Claire Mieszkalski - Discovery Snapshot

CATAMOUNT

FELLOWSHIP FOR EMERGING CHANGEMAKERS

How might we embed equity into the practices of environmental serving organizations?

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Regardless of race, culture or gender, we all depend on the natural environment. So why has the environmental sector in Canada and the United States been called out for being too white for too long? It is questions like this that have spurred on the conversation about social equity within environmental nonprofit organizations. Equity seeks to build fair results based on a community's pre-existing and current unfair situation.

Equity and Environmental Organizations

A US study in 2019 found that **2.1%** of environmental nonprofits were reporting the racial/ethnic composition of their staff and board (Taylor et al., 2019).

Another US study shows that, of reporting organizations

89% full time staff

83% board members

87.2% senior staff **are all white.** (Taylor, 2018).

But what about Canada? Are the board of directors and staff of Canadian environmental organizations representative of the communities around them?

Statistics Canada only began crowdsourcing similar information in 2021 and it suggested:

28.6% of reporting environmental organizations had written policies about the diversity of their board members (Statistics Canada, 2021)

11% of board members indicated that they were from a visible minority and 3% identified as First Nations, Metis, or Inuit (Statistics Canada, 2021).

Methodology

Throughout the 2020/2021 academic year, I was involved in the Catamount Fellowship, which enabled me to broaden my perspective on the issue of equity within environmental serving organizations by:

- Meeting with my faculty mentor and community partner
- Conducting a Literature Review
- Engaging with members of the broader community

As an ecotourism and outdoor leadership student, my perspectives have been additionally informed by classes that I have taken on social and environmental sustainability, social justice, and policy over the duration of my degree.

Diversity within organizations including board of directors affects:

- Strength of decision-making (Grant Thorton LLP, 2019)
- Connections with other organizations, resources, and donors (National Council of Nonprofits, n.d.)
- Presence of differing worldviews and experiences

What is equity versus equality?

- Equality looks to give the same opportunities and the same outcomes across groups of people (Espinoza, 2007).
- Equity looks at the socially unfair circumstances that groups find themselves in and seeks to understand what work needs to be done so that they could benefit from fair outcomes.

What does equity need to include?

Recognitional Equity	Recognizing the presence of diverse peoples, experiences, values, motivations, and ways of knowing (Friedman et al., 2018).
Procedural Equity	Focuses on meaningful and deliberate collaboration with communities so that they can participate meaningfully and fully in the design and implementation of a particular effort (Pascual et al., 2014).
Distributional Equity	The balancing of benefits and burdens that extend out of a project or program. These may be economic outcomes, but they can also be social or environmental (McDermott et al., 2013).
Contextual Equity	Occasionally included, this refers to the social and cultural, environmental, and political situation that a community has been and is impacted by (Friedman et al, 2018).

Equity and Reconciliation

Research has suggested that the inclusion of social equity considerations within conservation planning increases the likelihood of long-term sustainability and the overall success of a project (Ban et al., 2013). Given the violent colonial history of Canada and displacement of Indigenous peoples from their lands during conservation efforts, I believe that equity-seeking is most important as organizations look to develop relationships with Indigenous communities for conservation. Upholding Indigenous land and human rights must be a core value to equitable conservation efforts and organizations.

Equity and Environmentalism in Practice - What Can it Look Like?

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS)

- Across Canada, CPAWS has made strides in equity-seeking work with Indigenous communities. CPAWS appears to work with a rights-based approach to Indigenous equity within conservation. Indigenous equity is core to the organization's mandate, development, and delivery of efforts. These are a few highlights from CPAWS:

- Ongoing engagement of Indigenous communities is central to the CPAWS management strategy for the Rocky Mountain National Parks (Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - Southern Alberta Chapter, n.d.).

- The establishment of Fisher Bay Provincial Park, a collaborative effort between CPAWS and the Fisher River Cree Nation (Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, 2016).

- The hiring of Annita McPhee, the first Indigenous executive director of a CPAWS branch (Simmons, 2021).

