



**2019 ANNUAL REPORT**

# **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

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# President's Letter



**This is the third Annual Report on The Wilderness Society's effort to increase the diversity of our teams and partnerships, embed equity in our work and improve our culture to make it more welcoming and inclusive for all. Throughout 2019, we worked to integrate these values into everything we do.**

At The Wilderness Society, building a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive organization is absolutely critical to our mission, so we have elevated our focus on equity in everything we do, both internally and externally. For the past three years, we have published our **Annual Report on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion** in which we capture our progress, quantitatively and qualitatively, to measure our progress and how we could do even better in the year to come.

As a predominantly white organization with a long history of protecting our nation's public, wild lands, we came to recognize just how much we needed to change if we wanted to ensure our public lands achieve the promise of providing clean water, clean air, and equitable access to nature for all. Every year, since the first report, I have expressed pride in what we have learned and accomplished, and the important work captured in this report covering calendar year 2019 is no different. I could not be more impressed with what our team has learned, shared, and achieved with each other and with the many communities and partners we are connected to across the nation. Some of this collaborative work is reflected in the stories highlighted this year. We have also seen real progress from the changes we made in our hiring and recruiting practices where overall staff diversity has increased with staff of color growing from 12% at the end of 2015 to 19% at the end of 2019.

Looking to our organizational culture work, while the majority of our staff express that TWS is a welcoming and inclusive environment, we have heard from staff, particularly female staff and staff of color, that there is more work to be done to ensure all identities feel respected and valued. This feedback has fueled our efforts to review all facets of how we operate and communicate as an organization. Most significantly, we have developed a new strategic plan with equity at its center that is truly re-charting our future with a new mission, vision, and strategy to be more inclusive.

On a personal note, I am continually reflecting on how I can work to make sure I am both an ally and leader of this work across all of TWS and the conservation movement. I will continue to champion this work and the changes we must make. I will challenge myself to name and interrupt dominant culture and oppressive systems. And I will make every effort to better elevate the voices of Indigenous communities and communities of color.

We publish this report in the midst of a national reckoning on systemic racism, police brutality and racial justice. We have spoken out as an organization that Black Lives Matter and that everyone must be able to be safe in public spaces and on public land. To achieve that all-important goal, we must also continue to deepen our understanding and further our learning as an organization, strengthening our foundational commitment to equity and justice.

This work, our work, will never be done. It is a continuous process that requires us to stay vigilant in identifying components of our organization that need improvement.

Our mission of uniting people to protect wild places and our efforts to make them accessible for all people depends upon each of us to uphold equity and justice in all we do. I am appreciative of all the growth we have experienced in the past year and am excited to see us accelerate our equity journey at such a critical time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jamie Williams". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional but personal style.

**Jamie Williams**  
President

# Letter from our Governing Council Chair



**For many years, we have worked to increase our capacity to be more inclusive in our practices, attract and retain a more diverse team, and work toward more equitable outcomes.**

On behalf of the Governing Council, I would like to express our gratitude to the leadership and staff of The Wilderness Society as they elevate equity and justice at this important time in our organization's progress. We recognize how our equity work strengthens our organization's ability to achieve our mission because we must ensure diverse voices are a part of every conversation and decision and that we address structural barriers that keep some groups and communities from experiencing the benefits of public lands.

Each year, I have personally been more and more impressed with how TWS has taken on each tenet of our equity commitment. From increasing the racial diversity of staff as well as our Governing Council to supporting managers in leading more inclusive teams to broadening our partnerships, equity, diversity, and inclusion is evident in everything we do.

Having been deeply involved in our strategic planning process for much of 2019, I was able to witness firsthand the impact of staff's efforts to become more inclusive and have increased my own understanding and appreciation for how much more we could and should do, particularly as a Governing Council.

In particular, I want to recognize the important work of our Governing Council's Equity Committee, which consists of members who have dedicated time and energy to serving as liaisons to staff and providing additional insight and support in our organization's commitment to equity. Committee members are: Chair, Reginald "Flip" Hagood, Vice Chair, Norm Christensen, Brenda Davis, Martinique Grigg, Juan Martinez, Jaime Pinkham, and Greg Sherrill.

I recognize there is much work that goes into establishing equity as a core principle of any organization, and that staff has put us firmly on the right path. As our commitment to equity holds true for all of TWS, I look forward to leading the Governing Council as we partner with staff in this important work.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Crandall Bowles". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a light-colored background.

**Crandall Bowles**  
Chair, Governing Council

# Our Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at The Wilderness Society

The Wilderness Society believes public lands belong to and 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 about 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.

**The Wilderness Society's Mission:**  
Uniting people to protect  
America's wild places.

## 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, recognizes the contributions of every employee and empowers each employee to bring their whole selves to work every day. Externally this means ensuring that public lands are inclusive and welcoming, so that our shared wildlands can help people and nature to thrive.

**Our vision: A future where people and wild nature flourish together, meeting the challenges of a rapidly changing planet.**

## 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 and empower 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 diverse perspectives into our work that we will protect our public lands in a way that can truly support the health and well-being of us all, for generations to come.

## Definition of terms

- **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.

# 2019 in review

This year we saw great shifts in our efforts to bring about equity in all facets of our work. From engaging in a comprehensive strategic planning process to building on our Native Lands Partnerships program (formerly Native Lands Initiative) and deepening our skill and will as a member of the first Environment and Equity Leadership cohort among many other steps we have taken as an organization.

## Strategic Planning

One of the most involved endeavors of 2019 was The Wilderness Society's engagement in a months-long strategic planning process. Overseen by a committee of board members and team members of varying racial backgrounds, departments, positions and tenure, the process was one that aimed to position TWS to meet the current demands of conservation by centering people and equity in our approach. From engaging and surveying all staff and the Governing Council during multiple stages of the process to intentional outreach to key partners and stakeholders to get input on the direction of iterations of our reworked vision, mission, and priorities, the strategic planning process presented an ideal opportunity to consider how we can better embed equity and inclusion in the fabric of our organization, the who, what, and how of our work.

## Public Lands Curriculum

This year we also launched our Public Lands Curriculum. Through collaboration with members of the People Outdoors Team with support from the Avarna Group, this guide provides information and activities to learn and teach about the management, history, benefits, issues, and ways to protect public lands with specific consideration given to the stories of underrepresented communities that are often omitted or overlooked in public lands history. The curriculum was introduced through a series of webinars and gatherings of staff and partners and has been downloaded by hundreds of outdoor leaders, teachers, and youth programs.

