



Recommendation of  
Steven Rinella for  
Honorary Doctorate  
of Forestry &  
Conservation

2025 Spring Commencement

President Seth Bodnar  
University of Montana President's Office  
32 Campus Drive, UH109  
Missoula, MT 59812

November 17, 2024

Dear President Bodnar,

I write with great enthusiasm to nominate Steven Rinella for an honorary doctorate from the University of Montana. Mr. Rinella, who grew up in Twin Lakes, Michigan, completed his BA in English at Grand Valley State University and earned his MFA in creative nonfiction at the University of Montana in 2000. In the years since, he has become one of the most compelling and influential voices connecting people with nature. A New York Times bestselling author of more than ten books, star of the television series *MeatEater*, and host of the *MeatEater Podcast*, Rinella uses a trademark blend of story-telling, scholarly insight, and thoughtful dialogue to enrich our national conversation around wildlife, landscape conservation, and food systems.

I first encountered Mr. Rinella's work through his award-winning *American Buffalo: In Search of a Lost Icon*, which masterfully weaves together environmental history, biology, anthropology, and personal narrative to explore how bison and humans have shaped each other's lives in North America. What immediately struck me was his rare ability to translate academic research and complex ideas for a general audience without sacrificing intellectual depth or nuance. His career as a writer has been driven by an insatiable curiosity about the natural world, enriching his own field experience with insights drawn from literature, science, and history. His interests span disciplines from archaeology to zoology, and he commands an exceptional talent for synthesizing knowledge from disparate fields for his readers.

In addition to his literary achievements, Mr. Rinella has developed into a unique kind of curator of intellectual discourse and public understanding. Through his multimedia platform, he has created space for substantive engagement between groups that rarely interact constructively: hunters and vegetarians, ranchers and environmentalists, academic researchers and traditional knowledge holders. His podcast conversations have featured prominent scholars and cultural figures from across the spectrum: filmmakers Ken Burns and Werner Herzog; environmental historians Elliott West and Dan Flores; writers Michael Punke and Ian Frazier; wildlife biologists Diane Boyd and Matt Kauffman; and elected officials Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM) and former Wyoming Governor Matt Mead (R). He has also used his platform to help elevate voices from marginalized groups in the outdoor space, including Rue Mapp of Outdoor Afro; Arthur Lawson, the director of Shoshone and Arapaho Fish and Game; Paralympic archer Matt Stutzman; and Hmong chef and outdoorsman Yia Vang. What sets Mr. Rinella apart as a communicator is not just his ability to ask tough questions and to unpack the most abstract concepts clearly and creatively, but his gift for getting his audience to think critically about their own assumptions and consider perspectives different from their own. He approaches complex

political and social topics with nuance and humility, acknowledging the validity of multiple viewpoints without abandoning his own personal convictions and rigorous skepticism.

Perhaps most notably, Mr. Rinella continues to demonstrate to his audience of millions that academic inquiry remains relevant to public life. His books have introduced lay readers to cutting-edge findings in anthropology, biology, history, and the social sciences. His media platform has created opportunities for senior scholars to share their research with new audiences, while also providing a springboard for emerging researchers and writers working at the intersection of conservation, culture, and public policy. From encouraging his audience of hunters to submit waterfowl tissue samples for a genetic mapping project to crowdfunding snowmobiles for lynx researchers in Washington state—and even to facilitating a hands-on butchery experiment using stone tools for a team of archeologists—Mr. Rinella builds concrete connections between institutions of higher learning and the broader public. At a time when academic research often struggles to find resonance beyond university walls, he demonstrates how scholarly insights can enrich everyday experiences and inspire genuine curiosity about the natural world.

The impact of Mr. Rinella's work extends far beyond traditional measures of academic influence. His thoughtful exploration of food, hunting, and conservation has fundamentally reshaped how millions of Americans think about their relationship with wild places and wild things. In an age of increasing urbanization and digital distraction, he has inspired people across the country to engage meaningfully with nature—whether through hunting, fishing, foraging, or simply appreciating public lands and wildlife. His work has helped bridge the growing disconnect between Americans and their food systems, while fostering a more nuanced understanding of hunting's role in conservation and wildlife management. What's more, he has accomplished all this while maintaining a down-to-earth and accessible approach that makes his work relevant to audiences across social, political, and educational boundaries.

In short, Steven Rinella stands out as one of the most important voices to emerge from the University of Montana in recent decades. He embodies the democratic intellectual—learned yet unpretentious, precise but easy to understand, capable of both engaging substantively with scholarly debates and captivating general audiences. His contributions to public understanding of environmental history, conservation biology, wildlife and land-use policy, and American cultural studies make him an ideal candidate for an honorary doctorate. Such recognition would acknowledge not just his individual achievements, but also the vital importance of bringing academic knowledge into conversation with popular discourse.

