

**City Nature Challenge: Northwest Louisiana, and the South Central Plains Biodiversity
Challenge**
April 24-27, 2026

Background / Context

I'm George Gehrig, and am originally from Louisiana. I lived in Shreveport for the majority of my adult life, and retired after working for 20 years at the former LSU Health Sciences Center – Shreveport. Upon retirement, I moved to North Idaho, and got very involved in conservation work and supporting non-profits. My primary passion was, and continues to be, organizing bioblitzes at the county/parish, regional and ecoregional levels. A **bioblitz** is an effort to record all the living species within a defined area, and within a defined period of time. State-wide bioblitzes are federally mandated, and occur on a 10 Yr cycle, and result in a **State Wildlife Action Plan** (SWAP). The SWAPs identify species at risk, and guide conservation efforts. State biologists don't have the budget or capacity to track all species. Therefore, it is imperative to engage lay people, citizen scientists, to help gather and crowd source information to supplement their efforts.

The bioblitzes that I organize are modeled after the world's largest bioblitz: the **City Nature Challenge** (CNC) – <https://www.citynaturechallenge.org> (the website has a ton of great information. Be sure to check out the FAQ and Education Toolkit pages). The CNC started in 2016 as a competition between Los Angeles (Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County) and San Francisco (California Academy of Sciences) to document urban biodiversity. It is held once a year, always in late April/early May, and participants record what they observe using the iNaturalist or Seek apps. All observations are recorded to projects created on the free **iNaturalist** platform (<https://www.inaturalist.org/>). This year, the dates are **April 24-27, 2026**. The CNC has subsequently become an extremely popular international event that grows every year. In 2025, there were 669 participating "cities*" in 62 countries, with over 3.3 million wildlife observations recorded (*the projects are no longer just cities; many are now based on larger boundaries – i.e., counties/parishes, or even ecoregions). Participation is free, and extremely easy. There are projected to be over 1000 projects for 2026!

The first bioblitz that I organized was a City Nature Challenge in Bonner County, Idaho, in 2021 (this was a “Collection” project: it was just in one defined region). That year, I helped create a mini-competition called **the Northern Rocky Mountain Challenge**, between Bonner County, Idaho; Boise, Idaho; and Red Lodge, Montana. The “winner” was the project that got the most people per capita to make at least one observation. An internationally renowned metal artist created a trophy, and that first competition was won by Red Lodge, Montana. The organizer, Courtney Long, the then City Planner, can be seen proudly (and rather audaciously!) posing with the trophy in the photo. The trophy was kept by the winning project until the next year, then it was back up for grabs.



Each challenge got to select who /what entity would accept it on behalf of the county. The city governments of Red Lodge and Boise were to accept it, while the Library Director of the East Bonner County Library in Sandpoint, Idaho, agreed to accept it.

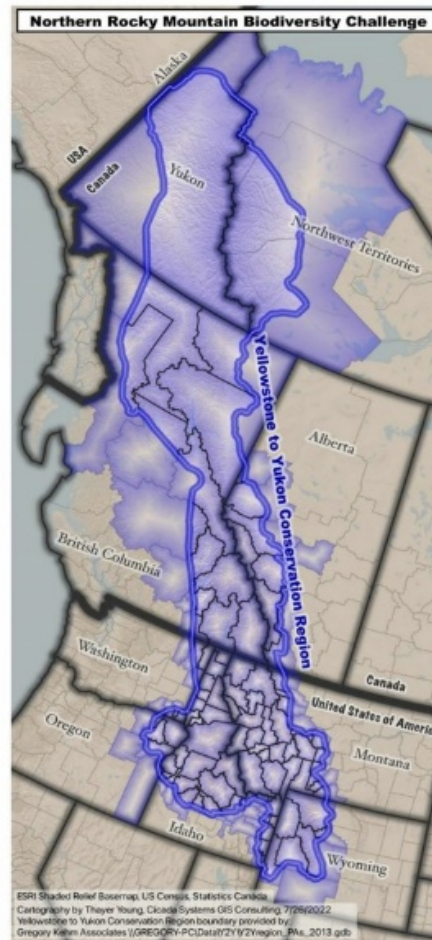
Over the next 4 years, I subsequently created the **Northern Rocky Mountain Biodiversity Challenge** (NRMBC), encompassing 106 jurisdictions (Counties in the US, Regional Districts in British Columbia, and Divisions in Alberta) that are in whole, or part, of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Corridor (Y2Y). The NRMBC was a triannual project held in the spring (in conjunction with the CNC), the summer and the fall. (The NRMBC is an example of an “Umbrella” project: 2+ individual Collection projects).

