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Artist Banovich Is Dedicated To Protecting The Wild In His Wildscapes

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John Banovich is an artist and conservationist that is internationally known for his dramatic portrayals of wildlife. Banovich's oil paintings can be found in museum, corporate and private collections around the world. Through his career, artwork and his publishing company, Banovich Art, Banovich has developed effective ways to help implement and support conservation programs and is utilizing his imagery to promote a message of wildlife preservation.

The Banovich Wildscapes Foundation (BWF) (<https://johnbanovich.com/wildscapes-foundation>) is a nonprofit organization fostering cooperative efforts to conserve the earth's wild places. Their goal is to benefit both the wildlife and the people that live there. Founded by John Banovich, BWF is the culmination of conservation efforts over the past two decades.

Q: Tell us about your organization?

John: My organization is the Banovich Wildscapes Foundation....the word Wildscapes being key as it is the wild in our landscapes that make them an ecological treasure for all of us to enjoy. We have all travelled to places where the big things with big teeth have been displaced or removed. Something always feels dead to me in those hallowed environments. There are still a few vestiges of habitat that harbor the mega fauna and ecosystems that, when encountered, lift our minds, replenish our spirits and renew our passions for living. In fact, spending time in wild, intact ecosystems has scientifically proven health benefits.

The mission of Wildscapes is to foster cooperative efforts to conserve the earth's wildlife and wild places benefitting the animals and people that live there. We accomplish this in three ways: 1) Supporting important science research and education. 2) Protecting large conservation landscapes. 3) Finding ways to benefit community development.

I founded BWF because I saw there was a chasm between the sportsman conservationists and the conservationist environmentalists. Prior to the 1960's, these individuals and groups worked, for the most part, in tandem on environmental and conservation issues. The majority of the time they were one in the same. Today you see the left and the right working independently because of differences in fundamental beliefs that either wildlife is a resource to be used, or wildlife should have individual rights and be protected at all costs...even at the cost of the species as a whole. The reality is that wildlife must be utilized, both consumptively and non-consumptively (depending on the landscape) and local people must benefit from its presence. If not, the wildlife will disappear. I call this the second inconvenient truth. Today wildlife must pay in order to stay. In an ever exploding human population of over 7 billion and growing, wildlife must bring value to communities; it must compete economically with other land use choices. In the future these wildscapes will become more valuable than anything we have....more valuable than anything that can grow on them, anything that can be built on them, or anything that can be extracted from underneath.

I once invited the Kenyan Speaker of the House to the USA to look at our wildlife policy; both the successes and failures, at the state and federal level as well as our national parks and private lands. He said to me, "John, people come to my country and say, 'you have beautiful wildlife...you must protect it. You must save it.' I call them suitcase conservationists. If they love it so much, why don't they take it home in their suitcase, because it eats my grass, it eats my cows and it even ate my brother." (His brother was killed by a lion.)

Kenya banned any sort of consumptive utilization of wildlife in 1977 and as a result of species not having any real value outside of protected areas (only 8% of its landscape), what was once the greatest wildlife country in Africa has now lost nearly 80% of its wildlife in less than 40 years.

Q: What is the most important thing you want people to know about your cause?

John: I don't think the word cause may be the best here. I would rather say mission. The mission of BWF is to awaken and inform the people. If we don't do something now, then wildlife and wild places will be gone forever. Never before has the wild kingdom faced the level of threats as it does right now. Animals are being poached and slaughtered at an unprecedented rate, and millions of human livelihoods depend on their survival. Rural people around the world can benefit from the utilization of wildlife, but if the animals continue to be poached, removed and exploited because they are viewed as an expensive burden, then we, as humans will all lose a part of ourselves.

Q: What is the nicest thing that someone has done for you?

I have been truly blessed with so many wonderful people in my life. Many have helped me open doors, surmount challenges and have lit the way when there was simply nothing but darkness on the horizon. To narrow down all of my blessings would be fortuitous and is simply too difficult, but recently one the nicest things was done for me was by my good friend Mary Hart and her husband Burt Sugarman. My book "BEAST- The Collected works of John Banovich" was released a few years ago, and Burt and Mary were kind enough to host a Book Launch Party at the Barnes and Noble store at the Grove in Los Angeles. They invited many of the "who's-who" in business and entertainment, and hosted a private dinner after the book signing. I brought two young lion cubs (arranged by my friend Jack Hanna, who wrote the forward in my book) to join our guests.

A few years prior, we had started a Lion Conservation program called the Lion P.R.I.D.E. Initiative. I saw this as a perfect opportunity to introduce the plight of the lion to our guests. NBC's Entertainment Tonight featured the event between Paul McCartney and Dick Van Dyke...and after the show aired, the number of hits to our website was over the moon. It was so important because much of what I do in my work contains an environmental message. Burt Sugarman and Mary Hart both love and appreciate animals and are very concerned about conservation issues and the well-being of rural people in developing nations. They really helped to shine a light on the importance of saving our wild places. It is this kind of reach that is important to spreading the message about the vital role that wild animals play in proving a quality of life on earth.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add?

John: Today we are at a precipice, and the decisions that we make now will seal the fate of wildlife for the generations to come. Just read the headlines...we are all well aware of the challenges facing our civilization in many areas, but one bright spot is that some species have made heroic comebacks from the brink of extinction. Animals are tenacious and resilient. All they need are the fundamentals of life to survive. We do not need to save one single species to accomplish this; all we need to do is to provide land and water. The animals will save themselves.