Sincerely,



Randall Williams, PhD

Department of History, University of Montana, 2015

[williams.randallm@gmail.com](mailto:williams.randallm@gmail.com)

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President Seth Bodnar  
University of Montana President's Office  
32 Campus Drive, UH 109  
Missoula, MT 59812

November 19, 2024

Dear President Bodnar,

I am pleased to express my strong support of Steven Rinella for the Honorary Doctorate degree from the University of Montana. While I do not know Steven personally, I am well aware of his immense impact on hunting and conservation in North America. Steven has accomplished what few others have in terms of telling our nation's conservation story to mass audiences through multiple forms of media, including television shows, books, and podcasts. He does so in a thoughtful, balanced manner that is engaging and entertaining. He is best known for *MeatEater*, a long-running television show and podcast, where he blends stories and outdoor adventures with educational and scientific content to inform viewers and listeners about the roles and obligations of hunters in conservation. As our society becomes increasingly urban and divorced from the natural resources that support it, the work of Steven Rinella is foundationally important to our collective aspirations for a sustainable future for both wildlife and people. Fortunately for University of Montana, this increasingly popular and impactful figure in society is a Grizzly, having earned a degree from UM in Creative Writing! Others than me, such as Chris Dombrowski, are far better suited to speak to Steven Rinella's accomplishments as a writer. I will simply note that Steven is a #1 New York Times bestselling author who has written a number of acclaimed books tied to conservation, hunting, and wild cuisine.

For my part, I will attempt to put Steven Rinella's accomplishments in context of the current conservation circumstance in North America. Most conservationists communicate primarily among themselves, which is especially true for biologists and scientists. We can speak at length on the role hunting has played in wildlife species conservation in North America, and we can speak well to the critical importance of ethics and fair chase in the conduct of hunting. Moreover, we have been instrumental in the development and application of science to the conservation and management of wildlife species and their habitats, which was made possible through funding provided by hunters and anglers. The problem is that we routinely struggle to communicate our knowledge and insights to large audiences. In result, most people in our contemporary society have little knowledge or appreciation for hunting and its role in supporting science and conservation. Even worse, a growing number of marketing and social media forces have portrayed hunting in a largely negative light by placing too much emphasis

on trophy hunting, commercialization, and the use of advanced technologies in pursuing and harvesting animals. It leaves non-hunters with a negative impression of hunting. At the same time, the proportion of our American population that hunts is declining substantially. This circumstance has led to a decline in the perceived relevance of hunting and conservation organizations to society, which could have negative ramifications for our future. As we transition away from our hunting-conservation legacy, the potential exists for conservation to become increasingly focused on preventing species extinctions rather than supporting robust populations of species that can support public hunting. The former can more easily be accomplished on increasingly fragmented landscapes, as seen throughout the more highly developed landscapes across the globe.

With that circumstance in mind, I can now more easily convey the impact of Steven Rinella's accomplishments within our society. Steven fully appreciates the current circumstance that I described above and has actually done something meaningful to address it! He is the exceptional hunter conservationist who has "broken through" the barriers to reach mass public audiences through mainstream media channels. His content routinely draws upon conservation science and ethics as he makes meaningful connections with his audiences. He has also appealed to a new hunter demographic who desires a deeper understanding and connection to wild food sources and the corresponding nutritional benefits. In doing so, he is helping build a new generation of hunter conservationists to carry the flag for wildlife habitat conservation at scale, which is of foundational importance for supporting public hunting into the future, and in turn, landscapes that can sustain abundant wildlife. He also promotes thoughtful consideration of hunting ethics, necessary for sustaining support of hunting in a society that is increasingly comprised of non-hunters.

I think Steven Rinella's career success represents the power of a UM education. He was formally educated within our renowned creative writing program and went on to have a significant, positive impact in wildlife conservation. Creative writing and wildlife biology have helped define UM's standing on the national stage, and I couldn't imagine a more worthy person to receive an honorary doctorate for his contributions to society in these spaces.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chad Bishop', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Chad Bishop, PhD  
Director and Professor  
Wildlife Biology Program  
University of Montana  
[chad.bishop@umontana.edu](mailto:chad.bishop@umontana.edu)

President Seth Bodnar  
University of Montana President's Office  
32 Campus Drive, UH 109  
Missoula, MT 59812

Nov. 20, 2024

Dear President Bodnar,

The word “transformative” is something of a cliché. However, I can think of no better word to describe the effect University of Montana alum Steven Rinella has had on the fields of outdoor media and wildlife conservation. Rinella’s career as a journalist, podcaster and video producer has fundamentally transformed -- and improved upon -- America’s public discourse of outdoor life and our relationship with nature. For this reason, I am delighted to urge UM to honor Steve with a doctorate degree.

I have spent 35 years in outdoor journalism and natural resource conservation, based in Montana but working across North America. My specialty is the intersection between effective communication and durable conservation. Steve thrives in this space like no one else I know.

