

RIVER VOICES

A RIVER NETWORK PUBLICATION

DIVERSITY AND
INCLUSIVENESS

Bridging the Divide
October 2015 Issue



CLICK THE BLUE
LINKS WITHIN
THIS NEWSLETTER
TO DIG DEEPER
ON THE TOPICS.



HEADQUARTERS
434 NW Sixth Avenue
Suite 304
Portland, OR 97209
503.241.3506
info@rivernetwork.org
www.rivernetwork.org

MISSION, VISION, AND FOCUS

River Network empowers and unites people and communities to protect and restore rivers and other waters that sustain all life. We envision a future of clean and ample water for people and nature, where local caretakers are well-equipped, effective and courageous champions for our rivers. Our three strategies for focused investment are strong champions, clean water, and ample water.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4 Bridging the Divide**
by Nicole Silk and Paco Ollervides, River Network
- 8 Embracing Change**
by Cindy Lowry and Adam Johnston, Alabama Rivers Alliance
- 10 Engagement and Outreach into Diverse Communities**
by Pamela Ritger, Clean Wisconsin
- 12 Hiring from Within: Creating A Multi-Layer Community Outreach Strategy**
by Susan Kornacki, Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper
- 13 Leadership in Support of Inclusion**
by Simone Lightfoot, National Wildlife Federation
- 14 Developing Tomorrow's Environmental Stewards**
by Dennis Chestnut, Groundwork Anacostia
- 15 Take Me Out to the Water**
An interview with Captain Mike Taylor, Calumet Waterway Stewards
- 16 Inclusive, Diverse, and Equitable River Conservation Efforts**
by Alberto J. Rodríguez, Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition
- 18 The Choice and Opportunity is Yours**
by Fred Tutman, Patuxent Riverkeeper



Photo credit: © National Wildlife Federation



Photo credit: © Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper

IN THIS ISSUE

When I imagine the future and water, my mind always turns to my kids and the generations that follow them. I want to be able to give them hope, a deep connection to nature, the keys to building a sustainable future, and a sense that everyone can work together for good. Sound familiar?

I know though that my kids will experience the world differently than I have - they already are. Their heritage links them to Guatemala and a mixed race identify. Sometimes they do experience a shift in perception or judgment by others due to the slightly more cappuccino color of their skin or their Hispanic last name.



The future we need for my kids is the same one that we need for our work in water. We need organizations that are welcome to people of all colors and identities and bring everyone access to healthy rivers, just like we need our society to embrace everyone equally. I think we can do that, but it will take dedication and determination. This issue of River Voices explores the changing nature of society, simple ways to start building a more diverse and inclusive movement, and incredibly evocative personal stories. Thank you contributors! As with all issues of River Voices, we hope these articles inspire you to explore further and even transform your path moving forward.

Finally, as you all likely know by now, we are in the midst of a major website overhaul. Our plans for the future include a place for online dialogue. Until we have completed this migration and worked through the functionality issues of this new space, we will be using River Network's LinkedIn Group for dialogue related to our quarterly themes. We invite you to join the conversation about diversity and inclusiveness that will be taking place through the end of 2015.

HERE ARE A FEW OTHER IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM YOUR FRIENDS AT RIVER NETWORK:

- River Rally 2016 [workshop proposals](#) deadline has been extended to October 22, 2015. Get yours in today!
- Join [River Network's LinkedIn Group](#) this quarter (through end of calendar year) about diverse and inclusive conservation.
- Register for [upcoming webinars](#) on a variety of topics.
- Please support us through your [donations](#) and [membership](#).

As you head into the last part of this year, we encourage you to recognize and listen to the people who you work with, find out their stories, and why taking care of our rivers and other waters matters to them.

Nicole Silk, President
River Network

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

Diversity and Inclusive Conservation for Our Rivers

by Nicole Silk and Paco Ollervides, River Network

Our work to protect and restore the rivers and other waters that sustain all life exists within the context of a society that is increasingly diverse. Today, nearly 40% of our population in the United States are people of color, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. And by the mid-2040s, predictions suggest that non-whites and people of mixed-race will be a majority of our population. States already without a white plurality include California, New Mexico, and Hawaii. We assert that to remain socially relevant, our organizations and our movement should reflect the diversity of society as a whole.

