



The
Wilderness
Society

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

2022 & 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

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Letter from our President



The Wilderness Society's 2022 - 2023 Report on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion is a testament to the collective effort we have tirelessly worked on since releasing our initial report in 2017 and reflects the evolution of the many learnings we've put into action. The Wilderness Society has been steadfast in our commitment, both internally and externally, to infuse equity into everything we do and to advocate for policy solutions that amplify diverse voices in the ever-changing conservation movement.

We have aligned our priorities with front-line communities and significantly focused on strengthening partnerships with Indigenous nations and communities of color. With a pro-conservation Administration, TWS has maximized this moment to conserve nature and address the climate crisis in ways that engage all voices and deliver equitable outcomes. We have advanced critical, inclusive priorities embraced by diverse coalitions, especially the America the Beautiful for All Coalition, the largest and most diverse national conservation coalition that is led by front line groups. We helped develop and expand outdoor equity funds in many states where we work to increase access to nature in underserved urban areas in 2022. Our partnerships with many Indigenous coalitions and leaders have supported sovereign tribal nations in protecting sacred, cultural areas and ancestral homelands with traditional knowledge and co-stewardship agreements. The Antiquities Act and other national conservation laws are now being used in support of Indigenous-led conservation efforts. For example, our work to support the establishment of the Awi Kwa Ame National Monument in Nevada and the Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kuveni- Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument in Arizona were critical steps forward in tribal co-management, providing opportunities for Indigenous Nations to create national monument designations tailored to meet the needs of these unique places and communities. This journey with our staff, partners and many others has been a deeply meaningful learning journey, and I'm so grateful we're on it together.

In our offices, we're practicing what we preach: our own workforce at The Wilderness Society is more representative of our country's racial and age diversity. Over the last few years, the number of TWS staff of color as a percent of total has grown from 12 percent in 2015 to 35 percent in 2023, while our staff under 30 years old has grown from 11 percent to 21 percent between 2017 and 2023. While our journey will always include advancements as well as steps we could have done better, we reflect and learn each step of the way, and will continue to move forward and grow. As I look to the future of TWS, the shifts we are making will help our organization become more resilient, more creative and more effective in the challenging work ahead for land, water and communities everywhere who rely on healthy, thriving nature.

In this report, we're not just telling the stories of what we believe we did well but also reflect on how we could do better on our equity journey. We are committed to facing the challenges head-on, holding each other accountable while lending support, and stepping up to find solutions. We are an organization deeply dedicated to continuous improvement, which is critical to achieving inclusive and equitable outcomes.

As I reflect on my 12 years at The Wilderness Society, I am proud of what we have accomplished together and how we have evolved the organization to build a more powerful movement, yet I know tremendous growth is still to come. Because we continue to act on our pledge to equity and invest in multiple opportunities for shared learning, we are better at serving a public as diverse as the landscapes we protect.

We must continue to learn from our mistakes, bring more people and perspectives to the table, and work at all levels to address the inequities in accessing and conserving public lands across the country. I look forward to the work the organization has in store for the years to come as TWS finds continuously innovative and joyful ways to do the hard AND necessary work of building a more inclusive and equitable conservation movement.

Best,

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



On behalf of The Wilderness Society's Governing Council, I want to express profound gratitude to The Wilderness Society staff for their perseverance on the long journey toward equity and inclusion in conservation. To transform who we are and how we work is much easier said than done and The Wilderness Society continues to consider new and innovative ways to center equity, diversity, and inclusion in the priorities of our work and the culture of the organization.

I recognize that equity is not simply an outcome of work toward fulfilling our commitment but consists of both a vision and practices that must be guided and modeled by a group of dedicated individuals who have a shared vision and are ready to put in the work. So many team members, past and present, have played critical roles in starting this journey and pressing forward.

For the 2022-23 report, I'd like to share great admiration for Jamie Williams. His steadfast leadership and vision for the great organization we could and have become is because he inspired the Governing Council and staff to commit to EDI in more substantive ways. I want to also share boundless appreciation to Wordna Meskheniten for helping make our vision for equity a reality through her facilitation of powerful collective learning experiences and keen understanding of what equity looks like in principle and practice.

Deepening and expanding the impact of our equity work requires centering people along with places and TWS continues to be a leader in building the inclusive conservation movement our country and our planet needs.

Respectfully,

Michael Mantell
Governing Council Chair



Highlights

This report spans the years of 2022-2023, and these are just a few of the highlights.

TWS in Color

Creation of the LGBTQ Caucus, the LGBTQ Inclusivity Learning Session, and The Emerging Queer and Intersectional Environmental Movement Webinar

In January 2022, TWS launched its very first LGBTQ Caucus, a community and learning space for TWS's LGBTQ Staff initially led by former Equity Associate Campbell Simmons and currently led by our Director of Equity & Learning, Jenny Truax. Much like our BIPOC Caucus and Youth Caucus, this space is designed to create opportunities for connection, action, and growth for our staff. The LGBTQ Caucus partnered with the Equity Team to bring the first LGBTQ Inclusivity Learning Session to TWS to help bring LGBTQ cultural fluency to all staff. This learning session was truly a collaborative project that started the growing conversation of LGBTQ inclusivity at The Wilderness Society. In October 2022, the LGBTQ Caucus partnered with our External Affairs team to hold a webinar called [The Emerging Queer and Intersectional Environmental Movement Webinar](#). We invited Somah Haaland, Yessenia Funes, and Owin Pierson to join us for a conversation on the history of LGBTQ people in the outdoors and the future yet to come. In 2023, the Equity, Culture and Learning Team hosted a three-part series titled "Creating Affirming Workspaces for LGBTQ+ Colleagues" to follow on our external work in 2022.

Integration of Staff Competencies into annual review process

In 2022, TWS integrated its Staff Competencies into our review process. We believe that at the core of successful organizational change, there is a staff that is committed to the change and equipped with the competencies the change requires. The Staff Competencies are designed to give us shared expectations and language to foster a more inclusive organizational culture and equitable outcomes in our daily and longer-term work. The five competencies are: Self Awareness, Solution Orientation, Equity Learning, Analysis, and Ownership, Direct Communication and Feedback, and Meaningful Relationships. These competencies provide some positive directions as we continue to co-create a healthy, equity-informed conservation organization.



Staff at TWS in Color

First TWS In Color: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Caucus Convening

In September of 2022, TWS held its very first convening for its Black, Indigenous, and staff of Color. Titled *TWS In Color: Joy and Connection*, this retreat took place in Washington DC from September 26-28. During TWS' All Staff Retreat earlier that same year, our Black, Indigenous, and staff of Color met and expressed interest in coming together on their own. Hearing that desire, the Equity Team worked on a crunched 5-month timeline to create an opportunity for our BIPOC Staff that they would never forget. The convening was constructed to support BIPOC-owned businesses, tap into staff knowledge and talent, delve into the importance of BIPOC in the conservation movement, share ideas on how TWS can still grow, and most importantly, make space for our BIPOC staff to have some fun. During those few days, our BIPOC Staff rested, connected, and celebrated with each other.

Racial Equity Trainings

Our Equity Team held a series of trainings on racial equity with a specific focus on racial equity in conservation. After receiving feedback that prior trainings with outside contractors didn't apply closely enough to our work here at TWS, the Equity Team came together to make a highly applicable training for all staff. Each staff member took two days to dig into racial equity in conservation with our Vice President of Equity Culture and Learning, Wordna Meskheniten. These trainings were structured to educate our staff on the history of racial equity in conservation while helping them find new ways of evaluating equity into their work. We were delighted to have a couple of our Governing Council members join these sessions.



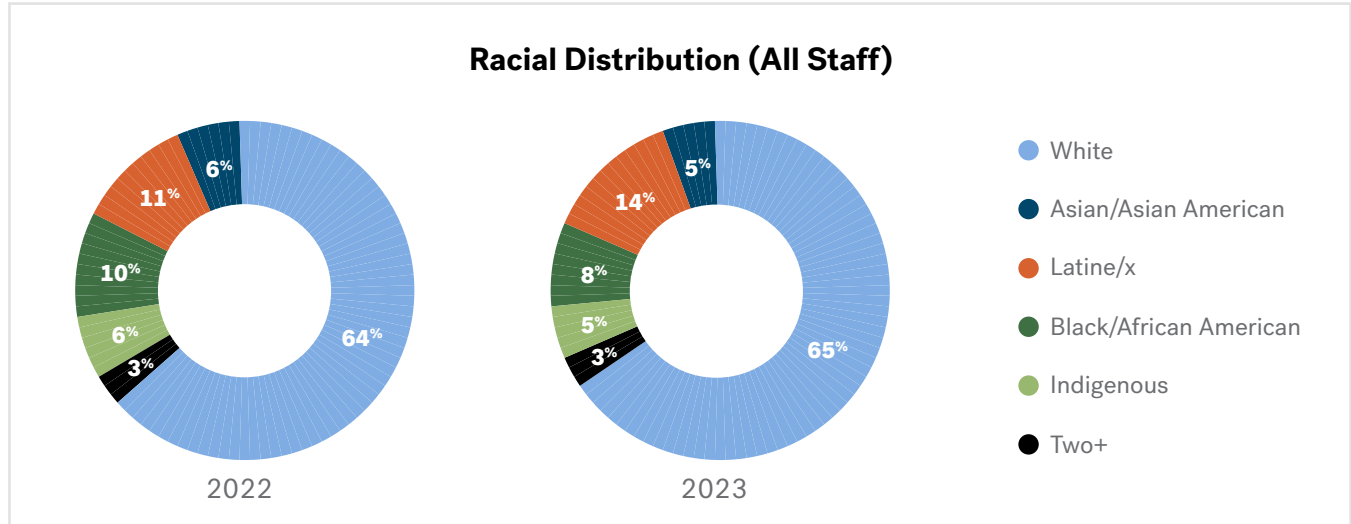
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Implementation of NLP Director position

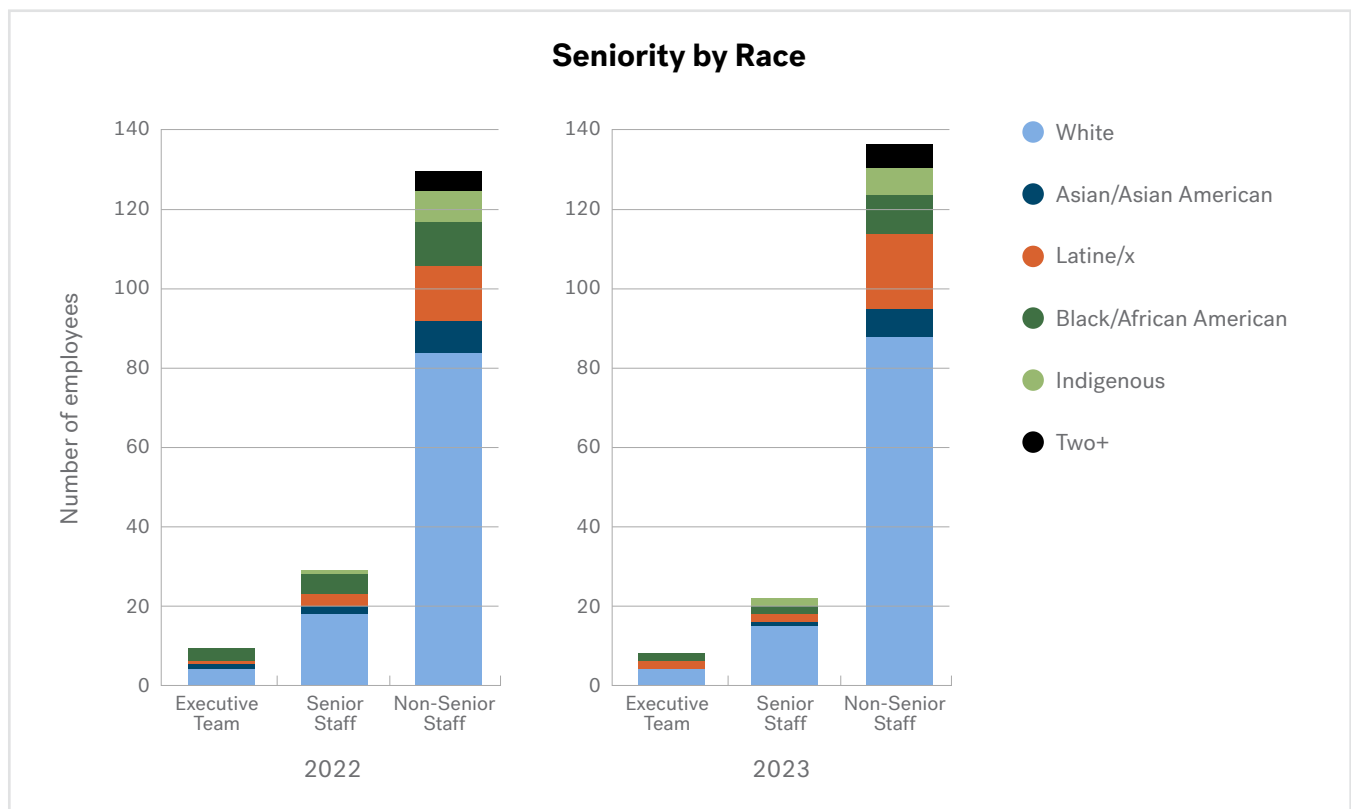
To further our commitment to cultivating equitable partnerships with Native Tribes and Nations, TWS hired a new Director of Native Lands Partnerships, Starlyn Miller. Initially, the Native Lands Partnerships was a body of work in different facets and teams around the organization, this role has been an opportunity to enhance TWS' partnership and work with Native and Indigenous communities. This role was one step towards reconciling historic wrongs and advancing the goals on the landscapes where we work. Starlyn came to TWS with a wealth of knowledge and expertise working in Indigenous communities.