Back in 2012, Steve had a growing reputation as a non-fiction writer and was venturing into television. I was the co-chairman of a fledgling conservation group, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers. BHA would grow into a national conservation force with an annual budget of several million dollars. But in those days, we were mostly volunteer led and scraping our nickels. Our goal was to organize our first in-person banquet at Ft. Missoula. Steve was living in New York City, but I thought he would be an excellent keynote speaker. I reached out to Steve’s agent, who quoted me a speaker’s fee that was several times the budget of our entire event. I explained our situation and declined.

A few days later, I received a personal email from Steve. He overruled his agent, showed up at our event and brought down the house. Steve’s generosity reflected a deep appreciation of what BHA was trying to achieve: grow hunters and anglers’ voice for America’s wild lands, waters, and wildlife.

Shortly thereafter, Steve’s launched The MeatEater brand, and his reputation skyrocketed. Audiences immediately latched onto his television show, website properties and podcast.

Rinella raised the bar for the intelligent and artistic outdoors content and became the most recognized face of the hunting and angling community.

Yale sociologist Steven Kellert (1978) categorized three main motivations behind modern hunters: “utilitarian” hunters who are chiefly in pursuit of food; “naturalist” hunters who prioritize the study and appreciation of nature; and “dominionistic” hunters who prioritized the pursuit of trophies and conquering nature. Prior to MeatEater, almost all hunting television and online content catered to “dominionistic” hunters, with an emphasis on trophies, equipment, and personal achievement. The effect was a narrowly skewed presentation of the American outdoors experience and profound public misunderstanding of what hunting and fishing is all about.

Rinella turned that media market upside down. The MeatEater brand stands upon four verticals: hunting, fishing, *cooking and conservation*. From the choice of MeatEater’s name to its creative formula, Rinella celebrates the connections food can provide to both human communities and natural ecosystems. Likewise, MeatEater has woven conservation content into the fiber of its many productions, educating audiences about important natural resource issues, taking bold positions, and even raising money for protecting habitat. It’s no coincidence, for example, that when President Trump announced his goal to protect Alaska’s Bristol Bay from the Pebble Mine, Donald Trump Jr. made the announcement on the MeatEater podcast.

Audiences and advertisers rewarded MeatEater with an enormously loyal and appreciative fanbase.

Steve’s style of storytelling reflects both relentless curiosity and deep respectfulness. MeatEater stands out because it provides content that reflects outdoor activities as intellectual pursuits, not simply as recreation. Through his books, articles and podcast interviews, Rinella has shared his platforms with artists, filmmakers, biologists, anthropologists, pathologists and a host of other fascinating thinkers. He has also amplified the voices of different cultures, including Indigenous voices from the High Arctic to the Amazon.

Steve Rinella stands out as an expert interviewer. One week, he may discuss the predator-prey population dynamics with a university professor. The next, he may chat up the locals knee-deep in a Louisiana swamp, discussing the best methods for jigging bullfrogs. The point is, no matter who Rinella has as a guest, the person is treated with utmost respect and a probing mind.

Since the emergence of the internet, the mass media has gone through upheaval, perhaps unparalleled since the dawn of the printing press. One result is greater access for producers and more choices for consumers. But downsides include increased gateways for misinformation and algorithms that reward division. In that atmosphere, Steve Rinella continues to tell intriguing stories, seek out facts, and bring people together.

Rinella has been called a “celebrity hunter.” In this case, he has done much worthy of celebration. Thank you for recognizing that.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Long". The signature is stylized with a large, looped "B" and a long, horizontal stroke for the "L".

Ben Long  
Conservationist and Author  
Kalispell, Montana.





President Seth Bodnar  
University of Montana  
32 Campus Drive  
Missoula, MT 59812

November 18, 2024

Dear President Bodnar,

It is with great enthusiasm that I write this nomination for Steven Rinella for an Honorary Doctorate Degree from the University of Montana. Rinella is the founder of the MeatEater franchise, a platform that has significantly influenced conservation and natural resource stewardship. By combining his talents in creative writing, entrepreneurship, and ethical hunting, Rinella has reshaped the way Americans perceive hunting by elevating dialogue around hunting and inspiring a deeper appreciation for its role in conservation.

Rinella graduated from University of Montana with a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing. His time at the university played a pivotal role in shaping his career as a writer and storyteller, merging his love for the outdoors with his literary pursuits and leading to MeatEater Inc. Rinella's creative media influence begins with several books, notably, *MeatEater: Adventures from the Life of an American Hunter* which was the springboard for the MeatEater podcast. The MeatEater podcast ranks among the top outdoor podcasts in the nation and has several spin-off series all connecting hunting, conservation, and field to table cooking. In 2018, Rinella expanded his media platform by adding a Netflix show with the same title and furthering his reach. Rinella often emphasizes the role of ethical hunting as a sustainable practice that supports wildlife conservation. He takes the time to educate hunters on the importance of respecting wildlife, following legal guidelines, and participating in practices that ensure healthy ecosystems. His philosophy promotes a deep connection to nature and fosters stewardship of the land and its resources.

