



WONDER & EXPLORATION QUARTERLY



Patty Ressler BHPFA Executive Director at our Buffalo Roundup booth in Custer State Park

A Message From Our Executive Director

Fall is in the air and as with the seasons, BHPFA is experiencing some change!

You will notice the format of our newsletter has changed significantly. We hope you enjoy this new look & find it easier to read.

Our donor/membership management system is also getting an upgrade. Thanks to a grant from the Black Hills Area Community Foundation we are moving to a system that is much easier to use for both you and our team. Watch for emails and more info through the rest of this year!

For the first time, your membership/donation has helped our partners support Artist in Residence programs at Agate Fossil Beds and Jewel Cave. Check out the great work and impact these artists made!

Meet the new Superintendent at Scotts Bluff / Agate Fossil Beds and learn about the new exhibits and programs at Wind Cave.

Your memberships, donations, and purchases all allow BHPFA to help our public land partners with their interpretive missions. As we continue to change and upgrade, we are always grateful to you all in SUPPORTING WONDER & EXPLORATION.

Patty



BLACK HILLS
PARKS &
FORESTS
ASSOCIATION

Support

BHPFA was awarded a \$4,765 capacity improvement grant from the Black Hills Area Community Foundation. This grant will be instrumental in upgrading BHPFA's membership and donor outreach systems, database management, and e-commerce platform, positioning the organization to better engage its community and fulfill its mission.
more on page 3

SheJumps

In 2024, BHPFA's SheJumps programs empowered women and girls to conquer rock climbing, build wilderness skills, foster confidence and connections and a deeper appreciation for the outdoors. New funding opportunities and fun programs coming in 2025! *more on page 5*



Looking for a unique gift?
Check out our new canvas bag designs on page 6!

New Exhibits at Wind Cave National Park



Exciting changes are on the horizon at Wind Cave National Park, as new exhibits are nearly finished! These exhibits, developed in collaboration with the park's tribal partners, are designed to tell a more inclusive and comprehensive story of the land and the people who have called it home "since time immemorial." The result of four planning meetings with tribal representatives, the exhibits weave together traditional cultural knowledge and modern scientific research.

"These exhibits tell a deeper, more meaningful story about this landscape and the people who have lived here for generations," said Patty Ressler, Executive Director of BHPFA. "They offer visitors a chance to

experience Wind Cave through a richer cultural and scientific lens, beginning with indigenous stories of the earth's formation and leading all the way to cutting-edge research on NASA's search for life on other worlds."

The new exhibits feature a prairie diorama, a walk-through cave, and interactive experiences that highlight both the natural beauty and scientific significance of Wind Cave. Visitors will learn about the park's unique role in advancing our understanding of Earth's geology, from the intricate cave systems below to the expansive prairies above, while also gaining insights into the cultural importance of the land to Native American tribes. "These exhibits celebrate the cultural and scientific stories of Wind Cave in a way that engages all ages and backgrounds," Ressler added.

BHPFA – along with our customers, members, and donors – played a critical role in providing funding to support the development and installation of these exhibits. This project is part of the park's ongoing effort to update its interpretive materials, ensuring that the stories told reflect a more complete understanding of the area's rich history, both human and natural. As visitors explore the new exhibits, they will be invited to connect with the land in a deeper way.

Save the date! Support wonder and exploration on South Dakota Day of Giving 12/3/2024! On SD Day of Giving, people like you who love South Dakota have an opportunity to ignite a movement of giving all across the state and help support your favorite non-profits! Learn more here: www.southdakotagives.org/about

Join the BHPFA Board of Directors

Are you passionate about protecting our public lands and supporting educational programs in the Black Hills and Nebraska Panhandle? BHPFA is seeking dedicated individuals to join our board of directors and help shape the future of our organization.

Currently, there's an open board position to be filled at the November meeting. If you're interested in contributing your time and expertise, we'd love to hear from you!