Staff demographics

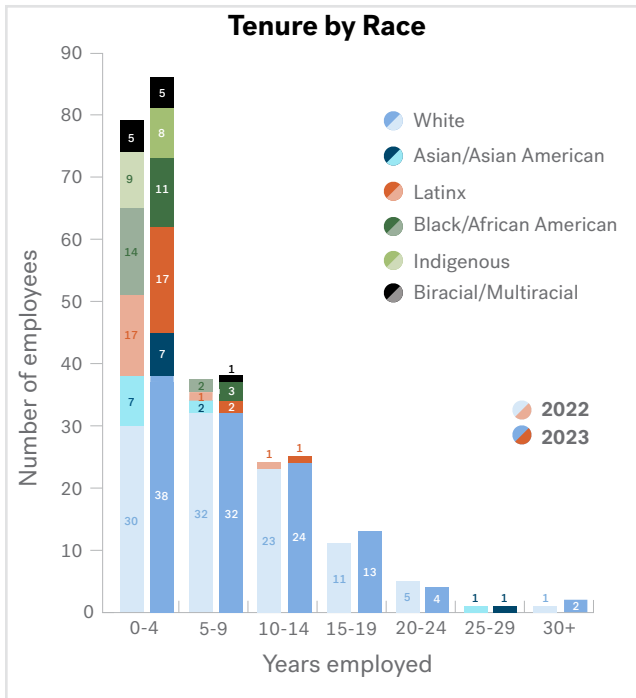
The following details the composition of our staff as of December 31, 2022 and December 31, 2023 as captured by our HR Employee database. We have shared data from 2021 for comparison. The Wilderness Society had a total of 162 at the end of 2022 and 167 at the end of 2023.



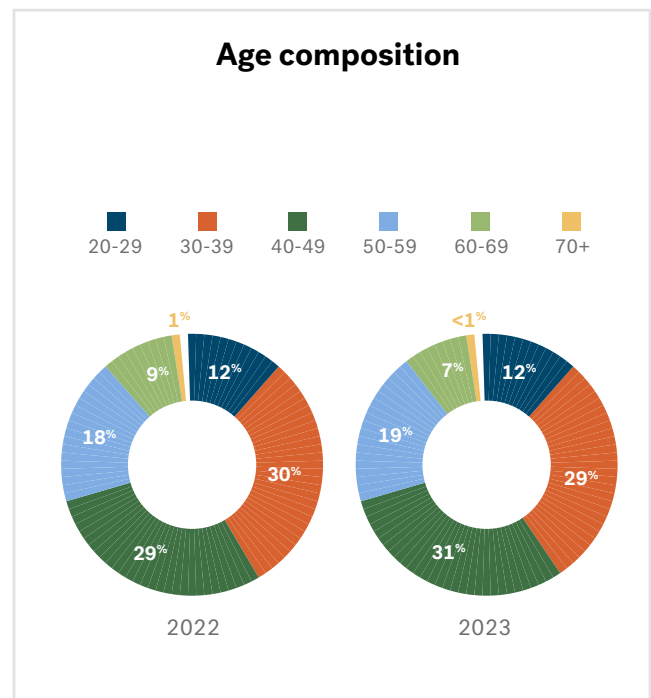
The percentage of Staff of Color has increased by 24 percentage points over the past seven years from 12% in 2015 to 36% in 2022 and slightly decreased to 35% in 2023.



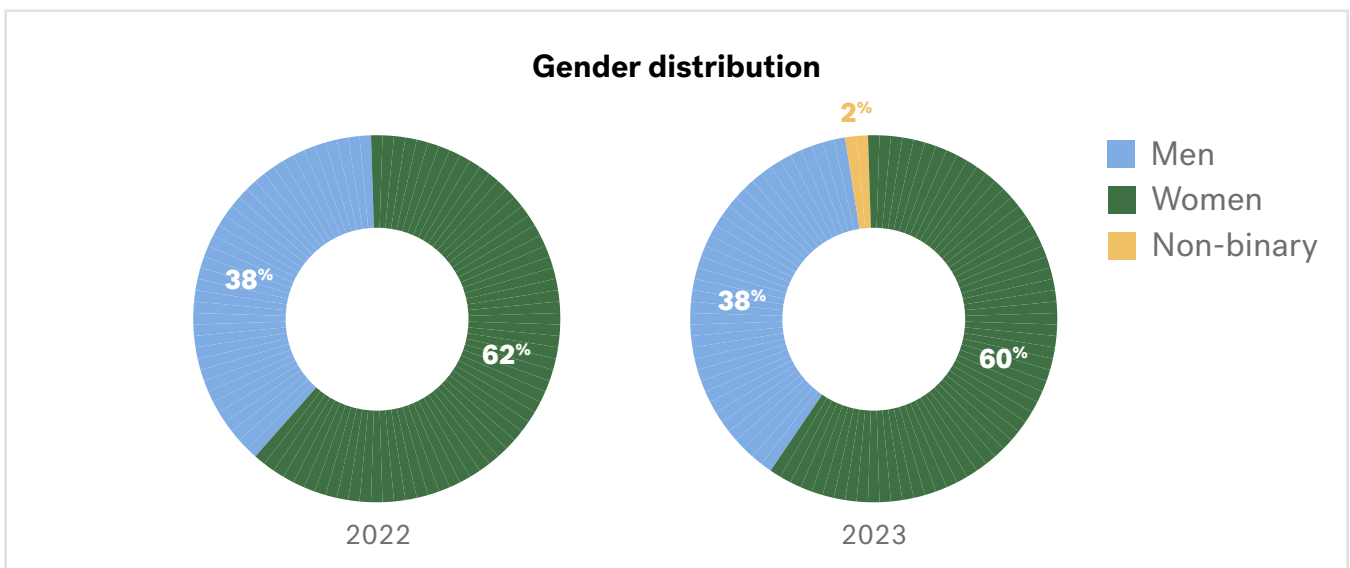
The majority of senior staff at The Wilderness Society identify as white. Senior staff of Color increased by ten percentage points in 2022 going from 28% to 38% senior Staff of Color and slightly down to 31.8% in 2023.



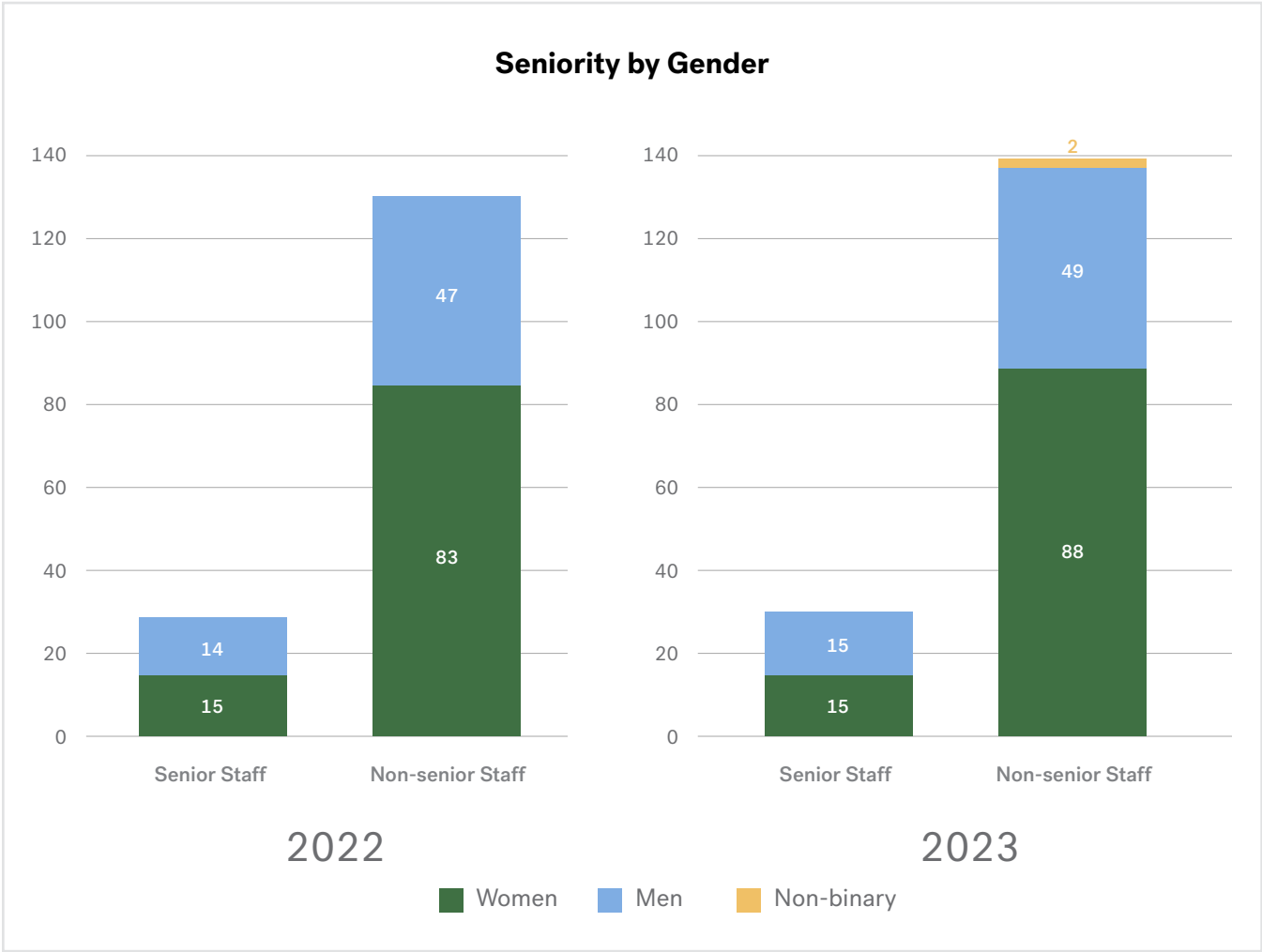
The vast majority of staff who have been with The Wilderness Society five or more years identify as white. The overwhelming majority of staff of Color have been with the organization for fewer than five years. The number of team members of Color who have been with the organization for five years or more has increased from 2021 (6) to 2022 (7). Because significantly more staff of Color joined in 2022, it appears as though the percentage has decreased, but the numbers of staff have increased.