What stands out most about Rinella's work is his ability to inspire curiosity about hunting among new and emerging conservationists. At the University of Montana, we offer a course, *Wild Sustenance*, which aligns closely with the ethical hunting principles Rinella champions through his media platforms. When I ask students why they chose to enroll, many cite MeatEater as their primary motivation to explore hunting as a conservation tool. This influence is particularly significant at a time when the nation faces a steady decline in hunting license sales, a trend with cascading effects on funding for wildlife conservation. Recent research in human dimensions has highlighted the need for wildlife organizations to broaden their demographics, with college-aged students identified as a critical group. Rinella's ability to engage this audience through relatable, educational content is not only inspiring a new generation of ethical hunters but also contributing to the sustainability of conservation efforts. Rinella speaks directly to this audience by touching on the components of hunting that resonate with students, sustainable food and connection with nature. Rinella knows that by framing hunting within the larger context of conservation, food sourcing, and respect for nature, he can cultivate a broad audience, bringing attention to conservation in ways that resonate beyond traditional outdoor communities.

Rinella has long championed the sustainable harvest of wild game for food, prioritizing this ethical approach over hunting for sport or trophies. This distinction reflects the values of the University of Montana, where we emphasize sustainable environmental practices and integrate these principles into our curriculum. Rinella's creative writing skills emerged in his first book, *The Scavenger's Guide to Haute Cuisine*, which explores the unique intersection of hunting and gourmet cooking. His focus on wild game cooking has become a defining aspect of his work, permeating his brand and earning him widespread recognition. In addition to authoring several cookbooks, Rinella frequently shares recipes and wild game cooking ideas on his show and podcast, inspiring a new generation of hunters and food enthusiasts. Students are particularly captivated by Rinella's approach to cooking, often turning to MeatEater recipes to prepare wild game dishes for the first time. Rinella's passion for writing about wild game and sharing food resonates deeply with Americans, fostering meaningful conversations about the role of hunting in conservation and the importance of sustainable food practices.

Rinella has the ability to engage broad audiences, often bridging political divides and bringing people together through shared ideas. Through his writings and media platforms, Rinella addresses complex and contentious topics, such as environmental policies, public lands advocacy, and the integration of science into wildlife management. His approach is both savvy and strategic, frequently inviting guests with differing perspectives onto his podcast to expose his audience to a wide spectrum of ideas. Rinella has established himself as an advocate for public lands, emphasizing the importance of preserving access to hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation. His advocacy work often intersects with political issues, sparking debate over his positions on specific policies or legislation. However, Rinella has deliberately positioned himself as a unifying figure, steering clear of overt partisanship to focus on shared values embraced by hunters, anglers, and conservationists alike. One of Rinella's most notable achievements is his ability to bridge gaps among conservation advocacy organizations. He has collaborated with groups like the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP), Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA), and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF), promoting their missions and advancing their work. His efforts have helped secure millions of dollars annually for habitat restoration, wildlife research, and public land access.

I believe the University of Montana would be strengthened by honoring Steven Rinella with a doctorate degree. His reach across audiences and his focus on conservation, ethical hunting, and sustainable food align well with our university community and our alumni. Please reach out if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Covelli Metcalf

Joel Meier Distinguished Professor of Wildland Management  
Senior Associate Dean of Undergraduate Affairs

Carmen Vanbianchi  
Research Director  
carmen@homerange.org



President Seth Bodnar  
University of Montana President's Office 32 Campus Drive, UH109  
Missoula, MT 59812

November 19, 2024

Dear President Bodnar,

As a wildlife researcher, I often feel that the work we do fails to reach beyond the pages of a scientific journal. This is despite the critical importance of securing public understanding and support for the enactment of actionable research outcomes for conservation. Steven Rinella has created a media space that bridges the gap between research and the public, doing so in a way that not only makes biological research accessible and entertaining but also fosters inclusivity for people from diverse backgrounds and viewpoints.

I first met Mr. Rinella in 2017 after listening to the *MeatEater Podcast*. I wrote to thank him for including women's voices in conversations about the outdoors and hunting—a topic typically dominated by men. In response, Mr. Rinella invited me on the podcast to share my experiences as a hunter and wildlife biologist. The ensuing conversation recorded for the podcast was strikingly different from the many other discussions I had had on the topic over the years. Whereas I had often been met with patronizing tones and dismissal of my abilities in the field and contributions to wildlife research, Mr. Rinella met me with respect.

This subtle but important tone set by Mr. Rinella allowed me to engage with an audience traditionally composed of men as a person with valuable insights, rather than as a *woman* with insights. By legitimizing and amplifying non-traditional voices in the conservation and outdoor realm, Mr. Rinella has been incredibly effective at making the space more accessible and welcoming to everyone. In this way, he has broadened the group of Americans who engage with the outdoors and understand the importance of conservation.

