



# Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

**2021 ANNUAL REPORT**



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# Letter from our President



The Wilderness Society's Annual Report on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion highlights the organization's efforts to instill these values at the core of our ever-important conservation movement and learn from this growing journey. TWS firmly believes that any meaningful environmental policy must be guided by inclusive principles to deliver effective, equitable solutions. This year, we bolstered our commitment, advancing these ideals in our workplace, our partnerships, and our major policy initiatives.

2021 continued to challenge our nation's resolve in the face of a turbulent political climate and the ongoing pandemic. Many of the systemic injustices at the center of 2020's national conversation carried over as President Biden entered the White House. With a pro-conservation majority gaining control of both the legislative and executive branches, TWS seized on the positive momentum, partnering with communities of color and Indigenous groups to show the nation's public leaders that a meaningful commitment to conserving nature and addressing the climate crisis must consider all voices.

We advanced critical, inclusive priorities embraced by diverse coalitions at both the state and national levels, such as legislation guaranteeing equitable access to nature through our Urban to Wild programs, new bills to protect Indigenous cultural heritage sites, and working with the Department of the Interior to address racist and offensive place names. Our ongoing work to protect 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030 is grounded in community-led efforts, where we have deepened our relationships with communities of color that have historically been excluded from conservation and disproportionately impacted by environmental degradation.

As an organization that seeks to better support local communities in their fight for clean air, clean water, and access to nature, we strive to reflect the country's rich diversity. Our workforce is becoming younger and more

representative than ever before, an effort that has been informed by ongoing internal conversations on building a more inclusive culture across race, age and gender. Over the last few years, TWS's staff of color has grown from 12 percent in 2015 to 26 percent in 2021 (and 44 percent of our Executive Team), while our staff under 30 years old has grown from 11 percent to 15 percent between 2017 to 2021. Broadening our team's talents and lived experiences has animated the organization and accelerated our efforts to become the change we seek to achieve.

Our work is far from finished, however, as we stare down continued injustices and the accelerating climate crisis, which is disproportionately impacting Indigenous communities and communities of color. Considerations of race and privilege need to be embedded in our work to safeguard our natural resources, as without them, our efforts would miss critical perspectives on equitable access to a healthy environment, cultural significance and history. Looking forward, our place-based initiatives must continue to reflect our nation's diversity, developing broad and representative coalitions unified under a common cause.

On a personal level, I continue to educate myself on what I can do better given my identity, privilege, and role as president of this remarkable organization. Our staff caucuses, listening sessions, and town halls routinely show me the vital importance of having honest discussions and providing space for voices that have been and continue to be excluded as we work towards an inclusive tomorrow. I have learned so much about what it means to be an ally working with this team, to truly be a learning organization, and I am really gratified and emboldened by the direction we are going together.

I am proud of TWS's dedication to ensuring everyone has access to our shared, vibrant landscapes and their enormous benefits for the health of our communities. As we take steps to build upon our progress, I will continue to listen and learn where we can do better, furthering TWS's commitment to conserving nature in equitable ways for all. Only through the hard work and commitment to equitable conservation exhibited by our staff can our society guarantee that our next generations will get to enjoy the bountiful natural world we have today.

Best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jamie Williams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "J" and "W".

**Jamie Williams**  
President

# Letter from our Governing Council Chair



On behalf of the Governing Council, I commend The Wilderness Society's staff for their continuing efforts to center diversity and inclusion to the heart of our conservation journey. Despite the turbulence of these last few years, I am incredibly proud to be a part of The Wilderness Society's ongoing campaign to codify equitable access to nature in both practice and law. 2021 proved to be another year of hurdles as the organization expanded and navigated a new administration but I am delighted by our continued progress towards a sustainable future.

TWS's strategic framework holds diversity, equity, and inclusion as three of its core principles, ensuring that our work serves and benefits all people, especially those who have not always been at the table or been excluded altogether. Climate change, coupled with the extinction crisis, remain the foremost interwoven challenges of our time and it is imperative that we include all views in our shared struggle. To that end, the Governing Council continues to prioritize bringing in new board members with a wide variety of skills and backgrounds so that we meaningfully reflect the nation's diversity. As conservation leaders, we must continue to be bold in evolving ourselves as we lead the charge towards a greener tomorrow.

Now is the time to grow new bonds with communities of color, learn from our Indigenous partners, and motivate all generations to take up this fight alongside us. This work will never be over, but I am confident that our growing team of more diverse professionals across age, race, geography, and experience will hold us steadfast against any obstacle.

Respectfully,

**Michael Mantell**





# Our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion

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The Wilderness Society believes public lands should benefit all of us. Our organization and work must embody the cultures and perspectives of people and communities across our nation, and connect and inspire people to care for the outdoors.

## WHO WE ARE

To be a relevant and successful organization in the 21st century and consistent with our values, we must continually challenge ourselves to ensure we reflect a rapidly-changing nation. We are committed to ensuring that our workforce represents our nation's broad array of racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and political backgrounds. Our effectiveness as an organization is strengthened by a workforce that embodies diversity in all its forms — a rich mix of talent, work experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, and beliefs that we need to fully achieve our mission.

## HOW WE WORK

We will be inclusive in the work that we do, and in the kind of organization we are. Internally this means working as a team that listens to different points of view, especially those who have been historically left out of the conversation and decision-making. It means recognizing the contributions of all of our colleagues, allowing each of us at The Wilderness Society to bring our whole self to work each day. Externally this means ensuring that public lands are inclusive and welcoming, so that our shared wildlands can help people and nature to thrive.

## WHO WE SERVE

We are committed to equity throughout our work, which we define as our commitment to realizing the promise of our public lands and ensuring that all can share in their universal benefits. We seek to respectfully and authentically engage with and learn from communities that have been historically marginalized in the conservation movement or have not equitably benefitted from our public lands. It is by valuing and incorporating perspectives that reflect every corner of our country that we will protect public lands in a way that can truly support the health and well-being of us all, for generations to come.

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

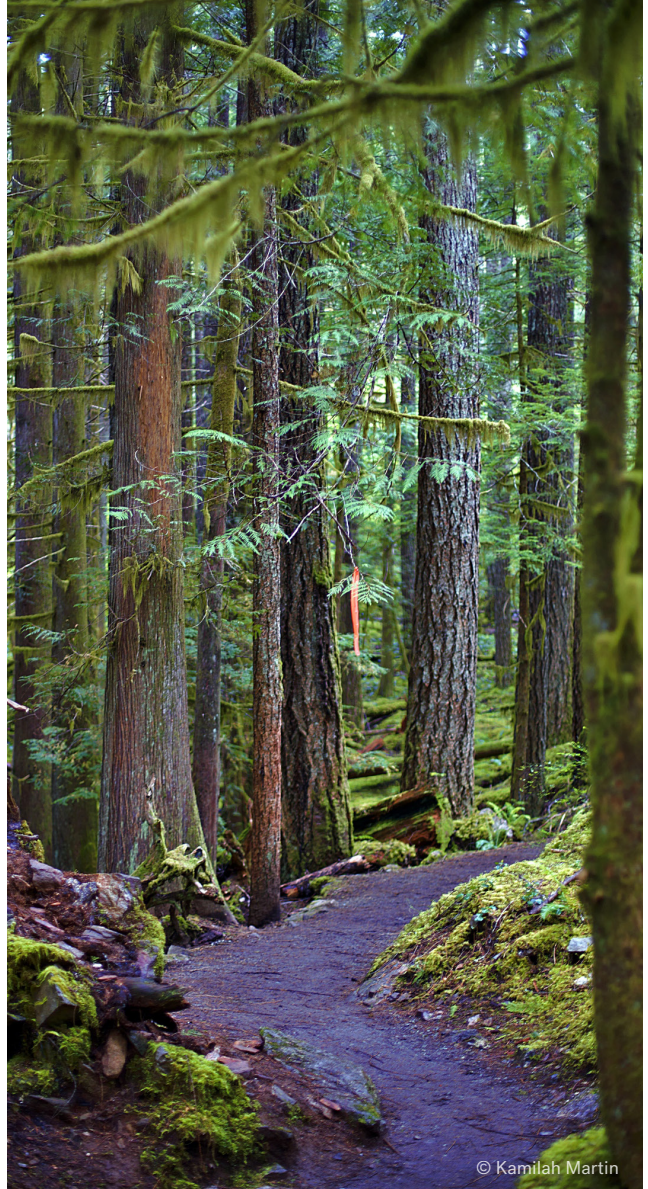
The Wilderness Society recognizes Native American and Indigenous Peoples as the longest-serving stewards of the land. We respect their inherent sovereignty and self-determination and honor treaty rights, including reserved rights that exist off their reservation. We acknowledge the historic and ongoing injustices perpetrated against Indigenous Peoples and are committed to being more conscientious and inclusive and working with Indigenous Peoples to advance the establishment of trust and respect in our relationships. We seek the guidance of Native American and Indigenous Peoples to effectively advocate for the protection of culturally significant lands and the preservation of language and culture.

We strive to support actions that respect the priorities, traditional knowledge, interests and concerns of Native American and Indigenous Peoples to ensure a more just and equitable future.

**DIVERSITY:** Diversity is a measure of the similarities or differences that exist within a group of people.

**EQUITY:** Equity is about fairness. It exists when practices and systems work for everyone and when group identity can't predict success and outcomes.

**INCLUSIVITY:** Inclusivity is the commitment to intentionally engage every person in the group, to make sure they feel respected and their viewpoint is valued, such that each person can bring their whole self to work every day.