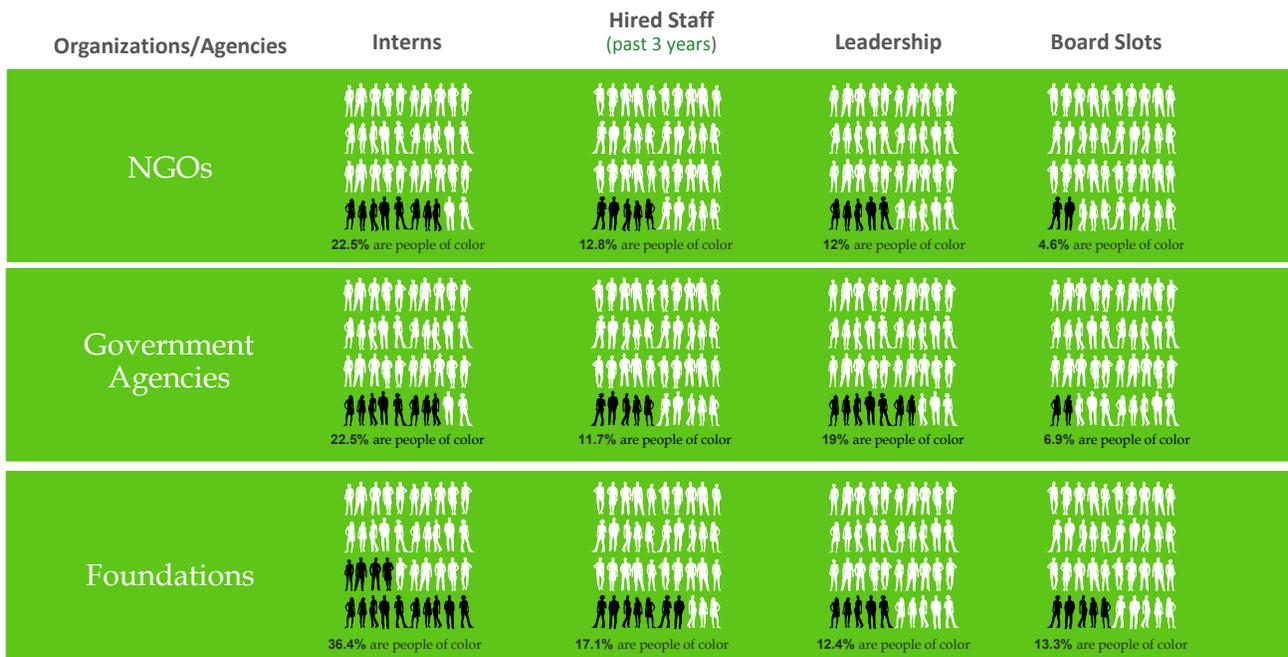
THE STATE OF DIVERSITY TODAY

Last year, a report was published entitled *The State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations: Mainstream NGOs, Foundations & Government Agencies*. Authored by Dorceta E. Taylor and commissioned by Green 2.0 - an initiative

dedicated to increasing racial diversity across mainstream environmental NGOs, foundations and government agencies - the report deserves our collective attention.

The State of Diversity report reminds us that despite increased racial diversity in the United States, the composition of environmental organizations and agencies has not broken the 12% to 16% green ceiling that has been in place for decades. And the situation is even more extreme at the board level with only 4.6% being people of color.

The report analyzed data from 191 environmental non-profits, 74 government environmental agencies, and 28 leading environmental grant making foundations. And although the river and watershed community may have slightly different numbers, trends are likely to be similar.



Reprinted with permission from Green 2.0.

The conservation movement in the U.S., beginning with the creation of the US Forest Service and the National Park Service in the early 1900s, and continuing with the establishment and ambitious achievements of many NGOs during the next 100 years, has largely been led by white men, particularly at the national level. Although these trends have begun to change, they maintain a firm hold on our movement and the internal culture of many of our organizations.

Interestingly, diversification has been on the radar screen of NGOs of all sizes, foundations, and government agencies for decades. And some have invested in programs to improve their recruitment and retention of a more diverse workforce. Many have invested in diversity internship programs, minority recruitment effort, cultural sensitivity training, grant making to enhance minority representation, and other efforts. Indeed, some gains have been made. For example, more women are now in leadership positions. However, these investments are not resulting in significant increases in representation of minorities in leadership and board opportunities.

DIVERSITY PROGRAMS AT ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS

- [Max Mukelabai Diversity Internships](#) at Conservation Trust for North Carolina
- [Tom Graff Fellowship Program](#) at Environmental Defense Fund
- [Apprenticeship Program](#) at Sierra Club
- [LEAF](#) and [GLOBE](#) programs at The Nature Conservancy
- See also other articles in this issue

So what is the problem? According to the report, unconscious bias, discrimination, and insular recruiting as well as lackluster interest in addressing diversity have held back faster progress.

Are these really impediments? Is this really what is holding back progress? They sure are, if you ask anyone who looks or feels different from today's majority or from their sense of that majority within the offices of a potential new employer. Building workplaces that are inclusive rather than exclusive, embracing of cultural and racial variety rather than homogeneous, and accepting of different styles of communication rather than only one way, will help us become attractive to a larger spectrum of society and more relevant to potential collaborators and supporters.

Efforts to protect and restore rivers should embrace all people, regardless of their race, color, national origin, sexual orientation or age. Everyone needs water to survive and healthy rivers are a key ingredient for thriving communities and a more sustainable future. Rivers that go dry due to climate change or over allocation (see [Ghost Rivers](#) from April 2015 issue), and those that are contaminated due to chemical spills, leaky mines, oil and gas development, urban runoff, illicit and illegal discharges, inadequate infrastructure, affect people of every walk of life.

When we work together across the differences that define and separate us, we have a much better chance of identifying and implementing solutions that are truly sustainable for people—all people—and nature. This work is not always easy and may uncover the striking reality that environmental hazards have a disproportionate impact on minority communities, economically disadvantaged areas, and people who have less political influence. Consider these recent reports and articles:

- [Water and Environmental Justice](#) by Amy Vanderwarker and Pacific Institute
- [Sewage problems in Alabama's Black Belt](#) by Al Jazeera (June, 2015)
- [Louisiana waterways are most polluted](#) by Times Picayune (June 19, 2014)
- [Racial disparities in access to water supply in North Carolina](#) by Jacqueline MacDonald Gibson, et al. (August, 2014)

- **More Cost per Drop: Water Rates, Structural Inequality, and Race in the United States—The Case of Michigan** by Rachel Butts and Stephen Gasteyer (December 22, 2011)

Where inequality exists, it can also help us band together to drive reform.

THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

At River Network, we believe that to remain socially relevant, we must reform both our institutions from the inside and our approach to the work that we do to protect and restore rivers. In a sense, we are intentionally blurring the lines between environmental justice and diversity and inclusiveness. We must move forward on both fronts to achieve a future of clean and ample water for people and nature.

If you support the premise in the last paragraph, you may now be asking yourself what you can do given the myriad of resource constraints you and your organization face. Without the influx of new investment, how can any of us begin this transformation? This was exactly the challenge facing River Network: we had desire but no resources. That might have been the end of our discovery process, but instead we soldiered on, prompted in part by our Board of Directors.

The State of Diversity Report recommends changes in three areas to support diverse leadership and inclusive workplaces:

- **Tracking and transparency:** NGOs, foundations and government agencies must begin tracking diversity data to show whether their efforts are working and disclose progress openly.
- **Accountability:** Foundations, NGOs and government agencies should integrate diversity goals into performance evaluations and grantmaking criteria.
- **Resources:** Increased and sustained resources must be allocated for diversity initiatives to work. Organizations should also provide sustainable funding to support and reduce the isolation experienced by leaders of color.