Contact Patty Ressler at pressler@blackhillsparks.org or 605-745-1264 for information.

BHPFA Awarded Capacity Improvement Grant to Enhance Member, Donor, and e-commerce Outreach

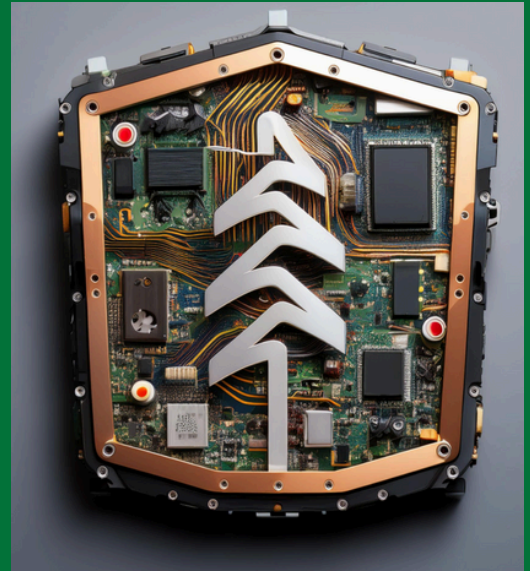
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BHPFA's current systems for managing memberships and donations are outdated. "Many of our systems were pieced together by hand," said Jason Gray, Digital Content and Data Manager. "We were taking membership information from visitors on paper, collecting their donation in the register system, and then entering them by hand into a database system that wasn't really built for organizations like ours. When we use this grant to build out our new integrated database and outreach system, our members and donors will have a much more welcoming, personalized, and meaningful relationship with us."

The grant will fund Salesforce Non-Profit Cloud and Donorbox Memberships, designed specifically for nonprofits. These new tools will streamline communication and record-keeping, allowing staff to maintain a centralized record of interactions with members, donors, and partners.

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BHPFA Receives Grant to Support Junior Ranger Program at Scotts Bluff National Monument



BHPFA is thrilled to announce a \$1,500 grant from the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation (NSHSF), which helped fund the printing of additional Junior Ranger Program booklets for Scotts Bluff National Monument. This essential program provides young visitors with an interactive way to learn about Nebraska's rich history and the significant role Scotts Bluff played in the westward expansion of the United States.

Scotts Bluff rangers have seen firsthand the impact of this program, which has grown in popularity since the redesign of the booklets in 2021 – also funded by BHPFA. As a parent and 'parkie' myself, the Junior Ranger program is a huge part of our travels to National Parks and Forests," says Jason Gray Digital Content and Data Manager at BHPFA. "My kids always engage with and learn from the resource better with these fun activities. Some of their core memories

include interacting with the rangers at parks we've visited across the country. It's a privilege at BHPFA to help keep this program alive at our partner sites."

The grant ensures that BHPFA can continue providing these booklets and the iconic wooden badges awarded to participants, free of charge, even in the face of federal budget cuts. "When we can enlist the support of like-minded organizations like NSHSF to help us achieve this, it's a win-win," said Patty Ressler, BHPFA Executive Director. The program remains a cornerstone of youth engagement at the monument, helping to foster a sense of stewardship and pride in Nebraska's history.

BHPFA Welcomes New Superintendent for Scotts Bluff and Agate Fossil Beds National Monuments



South Dakota Volunteer Naturalist Program Wraps Up Fourth Year

This year, 50 participants from across the state participated in 12 weeks of online coursework, combined with hands-on field trip experiences throughout South Dakota.

The program offers a mix of indoor presentations and field experiences that teach volunteers about South Dakota's natural resources. Applications for the 2025 cohort will open on December 3, 2024, with the virtual class starting on March 4, 2025. To learn more, visit: blackhillsparks.org/volunteer.