- The inclusion of intentional and meaningful collaboration and co-creation with Indigenous communities in the organization's mandate, most impactfully included by CPAWS BC (Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, n.d.; Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society- British Columbia Chapter, n.d.).

Equity and Reconciliation

Commitment to social equity, starting with the CEO and board of directors

Transparency about diversity data in staffing, board composition, and policy

Strive for collaboration, co-creation, and consent alongside communities rather than consultation.

Through the leadership of Indigenous communities, integrate traditional Indigenous knowledge systems with Western environmental science

Commit to a continuous process of equity-seeking with adequate resourcing to be effective

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Claire Mieszkalski - Creative Work

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EQUITY, CONSERVATION, AND ME

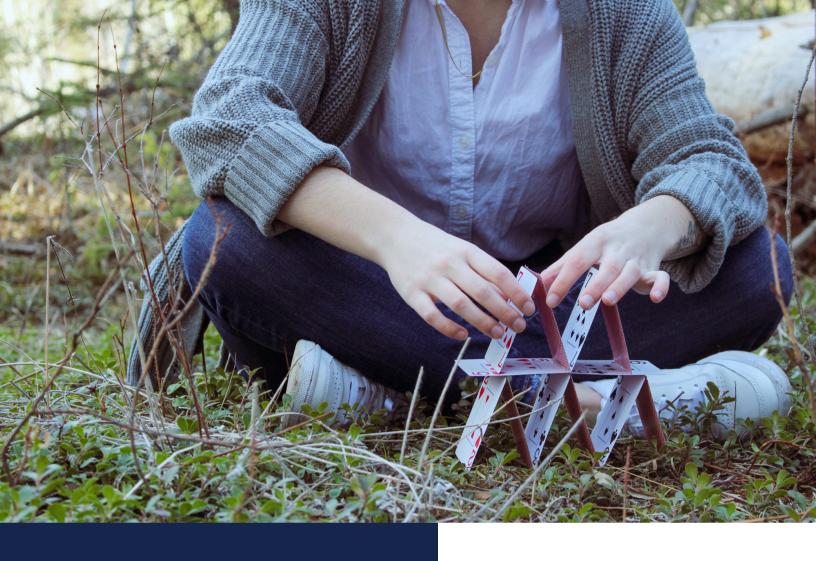## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS IN SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND SYSTEMIC RACISM IN CONSERVATION INITIATIVES

Photography and reflections by
Claire Mieszkalski

PROXIMITY

WHAT INFORMATION DO WE MISS ABOUT SYSTEMS WHEN WE LOOK TOO CLOSELY AT SINGULAR ELEMENTS?

WHAT OTHER ELEMENTS MAY SUPPORT THE LACK OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS?

CONSTRUCTION

WHAT ROLES DO WE PLAY IN BUILDING OR SUPPORTING AN INEQUITABLE SYSTEM?
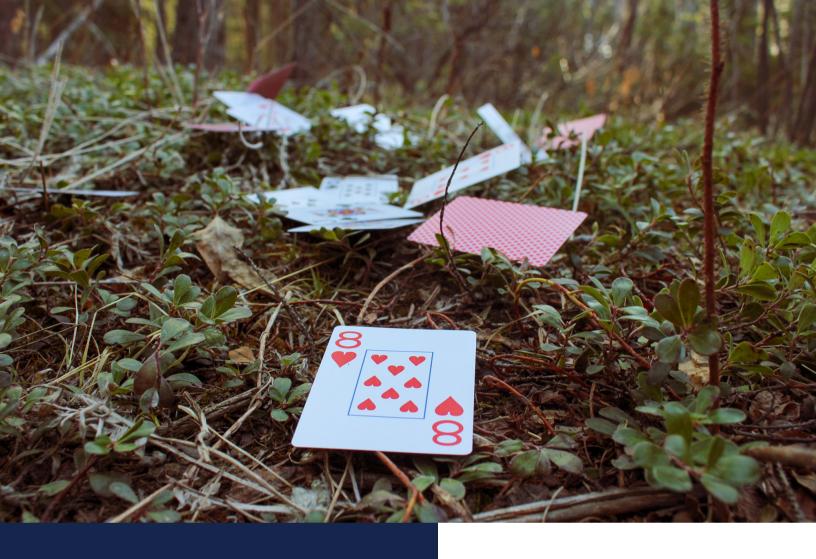
IF WE DON'T STOP, HOW CAN WE ALL PROSPER?