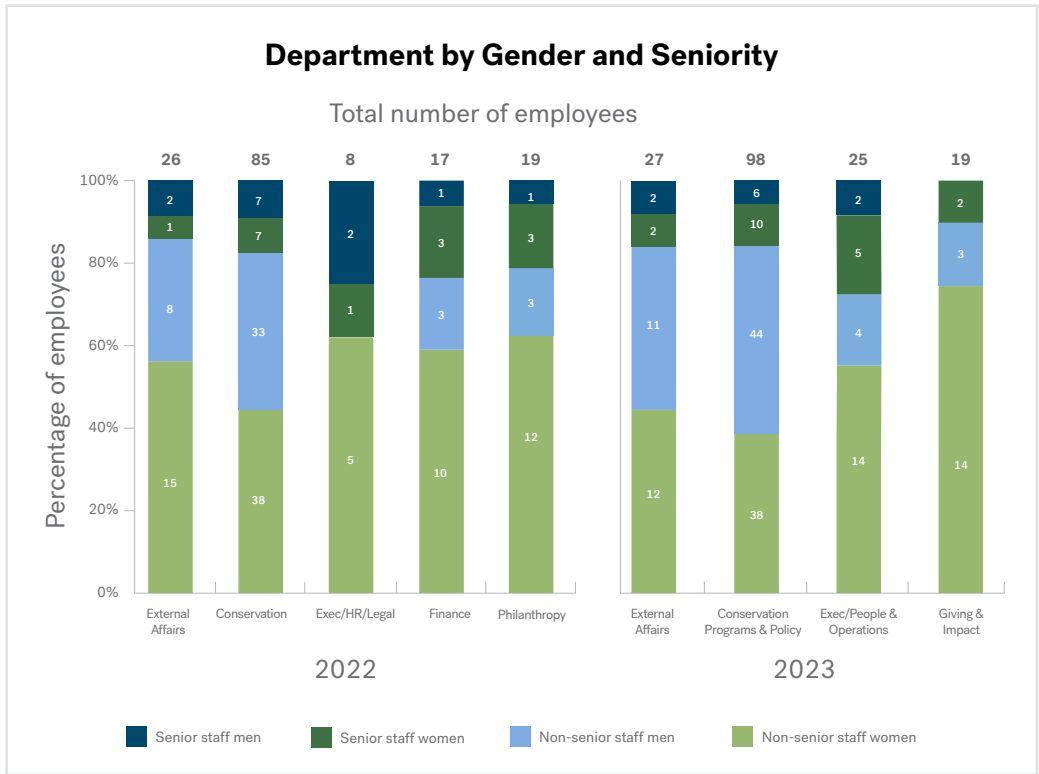
The largest proportion of The Wilderness Society staff in 2022 & 2023 are in their thirties (30%), and the smallest proportion of staff (1%) are in their seventies.



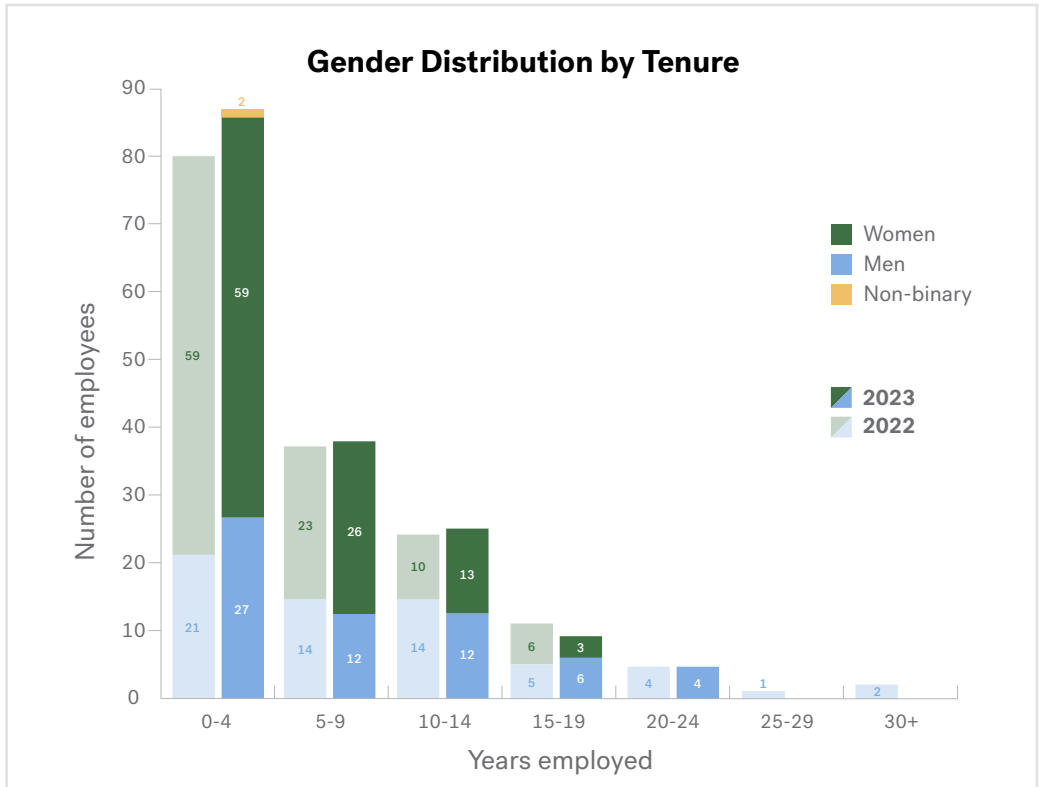
We added a nonbinary category for gender in 2023 and moving forward, the category will be available.



The majority of senior staff for 2022 and 2023 identify as women. Our gender identification changed in 2023 to include our nonbinary colleagues.

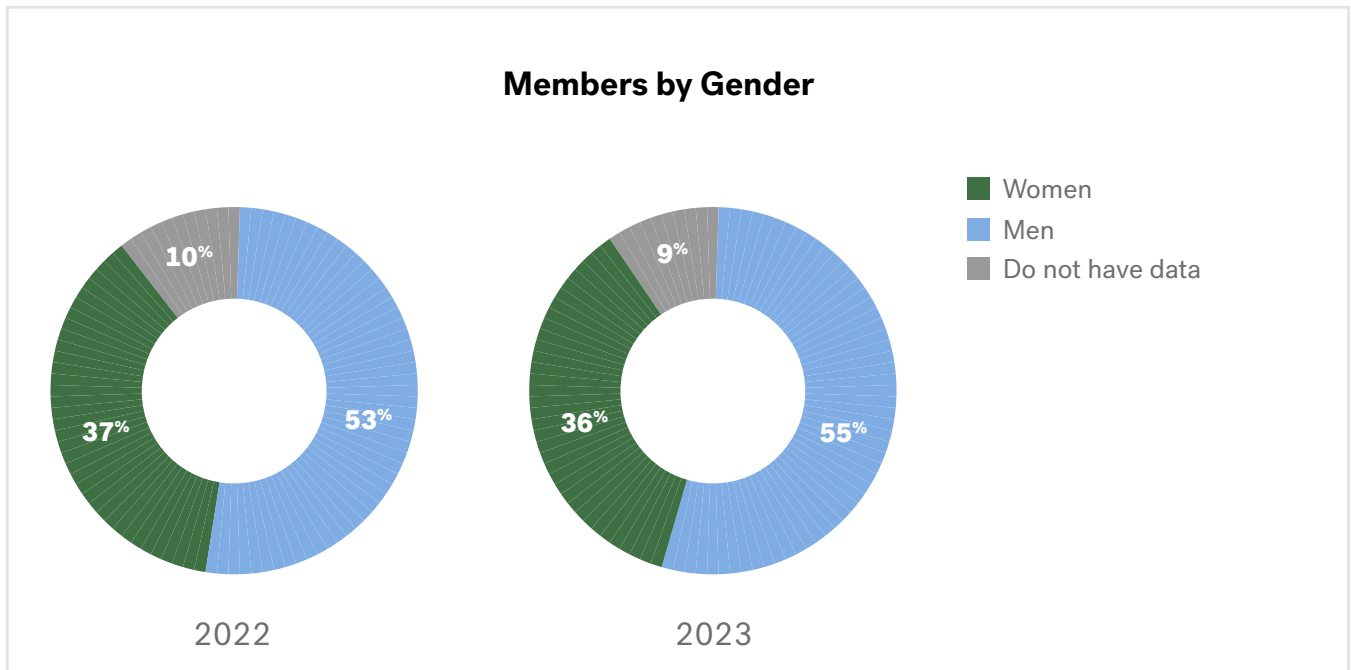
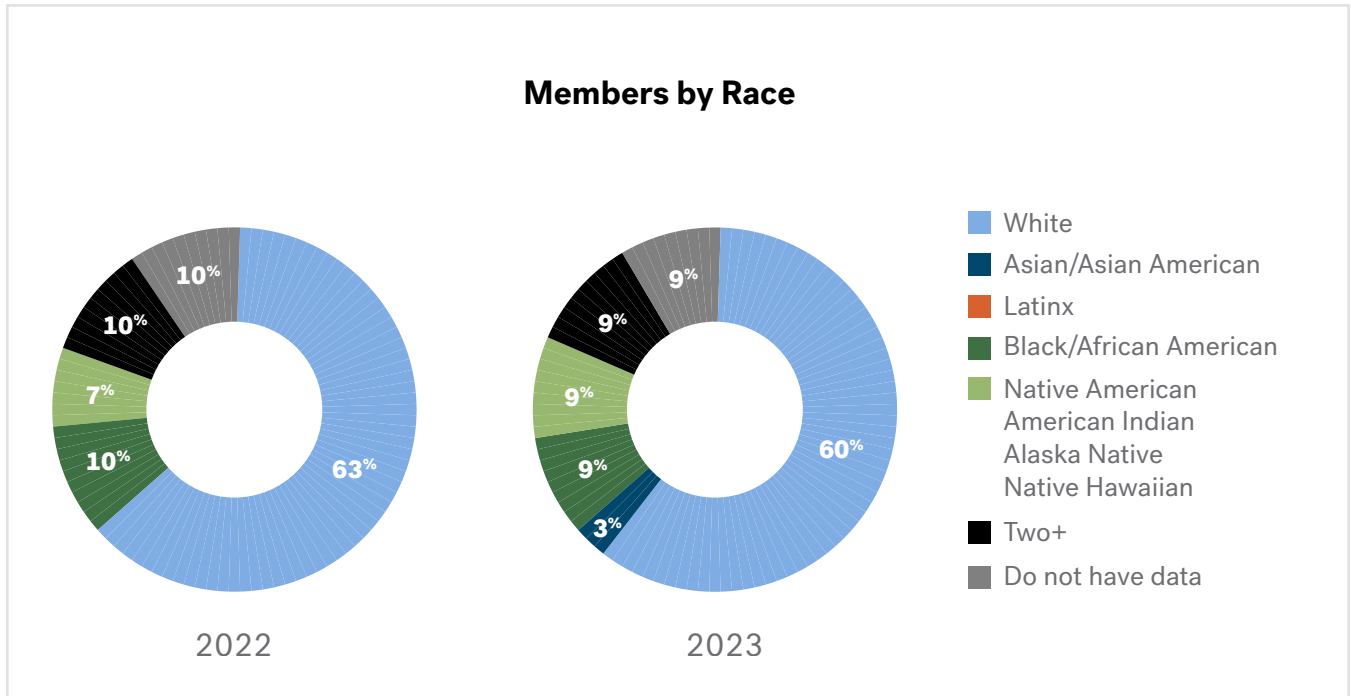


Gender balance across the organization is similar to last year's data.

