

Neil Thagard
Director of Operations
Wild Sheep Foundation

Biography

Neil Thagard is the Wild Sheep Foundation's (formerly FNAWS) Director of Operations.

He grew up in Asheville, North Carolina where his family introduced him to hunting and the outdoors at a very young age.

In high school he was a multi-sport athlete (baseball and football), and was highly recruited by major universities for his athletic abilities. After much deliberation he decided to attend Union University in Tennessee where he graduated with a bachelor's degree focusing on business and wildlife management. There he starred for 4 years on Union's Baseball team, and received numerous awards for his abilities on the diamond.

Neil later signed a professional baseball contract where he spent 2 years in the minor leagues as a starting catcher. Neil was fortunate to be a part of history by playing in the 1st professional baseball game where a black manager managed each team. He also had the privilege to compete against such players as Rafael Palmero, Bobby Thigpen, and Ken Griffey, Jr. just to name a few.

After his professional baseball career, Neil returned to the town of his college alma mater - Jackson, TN where he served simultaneously as an associate scout for the Houston Astro's organization, and a district executive for the Boy Scouts of America. As a district executive he managed membership quotas as well as forming finance campaigns, recruiting, training, and managing volunteers. During his tenor with the Boy Scouts he was awarded the National Chief Executive Officers *Winner's Circle Award* for excelled membership and finance growth.

Because of his love for the Rocky Mountain Region, Neil returned to Boise, Idaho where he was employed at Micron Technologies/A \$5.5 billion Fortune 500 computer memory company. In his 13 years of employment he served in a number of managerial positions where my responsibilities ranged from monitoring and evaluating personnel to building and implementing capacity models to determine short and long-term equipment needs. In these positions his management structure consisted of more than 200 employees.

During Neil's residency in Boise, Idaho he became affiliated with the Wild Sheep Foundation where he served on the local chapter board of directors, later to become president of that chapter where in 2002 he, along with a great team, conducted a fundraising effort and was able to raise \$90,000 (a record at that time) for the states bighorn recovery efforts through its state bighorn tag raffle. During his presidency, he and his team also secured the \$200,000 funding necessary to purchase the last domestic sheep grazing allotments on Idaho's Lost River Range, helping to promote a positive future for wild sheep recovery.

Immediately following his chapter board obligations, he took the position as director of development at the International Headquarters of WSF where he primarily deals with wild land & wildlife management issues, the Foundations trust fund, public education, and chapter relations.

Today, Neil is well respected in the wildlife arena for his knowledge of public lands and wildlife management issues. Many federal, state, and provincial wildlife managers consult in his knowledge regarding such issues as public land grazing and wildlife disease. These managers are confident in his abilities to make sound decisions based on sound data for the benefit of wildlife. He has also been successful in selling the problematic issues that wildlife faces to the concerned public through print and television media.

Neil is a primary voice for the Wild Sheep Foundation as he demonstrates during a monthly radio show. He also takes part in a number of hunting and wildlife conservation television programs at the national level, including being the producer for WSF's television program *Hittin' the Outdoors with Wade Boggs*.

Neil has also authored a number of articles regarding hunting and conservation issues. His articles have been featured in such publications as: *Wild Sheep*, *Sports Afield*, *Bowhunter*, and *Eastman's Bowhunting Journal*.

Much of Neil's time is spent on mitigating the incompatibilities between domestic sheep and wild sheep, and other issues that adversely impact wild sheep (This not only *Puts Wild Sheep on the Mountain – but Keeps Them on the Mountain!*). Neil's efforts have helped to enhance the health and welfare of wild sheep by reducing the risk of disease. A program Neil has established is an alliance with western chambers of commerce to educate them about the disease risks associated with domestic sheep grazing in wild sheep habitat. This program gives wildlife conservation groups additional support from the rural communities that are dependent on healthy wildlife and wild lands for their economic development.

Recently, through the help of a state and local grant that Neil secured, a re-model of the WSF Headquarters transformed it from a trophy room into a conservation educational center which we are all very proud to show the 12,000+ visitors we have walk through our doors each year.

Wildlife and wild places are Neil's passion. He states, "It is my strong opinion that without the stewardship of non-governmental organizations such as the Wild Sheep Foundation the future of wildlife and the places they call home will certainly be in jeopardy!"

Neil is a conservationist and an avid bowhunter. He has taken, under fair chase conditions, ½ of North America's big game species with a bow, with more than 20 record book-qualifying animals. In 1994 he was the recipient of the Idaho State Bowhunters

Association *Bowhunter of the Year* award, which not only recognizes 1 of its members for their accomplishments in the field, but for their giving back to conservation.

Neil is a Life Member and Endowment Donor of WSF. He's also a life-member or member of many other wildlife conservation organizations.

No matter where Neil is or what he is doing, he is always representing WSF and wildlife conservation. He is a true ambassador for all wildlife.