In addition to creating a platform where minority voices are respected, Mr. Rinella helps scientists communicate with the public. While biologists may excel at research, we are not always skilled at communicating our work or reaching a broad audience. This is where one of Mr. Rinella's greatest strengths shines: his unparalleled skill as an interviewer enables him to craft conversations that break down complex research in an understandable and engaging way for his audience, regardless of their education, background, or prior knowledge of the subject. I view his ability to translate and package science so that the lay person can understand and enjoy it as an extremely important gift that Mr. Rinella uses to help connect and foster support between research and the public.

In recent years, my own lynx and wildfire research benefited from the profound impact of Mr. Rinella's gift. As a returning guest on the *MeatEater Podcast*, I was not only given the

opportunity to reach a far larger audience than I could have otherwise, but I was also able to effectively communicate the importance of lynx conservation and wildfire resilience—a complicated and nuanced subject—thanks to Mr. Rinella’s skillful guidance of the conversation. The outpouring of support for our research following the podcast was phenomenal. Not only did the podcast fully crowdfund the purchase of snowmobiles for our winter fieldwork, but it also skyrocketed the number of people that now appreciate the conservation issues caused by increasing wildfires. As a result, our research is now well-positioned to communicate the necessary management implications to an informed and supportive audience.

As someone who has personally experienced the enormous impact of Steven Rinella’s exceptional ability to translate research science for a general audience, it is clear to me that he is an outstanding candidate for an honorary doctorate. Few people have done as much as Mr. Rinella to connect the public with nature, biological science, and conservation while uplifting marginalized voices to foster a richer, more inclusive discourse on our natural world and how we should care for it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Carmen Vanbianchi', with a stylized, cursive script.

Carmen Vanbianchi  
Research Director  
Home Range Wildlife Research

November 18, 2024

Dear President Bodnar,

I'm Dan Flores, holder of the A. B. Hammond Chair in the History of the American West at UM from 1992 - 2014. I retired that year to be able to write full-time and moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico. This was obviously just before you assumed the presidency, so let me express my regrets at not getting to meet you.

I'm writing in fulsome support of the honorary doctorate UM is considering bestowing on my former graduate student at UM, Steven Rinella. Steven and I became lifelong friends when he was in Missoula doing his MFA in Creative Writing and I was teaching regular graduate classes in Environmental History. After Steven took courses with me and asked me to serve on his thesis committee, I invited him to dinners and gatherings at my place in the Bitterroot and he returned the favor with invitations to share some of his lavish and variegated wild game dinners. When he landed his first major article at *Outside Magazine*, resulting in a contract for his first book, Steven gleefully called to let me know.

We've been sharing adventures ever since. We've both written about our visit to the famous Clovis mammoth site, and Steven has had me on his Meateater podcast three times now and just asked about a fourth. Last year I talked him into joining me on the Conservation Advisory Board of the "de-extinction" company, Colossal Bioengineering, and only a month ago we did a scene together for his new series on the History Channel, "Hunting for History."

Steven has done something unique in the modern world. As *New York Times Magazine* titled its recent bio piece about him, "A Conservationist with a Gun," Steven has managed to win back a very large piece of the hunting community to environmental values. Once stalwart champions of conservation, hunters had shied from modern environmentalism because of its perceived threat to gun ownership. In the past two decades Steven's Montana-based television show, podcasts, and a steady stream of books has miraculously lured sportsmen back to a wide range of environmental causes. I don't know anyone else, really, who could have done something like this.

As a result of a cultural imprint rooted in Montana but far larger than the state, Steven Rinella is a force for great good in the world. He well deserves the University of Montana's recognition for being one of its famous sons by awarding him an honorary doctorate degree.

Dan Flores  
Professor Emeritus  
University of Montana

17 November 2024

Chris Dombrowski  
Director of Creative Writing  
University of Montana  
[christopher.dombrowski@mso.umt.edu](mailto:christopher.dombrowski@mso.umt.edu)

Dear President Bodnar:

I am writing in emphatic support of the nomination of Steven Rinella for an Honorary Doctorate Degree from the University of Montana. I cannot think of a more deserving and inspiring candidate for the award.

As a graduate of UM's MFA Program, as current Director of Creative Writing (a Program of National Distinction at UM) and as the author of five books, I would like to speak first to the groundbreaking impact of Steve's written work, as well as its origins at UM. While studying nonfiction in the MFA, Steve worked closely with beloved Professor Deidre McNamer, who, after observing Steve's hunter-gatherer obsession, gave him the 1903 classic by famed French chef Auguste Escoffier, *Le Guide Culinaire*, a singular gift to say the least, which would come to serve as the impetus and template to Steve's groundbreaking debut book, *A Scavenger's Guide to Haute Cuisine*. Soon after researching a recipe by Escoffier that called for—if I recall correctly—squab eggs, Steve asked to borrow my long-handled fishing net so that he could pilfer pigeon eggs from the nests under the I-90 overpass. Missoula at the turn of the millennium: a formative time to be sure.