By hosting 3 challenges a year, I gave participants an opportunity to notice the seasonal (phenological) changes in species on the landscape. The last NRMBC was in the Spring of 2025. Here’s a link to that overall umbrella project:

<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/2025-cnc-nrmbc-umbrella-project-page>

As you will be able to see, over a 4-day period from April 25-28, 2025, the totals were: 33,975 Observations were made by 2,012 individual Observers, and 2,772 Species were identified. From the overall umbrella, you can go to sub-umbrella project pages for Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, British Columbia, and Alberta, and then to each of the individual 106 collection projects.

I was invited to give talks about the NRMBC at the city, state and national level. I also attended several conferences and presented posters.



While I created projects for the entire ecoregion, and tried to get to as many people in each of the 106 jurisdictions to make observations as I could, Bonner County, Idaho, was always my base. To encourage participation, and to help popularize bioblitzes, a mascot was chosen: a Sasquatch. A member of the local Master Naturalist chapter built a 7' cut-out that could fold in half for easy transportation. We had a naming competition, and "Sassy" was chosen. We then had a local artist paint her.



The local libraries co-sponsored programming, and I took Sassy to the various branches to teach people about bioblitzes, and how to use the iNaturalist and Seek apps. The library co-sponsored various efforts: trifold displays, handouts, display case advertising of a 4-part lecture series, hosting the lectures, and creating announcements in their newsletter, on their webpage, and flyers.



During the actual CNCs and NRMBCs, Sassy was hidden in different locations throughout the county. The first person to find her each of the 4-day of the competition was awarded a mini-Sasquatch trophy. At the end of the NRMBCs, recognition was given to the: The Top 3 observers in each jurisdiction, the Top 10 in each state/province, and the Top 50 overall. In addition, the jurisdictions were ranked based on the number of observers per capita. I'd love to be able to replicate those efforts.

Current Projects

Upon moving back to Louisiana, my home state, in June, 2025, I have created 2 umbrella bioblitz projects that will run concurrently from **Friday April 24 - Monday April 27, 2026**. Both umbrella projects have much more information available in the About sections, and in the Project Journal feature. Results will be announced on **Wednesday May 13, 2026**, and we'll be able to see how each parish, and our region as a whole, compares to projects from around the world.

1) **2026 City Nature Challenge: Northwest Louisiana (CNCNWLA)**, encompassing 12 parishes:

<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/city-nature-challenge-2026-northwest-louisiana>

As you can see from the 2025 CNC Participating Cities Within the Region map, there have been zero CNC projects in Louisiana outside of New Orleans and Baton Rouge. That accounts for the fact that almost no one knows about, or has heard about bioblitzes, and there is a correspondingly low knowledge about, and an appreciation for, biodiversity.

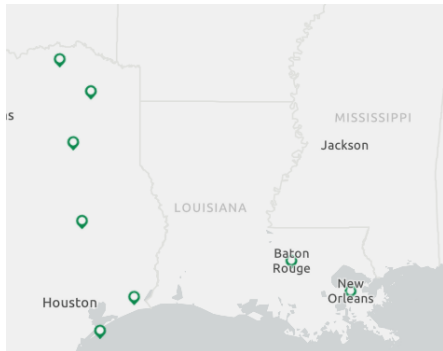
The same is true for our neighboring states of Oklahoma, Arkansas and Mississippi, where no CNCs have ever been organized. Texas, on the other hand, has well developed and long running CNCs. Organizers in the Tyler area, and in Walker & Trinity Counties in Texas, are interested in setting up a cross border mini-competition. That should really jump start interest in Northwest Louisiana, and garner lots of publicity.