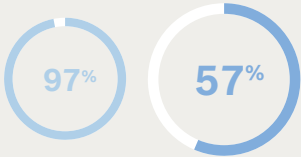


In 2023, 53% of The Wilderness Society staff's tenure has been for four years or less, which is almost 10 percentage points more than 2022. Most employees who joined in the past four years identify as women. Of The Wilderness Society's staff, men outnumber women as tenure increases.

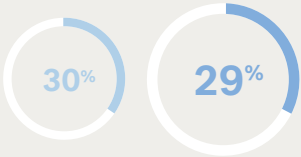
Board demographics



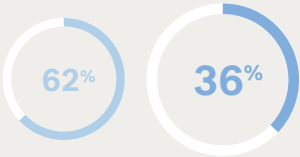
Equity and diversity in recruitment, hiring and retention



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



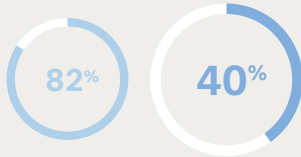
Average percentage of **people of Color in each applicant pool**



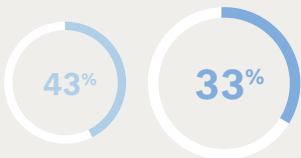
Percentage of **interviews** with applicants who identified as people of color

Quantifiable Metrics

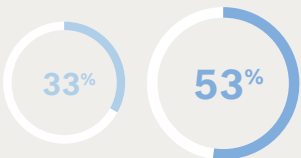
2022 2023



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

Please note that this data is presented as raw percentages based on self-identified demographic characteristics. This data is not intended to conform to standards of legal or statistical significance and should not be construed as such.

Putting equity into practice

Native Lands Photo Essay Project

2022

Starlyn Miller, Jill Gottesman, Mason Cummings, Jen Parravani, Kim Smith



Project Introduction:

Our Eastern Region Team worked with our Communications and Native Lands Partnerships teams to create a photo essay project with Natives Outdoors and the Eastern Band Cherokee Indians.

What went into the creation of this project?

Jill:

It started with Mason letting us know that we had an opportunity with a photographer, Micheli Oliver, from Natives Outdoors who was interested in coming to this region. She was really interested in coming to the southeast and expressed interest in learning more about the Trail of Tears. It was on a compressed timeline, but we wanted to do it in a way where we could offer something of value back to our tribal partners. I talked to the Eastern Band Cherokee Indian forester and asked if he could use some amazing photographs of the places where he works. He was super interested, but we had to shift our timeline a little bit. In the course of our planning, we were lucky enough to hire Kim. It was one of her first big projects for The Wilderness Society. She was able to tap into her own community. She knew that we couldn't just come and take pictures and stage a few people here and there. It really had to be owned and shaped by the community. It was important to do it the right way. We've got strong relationships here, and we wanted to ensure we're tapping into them in the right way. We worked with the photographer, former communications staff Jen Parravani, Mason, Lulu, and our whole External Affairs team, to make sure that we could give full Free Prior and Informed Consent Power to the people who were so generous in sharing their knowledge and their images with us. Part of what's important in working with Indigenous partners is being willing to say that we're still learning as an organization. We have to always come with that humility so that if we need to change something, we can do it at any time. It's not something that just goes away after the project is done.

Mason:

In the year prior, we had done a photo essay project with Natives Outdoors as part of our photo grant program and this was our second iteration of that. We put out another request for proposals in our priority landscapes and Natives Outdoors came back to us with three different ideas. I went to Jill with this opportunity in the Southern Apps, though it was on a very expedited timeline. Fortunately, we were able to extend the timeline a little bit. Then there was the serendipity of Kim coming on at the same time and it all came together.



Kim:

For me, it was about elevating community voices that could uplift and accurately share the relationship between this Nation and their Ancestral lands. This is the community I've been in since birth, so all I had to do was call up a friend and say, "Hey, I need help." So, I don't really take much credit for making the magic happen, I just take credit for being able to connect the dots. That's my contribution; connecting the people to the right sources. One thing that I was intentional with, especially coming into The Wilderness Society as a new employee, was talking to my community members in an honest way. A lot of the participation came from trust in me. I will not put community members into a situation that would be harmful or disrespectful. I'm very protective of our culture and not letting our people be used because that has been the relationship Indigenous people have had with outsiders since colonial contact. So, like a mother figure, I want to protect my people. It was important to be able to tell the community that Free Prior and Informed Consent and respecting their boundaries are priorities. For example, I would have loved to incorporate the aspects of the relationship between the land and the stars, our Indigenous astronomy, but the community did not want that to be shared with the rest of the world. Because that was the community's right, it did not get included in the project. TWS's firm respect for that, and willingness to allow this project to be fluid is what really made this community open up to The Wilderness Society. The trust that came from this whole project spawned new projects separately. It was also so important to have a photographer who was an Indigenous woman

talking about land rematriation. She was respectful and wanted to sit and listen, before trying to give photographic directions. She let the participants lead and decide how they shared their culture and connection. I also had to go to DC for the TWS's BIPOC Convening right at the beginning of this project, so I was literally telling my people, "You're going to go to a place where there's bad cell phone service, and you're going to meet a white lady, and a light-skinned native, but trust them." It was great to know that I could lean on Jill and Micheli to be good representatives of TWS and respectful of the community and their landscape as visitors.

Starlyn:

This project was a model of how we should be doing our work. Even with challenges, this is the way we should be showing up. Native Lands Partnerships wants to share this story about how the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Jill, Kim, and TWS comms worked on this project so that we can replicate it throughout the organization. We had some other projects that didn't work out as well, and I think the biggest takeaway is that we have to work from relationships. Having a person like Kim from the community and Jill having such a long relationship with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians meant all the difference. When you don't have a relationship, you can do harm to the narrative at a national scale especially as we're dealing with the invisibility of Indigenous people. That's where Native Lands Partnerships comes in. Kim and Jill had the relationships, and we can work to make sure the story is being told in the way the community wants.

What were some of the ways you supported each other as team members? And how did that support help you to better center equity in your work?

Kim:

I want to acknowledge the support I received. My first day was September 6, and this project on-site took place the last week of September. I was green to TWS, but I could lean on Jen to figure out how to uplift the narrative we were creating, and Jill to help be a face for TWS in person while I was gone. That gave me comfort and trust. For me, the biggest thing was that TWS immediately gave me the trust to lead this project with three weeks under my belt. That's atypical for most of my work experiences.

Mason:

I have to give Jill a huge shout-out for supporting this whole thing while I was on sabbatical. I was entirely absent for most of this work. I had painted a vague picture of what we were hoping to achieve, and Jill was able to work with Kim and turn it into something meaningful, not just for TWS but for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. I just got back from sabbatical, and I was blown away by what they had put together. Huge kudos to Jill for taking what I gave her and running with it and with the community every step of the way. It's just amazing.

Jill:

We needed a lot of internal support and flexibility on several fronts. We literally amended our photo consent form to address Indigenous communities and include Free Prior and Informed Consent. I also got gift cards to offer some reciprocity and thanks to community members who took time, drove far distances, and brought their families

and kids to participate. We wanted something to hand people right when they came. That's slightly outside of our financial policies, but we did it. I was clear with our finance and accounting team that this is necessary for our work. We need to be able to offer things to people in communities right in the moment. This project has also led to a bigger conversation internally about informed consent. We were raising these issues in real-time with this project. It helped us center equity both in this project and on an organizational level.

What was a challenge that you faced in this project in the last year? And what did you need to overcome that challenge?

Mason:

When we got this proposal from Natives Outdoors, we had a very compressed timeline. We were hoping to get this done in the fiscal year, and I also had to leave for sabbatical. Those factors compressed things, and we had to find colleagues' flexibility and trust to move this forward.

Jen:

From a comms perspective, I learned that as communicators, we get excited to share a story. But this was a moment to step back and say, we need to pump the brakes. For example, Kim and I talked about inviting in a reporter, but this is not necessarily TWS's story to invite a reporter in. This is the story of the community to tell. Sometimes the best way to do that is by letting their words speak for themselves. It was a learning experience from a comms perspective.



© Micheli Oliver

Kim:

Would we have had the same environment and the same openness by the participants to share and feel comfortable in this space, with a photographer, an outsider from The Wilderness Society, and then a reporter? I think the overall success of the project was partly because we did not push for that media component during the process. The challenge I found most difficult in this process was after the project was done. We had worked with Micheli to ensure the narrative that she wrote complemented the pictures and was authentic and respectful to the community. We shared that initial draft with community members. However, when I came back from being out for surgery, I found that the narrative had been changed drastically by the contractor we were working with. It was quite offensive and more of a colonized textbook style narrative that did not speak to the voice of the Indigenous people that were involved in the project. The photographer even mentioned feeling defeated because her words had been changed. And it had gone from emotional and people-focused to a timestamped history-based narrative. I told Jill I didn't feel comfortable going forward with that language and showing it to my community. Jill went to bat for the original content. Thankfully the changed version was immediately pulled and returned to the original. I've been in workplaces that work with Indigenous people that do not respond the same way when there's conflict or opposition to their idea of how a narrative should be presented. TWS's response was relieving for me but also speaks to why this project is successful.

Starlyn:

Native Lands Partnerships was supportive of going with the original narrative, and the communications team was as well. They told the contractor he wasn't going to show up in this way. The process worked. The contractor was Indigenous too, but just because you're an Indigenous contractor doesn't mean you understand that specific community. We learned something from that as well.

Kim:

One question that we were asked after the fact was, why didn't we have an Eastern Band of Cherokee Indian photographers involved in this project? Why didn't we include those individuals in this process? That's something we're learning and wanting to be intentional within this next project that's coming from the relationships created here. We're going to look at respecting the wishes of the community and doing a deeper dive into our intentions on how we uplift their own narrative.

Starlyn:

That's important to how we work internally on these issues. I know comms and I learned that lesson. TWS has been working with Tahoma Peak Solutions to make our communications more equitable and inclusive for Native peoples. We've done webinars, a communications audit, and an internal messaging document. They had recommendations that we incorporated from them from an Indigenous lens at a national level, so they've really helped us zone in on our communications and where we need to show up better. We've been talking about invisibility in the narrative, and it was important for us to have that conversation. There's nothing in place right now that requires that conversation to happen. I can't say enough about Jen and her willingness to look at the consent form and update it to make sure there's informed consent at every step of the way. She did a fantastic job working through that contract. Also, to Kim's point about making sure that we're showing up, not extractive, and actually adding to the community, we need to talk about compensation more seriously. There are photographers in every community, we have to understand who those people are and how to connect with them. We can do this through the landscape teams. I think when we rely on subcontractors as the answer to everything, we lose the place-based element. Thinking about how we can work through place is super important. For this project, we also had to make sure it's not just for TWS, but the people and Nations involved in the project are also able to use the pictures. That's super exciting to me, and we can replicate that process in many landscapes.

Jill:

For me, there was the challenge of knowing when to step back or step in. I had to step back when I realized that people might show up when they're supposed to and maybe not. It's OK if things don't happen on a strict agenda. It can be a little hard to let go and trust that it'll work out. Ultimately, it was beautiful and there were people who hadn't seen each other for a long time, and that connection was beautiful and important to the photos themselves. My role was to make sure people were fed, and happy, had coffee in the morning when it was cold, and that elders were comfortable and had chairs. I had to learn to step back and just provide that support.

Going back to the story Kim told about Micheli's words being changed, it felt particularly bad because she was a younger Indigenous woman, and we had talked about the issues facing young Indigenous people and Indigenous women in general across careers, sectors, and communities. So, when we saw her words were changed, we knew we needed to step in and make it right.

What hopes do you have for the native outdoors photo essay project that you want to see actualized? What do you need to actualize those hopes?

