



National Forest Recreation Association
74th Annual Recreation Conference
February 27, 28 & 29, 2024

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

JAY BERKOWITZ

Director Business Performance & Analytics

[InterWest Insurance Services, LLC](#)

Redding, California

☞ Jay Berkowitz grew up in a small town in Northern California where he worked his family's restaurant and golf course from a young age all the way through college. Jay played college golf at the University of California at Berkeley and graduated with a Bachelor's degree in 1999. He began his career in Outdoor Recreation and Hospitality in 1998, spending the next 16 years working for some of the most respected names in the industry. His industry knowledge is extensive in the areas of retail, hospitality, food safety, recreation, agriculture, fire safety, ergonomics, and general industry.

Jay joined InterWest Insurance Services in November 2017 as a Risk Management Consultant. Bringing over 20 years of coaching, safety, consulting, and managerial experience to a wide variety of companies and clients, Jay specializes in team building, culture change, training development, process management, and safety leadership. Jay is currently the Director of Business Performance and Analytics, overseeing a team of talented individuals at InterWest that develops customized and innovative solutions to common safety problems. Recognizing the complex interactions between people and systems, Jay's goal is to provide elegant solutions that enable organizations to build strong safety culture and use safety as a transformational force in their organization. Jay is certified in Wilderness First Aid, CPR, and is a member of the American Society of Safety Professionals (ASSP). He is also a certified Safety Management Specialist (SMS) through the Board of Certified Safety Professionals.

Jay resides in Nevada City, California with his wife, Stephanie

GORDIE BLUM

Director Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Services

[USDA Forest Service – Managing for Recreation](#)

Washington, DC

☞ Gordie was named the Director of Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Services for the Forest Service, last September. He had served as acting Director since September 2022. Prior to that position, he was the Deputy Regional Forester for the Eastern Region from December 2019 to October 2021.

Gordie has over 30 years of federal service. After serving in the U.S. Army from 1991-1997, he began his career as a Community Involvement Specialist with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in Chicago. He joined the Forest Service in 2000 as the Communications Director for the Forest Products Laboratory. He has also been a legislative affairs specialist in Washington, D.C., the Deputy and Acting Forest Supervisor on the Willamette National Forest in Eugene, OR; Pacific Northwest Region Recreation, Lands and Minerals Director in Portland, and Eastern Region Recreation Director. He has also served in many various acting leadership assignments over the years including NRE liaison, Deputy Director of Fire and Aviation Management, and multiple line officer assignments.

Gordie has a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Wisconsin, and a Master of Arts from the State University of New York. He is also a graduate of Senior Leader, the Federal Executive Institute, and the USDA SES CDP program. He has been married to his wife Christine for 30 years, and has two children, Jovanna Rae and Caden Conrad. They enjoy all sorts of outdoor activities and doing restoration work on their property in Wisconsin.



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KRISTI BRAY
Public Affairs Specialist
[Recreation One-Stop, USFS](#)
South Lake Tahoe, California

☞ Kristi serves as a Public Affairs Specialist for the Recreation One Stop Strategic Communications Team and leads internal communications while supporting a variety of communication needs across the Recreation.gov platform.

Kristi's Forest Service career began as a visitor center information specialist, wilderness ranger, and writer/editor. She has spent most of her 20+ year career with the Forest Service as a Natural Resource Specialist working in recreation, and now in communications and outreach. Previously, she worked in the ski industry in marketing and communications.

Kristi enjoys spending time outdoors – trail running, mountain biking, paddle boarding, and hiking with her dog. Other interests include art (as observer and painter), travel and soaking up the sun on the beautiful beaches of Lake Tahoe where she resides with her family.

TOMMY DRAKE
R1S Interagency Program Manager
[Recreation.gov \(US Forest Service\)](#)

☞ As the interagency program manager for the Recreation One Stop program, Tommy leads the dedicated team that oversees all operations for the program, including strategic planning, acquisition, financial management and contract management.

Tommy has worked across a variety of functions in the National Park Service, including three years in the NPS Concessions program, four months as the interim leader of Yosemite's business and revenue management division, and most recently as an internal consultant advising park and program leaders on business management, analytics, and workforce planning. He also spent two years as a leasing and RFP manager for Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport and three years in economic consulting for the tech industry. Tommy has a master's degree in public policy from UC Berkeley and a BA in economics from Carleton College.