## Native Lands Partnership

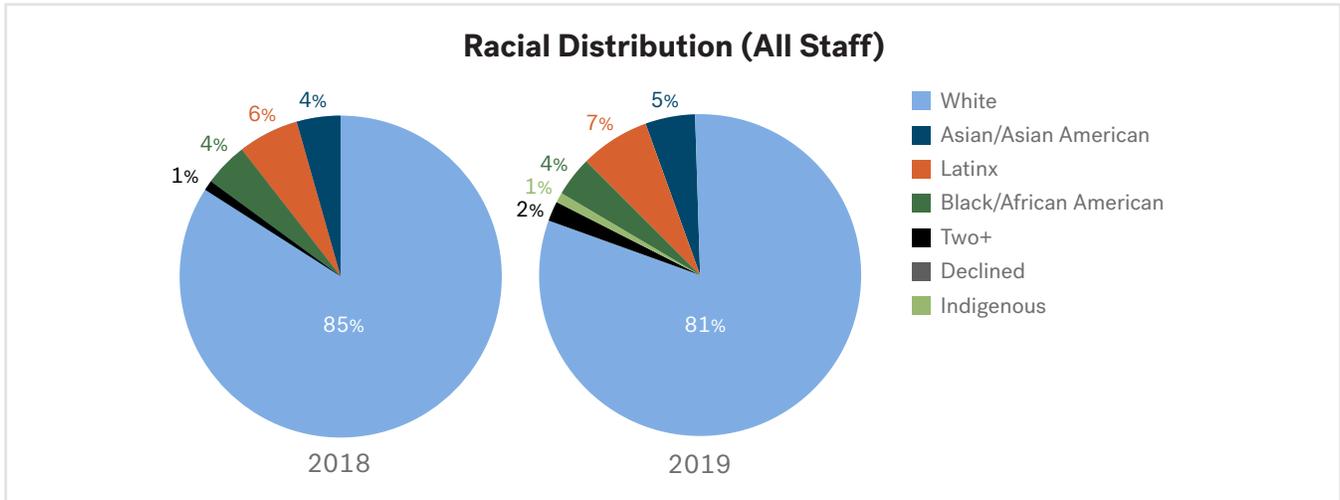
We advanced our Native Lands Partnerships work, which launched in 2018 and was carried out with guidance from the Inclusive Community Cooperative (ICC). The purpose of this program is to ensure that TWS embodies our commitment to equity and justice by cultivating authentic partnerships within and across Indigenous communities. Throughout the course of this year, we took multiple measures to establish a foundation for broadening this work across all of TWS. After allocating dedicated staff time, we were able to identify key pillars for the Native Lands workplan as well as determine an initial set of protocol to adapt our current and guide our future engagement of Native partners and prospective partners.

## Environmental and Equity Leadership Cohort

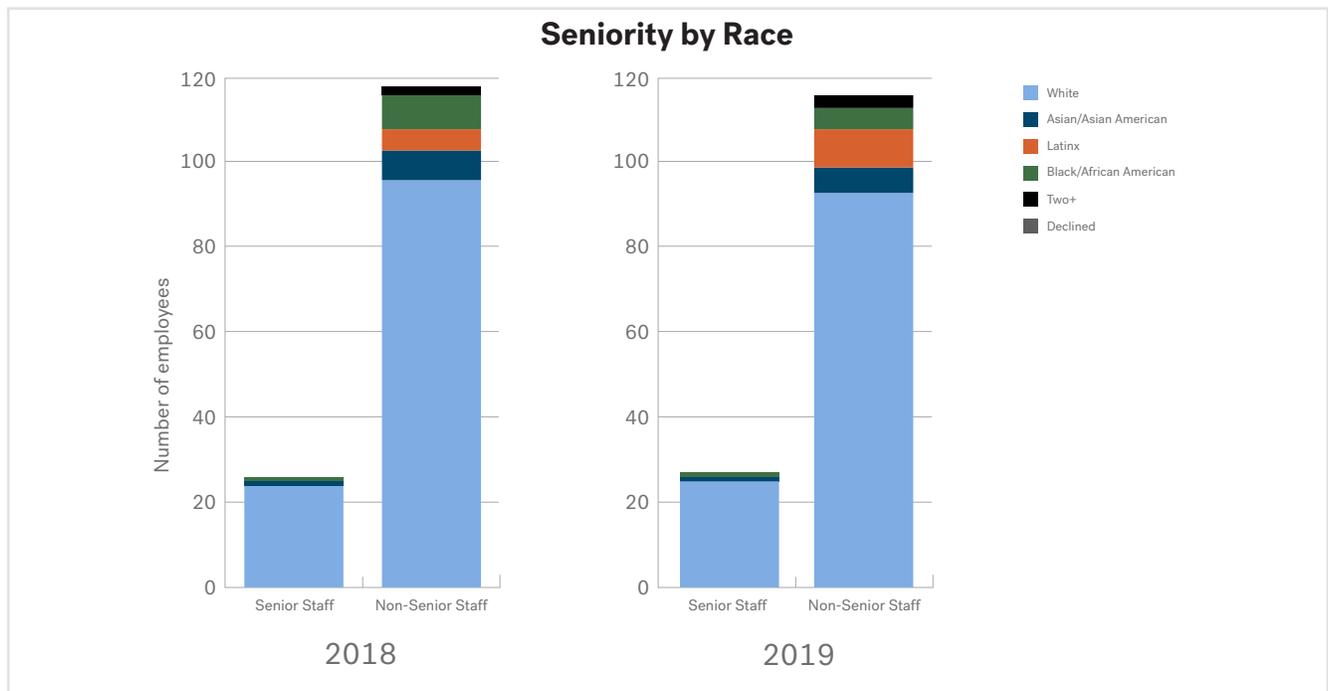
Lastly, a cohort of TWS team members and Governing Council members participated in the first Environment and Equity Leadership Cohort sponsored by The Hewlett Foundation. Following a curriculum designed by Equity Consultant Angela Park with support from Green 2.0, eleven environmental and conservation organizations engaged in deep knowledge-building and sharing best practices as we further our equity initiatives with our respective teams and across the field. Through a series of in-person retreats, group trainings, affinity spaces, and complementary webinars, TWS team members had the opportunity to engage in deep reflection and planning around the next steps of our equity work. Topics covered included organizational change and transformation, managing for equity, and creating an anti-racist environmental movement among others. Each engagement allowed the cohort to consider where we needed to further clarify what equity and justice means for both teams and the organization as a whole and to also contemplate where further action could be taken.