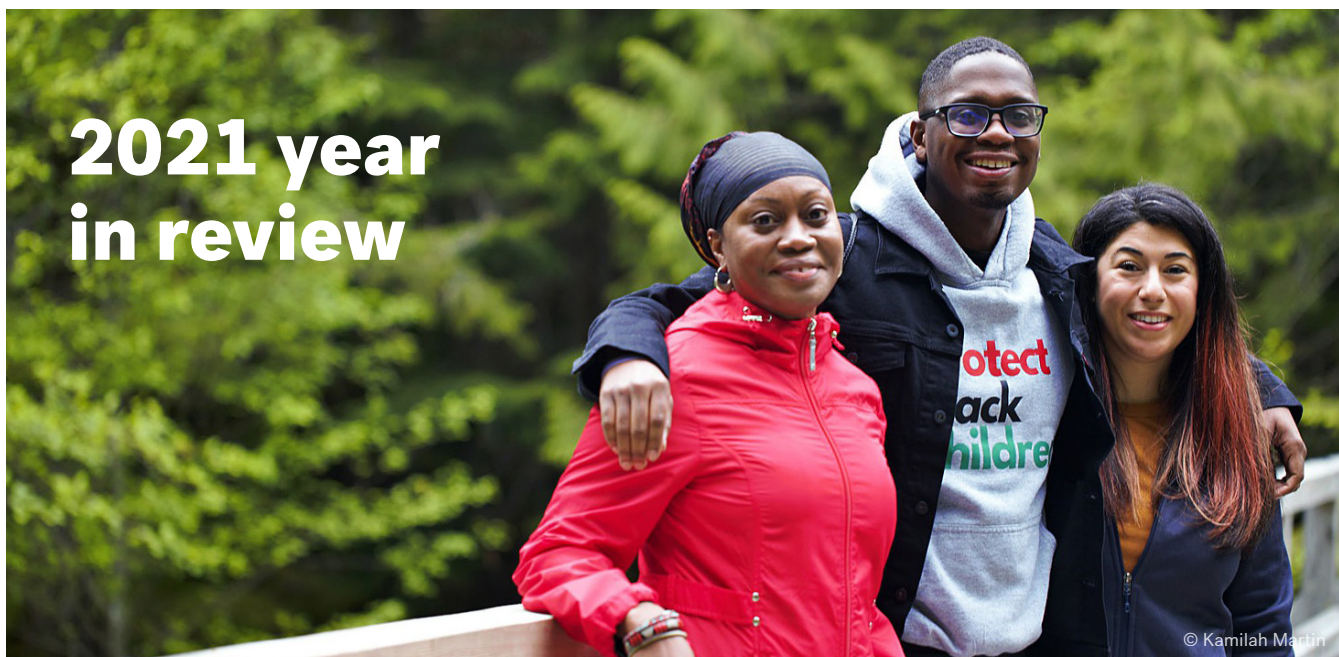
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**Call-in box:** Our Commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion was recently updated to be in line with our inclusive messaging guide. We will undergo a full revision process in 2023 to better represent where we are currently as an organization. In the past few years we've gone through many changes and the way we work has changed deeply. We hope our new commitment will reflect our continual transformation.

\*This year we're including call-in boxes to help acknowledge areas where TWS needs to grow. We believe we can't paint a complete picture of where TWS is on our equity journey without bringing attention to places we have yet to live up to our own standards. Of course, we will never be done growing, but we hope this will help hold us to moving forward in becoming a more equitable organization.



# 2021 year in review



2021 was characterized by a deepening of our equity work throughout the organization, and a growing of our Equity Team. As TWS continues to grow and move forward in our equity journey, providing accountability tools and creating learning opportunities has been a central part of our work.

## STAFF COMPETENCIES

This year TWS developed and cut our new Staff Competencies. These competencies are made up of five pillars to help hold each of us accountable to advancing equity individually, with our teams internally, and in our work externally. Each pillar was crafted to make TWS a more inclusive organization and to combat white supremacy culture, however it may arise. These competencies include 1) Self Awareness, 2) Solution Orientation, 3) Equity Learning, Analysis, and Ownership, 4) Direct Communication and Feedback, and 5) Meaningful Relationships. As TWS moves forward in our journey to become a more equitable organization, these competencies will provide a tool and a guiding light as we examine our policies and practices, but also as we

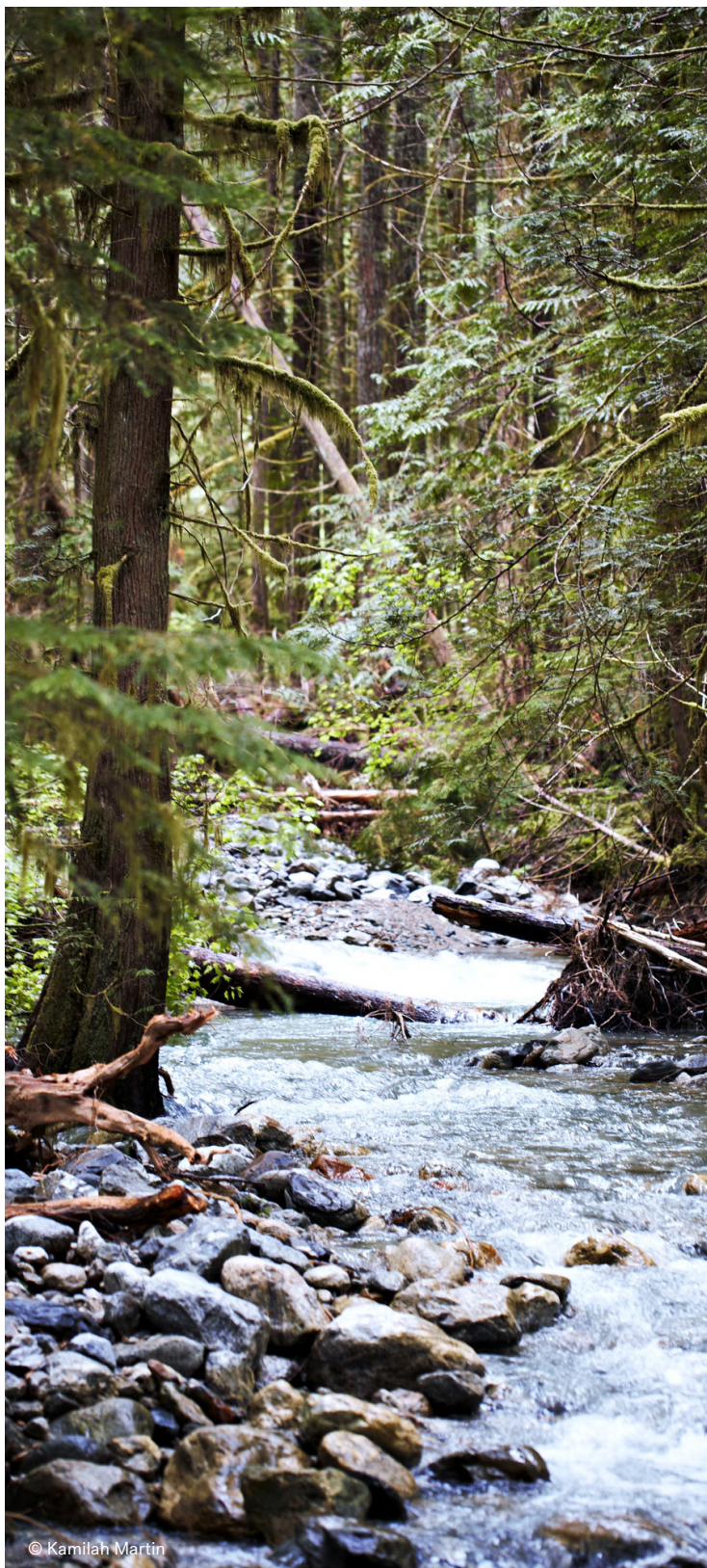
examine ourselves. Crafting these competencies was a long process of research, drafting, feedback, and revision. Developing a way to guide and measure something inherently qualitative is deeply challenging. That being said, there's no way of progressing unless you're willing to let go of the fear of failure and try something new. The competencies are a new space for us, and integrating them will be challenging work, but we have trust in our staff and leadership to use these tools to grow.

## TRAININGS

Through 2021, TWS enlisted the help of the Racial Equity Institute (REI) to deliver mandatory Racial Equity training sessions for all TWS staff. These trainings were crafted to help people begin to understand how systemic racism isn't just a surface level issue but runs deep in our society.

Additionally, as we've become more diverse we've made an investment in professional coaching and support for our staff, with a particular emphasis on members of our senior staff. And as part of this, we engaged a team of coaches, predominantly BIPOC coaches, all trained and certified with a focus on coaching through an equity and inclusion lens.





## REGINALD FLIP HAGOOD MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

This was the first year of the Reginald “Flip” Hagood Mentorship Program. The program is named for TWS’ former Governing Council member and current Honorary Council member, Reginald “Flip” Hagood, who has been a leader of equity in conservation for decades and a mentor to many throughout his life. Through this program we honor his legacy and continue the work to which he has dedicated himself, mentorship. This mentorship program helps Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) on TWS’ staff build connections with other BIPOC team members. The goal is to provide support to staff members who are looking for guidance and new opportunities for growth. The development and retention of staff is a priority for all of TWS and especially the Equity Team, and it’s our hope that programs like this help create community and trust among BIPOC staff while also offering career guidance and support.