BHPFA co-sponsored a field trip to the National Grasslands Visitor Center and Badlands National Park. Volunteers explored the history and management of the National Grasslands, participated in a BioBlitz at Buffalo Gap National Grassland, and learned about the paleontological history of the Badlands while hunting for fossils.

“Welcome!” to Jay Sturdevant as the new superintendent of Scotts Bluff and Agate Fossil Beds National Monuments. Sturdevant brings over 25 years of experience with the National Park Service, most recently serving as the integrated resources division lead at Pearl Harbor National Monument and Honouliuli National Historic Site in Hawaii. He will assume his new role in early October. He takes over Dan Morford's previous position after Dan's retirement earlier this year.

Sturdevant has a strong background in natural and cultural resource management, having spent over two decades at the Midwest Archeological Center in Nebraska. He says he's eager to return to the Midwest and looks forward to collaborating with local communities, Tribal partners, and organizations like BHPFA. “The Midwest Region introduced Jay to community stakeholders at the end of August,” said Patty Ressler, Executive Director of BHPFA. “He seemed eager to get back to the Midwest and showed a true appreciation and interest in working with the local communities and partners.”

Our team and the rangers at Scotts Bluff and Agate are looking forward to Jay's arrival. His expertise in archeology is especially valuable as both parks continue to build strong relationships with Tribal partners and work to respectfully care for important cultural artifacts. We're excited to see what new ideas and projects Jay will bring to the table, and BHPFA is ready to support his vision for the future of these two parks.

NEW ARRIVAL

Available online: blackhillsparks.org/shop
or at your favorite park store

Our brand new line of canvas bags capture the essence of our partner locations with stunning artwork of Jewel Cave, Wind Cave, and Scotts Bluff. These bags aren't just for carrying supplies for your next road trip adventure; they're about carrying and sharing your stories, adventures, and support for the public lands of the Black Hills & Nebraska Panhandle.

The stunning "Maka Oniye" bag features Jim Yellowhawk's original artwork for Wind Cave. The seven tipis represent the seven Lakota virtues: compassion, honesty, generosity, humility, wisdom, respect, and prayer. The outer circle illustrates how humans merged and joined the Buffalo Nation on the surface, where "we came together as relatives." A portion of each Maka Oniye bag purchase goes to a recently created BHPFA Native Artist Fund.

These high-quality, durable bags are perfect for your next journey or a thoughtful gift for nature and history lovers. Every purchase has a purpose by supporting your public lands.



SheJumps Programming Recap: Building Confidence & Skills Outdoors

Rock Climbing: In June 2024, BHPFA partnered with Sylvan Rocks Climbing School in Custer, SD, to offer a beginner climbing course for women. Four participants, who had never rock climbed before, pushed past their limitations and discovered their capabilities. Rock climbing is not just a physical challenge but also a tool for developing mental strength and deeper connections with public lands.

Wild Skills Camp: In July, BHPFA and SheJumps hosted a Wild Skills Camp at Wind Cave National Park. Ten girls, ages 9-14, took part in activities including nature hikes, lessons in wilderness first aid, how to build a fire, and counting tree rings, all while building connections with one another and the natural world at

Wind Cave National Park. A huge thank you to Pennington County 4-H, Wind Cave National Park, Custer Search and Rescue, and BHPFA volunteers for making this camp possible! Wild Skills Camps will be offered in the summer of 2025—stay tuned for details in upcoming newsletters and on social media.



Ranger Kim taught the participants about wildfires, and the girls earned their Jr. Ranger badge.



"Rock climbing can translate to life!" During the course, participants challenged their physical and mental strength.

Connecting Art and Nature: The 2024 Artists in Residence at Jewel Cave National Monument and Agate Fossil Beds National Monument

Art has always played a vital role in how we connect with America's natural landscapes, and the NPS Artist in Residence program continues that tradition. In 2024, Agate Fossil Beds welcomed two talented artists: photographer John Emery and mixed-media artist Magan Ruthke. Both artists found unique inspiration in the monument's grasslands, history, and culture, creating works that will leave a lasting impression on visitors.