HOW CAN WE BE SUSTAINABLE STEWARDS USING THE INVOLVEMENT AND EFFORTS OF EVERYONE?

COMFORT

HOW DO WE CONFRONT
COMFORT IN THIS SYSTEM?

WHEN BOTH PEOPLE AND THE
ENVIRONMENT STAND TO
BENEFIT, WHY WOULD WE
STICK TO WHAT IS EASIEST?

REINVENT

IF COMMUNITIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT ARE INDICATING INSTABILITIES ARE PRESENT, WHAT HAPPENS IF THE SYSTEM COLLAPSES?

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES ARISE IN ASSESSING WHAT THE SYSTEM IS AND HAS BEEN?

CHANGE

CAN WE COLLECTIVELY CREATE A NEW FUTURE THAT IS ENVIRONMENTALLY AND SOCIALLY JUST FOR ALL?

HOW DO WE AVOID MAKING THE SAME MISTAKES?

Claire Mieszkalski - Scholarly Output

CATAMOUNT

FELLOWSHIP FOR EMERGING CHANGEMAKERS

Understanding and Exploring
Equity within Environmental Organizations

Claire Mieszkalski

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Acknowledgements

Who Am I?

I would like to acknowledge that I am a non-Indigenous settler on these traditional and ancestral lands. I study, live, and play on the lands of the Blackfoot Confederacy, including the Piikani, the Kainai, and the Siksika. This land is also home to the Tsuu T'ina Nation, and the Iyarhe Nakoda First Nations and Metis Nation III of Alberta.

I was born and raised in Mohkinstsis, what is currently known as Calgary, Alberta. I am a descendant of Scottish, Irish, and Polish immigrants and I acknowledge the unique lens, as well as the blindspots that this presents to my exploration of this issue. The opportunity to research this topic has presented a great opportunity to better understand the similarities and differences between how I engage with the natural environment and those of the Indigenous communities whose land I live on, and to explore the viewpoints on increased equity-seeking in the environmental sector.

I have always found myself looking for opportunities to engage with and develop deep and empowering relationships within the context of community. This is a major reason why I chose to study ecotourism and outdoor leadership at Mount Royal University. I feel that the outdoors connects individuals in ways that I have not quite seen elsewhere. I feel there is a great sense of camaraderie within the community that is anchored in adventure, exploration, and transformative experiences. The outdoor recreation community also has a past of erasing the valuable experiences, worldviews, and skills of racialized and Indigenous people, among others (Ross, 2020). It is my hope that through on-going research, dialogue, and collaboration in both the environmental and outdoor recreation sectors can evolve to be more inclusive, equitable, and diverse in the future. I look forward to continuing my engagement in this area and to the continuous development of my outlooks and learnings.

Introduction

Regardless of race, culture or gender, we all depend on the natural environment. This fact is even more important in light of the climate crisis and the impending social, economic, cultural and ecological impacts. Despite overlapping identities and many shared interests in the environment, the environmental sector has been called out numerous times through the last decade for looking too white and too male. This was possibly seen most notably in North America by a Green 2.0 report in 2014 (Taylor, 2014). More recent studies in the United States and Canada indicate that this issue continues to be prevalent today (Taylor et al., 2019; Statistics Canada, 2021). The environmental sector includes a number of different players such as nonprofit and philanthropic organizations and corporations with focuses placed on resource management and/or environmental protection (Eco Canada, 2010, p.11). This report will focus primarily on nonprofit and philanthropic organizations involved in the environmental sector. Equity, diversity, and inclusion, although neglected, are an integral piece of environmental protection and conservation. Organizations and the environment stand to benefit from engaged communities that bring forward diverse perspectives and solutions (Grant Thorton LLP, 2019). In Canada and the United States, the regions of focus within this report, the historical legacy and current presence of white supremacy and colonialism also precludes many Indigenous peoples from involvement in environmental organizations and funding opportunities. Their environmental leadership, rooted in rich and multifaceted histories with the land has often been brought up as a way forward for the sector and planet.