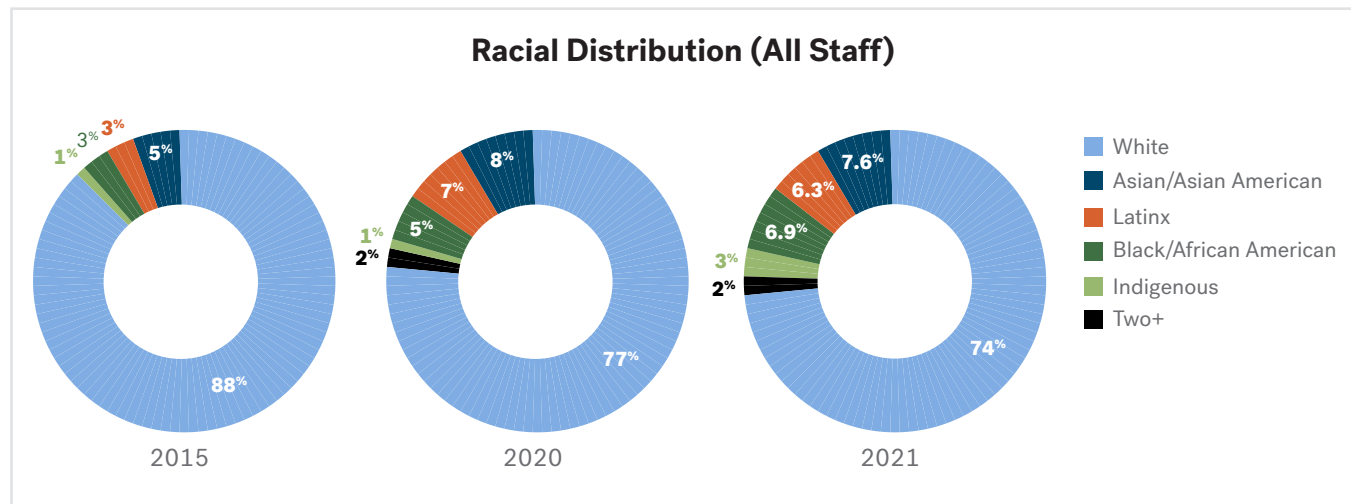
## OUR CAUCUSES

In 2021 we continued our work to create spaces for learning, community, and action with our caucus spaces. Along with our race-based caucuses, we welcomed a new caucus to the fold with the establishment of the Youth Caucus. The Youth Caucus is for staff members 30 and under looking to build community and essential skills as they navigate the professional world as young people. But our caucus spaces aren’t just places for us to learn and connect, they’re where we bring our hardest roadblocks and address some of our biggest weaknesses. We all have our shortcomings, and making time and space to uplift equity isn’t always easy, but these spaces provide a venue for us to challenge ourselves, and find new ways to grow and shape our learning.

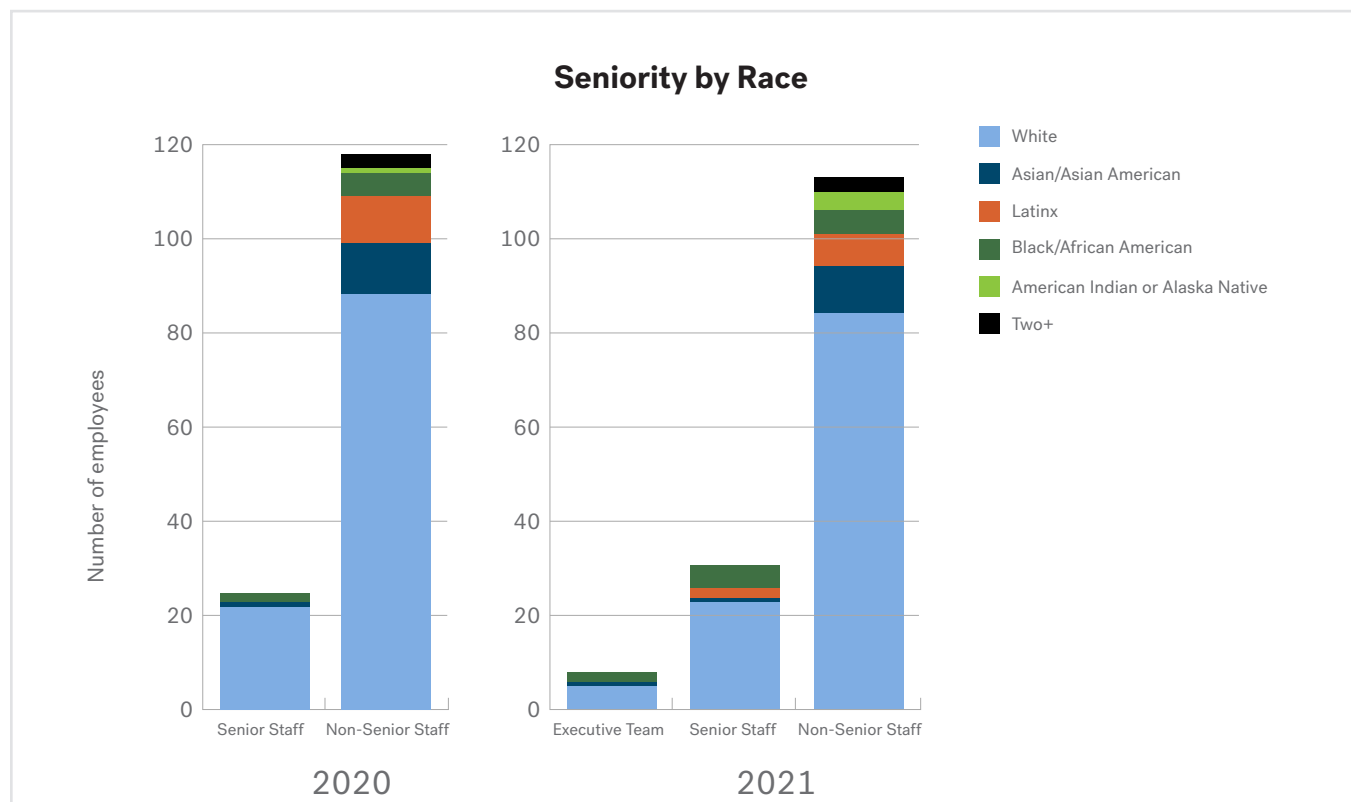


# Staff demographics

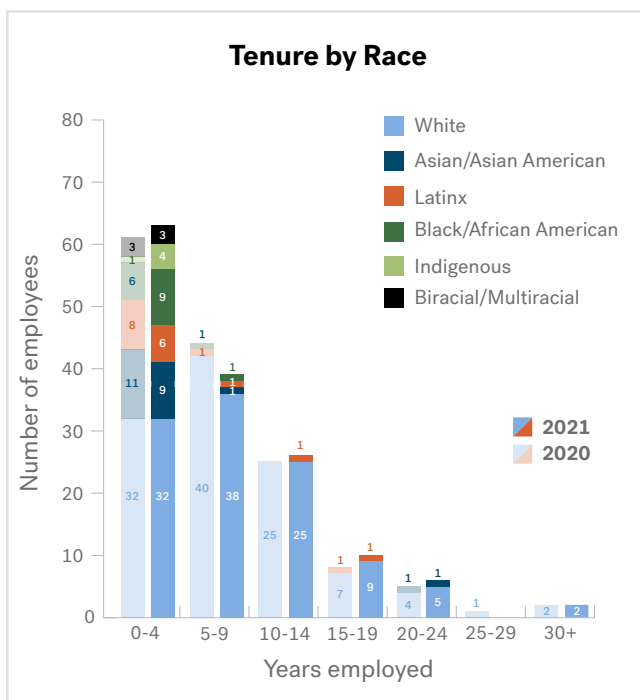
The following details the composition of our staff as of December 31st, 2021 as captured by our HR Employee database. We have shared data from 2020 for comparison and will continue to report on these data points annually. The Wilderness Society had a total of 144 staff members at the end of 2020 and 144 team members at the end of 2020.



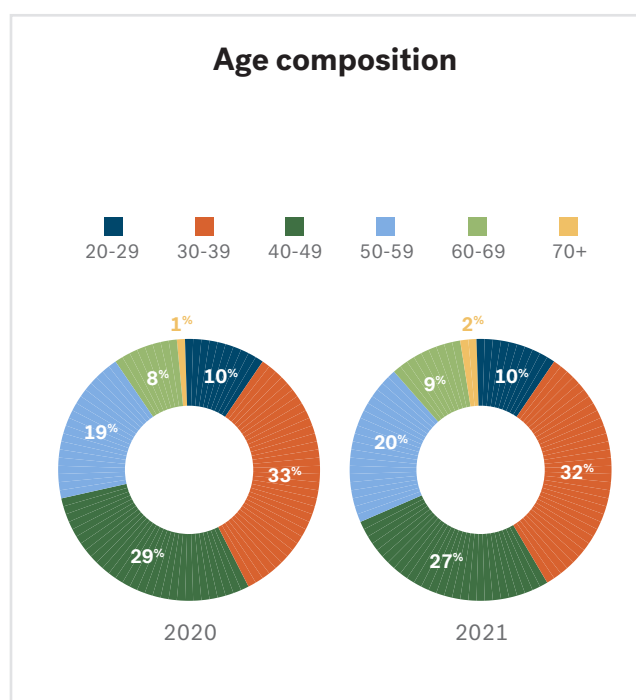
The percentage of staff of color has increased by 14 percentage points over the past 6 years from 12% in 2015 to 26% in 2021.