As others have said, diversity statements without a plan or data collection are just words on paper. Being transparent means making

a commitment to tracking information and disclosing it openly. Addressing unconscious bias within our organizations and overhauling recruiting practices so that we reach beyond the “green insiders’ club” when we have job openings is crucial. We can do much more to connect with people who are different from the status quo, to include and elevate their voices, and to make way for new leadership. Most of us can do quite a bit, even without new funding.

In our organizations, just like in the for profit business world, changing our internal culture and even how we approach our work takes commitment and leadership.

“CHANGE IS THE LAW OF LIFE. AND THOSE WHO LOOK ONLY TO THE PAST OR THE PRESENT ARE CERTAIN TO MISS THE FUTURE.”

–John F. Kennedy

Public Papers of the Presidents:
John F. Kennedy, 1963.

IMPROVING OUR IMPACT

Using the recommendations from the State of Diversity Report as our guide, at River Network we have begun to reform our institution from the inside and our approach to the work that we do to protect and restore rivers. Taking the first step was the hardest part—exploring what diversity means, examining our own biases, and pushing past our resource limitations. Moving forward has also created its own momentum, igniting excitement among our staff and our Board of Directors:

- **Holding ourselves accountable:** We have committed to tracking our diversity data and reporting it through [GuideStar](#). We incorporate diversity into our board self-evaluation and recruitment processes and policies. Our staff is 21% diverse with 79% women and our board is 19% diverse with 56% women—not bad, but we can do better. We are also expanding where

we post our job vacancies and how we recruit board members. These are actions that any organization can take immediately.

- **Diversifying our work:** As you know, River Network focuses on three specific strategic areas: strong champions (i.e., strengthen coalitions, organizations and leaders), clean water (i.e., promote clean water solutions and innovations), and ample water (i.e., advance water supply security and sustainability). In each of these areas, we are intentionally seeking opportunities to connect to and collaborate with organizations that represent diversity interests. We are also actively seeking stories and experience from diverse voices to promote through our website (soon to relaunch) and new partnerships to expand our work. Beyond these adjustments, we are seeking new funding to grow our expertise and capacity to support diversity and inclusiveness initiatives across the river and watershed conservation community so that we can do more to help others.
- **Changing the conversation:** We began intentionally building opportunities to discuss the challenges of becoming more diverse and inclusive and elevating best practices among our community into River Rally beginning in 2015 and have made it one of our focus themes for workshops and plenaries for our national conference for the next three years. We are also recruiting speakers across all themes that are diverse themselves. We are actively seeking sponsors to support scholarships enabling the participation of next generation's leaders. We will begin collecting information on diversity to assess trends across our community later this year (yes, get ready for another survey)

and encouraging our community to also report diversity information through [GuideStar](#). And finally, we hope to continue the conversation through future issues of River Voices, our online discussion forum, and online places for dialogue.

We don't have all the answers. And we know we will need to continue to invest in this transformation if it is going to stick. What we do know is that change is necessary if we individually and collectively are going to remain relevant as our population becomes more diverse. We hope you agree and will join us in committing to this transformation. Join the conversation in River Network's [LinkedIn group](#) this quarter.

Learn more:

- **The State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations: Mainstream NGOs, Foundations & Government Agencies** by Dorceta E. Taylor
- **Great Leaders Who Make the Mix Work** by Harvard Business Review
- **Transformational leadership** training opportunities at Center for Diversity and the Environment
- **Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool** by EPA
- **A Multi-Faceted Look at Diversity: Why Outreach is Not Enough** by Heather Berthoud & Robert D. Greene
- **Diversity in Action Assessment** by BoardSource
- **Diversity and Inclusivity Organizational Self-Assessment Tool** by Charities Review Council



Photo credit: © Pamela Ritger

EMBRACING CHANGE

by Cindy Lowry and Adam Johnston, Alabama Rivers Alliance

The world around us is changing at all levels—our global atmosphere, the demographics of our country, the demands and uses of freshwater, and the nature of nonprofit organizations are all shifting beneath our feet. To meet the ever-growing needs of our planet, our watersheds' citizens, the political and regulatory agencies we work with and our organizations' members, we—watershed protection organizations—must embrace these changes by proactively planning to organize and support a more inclusive and diverse community of conservationists.

It is all-too-easy to say that working to build diversity and inclusion into the fabric of our organizations is an important and vital goal. But how do we ensure this work supports our missions, rather than competes with them? In recent years, we at the Alabama Rivers Alliance (ARA) have been increasingly intentional in our efforts to reach out to new communities, including rural, low-income, and communities of color. And as a result, we find ourselves working harder to balance the work we have planned and committed to deliver for our members and funders, with the sometimes overwhelming needs of these overburdened communities. As a statewide network of groups, ARA has always made it a priority to work and partner with local communities on local issues when needed. Historically, these “Friends of” groups have played an important role in our past successes, but often times these groups are led by and represent a subset of their communities whose similar backgrounds and demographics contribute to the current lack of diversity within our own organization.

Ironically, it is this very struggle that propels organizations like ours to grow beyond our traditional boundaries and become the more inclusive, stronger organizations that we need to be if we are to achieve our missions and goals.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Along the way we've learned that in order to become more inclusive, we have to prioritize relationship building. Building strong relationships in our communities may be one of the most important, yet most difficult tasks ahead of us. It takes time to build trust. It also takes a budget, for driving and for providing food and materials at meetings that are organized and held in the communities we're trying to partner with. It takes patience, honesty, humility, and cultural sensitivity, but it is so worth the effort. A diverse river “voice” creates the political power we so desperately need at all levels of governance to protect our rivers.

Rural, low-income, and communities of color are often overburdened with pollution and have long been the dumping grounds of our society. These communities may also be disenfranchised in other ways. Taking the time to learn their concerns and visit their communities takes determination as well as resources. But practicing inclusive conservation requires us to plan and set aside the resources—time and money—needed to include them.

