Game Wardens and Rugged Outdoorsy Sleuths: Crime series set in the Natural World


Outdoorsy types are the new tough guys (and gals) in crime fiction. C. J. Box’s Wyoming game warden Joe Pickett may be the best known of the current crop, but Joe better not look back (as Satchel Paige warned), because, if he does, he’ll likely hear Paul Doiron’s Mike Bowditch, from Maine, gaining on him. And, of course, let’s not forget Nevada Barr’s Anna Pigeon, who is a park ranger rather than a game warden but who was finding trouble in the woods years before any of these newer fellows. This list brings together Pickett, Bowditch, and Pigeon and, for good measure, throws in a “wilderness detective” and a retired cop, both from Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, along with a Wyoming sheriff and a Montana fishing guide. Doiron has said that, in Maine, game wardens are off-road police officers, with all the rights that title suggests, and while not all the characters on this list have quite as much legal sanction to bash heads in the line of duty, they all do what needs doing.

The Jamaica Wild series by Sandi Ault.
Stationed in Northern New Mexico, Bureau of Land Management Resource Protection Agent Jamaica Wild, accompanied by her Wolf companion, solves mysteries blending outdoor adventure, Native culture, Spirituality, and preservation of natural ecosystems.

The Anna Pigeon series by Nevada Barr
Barr’s long-running Anna Pigeon series, starring the intrepid National Park ranger. These mysteries are set in natural setting integral to the mystery.

The Joe Pickett series by C. J. Box
Joe Pickett, star of Box’s long-running series, is a game warden in Wyoming, and like Paul Doiron’s Mike Bowditch, he has a way of angering his superiors while standing up for the natural world in the face of exploitation. Like Maine in Doiron’s novels, the Wyoming high country is a palpable presence in this series, its grandeur continually set against the venality of most human concerns.

The Mike Bowditch series by Paul Doiron
Set in Maine, Mike Bowditch is a bureaucrat-battling game warden who tracks down murders instead of ordinary game poachers.

The Faux Mystery series by Jim Harrison
Detective Sunderson is a retired cop living in Michigan’s UP and looking forward to some quiet time at a cabin on a trout stream deep in the woods. Not happening.

Woods Cop series by Joseph Haywood
Michigan’s Upper Peninsula provides the rugged setting for Heywood’s series featuring conservation officer Grady Service of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and its bewilderingly diverse population of Native Americans, long-established families, several waves of immigrants, and enough oddball characters for a freak show.

The Joe Leaphorn/Jim Chee series by Tony Hillerman. Written between 1970 and 2006, the 18 titles in this series feature two Navajo Tribal Police Officers set in the Four Corners area of Arizona. Anne Hillerman has continued this series. Joe Leaphorn has retired in series and a new character Bernadette Manuelito has been introduced.

The Holmes on the Range Series by Steve Hockensmith

Jamie Stanley
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Cowboys Otto “Big Red” Amlingmeyer and his brother Gustav “Old Red” in 1890s Montana got interested in being detectives after reading a Sherlock Holmes story. They start their own sleuthing adventures as they travel West from San Francisco to Texas in this humorous series.

**Walter Longmire series by Craig Johnson**
Walt Longmire is the near retired sheriff of Absaroka County in a remote part of Wyoming. Sheriff Longmire is known for his intensity, cultural sensitivity and devotion to Western justice.

**The Sean Stranahan series by Keith McCafferty**
Sheriff Martha Ettinger and fishing guide and part-time detective Sean Stranahan have an off-again, on-again relationship in the McCafferty series set near Montana’s Crazy Mountains. McCafferty knows his mountains and his trout streams as well as anyone on this list.

**The John Marquez series by Kirk Russell**
John Marquez an ex-DEA agent and now a member of the Special Operations Unit of the California Department of Fish and Game in Sacramento. Marquez is a quiet but capable hero who’s focus is to track down poachers intent on trading on vanishing animal species.

**The Ella Clah series by Aimee and David Thurlo**
Ellah Clah is a Navajo Tribal Police special investigator who works in both the white and Navajo worlds and deals with conflicts that arise between the traditionalist and modernist factions on the reservation.