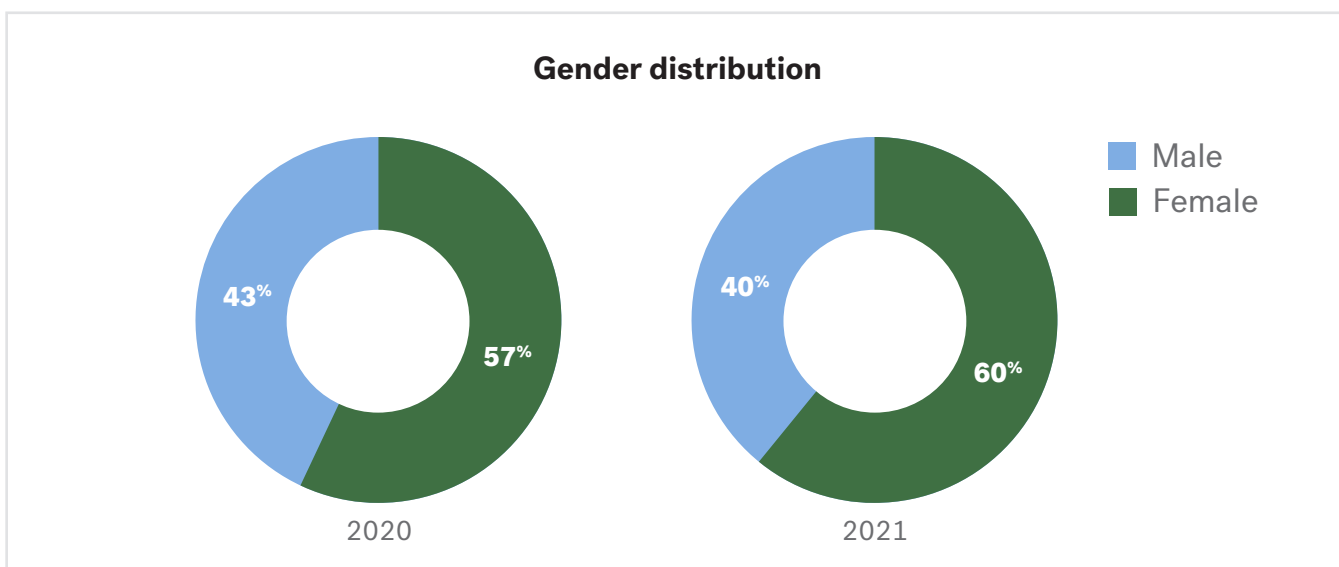
The vast majority of senior staff at The Wilderness Society identify as white. Senior staff added 8 additional team members of color in 2021 going from 12% to 28% Senior Staff of Color.



The vast majority of staff who have been with The Wilderness Society 5 or more years identify as white. The overwhelming majority of staff of color have been with the organization for fewer than 5 years. The percentage of team members of color who have been with the organization for 5 years or more has increased from 2020 (12%) to 2021 (16%).

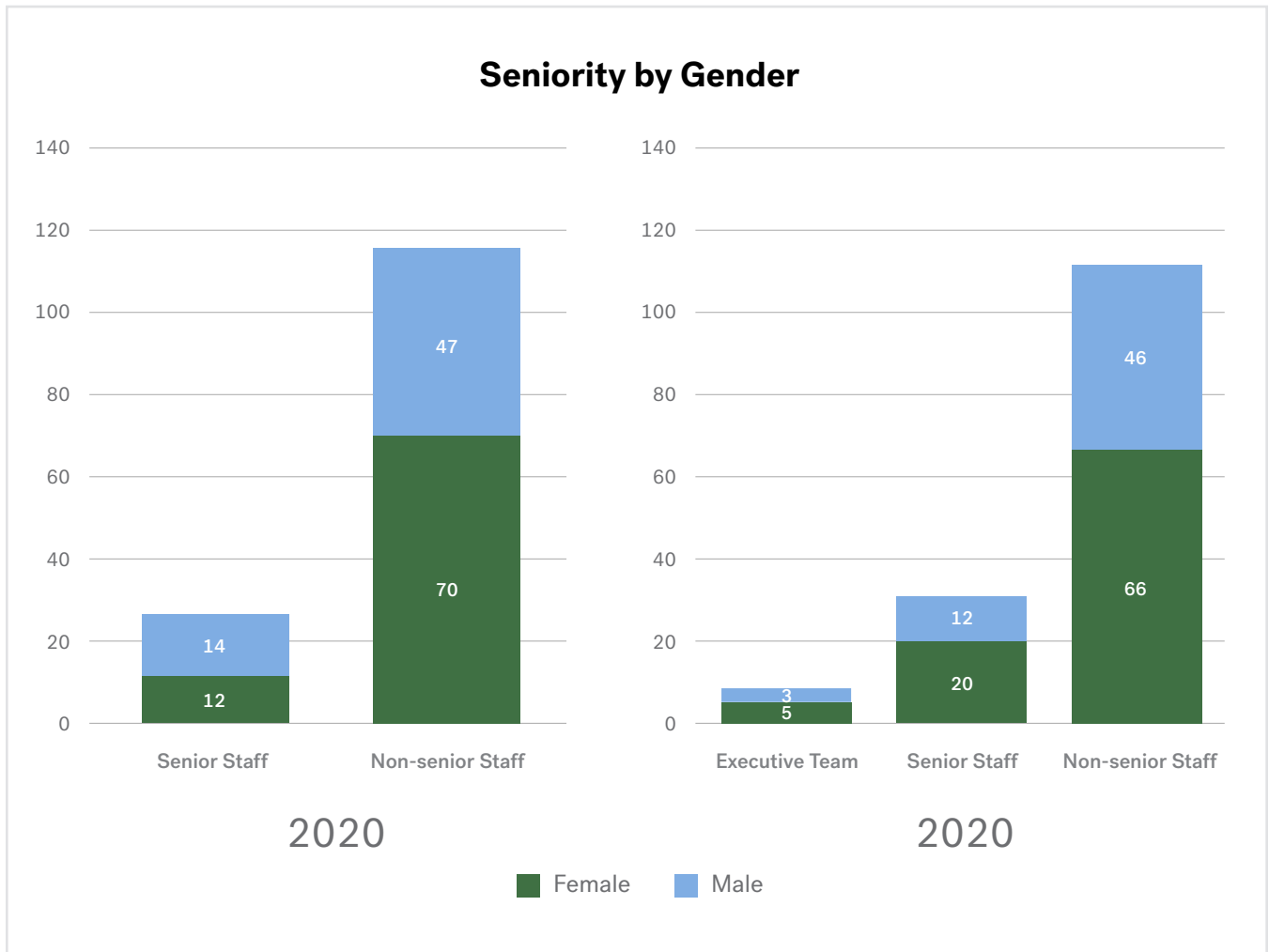


The largest proportion of The Wilderness Society staff respondents (31%) is in their thirties and the smallest proportion of staff (2%) is in their seventies.

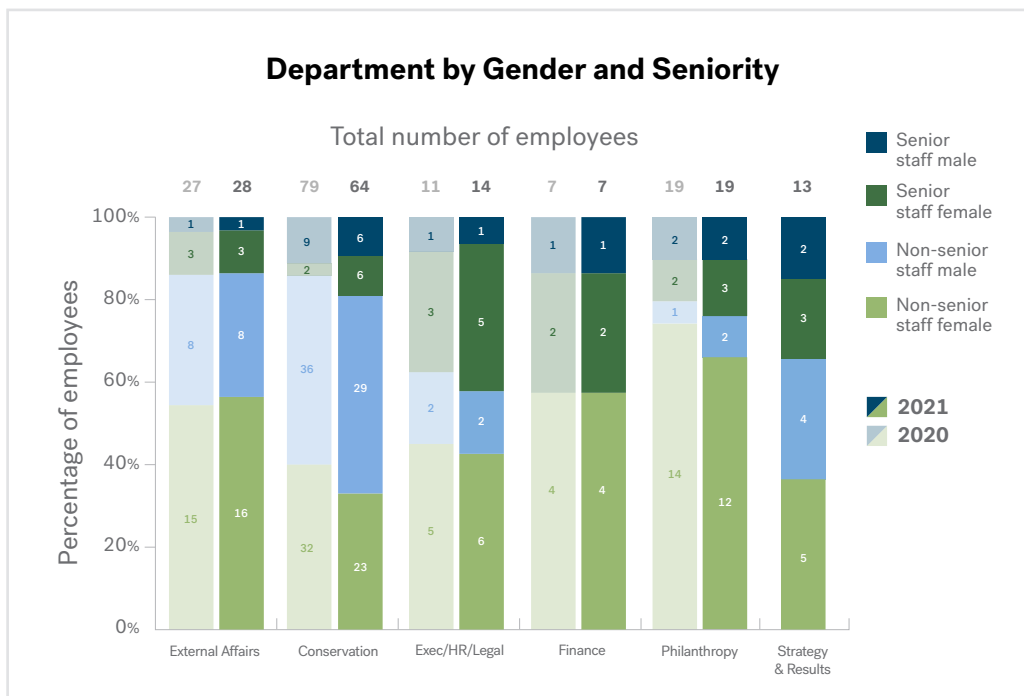


The percentage of female staff members has increased to 60% compared to 40% male.

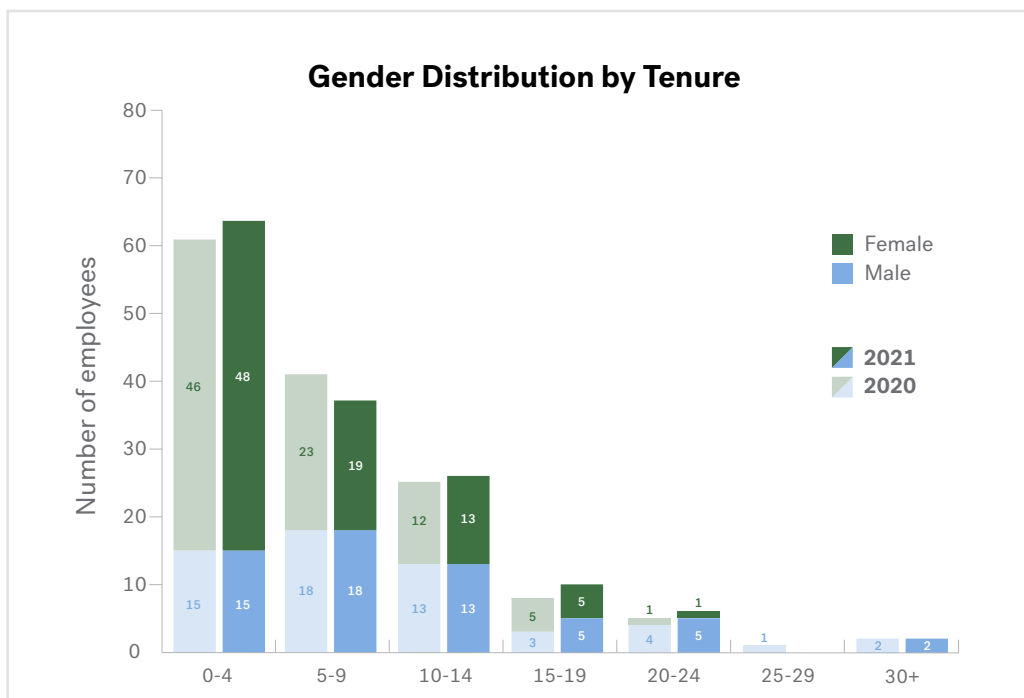




There is a majority female senior staff



Gender balance across the organization is similar to last year's data.