Tommy is a Minnesota native and is married with three kids. He enjoys spending time outdoors, running, cooking, and sauna culture.

DAVE FIELDS
President and General Manager
[Snowbird Resort](#)
Snowbird, Utah

☞ Dave Fields is the President and General Manager of Snowbird Resort in Utah. A native of Salt Lake City, Fields joined Snowbird in 2000 and has held a variety of positions at the year-round mountain resort. After 10 years of working in Snowbird's Public Relations, Marketing and Ticketing, Fields became Vice President of Resort Operations in 2010. Fields became Snowbird's General Manager in 2017, and President and General Manager in 2018.



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KEVIN R. GARDEN
Managing Director
[The Garden Law Firm, P.C.](#)
Alexandria, Virginia

☞ Kevin Garden is the Managing Director of The Garden Law Firm, P.C., which has its offices in Alexandria, VA. Kevin has been working with Forest Service permittees for over thirty years regarding all aspects of their permits. He has a background in government contracts law, environmental law and administrative procedure, which brings together the three key facets of law related to Forest Service permit activities.

Kevin represents clients nationwide in proceedings before the Forest Service, including appeals and litigation of adverse decisions concerning their permits. In addition to his work with Forest Service permittees, Kevin is counsel to the National Forest Recreation Association, the Back Country Horsemen of America, the National Forest Homeowners, and the National Park Hospitality Association. He is actively involved in the cause of ensuring adequate access for all user groups in the National Forests.

Kevin received his JD from The American University in 1989 where he was a member of the Law Review, and his BA from the University of Notre Dame in 1986.

BEN JOHNSON
Assistant Director, Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources
[USDA Forest Service – Managing for Recreation](#)
Washington, DC

☞ Since February 2024 Ben Johnson has served as the Assistant Director for Recreation, Heritage, and Volunteer Services. Prior to this role Ben Johnson served 7 years as a program manager for the Forest Service's national Recreation Special Uses program. In this role he provides oversight and coordination to recreation permitting and concession policy and provides support to National Forests around the country. Prior Forest Service roles include Acting National Assistant Director of Recreation, Organization Development Specialist and Strategic Recreation Planner with the Forest Service's Enterprise Program and completion of the Presidential Management Fellowship on the Coronado National Forest and the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests. Before joining the Forest Service Ben worked as a professional climbing/backcountry guide in North Carolina, Texas, Minnesota and Utah and spent time with Peace Corps' Office of Program and Training Support in Washington, DC.

Ben received a Master of Science in Environmental Justice and Master of Public Policy from the University of Michigan and a Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Studies and Spanish Language and Composition from Southwestern University.



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WARREN MEYER
President
[Vista Recreation](#)
Phoenix, Arizona

☞ Warren Meyer is President of Vista Recreation, (a newly formed company). The company is a private operator of public parks, campgrounds, and recreation facilities in 14 states. He is currently President of the National Forest Recreation Association, and a board member of the California Parks Hospitality Association.

Prior to RRM, Warren held a series of senior marketing and planning roles at AlliedSignal, Honeywell, and Emerson Electric. He also ran several Internet companies during the late 1990's Internet boom.

Warren has an MBA from the Harvard Business School and a mechanical engineering degree from Princeton University. In his spare time he is a writer and has a weekly column at Forbes.com as well as three different blogs, including Coyotebog.com. He is a frequent speaker on public-private partnerships in public recreation as well as on climate change topics. He has written a novel called "BMOC" and has a second book in the works.

AMANDA NOYES
National Assistant Recreation Special Uses Program Manager
[USDA Forest Service – Managing for Recreation](#)
Washington, D.C.

☞ Amanda began her career with the US Forest Service in 2000. She has worked on 4 forests in 3 different regions in a variety of positions that include Environmental Education Assistant, trail crew member, Permit Administrator, District Recreation Staff, and Forest Recreation Program Manager. She then joined the FS Enterprise Program recreation staff focusing on special uses. Amanda currently serves as the National Assistant Recreation Special Uses Program Manager in the Washington Office.

Amanda graduated from Muskingum University with a degree in Conservation Science. She lives in western Colorado with her husband and three sons.