Beginning in the fall of the 2020/2021 academic year, I was paired with the organization Alberta Ecotrust Foundation through the Catamount Fellowship. The Alberta Ecotrust Foundation was founded in 1991 and operates in the middle ground between corporations and environmental nonprofits (Alberta Ecotrust Foundation, n.d.). In their work, they place a major emphasis on community through investment and grantmaking, collaboration and capacity-building, and action (Alberta Ecotrust Foundation, 2018). Given the nature of the environmental sector's whiteness versus their own commitment to community, Ecotrust has an interest in understanding how equity may become a tenet in the operations of environmental nonprofits and philanthropic organizations. By looking at socially innovative examples of equity-seeking in the environmental sectors around the world, a better roadmap of steps and solutions can be developed.

From the beginning of the Fellowship in September 2020, I have met with my faculty mentor and my community partner to be advised on research approaches, explore key concepts, and discuss developing areas of interest. I also had the opportunity to host a community conversation on equity and climate action. While no data was collected from this dialogue, it did assist in framing the nature and importance of this research.

I was enlightened on the varying perspectives that are brought into conversations about environmentalism. Additionally, my perspectives and ideas are shaped by my learning in courses I have taken throughout my degree on policy, social and environmental sustainability, leadership, and equity.

The chosen research question for this report is: how might we embed equity into the practices of environmental serving organizations? In developing an answer to this question, this report will seek to develop comprehensive definitions and breakdowns of what equity means within the context of the environmental sector. Barriers to building equity within organizations and the work they do will also be discussed. The environmental sector does not operate in isolation, hence the importance of mapping out the network of other impacts and influences that lead to, reinforce, and prolong inequities in this area is essential to this research. Looking into the solution landscape by comparing and contrasting the work of Canadian and international examples will provide some insight into the options that are currently being tested and evaluated.

What is Equity?

Oftentimes conversations about social justice include common themes such as equity and equality, diversity, inclusion, and representation. Throughout the research process, I found myself disturbed by the systemic and systematic unfairness that is prevalent in our society. Given this, there is an increasing motivation for individuals, organizations, governments, and corporations to involve themselves in these discussions. Through my own observation, it seems more common than not to see the word "equity" used alongside "diversity" and "inclusion" through mainstream channels such as news media, organization publications and reports, and even on social media. While there is nothing technically wrong with this, in isolation I wonder if it may cloud the meaning and intentionality of the language that we choose to use. Due to this, equity is a concept that is often lumped together with equality and other social concerns. I believe that on its own equity is a complex and multifaceted concept that is worth understanding in-depth.

One may ask "Equity or equality for who?" and "Equity or equality by whom?". Equality concerns itself with creating an equal society (Espinoza, 2007. Pg 346). Many people will hear equality used in the context of rights, opportunities, and status. As long as all people are treated the same, equality assumes that everyone will enjoy those same rights, opportunities, and statuses (Espinoza, 2007). The history of Western society is marred with centuries of violent colonialism, white supremacy, and gender inequality. As I have considered this over the duration of this project, an important question continues to surface for me:

how could equal outcomes stem from equal treatment when there is already a historical and modern disadvantage for certain groups of people? Equity more particularly applies to this context. Equity looks at the socially unfair circumstances that groups find themselves in and seeks to understand what work needs to be done so that they could benefit from fair outcomes. Note here that "fair" is not equivalent to "equal" (Putnam-Walkerly & Russell, 2016). Within the concept of "fairness" one must also ask: who decides what is fair? Who is it fair to?

A US study in 2019 found that

2.1%

of environmental nonprofits were reporting the racial/ethnic composition of their staff and board (Taylor et al., 2019).

Equity has been framed and re-framed by the academic community a number of times. While each explanation approaches it slightly differently, few things genuinely change. Generally, academic definitions look at equity as being something that goes into and comes out of a particular circumstance or project. There are additional variations to what is considered an equitable outcome. These ideas will be discussed further below.

