

Southlands: Contributor Guidelines

What is *Southlands*?

Southlands is a new print journal that will publish its debut issue in September 2025—before moving on to a biannual (and, eventually, quarterly) publication schedule. *Southlands* explores the diverse ways Southerners connect with the natural world.

Think *Garden & Gun* but more dirtbag, or the *Bitter Southerner* out in the woods. We build connections between the people, species, and landscapes of the South through storytelling. We emphasize stories of the human relationship with a more-than-human world, including adventurous travel and outdoor sports—from hunting and fishing to paddling and backpacking to gardening and farming, even—and thoughtful coverage of the environmental issues impacting the Southern landscape.



Tentative mock-ups – the branding isn't yet finalized - please do not distribute

Who is behind this?

Right now, just me—Boyce Upholt, founder and editor-in-chief. I'm a freelance writer, the winner of a James Beard Award for investigative journalism and the Willie Morris Award for Southern Writing. I'm based in New Orleans, and I've long been focused on Southern environmental issues. My debut book, *The Great River*, was published by W.W. Norton last year. If you have questions, you can find my email on [my website](#)—though if you're pitching, please use the address further down in this document.

What are we looking for?

At the magazine's core lies its features and feature-length photo essays: deeply reported stories or immersive narratives that bring readers into the heart of the Southern wild. Features will range in length from 1,500 to over 4,000 words. I'm aiming for about half of these stories to be inspirational and aspirational—basically, showcasing the cool s--- that it's possible to do here in the South—and half to provoke readers to think critically about their connection to nature and/or to the Southern community at large.

Besides the features, there are several other departments, which you'll find described at length below. And note that the whole magazine is a work in progress! So if you have a great idea that doesn't quite fit these departments, I'd still love to hear it.

I'm open to hearing from both writers and artists/photographers—together or separately. If you have a great idea but need a partner I'm happy to be a matchmaker.

And, I should note, I have some story *ideas* for the first issue that I may wind up assigning; so even if you don't have a specific pitch yet, but you're a professional writer or photographer with a track record of producing good work on these topics, please introduce yourself.

Is there a theme?

Yes! Issue one will focus on *the Nature of Southern Nature*. The idea is to explore whether there is a particularly "Southern" relationship with nature, distinct from, say, the Western ideas of wilderness and public lands that so often dominate our public imagination. How do Southerners relate to their landscapes differently? What traditions shape our relationship with nature? How are changing demographics and climate reshaping these connections? But part of the fun of a theme is bending it in different directions, so interpret this how you will.

What do you pay?

Less than I wish, at least for now. I'm bootstrapping this first issue, and my goal is to keep editorial costs under \$20,000; beyond that, things will be flexible. To be more clear, I'm expecting to pay \$250 to \$400 for the shorter and more essayistic content, and up to \$1500 per contributor for the heftiest features. The specific fee will depend on the complexity of each assignment.

What's the timeline?

It's really important to me to get the editorial mix just right in this first issue, so I'm going to keep the pitch window open until March 15; then, only after the submissions are closed, I'll make assignments—so expect to hear back in early April. (And please make very clear if yours is a simultaneous submission.) I'll need drafts by early July.

How should I send pitches?

Please send an email to southlandspitches@gmail.com, **including the phrase "freelancer pitch" in the subject line**. Be sure to showcase your writing abilities, and make clear how this is

not just a *topic* but a story: how will the piece be structured? How will you conduct your reporting? Important, too, is how you will surprise readers, how you might provoke new thoughts. And all that in just a few brief paragraphs, please! And give me a bit about yourself, too, please—where you’re based, what you’ve published before, and why you’re particularly suited for this story.

For reference, [here](#) is an example of one of my successful pitches—not a fit for *Southlands*, but an example of the level of detail and research that’s needed. I also share [this template](#) with students when I teach magazine writing. Given the high volume of pitches I’m receiving, many AI-generated, **I will not be responding to pitches that do not include: a description of a clear, central storyline/thesis; some sense of the writing and scenic quality; and a viable and specific reporting plan** (e.g. I need to know not just that you’ll talk to “scientists,” but have some sense that you’ll know how those scientists are).

Note that if your idea is more essayistic—that is, dependent on voice, personal epiphanies, personal experiences, etc.—I will likely need to read a draft before considering the assignment, especially if you have limited previous professional publication experience.

Departments

Feature Well

Our features blend immersive storytelling with deep reporting about the South's landscapes and the people who shape them.

Major features

Long-form stories that blend immersive storytelling with deep reporting. 2,500+ words, three per issue. A successful feature pitch *must* be either essential or surprising—ideally both. In other words, it must say something that every sporting or nature-loving Southerner needs to hear, or it must blow readers’ minds, either by exposing them to a corner of the South they did not know about, or by prompting them to reconsider long-held ideas.

Example (and note that all these examples are just thought experiments; if you can put meat on their bones, feel free to pick up the pitch): "After the Storms," a reported feature examining how western North Carolina's outdoor recreation economy is rebuilding after Hurricane Helene—examining how trail builders, outfitters, or local officials balance quick reopening with long-term resilience while exploring how climate change is reshaping the region's relationship with its mountains. Or a feature about how the federal budget cuts or a reshaping the country’s most popular national park.

Note: We welcome both solo and joint pitches for features. If you're a writer with a great story idea or a photographer/illustrator with a compelling visual concept, we're happy to pair you with a complementary collaborator from our network. We're especially interested in stories that require on-the-ground reporting and original photography.

Mini features

Shorter, less reporting-intensive features, 1,000 to 2,000 words.

Photo essays

Visual stories that explore Southern landscapes and outdoor life through compelling imagery accompanied by extended captions or brief narrative text. We're particularly interested in photo essays that reveal unexpected aspects of familiar places or document emerging changes in Southern landscapes. Photo essays typically include 8-12 images.

Examples: A dawn-to-dusk journey with Tennessee's growing ice climbing community, documenting how climate change has created a brief but intense winter season that draws adventurous souls to the state's frozen waterfalls; an exploration of what the “Gulf of America” name means to coastal fishermen, recreational and commercial, in this strange new era.

The Southlands Guide

An anchor piece in each issue that helps readers understand an iconic Southern site: its geological underpinnings, key species and landscapes, and opportunities for experiencing its nature. Less focused on specific businesses than on helping readers develop a rich understanding of place. Likely to be produced in-house, but we're open to pitches.

Example: An exploration of Georgia's Ocmulgee Mounds as the site transitions to national park status—how the site's ancient earthworks reveal a deep history of human-landscape interaction combined with coverage of the best trails and viewing areas for modern visitors.

Front of Book (“Field Trip”)

Length: 500-1500 words

Dispatches

News-driven pieces about nature-oriented events and trends

Example: The revival of traditional cast net fishing tournaments along the Georgia coast, where a new generation is learning techniques passed down in Gullah Geechee communities

Cohabitants/Larder/Traditions

Essays and reported pieces exploring Southern species, food traditions, and outdoor culture. Larder pieces include at least one recipe.

Example: A look at the mythology surrounding the black bear, on the occasion of Louisiana re-opening the bear-hunting season.

End of Book (“Campfire”)

Reflective pieces that help readers digest and understand the South's relationship with nature.

Musings

Essays or Q&As sharing the thoughts of important Southern thinkers about nature and place. We may also publish poetry that deals with Southern landscapes, ecosystems, or sports.

Length: 800-1,000 words

Southlanders

Profiles of people reshaping our image of the natural South.

Length: 1,000-1,200 words

Bookshelf

Thoughtful reviews of new books about Southern nature and outdoor life.

Length: 800-1,000 words