Managing our organizations' time can either be the answer or become yet another barrier to creating inclusion. If your organization doesn't have a



Photo credit: © Alabama Rivers Alliance

dedicated community outreach or organizer on staff, committing this time can be challenging. But even when we have a dedicated staff person, it can be a struggle to strike a balance between building relationships in new communities and supporting existing community partners. The work of building inclusion and diversity is a huge task for a single employee; if organizations truly want to build a more inclusive base, the entire organization must commit to this goal.

BALANCING ISSUE WORK

But beyond building relationships, an organization must also make an honest commitment to understand and share a community's struggle. If we are only in it for our own organization's benefit, trust erodes and the relationships are lost. Our challenge is that overburdened communities typically face multiple issues and our organizations' capacity to take on new issue work is very limited.

This is the struggle that ARA is currently facing. Our staff has been working in Alabama's Black Belt region, an area of our state that has suffered from multiple environmental injustices. As a result of our involvement with Black Belt communities and their members, we have incorporated the issue of inadequately treated wastewater into our core work. While we currently lack dedicated funding or extra staff capacity to commit to this new focus area, we recognize its importance and are doing what we can to join communities in advocating for long-term solutions across Alabama. However this isn't always possible, as some issues require local solutions and do not present good opportunities for state-level advocacy.

Rather, we know that organizing and empowering local citizens to address their communities' problems is the best way forward. Our experience has been that citizens are interested and able to protect their own communities, and we are most effective when we help connect them to the right tools and experts. Our staff works to build and support local leaders, while we also offer meeting facilitation and planning support if needed. These efforts demonstrate our commitment to the relationship without requiring us to take on large amounts of the workload.

We, at the ARA have by no means mastered this balance. This is the topic of daily conversations between our organizing and program staff. Continual communication, even when it is uncomfortable, is helpful.

DEFINING SUCCESS

We all instinctively know that building a more diverse constituency will only help our organizations. More people equal more voices when action is needed, more perspectives when strategies are built, and more members to support the effort. Most funders want the organizations they support to be healthy and growing at all levels. Similar to other efforts to support our work, such as securing grants or building a donor program, the hard work pays off when it is successful.

Therefore, understanding and articulating what success looks like is key. We have learned the hard way that you cannot define successful diversity work through numbers alone. We consider it a success when we find ourselves working alongside local leaders and their groups to spread the same message, when the events we host attract more diverse participants and when we notice the issues that are important to us being discussed in circles that surprise us.

Rural, low-income, and communities of color provide powerful stories and put real faces to the issues we have been trying to address for years. Documenting the struggles real people face due to the impacts of pollution can be an effective way to bring much needed attention to the issues that are threatening our rivers and waterways. A [recent article](#) published in The Guardian illustrates this by connecting an Alabama community's struggle for environmental justice with the modern-day fight for civil rights.

PLANNING FOR INCLUSION

The ARA is working proactively to address these issues. We are undertaking diversity training work as part of our annual board retreat later this fall and plan to address inclusion work in the context of our upcoming strategic planning process. We are working with a consultant who specializes in this arena and strongly recommend that all organizations participate in a facilitated training to build the skills needed to embark down this path.

The ARA is embracing these changes one day at a time. Although this work is slow and at times difficult, we are starting to see positive changes in our organization and our movement. We encourage everyone to embrace these changes proactively until every community and every citizen is an equal partner in protecting and preserving our life sustaining rivers and waterways.

ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH INTO DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

by Pamela Ritger, Clean Wisconsin

While there is increasing recognition of the need to better engage diverse community members in the U.S. environmental movement¹, genuine involvement of diverse communities around specific environmental campaigns or projects can be easier said than done. Below I describe the most important practices I learned about engaging diverse communities while working with the River Alliance of Wisconsin's Urban Rivers Program and from June through December of 2013, and with Clean Wisconsin as Climate Resilience Project Manager since January 2014, working to raise awareness and encourage the use of green infrastructure practices in Milwaukee's inner city neighborhoods.

Although it may seem obvious, the first issue to consider is whether your environmental work, or at least some aspect of it, is important and relevant to the community you seek to engage.

¹Bonta, Marcelo, "The movement's greatest challenge is its own lack of diversity." January 3, 2008, available at <http://grist.org/article/how-to-diversify-environmentalism/>.

Even if the link between the environmental issue and the community is somewhat tangential or the environmental issue is one of many issues a project seeks to address, the connection to community interests is necessary to ask individuals to give their time and energy to a project or campaign. For example, many members of the Hmong community in Wisconsin enjoy boating, fishing and eating their catch. Therefore, seeking that community's engagement to advocate for policies to keep rivers and lakes clean naturally fit within many Hmong community members' interests and values, and they were more likely to become involved in that advocacy work. Similarly, I have been able to successfully engage diverse communities around stormwater management and green infrastructure practices at least in part because those communities have experience with stormwater management challenges, such as frequent street flooding



in their neighborhoods, and a high incidence of sewer back-ups into their basements. The relevance of the issue to community members' everyday lives must be made clear to genuinely engage community members.

When trying to demonstrate that the environmental work you wish to engage a community around is relevant to them, it is helpful to engage and communicate with these members through existing organizations and communication channels that they typically utilize. Upon embarking on an environmental campaign or project, it is often better to meet community residents where they are versus attempting to have community members come to you. In practice, this may mean attending neighborhood or community organization meetings to talk about the project with community members as one topic among many discussed at the community meeting, rather than planning your own meeting focused solely on your particular environmental campaign or project, and then trying to convince community members to attend.

Moreover, by attending a community's neighborhood meeting, you will learn about major community concerns and issues, and identify ways that your project or campaign may be able to help address some of those issues in addition to achieving its environmental goal.