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CHRIS PERKINS

Senior Director ~ Outdoor Recreation Roundtable

[Outdoor Recreation Roundtable](#)

Washington, DC

☞ 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, Wyoming with his wife Sheldon, kids Silas and Molly, and dog Tilley.

FRANK PIKUS

Chief Executive Officer, ExplorUS

goexplorus.com

Overland Park, Kansas

☞ Frank Pikus provides management support and oversight for all ExplorUS concessions. As CEO, he is responsible to the owners of ExplorUS and is responsible for ensuring the ongoing success of operations and for maintaining relationships with our partners.

JENNIFER ROESER

Owner ~ Roeser Livestock and Equipment / 8 Mile Ranch

[Roeser's Range of Light Mules](#)

[Inyo County, 4th District Supervisor](#)

Independence, California

☞ Jennifer has spent her entire life in the equine industry. In 2021, she was elected to be Inyo County's 4th District Supervisor, and began her new duties. She has served on numerous tourism committees on the East Side of the Sierra, as well as serving on the Mule Days Board of Directors for many years. She helped coordinate the '100 Mule Walk' taking 100 mules from the Owens Valley to Los Angeles to highlight the important role mules played in the construction of the aqueduct to transfer water to LA. She and her husband have also participated in providing wagons for Forest Service, BLM and other dignitaries to ride in the Rose Parade, including taking Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen in the 2019 parade and Smokey Bear in 2023. Jennifer continues to serve on the NFRA Board of Directors.

Read [Jennifer's Biography](#) of her experience with horses and mules. With her husband Lee, they have been instrumental in developing education programs for youth through Bishop Mule Days. Jen and Lee recognize the importance of collaboration, and work with numerous youth groups. The setting of working with mules and horses in a grand landscape can inspire young people and change their lives.



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GRIFFIN (GRIFF) SCHIREMAN
Forest Service Agency Program Manager
Recreation One-Stop
[Recreation.gov \(US Forest Service\)](https://www.recreation.gov)
Lakewood, Colorado

☞ Griff Schireman is a national program manager for Recreation One Stop in the U.S. Forest Service. He started with the team in October of 2020 and enjoys the challenge the job brings on a daily basis. Griff started his career with the Forest Service in college by working as a Range and Recreation Technician on the Wallowa-Whitman and Willamette National Forests. After graduating college in 2014 from Oregon State University (GO BEAVS!) with a B.S. in Natural Resource Management, he transitioned to a job with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as a Park Ranger. He later worked for the Bureau of Reclamation overseeing recreation and since has come full circle back to the Forest Service, where it all began.

In his spare time, Griff enjoys long walks on the beach, pretty sunsets, and pretty flowers. No. Really, he enjoys attempting to play the game of golf, snow skiing, fishing, and cold beer.

KELLY SIGHEL
Vice President of Forest Operations, ExplorUS
[goexplorus.com](https://www.goexplorus.com)
Overland Park, Kansas

☞ Kelly Sighel oversees the management of our USDA Forest Service operations, which currently number nine in five states. She ensures on-site services create positive, safe visitor experiences.

STEFFAN SONNEVELDT
Chief Operating Officer, ExplorUS
[goexplorus.com](https://www.goexplorus.com)
Overland Park, Kansas

☞ Steffan Sonneveldt is responsible for overseeing all company operations – Park, Forest, and Marina Divisions. As the direct supervisor of our V.P.s and Directors of Operations, corporate V.P. of Construction, Facilities and Design; Director of Maintenance; IT Department; Director of Food and Beverage Operations; and V.P. of Merchandising.



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SUSAN (SUE) VALENTE
Forest Service - National Program Manager
Recreation One-Stop
[Recreation.gov \(US Forest Service\)](https://www.recreation.gov)

☞ Sue Valente is a national program manager for Recreation One Stop in the US Forest Service. She has been with the Recreation.gov program since July of 2015 and is considered an expert on the national reservation system.

Sue earned her degree in Recreation and Tourism, Parks and Protected Area Management from Colorado State University. She has gone on to study Data Management, Program Management, Public Communication, and Bicycle Repair (!!) from several different sources. Her strong background in leadership, data, and recreation makes her the perfect fit for managing the vast world of the USFS Recreation.gov program.

Sue and her husband are excited to get outside and explore all that public lands have to offer in the post-pandemic world!

