



Photo credit: Bruce Neeb

Why Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) in Conservation?

Wisconsin's Green Fire (WGF) has joined dozens of partner organizations in opening our doors and workspaces to residents of this state who previously have not felt welcomed or allowed to join the state's conservation community. The people absent from our group photos in the past and not present at our meetings do not share our background of white privilege.

In seeking diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in Wisconsin's conservation community, we unequivocally agree to make space for everyone. Only by welcoming and embracing people of all races, ethnicities, cultures, and backgrounds will we succeed in protecting the environment for future generations.

WGF has taken several first steps down this path but there is no road map showing us where to turn or how far to go to succeed. This newsletter highlights some of these steps and lessons learned from the process, and we encourage our members and readers to continue embracing the growing diversity of perspectives, backgrounds, and identities in the conservation field.

Below, three WGF leaders reflect on the importance of these efforts for WGF and the conservation field.

Dolly Ledin, co-chair of WGF's Environmental Education Work Group:

Many of the leaders in conservation viewed conservation through a narrow white lens and, in some cases, encouraged and led racist actions. We frequently fail to acknowledge that America's national parks were taken, sometimes violently, from their Indigenous inhabitants.

But those historical examples were not the end of the exclusive nature of conservation history in America.

In our own lifetimes, black families were red-lined out of buying homes in neighborhoods with green spaces. Black, indigenous, and people of color in low-wage jobs often were dependent on public transit limiting convenient access to distant recreation areas. Indigenous communities were relegated to reservations with minimal access to well-paying employment or opportunities for higher education. [Continued on page 2](#)

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WGF can't single-handedly right all these and the hundreds of other wrongs that have become part of the fabric of society and conservation. But we're not alone. The Wisconsin DEIJ Community of Practice, which we helped to initiate, includes 190 representatives from more than 80 statewide and local conservation and environmental groups working together to weave a new fabric of conservation - one that includes all the threads that can make it strong and durable.

Conservation was a male-dominated field for decades, but in recent years more women have joined the career field - an accomplishment that should strengthen our resolve to keep pushing for greater diversity and inclusion.

Terry Daulton, WGF immediate past President and longtime Wisconsin natural resource professional:

On Feb 1, 2023, Scott Craven gave the keynote address celebrating the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Wisconsin Chapter of The Wildlife Society (WCTWS). There were more than 20 of WGF's wildlife work group members in attendance, along with wildlife professionals from across Wisconsin.

I scanned the audience, thinking back to my early career in the late 1980s when I first attended the WCTWS conference. I was one of the few women present in a sea of white male biologists in those years. It was much different now; the audience appeared to be at least half women, many in leadership roles.

As I listened to Scott talk about past successes, leaders, and future challenges, I tried to imagine a gathering 30 years from now. Would DEIJ initiatives forge a more diverse and inclusive professional gathering? Thinking over the progress we have made in the past 30 years, I have a strong sense of hope that given dedicated effort, we can achieve our DEIJ goals.

LGBTQ+ residents of Wisconsin and their allies are speaking up and demanding that they be seen and heard across the state. The conservation community must open the door to them as individuals offering their expertise as well as their lived experiences.



Photo credit: Tom Jerow

Tom Jerow, WGF Board President

When I began my career with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources 44 years ago in northern Wisconsin, being open about my sexuality didn't seem like a wise career choice for a gay man. The agency was male dominated and from my perspective deeply homophobic.

Probably the most dehumanizing example was a "joke" about HIV/AIDS during the height of the epidemic. The punch line implied, in a passive aggressive way, the world was better off "without [insert pejorative term used to insult and dehumanize gay men]". That "joke" began my coming out process. The first step: I told the person telling the "joke" it was deeply offensive, inappropriate, and not appreciated.

Today the LGBTQ+ community is better accepted but systemic homophobia is still with us. It is heartening, however, to see more acceptance particularly among our younger generation of aspiring conservation professionals. If we all work together toward an inclusive and accepting environment, life will get better for everyone.

At Wisconsin's Green Fire, one goal of our recently adopted strategic plan is to work toward a more inclusive conservation community that benefits from the participation of both the LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities. Read more in this newsletter and at wigreenfire.org.

Mission

Wisconsin's Green Fire advances science-informed analysis and policy solutions that address Wisconsin's greatest conservation challenges.

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"Sven the Painted Turtle" piece by Cameo Boyle, Lac du Flambeau tribal member and student artist intern at Trout Lake Station during the summer of 2022.