Community engagement work is time-consuming, as it requires you taking time to attend community meetings outside regular work hours and learning about a variety of community concerns. It may also take you outside your comfort zone, whether into neighborhoods you have not previously spent time in, discussing issues you do not typically think about, or engaging in social networks that are unfamiliar to you. However, by stepping out of your comfort zone, you will better understand the perspectives of community members and a more complete picture of community concerns will emerge. After all, genuine community engagement works both ways: you should be willing to engage with diverse communities as much as you would like those diverse communities to engage with you.



Photo credit: © Pamela Ritger

HIRING FROM WITHIN: CREATING A MULTI-LAYER COMMUNITY OUTREACH STRATEGY

By Susan Kornacki, Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper

Western New York state has seen an influx of refugees over the past decade. Many refugee communities, especially Burmese, Iraqi, Nepalese and Somali, fish for sustenance in local waterways without knowing the dangers of the region's industrial history and pollution problems. As an ardent advocate for equitable access to enjoyable waterways, Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper (Riverkeeper) saw that refugees and these New American groups have been disproportionately affected by the lack of culturally appropriate advisories or public health education programs.

In early 2011, Riverkeeper launched a community needs assessment survey based on urban fishing populations, targeting multiple immigrant populations and native Buffalo groups. Riverkeeper noticed an increasing number of urban anglers were coming from diverse communities where English is not their primary language. In order to tackle immediate needs of New American anglers, Riverkeeper reached out to refugee resettlement agencies, recruited ethnic consultants through agency partners, and created unique, culturally sensitive fish advisories in 5 languages—Burmese, English, French, Nepali and Spanish—that were widely spoken or understood in Buffalo New American communities.

However, we observed that refugees and New American anglers were not receptive of fish advisories, even though they were translated into multiple languages. Riverkeeper also realized the need of multi-layer approach to tackle urban subsistence fishing, as a majority of refugees come from cultures and traditions that value fish meals. In 2013, Riverkeeper recruited a coordinator from the refugee community, and started to establish strong working relationships with ethnic-led not-for-profit organizations and active community groups. Mr. Ba Zan Lin is currently our Environmental Justice Outreach Coordinator and through networking, trust-building and culturally sensitive programming we have been able to launch educational tours that invited refugees and New Americans to participate in the hands-on enjoyment of local waterways, and to engage in place-based fish consumption workshops. As result,

within a few months Riverkeeper noted significant improvements in outreach efforts and received positive responses from refugee communities.

To maximize and expand fish consumption outreach and education initiatives, Riverkeeper recruited local refugee youth activists as community liaisons, and provided them with stipends to conduct multiple mini-workshops at places of worship, ethnic festivals, afterschool programs and community meetings. In addition, Riverkeeper launched Young Environmental Leadership Project in 2014—in collaboration with two Buffalo Public Schools, South Park High School and Riverside Institute of Technology—to empower refugee youth to pursue environmental careers and become watershed stewards in their own communities through hands-on science workshops and field-based environmental learning experiences.

Although Riverkeeper initially encountered cultural differences, language barriers and social disconnect in fish consumption outreach efforts, the organization's direct and active partnerships with New American community groups, refugee service providers, concerned community leaders and aspiring youth have essentially created a working, multi-layer community outreach system that welcomes and promotes diversity in the Buffalo-Niagara Watershed. Likewise, these New American angler populations are now thoroughly equipped with information on local environmental history, public health issues and the value and importance of community activism.

Riverkeeper encourages similar river and watershed organizations to recruit partners and collaborators from within the ethnic communities where you work, to establish relationships with community groups and service providers through place-based educational programs, and to empower New American youth to engage in being productive and long-lasting environmental stewards.

For questions about Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper, contact Susan Kornacki, Communications and Development Manager, (716) 852-7483 ext. 38 or skornacki@bnriverkeeper.org.

LEADERSHIP IN SUPPORT OF INCLUSION

By Simone Lightfoot, National Wildlife Federation

The majority of my colleagues in the fields of conservation and sustainability are white. While many tend to be open-minded and even cool about discussing race, they openly admit what studies have shown; our field (aka green) does an inadequate job embracing diversity and inclusion.

Interestingly, those of us that engage in this work understand nature yet, struggle with human nature. We understand diversity of ecosystems and the Earth's biodiversity, but not quite how to achieve diversity within our own organizations. We draw on our natural resource management with ease, yet are often clueless how to add color and diverse cultures to our leadership, staff and volunteer ranks. And we absolutely make the correlations between historical neglect of our waterways, air quality, land use and habitats. But not so much the connections associated with the neglect of inclusion.

Simply put, diversity is the mix; inclusion is getting the mix to work well together. Diversity brings people in while inclusion values their views. And yet, we struggle with lackluster efforts and disinterest in addressing diversity, alienation, unconscious bias, discrimination, and insular recruiting that takes place.

So what does it all mean and how do we fix it?

Leaders need to be bold, deliberate and intentional as diversity has become a driver of growth and relevance around the world. These demographic differences create new impacts and the need for culturally sensitive engagement and responsiveness.

More decision makers need to follow the six-year lead of our former regional director, Andy Buchsbaum when he recruited me into the National Wildlife Federation. He looked around at his great team and boldly acknowledged it was not diverse enough. That fact rendered their work less impactful than its potential and void of an urban presence. He took action that has proven beneficial.

Funders, foundations and philanthropists can also ensure immediate action occurs by tying diversity and inclusion to grant applications, sponsorships, joint

alliances, monetary allocations and awards. Assuredly, improvements would happen almost immediately.

Here are a few other best practices that would help expedite diversity and inclusion throughout green organizations:

- Boards, directors and managers take ownership and responsibility for embracing a diverse vision and declaring as a top priority the engagement of all plausible community voices in our work. At the same time, tie diversity and inclusion to goals, evaluations and advancement.
- In some cases, simply declare a change will occur. In other cases, a full action plan on diversity and inclusion may be warranted (although time consuming). Be sure to have a diverse pool of people help craft the plan.
- Leaders must become comfortable with a bit of discomfort among the ranks (at least initially) with everything from new staff adjustments to expanding the workplace menu beyond bagels, yogurt, granola and hummus.
- Seek out diverse interns and summer job applicants beyond environmental justice work.
- Go to where diversity is, not insist diversity come to you.
- Build diverse relationships and alliances before they are needed, not in times of crisis or self-interest.
- Laud and lift diverse members into the forefront of press conferences, legislative interaction, blogging and social media opportunities, as well as in decision-making meetings behind the scenes.