Agate Fossil Beds National Monument 2024 Artists

John Emery: Capturing the Emotional Power of the Plains

John Emery, a large-format photographer, spent two weeks at Agate using both modern and antique glass plate cameras to capture the subtle beauty of the plains. John wrote in a blog post about his experience, "Grasslands and the plains don't receive the attention or respect they deserve. While there may not be dramatic mountains, canyons, or spectacular waterfalls, the plains have an aura about them that is harder to describe." John's time at Agate was a deeply emotional journey, he says. The stark contrast of the landscape, from serene sunny days to

dramatic snowstorms, provided endless inspiration for his black-and-white photography. Whether capturing the eerie calls of coyotes at dawn or the dark night skies untouched by city lights, John's photographs reflect a profound connection to the natural solitude of the plains.



Magan Ruthke: Balancing Nature and Culture

Magan Ruthke explored Agate in February, drawn to both the open landscapes and the cultural history embedded in the park. Both a far cry from her home in Baltimore. As a mixed-media artist, Magan was particularly inspired by the vibrant patterns and colors found in the Lakota art within the Cook Collection at Agate. While she and her work is not of Lakota origin, she respectfully integrated those artistic influences she encountered with the expansive views of the grasslands.

Reflecting on her experience, Magan shared, "I've hiked the hills, driven the long straight roads through pasture and prairie, tromped through wetlands, visited small towns, viewed insane dark sky, and made progress on work for back home. I'm so grateful for our National Parks and their staff for making programs like the AiR possible."

Jewel Cave National Monument's 2024 Artist: Audrey Merwin: Jewel Cave's first ever Artist In Residence • Audrey spent a week at Jewel Cave in June to soak in the experience and resources of the monument, then continued working on her projects through July. Her incredible eye for detail and inviting creative process have been the highlights of her work here at Jewel Cave. She created graphic designs and artistic iconography for the park to use as volunteer appreciation items, including a bandana and magnets. Audrey's artwork was premiered at the Volunteer Appreciation event at Jewel Cave on September 28th

Supporting Conservation Through Art

Both John and Magan donated works created during their residencies to Agate Fossil Beds, where they are now on display for visitors to enjoy. Audrey's work will be seen by visitors for years to come on the gear used by park volunteers. Their contributions are part of a larger tradition of artists helping to foster a deeper connection between the public and our national parks. Art has the power to connect people to the landscapes they care about, encouraging a sense of stewardship and conservation.

BHPFA's Role in Supporting the AiR Program

The Artist in Residence program and the artist seminars at Agate Fossil Beds and Jewel Cave are made possible with the support of the BHPFA. By providing essential funding, BHPFA ensures that artists like John, Magan, and Audrey have the resources they need to create and share their work with the public, enriching the visitor experience and promoting the conservation of our natural and cultural heritage.



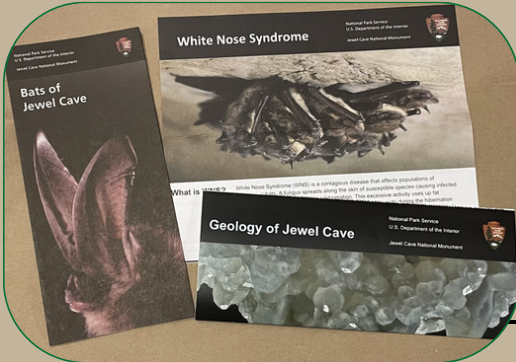
Partner Programs Funded by BHPFA



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Your purchases, donations, and memberships make a real impact! Here's a glimpse of the programs and resources you've helped support at our Parks and Forests.

Wind Cave – Lakota Interpretation: This summer, BHPFA funded cultural educator Adrian Primeaux, who offered interpretive programs on Lakota culture & a deeper understanding of the park's cultural significance.