ANNIE WAGNER
[Associate Social Media Manager](#)
KPS3
Reno, Nevada

☞ Ambitious, lively, and dedicated, Annie Wagner has quite a bit of experience when it comes to all things social media. Research-driven work is what inspires her to create and manage exciting campaigns for clients that push their businesses (and their content) forward. She loves bringing clients' visions to life. Annie joined KPS3 in 2021 as a social media coordinator and has since then successfully changed her title to Associate Social Media Coordinator.

Annie graduated from the University of Nevada, Reno with a bachelor's degree in journalism and a focus on strategic communications and public relations. Annie's love for PR led her to get involved with PRSSA (Public Relations Student Society of America), where she gained a position as the VP of Membership for the club, and then later, her certificate in Principles of Public Relations. Throughout her time at KPS3, Annie has gained experience working with influencers, managing social media campaigns, copywriting, and has recently earned her certificate in Social Media Marketing from Cornell University.

SADIE WEHUNT
National Assistant Recreation Special Uses Program Manager
[USDA Forest Service – Managing for Recreation](#)
Washington, D.C.

☞ Sadie began her Forest Service career in 1998 as a recreation technician on the Helena National Forest in Montana. She has spent most of her 24-year career working in recreation and special uses programs at the district and forest levels in the Northern Region. Sadie joined the Washington Office Special Uses team in January 2023.



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STEVE WERNER
President, CEO
[American Land & Leisure Inc.](#)
Pleasant Grove, Utah

☞ Steve Werner, as President and CEO, oversees all aspects of American Land & Leisure. Established in 1986, AL&L is a Forest Service Concessionaire who manages over 400 recreation facilities in 9 states.

Steve has dedicated his entire career to providing outdoor recreation services. After completing his Master's degree in Recreation Resource Management at Texas A&M, Steve started his career with the Forest Service in various recreation roles at the Lake Tahoe Basin.

For twenty years, Steve worked in the private sector for Thousand Trails Inc., a nationwide, exclusive membership system of camping resorts as a Regional Operations Manager and as the National Training and Recreation Program Manager.

Steve is the past president of the National Forest Recreation Association whose members partner with various federal agencies to provide quality recreation services. They are comprised of resort owners, marina owners, camp owners and Forest Service concessionaires. (www.nfra.org)

STEVEN WILLIAMS
Executive Vice President
[InterWest Insurance Services, LLC](#)
Redding, California

☞ A 1982 Business Administration graduate of CSU, Chico, and Steve immediately began his career in the firm his grandfather founded in 1931 and that his father helped grow. Steve continued in this direction when he helped merge the firm with others to form InterWest Insurance Services in 1992. From his years in the industry, Steve has acquired a solid background in commercial insurance and risk management. He has kept abreast of changes in the industry by obtaining the Certified Insurance Counselor (CIC) and the Certified Risk Manager (CRM) professional designations, both of which enable Steve to not only stay current through annual courses, but also to constantly hone his specialized risk management skills for multiple industries.

Currently, a large number of contractors, parks & recreation concessionaires, manufacturers, distributors, financial institutions, and health care providers depend on Steve to provide them with his knowledge and expertise. In addition, public and private schools as well as public colleges and universities also rely on Steve to represent them. Steve and his team enjoy working with clients to assess their exposures and develop creative risk management solutions for their unique business risks.

Keeping the best interest of his clients first and foremost, Steve works in partnership with each client to help them lower their cost of risk and increase profits.

A strong believer in community involvement and philanthropy, Steve has always been active in the business, as well as the larger, community. He is a past president of the Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers Association and served on the CNA Pacer Counsel. For over ten years, Steve enjoyed coaching and managing youth baseball in the region. He also served on the Board of Directors for Turtle Bay Exploration Park for six years.



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(Steve Williams – Continued)

Steve currently serves as a board member for the following organizations: Lassen Park Foundation, Turtle Bay Board of Regents, Shasta County Economic Development Corporation, Greater Redding Chamber of Commerce, and the Shasta Builders Exchange.

In addition, Steve is an active member of Redding Rotary. A fifth-generation Shasta County resident, Steve is often sought out for his opinion on various business and community issues by clients, community leaders, and colleagues. Steve continues to help guide InterWest in a positive, dynamic direction, serving as a mentor to new brokers in the firm and as a member of the InterWest Board of Directors.

Married for over thirty years, Steve and his wife Nancy have two adult children.