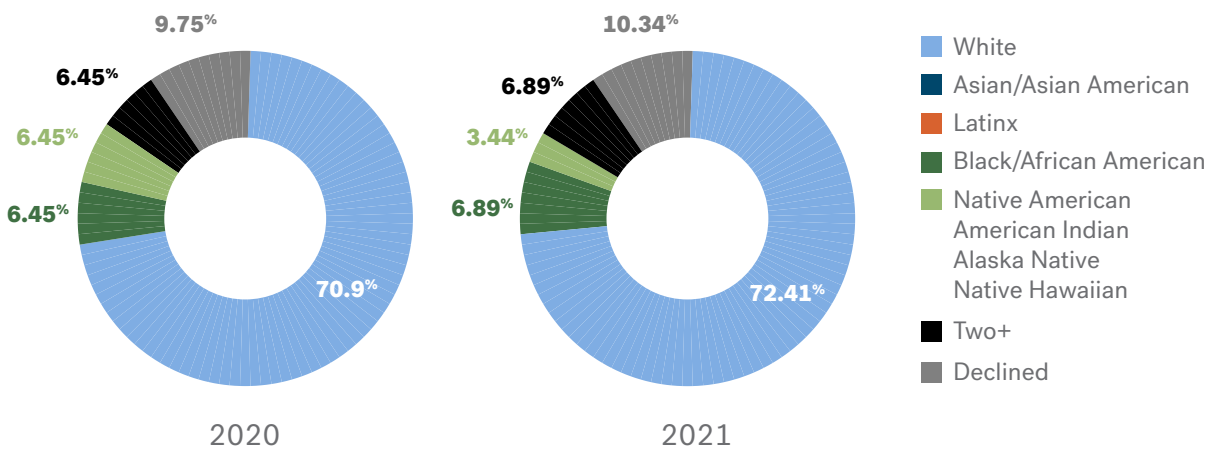
In 2021, 43% of The Wilderness Society staff's tenure has been for four years or less which is 1% more than last year. Most employees who joined in the past four years identify as female. Male staff outnumber female staff as tenure increases. 55% of female staff at The Wilderness Society have a tenure of over 4 years compared to 74s% of male staff.



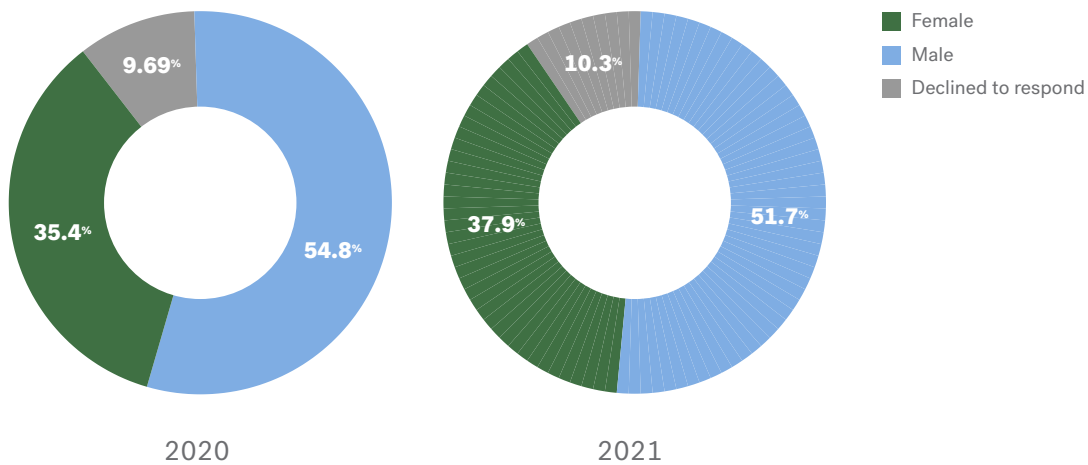
# Board demographics

20/30 board members submitted their data for this survey.

## Members by Race



## Members by Gender



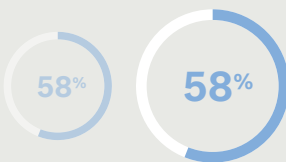
# Equity and diversity in recruitment, hiring and retention

## Quantifiable Metrics

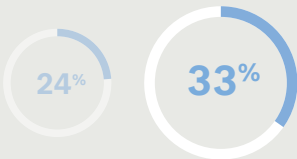
2020 2021

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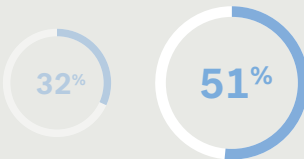
Number of positions hired in 2021 under **TWS recruitment and hiring policy**



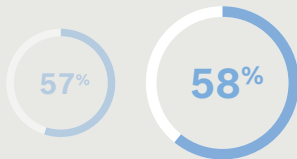
Percentage of hiring processes that achieved targeted interview **pool diversity**



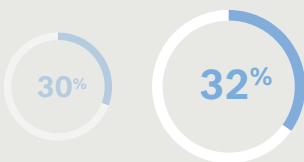
Average percentage of **people of color in each applicant pool**



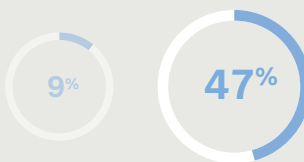
Percentage of **in-person interviews** with applicants who identified as people of color



Percentage of **positions filled** with a person of color



Percentage of **promotions** given to a person of color



Percentage of **departures** by a person of color

**Call-in box:** While we have made progress in making The Wilderness Society more racially diverse, we must acknowledge that in the past year our retention rates suffered a hefty blow. We take this as a sign that we can do more to invest in our Black, Indigenous, and staff of color. We're working on developing programs that serve BIPOC, as highlighted in our year in review and we will work to find new ways of becoming a better organization that our staff want to be a part of for years to come.

# Putting equity into practice

**Call-in box:** Each year when drafting our Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Justice Report we put out a call to our staff to submit and nominate stories to include in our report. We often only receive a few submissions, though we know there is a broad array of work throughout the organization that centers justice and equity and deserves to be highlighted. It's our hope that with future publications we can further engage and excite our staff around sharing their work and stories.

## Gabriel Otero on the Outdoor Equity Grant Program



### PROJECT INTRODUCTION:

The Outdoor Equity Grant Program was a community-based effort to create grants for organizations working to create opportunities for youth and their families from communities who have been systemically marginalized, so that they have equitable opportunities to get involved in recreational activities and experience Colorado's open spaces, state parks, public lands and other outdoor areas. TWS played a role in shepherding this work and ensuring its success.

### WHAT WAS THE INSPIRATION FOR THIS PROJECT INITIALLY?

The inspiration for the Colorado Outdoor Equity Grant Program was initially from New Mexico's outdoor equity grant program. There were a lot of things to learn from that effort. We partnered with Next 100 Colorado which is a group led by people of color all around Colorado, working in the conservation, wildlife, and environmental justice spaces. The political climate and timing created the perfect opportunity for us. We decided to start drafting language, identifying a congressional champion, and then building out a larger coalition. Another major inspiration was understanding that there is inequity among people of color in accessing the outdoors, as well as among youth and low-income people. Their experiences are very different in the outdoors and they often face discrimination, exclusion, and a lack of representation in these spaces. So, before this effort began we sent a letter to state leadership in Colorado, talking about the disparities in people of color's experience in the outdoors, and addressing hiring and representation in state agencies.

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE LESSONS THAT YOU LEARNED FROM THIS WORK?

I learned a lot during this effort, the most important lesson learned doing this work is that relationships are everything. To effectively mobilize a broad community across a state, you have to build and grow relationships with the communities in place. I know folks are passionate about many things, but those dedicated to serving our youth, working with youth every day, trying to provide them a better life, more opportunities, that dedication





is inspiring and vital to all our communities and to the future of conservation. When youth are involved their families are also involved, programs like the Outdoor Equity Grant Program (OEGP) reach entire families and that's how you transform communities. I learned that many small non-profits and even school districts don't have the capacity or resources to apply for an outdoor equity grant program. I worked with many of them, helping them write their grants, wearing my Next 100 Colorado hat, my TWS hat, as well as volunteering my personal time to get this work off the ground in Colorado. There wasn't a network or coalition that existed that brought together outdoor education non-profits, school districts and Tribes in the state. Bringing those groups together and using our collective voice to push this work forward was critical to the success of this effort. Our tribal representation wasn't as strong as I would have liked, they didn't lead in this campaign, they were consulted and did support the Outdoor Equity Grant Program but I would have liked for them to be even more involved. I gained a deeper understanding of the nexus of TWS's work and the concerns of communities in Colorado. It was encouraging to hear from them expressing interest and support for 30x30, climate justice and other TWS priority issues. The fund currently lives

under Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), a state agency that manages all state parks and state land trusts. The nexus between CPW and our work at TWS provides us the opportunity to grow this work in a meaningful way. I also learned that getting annual funding, real dedicated dollars for an outdoor equity fund is challenging and will be a challenge in every state where we stand up an outdoor equity fund, but there are ways to do it and there are states that are ready for outdoor equity funds. I look forward to continuing to lead in this work, because relationships are everything, and I've established relationships with not just Colorado communities but leaders in other states working in outdoor education with youth and families.