Simone Lightfoot heads up Regional Urban Initiatives for the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) Great Lakes Region. She integrates the work of the NWF with urban green efforts. Her territory includes Chicago, IL; Indianapolis and Gary, IN; Milwaukee, WI; Cincinnati, Toledo, Columbus and Cleveland, OH; Detroit, MI and Buffalo, NY. She can be reached at 313.585.1052 or slightfoot2004@yahoo.com

DEVELOPING TOMORROW'S ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDS

by Dennis Chestnut, Groundwork Anacostia

Photo credit: © Groundwork Anacostia

WASHINGTON D.C.'S FORGOTTEN RIVER

Flowing through the heart of our nation's capital, the Anacostia River has long been described as "DC's forgotten river", obscured in the public's mind by the Potomac River into which it flows. The Anacostia River's 176 square mile watershed encompasses most of the eastern half of the District of Columbia and large portions of Prince Georges and Montgomery counties in Maryland. As such, it faces many challenges familiar to urban waters elsewhere, including polluted runoff, combined sewer overflows and trash.

The Anacostia River flows through some of the poorest neighborhoods in the District of Columbia, whose residents have for decades borne a disproportionate share of the impacts of this pollution. In 2007, a group of neighbors committed to improving the river, its tributaries and green spaces for the benefit of their communities founded Groundwork Anacostia River D.C. (GWARDC), a locally-based, nonprofit organization working to create sustainable environmental change.

GWARDC's mission is premised on the understanding that environmental conditions are inextricably linked to the economic and social health of our neighborhoods. We are deeply committed to our motto of "changing places and changing lives" and strive to transform our local communities through on-the-ground projects that bring together the public, private and non-profit sectors. At the heart of this work is our goal to reconnect residents to their neighborhoods' environmental assets—the river and its tributaries, parks and open spaces—and to increase residents' and stakeholders' capacity to improve and care for their local environment.

TARGETING THE DISTRICT'S URBAN YOUTH

From the very beginning, we've understood that engaging the young people of our communities is essential to our organization's long-term vision for neighborhood change and renewal. Over the past six years, we have developed our *Green Team* into an award-winning, youth program that works to develop urban young people into "Natural Leaders" and the next generation of environmental stewards.

Green Teams are made up of youth and young adults from urban neighborhoods that we engage in service-learning activities that include volunteer community conservation projects, active recreation, and exposure to careers related to conservation and natural resources. In short, we connect young people to the outdoors.

Our five D.C. high school-based Green Teams operate under the guidance of a team leader who leads weekly after-school and monthly weekend programs, performing service-learning activities that restore the Anacostia River, green their school yards, etc. Participating students receive community service credit. In addition, we partner with other organizations, local universities and colleges, and other high schools to help dedicated students facilitate monthly, close-to-home stewardship outings for their peers. Team leaders facilitate meetings, serve as mentors and evaluate program progress. We also partner with the Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service, municipal agencies and nonprofit partners to deliver our programming.

TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES WHILE BUILDING LEADERS

Groundwork Anacostia's Green Teams have implemented a wide variety of on-the-

ground projects that include installing and maintaining Bandalong litter traps—floating litter collection devices; conducting water quality monitoring and benthic macro-invertebrate sampling; and implementing wetland restoration and green infrastructure projects. The Bandalong traps are regularly maintained and emptied by GWARDC staff, watershed protection teams and volunteers, and have succeeded in removing more than 60,000 pounds of trash from the Anacostia River’s tributaries over the past five years.

Another unique project is Groundwork Anacostia’s *Urban Archeology Corps*, through which students participate in a paid, summer internship to conduct archeological research, studying the cultural landscape of the community through traditional historical research and oral history conducted at Fort Mahan, a local park and important National Park Service site dating back to the Civil War.

Youth in our urban communities—youth of color in particular—don’t typically engage or see themselves as part of the world of conservation. Through the training in conservation, environmental and watershed restoration, park and trail management and community outreach provided through our Green Teams, Groundwork Anacostia is making a tangible difference. The results speak for themselves. Since 2010, ten Green Team graduates have gone on to become National Park Service park rangers, professional arborists, public land managers and to pursue degrees in natural resource management. All of these young people come from urban communities and are youth of color, making our goal of “changing places and changing lives” a tangible reality.



Photo credit: © Groundwork Anacostia

TAKE ME OUT TO THE WATER

*An interview with Captain Mike Taylor,
Calumet Waterway Stewards*

Q: Was there a particular instance or experience that urged your organization to consider being more inclusive and promoting diversity in your activities/programs/leadership? What was it?

A: From the inception of our organization, the Calumet Waterway Stewards, the concept of diverse minority outreach has been central. The Little Calumet River flows through the south suburbs and south side of the city of Chicago; it is therefore, in the heart of a mostly minority community. Our goal has always been to try to raise awareness as to the benefits of the river to its residents. One of the biggest challenges has been to change the mindset of local residents by teaching them that the Little Calumet River is a river and not a drainage ditch. This has proven especially difficult because the community was built with its back to the river—all the buildings along the river face away from it. By design, the river was treated and viewed as part of the sewer system with bridges and overpasses crossing the river, but no river walks or parks along the river. Ironically, this may be why the river is such a special place to paddle: it feels remote, with wooded banks, and few views of buildings.

Q: What are some obstacles or unforeseen difficulties you have encountered in your organization’s endeavor to increase diversity?