Published in 2006 by Miramax Books, *A Scavenger's Guide to Haute Cuisine: How I Spent a Year in the American Wild to Re-create a Feast from the Classic Recipes of French Master Chef Auguste Escoffier*, took the book world by storm. "If Jack Kerouac had hung out with Julia Child instead of Neal Cassidy," proclaimed *The Wall Street Journal*, "this book might have been written fifty years ago." *Men's Journal* called it "A warped, wonderful memoir of cooking and eating," and it was lauded everywhere from National Public Radio to the *Los Angeles Times*. By now a correspondent for *Outside*, Steve became an instant literary star. But even the extensive book buzz paled in comparison to the localvore, conservation-based food ethic—a movement, it's fair to say—that he inspired and to which he gave eloquent voice.

Three years later Random House published Steve's follow up, *American Buffalo: In Search of a Lost Icon*, which again gained praise from a wide variety of outlets, from *Time Out New York* to *Time*, from *Rocky Mountain News* to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the latter of which called it "a lesson for the head, the heart, and the stomach," a quote that could describe the ethos behind all of Steve's work. *American Buffalo* won The Sigurd F Nelson Nature Writing Award and the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association Award, among others. Over the next fifteen years, Steve would go on to publish eight more books, including a *New York Times* #1 Bestseller, and publish work in *The New Yorker*, *Oprah*, *Salon*, *The Best American* series, and many others—in

addition to starting a very successful media company and starring in multiple television shows including the hit Netflix series of his own creation *MeatEater*.

Back when we were students together (and occasional hunting and fishing partners) in the early 2000s, I would never have been able to envision the gargantuan impact that Steve would go on to have in the outdoor media world, the millions of viewers and listeners his storytelling would touch. But I knew with conviction that his written work would alter the literary landscape. He has possessed from the beginning an authentic voice that traverses an original world, a rarified combination to be sure. Perhaps most importantly, he has used his platform to highlight conservation efforts across the country, most notably the fight to preserve public lands.

In closing, I would like to reiterate my enthusiastic support of the nomination of Steven Rinella for an Honorary Doctorate from UM. The Creative Writing Program is proud to cite Steve among our illustrious alums; this honor would only further cement his reputation as one of the most important voices of his generation.

Sincerely,

Chris Dombrowski



November 19, 2024

Dear President Bodnar:

I'm honored and delighted to write a letter in support of Steven Rinella's nomination for an honorary doctorate at the University of Montana—an honor that I'm sure will be extremely meaningful to him and inspiring to others.

I first met Steve when I became his editor and publisher for his book *American Buffalo*, a history of the American buffalo in America, told through the lens of his solo hunt for a buffalo in Alaska. His knowledge of natural history was (and remains) remarkable—he is a voracious reader, and his understanding of the natural sciences combined with his vast experiential knowledge makes him unique in his field. But what was even more compelling to me as an editor was his natural ability as a storyteller. Steve is able to draw in the most unlikely range of readers, including a city girl like me, to bring us closer to the natural world through his always engaging blend of narrative and information. I went on to publish his two hunting handbooks and his first cookbook, and as I have watched his audience grow, through his TV show, his podcast, his social media presence, and as a talking head in the news and documentaries, I have been awed by his fans' degree of engagement. Recently, at a dinner, I asked a young man who had been talking passionately about fishing if he was aware of Steve. It turned out that Steve was his hero (imagine his reaction when he learned that I knew him), and he announced to the table that Steve had done more for conservation of the wilderness than anyone he could think of. I felt so proud at that moment for having had a hand in bringing his writing to readers—and I realized that working with him changed me too, as I have gone on to publish other significant voices writing in that space.

Steve has a rare combination of true brilliance, deep knowledge, charisma, openness, and talent as a writer. His respect for the natural world is embedded in all of his writing and in the way he leads his life. As he was to the young man at dinner, he is a role model to so many men and women who care about the wilderness and want to preserve it; his is a much-needed voice at this moment, as our open lands become vulnerable to development. And because he is a truly curious person, he is able in the way so few are to transcend the political divide and unite people in their love for the natural world and their passion for conservation.

***Spiegel and Grau***

***Cindy Spiegel***  
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Steven Rinella is one of my heroes too; my admiration for him is boundless. Receiving an honorary doctorate from the University of Montana, where he studied and near where he lives, would signal the importance of his work and inspire others to be respectful stewards of the land.