"Lightning Flash" Work Group Updates



Photo credit: Jim Feldman



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ASPIRING CONSERVATION PROFESSIONALS

Aspiring Conservation Professionals (ACP) Work Group

In January, ACP members and UW-Green Bay students attended a retreat at the Lowenwood Conserve School in Land O' Lakes, Wis. During the retreat, we had a chance to connect with the students, talk with them about WGF and our work group, learn about the career paths of several WGF members who were also in attendance, and have some fun in the snow!

At Lowenwood, our work group also had a strategic planning session. Two goals emerged that we will be working toward for the next two years: (1) enhance work group member engagement, and (2) enhance capacity of the work group to ensure sustainability. We are working to branch out, have more in-person events, and find a new group of students and emerging professionals to continue leading the work group.

Public Trust and Wetlands Work Group

Work group members are participating in the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources technical committee on NR 300 rules governing structures and erosion control for Wisconsin's waterways, including the Great Lakes. We are seeking to ensure that sound scientific principles are applied in the development and administration of these rules.

Members of our work group participated in the Wisconsin Lakes and Rivers Convention to provide background on Wisconsin's "Public Trust Doctrine," which holds all Wisconsin waters in trust for the citizens of the state. The conference was held on April 19-21st in Stevens Point, WI. Visit wigreenfire.org/work-groups for more resources.

"Lightning Flash" Updates

Environmental Rules and Water Resources Work Group

Work group members have engaged in discussions with the Alliance for Great Lakes and other organizations to develop an innovative proposal that will financially reward sustainable farming from the standpoint of nitrogen, phosphorus, soil loss, and greenhouse gas emissions. The proposal was featured during WGF member appearances at two state conferences and in discussions with Senator Baldwin's staff and with Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources administration for possible funding of watershed scale pilot projects.

The work group also provided comments to WDNR on the latest version of Wisconsin's Consolidated Assessment and Listing Methodology. Finally, work group members have been researching the benefits of manure treatment and intend to develop a summary document on these findings in the coming months.

Contaminants of Emerging Concern

WGF's Contaminants of Emerging Concern Work Group has been hard at work planning the PFAS in Wisconsin – Policy and Practice for Local Government



Leaders collaborative workshop in May 2023. This invitation-only event will prepare local leaders to understand, respond, and act to protect communities from the risk of PFAS, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances or the "forever chemical" contamination. The

workshop will cover topics including PFAS sources and pathways, testing, response management, state and federal regulation and standards, and legislative and policy needs to address PFAS in the state and across the country.

Presenters will include staff from EPA Region 5, Wisconsin DNR, Wisconsin Department of Health Services, research scientists, municipal managers, and local elected officials in PFAS-affected communities in Wisconsin.

Visit WGF's website at wigreenfire.org/our-work to keep up to date on WGF's work across Wisconsin

Creating a Conservation Legacy through Planned Giving

Jake and Kris Barnes are avid outdoor enthusiasts who enjoy skiing, biking, and running. They live in Amherst, Wis., but enjoy traveling internationally. They are pictured below exploring the mountains of Nepal. Here, Jake reflects on why he and Kris chose to include Wisconsin's Green Fire in their living trust:

Kris and I were introduced to Wisconsin's Green Fire by a friend several years ago. The organization made sense to us, and we liked the mission. The people in the organization seemed genuinely interested in helping the environmental situation in Wisconsin which in our opinion had suffered for years. We liked that the most!

So, we subscribed to the online newsletter, went to an event or two, and we made some modest year-end periodic donations to support Green Fire's work.

It came time to take a serious look at our estate plan and determine where things would go when we passed. We chose to make some outright bequests, and our attorney suggested we pick out organizations and name them outright in our living trust document. We chose Wisconsin's Green Fire as one of these organizations. The process was simple and easy!

For more information on creating your own conservation legacy through planned giving, visit wigreenfire.org/make-a-difference/support-our-work/



Building Effective Cross-Cultural Partnerships with Wisconsin's Tribal Communities

Those of us who live in Wisconsin, and across the United States, stand on ancestral lands of Indigenous people who cared for this land since time immemorial. These people were forcefully removed from their native lands due to European colonization and genocide. In acknowledgement of their long presence and stewardship, Wisconsin's Green Fire (WGF) is committed to building partnerships with these communities and educating our members on the importance of Indigenous perspectives in natural resource conservation.

This article examines roles of tribal natural resource agencies and includes an interview with the director of the [Wisconsin Tribal Conservation Advisory Council](#) (WTCAC), an overview of the [Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission](#) (GLIFWC), and a reflection on land acknowledgement statements and Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

Ideas on Partnering with Tribal Natural Resource Agencies Terry Daulton

Being a good partner to tribal nations in Wisconsin is complex. Jeff Mears is an Oneida Nation member who managed the Oneida environmental, health, and safety programs for 26 years and now serves as the executive director of WTCAC. I recently asked Jeff for suggestions on working with the myriad agencies and perspectives involved in tribal natural resources. He said that it is important to recognize the varying capacities of tribal nations and communities in Wisconsin and their natural resources/environmental departments. Specifically, funding tribal priorities and staffing is often tied to revenues from casino gaming.