Kim:

I wanted this to be a resource for my Nation to take pride in, to see ourselves in such a beautiful way, and really uplift our own spirits. These aren't just going to be on a thumb drive in somebody's desk drawer. They're being used. They're going on signs that visitors are seeing when they come to our homelands and engage with our landscape, being presented at national conferences. The things that I wanted to see happen are already happening. That doesn't mean I don't want to see them on a grander scale. If we could build those national relationships, it's easier for us to replicate the success of this project. It's important that TWS uplift Indigenous voices and be visible in Indian country as an organization that is providing quality support and quality content in the right way. My people have embraced working with The Wilderness Society and with Micheli. We're doing a mini artist in residence with her and she's coming out full force to do multiple projects while she's here. I just wish I could pause to enjoy each part of the process.

Starlyn:

There's still stuff that we need to do to come to the table and make sure that teams are doing this work in the right way. I think we should be elevating youth storytelling. If a community wants to kind of connect their language camps or their culture camps with some of these other skill sets we can bring people in to help support whatever programming they have to go on so that more people, more Indigenous youth, and more Indigenous women can tell their stories. It's not us being the middleman, but them actually getting the skill set not just with TWS, but everywhere they go and whatever work they do. That would be my dream. I'm happy to see this project set a precedent for how we approach these types of projects moving forward. I'm so grateful to be a part of this team and help move our work in the right direction.



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Urban to Wild Managers

2022

Rachel Swanteson-Franz, Sharon Musa, Rebecca Perez, Jacqueline Reyes



Rachel Swanteson-Franz



Sharon Musa



Rebecca Perez



Jacqueline Reyes

Project Introduction:

Our Urban to Wild managers manage the Urban to Wild programs in Tucson, Seattle, Albuquerque, and Los Angeles. These are their reflections on how they center equity, not just in their external work but as the Urban to Wild team within TWS.

What are some of the ways that you all have supported each other as members of the same team that are focused on different areas? And how does that support help you better center equity in your work?

Sharon:

One thing that was really helpful for us that we started in the past few months, is just having regular manager meetings. Although we have a lot of opportunities in group settings to talk about our work, (on regular Urban to Wild calls, or Community Led Conservation calls), a lot of times it's focused. It's either really quick, because there are a lot of people on the calls, or it's focused more so on getting top-down information. So we decided we wanted to fill the gap. Normally we don't necessarily have time to get deep into each other's work. And often, Urban to Wild looks really different in each of our cities. Each of us also views all the other managers as sounding boards when we run into hurdles, often in coalitions or with different campaigns. Finding time to connect with each other in smaller settings that are focused on our current needs has been really helpful.

Jacqueline:

I would agree the manager's meeting has been really helpful. Having that time where we're able to dig deep into our work can even prevent other challenges from coming up because we're learning from each other. We're a united front and that can strengthen that voice for equity in that space. That's something that I've been really appreciative of while trying to understand the best way to go about making changes or providing feedback. Having a supportive team has been instrumental in being able to feel safe and empowered enough to do that.

Rachel:

I will also say, there's something really special about the Urban to Wild program as it provides opportunities for growth as a newer professional in the environmental field. When I started in 2020, I was just a year into fully professional salaried work. And having Elena Arakaki (former Urban to Wild staff member in Seattle), who was also young, but could show me the ropes, was huge. I was the youngest person by a long shot for a long time, so having Elena there was big. And I've tried to replicate that as Sharon, Jacqueline, and Rebecca have stepped into their roles. That's something that has been really beneficial and unique about what we've got here.

Sharon:

Another thing that is really unique and great is that we have real trust in each other. The managers' meeting is a space where we can be very honest about what we're struggling with externally or internally. It helps us know how to support each other whether that looks like working together to advocate for some internal change or just having a space to express your frustration. To Rachel's point, as I came in it was great to have both Rachel and Elena around because I was looking up to them as people who were doing really unique work in the organization- but also see them as peers who were modeling what I am potentially capable of doing, here at TWS and more generally, in the conservation world around equitable access. It's great to have other people who are in the same headspace about the type of work and what you should expect as an employee.

Rebecca:

I appreciate how the lines of communication feel really open. If I have questions, I can very easily chat with the program managers, and I get a quick response. That contributes to trust building. From the start of employment, the Urban to Wild managers were very welcoming and spent time trying to get to know me, beyond the work.

What are some systems that exist on your teams to encourage accountability for each other?

Rachel:

I am just so appreciative of Michael Casaus and Kay Bounkeua (current TWS staff members) in New Mexico because I have grown so much from working with them. I think the entire organization can learn from their approach. My equity work is really informed by them. Urban to Wild can get very siloed, so I'm just super thankful for the way Michael and Kay work to keep open lines of communication. That has kept me accountable in so many ways. I appreciate that.

Sharon:

I feel like people often conflate accountability with punishment. But really, I think what's great about the accountability that we have, is that it's very forgiving and understanding. There are definitely times when I have been called in, for example in our manager meetings. But then also, the follow-up is, "what can I do to help you get to the point that you need to be at?" It's great that the accountability on our team is framed from the perspective of "how can I help you?" That really encourages you to reach out to people for help.

Jacqueline:

Our team does a great job of resource sharing, and whether it is a training or an upcoming conference, we are always working to support one another. Another thing that I've really appreciated about this team is how mental health is prioritized. I cannot tell you how many times people have reminded me to take my days off, not overwork, or to actually take flex time when I've worked extra. There's a lot of positive reinforcement to remind us that your mental health and your time are really precious. While the work is really important, it will always be there. That's a foundation that I think is really important because I've never experienced that in other places. And I've really appreciated that about this team.

Rebecca:

I want to add that Program Managers invite me to everything, even though I'm new. That constant communication and looping in is really valuable. Even when it's not always clear what I can contribute, there's always that inclusion.

How have you worked to build meaningful relationships among team members?

Sharon:

The first thing I think of again, are our internal core manager meeting. They are really important for our internal relationship building because they're also very flexible in terms of what we use that space for. It helps us meet each of our needs, depending on what's going on in the week workwise, emotionally, etc. All of us demonstrate investment in each other's well-being, which is core to building meaningful relationships. We're always making sure that people's mental health is the most important thing at the end of the day. And that extends into advocating for each other within the organization as well. If I'm feeling some type of way about something in our organization, from the work that we do to the value it has, then I would imagine that my co-managers are also feeling the same way. It's important for us to share generally, when we are working on something that will help one of us, we extend it to everyone because we're important people to each other, and we value the work that the others do as well. At the end of the day demonstrating that each person is important to you is at the core of relationship building.

Rachel:

When I look at past jobs too and who I'm still connected with like it was people I spent a decent amount of time talking about life outside work. I think a lot of times, it's hard in very structured meetings to try to have more opportunities for relationship building. But thankfully our manager meetings are super flexible. Sometimes it is genuinely an hour where we don't talk about work. And I think that's what helps us hold each other accountable, ask hard questions and work together well—because we can show up as full humans, instead of just as our working role.

What was a challenge that you faced in your work in the last year? And what support did you need to overcome that challenge?

Rachel:

For me, last year was a lot on a lot of different levels for me. One thing that was hard was that by June I got my fourth boss in just a little over two years here. Even though it has always worked out incredibly well, it was a really jarring moment for me. It was really helpful to have Jacqueline and Sharon there to talk through things. There were some other really difficult moments last year for me personally and at work, so it was really helpful to have people that I knew I could go to who understood and who would help me work through it and move past it in a really healthy way. That was really helpful.

Sharon:

For me, one of the biggest hurdles was just learning what's going on in this work and this organization. This was always a great team to learn from. Never did it feel like you should be ashamed for not knowing how to do something. It always felt like people really wanted to see you succeed. That was always really nice because coming into a new workplace there's always some level of imposter syndrome. On top of that, although I love the work that we do, another big struggle is just not getting burnt out. Because we do primarily external-facing work, our work hours really don't look the same as many others across organizations. That means the times we're working, but also it includes the types of things that we do are quite different & often not well supported by existing organizational structures. Difficult coalition meetings are just the tip of the iceberg. In this work, you're often out and about in various geographic areas, relationship-building with many diverse people, and that can be really

nerve-racking as well as emotionally exhausting. It can often feel like a lot of pressure because you're also the only one, representing our organization, doing that type of work for your city. At times, our work on Urban to Wild is hyper-visible. It shows up in our annual reports and it's always talked about by philanthropy, etc. So it feels like a lot of pressure to be in this role because people always want to know 'what's going on in Urban to Wild?'. But then at the same time, rarely do people come to Urban to Wild and say, "You guys are experts, you've been doing this for seven years already. What can we gain from you and/or learn from you? Or in that same vein, recognize and value the expertise that you're bringing to the space? Or how can we help you lead this unique work?" That juxtaposition can be very exhausting at times. I look forward to see creativity in the ways Urban to Wild is supported through different parts of the organization. The bridges to connect the work are so clear, and I'd like to see an effort to significantly support Urban to Wild, and other local place-based, equity centered work. But the great thing about having a group like the Urban to Wild managers is that we have people to talk to about those frustrations with, and we can work together to change things.

Jacqueline:

Something that's helpful for me is that people don't gatekeep information or resources. If I ever ask for help or examples, folks are really willing to share which is helpful so we don't recreate work. One other place where there's a lot of room for growth at this organization is that it's hard to make changes or to be taken seriously especially if you're young or if you're newer or if you're in an entry level role. We need to have people realize that we're subject matter experts of this body of work. We've been doing this for a really long time. We should be taken seriously regardless of our title or for how long we've been in this organization or our age. That's something that I would like to see happen and change.

What hope do you have for the Urban to Wild program that you want to see actualized and what do you need to make that happen?

Sharon:

It would be great to have more staff because we're each the only person who does urban access work in each city, and that looks like a lot of different stuff on any given day or week. Sometimes it's programming, sometimes it's relationship building with different partners, sometimes it's being a funding and grants resource, and sometimes it's policy advocacy. You might need to know how legislative propositions get made in your state or in your city, what different tax measures look like, and how they can be utilized to support park equity and green space equity, as well as how to put together events, how to facilitate coalitions, etcetera. There's a lot of stuff you have to hold in your head as one person. It's so many balancing acts of how to prioritize those various program priorities and strategies in your mind.

Rachel:

As I mentioned earlier, Urban to Wild has historically been a great entry-level into conservation. This organization most of the time openings are director-level and above. We could have a good model of multiple managers working on things together or multiple specialists, co-leadership. Whatever is necessary to make sure people are compensated for the work that they're being asked for and the work is shared to build capacity. I would love to see that happen in Urban to Wild, and I know Kitty Craig, Yvette Lopez-Ledesma, and others are interested in that conversation as well. As Jacqueline talked a lot about earlier, Urban to Wild is so often just labeled as a Transit to Trails program, which is so far from what we do. But oftentimes that's all people have a concept of. In reality, there's like so much work that touches on climate solutions and 30 by 30 and our results teams. I feel like the New Mexico Team has a great model for that integration and I hope to see it done more across the organization. In Albuquerque, I've been trying to work more on climate solutions, and in LA, Sharon's doing a lot of amazing work on food justice, for instance. We have had so much flexibility in the program because of our partners and our leadership, but it would be nice to see that sort of creativity spread more within the organization.

Rachel:

My experience recently working with Ahad, Chelsea, Kerry, Michael Russo, Max on very hyper-specific Zero Fares advocacy has been so nice. After years of never feeling like I had communications support because none of my stuff was tied directly to federal legislation. The way I work with the New Mexico staff has also been good in terms of that integration. Everything that Jacqueline was talking about would really transform how we do our work. If I'm being honest I don't think our reorganization is getting to what we need. I think tinkering with where everyone sits isn't going to fix it. I think there are really great examples of that work already going on that we need to support and share more often.

