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News Release

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Wings Over Water Wildlife Festival registration now open! Naturalist and author Scott Weidensaul to present keynote speech

Scott Weidensaul, author of more than two dozen books on natural history including the Pulitzer Prize-nominated "Living on the Wind," will be the keynote speaker for this year's Wings Over Water Wildlife Festival to be held Nov. 6-11 on the Outer Banks of North Carolina

In 1955, naturalists Roger Tory Peterson and James Fisher published their best selling book "Wild America," chronicling a now-legendary 30,000-mile trip across North America. Fifty years later, Weidensaul retraced their epic journey, to see what has been gained and lost, and to catch a glimpse of what the future holds for wildlife and wild lands.

"I'd read 'Wild America' as a kid, and was -- like most of its readers -- on fire with the idea of doing a similar trip, bumming around wild country finding exotic birds," said Weidensaul. "But as I got older and periodically re-read the book, I came to realize that Peterson and Fisher were seeing America at a crossroads in the early 1950s, both culturally and at a critical time for conservation. a "And I realized that with the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of the original book coming up in 2005, there was a marvelous opportunity to go back and retrace the original trip, and use it as a framework to look at what we'd gained and what we'd lost for conservation in the past half-century."

As he retraced the steps of Peterson and Fisher, Weidensaul traveled from the great seabird cliffs of Newfoundland to the cypress swamps of Florida, from the cloud forests of the Sierra Madre in Mexico to lonely islands far out in the Bering Sea. He searched out the wild heart of the continent - and found it strong. His journey and subsequent findings are the basis of his book "Return to Wild America: A Yearlong Search for the Continent's Natural Soul."

Recently, Weidensaul joined the National Audubon Society in sounding the alarm about

decreasing numbers of some bird species.

Among the more common species that bird counts indicate are declining are the Northern Bobwhite, Evening Grosbeak, Northern Pintail, Greater Scaup and the Boreal Chickadee.

"We see more species that are in trouble than the ones that are doing really, really well," he told the Boston Globe. However, some species such as Canada goose and wild turkey are now over populated, he added.

Weidensaul lives in the mountains of eastern Pennsylvania, where he studies the migration of hawks, owls and hummingbirds.

He writes for such publications as Smithsonian, Audubon, Nature Conservancy and National Wildlife and his newest book is "Of a Feather: A Brief History of American Birding."

The Wings Over Water Wildlife Festival keynote dinner will be at 6 p.m., Friday, Nov. 9, at Roanoke Island Festival Park. Cost is \$30 and advanced registration is required.

The six-day-long Wings Over Water Wildlife Festival offers dozens of programs for paddlers, birders and others who enjoy the great outdoors in a variety of ways. Wildlife photography, birding, decoy carving and history tours are just a few of the many types of offerings planned for this year. Participants are encouraged to register early as most programs have limits on number of registrants.

And those traveling to the area also should book accommodations early to ensure that lodging can be found in convenient areas.

To learn more, go to www.wingsoverwater.org or call the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce to receive a copy of Take a Walk on the

Wild Side which includes a complete listing of programs. The book also is available at area visitor centers, businesses and in

downloadable form on the official website. To call the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce, call 252-441-8144 or go to

www.outerbankschamber.com.