# Staff Demographics

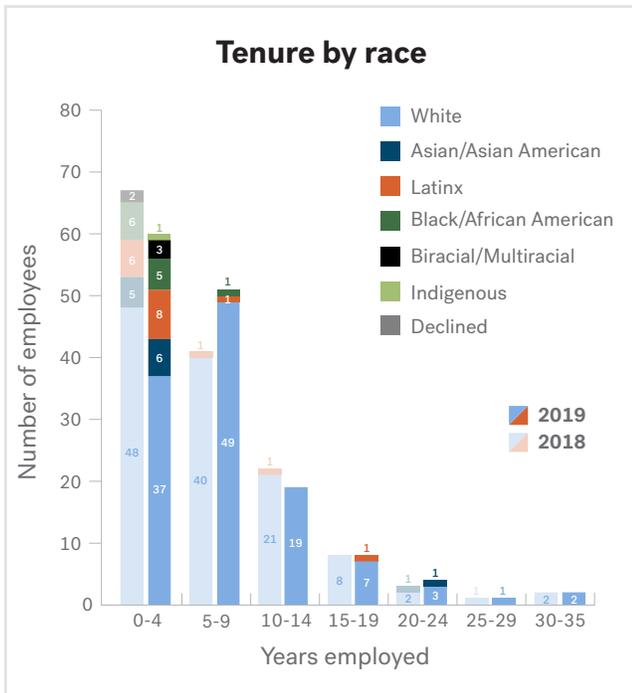
The following details the composition of our staff as of December 31st, 2019 as captured by our HR Employee database. We have shared data from 2018 for comparison and will continue to report on these data points annually. The Wilderness Society had a total of 144 staff members at the end of 2018 and 145 team members at the end of 2019.



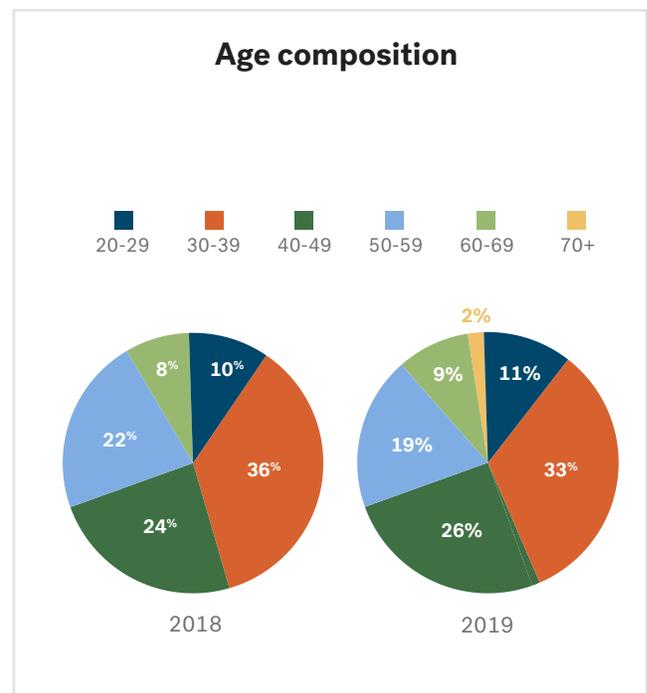
19% of The Wilderness Society staff identify as People of Color which is a 4% increase from 2018.



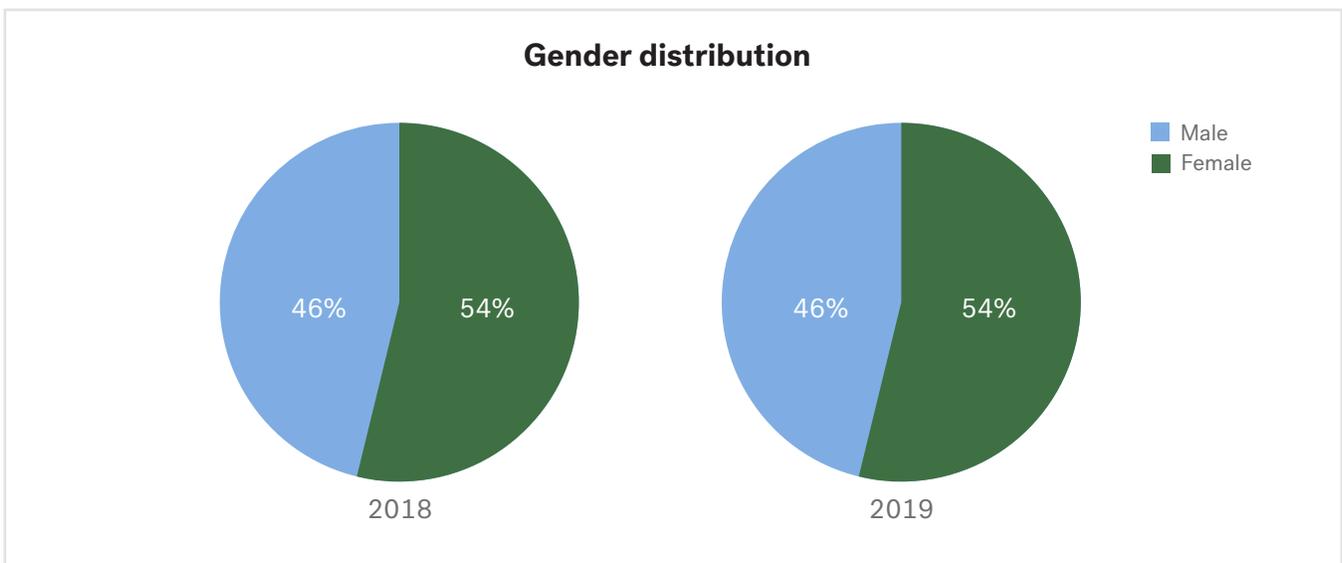
The vast majority of senior staff at The Wilderness Society identify as white. As was reported last year, Black/African American and Asian/Asian American staff account for one senior staff position each (total 8% of senior staff).