Sincerely,

Celina Spiegel  
CEO, Spiegel & Grau

***Spiegel and Grau***

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President Seth Bodnar  
University of Montana  
University Hall 109  
Missoula, MT 59812

Dear President Bodnar,

It is my great pleasure to enthusiastically support Steve Rinella's nomination for an honorary doctorate from the University of Montana. His remarkable contributions to conservation and natural resource stewardship have significantly influenced the national dialogue on these critical topics. Through his influential platform, Mr. Rinella has created a unique intersection of conservation, science, and culture, making these subjects both accessible and impactful. By emphasizing education and storytelling grounded in evidence-based science, he has engaged audiences far beyond traditional conservation circles.

At the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, I have led teams behind the development of the Merlin Bird ID app and eBird, global citizen science platforms that have amassed 2 billion bird observations and engaged over 20 million participants. As a conservation nonprofit within Cornell University, we work at the intersection of science, public engagement, and conservation—closely aligning with Mr. Rinella's mission. Like him, we transcend geographic and political boundaries, delivering science-rooted messages to diverse audiences.

I first encountered Mr. Rinella's work in 2018 and was immediately impressed by his ability to communicate complex conservation challenges in ways that are readily understood and relatable with outdoor communities. Our organizations share the goal of inspiring people to love wildlife, become informed, and take meaningful action. Mr. Rinella's work has since become a model for how we approach challenging conservation topics.

Through his creative approach to public engagement with conservation, Mr. Rinella ensures that issues like habitat restoration, biodiversity loss, and wildlife management reach and resonate with diverse audiences. His focus on public lands and wildlife stewardship mirrors values shared by birdwatchers and outdoor enthusiasts, bridging communities, and cultivating a sense of shared responsibility for the natural world. In an era where conservation often polarizes, his measured, non-partisan approach fosters collaboration among scientists, hunters, birders,

policymakers, and educators. His work amplifies the importance of preserving biodiversity and habitat while celebrating the deep connections between people and nature across cultures.

Thank you for considering this nomination. It is an honor to offer my full support for Steve Rinella's candidacy. His contributions to conservation have left an indelible mark on Montana and beyond. I am confident his legacy will inspire future generations to cherish and protect the natural world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessie Barry". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "y".

Jessie Barry

Program Manager, Merlin and Macaulay Library  
Cornell Lab of Ornithology  
Cornell University



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November 20, 2024

President Seth Bodnar  
University of Montana President's Office  
32 Campus Drive, UH 109  
Missoula, MT 59812

Dear President Bodnar:

By way of this letter, I would like to extend my full support to the proposal to award Steven Rinella an honorary doctorate degree in Creative Writing at the University of Montana. I have been collaborating with Steve for the last five years and enjoying and benefiting from his work for much longer. Steve is the mastermind and creative director behind The Meateater brand which encompasses much more than the well-known and popular podcast and TV show on Netflix and other platforms. The Meateater website has grown into a reliable information hub with contributions that lean heavily on subject matter experts for the various topics they write about. The podcast, TV show, and Web information is reliable in that it's based on good solid science and common sense. Skepticism reigns to filter out information that's being passed off as good science, but is in fact not.

I have always appreciated The Meateater support for wildlife professionals working in the field. If information is discussed on their platform that turns out to be more complex than presented, Steve and his coworkers are quick to correct that information in the public space. Steve's commitment to solid information is what makes that happen. I gravitated to the Meateater brand with all of its information outlets because of the emphasis of providing reliable knowledge in an entertaining way rather than just entertainment. Early in my career, I never paid attention to outdoor media or the personalities behind it. It simply didn't resonate with me as it seemed to be all about killing animals rather than the conservation needed to provide those animals or the deeper, more ethical issues involved. Steve, with his Meateater brand, simply revolutionized the way outdoor media talked about conservation and hunting. The focus on the food aspect of harvest and intelligent conversations about sticky ethical situations is what will maintain the support of about 80% of the public for an activity that only 5% of us participate in. Hunting will continue to exist not because it's simply sustainable and science-based, but because the 95% of the public that doesn't hunt sees us as a positive force for conservation. Steven Rinella is providing a platform that I am proud for the nonhunting general population to see and more fully understand.

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**ARIZONA**

azgfd.gov | 602.942.3000

5000 W. CAREFREE HIGHWAY, PHOENIX AZ 85086

**GOVERNOR:** KATIE HOBBS **COMMISSIONERS:** CHAIRMAN CLAY HERNANDEZ, TUCSON | MARSHA PETRIE SUE, SCOTTSDALE | JEFF BUCHANAN, PATAGONIA  
JAMES E. GOUGHNOUR, PAYSON | TODD G. GEILER, PRESCOTT **DIRECTOR:** TOM P. FINLEY **DEPUTY DIRECTOR:** JOSHUA W. HURST

Steve's ongoing contributions will benefit the conservation community and the nation as a whole for many generations to come. Someone who has made such contributions to the future of sustainable harvest, and the perpetuation of this great system of wildlife conservation, deserves to be recognized in this way as an honorary doctoral recipient.

