



# AMERICAN PRAIRIE

Celebrating  
the Indomitable  
American Spirit

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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*Ken Burns American Heritage Prize to be awarded to Dr. Sylvia Earle*

*Presented by American Prairie in celebration of the indomitable American spirit*

American Prairie is proud to announce that president and chairman of Mission Blue and former Chief Scientist of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), **Dr. Sylvia Earle** has been named the recipient of the 2024 *Ken Burns American Heritage Prize*. The award will be presented May 1, 2024, at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. The evening's festivities will include remarks by Ken Burns, Sylvia Earle, and American Prairie CEO Alison Fox.

Named in honor of America's most revered visual historian and filmmaker, the *Ken Burns American Heritage Prize* recognizes individuals whose achievements have advanced our collective understanding of America's heritage and the indomitable American spirit of our people. Nominees for the annual Prize consist of visionary artists, authors, educators, filmmakers, historians, and scientists. The candidates are chosen by a National Jury of distinguished leaders who represent communities across the country and share a common appreciation of America's heritage.

*"Dr. Earle is most deserving of this prize and she represents the important work being done in the ocean version of our prairie. I know what it is to be inspired by the frame of a place. It leads you to submit, in the best sense of the word, to larger forces." -Ken Burns*

Dr. Sylvia Earle is the president and chairman of [Mission Blue](#), a National Geographic Society Explorer at Large, Founder of Deep Ocean Exploration and Research Inc. (DOER), Chair of the Advisory Council for the Harte Research Institute, and former Chief Scientist of NOAA. She is an oceanographer, explorer, author, and lecturer with a lifetime of experience as a field research scientist, government official, and director for corporate and non-profit organizations.

*"I am honored to receive this award from American Prairie and in Ken Burns's name. It represents the connection between the important work being done on the prairie and in the ocean. Knowledge of the consequences is coming into focus, and connecting the land and the ocean is essential." -Dr. Sylvia Earle.*

A scientist, explorer, and educator, Dr. Earle earned her doctorate at Duke University after which she launched her lifelong mission of cataloging every plant species in the Gulf of Mexico.

Dr. Earle was the leader of Tektite II, an expedition sponsored by the U.S. Navy, the Department of the Interior, and NASA in which scientists lived for two consecutive weeks underwater. The expedition



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achieved scientific breakthroughs advancing knowledge of marine life and elevated worldwide public awareness of the importance of conservation of the seas and its various life forms.

Dr. Earle was NOAA's first chief scientist and founder of the Ocean Exploration and Research Corporation and led the first team of United States Women Aquanauts. She was instrumental in persuading President George W. Bush to create the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument around the Hawaiian Atolls and in encouraging President Obama to expand the Monument creating the world's largest marine protected area.

Today, Dr. Earle is an Explorer at Large at the National Geographic Society. More recently, she led the Google Ocean Advisory Council, a team of 30 marine scientists providing content and scientific oversight for the "Ocean in Google Earth." To date, she has led over 100 expeditions, logging more than 7,500 hours underwater.

## About American Prairie

American Prairie's vision is to create a vast and collaboratively managed prairie destination that serves as a fully functioning ecosystem for wildlife, and offers visitors permanent access to the landscape that shaped our nation's character. American Prairie offers visitors an opportunity to learn about and connect with nature on a truly grand scale. Learn more at [americanprairie.org](http://americanprairie.org).

## About Ken Burns

[Ken Burns](http://kenburns.com) has been making documentary films for almost 50 years. Since the Academy® Award-nominated Brooklyn Bridge in 1981, Ken has gone on to direct and produce some of the most acclaimed historical documentaries ever made, including *The Civil War*, *Baseball*, *Jazz*, *The War*, *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*, *Prohibition*, *The Roosevelts: An Intimate History*, *The Vietnam War*, *Country Music*, *The U.S. and the Holocaust*, and, most recently, *The American Buffalo*.

Future film projects include *Leonardo da Vinci*, *The American Revolution*, *Emancipation to Exodus*, and *LBJ & the Great Society*, among others.

Ken's films have been honored with dozens of major awards, including 16 Emmy® Awards, two GRAMMY Awards, and two Oscar nominations. In September of 2008, at the News & Documentary Emmy® Awards, Ken was honored by the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences with a Lifetime Achievement Award. In November of 2022, Ken was inducted into the Television Academy Hall of Fame.

## About Sylvia Earle

Dr. Sylvia Earle is the President and Chairman of Mission Blue, an Explorer at Large at the National Geographic Society, Founder of Deep Ocean Exploration and Research Inc. (DOER), Chair of the Advisory Council for the Harte Research Institute, and former Chief Scientist of NOAA.



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Author of more than 225 publications and leader of more than 100 expeditions with over 7,500 hours underwater, Dr. Earle is a graduate of Florida State University with master's and doctoral degrees from Duke University and 34 honorary degrees. Her research concerns the ecology and conservation of marine ecosystems and development of technology for access to the deep sea.

She is the subject of the Emmy® Award Winning Netflix documentary, *Mission Blue*, and the recipient of more than 100 national and international honors and awards including being named *Time Magazine's* first Hero for the Planet, a Living Legend by the Library of Congress, 2014 UNEP Champion of the Earth, *Glamour Magazine's* 2014 Woman of the Year, member of the Netherlands Order of the Golden Ark, and winner of the 2009 TED Prize, the Walter Cronkite Award, the 1996 Explorers Club Medal, the Royal Geographic Society 2011 Patron's Medal, and the National Geographic 2013 Hubbard Medal.