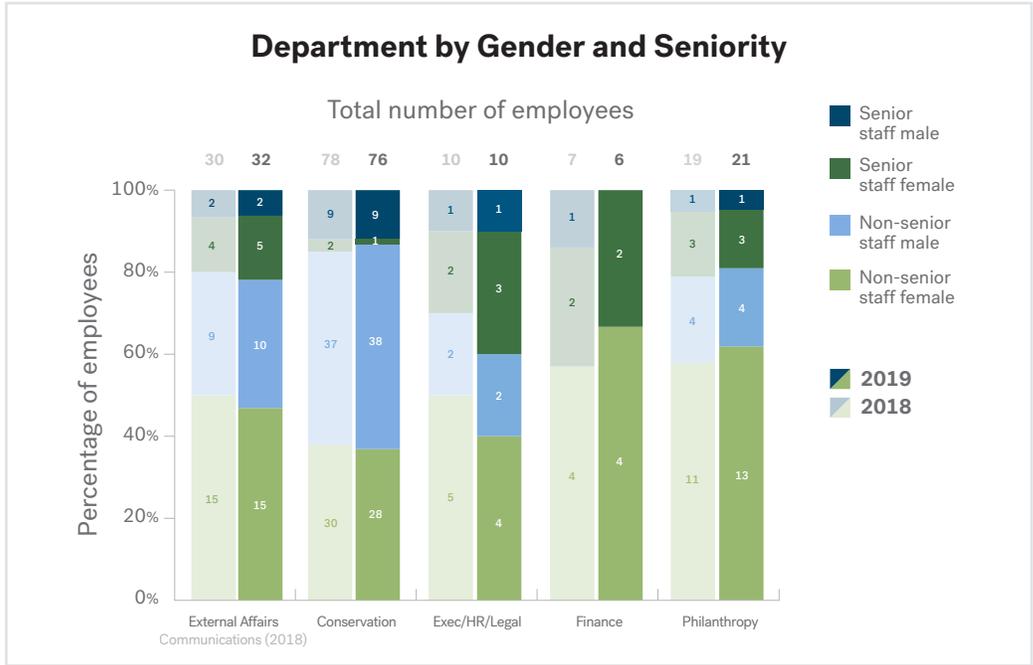
The vast majority of staff who have been with The Wilderness Society 5 or more years identify as white. The overwhelming majority of staff of color have been with the organization for fewer than 5 years. The percentage of team members of color who have been with the organization for 5 years or more has increased from 2018 (14%) to 2019 (15%).



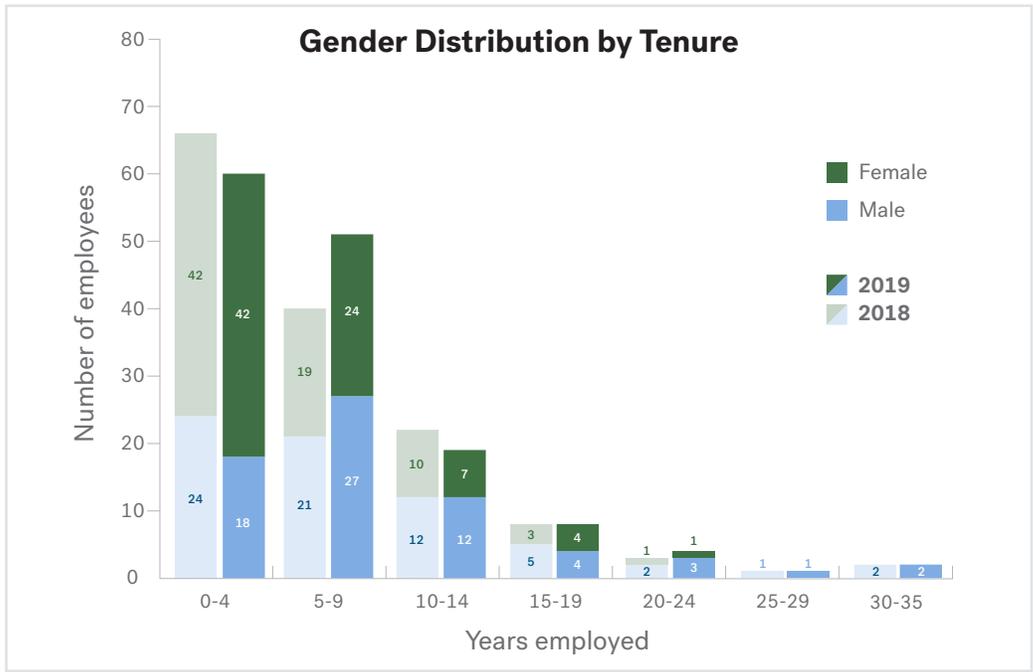
The largest proportion of The Wilderness Society staff respondents (33%) is in their thirties and the smallest proportion of staff (2%) is in their seventies.



The Wilderness Society's staff gender distribution remains consistent with 54% female and 46% male.