#### **WHAT WAS AN ENLIGHTENING MOMENT YOU ENCOUNTERED DURING THIS PROJECT?**

There are many. In my career in conservation, and particularly in the pandemic, you're not always able to connect with different community leaders beyond conservation". For example, those working to break the school-to-prison pipeline, working in social justice, and others. With this effort, there were more opportunities to engage with these partners and now the door is open. That's part of organizing, but you won't always grab their



attention talking about a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) resource management plan– it just doesn't always resonate. With this effort, we talked about funding that's going to help their community, their children, and their future. There were so many people we built relationships with. A lot of folks were like, 'Oh, that's great. I didn't know large green organizations were doing this kind of work.' That was really enlightening to see. We showed up for them with this effort and helped them get more resources for their community. And in turn, very valuable relationships that have come out this effort. I think it's going to really help us as we're working on our 30 by 30 strategic goal, in Colorado and other states.

### **WHERE DO YOU SEE THIS PROJECT GOING IN THE FUTURE? WHAT ARE YOUR VISIONS FOR IT?**

We've received a verbal commitment for additional funding from governmental leadership. But as we know, that doesn't always translate into real action. There's another piece of legislation that went through

in Colorado called the Colorado Wild Pass, that will generate money by spring of next year, and state leadership has said a portion of that will go to the Outdoor Equity Grant program. Also, we're considering the idea of making the program into its own 501(c)3. We believe that could supercharge the fund, and we're working on a marketing campaign as well. We've also had conversations with state leadership where they've expressed interest in tracking how the first grant cycle goes, and our champs are willing to revisit this and see where they can get additional funding as well. In Colorado, it can be difficult to increase funding, but we're confident we'll be able to get some more funding over the coming years. I encourage TWS and partners to continue to support these efforts. I think this is just the beginning. We've seen success and growth in other states, and we'll see it here in Colorado too. There's a lot of opportunity, and I encourage us to continue to support the staff that are working in these spaces.



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# Lia Cheek and Jill Gottesman

## on the Rappahannock Tribe Fones Cliff acquisition

### PROJECT INTRODUCTION:

In April of 2022 the Rappahannock Tribe had more than 460 acres of ancestral lands, called the Fones Cliffs, returned to them. Throughout 2021, The Wilderness Society played a supportive role to help make this happen. While TWS was not a leader in this effort, we believe it's an important story to uplift in this report because it embodies our goals to center equity in our work and illustrates an important step for TWS in supporting tribal sovereignty and Indigenous-led conservation efforts.

### WHAT WAS THE CATALYST FOR THIS PROJECT?

**JILL:** Alexa Sutton Lawrence (TWS' former Southeast Regional Program Director) was an architect of the East Coast Indigenous and Cultural Landscape (ECLIP) program which was started to create a larger umbrella of some of the pieces of work that were already happening here at The Wilderness Society. There was an incredible opportunity that the Chesapeake Conservancy developed to try to purchase the Fones Cliffs to return back to the Rappahannock Tribe. The project was still in its infancy stages when Alexa transitioned to take a leadership role at another organization. I made a commitment to uphold the ECLIP Projects. Unfortunately, we didn't have the team capacity to hit the ground running on the Fones Cliff Project right off the bat. Some time went by and when Lia Cheek came on board as our Senior Director for the Eastern Region in 2021, we had this awesome person who could give us the capacity to move forward and make sure TWS continued its commitment to this project.

**LIA:** I'm so glad you kept the drumbeat going about Fones Cliff. I think at the other end, there had been communications about Fones Cliff at higher levels in the



Lia Cheek



Jill Gottesman

organization. Some of our board members got involved around trying to find funding and communicated with Jamie, President of TWS. And Jamie, from the very beginning, had been very excited about the idea and the story of the Tribe finally having their ancestral land returned. He seemed passionate about seeing TWS support this and having his eye on things from a higher level, as well as pushing on the ground, really helped us to move this project forward. It really lands in a tipping point for The Wilderness Society, this being a private land acquisition for a public lands focused organization. The way we embraced this project on our leadership and staff levels is indicative of how much the organization has grown and how much energy we have for pursuing projects that truly center justice. I think this effort helps us to further consider our place in the Land Back Movement.





### **WHAT WERE SOME OF THE LESSONS THAT YOU LEARNED FROM THIS EFFORT? WHAT WERE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES?**

**LIA:** One of the big lessons that I learned from this effort, was understanding that we have to be really careful not to speak for the Tribe without permission. We have to be super aware and cognizant of every step we take and everything we communicate. If you have not specifically been given permission to speak for the Tribe, then you should not speak at all. We have to ensure that every action we take is done with consent and in consultation with the Tribe. And making sure that we are not stepping between the relationships that the Tribe needs to build with the surrounding institutions or partners that they work with. In fact we ended up doing a lot to water the seeds of those relationships. It's not common for older environmental organizations to make a direct connection between a partner and a high level funder as TWS did, without aiming to receive something in return or serve as a go between. TWS's willingness to step aside and share resources and power with the Rappahannock Tribe is the kind of behavior we need to continue to advance equity and justice in conservation.

**JILL:** Another really eye-opening piece of this for me was around my well-intentioned assumptions that other entities in this process are moving forward with the best interests and the end goal for this land to be back in the Tribe's hands. And for conservation groups and other entities, that's just not the case. I've been

constantly surprised learning about structures and white supremacy culture. I shouldn't still be surprised, but I am that the odds are still so stacked against the land going back to Tribes.

### **WHAT WAS AN ENLIGHTENING MOMENT THAT YOU ENCOUNTERED DURING THIS PROJECT?**

**JILL:** There's definitely been a lot. Especially the opportunity to be present in person on April 1, at the ceremony where Fones Cliff was officially returned to the Rappahannock Tribe. Holding that space was so powerful, especially because Secretary Deb Haaland was in attendance. I was really humbled to be there. Secretary Haaland said that she was going to have to hold back tears and that it was so important to her that the Rappahannock is led by a woman: Chief Anne Richardson. That moment, the two of them hugging and recognizing each other, was so beautiful. They have completely different backgrounds and come from completely different places, and they are such strong leaders. That was incredibly enlightening for me. Just to behold that.

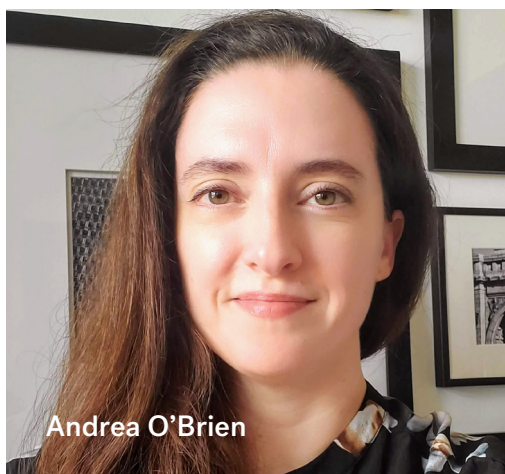
**LIA:** For me, it was seeing the willingness of the partners and in TWS's case, to really put our ego and the desire for credit aside to support this wholeheartedly because it was the right thing to do. Also the diversity of partners, from businesses, other conservation NGOs, individual donors, and government agencies was really inspiring to see come together in a way that was humble and held the Tribe up. That was really inspiring to me. It feels like the future.



## Andrea O'Brien, Liz Siddle, Allie Cohen, and Mary Hsue

### on Forming the Philanthropy Equity Working Group

**Full Working Group:** Ashleigh Chuang, Carolyn Stevens, Lauren Rote, Liese Dart Hodges, Andrea O'Brien, Liz Siddle, Allie Cohen, Mary Hsue, Zeynep Wironen, Tami Rowan



#### PROJECT INTRODUCTION:

In 2021 our Philanthropy Team developed our Philanthropy Equity Commitment to shape Philanthropy's goals to center equity and racial justice in their work. To hold themselves accountable to their mission, and maintain the energy around this commitment, they created the Philanthropy Equity Group. This self-selected Working Group is an example of the ways we hope our staff will take responsibility to build equity in their work and find new strategies to enact change.

On the following page is the commitment.

## 2022 Philanthropy Team Equity Commitment

As an organization, TWS has prioritized a commitment to equity and racial justice, and as an organization we acknowledge our privilege and are committed to unlearn some of the perceived best practices that have perpetuated racial inequity in our work. In Philanthropy, we must consciously reconsider the systems that hold up our current model of and approach to philanthropy. Our focus is on the communities we serve on public lands, on climate change, and on building a sustainable and equitable future.

As such, **we are committed to building a broader base of support** and beginning the work to ensure our donors are a reflection of all the people across this country. We believe approaching this work with a scarcity mindset can encourage fundraisers to over-prioritize relationships with high-wealth funders and devalue others. We are first and foremost accountable to our mission, vision and to the communities we serve, and we recognize, and value equally, all contributions to this work. We are committed to shifting our mindset to operate with abundance to encourage movement building and collaboration.

**We are committed to sharing resources**, such as funding, access, and knowledge. We will use our position of privilege to support others in the work we are doing together. We will not dictate unnecessary terms to partner organizations or operate as a gatekeeper to necessary resources. And we will work to be transparent, authentic, and thoughtful in our efforts and to be mindful of the potential to engage in actions that might be seen as performative rather than truly impactful.

**We are committed to building trust and developing equitable relationships** throughout the organization and with our funders. And we will value the development of strong relationship in equal measure to the value placed on more traditional metrics, such as revenue.