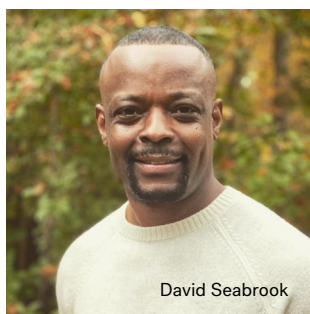
Jacqueline:

The thing that I would like to see is for the organization to start to rethink how we show up on place-based efforts and city-based work. I think a point of growth and opportunity for this organization is to have equity exist in all parts of the organization and not just in teams that are directly tied to equity or tied to communities. It would be helpful if when suggestions are made people really listened and figured out how we can restructure and rethink how we can do our work because it is important. I would like to see that openness happen in all TWS spaces. I would like to see that change and for equity to not only exist in one space but for all of us to work on it.

The Finance team makes bank transition to better align with TWS's Equity efforts:

2023

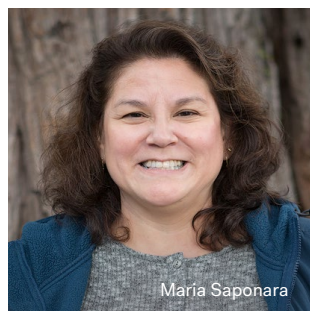
David Seabrook, Aarti Ravi,
Maria Saponara, Julie Hogan



David Seabrook



Aarti Ravi



Maria Saponara



Julie Hogan

Could you describe what initially sparked the idea of moving on from our former banking institution?

David:

When HR scheduled my onboarding meetings in 2020, this topic of conversation came up. Quite a few people asked me, 'When are you moving away from [banking institution]?' There was a lot of pent-up frustration from where we used to bank, and staff were looking for an opportunity to make the change. It was one of the first things I heard coming into TWS.

Aarti:

We worked with a separate bank for our corporate credit card program. The bank suddenly contacted us and said, 'We are ending this corporate credit card program, and you have 30 days.' I was new in my tenure, and a lot of equity conversations were happening at that time. There was a conversation David and I had about what this meant for our team. There was a lot of emphasis on equity in our program work but not very much thought on what it meant for the rest of the organization. I brought up, 'Why are we only reaching out to large banking institutions when it takes just as much time to find alternative options that align with our goals.' When we further researched that question, we found banks that better fit the needs of our organization and align with our goals.

In the Summer of 2021, we had finance interns who did research to find new alternative banks for us to migrate to aside from the credit card program. They looked at many different factors, including the bank's ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) standards. The interns interviewed many folks internally, including our Finance team, our Planned Giving Team, and Program staff. Because of the reputation of our previous bank, we were looking for a new bank that could do the work we needed and had the services we needed for regular banking and planned giving operations. We had a set of criteria we asked each bank when we sent the RFP (Request for Proposal): can you provide the services we need? How are you mindful of your banking practices? What is the composition of your board?

Julie:

One of the reasons that prompted the move was the discontinuation of services that our previous bank stopped offering that our new bank now offers. For example, if we needed to look up information that was past 90 days, we had to submit a request to get a copy of that transaction. It became difficult to track data. Having to involve the bank with something that could easily be resolved had to involve a representative from the bank. The second reason was that the rates were no

longer favorable for our organization.

Maria:

We met with four different banks, and the one we decided to move forward with has easy-to-use online banking, lower fees than our previous bank, and the most compelling was their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion statement and work. This is the second bank move in my tenure here. It is not easy because checks have to clear (coming in and going out) from our donors to our organization. We need to keep in mind that revenue can still be coming to the old bank and to the new bank. For this reason, it will take some time before we fully close our old bank.

Does this bank better align with our organizational goals?

David:

When it comes to our work in Finance, there are not a lot of opportunities to be creative and to make our commitment to equity part of our work. There is a network of banks who understand that CFOs (Chief Financial Officers) want to show their commitment to equitable practices and socially responsible banking. Unfortunately, because of our organization's size, working with smaller banks to meet all our needs is not possible. We still show our support for smaller banks. One way we show support is by having idle cash in some of these community banks or by purchasing CDs (Certificates of Deposit).

Aarti:

Being equity-minded in service of the organization's programmatic goals feels like the right step. That was partly why I felt we could take a step back, (when we were going to move banks for our credit card program) do some research, look at the options, and if something is available, why not try to go with it? TWS holds a lot of money in the bank and the bank also makes money off us. For this reason, where we bank matters.

Maria:

Yes, our current bank has some environmental commitment and is more aligned with our values. Normally, it has been "Who has the lower fees?" or "How much will it cost to have my account there?"

Julie:

It was both a functional and streamlined move, especially when it comes to security protocols. We have had instances where our old bank should have raised flags with some transactions, but it did not. A lot of the equity research was done prior to my involvement with the bank move.

Who was involved in making this move happen?

David:

I did not get any push back from the Governing Council or our President. It would have taken a different turn had they not been supportive of this effort. I was surprised with how quickly people were supportive of this effort. The hesitation was more internal rather than the leadership having hesitation. I had the freedom to make the equity impact I wanted to see in the Finance department and that was nice to see. Both Excy (Digital Fundraising) and Todd (Strategic Operations) work with banks as much as our Finance team so they were involved in providing input with this move and they were great partners in this effort.

Maria:

Besides the finance team, we worked with the Impact and Giving team since trust accounts needed to be moved and aligned with our donors. There was also a move for our payroll accounts to be with our new bank. We had to work with our Membership department and Strategic Operations to coordinate our online giving with our new bank. Our prior accountant, Jameya Way, was the one who helped to initiate our move at the start of the fiscal year.

What were some of the challenges getting this work across the finish line?

Aarti:

Internal bandwidth was a struggle even to get the ball rolling and implementation is a slow process. From running this by the board, to running it through the Executive team, to presenting it to the entire staff during a town hall, it took a long time. David did a lot of the heavy lifting initially and became the executive champion to get this to move finalized. All this work was in addition to our teams' day-to-day work. It took about a year to socialize the message of why the move was important and how we planned to go about it.

David:

This was an effort that needed to be overcome internally. The next challenge was finding a bank that could hold some of our investments. No bank is going to completely meet all our organizational values, but we needed to find a bank that was as favorable as possible.

Julie:

The new institution made it easy for us to move. They had a checklist for us to make and we would send the information over to them. We had a team and a project manager dedicated to answering any questions we had to ensure the process went smoothly. We ran into some challenges when having our vendors build files to our new bank's specifications. We were set up with contacts at the bank to train us on the systems they used.

Maria:

We needed to get in sync with every department internally involved in this move, get our reporting ready, start the move during our new fiscal year, and have a clean start for our annual audit with our new banking institution.

Aarti:

It's slow going. As I now oversee our Finance team, I am pushing for us to have a full transition by the end of 2024 because it has been a two-year process. Once that process is complete, we plan to explore putting some of our funds in an Indigenous-owned bank and a Black-owned bank. Some of our tribal partnerships have had reservations about working with larger banks and this could be a step in the right direction so that we can build more trust by offering more options to our partners. It's twofold: support community banks and show our partners there is another way to work with us.

What do you hope this bank move helps actualize for our organization?

Aarti:

We have a much better banking relationship than in the past. Internally, that has been an improvement. We are doing our small part to commit to equity.

David:

We had an internal lack of capacity, but we had to make it happen. Changing banks is always disruptive, but I think we are in the process of making it happen. The largest lift is the large bank that will handle most of our transactions. Then, efforts will be made to work with the smaller banks, including a Native-led bank, a Black-owned bank, and a bank that is a Certified B Corporation. The team chose the bank first, which is right, rather than the composition of the banking team to service our account.

Julie:

The new bank helped us make the transition easy and seamless. It also meant we now have tools that we didn't have at the bank we are moving from.

Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni- Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument

2023

Mike Quigley, Nicole Layman, Gaby Diaz



Could you provide a bit of background on this campaign?

Mike:

Trying to pinpoint when a campaign began is sometimes more complicated than it might seem—over time, campaigns can ebb and flow; individuals and organization engage and disengage; goals and outcomes morph. There has been interest in preserving the larger landscape around Grand Canyon itself for a very long time—likely pre-dating the establishment of the National Park.

I joined TWS in 2010 and in 2011 there was a large group convened on the North Rim to discuss landscape-scale protections. Kim Crumbo—a longtime advocate for the Canyonlands—and our own Phil Hanceford facilitated the discussion. So that's my earliest involvement. TWS didn't immediately take a very active role in the campaign due to capacity constraints.

As the campaign developed under the Obama Administration, TWS was asked to engage more substantively to make this a premiere landscape to protect under the Antiquities Act. I got more involved in the last year or two; that would have been 2015-2016. We hired a contractor in Flagstaff to go door-to-door to engage businesses, table at events, and build public awareness of the campaign. We promoted the effort to our members and supporters. We gained a lot of local support and positive media coverage. We thought we would win at the end of the Obama administration, and that was when Bear Ears [National Monument] was also in play. Our sense was that we were sure that we were going to be next after Bears Ears. I helped staff the Bears Ears public meeting to prepare myself to make the event in Arizona successful. One week I was scouting potential public meeting venues in Flagstaff and the next week the election happened. That was the end of National Monument proclamations by President Obama; and the end of the Greater Grand Canyon Heritage campaign.

Or was it? Fast-forward a few years, and one thing that changed was the tribes' active leadership in the effort. Congressman Grijalva's team was working with tribal leaders in the region. There was a tribal coalition formed. The environmental groups played a supporting role. This "new" campaign was tribally-led and we were providing our policy, scientific and research expertise in addition to rallying our membership to advance this effort. It proved to be wildly successful. President Biden came to northern Arizona in August 2023 for a Proclamation signing ceremony near Red Butte, which is a sacred site for the Havasupai Tribe. Arizona then got a new 900,000-acre National Monument protecting a sensitive, important cultural landscape and a physical landscape rich in geological and natural history. It had been more than two decades since there had been such a significant conservation win in Arizona.

Nicole:

It was a very important campaign for the organization. Mike provided some context about the campaign, and it had been a 15-year legislative effort. I will say there has been efforts by the Native American communities around these lands have been working to protect these areas since time immemorial and honor all the work that has come before. We had a bunch of failed legislative efforts then in 2016, a failed monument effort. There was a retooling that occurred where there was some tribal engagement, but it was conservation-led. There was a uranium mining withdrawal in the area but it was an administrative withdrawal. What this does is it gives a clock and it starts to tick as soon as it passes so we only have 20 years. It was a good achievement that did occur during the early part of the Obama administration because it paused any new leases from happening, but it did not pause existing mining that was already happening. What we were looking to do was a permanent mining withdrawal. The watershed in this area is not only important for the habitat and wildlife in the area, it is important to the way of life for people of the area. My team and I got deployed to other campaigns after the initial effort ‘blew up’ and Mike stayed engaged on the campaign. There was a good recognition that we should be doing this work differently.

After two rounds of failed legislation, the Tribes (there are 13 nations involved in this effort) were ready for some action. National monument allow action to happen when Congress is unable to do its job. After the last congressional session in 2022, Congressman Grijalva sat everyone down and said, ‘What would you like to do?’ and the Nations decided to move forward on their terms (boundaries, management prescriptions, including the name). The name was no small task since it required thirteen nations to pick a name in three different languages.

Gaby:

This was one of the first campaigns I worked on when I came to The Wilderness Society to support the communications strategy for the coalition. I would facilitate communication coalition calls and how we talked about this campaign that centers tribal voices and does it in a way based on accuracy, trust, and transparency.

Why did this campaign align with our organizational values?

Mike:

The Wilderness Society has several of our values advanced with the creation of the Baaj Nwaavjo I’tah Kukveni-Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National

Monument. At over 900,000 acres the Monument is a large landscape-level conservation success. The Monument protects wildlife habitat and connectivity, and also watershed health for the Colorado River and for many seeps and springs within Grand Canyon itself. The Monument also advances our organization’s interest in seeing Native and Indigenous people’s interests advanced and their Traditional Ecological Knowledge be respected and brought to bear on the challenges facing the natural world today. The Monument Proclamation specifically provides for continued tribal engagement in the management of these lands—providing an opportunity for tribal co-stewardship, literally providing seats at the table for tribal engagement through an Advisory Committee, and creating a Grand Canyon Commission of tribal representatives to assure participation in future management decisions.