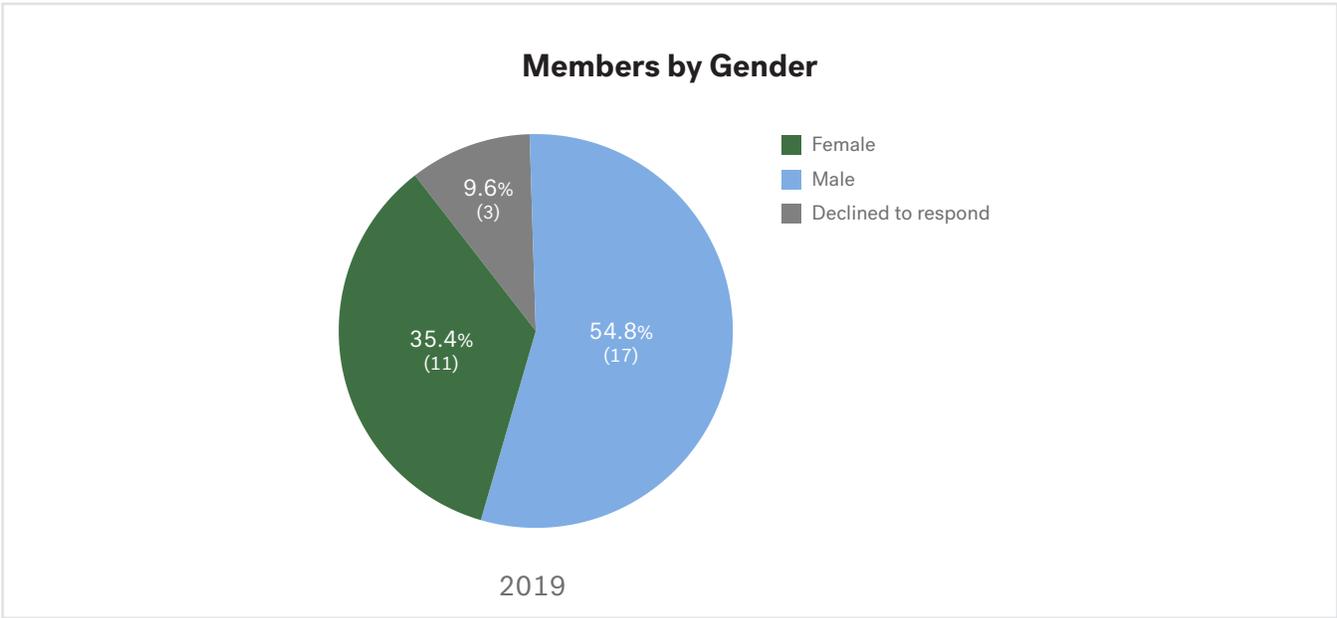
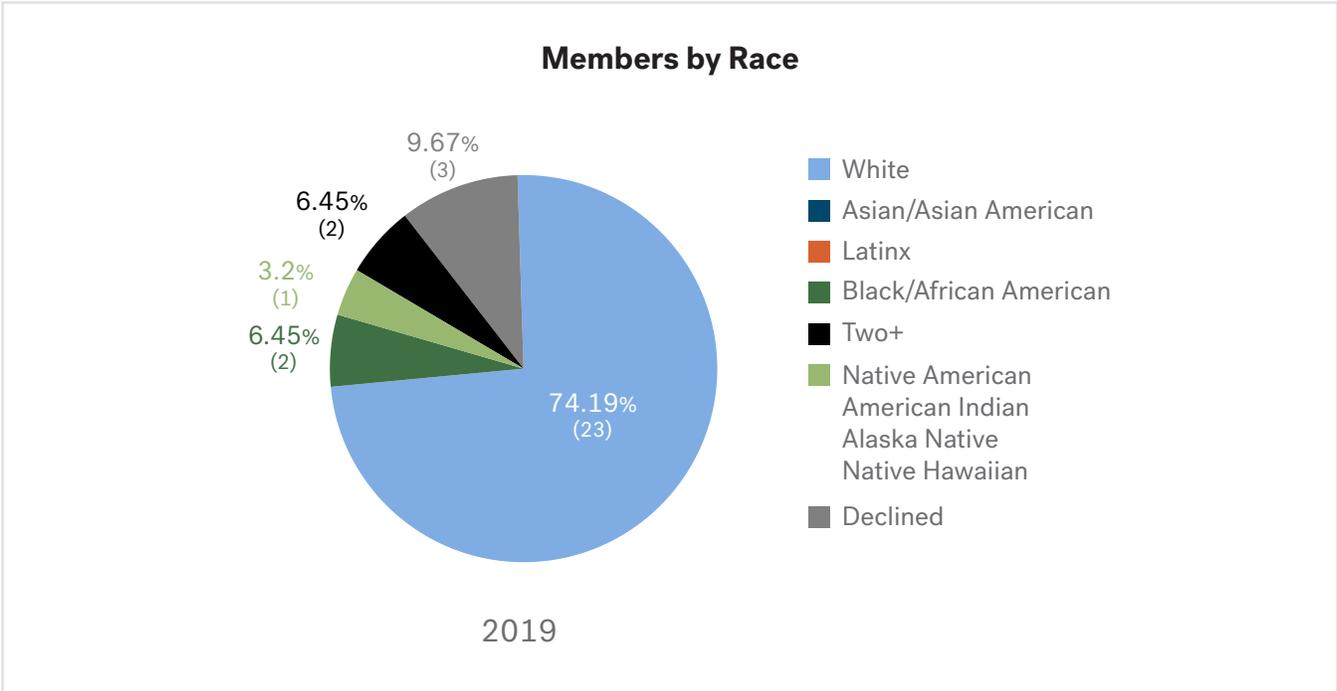


Gender balance across the organization is similar to last year's data. Staff remains predominantly female in all departments except for Conservation.



In 2019, 42% of The Wilderness Society staff's tenure has been for four years or less which is a 4% decrease from last year. Most employees who joined in the past four years are female. Male staff outnumber female staff as tenure increases. 46% of female staff at The Wilderness Society have a tenure of over 4 years compared to 73% of male staff. In 2018, 64% of male staff had worked at the Wilderness Society for over four years compared to 44% of female staff.

# Board Demographics



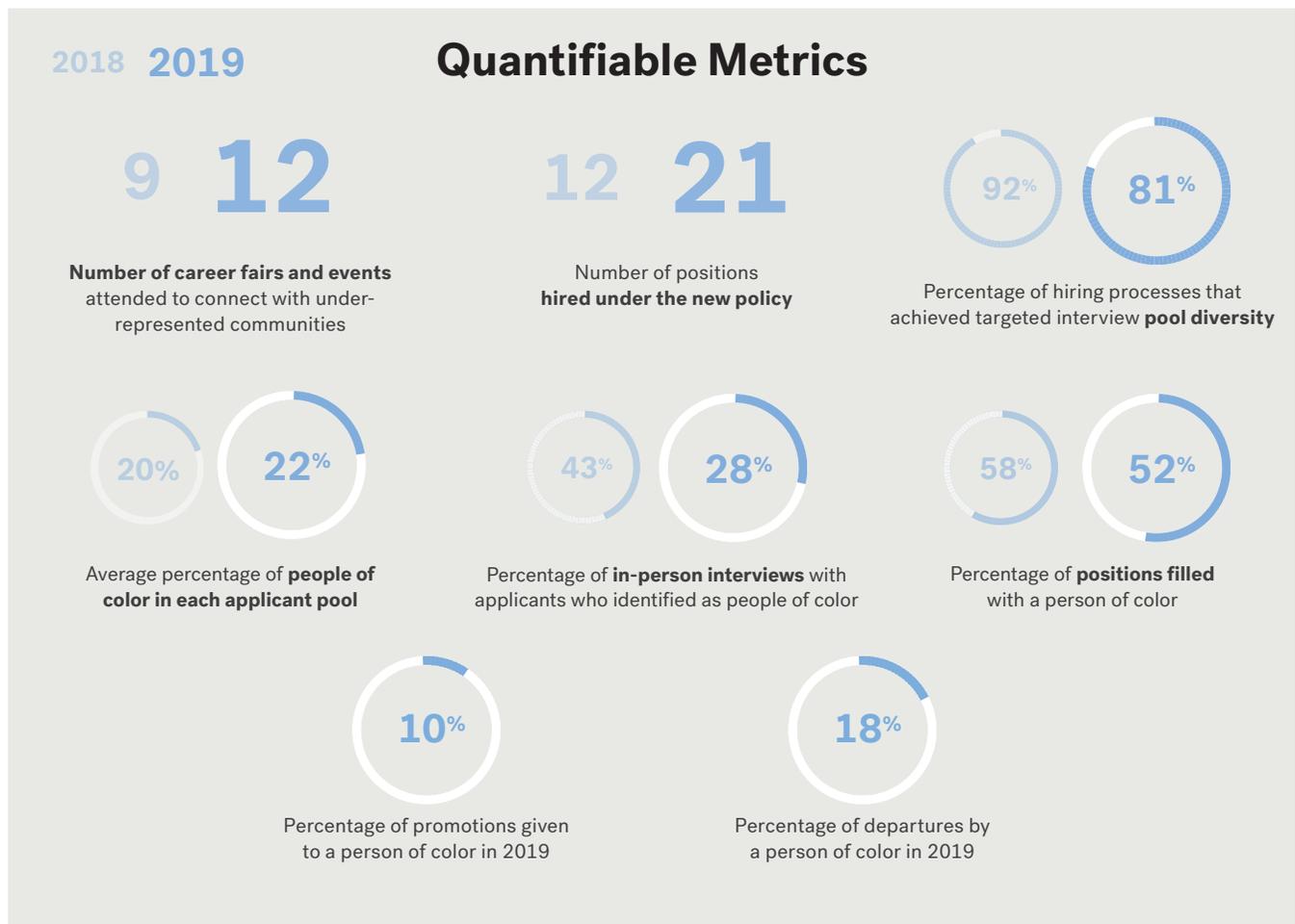
Board demographic data has not previously been tracked and reported but began in 2019 and will continue going forward.