A: The hesitance of people to participate in water activities. Because many minorities can not swim, many are reluctant to try activities near or in the water for fear of drowning. Unlike the 1970s and 1980s when the county had a commitment to physical education and swimming programs, today there are many schools where they have pools that are empty for a lack of funding. My suggestion is to introduce them to water activities in shallow rivers or creeks. This way they can learn the benefit of their water systems and hopefully develop a comfort level with a PFD to prepare them for deeper waters.

Q: What advice would you give to other organizations seeking to become more inclusive?

A: Work with younger kids or high school level young adults, make sure they can relate the activity to a benefit to their community, make it educational, and make it fun. Target high schools, colleges, and municipal entities. Find ways to connect to them where they hang out, including through social media!

Captain Mike was honored as River Hero in 2014 during River Rally celebrated in Pittsburgh, PA. He has an E-book “City Paddler” available on Amazon www.citypaddler.com



INCLUSIVE, DIVERSE, AND EQUITABLE RIVER CONSERVATION EFFORTS

by Alberto J. Rodríguez, Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition

Photo credit: © Paul Joseph Brown

The Duwamish, Seattle's only river, is a 5.5-mile long Superfund Site that flows through Seattle's Duwamish Valley—a highly developed urban/industrial center south of downtown. It is one of the most toxic wastes sites in the nation. Eighty percent of Seattle's industrial lands are located within the Duwamish Manufacturing and Industrial District, and over 8,000 people live in the immediately adjacent neighborhoods, or “fenceline” communities, of South Park and Georgetown.

The community's public health concerns are numerous and well-founded. There are more than 40 chemicals at levels above human and environmental health standards in the river. The state Department of Health has issued advisories against any consumption of resident seafood, and against swimming near any of the combined sewer overflows within three days of a rainfall. However, low-income residents, tribal members, immigrant and refugee families, and members of Seattle's homeless community harvest highly contaminated seafood from the river. An additional concern is presented by neighborhood children who frequently play on the beach and street ends and wade or swim in the river, even after rainstorms.

The residents of Seattle's Duwamish Valley are predominantly underserved communities with multiple environmental justice and health equity concerns and susceptible or vulnerable populations. Originally farming and suburban areas, the neighborhoods were engulfed by industrial rezoning during World War II. Today, the residents of zip code 98108, home to the riverfront neighborhoods of South Park and Georgetown, are 42% foreign-born, 40% Latino, and more than 70% non-white minorities, including Asian, Pacific Islander, Hispanic, African-American, and Native American. Throughout the valley, residents speak more than 30 languages. Median household income is 40% below the Seattle average, 32% percent of residents live below 200% of the poverty level, and 78% of children enrolled at the local

elementary school qualify for reduced-price lunch. Compared to the city average, these neighborhoods also have a significantly higher percentage of vulnerable populations such as elderly residents (>65) and children (<5) than the city average.

A STORY OF HOPE

The Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition/Technical Advisory Group (DRCC/TAG) was founded in 2001 by ten community, environmental, tribal, and small business organizations to serve as EPA's Community Advisory Group (CAG) for the Lower Duwamish Waterway Superfund Site and as the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) to the affected communities. DRCC/TAG's mission is to ensure a Duwamish River cleanup that is accepted by and benefits the community and protects fish, wildlife, and human health. We believe the only way to achieve this is by having the community at the decision-making table at all times so they guide the river cleanup. For this reason, we look at building the capacity, leadership, and power of the local communities through everything we do. Even though the full river cleanup hasn't yet started, our work with the communities to address Early Action Areas has already resulted in a cleaner river and healthier communities—*this fills us with hope as the best is yet to come!*

MAKING ROOM FOR FUN IN SUPERFUND

What does it mean to practice inclusive, diverse, and equitable river conservation in our local context? For DRCC/TAG, the answer to that question is simple and foundational. Everything we do is guided by the affected communities: we cater to the needs, values, concerns, and diverse cultures of the communities we work with and for. Throughout the years, this has forced our organization, as well as state and federal agencies, to do things in unconventional ways—which has yielded unprecedented, positive results. Some of the key ingredients to bring fun to Superfund are:

- **Bend the rules.** Public agencies have specific ways in which they engage communities. People on the ground know that these approaches are sometimes ineffective when dealing with communities that have historically been left out of the environmental/conservation movement and decision-making processes. Tip: Propose alternative ways to engage your community, even if these don't completely align with the regular processes used by the agencies. In 2013, we were able to extend a public comment period from 30 to 105 days in order to garner meaningful and diverse community input. As a result, we delivered more than 2,300 comments to the agency in 10 different languages!

- **Hang out with the community.** In order to avoid community fatigue, it is important to host as many engagement activities in places and times when the community is already gathering—or make it worth their time. Tip: Ask for time in their meeting agendas, meet immediately prior to their regular meetings, or organize a separate fun event. One of our most successful events is a yearly, multilingual, educational festival that celebrates the river and the diverse cultures that depend on it. Thousands of people show up every year to the Duwamish River Festival!

- **Sharing is caring.** This is especially true in low-income, family-oriented communities (such as communities with high percentages of recent immigrants and refugees). In our work, it has been incredibly important to provide free childcare, food, and transportation to mobilize hundreds of community members at a time. Tip: Having local *abuelas* making the *tamales* you will be serving at the event has always been a hit!

- **Set your imagination free.** If you want diverse community input, you need a diverse community engagement plan. Disseminate the information via one-one-one conversations and social media, make it available in different languages, and show up at different venues or host different events—multilingual festivals, churches, floating classrooms or boat tours, panels, rallies, etc. Also, be flexible and allow people to give their input using a variety of formats (e.g. verbally, postcards, written, social media, coloring maps, photos, videos, etc.). Tip: One of our most successful public meetings was “The Duwamish River in 3-D”, an event that featured a 50-foot model of the river and visually compared EPA’s proposed cleanup plan with the one the affected communities were advocating for.