Gaby:

Our strength in the campaign was our national presence, staffing capacity, and ability to support the on-the-ground staff and partners. The direct line to the congressional representatives was a large value-add to Tribal leaders. We were able to utilize the iconic landscape to gather national outlets to pick stories regarding the campaign. It was incredible to have been able to support a campaign like this and to contribute a piece to this important area.

Nicole:

It is the type of approach where the effort is led by that community. When we talk about the composition of the coalition, it ran the full spectrum, from national groups, federations, local groups, and businesses. One business in particular, Pizzcletta, a great place to eat pizza when anyone goes to Flagstaff was a great advocate for our campaign. It was a wide spectrum of support outside of the traditional groups like Conservation Alliance (a group of outdoor businesses), which made this campaign fun and unique. It was also one of the first times many people in this coalition had been a part of an effort that was tribally-led. We held the line to make sure messaging did not get ahead or out of step with the tribes. We always delayed releases from when the nations were planning to release communication as a form of respect.

What were some of the challenges to getting this to the monument designated?

Gaby:

Some of the challenges the campaign encountered was ensuring the campaign was compelling and that the Biden administration could get it done. This administration has been interested in and motivated to

designate national monuments that have support from tribes. On one hand, we had a timeline to try and get this designation done before the end of the administration, and on the other, we had to ‘work at the speed of trust.’ There was tension between hurry and move and then ‘hold on, we need to make sure this messaging is correct to this press statement is going out?’ We had to wait a certain amount to ensure tribal leaders’ voices came first and honor that. Navigating interpersonal dynamics was also a challenge but something that happens when you work in a large coalition.

Mike:

Like most successful conservation efforts, there were many challenges along the way that needed to be overcome. A big challenge these days is that legislative success in a very divided Congress is unlikely; thus everyone pivots to asking the President to use the authority of the Antiquities Act to achieve lasting protections. There are people all over the country that care deeply about their special places, that have been working for years to gain protection for them, and are now all trying to get on the list and attract the attention of the President. It’s a single path and it is crowded with worthy campaigns. Not all of them will see the President act. Arizona felt this let down acutely in 2016 and a major challenge for us was keeping our supporters motivated, continuing to highlight the values and threats, and keeping the idea alive for four long years until another chance emerged. We did this through public gatherings, monthly check-in calls, radio ads that we ran featuring local supporters talking about their personal connections to the place, and more.

A difficult challenge was the need for compromise on the campaign. In order to be successful we needed a very broad and diverse coalition supporting the Monument, advocating with Arizona elected officials and leaders, and calling for action from the President. In forming such a coalition there are often differences of opinion between coalition partners; and different coalition partners have different constituencies they need to hold together if not completely please (that includes us, of course). Sometimes compromises in the proposal need to be made in order to keep the coalition together and progress moving. Like literally removing a hundred-thousand acres or so of important lands because that particular area’s inclusion causes distress for other coalition partners. No one likes to give up on their special places and the places they know are valuable, even for the greater good. Those are difficult negotiations to navigate and often painful choices to make.

The next challenge was ramping up again when the opportunity re-emerged. We can go from slow to really fast but that takes significant investment and planning ahead so the resources are available when the time comes.

Nicole:

This campaign was not without it’s ups and downs. This campaign was a quick turnaround for a monument ask in my experience. There was decision in February 2023 and designation in August. In monument speed, it meant: a bill had to be introduced, a secretarial visit, a public meeting, and President Biden visit in August to announce Baaj Nwaavjo I’tah Kukveni as a national monument. I did have the gift of learning of what this meant with other campaigns like Avi Kwa Ame, Bears Ears, and Grand Staircase- Escalante.

Gaby:

The Grand Canyon Tribal coalition was consulted first on messaging and how they would like to talk about their ancestral land and historical landscape. There would be sovereign-to-sovereign consultation between tribes and federal government representatives, which would be communicated to our communications team and then sent to others.

One thing I learned was important is the sovereign consultation needed to happen first before NGOs could step in and help support. Our lane was focused on what we heard from congressional staff and their conversation with tribes. Only one person on our communications team, who worked with the Grand Canyon Trust, had direct contact with the tribes. It was a layered process. An example would be gathering quotes then to develop graphics to help with posts that the team developed.

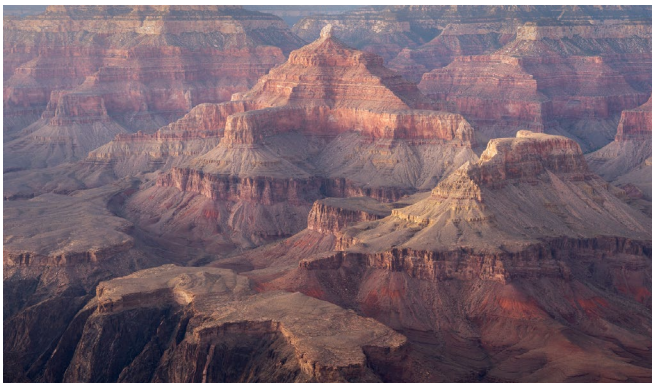
What kind of support did you need to see this campaign through?

Nicole:

We brought surge support and that is sometimes what you need to get a campaign done. TWS brought this expertise uniquely because of our experience so we can put parameters in place for campaign that are tribally-led. People learned that we would for messaging and guidance, it’s not always easy for some folks. We didn’t fundraise using some of the images that the tribes asked not to use. It was important to bring lessons learned and support our sovereign nations in the way that they wanted. We had a tribal liaison which was helpful because of the relationships people or organizations had with some Nations and how the coalition communicated about the campaign.

Mike:

It amazed me how quickly things moved at the end. Remember, this was an effort a decade or more in the making; then in 2022-23 it got crazy. Crazy in mostly good ways—our effort was getting positive attention from the key people and groups needed to make it a success. The effort ramped up in a big way: more groups joining the coalition, more people in the calls and meetings, more people on the ground and going to DC—and not all of this went perfectly smoothly! For TWS, we increased our investment and engagement in the effort by orders of magnitude: we ran paid awareness ads, we hired on the ground contractors for door-to-door outreach and visibility events, we were engaging more often and at different levels with decision-makers and our allies. Some of it is high level: briefings with Senators and Administration officials, media interactions. Some of it is more discrete: getting t-shirts and stickers made and distributed to supporters; securing transportation and lodging for supporters and tribal members to be able to attend important events; finding local folks who will be good grassroots organizers and getting them the information and materials they need to be effective; securing visual assets like photographs and videos and tracking the appropriate re-use permissions for each of those; keeping the website and printed handout materials updated as things changed (including a name change the night before the signing ceremony!); and a bunch of other details.



Importantly, it was marshalling TWS resources from across the organization: the National Monuments team, Regional Conservation, External Affairs, Membership, Government Relations; all of whom also had a dozen or more other priorities on their plates. TWS can go from slow and steady to really fast rather quickly but that takes significant investment and planning ahead so the resources are available when the time comes, and it also benefits from prior relationships of trust within TWS and with partners. For example, when success looks imminent everyone wants in on the effort. I've seen the dynamic of campaigns shift a lot when that happens—long-time

and usually smaller, more local participants feeling swept aside as the “big national groups” roll into town. I'm particularly proud of how TWS managed that dynamic. Part of our success was we had been engaged even in the slow times with my ongoing role on the effort. And even though I work for a national group, my relationships with others in Arizona helped smooth a larger TWS team engaging. When that larger TWS team did engage, we were sensitive to dynamics and we presented ourselves as “we have experience with these things elsewhere; we're here to help you make your thing successful” rather than “we know best, we need to be quoted in the release, thanks but we'll take it from here” (yes, that's happened with other groups). On this campaign that was maybe even more important than usual. A lot of us in Arizona had become pretty familiar with losing, not so much with a big win like this. TWS bringing experience with successful monument campaigns elsewhere—and bringing that experience in a helpful and humble way—was absolutely critical to getting this win in Arizona.

Gaby:

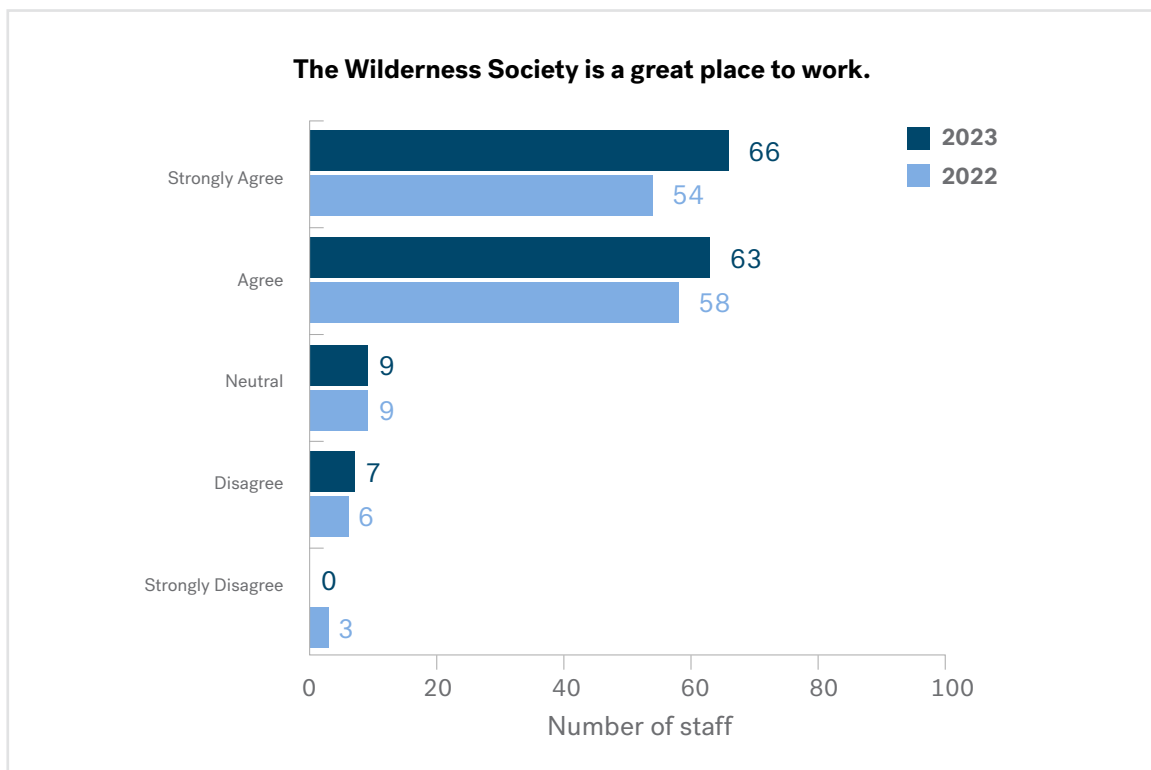
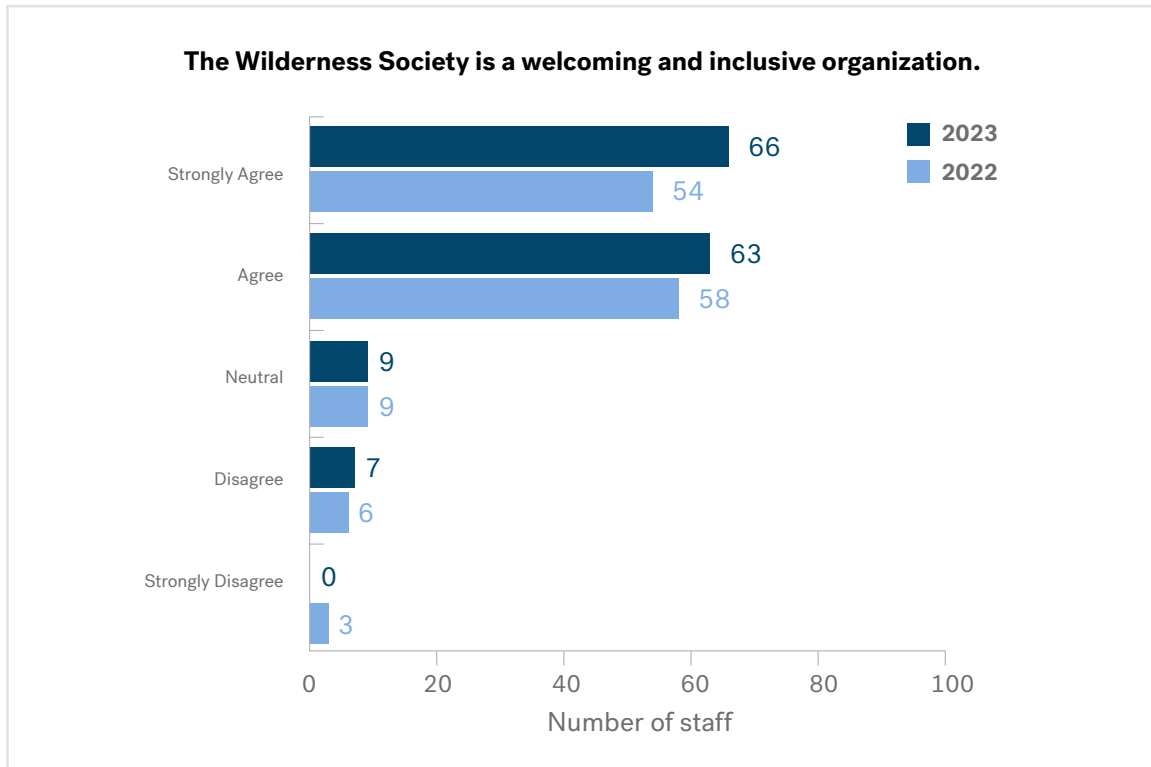
We need a few different things, and an important one is patience. It was also important to understand why this designation was important for this site and what it would help it achieve. What are the threats to the area? What are the values? National Monuments designations stand on values and objects. That is what makes them defensible and have a deep understanding of the values of the place. There were so many groups that came together in support of the tribal proposal and request. Everyone has their own style of communicating, but the shining star was: What do tribes want us to communicate?