# Equity in Recruitment & Retention

We continue to implement our revised hiring and recruitment policy established in 2017 to ensure that our hiring practices are equitable and result in developing a highly qualified and racially diverse team.

## The goals of our process are to:

1. Recruit the finest professionals and broaden the rich mix of talent, work experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, and beliefs needed to fully achieve our mission.
2. Create a team that listens to different points of view, recognizes the contributions of every employee, and empowers each employee to bring their whole selves to work every day.
3. Attract and retain employees with the experience and expertise that enables us to embed equity throughout our work.



# Promoting Equity Through Our Work

## Karlin Itchoak

Alaska State Director

### Making stronger connections in Alaska



#### What was the catalyst for this project?

Being selected by The Wilderness Society for the position of Alaska State Director has allowed me to put measures in place to be the change I wanted to see in conservation. I had been applying to conservation jobs for ten years with no success. When I was going through the TWS interview process, I talked about decolonizing and Indigenizing conservation and I was hired to the team! When I came on board I met with staff and donors and shared an interest in looking at new land conservation through an Indigenous lens. I was asked to put a plan on paper, The Imago Initiative. The Initiative was approved by the Executive Team and outlined a paradigm shift for how we protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

My goal was to show up the same way I wanted to be treated by staff and partners: with kindness, dignity, and respect. I could not fill the shoes of my predecessor who had been with TWS for 20 years. I had to be myself. Be humble and open to learning. I recognized that I have something of value to add to how we steward places as much as TWS was a place where I could learn so much and truly make a difference in the conservation field.

#### What have you learned at TWS?

There is such a breadth and depth of knowledge of conservation on our team. Staff are smart, down to earth, and brilliant. I have also been really impressed with level of emotional intelligence and mindfulness of our colleagues. The camaraderie, love, and respect feel like a real team. There is a willingness to work together. I have learned about coalition and team building, and campaign work, how to amplify our message in ways that connect with our Native partners. I have regular contact with the Inuit Circumpolar Council of Alaska and the Alaska Federation of Natives and important Native thought partners not actively involved in the conservation community.





### **How can the results of these efforts influence future work of your team or our organization?**

As an organization, we can be open to new and creative ways of looking at conservation. We can still carry on important work of our founders, Zahniser, the Muries, and find ways to work with Indigenous people. We do not have to compromise our conservation values in recognizing the inherent rights of the Indigenous people who live in and around these protected areas. We can do both. And in situations where there is opposition, we must work closely together and involve them in compromises.

### **What impact do you think this work had on those involved in this collaboration?**

Internally we have seen a positive pivot in our thinking. It has taken patience, time, and education on getting folks to see the value of shifting how we do conservation in places Indigenous people occupy or have lived since time immemorial. We have seen partners shift as well. The TWS DEI internal work promotes an outward manifestation for what we are trying to do with an indigenous lens.

### **How are you incorporating lessons learned from this experience in your daily work?**

Everyday things are changing, and we have to use local resources to determine best practices for what will work in our communities. We need to not impose our ideas but engage the Inupiaq people for how new protections should look given their sovereignty and self-determination and ability to govern themselves.



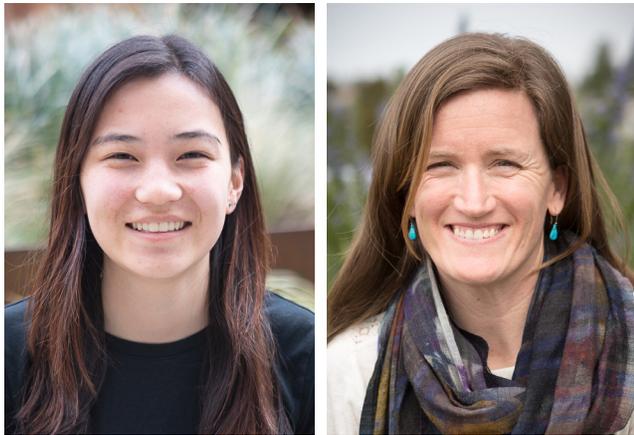
Urban to Wild Coordinator

## Elena Arakaki &

Washington State Deputy Director

## Kitty Craig

### Connecting people and the outdoors in Washington state



#### Share more about the catalyst and outcome(s) of this project.

King County started Trailhead Direct, a regional transit to trails service, originally focused on reducing parking congestion at trailheads. Now the program is focused on equity and engagement as opposed to infrastructure. The goal was to broaden our user base, and one approach we identified was to work with the Environmental Coalition of South Seattle (ECOSS), a multicultural organization specializing in environmental outreach to businesses and communities of color throughout King County.

Through our work with ECOSS's New Arrivals program for immigrants and refugees, we were able to bring 145 people outside to experience places that they might not have known about otherwise and to have an opportunity to familiarize themselves with a new environment.