Changes in the 1995 Farm Bill led to the formation of Tribal Advisory Councils to advise the Natural Resource Conservation Service and US Department of Agriculture on tribal issues. WTCAC was the first tribal council established in the country and works to encourage and fund voluntary practices that reflect tribal activities such as wild rice gathering and aquaculture.

Mears explained that tribes are sovereign nations and therefore require government-to-government relationships. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was the first federal agency to establish this government-to-government policy in 1984. Since then, many state and

local governments have followed suit and requests for tribal input have grown exponentially.

In addition to WTCAC, other organizations that play a role in tribal natural resource management include the [Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council](#), GLIFWC, and the [Great Lakes Intertribal Food Coalition](#).

In suggesting how WGF and others can improve partnerships, Mears said to make tribal participation easy. Ask each tribe for input first and work with those who respond. Early engagement, use of online venues, and holding meetings around the state can help tribes participate.



"A Turtle's Tale" by Cameo Boyle, Lac du Flambeau tribal member and student artist intern at Trout Lake Station during the summer of 2022

What is the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission? Dr. Jonathan Gilbert, GLIFWC Biological Services Director

The short answer is "GLIFWC is an intertribal, Ojibwe, natural resources agency whose mission it is to assist our 11 member tribes in the implementation of their treaty-reserved rights (in a manner that is biologically sound and culturally appropriate) and to help protect the resources upon which those rights are based."

GLIFWC is not a regulatory agency; regulation rests with each tribe. GLIFWC is a service agency providing technical assistance to member tribes across Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan.

GLIFWC was formed in response to two court decisions: the Gurnoe decision affirming fishing rights in Lake Superior, and the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians v Voigt decision affirming inland rights in Wisconsin. GLIFWC's Lakes Committee supports the tribes in Lake Superior. The Voigt Intertribal Task Force (VTF) supports the tribes in their inland hunting, fishing, and gathering rights.

GLIFWC is unique in many ways. Tribes are sovereign governments who can act independently of each other, yet the tribes have delegated authority to GLIFWC to manage harvests and to interact with other natural resources counterparts. The VTF holds monthly meetings and sets harvest limits when required, and those harvests are shared among the tribes. The VTF also acts as a conduit for communications with other states' natural resource agencies, the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

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Why Land Acknowledgments?

Dr. Patty Loew, WGF Ambassador and enrolled citizen of Mashkīizibii, the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe

We offer land acknowledgments to recognize the First Peoples of the territory we reside in and to honor their relationship to the land. Land acknowledgments are an opportunity to turn words into actions—to recognize the common interests of all who share the land to protect the air, water, and web of life for us and for future generations to enjoy and cherish.

Wisconsin's Green Fire is working hard to widen the circle of conservationists, realizing that there are multiple ways of understanding the natural landscape. The Native nations in Wisconsin are obvious allies in that effort. However, tribal sovereignty means that environmental organizations, like WGF, must interact with them differently than they would with other stakeholders. Tribal governments predate the US Constitution. Their treaties, like those negotiated with other foreign nations, are the "supreme law of the land" and the rights outlined within those treaties must be acknowledged and respected. Ironically, Indian treaty rights are some of the most powerful legal tools available, not only to protect the environmental quality of life for Native people, but for all people.

Honoring Indigenous relationships to the land requires embracing Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), or Indigenous Knowledge. TEK combined with scientific ecological knowledge (SEK) can play a critical role in expanding our knowledge of the land we cherish and setting strategies for protecting natural resources. Often TEK and SEK align in powerful ways; sometimes the two knowledge systems cannot be reconciled, but ultimately the goals are the same: to understand and protect our environment for ourselves, our children, and the generations to come.

More Resources on Embracing Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Efforts to integrate TEK and Indigenous Knowledge in conservation efforts have expanded in recent months. In November 2022, the White House Office of Science and Policy released [guidance](#) for federal agencies on incorporating Indigenous Knowledges into research and programs. This is an important step towards respectfully navigating relationships with tribal and Indigenous communities and their knowledge systems, acknowledging that these ways of knowing are crucial to holistic and inclusive efforts to conserve our natural world.

This spring, the National Climate Adaptation Science Centers will be hosting bi-weekly webinars to explore best practices on ethically engaging with and respectfully navigating relationships with tribal and Indigenous communities and their knowledges. Webinars will be held at 2PM CT bi-weekly from April 6th – June 1st. Visit <http://www.usgs.gov/casc/ikwebinars> for more information and to register. You can also visit GLIFWC's website for information on integrating TEK into GLIFWC's Climate Change Program at <https://glifwc.org/ClimateChange/TEK.html>.