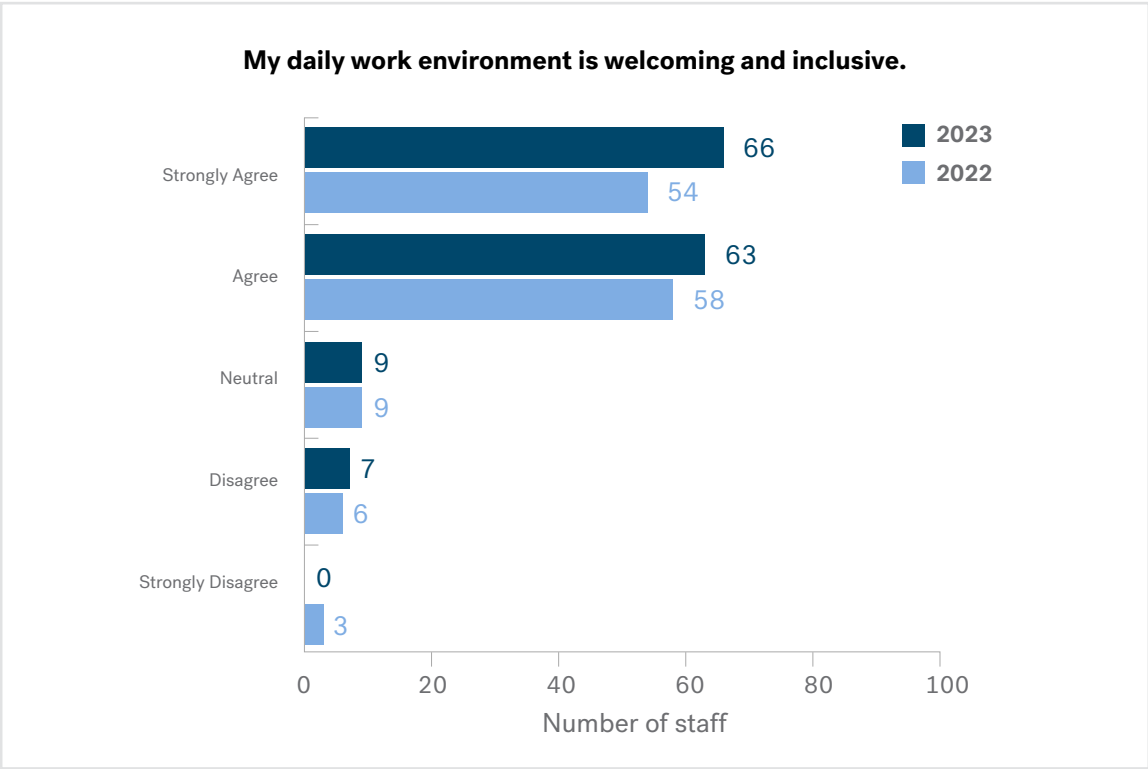
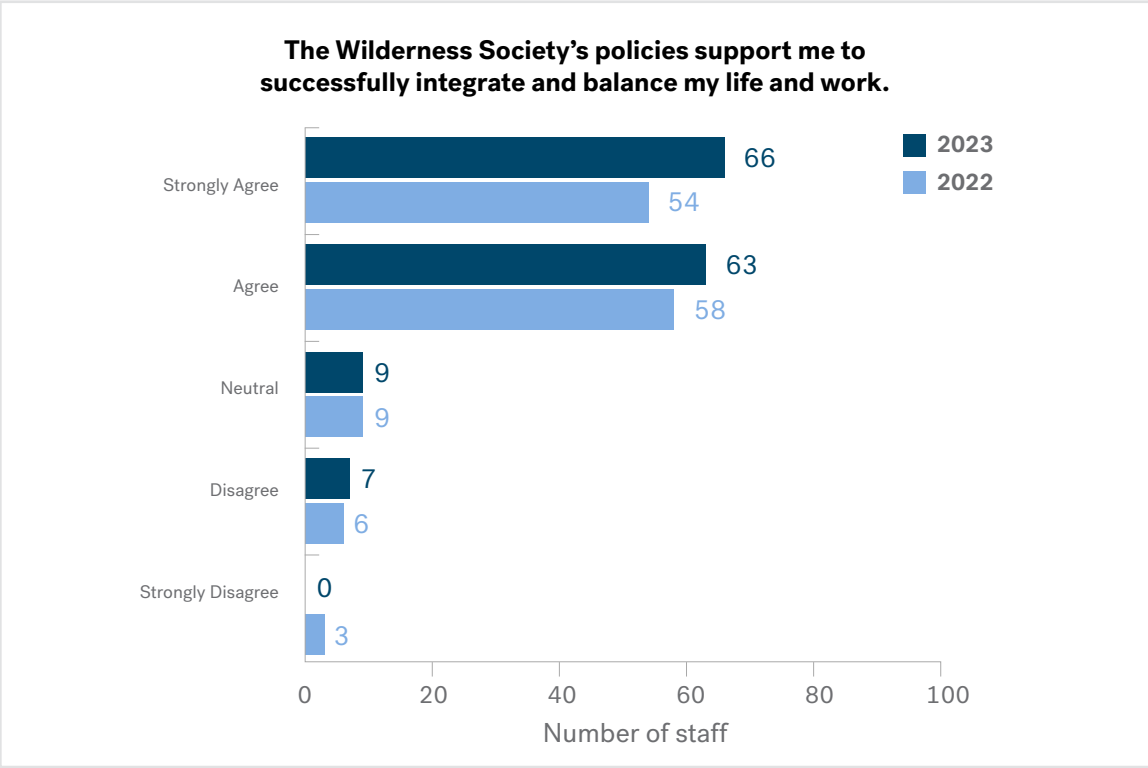
Nicole:

We had Kiara and Mike helping on the Government Relations side, Amelia helped with contractor to make sure they had all that they needed to do community outreach, and Gaby led with communications with the Grijalva team. We did a lot of logistics for the coalition to ensure folks felt welcomed and accommodated. The details to make sure it allowed people to participate fully. The result was something we should all be proud of. We learned a lot as a team and some partners have never been down the tribally-led path.

We protected some incredible cultural sites, wildlife corridors, and it was almost a million acres in an area that had eleven years already into 20-year leasing pause. There is now a seat at the table for Tribes to engage in the management of this area that does not come with a withdrawal. A withdrawal doesn't give a management plan. We have a support book of folks who supported the effort which ran the gamut. This is a testament to the important work the Tribes did to get the area protected.

Annual workplace culture survey





Closing reflections



Last year, a Governing Council Member asked about my experience leading equity and inclusion efforts at The Wilderness Society and potentially reflecting on it in a future report. For the 2022-23 report, I've decided to focus my closing letter on responding to this inquiry.

Leading our Equity, Culture, and Learning team and guiding equity work at TWS has very much been like walking a tightrope. Every step in this work has been walking the tense and fine line that connects organizational priorities with creating better outcomes for people who have been historically excluded in how and where we work. This effort requires immense core strength and balance. And as I have advanced in leadership at the organization, the tightrope has been raised higher so that more people can see and experience the work. However, as the work is elevated, the net, which is already smaller for leaders of color, is now virtually non-existent such that any misstep could result in, at best, great embarrassment and a blow to my reputation and at worst serious mental, emotional, or physical harm. And in no way is the previous statement hyperbolic.

The mental and emotional toll of leading this work is often overlooked and unspoken. In my six years of leading equity at TWS, I could share a list longer than this letter of the ways I have been unseen, undervalued, unprotected, and attacked. With that list, I could easily outline the connections of these experiences to aspects of my identity that I highly regard but are constantly subordinated by society at large and within The Wilderness Society. Keep in mind, the challenges or, rather, challengers I face at TWS are only a microcosm of the mental, emotional, and physical threats I face as a Black woman every single day. While my experiences range in aggressiveness, the majority would likely be characterized as microaggressions, commonplace verbal, behavioral or environmental slights that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative attitudes toward those of different races, cultures, beliefs, or genders. I have heard microaggressions compared to papercuts. While they are seemingly small and inconsequential they still hurt, and the pain lingers. But when these microaggressions come from people you work with day in and day out, people across racial and gender identities, people you make every effort to support and value, these microaggressions, which in my case are rooted in racism, anti-Blackness, sexism, etc. are more like heartbreaks. While there is no actual physical harm inflicted at the moment, the mental and emotional turmoil can and

often does have detrimental impacts on one's health and well-being as these years of leading this work, the past two years especially, have had on mine.

The Sufi poet Rumi once wrote "The wound is the place where the light enters you." And I have been filled with much light leading equity at TWS. This reflection would be woefully incomplete and inauthentic if I did not acknowledge that there are many ways I have felt and continue to feel supported, recognized, uplifted, and held by this organization and many of the people within it. To have the work of achieving equity and inclusion through conservation continue to be a measure of our success is a feat. The stories, voices, and data that we have highlighted in our reports over the years are only a fraction of the ways that we as an organization continue to embody our commitment to equity. And at a time when many organizations and agencies are distancing away from equity and inclusion, TWS continues to lean in. Though we certainly wobble and slip on this walk, we have not fallen, and this is indicative of how firmly planted we are on the narrow line of conservation and equity. Although we will always have forward and backward movements as we balance our mission while working toward equity, every shared step we have taken has ultimately been one toward progress and that is worthy of celebration.

Won't You Celebrate With Me

*won't you celebrate with me
what i have shaped into
a kind of life? i had no model.
born in babylon
both nonwhite and woman
what did i see to be except myself?
i made it up
here on this bridge between
starshine and clay,
my one hand holding tight
my other hand; come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed.*

- [Lucille Clifton](#)

In Solidarity,

Wordna Meskheniten
Vice President, People & Culture