Ultimately, we collaborated to create the Cougar Mountain Route in south King County, which does not have as many outdoor opportunities and is home to many communities of color. Additionally, intentional efforts were taken to increase language inclusivity and diverse representation in promotional materials.

#### What was the most enlightening moment you encountered during this project/work?

It was powerful to read quotes from our partners about how much the experiences meant to them. This was more than providing a fun day outside on the trail, it was really about community-building. Their reflections showed how much of an impact this service was having on people's lives.

Also, there is the realization that connecting people to the outdoors does not always have to be around traditional hiking trails. Some participants shared that they had not used the word "hiking" before or that it was not a word in their native language. Spending time outdoors can mean doing yoga or having a picnic, gathering in groups, or enjoying the outdoors alone. There are many inclusive ways to talk about outdoor recreation.





### How are you incorporating lessons learned from this experience in your daily work?

We are thinking more about how to sustain and strengthen our relationship with ECOSS over time, in big and small ways. For example, passing along grant opportunities, featuring our partners' work in different ways, and collaborating on other projects such as community-based research.

Our efforts this year have served as a model for other partnerships starting by meeting partners where they are and recognizing different needs and the necessity for us to plan for and adequately compensate partners for their time and investment.

### How can lessons taken from these efforts be used to educate others on the need for diversity, equity, and inclusion in conservation?

Our work in King County breaks the narrative that people of color are not interested in the outdoors or the environment. Through the partnerships we established, there is a demonstrated interest from many cultural communities in enjoying the outdoors and it is important to lift up those experiences. Moreover, we need to broaden the definitions of what "recreation," "outdoors," and even "conservation" looks like as we recognize barriers to nature and seek to address them.

Quote from Community Participant:

**“I participated for the first time in a hiking activity organized by Trailhead Direct and ECOSS last summer. As a Latino immigrant man, I never had anyone to introduce me or invite me to explore this wonderful physical, social and emotional activity. Meeting new people in such a healthy outdoor environment and being able to reach extraordinary views and be in direct contact with the abundant nature of PNW was profound to me. I cannot wait to continue this activity with friends and other members of my community. Thank you so much to the organizers, sponsors and to the public transportation system for letting me have this positive experience free of cost.”**

**– J. Fernando Luna**  
Latinx community hiker

# Paul Spitler

Director of Wilderness Policy

## Protecting tribal cultural sites



### Please share more about what you considered as you started your work.

As we deepened our native partnerships, there was the realization that many tribes across US are seeking 1) better management of public lands, 2) more say over how important cultural sites are managed; and 3) in some cases wanted the return of sacred sites to tribal management. Through conversations with tribal leaders, I learned there is no nation-wide system of protected cultural sites on public lands and no easy means to protect those sites through legislation. The 1964 Wilderness Act created a wilderness system which states what wilderness is, how it is defined, and how you can add places. No such system for cultural sites. Realizing this huge gaping loophole in federal law demonstrated a need and sparked my work on this project.

### What impact do you think this work had on those involved in this collaboration?

One important impact is that we have developed some really strong relationships between TWS and tribal leaders. Our connections are not just with the National Congress of American Indians and All Pueblo Council of Governors but with other tribal leaders as well. We have also created a lot more understanding between TWS and tribes as well as understanding among members of Congress as to what tribes are seeking with regards to cultural sites on federal lands and how conservation groups are supporting their interests.



### What was the most enlightening moment you encountered during this project/work?

Realizing how important it is for tribes to reclaim their traditional homelands. Their traditional homelands are significant to their cultural identity and sense of self. Their heritage is inextricably tied to these places and tribes still feel tremendous loss of not being able to access and control lands they have been connected to for generations.



### **How are you incorporating lessons learned from this experience in your daily work?**

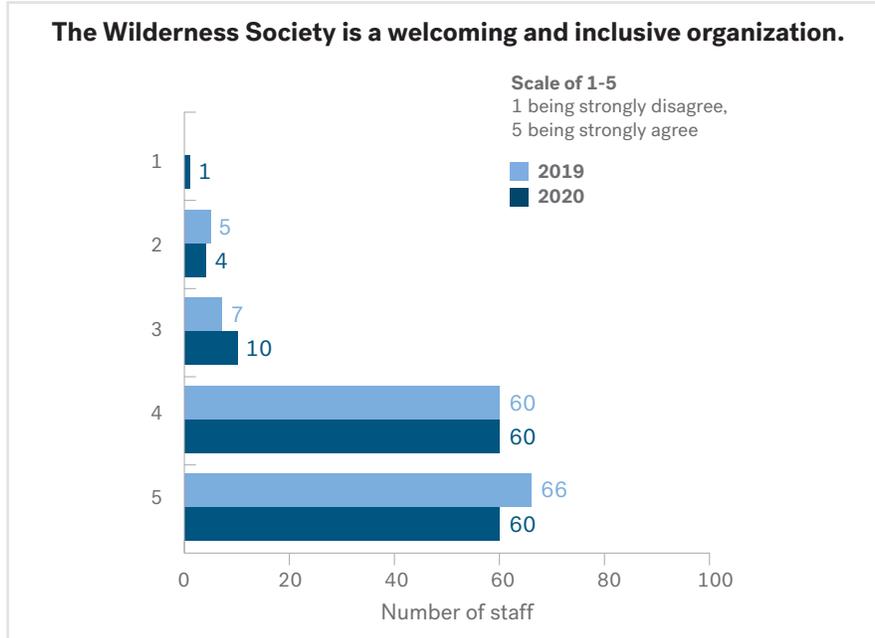
Relationships are really important and I really value the relationships built through this process. These relationships have led to many good opportunities for TWS to engage in other issues that we might not have otherwise considered. I have personally learned a lot about how to approach building relationships with tribal leaders, getting to know them and understand what issues are dearest to them. In turn, I now think of ways for TWS to support tribes where we have not been involved previously.