To build something new, non-profit organizations who are committed to justice and equity must work to dismantle a foundation of white supremacy; decolonize the profession; and move away from the harms of exploitative and transactional relationships. There will always be a role for generous philanthropy, and we envision a model that centers equity and community, rather than just money.

We have only just begun the conversation about the power dynamics involved in philanthropy, but we believe that philanthropy should be a space where we reach across divides, where “we move from hoarding to sharing, move from dictating to listening, where we do more than use our power, we share it.” As a department, we are committed to continuing education about the ways in which inequity shows up in our work and how we disrupt racist systems and reimagine the philanthropy landscape. We are committed to an annual review of the Self-Assessment of Racial Justice and Equity and to revisit this Equity Commitment on an annual basis as well, so that it may grow and expand with our understanding.



## WHAT WAS THE INSPIRATION FOR THIS PROJECT AND STARTING THE PHILANTHROPY EQUITY WORKING GROUP?

**ANDREA:** The inspiration for the working group came as we got to the end of our work on developing the Philanthropy commitment, which started with our Philanthropy Staff Retreat. It was a long journey for us as a department. We got to the end of the commitment and thought, ‘great we have this commitment as a guiding document, but how do we put it into practice?’ We were left with a lot more questions to figure out. There’s no roadmap, this is new work, especially for the philanthropy space, which is historically and currently dominated by white people, so we decided to get a group together to discuss and find new ways to actualize our commitment in our work.

**LIZ:** The inspiration for me partly came from TWS’ overarching commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. We in philanthropy had a lot of conversations about it. I also was really inspired by Vu Le’s writing on his blog about nonprofits (Nonprofit AF). Vu had written about how donor centrism, centering the donor in the work and setting them up as the hero, perpetuates racial inequity. He gave voice to a lot of stuff that I had been thinking, but didn’t quite have the words for. And because

of TWS’ commitment to Diversity Equity Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ), Andrea and I, and others in the department were talking about these concepts, and felt empowered to move forward some thinking about how to examine and rectify how our profession upholds inequity.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE LESSONS THAT YOU ALL HAVE LEARNED FROM THIS EFFORT? WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE CHALLENGES?

**ANDREA:** Centering DEIJ comes up against a lot of best practices that we’ve been taught about how to be successful in philanthropy. And it’s going to be tough to undo that. It’s going to be hard work. But that’s what’s exciting.

**MARY:** We’re on a learning journey to do this work well and authentically. We have a lot to learn. Those of us who volunteered to be on this Equity Working Group, we ourselves have a lot to learn. This space is new for our sector, so the solutions to the challenges will be new. We have the opportunity to be innovative in how we approach the work.

**ALLIE:** In the last two years, Community Centric Fundraising, and Nonprofit AF (mentioned above) has come out with a lot of great resources to help analyze





our fundraising policy and best practices. There is a lot to think about in how our practices are perpetuating inequities. Some of the things that I've done in my fundraising career are no longer the best practice. As frontline fundraisers, we are measured by how much money we raise. If we're going to measure ourselves by another set of metrics, then we need to adjust our goals. So the question we're asking ourselves is: How will we unlearn and find new strategies to meet our goals?

**LIZ:** It's been really powerful to have a group come together. This is really challenging and big work. It takes a lot to think through what this might mean for our profession. When you think about the big picture, it's easy to think, "How are we going to get there? This is so much..." I'm really grateful to have the group as a place where we're all processing this together. Having that space where you can share those ideas together is hugely important for that kind of growth.

**ALLIE:** Another challenge is that our equity journey as TWS staff is going to be different than that of some of the donors that we're talking to. So, we must understand that people are coming from a different place in this process. That's another layer of how we're learning and applying some of the steps because, the audience that we're talking

to might not be as knowledgeable or might not be in the same place we are on some of these issues or how we're implementing some of these practices. We need to meet donors where they are, and in some cases we might need to educate a donor to bring them along with us.

**ANDREA:** We also have to create new best practices, but we probably won't get it right the first time. With no real roadmap, we need to be courageous enough to try something and then admit when it's not working. We'll have to keep trying new things. There's going to be a lot of discarded projects on the floor that just didn't make it. And I think that's hard when you have "best practices" that you know will get you to your goals, at least your revenue goals, but that aren't taking you down the path you want to be on. A different route may be slower, but it also may have a better destination. We just have to have the patience and determination to try it a different way.

## WHERE DO YOU ALL SEE THIS PROJECT GOING IN THE FUTURE?

**MARY:** We've been discussing the Philanthropy Equity Commitment over the past few meetings, but our focus now is on how we operationalize it. How do we bring it to life? Meaning internally, for our team, for the organization, and how we work with donors and partners. We completed the first-ever review, from an equity perspective, of the Philanthropy Gift Acceptance Policy, a document that underlies many of our operating procedures. We're also looking at volunteerism as a way to advance equity in philanthropy and the broader environmental movement. This emerged from a recent







conversation around valuing contributions of time, talent and treasure equally. We were grappling with the statement in our equity commitment, “...and we will value the development of strong relationships in equal measure to the value placed on more traditional metrics, such as revenue.” We’re in a place where we can examine how we can measure the impact of relationships that are being built, and there’s value in relationships with communities we have not worked to engage with in the past, specifically young people and people of color.

**ALLIE:** Mary and I had been working for over a year to advance the idea that volunteerism is a strong way to bring people close to TWS and help lead them to deeper engagement in our work. We’ve seen success in previous roles at other organizations where we’ve launched unique engagement opportunities to appeal to broader audiences and to allow people to give their time and talent as well as their treasure. We’re excited to explore how we can apply an equity lens as we think about implementing these engagement strategies at TWS. We’ve also made a commitment that this (the Philanthropy Equity Commitment) is essentially a living document, and that we’ll revisit it on an ongoing basis. As we do that, hopefully we get more advanced in how we’re progressing in upholding it.

**ANDREA:** Our hope is that this group tackles specific projects that we believe we need to pull apart, but also that the group would be a collective of people who can advise folks in other channels on things they are working on. Whether it’s a policy, plan, or project, this group could review it with an equity lens, and really approach it from that perspective. We will also connect with the rest of our colleagues on this team and help to ensure old ways get a fresh set of eyes on them, and that we are engaging an equity-centric approach to philanthropy.

## INVESTING IN VOLUNTEERISM

We recognize that in this day and age, time is the most precious asset. Giving time is meaningful from a donor’s perspective, and it often precedes giving treasure. So we’re exploring two initiatives to help cultivate a more diverse future generation of conservationists and philanthropists through volunteerism – Advisory and NextGen Councils.

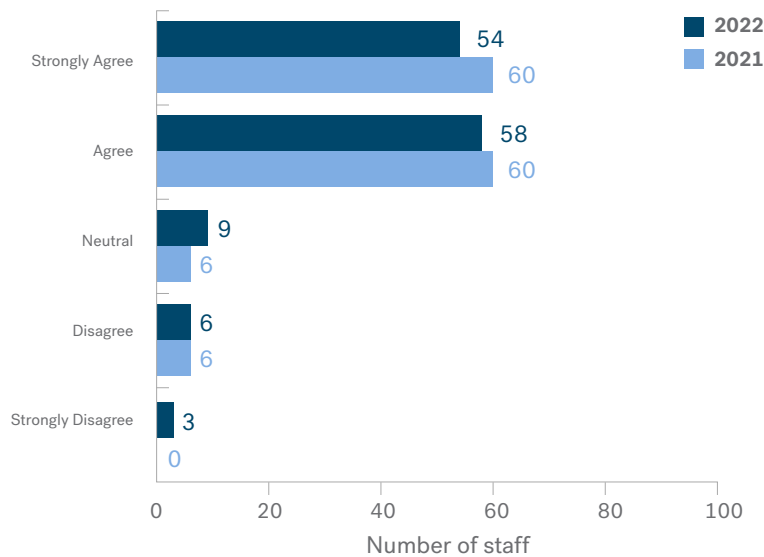
**MARY:** An Advisory Council is a way to engage untapped individuals with passion for our mission and vision, expertise from which our organization would benefit, and the capacity to support our work with time, talent, and treasure. It could be a great introduction to TWS and our community for young people and people of color who want to do something about climate change, species extinction and environmental inequity. The Next Gen Council could take engagement a step further.

**ALLIE:** I’m really excited about the Next Gen Council concept that we’ve been developing within the Major Gifts team. As this idea continues to take shape, our colleague Ashleigh (Chuang) connected the dots of our philanthropy work with that of TWS’ new Youth Caucus which was also discussing ways to engage younger supporters in a volunteer capacity that would focus on cultivating the next generation of TWS supporters and activists. Members of our Equity Working Group and the Youth Caucus got together to discuss these ideas. It’s a great example of collaboration across the organization on issues of equity and inclusivity. And this is just one of the plans we’re hoping to build out as a department to further operationalize our equity commitment.

