws from Gonzaga University.



DR. MEGAN LAWSON is an economist, scientist, and communicator with expertise in the intersection of the economic impact of housing and land use policies, outdoor recreation, economic diversification, and public land management. She is an economist for Headwaters Economics. Lawson's innovative and analytical skills help communities nationwide understand the economic potential of outdoor recreation, including the impact on local jobs and income. Lawson is regularly featured by major media outlets and has appeared on NPR. She holds a PhD in Economics from the University of Colorado.



DAVID LIPSETZ is the President and CEO at the Housing Assistance Council (HAC) and a leading expert in affordable housing and sustainable community development. David came to HAC after holding several White House-appointed positions, most recently serving as the Associate Administrator for Rural Housing and Community Facilities at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA.) His office oversaw policy development and program administration of more than \$100 billion in direct lending, mortgage guarantees, grants and technical assistance for community and economic development in rural America.



SANDRA "SANDI" MARRA has served as the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's President and CEO since 2019. Her connection to and love for the A.T. spans four decades, during which she has served in numerous volunteer roles for both the Trail and the Conservancy. Sandi has been an A.T. volunteer for over 35 years and is an Honorary Member of both the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. She founded and served as the principal of Marra Consulting Group, which provided organizational and strategic planning expertise to nonprofit organizations. Sandi also served as the Chief Operating Officer of St. Coletta of Greater Washington, a nonprofit organization supporting educational and service programs for developmentally disabled children and adults. Coupled with her nonprofit experience, she has worked in the private sector for various government contracting firms providing operational, human resource, and organizational change management.

She holds a Master of Science in Personnel & Human Resource Management from American University's Kogod School of Business and a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from Rowan University.



JASON McDOUGALD is the Executive Director of Camp Grier, located near Old Fort, North Carolina and has been involved in the outdoor recreation industry both personally and professionally for over forty years. McDougald leveraged the economic potential of Old Fort's valuable and underutilized natural asset, the Pisgah National Forest, to bring outdoor recreation to the once thriving manufacturing hub. He holds a deep passion for wild places and the natural environment as a result of his early backpacking endeavors in the North Georgia mountains.



SARA MOFFAT currently serves as Senior Policy Advisor to the Director of the Bureau of Land Management. Prior to her time at the BLM, she served as director of government relations at the Western Conservation Foundation and as policy advisor to U.S. Senator Harry Reid focusing on public lands and natural resources. Sara holds a master's degree in comparative politics from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Nevada, Reno. She grew up in Southern Nevada and currently lives in Washington, D.C.



NATHAN OHLE is the President and CEO of the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), a non-profit serving global economic developers. He is globally recognized as an expert in economic development and a leader of public, private, and nonprofit organizations. Ohle previously served as the Senior Advisor at the U.S. Economic Development Administration and lead the U.S. Department of Commerce on the White House Rural Council and the Administration-wide Community Solutions team. Prior to joining IEDC, he was Chief Executive Officer of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership, where he worked to build capacity in rural and tribal communities across the U.S.



SHAUNEEQUA OWUSU is the Chief Strategy Officer at ChangeLab Solutions, where she leads a multidisciplinary team at the intersection of community development and health to create healthier communities across the country. Owusu previously served as the Director of Strategic Partnerships and Community Engagement at the New York Academy of Medicine, leading community development and government relations for the organization, and as a legislative policy analyst for the New York City Council.



CHRIS PERKINS is Vice President of Programs at the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, where he works to promote the sustainable growth of the outdoor recreation economy. This work focuses on rural economic development through outdoor recreation, outdoor recreation infrastructure, state outdoor recreation advocacy, the outdoor recreation workforce, and building a more inclusive outdoor recreation community. Chris received a Masters in Environmental Management and Masters in Business Administration at the Yale School of the Environment (YSE) and Yale School of Management (SOM). Chris has also worked for the U.S. House of Representatives Natural Resources Committee, Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee. Chris supports Founder Teresa Baker on the Outdoor CEO Diversity Pledge (“The Pledge”), a commitment for outdoor businesses and organizations to improve DEI efforts. The Pledge now has over 180 corporate and nonprofit partners. He lives in Jackson, WY with his wife Sheldon, kids Silas and Molly, and dog Tilley.



TONY PIPA is a senior fellow in the Center for Sustainable Development at the Brookings Institution. Tony launched and leads the [Reimagining Rural Policy initiative](#), which seeks to modernize and transform U.S. rural policy, and hosts the [Reimagine Rural](#) podcast, collecting the stories of rural towns across America that are experiencing positive change. Tony has three decades of executive leadership experience in the philanthropic and public sectors addressing poverty and advancing inclusive economic development in the U.S. and globally.