Please give serious consideration to this proposal as I can't fathom anyone else more deserving.

Sincerely,



Jim Heffelfinger  
Wildlife Science Coordinator  
Arizona Game and Fish Department  
and  
Research Scientist  
School of Natural Resources and the Environment  
University of Arizona  
and  
Chair, Mule Deer Working Group Technical Committee  
Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies  
and  
Member, Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group (SULi)  
International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

# Steven Rinella

Outdoorsman, conservationist, writer, producer, and television and podcast personality who is a passionate advocate for conservation and the protection of public lands.

Bozeman, MT  
[www.themeateater.com](http://www.themeateater.com)  
instagram.com/@stevenrinella  
TikTok: @the\_meateater\_crew  
facebook.com/  
StevenRinellaMeatEater

## EXECUTIVE EXPERIENCE

### **MeatEater, Inc., Bozeman, MT**

Founded with the belief that a deeper understanding of the natural world enriches all of our lives, MeatEater, Inc. brings together leading influencers in the outdoor space to create premium content experiences and unique apparel and equipment.

Founder & Chief Creative Officer  
2018 - Present

The MeatEater Podcast & MeatEater Live Radio, Host  
2013 - Present

MeatEater TV Series, Host & Writer (Seasons 1-12)  
2012 - Present

Executive Producer  
2012 - Present

*MeatEater, MeatEater: Rough Cuts, Bear Grease Roadshow, Montana Walleye Tour, MeatEater Cooks, Wild & Whole: Sourced, Deer Country, Sabertooth, On the Hunt with Janis Putelis, Duck Lore, One Week in November, B-Side Fishing, Pardon My Plate, Fur Hat Ice Tour, MeatEater Hunts, Back 40, Das Boat*

## WRITING EXPERIENCE

### **Book Author / Audiobook Author**

2006-Present

- MeatEater's Campfire Stories: Discoveries, Revelations, and Near Misses - Audiobook original (2024) - *New York Times* Bestseller
- The MeatEater Outdoor Cookbook (2024) - *New York Times* Bestseller
- MeatEater's American History: The Longhunters (1761-1775) - Audiobook original (2024)
- Catch a Crayfish, Count the Stars: Fun Projects, Skills, and Adventures for Outdoor Kids (2023) - #1 *New York Times* Bestseller
- Outdoor Kids in an Inside World: Getting Your Family Out of the House and Radically Engaged with Nature (2022) - *New York Times* Bestseller
- MeatEater's Campfire Stories: Narrow Escapes & More Close Calls (2022)

## AWARDS/DISTINCTIONS

#1 *New York Times* Bestselling Author

WFSA Dr. Vito Genco Shooting Ambassador Award, World Forum on Shooting Activities (2023)

The Ted Trueblood Award, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (2019)

Capital Conservation Achievement Award, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (2017)

Best American Travel Writing anthology inclusion (2016, 2014, 2010, 2003)

Communicator of the Year Award, National Wild Turkey Federation (2014)

Sportsman's Choice Award for Best New Series, Best Host, Best Hunting Show, and Best Educational Show, Sportsman's Channel (2012)

Finalist for Best Television Program, On Location, James Beard Awards (2011)

Sigurd F. Olson Nature Writing Award (2008)

Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association Award (2008)

- MeatEater's Campfire Stories: Close Calls (2021) - *New York Times* Bestseller
- The MeatEater Guide to Wilderness Skills and Survival (2020) - *New York Times* Bestseller
- The MeatEater Fish and Game Cookbook: Recipes and Techniques for Every Hunter and Angler (2018)
- The Complete Guide to Hunting, Cooking, and Butchering Vol 1: Big Game (2015)
- The Complete Guide to Hunting, Cooking, and Butchering Vol 2: Small Game and Fowl (2015)
- MeatEater: Adventures from the Life of an American Hunter (2013)
- American Buffalo (2009)
- The Scavenger's Guide to Haute Cuisine (2006)

## Journalist / Essayist

2000-Present

- *The New York Times, The Free Press, The New Yorker, Los Angeles Times, Outside Magazine, Men's Journal, Men's Fitness, Glamour, O: The Oprah Magazine, Wall Street Journal, Field & Stream, and many others.*

## VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

### Board Member

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

2018- Present

*Collaborative awareness and/or fundraising efforts with National Wild Turkey Federation, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, Ducks Unlimited, Texas Wildlife Association, Pheasants Forever, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, and many other conservation and wildlife organizations.*

## EDUCATION

**University of Montana, Missoula, MT**

*Master of Fine Arts, 2000*

**Grand Valley State University, Allendale, MI**

*Bachelor of Arts, 1996*

## OTHER PROJECTS

### The American Buffalo

Talking Head

Documentary Film by Ken Burns, 2023

### Stars in the Sky: A Hunting Story

Writer & Executive Producer

Documentary Film, 2018