As a City Nature Challenge organizer, and an Ambassador for iNaturalist, SciStarter, and the Xerces Society, I am in a position to give back to my community in a meaningful way. Given limited time and resources (at this point I don't have any grant or sponsorship funding), I plan to do an extensive outreach online, targeting media outlets, schools, extension agencies, libraries, and city and county governments. The focus initially will be in Northwest Louisiana, then extend into East Texas and South Arkansas.

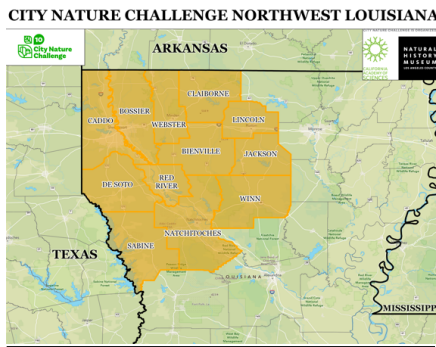
2025 CNC Projects Worldwide



2025 CNC Participating Cities Within the Region



<https://www.citynaturechallenge.org/current-results>



2) **2026 Spring South Central Plains Biodiversity Challenge (SCPBC)**, which includes 102 counties and parishes in Texas (43), Oklahoma (7), Arkansas (24), and Louisiana (28) that are in whole or part of the ecoregion:

<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/2026-spring-south-central-plains-biodiversity-challenge-scpbc>

Not only is there a lack of understanding of biodiversity in general, there is almost no appreciation for the ecoregions that species have co-evolved together in over millennia, or their ranges and habitat needs. This results in what I have termed “Biodiversity Blindness.” One way to begin to overcome it is to understand that species don’t recognize the artificial boundaries that we have drawn upon the landscape. As far as I can tell, no bioblitz has been organized based on ecoregions. This presents a tremendous opportunity, and lots of folks are interested in helping me promote the idea.

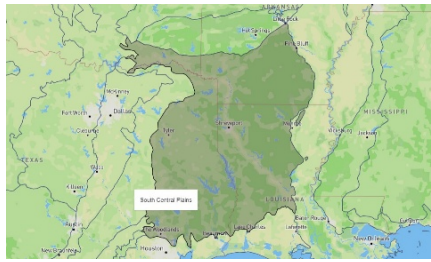
As mentioned, the SCPBC is modelled on the CNC. It will be held 3 times a year, (spring, summer and fall), with the 2026 Spring SCPBC being held in conjunction with the once-a-year CNC. The CNC will “prime the pump” for the ones that follow. Therefore, additional opportunities for library-based programming could be offered throughout the year.

Like the NRMBC, a SCPBC “winning” jurisdiction would be crowned based on the highest number of observers/capita.

In addition, my hope is to use the CNCs and SCPBCs to promote the idea of a national **Biodiversity Corps** (similar to the Climate Corps), and to facilitate the creation of local **Biodiversity Clubs**, and school-based **Biodiversity Halls of Fame** at the school, district, state and national levels.

Participating students can use this opportunity to gain some exceptional community organizing and leadership experience, and possibly participate in a variety of citizen science projects that could lead to presentations, posters, and possibly even publications.

South Central Plains Ecoregion



<https://www.nativerevegetation.org/era/>

SCPBC Map



Finally, there are any number of other community science projects that could be initiated. As a SciStarter Ambassador, I'd love to work with libraries to create whatever programs they think their patrons would be interested in

Goals of the CNC and the SCPBC

CNC

- emphasizes cooperation

1. Connect people to nature where they live.
2. Build community through collective action for local nature.
3. Make and share nature observations to help fight biodiversity loss.
4. Grow and support nature documentation globally.
5. Have fun doing science while collaborating with people around the world.