JESSIE POWERS is the Executive Director of the Outdoor Recreation Council of Appalachia (ORCA) which develops outdoor recreation opportunities and sustainable economic development through Appalachian Ohio communities. She previously served as the Athens County Regional Planning Director and has worked in community economic development at the local and state level. Powers spent her childhood holidays and summers visiting extended family in Ohio.



DR. NATHAN REIGNER is Pennsylvania's first Director of Outdoor Recreation and was instrumental in the creation of Pennsylvania's Office of Outdoor Recreation. Reigner was previously a member of Penn State's research faculty and Principal of Recreation Tourism Science, which served as an outdoor recreation consultancy. He has over a decade of experience informing visitor use, tourism, resource planning, and management in the outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism industries.



SAM REIMAN has been the Director of the Richard King Mellon Foundation since 2019, and a member of the Foundation's Board of Trustees since 2020. As Director, Reiman oversees, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, the Foundation's staff, strategy, and annual philanthropic program. In 2022, the Foundation disbursed more than \$152 million in grants and program-related investments, ending the year with net assets of \$2.8 billion. Reiman joined the Foundation in 2015, as Associate Director. His work prior to the Foundation included serving as a Senior Consultant for Deloitte in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Reiman grew up in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and his higher education began at Harrisburg Area Community College. He went on to receive a BA degree in Science, Technology and Public Policy from Franklin & Marshall College, matriculating on a work-study scholarship and graduating Cum Laude. Reiman also earned an MS degree in Public Policy and Management, with a Minor in Business Administration, from Carnegie Mellon University, and an MS degree in Biotechnology from The Johns Hopkins University. He and his wife, Sandra, have two daughters, Isabella, and Sofia.



ROB RILEY is President of the Northern Forest Center, a regional innovation and investment partner creating bold possibilities for rural communities across Northern Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York. Through his leadership at the Center, he helped create the Northern Forest Board Forum, the Rural Development Innovation Group in partnership with the Aspen Institute and the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities and launched the Center's impact investment funds to develop middle market housing in focal communities across their region. He is passionate about community-centered capital and development and making time to mountain bike, trail run and cross-country ski with his family.



LARRY SELZER is the President and CEO of The Conservation Fund, bringing an entrepreneurial spirit to conservation to better integrate economic and environmental goals. He previously worked at the Manomet Center for Conservation Science and served as chairman of the Outdoor Foundation, the Sustainable Forest Initiative, Inc. and served on the board of the American Bird Conservancy.



LUCAS ST. CLAIR is a prominent figure in land conservation and outdoor recreation. Raised in the North Woods of Maine, St. Clair has been instrumental in protecting vast tracts of wilderness in the region, including the creation of Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument. St. Clair is the President of Elliottsville Foundation, which focuses on advancing environmental justice and community-based economic development throughout Maine. In addition, St. Clair is the Board Chair for The Trust for Public Land.



STEPHANIE SWEPSON-TWITTY is an economic development specialist and CEO of Eagle Market Streets Development Corporation, CDC. She works to provide market-driven solutions to pressing economic issues in the U.S., including the hurdles faced by disadvantaged populations and small businesses in development, asset building, and wealth creation. Swepson-Twitty was born and raised in rural North Carolina and a resident of Old Fort. She actively champions the cause of creating a more equitably-inclusive Old Fort.



TEE THOMAS is the CEO of Quantified Ventures with over fifteen years of water financing and environmental equity expertise. She previously served as the Water Finance Director for the state of Vermont. Thomas wrote and helped pass legislation related to the state's Clean Water State Revolving Fund and created the Natural Infrastructure Interim Financing Program to protect and restore wetlands, streams, river corridor easements, and drinking source water protection areas. She is passionate about natural infrastructure and a strong advocate for public financing as an investor in nature-based solutions.



I LING THOMPSON is the Chief Executive Officer of the Foundation for America's Public Lands, the congressionally chartered charitable partner of the Bureau of Land Management. As a mission-driven leader with two decades of expertise in global land and water conservation, I Ling has dedicated her career to fostering people's love, connection and stewardship of the outdoors. Before joining the Foundation, I Ling held leadership roles with The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Land and the Outdoor Industry Association.