Visit WGF's website for more information.

Practicing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice as a Conservation Community

By Jenny Washam

Talking about diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in conservation is the first step in a long journey of learning and understanding. This journey is best done in the company of others working towards the same goals and learning from similar mistakes. That is why Wisconsin's Green Fire, the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin, Gathering Waters, and Wisconsin Wetland Association came together to form the Wisconsin DEIJ Community of Practice (CoP) in 2021. Our organizations wanted to create a safe space for mutual learning, to ask questions and discuss solutions, and support each other through the process. The CoP has grown to a group of over 120 statewide and local conservation and environmental organizations.

The CoP meets bimonthly via Zoom to learn from guest speakers, who describe programs and tools their organizations have implemented to encourage diversity in the conservation field. Examples include externally facing internships and community outreach, and internal initiatives to assess organizational cultures and ensure DEIJ is interwoven across all program areas.

If you are associated with a conservation organization in Wisconsin and committed to actively participating and engaging in the Community of Practice, visit <https://www.wisconservation.org/community-of-practice/> to join our upcoming meetings.



PROFILE IN CONSERVATION

Roberto Pacheco

Roberto Pacheco was born into his Ojibwe tribe in northwestern Wisconsin, but as a child moved with his family to Las Vegas. "I didn't really grow up around a lot of native people," he said. "I had good friends, but sadly I was separated from my home and my tribe."

Three years ago, his family moved back to Wisconsin, and it was here that everything changed. He got a job at a casino, but in the end, it was just a job. He talked about it with his beloved uncle, Dean Louis, a masterful outdoorsman and mechanic. "Basically, my uncle pushed me to go to college."

At Lac Courte Oreilles University his teachers encouraged him to apply for the Conservation Pathways scholarship offered by Wisconsin's Green Fire. "They told me it was important to show up and be a part of something greater than yourself." Roberto found a group that among other things is working hard for the benefit of wild animals, among them the wolf, important to Ojibwe culture. "Now I am spreading the word about Green Fire at college."

He is majoring in biology. His dream job, he said, would be to work for the Environmental Protection Agency. Someday, he said, he would like to return to the university and be a mentor to young people in his tribe. "They really believed in me when I didn't," he said of the university staff. "The teachers here are so smart. I really love them." To read more about Roberto, visit WGF's blog at wigreenfire.org.

In 2022, WGF launched the Conservation Pathways Scholarship Program to engage and support young people from all backgrounds and abilities in conservation and environmental careers. The program focuses on inclusion and creating equitable learning environments to allow all students, particularly those who have been historically excluded or under-represented in conservation and environmental fields, to feel that they belong and can succeed in these fields.

These profiles feature two of our Conservation Pathways scholars, and their paths into the conservation field.

Annika Sedelis

In her second year at Nicolet College in Rhinelander Annika Sedelis joined the WGF's Conservation Pathways program on the advice of a college advisor. Years of hiking, Nordic skiing with family, and exploration of the wild areas around her home in Minocqua have helped her develop career plans. Annika hopes to broaden her citizen science skills by participating in this year's annual Midwest Crane Count. Next, she plans to transfer to Pennsylvania to continue her studies with friends there, perhaps returning to Wisconsin to work toward a master's degree in environmental engineering.

"I think more students will look at environmental careers if they have opportunities to get involved with issues in their own communities," Sedelis says, "and to express their thoughts through social media."

With her passion for preserving natural communities and her love of math and science, Annika says she feels drawn to emerging clean energy technologies including geothermal, wind and solar. One of the greatest benefits of the Conservation Pathways program, she says, is the opportunity to work with mentors she's met through Wisconsin's Green Fire. She has particularly appreciated their advice on her career path, help with resume development, and the opportunity to work with other women who've made careers in natural resource science.



Calling All Aspiring Artists!

Are you an artist who enjoys re-creating Wisconsin's beautiful landscapes and wildlife in paintings or drawings, a photographer who captures natural beauty through a camera lens, or a poet who paints pictures with words? If so, read on! WGF is looking for submissions of Wisconsin and nature-based artwork or poetry that could be included in future editions of *Confluences* as keepsakes for members, such as the artwork by WGF's own Terry Daulton seen here. Submissions should celebrate Wisconsin natural resources and be appropriate for all audiences.

If you are interested in contributing, or have questions, please send your submission via email to wgreenfire@gmail.com.



"Northwoods Nessie," a family of otter swimming illustration from the book *Wrong Tree: Adventures in Wildlife*
Credit: Terry Daulton