Also, casual observations, and observations of captive and cultivated organisms, will not count. Quality instead of quantity is the overarching theme in order to build more robust data for research.

The international CNC organizers have provided a number of helpful publications that can be shared. I have attached some of them for your consideration.

SCPBC

-more competitive with a number of secondary objectives to increase participation and encourage youth/community engagement

In addition to the CNC goals:

- 1) Recruit people in every parish and county to be local organizers to jump start bioblitzes;
- 2) Create an ecoregional competition between all the jurisdictions, with a trophy (to be commissioned) to be awarded to the winning jurisdiction (the one with the most unique Observers per capita), with the trophy accepted by either library districts, school districts or county/parish commissions;
- 3) Identify the Top 3 Observers in each jurisdiction, the Top 10 in each state, and the Top 50 overall;
- 4) Create Biodiversity Halls of Fame in various categories (high schools, colleges/ universities, county/parish, state and ecoregional);
- 5) Create mini-competitions between schools in the same and different states, and between sister cities in different countries;
- 6) Create lists of Endangered, Threatened and Sensitive species for each jurisdiction, and a list of species that have been extirpated;
- 7) Spur the creation of additional ecoregional challenges throughout the US and Canada, and then the world.
- 8) Prompt local citizen science projects, like comparing the 5-year plans of Soil and Conservation Districts; the 10-year State Wildlife Action Plans (that identify Species of Greatest Conservation Need); and jurisdictional (city, county/parish) comprehensive plans (with particular emphasis on whether "Natural Resources" should be replaced with "Natural Heritage", and whether critical habitat and conservation corridors are identified, or the Biodiversity Index for cities has been adopted).

Social Media / Website

For now, I'll only be using Facebook as a social media platform. Here are the links to the Facebook and iNaturalist project pages:

City Nature Challenge: Northwest Louisiana

Project: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/city-nature-challenge-2026-northwest-louisiana>

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61585922150025>

Facebook Event: <https://www.facebook.com/events/851829610770960>

South Central Plains Biodiversity Challenge

Project: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/2026-spring-south-central-plains-biodiversity-challenge-scpbc>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61580004354102>

I'd love to recruit students (or other) volunteers to help with social media, and to possibly even create a website, and to recruit people/organizations to become organizers in their own communities or counties/parishes. Here are the links for our nearest competitors to see what they have been able to accomplish over the years that they have participated in the CNC:

Tyler / East Texas CNC

iNaturalist: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/city-nature-challenge-2025-tyler-east-texas>

Website: https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/wildlife_diversity/texas_nature_trackers/naturechallenge/#projects

Baton Rouge CNC

iNaturalist: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/city-nature-challenge-2026-baton-rouge-region>

Website: <https://www.brnaturechallenge.org>

Southwest Louisiana CNC

iNaturalist: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/city-nature-challenge-2026-southwest-louisiana>

Again, additional information, and links to some great resources can be found on the CNCNWLA and SCPBC umbrella project websites.

I would love to have the opportunity to connect to talk more about bioblitzing and these projects, to give a presentation, and/or to help set up an indoor or outdoor practice bioblitz for interested any group/class to get practice with the app, and to learn how to make the best observations. Please contact me if interested.

Regards,

George Gehrig

geogehrig@gmail.com

318-564-0840

Ambassador, iNaturalist

Ambassador, SciStarter
Ambassador, Xerces Society
Board Member, Idaho Environmental Education Association
Founder, City Nature Challenge: Northwest Louisiana
Founder, Northern Rocky Mountain Biodiversity Challenge
Founder, South Central Plains Biodiversity Challenge
Founder, Wild Ones Northern Rockies Chapter
Master Melittology Apprentice, Native Bee Society of BC
Member, IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM)
Membership Committee Member, Society for Conservation GIS
Participant, Montana Moth Project
President, EcoRegional Consults