I Ling drove the game-changing 2012 Outdoor Recreation Economy Campaign, which significantly elevated and reframed the industry's impact on the U.S. economy. She has earned recognition for her work, including receiving the 40 Under 40 Outdoor Industry Award. I Ling also remains active in the community through her board service with the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, the Keystone Policy Center and the Together Outdoors Governance Council.



BARATUNDE THURSTON tells stories of interdependence through our relationship with nature, each other, and technology. He is an Emmy-nominated host, writer, public speaker, and proud Earthling. He is the host and executive producer of America Outdoors with Baratunde Thurston on PBS, the creator and host of the podcast How to Citizen with Baratunde, and a founding partner and writer at the media company Puck. He wrote the New York Times best-selling comedic memoir, *How to Be Black*, and his latest project is *Life With Machines*, a video podcast focused on the human side of the AI revolution.



JESSICA (WAHL) TURNER is the first President of the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR), America's leading coalition of outdoor recreation associations and organizations. Under her leadership, ORR has connected all segments of the outdoor recreation economy to pass historical legislation like the Great American Outdoors Act and achieve millions of dollars in funding for public lands, waters and rural gateway communities. Jessica has over a decade of experience navigating the halls of The White House, Department of the Interior (DOI), Capitol Hill, state recreation offices and outdoor lifestyle businesses.

Prior to ORR, she directed Outdoor Industry Association's (OIA) outdoor recreation portfolio in Washington D.C. where she successfully gained landmark government recognition of outdoor recreation's contribution to the national Gross Domestic Product as one of America's leading industry sectors. Jessica began her career at the Department of the Interior where she managed external relations for the Secretary, as well as First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! Outside and Let's Move! in Indian Country initiatives. Jessica is also the co-founder and past-chair of the Coalition for Outdoor Access, serves on the Board of the American Conservation Coalition, Advisory Council of Oregon State University's Outdoor Economy Program, Business Advisory Council for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and has been recognized for her leadership in D.C. and the outdoor industry with *Outdoors' 30 Under 30* and the *Hill's Top Lobbyist*. Jessica has a Master of Arts and bachelor's degree in American Government from Georgetown University and is a passionate outdoorswoman.



DR. DANNY TWILLEY is the Assistant VP of Economic, Community, and Asset Development for the Brad and Alys Smith Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative at West Virginia University, where he focuses on growing and leveraging West Virginia’s outdoor economy to make the state a desirable place to live and work. He regularly engages with community members, state and local governments, the outdoor recreation industry, and related groups to collaboratively grow the state’s outdoor economy.



BRIAN VINCENT is the Mayor of Farmville, a two college town in Virginia. Prior to his current mayoral term Vincent served on Town Council in Farmville for 4 years and was Chair of the Recreation Committee. Mayor Vincent runs Appomattox River Company, an independent paddlesports retail business on Main Street in Farmville with a focus on national online sales and grassroots advocacy in his community. He’s in his second 4 yr term on the Board for the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources. He serves on the Board of Directors for the Paddlesports Trade Coalition, and was voted by its members to represent the PTC at ORR as a new organization member. He serves on the Legislative committee for the Virginia Municipal League, and on the Small Cities Council and University Communities Council for the National League of Cities. Prior to all this he was a dirtbag rock climber who lived in a van down by the river.



TAWNY WILSON is Director of Advancement and Impact at Oweesta Corporation. Tawny is a proud Sicangu/Oglala Lakota and an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe in South Dakota. Born and raised on the reservation, she embodies the spirit of her people, the Sicangu or “Burnt Thigh Nation” in Lakota. Tawny began her career in the fast-paced world of finance as a mortgage broker, banker, and sales manager right out of college, and then found her true calling in serving others by working with national Native nonprofit organizations dedicated to uplifting Tribal communities across the country. Committed to empowering her community and advocating for Indigenous causes, Tawny focuses on rematriating resources back to Native people. Before joining Oweesta, she served at NDN Collective as the Director of Lending, where she co-developed the groundbreaking Resilient Finance Model, a decolonized approach to underwriting.



With a Bachelor's in Business Administration from the University of South Dakota and a Master's in Public Policy, specializing in Environmental Policy, from UMass Dartmouth, Tawny is dedicated to bringing bold visions to life.



KIM WOOTTEON is the Vice President of Commercial Strategy for KOA and has more than 20 years of experience in retail, sales, marketing, and hospitality, including independent and branded hotels, campgrounds, and attractions. As part of the commercial strategy team—which includes five core business units: local marketing, revenue management, field operations, business intelligence, and retail—she works with franchise locations and the owned assets of KOA to develop integrated strategies to drive top-line revenue.