### **How can lessons taken from these efforts be used to educate others on the need for diversity, equity, and inclusion in conservation?**

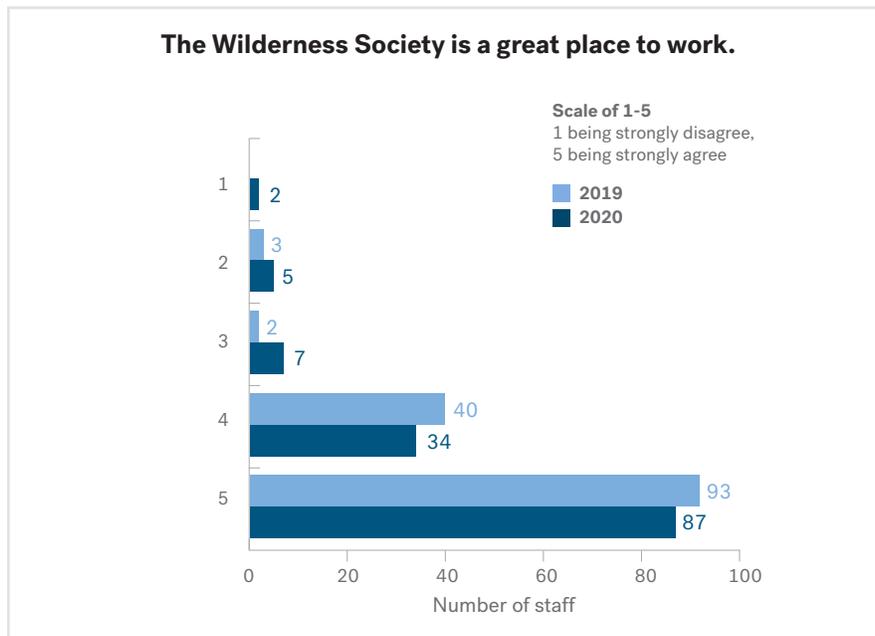
Virtually every site where we work is the ancestral homeland of some tribe or multiple tribes. It is of critical importance that as we think through any place-based work and any policy work not place-based, we immediately think of who are the impacted tribes. Who are the tribes that have a connection of this landscape? How can we authentically engage with them and take proper measures to learn and support their views and perspectives?

# Annual workplace culture survey

The following data points include self-reported data from team members on 2020 Annual Workplace Culture Survey. 135 respondents, or 92.5% of The Wilderness Society staff, participated in the 2020 survey. For the 2019 Annual Workplace Culture Survey, there were 138 respondents and a 96.5% response rate.

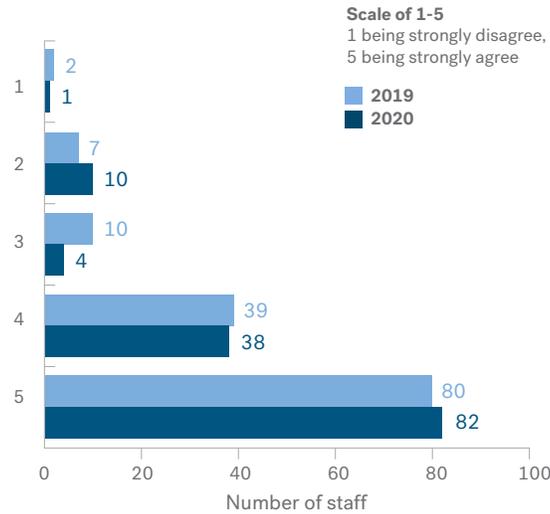


Most respondents (89%) agreed that The Wilderness Society is welcoming and inclusive. 4% of respondents disagreed about the inclusiveness of The Wilderness Society. In 2019, 91% of The Wilderness Society staff agreed that the organization is welcoming and inclusive, while 4% of staff disagreed.



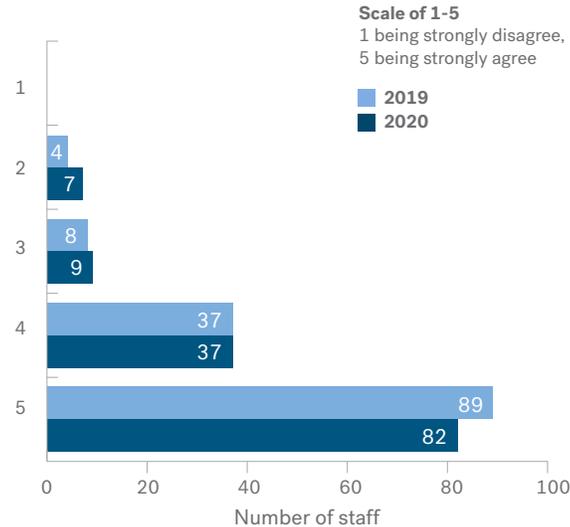
The vast majority of staff (90%) believe that The Wilderness Society is a great place to work. Previously, 96% of respondents agreed that The Wilderness Society is a great place to work. More staff disagree with the proposition that The Wilderness Society is a great place to work in the 2020 survey than the 2019 survey.

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



89% of staff agree that The Wilderness Society's policies promote a healthy work life balance. In the previous survey, 87% of staff agreed with the proposition. The number of respondents that disagreed with the statement slightly increased from 2019 to 2020.

**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. 12% of 2020 staff respondents disagreed or remained neutral about the inclusivity of their daily work environment compared to 9% of respondents on the 2019 survey.

# The Many Voices of TWS

The Wilderness Society is made up of unique individuals of many identities and many voices. We asked our team members to share more of who they are in their own words and here are the identities they shared.



# Closing Reflections



2019 provided much needed space for meaningful learning and planning as we make strides to advance equity in all facets of our work and culture. So often in equity initiatives, the focus on conversations and action overrun necessary time for reflection and planning. There were multiple opportunities this year for both.

In addition to my ongoing advisement of our Executive and HR Teams, I had the pleasure of working more closely with colleagues as both a member of the Strategic Planning Committee and the TWS Environment and Equity Leadership Cohort (E2LC). With the Strategic Planning Committee, I was able to gain firsthand experience of the value that team members working together across race, tenure, geography, and many other identities can bring to efforts to transform how we approach each other and our individual and collective work. As a member of the E2LC cohort, I was able to join with colleagues in much-needed time to reflect on our equity work to date, learn of the history of injustice and our place in that history, and connect with other organizations to think about collective impact.

I am appreciative of the colleagues that I have had the opportunity to work in partnership with and am grateful for the learning that each of these spaces afforded me

as I guide our collective efforts. As each of us has a role to play in establishing greater equity in our practices, policies, and programs, I think it is important to lift up that our inputs are just as significant as our outputs and that the individuals of our organization are our greatest agents for change.

As we embark on bringing our new strategic framework into fruition in the coming years, prioritizing inclusive community-led conservation and the climate and extinction crises, we will hold space for each of us to individually and collectively reflect on the ways that equity has, can, and should show up in the core of our work. Our mission is only achievable with equity at the center and it will take the dedication and contributions of each of us create and sustain that change.

In Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Wordna M. Meskheniten".

**Wordna Meskheniten**

Deputy Vice President of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion  
& Special Advisor to the President