# Annual workplace culture survey

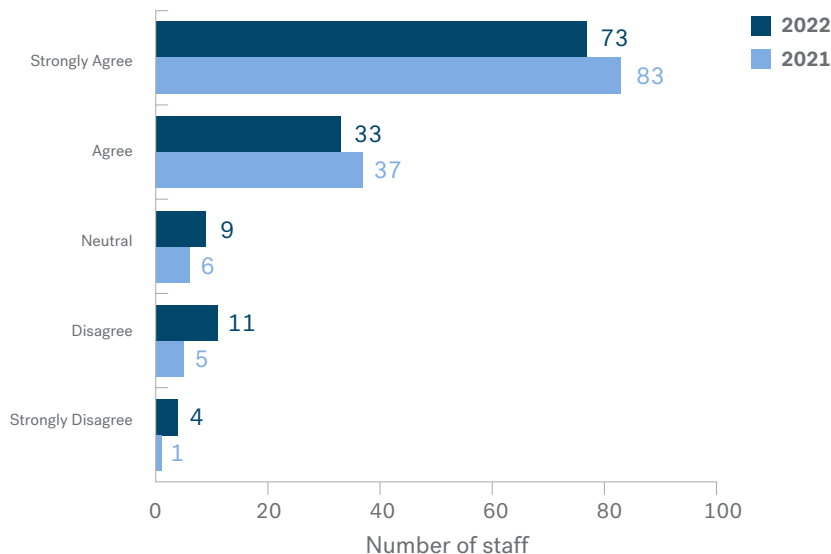
**Call-in box:** This year according to our annual Organizational Culture Survey, our staff satisfaction fell. This may in part be due to the fact that a smaller number of participants completed the survey this year (130 people out of 151 - 86% down from 91% in 2020), but we recognize that this is a challenge we have to undertake. We are spending time with respondents' feedback on how we can improve, and we hope to use this year to address staff needs and concerns. Our staff work extremely hard to protect public lands for all people, and we deserve a workplace where we all feel empowered and respected everyday. As an organization, we will strive for this goal and push ourselves to raise the bar and not settle for less.

## The Wilderness Society is a welcoming and inclusive organization.



Most respondents (86%) agreed that The Wilderness Society is welcoming and inclusive. 6% of respondents disagreed about the inclusiveness of The Wilderness Society. In 2021, 90% of The Wilderness Society staff agreed that the organization is welcoming and inclusive, while 4% of staff disagreed.

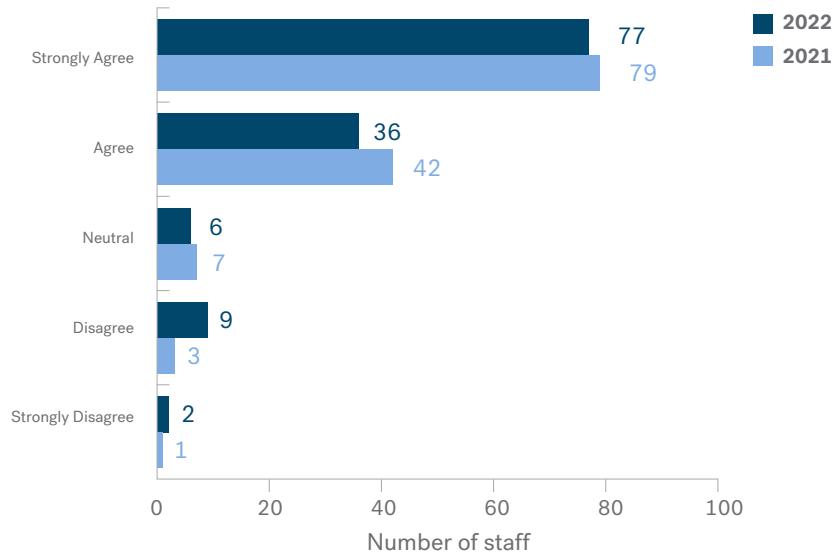
## The Wilderness Society is a great place to work.



The majority of staff (81%) believe that The Wilderness Society is a great place to work. Previously, 90.9% of respondents agreed that The Wilderness Society is a great place to work. More staff disagree with the proposition that The Wilderness Society is a great place to work in the 2022 survey than the 2021 survey

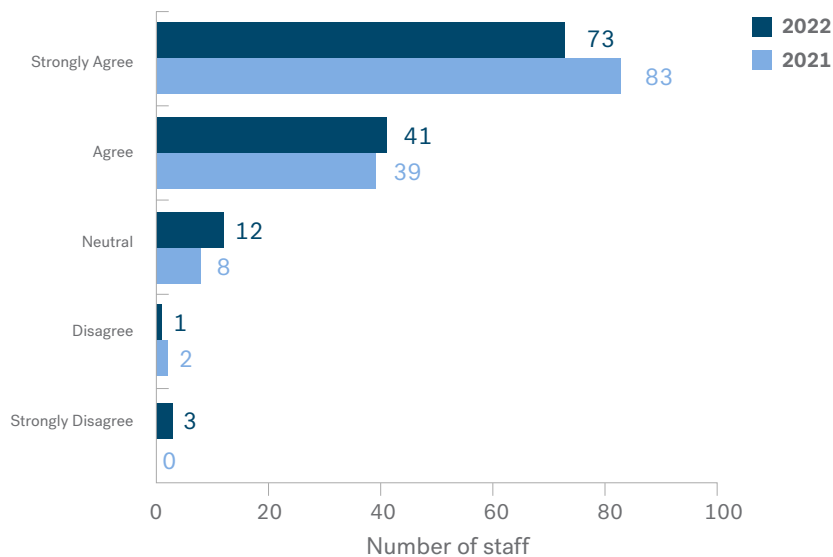


**The Wilderness Society's policies support me to successfully integrate and balance my life and work.**



87% of staff agree that The Wilderness Society's policies promote a healthy work life balance. In the previous survey, 92% of staff agreed with the proposition. The number of respondents that disagreed with the statement increased from 2021 to 2022.

**My daily work environment is welcoming and inclusive.**



The majority of The Wilderness Society's staff agreed or strongly agreed (88%) their daily work environment is welcoming and inclusive. 11% of 2022 staff respondents disagreed or remained neutral about the inclusivity of their daily work environment compared to 7.5% of respondents on the 2021 survey.

# Reflections from our Organizational Culture Survey

What was something a coworker did for you this past year that greatly influenced or impacted you particularly as it relates to equity, diversity, inclusion, and justice at TWS?

Shared their personal story and what it meant to the work here. I do not think that should be required in the workplace and demands a trusting relationship, but it can be impactful.

Two colleagues really stepped up to help create and support a new representative coalition with frontline groups for creating a shared advocacy agenda.

My manager helped me figure out how to more fully incorporate equity in my work upfront.

Having my manager openly state their own biases as a white person and that they acknowledge that they have room to grow and learn.

Provided support in raising concerns about equity.

I appreciated the opportunity to provide specific pass-through grants to local organizations that are BIPOC-led. We were able to make a huge difference and build stronger relationships with that funding, and I hope we'll have that as a regular part of our discretionary funding process.

Sharing great articles, books, and experiences.

A consistent thing that my team has done is provide a comfortable and safe space to voice concerns or issues. This extends into the realm of equity, diversity, inclusion, and justice.

Reminded me to show up as my whole self.

Constructive feedback on how I was structuring an event to ensure it was more representative and welcoming.

Coworkers who respected my opinions/expertise.

What I appreciated most was every colleague that asked me how I was doing and remembered to say thank you.

Advocated for Land Back.

My small group White Staff Member Caucus opened my eyes to the issues within TWS and conservation, and also helped me learn a lot about advocacy efforts.

A coworker checked in on how I was feeling after an uncomfortable situation. I really appreciated this gesture.

My manager was accommodating when I had a personal matter to attend to. Did not pry and provided flexibility when needed most.

Was honest with me when they felt uncomfortable in a specific situation

and allowed me to discuss and work through that discomfort.

A coworker reached out to create a standing check-in relating to equity. We now have a 30 minute check-in every 2 weeks to discuss equity challenges, share resources, and provide each other with feedback through our growth journey. Creating this buddy system has helped maintain accountability and a safe space to explore different subjects that may not always be centered in the specifics of work.

Started including Indigenous voices in public land conversations.

Helping me think about JEDI in ways that expanded my knowledge of how they could and should be thought about and implemented in the conservation movement.

One of my coworkers helped me think through an equity strategy for my campaign!



# Closing reflections



Is it just me or was 2021 the longest fast year ever? It was a year that seemed to drag on and yet so much of what happened is also a bit of a blur. With the pandemic continuing into the new year, what many thought would be a temporary interruption in the way we had come to live and work persisted to usher in what we now see as a “new normal”; a new way of living and working with more hybrid in-person and virtual gatherings, more mask wearing and social distancing, and more people spending quality time outside, among other changes. I have also noted that these changes encouraged so many of us to be more reflective individually and collectively.

As an organization in alignment with our strategic plan, we reviewed our structure and approach to work and implemented changes to better ensure our success and commitment to equity in the process and practice of our work. We welcomed many new team members bringing a diversity of backgrounds, talents, and expertise who gave new perspective to our work. And groups of team members, some long-tenured and others recently onboarded, collaborated in numerous ways to consider how the small but significant changes could put TWS more on a path toward justice. All these considerations and changes made for a new collective outlook on what success looks like in, across, and through our organization.

One resource shared this year to provide guidance for our success were our TWS Staff Competencies:

Self-Awareness  
Solution Orientation  
Equity Learning, Analysis, & Ownership  
Direct Communication & Feedback  
Meaningful Relationships

These five (5) competencies articulate both goals and actions for how we support each other, partners, and communities on our quest to uphold equity and justice in all that we do. Whether checking in with our managers, participating on a cross-functional team, or leading a campaign, commitment to learning and growth as an individual ensures learning and growth together. The competencies were designed to improve how we relate to each other and ultimately to strengthen our trust in one another as trust is so foundational to any relationship and thus to any movement. Trust is built brick by brick, person by person, moment by moment. It is a long process that takes time and yields results.

I recognize that in many ways our “new normal” presented necessary opportunities to think and show up differently as what had long been accepted as normal was certainly not always just. The conservation movement, including The Wilderness Society, has had a long history of exclusion and it will take each of us to walk the long narrow path toward restoration and healing. 2021 provided space and time to be reflective and honest about what we have done and how much more we need to do. And many of us have shifted our perception of what we can achieve particularly with and for Indigenous communities and communities of color.

In one of his final speeches, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said “We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.” 2021 was a long year with a longer list of changes in our world and in our organization, and I trust that we at The Wilderness Society have moved closer to justice.

In Solidarity,

**Wordna Meskheniten**  
Vice President of Equity, Culture, and Learning