

# Western National Parks Announces 2025–2026 Award Honorees and Grant Recipients

*Western National Parks (WNP) recognizes the individuals, educators and research efforts shaping the future of national parks and inspiring new park stewards.*

TUCSON, AZ, UNITED STATES, May 13, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Western National Parks (WNP) recognizes the individuals, educators and researchers shaping the future of national parks. From scientific discoveries, immersive learning and deep commitments to community engagement, research and connections with parks, these honorees embody the spirit of innovation and stewardship that protects the nation's treasured landscapes.

2025 Outstanding Contributions to National Parks  
Edward B. Danson Award: Gretchen Baker



## western national parks



WNP honors Edward B. Danson Award recipient Gretchen Baker and Stewart L. Udall Award recipient Natalie Teboul.

For 25 years, Gretchen Baker has worked to conserve the unique underground environments of Great Basin National Park. Over the course of her career, Baker has secured over \$8 million in grants to improve cave infrastructure and develop programs supporting the interpretation of wild caves. As the National Park Service Scientific Permit and Research Coordinator, she has supported multiple WNP-funded research projects and helped design several visitor center exhibits.

"I have continually been amazed and impressed at how active she is in bringing to light the beauty and wonder of [Great Basin National Park] not only at a local level but on a broader

scale,” said Kristin Gjerdsen, Professor of Art at Wisconsin Lutheran College. “Gretchen lives for and loves the Western landscape as seen through her actions; actions which have an eye for the future in preserving and protecting these precious, natural spaces.”

Since 2009, Baker has organized 16 BioBlitz events designed to connect community scientists with the park’s environments. To date, these events have documented 700 different species of plants and animals within the park, including several that are new to science. Baker has published many research papers and interpretive materials, including park guides for both children and adults. She is the founder and editor of *The Midden*, a biannual resource management newsletter. She is a Life Member and Fellow of the National Speleological Society, has served as the National Coordinator of the National Cave Rescue Commission since 2021, and has worked at six other NPS sites—including Carlsbad Caverns National Park, Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, Death Valley National Park and Yellowstone National Park.

WNP honors Baker for her unwavering commitment to the parks through her research, community outreach, publications, and advocacy work, ensuring that Great Basin’s landscapes can be enjoyed and stewarded for generations to come.

Stewart L. Udall Award: Natalie Teboul

As an educator and creator of Traveling Miss T.’s Math Maps®, Natalie Teboul creates education materials that use the coordinate plane, something every student learns in math class, to allow learners to “travel” to the national parks without ever leaving the classroom.

Described by Ivana Mowry-Mora, Coordinator of Special Projects and Initiatives at the American Geographical Society as “the closest to a ‘Miss Frizzle’ for the field of geography [she has] met” and “an exemplary representative of the power of K–12 education in sparking curiosity and care for the world around us,” Teboul has created maps featuring over 60 public lands sites. Her work makes learning an accessible adventure to all through math, art, storytelling and geography.

Teboul collaborates with the National Association for Interpretation and has received support from the American Geographical Society and the American Association of Geographers. WNP honors Teboul for her work connecting learners to the parks, so they may grow into the next generation of stewards.

Learn more about these awards and the nomination process at [wnpa.org/what-we-do/wnp-awards-grants-scholarships/wnp-awards](https://wnpa.org/what-we-do/wnp-awards-grants-scholarships/wnp-awards)

2025 James E. Cook Nature’s Classroom Grant

Experiencing a national park—whether in a classroom through an immersive lesson, through a park ranger school visit or on a field trip to a national park—is an amazing learning experience. The James E. Cook Nature’s Classroom Grant strengthens the connection between young people

and parks, increasing access for underrepresented K–12 youth by providing vital funding for educators to bring the wonders of national parks into classrooms.

This year:

Arroyos del Norte Elementary School students will visit Bandelier National Monument to learn how ancestral Puebloans' lives and culture were shaped by their environment.

Peñasco Elementary School students will visit Petroglyph National Monument to learn about the park's petroglyphs and the importance of conserving cultural heritage sites and artifacts.

Tularosa High School students will learn about Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument through an in-class experience, diving deeply into the area's unique Indigenous and Hispanic heritage.

Students enrolled in the Native American Advancement Foundation After School Program will participate in Saguaro National Park's Lost Carnivores citizen science project.

Learn more about the James E. Cook Nature's Classroom Grant at [wnp.org/grants](https://wnp.org/grants).

## 2026 WNP Research Grants

National park research drives conservation, resilience and discovery. This year's grants support these vital projects:

Channel Islands National Park: Investigating the seasonal diets of the endemic Island Scrub Jay.

Chickasaw National Recreation Area: Studying visitor use and crowding perceptions.

Great Basin National Park: Surveying lakes and the Lehman Rock glacier to map, model and monitor the park's freshwater reservoirs.

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument: Investigating the impacts of the border wall on wildlife.

Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area: Studying the home range of southwestern pond turtles.

Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument: Documenting Nuwu/Nuwuvi knowledge and perspectives of the park's landscapes.

White Sands National Park: Reconstructing lake levels to understand past landscapes and determine possible locations for other ancient human footprints and trackways.

Wupatki National Monument: Documenting the historical and current architecture of Wukoki Pueblo.

To learn more about WNP Research Grants, visit [wnp.org/what-we-do/research](https://wnp.org/what-we-do/research)

“The work we celebrate today is vibrant, forward-looking and deeply impactful—bringing new knowledge to light, expanding access to meaningful park experiences and inspiring curiosity across generations,” said WNP President and Chief Executive Officer Marie Buck. “From groundbreaking research and innovative education to community-driven stewardship, these honorees are not only enriching our understanding of national parks—they are actively shaping their future. We are proud to support and celebrate their achievements as they help ensure these extraordinary places continue to inspire, connect and endure for generations to come.”

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About Western National Parks

As a nonprofit education and philanthropic partner of the National Park Service, WNP supports parks across the West, developing products, services and programs that enhance the visitor experience, understanding and appreciation of national parks. Learn more at [wnp.org](https://wnp.org).

Julie Thompson

Western National Parks

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