Jewel Cave – Informational Brochures: BHPFA funded the production of three newly designed brochures for Jewel Cave - Bat species, White Nose Syndrome, and area geology.

Agate Fossil Beds – Native Art: Harmony Star Straub and her niece Kenzie led a beaded bracelet class at Agate Fossil Beds, sharing their expertise with visitors.



Scotts Bluff – Costumed Interpreter: With BHPFA funding, a cornerstone of Scotts Bluff's educational outreach, the costumed interpreter program, brought history to life at the replica wagons along the Oregon Trail Pathway.

Black Hills National Forest – Moonwalk Program: Hundreds of visitors explored the Black Hills under the glow of a full moon through the MoonWalk hiking series, co-hosted by BBNF and BHPFA.



Nebraska National Forest and Grasslands Smokey Bear's Birthday at Bessey: Smokey Bear turned 80 this year, and the Bessey Ranger District, along with BHPFA, celebrated in style. Smokey greeted fans during story time and posed for pictures with attendees.



National Grasslands Visitor Center – Grand Re-opening: Smokey's birthday celebration continued with the grand re-opening and 30th Anniversary of the National Grasslands Visitor Center in Wall, SD.

2024 Fall Events

OCTOBER 2024

10/13 Native Americans Day Activities | Wind Cave National Park Wind Cave National Park Visitor Center 11am-3pm

Experience an exciting and enriching day packed with engaging speakers, interactive activities, vendors, and a wide range of programs tailored for all ages! Event is free/open to the public. All activities take place at the visitor center.

10/16 National Fossil Day Program | Hot Springs The World Fossil Finder Museum, Hot Springs 4:30-6:30 pm

Join BHPFA and many other organizations and "dig" into paleontology! There will be free museum admission, a coloring contest, a dig pit, and variety of interesting activities for all ages!

10/20 SheJumps & BHPFA | Map and Compass Skills - Part 1

The Trailhouse 148 Gordon Street Custer, SD 9am-12pm • Total cost: \$25. *Registration required*
Join SheJumps and BHPFA for a two-part course to learn map and compass navigation.

Part 1 Basics: This course covers the fundamentals of reading a topographic map, proper use of orienteering a compass and how to put the two together. Also included - learning about magnetic and true north, declination, and taking a bearing from terrain and maps. There will be indoor classroom time with outdoor skills practice.

10/25 Trunk or Treat | Nebraska Natl Forests & Grasslands Downtown Chadron, NE

Join Nebraska Natl Forest staff and Smokey from 5-7pm for Halloween Trunk or Treat!

10/27 SheJumps & BHPFA | Map and Compass Skills - Part 2 Wind Cave National Park Visitor Center Hot Springs, SD 9am-12pm

Part 2 Field Portion: will be held outside at Wind Cave National Park. Participants meet at the visitor center, then head to the back country where you will put your new map & compass skills to the test. Participants will work together to navigate off-trail and find a designated point.

Participants MUST ATTEND Part 1 to participate in Part 2 - registration required. *Session will be outside and includes hiking over rough terrain - be prepared by wearing the proper shoes and clothing. This program is open to girls 12 and up, but they must be accompanied by an adult for the full duration of each day.*

NOVEMBER 2024

11/6-9 Annual Ranger Rendezvous | Rapid City Holiday Inn, downtown Rapid City

Current and retired NPS rangers come together to learn, connect, and celebrate their shared experiences. BHPFA will be a vendor, come visit us!

11/11 - Veterans Day

Fee free day at select National Park Service and National Forest Service locations! Free cave tours at Jewel Cave National Monument.

11/9 Native Americans Heritage Day Program | Jewel Cave NM Jewel Cave National Monument 9am-3pm

Vendors, hoop dancers, and entertainment.

11/28 Happy Thanksgiving

BHPFA, National Park Service and US Forest Service locations closed.



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