Photo credit: © Paul Joseph Brown

- **Learn a new language.** The demographics in the U.S. have changed so much that it is no longer enough to translate factsheets, posters, and announcements—keep on doing this but do more! Tip: In 2013, we partnered with EPA and the Washington State Department of Ecology to host what we believe to be the first-ever non-English language formal public meeting in the nation. South Park is approximately 40% Latino so we hosted a meeting 100% in Spanish and asked EPA and Department of Ecology staff to wear the “funky” simultaneous interpretation equipment that they typically expect community members to wear. Over 150 Spanish-speaking community members showed up, compared to the average of 5–10 community members that attend hearings where simultaneous interpretation is available.

- **Share the spotlight and the “dough”.** Let community members be the ones presenting to their neighbors and peers about the issue you are working on and compensate them for their experience and expertise. This not only builds capacity, leadership, and power in the community but also ensures community members will invite their neighbors and peers. Tip: In 2013, prior to hosting a multilingual public meeting/community workshop, we trained community leaders to be presenters. They engaged 250 community members and presented simultaneously in four different languages. The format was so successful that more than 90% of attendees provided meaningful public comment that night.

We know every community is different, but having an open mind, being creative, working with the community to figure out what will work for them, and delivering on our promises has set us, and the community, on a path to achieve what we all need, want, and deserve in Seattle: A River For All.

DIVERSITY: THE CHOICE AND OPPORTUNITY IS YOURS

by Fred Tutman, Patuxent Riverkeeper

National opinion surveys portray considerable interest in the environment by African-Americans as well as other ethnic minorities, so why haven't mass conservation movements managed to capture hearts and minds or resonate proportionally with these vast untapped demographics? Just maybe we are not all talking about the same environment?

Diversity work is a form of anti-racism activism. It raises our understanding of how race matters. There is so much work that needs to be done in order to heal racism's scars and balance the scales of racial equity. Each of us, whatever our ethnicity, are captive to the expectations of others. Traditionally, having white skin is both a social gold standard and the accustomed role model for environmentalism. For example, as an African-American, every time I hike on the Appalachian Trail, somebody asks me for a deeper explanation of who I am, and why I am doing something that is far less common for people of color to be doing. The observation is not racist, rather it is an acknowledgement of existing expectations.

Diversifying a movement can be challenging because there is cultural momentum and tradition that defines environmental organizations and the work they do. There are also affinity groups that cater to donors, members, volunteers and boosters who share a common world view and shared experiences about the environment. I have found that, often, white and middle class people in our society associate the environment and nature with benign experiences such as camping, boating, and birding. So the activism that serves them often focuses on protection of existing privileges rather than on adversarial work aimed at correcting a legacy of social and environmental injustice. But such movements do not really offer much in the way of empowerment avenues for minority participants who have traditionally had less—less access, less money, less opportunity to connect with

raw nature. The more fixed your worldview, the harder it is to attract diversity around you. Basically, diversity requires all of us to be much more embracing of environmental values that might seem unfamiliar, strange or different from our own knowledge and experiences.

Diversity and environmental justice are very different themes, but they are nonetheless closely connected. We must be clear about the difference between employment diversity and the equivalent need to do environmental work that serve communities of color. A diverse environmental workforce is only part of the solution to the existing gap. But ironically many environmental problems that are found in communities of color are considered to be off-message to conservation groups that spring from a predominantly white-middle class environmental frame of reference. Quite a lot of focus is instead applied to increasing environmental literacy among people of color—to endow them with the same sensibilities enjoyed by white patrons, but that does not mean people of color are ignorant about the environment. I assure you that most ethnic minorities have environmental knowledge that is wholly appropriate to the exact environment that exists where they live, work and/or play.

So here are helpful suggestions you might use to better position your organization to foster ethnic and cultural diversity, based on my personal experience:

- **Don't just diversify your field staff, diversify your organization at every level.** Strategically build a work force at every level that reflects the constituencies being served. If you work in an all-white organization then it will be harder to connect with a diverse community.
- **Diversify your personal life.** It will be very hard for you to effectively diversify your workplace if your personal life does not reflect diversity too. Do you have any people of color among

your close circle of friends? How about in your neighborhood, or church? True diversity is not a check off box or a head count, it is actually a set of values and a worldview where we must not only talk the talk but also walk the walk.

- **Commit to working on the very worst ecological problems to be found in your watershed.** I guarantee you will find these often exist among underserved and non-white communities. Paid environmentalists often work on issues that have funding, or peer support, or where they can readily feel they can make a difference. But this approach rarely has solutions to the biggest environmental justice problems.
- **Partner with other groups (environmental or otherwise) that have as their mission serving communities of color.** These groups generally have a very harder time finding resources. Partnering with these groups will help raise your true grassroots quotient and allow you to pass through at least some resources that are more readily available to non-profit groups staffed and managed by white folks.

Let us think of creating diversity and combatting disparities as much broader in scope than just discrimination or animus; it is also attacking a set of expectations that are often unconscious and inadvertent. Herein lies the difficulty of overhauling these preconceptions. Surely, confronting racial disparity is the only effective way to call out and eliminate the environmental gap between white and non-white, between rich and poor. Ignoring these realities simply perpetuates them. If ever there was a realm where you are either part of the problem or part of the solution—this is it. We can either collectively eliminate institutionalized social and environmental disparities or we can accommodate them. The choice is yours and the opportunities are endless.

Fred Tutman is the Patuxent Riverkeeper in Maryland. He teaches an adjunct course in Environmental Law and Policy at historic St. Mary's College of Maryland. He is among the longest serving Waterkeepers in the Chesapeake Bay region and the sole African-American Waterkeeper in the nation.



Photo credit: © Patuxent Riverkeeper



MISSION, VISION, AND FOCUS

River Network empowers and unites people and communities to protect and restore rivers and other waters that sustain all life. We envision a future of clean and ample water for people and nature, where local caretakers are well-equipped, effective and courageous champions for our rivers. Our three strategies for focused investment are strong champions, clean water, and ample water.

HEADQUARTERS 434 NW Sixth Avenue, Suite 304, Portland, OR 97209
503.241.3506 | info@rivernetwork.org

www.rivernetwork.org