The Four Frames of Equity

Due to the inherent complexity of achieving effective equity, a number of academics have simplified the way it could be explained. Generally, it has been reduced to three themes of equity, and occasionally a fourth theme. These themes may seem like a step-by-step approach to achieving equity, but this would be a gross oversimplification. Equity-seeking work must be entrenched in each one of these concepts. Any work should be reviewed and re-reviewed against these ideas often, with adequate resources. The need to realign with them may arise, but to ignore this need makes the effort moot.

The first of these themes, recognitional equity, concerns itself with recognizing the injustices that an individual or a group of people encounter (Friedman et al., 2018). This means having a solid understanding of the common barriers faced and that adaptations or innovative solutions may need to be developed to reduce these barriers. Recognitional equity asks important questions about who is involved in various processes and whether that involvement is accessible, whether their voice is commonly sought out and understood, and whether they feel inclined, welcomed, or empowered to engage at all (Nesbitt et al., 2019). Without recognitional equity, the voices needed will rarely be present or valued (Cocks et al., 2021). To leave recognitional equity behind is to not acknowledge the power imbalances present in the society one lives in.

If you were to attempt to co-create a project while ignoring all of the potential challenges or unique opportunities that an equity-seeking community may encounter, then a successful development process could be harder to maintain. It is because of potential situations like this that procedural equity becomes distinctly important; procedural equity focuses on meaningful and deliberate work to have marginalized communities participate meaningfully and fully in the design and implementation of a particular effort (Pascual et al., 2014). This means that the community's values, goals, approach, and dissent are listened to and respected. Additionally, they play an active role in the delivery of the effort and are physically, emotionally, and mentally present and valued.

If all parties are involved in a collaborative effort where inequities are recognized and procedures have been designed to facilitate inclusion, an inequitable outcome is not likely to be satisfactory. The concept of equitable outcomes is called distributional equity. Not only does it concern itself with ensuring that everyone enjoys fair benefits, it also ensures that potential burdens are not placed more heavily over one community than another (McDermott et al., 2013). Distributional equity pushes one to separate the ideas of "equal" and "equitable". Just because two communities, one having been marginalized, share the same burden or benefits does not mean that it has met the standards of distributional equity. The marginalized community's benefits may need to outweigh that of the other community, or they may need to carry less of the burden (Klein et al., 2015). This potential should be indicated by understandings built through recognitional equity.

The above comprise the three main subcategories within equity. Some academics and activists may bring a fourth dimension into the conversation as well: contextual equity. This is also included under recognitional equity at times. For those who separate contextual equity from recognitional equity, contextual equity focuses more on the historical aspect of injustice. It may look at the historical cause and effect of injustices, which may further inform the knowledge built through recognitional equity.

What does equity need to include?	
Recognitional Equity	Recognizing the presence of diverse peoples, experiences, values, motivations, and ways of knowing (Friedman et al., 2018).
Procedural Equity	Focuses on meaningful and deliberate collaboration with communities so that they can participate meaningfully and fully in the design and implementation of a particular effort (Pascual et al., 2014).
Distributional Equity	The balancing of benefits and burdens that extend out of a project or program. These may be economic outcomes, but they can also be social or environmental (McDermott et al., 2013).
Contextual Equity	Occasionally included, this refers to the social and cultural, environmental, and political situation that a community has been and is impacted by (Friedman et al, 2018).

Environmental Conservation and Social Equity

Humans and the land do not exist in distinct vacuums. Each affects and influences the other's ability to support itself and the other. When a more holistic approach to conservation is applied, it allows for greater social equity and environmental achievements. This is evident through research on the subject. Klein et al (2015) found that, as communities are involved equitably in the processes and outcomes of a conservation project, it is more likely to see more positive, long-term outcomes. This further indicates the deep desire that communities have to play a role in how the world is shaped with and around them.

While the potential outcomes are positive, Alberta Ecotrust's interest in this issue suggests that the sector is precluding itself from capturing the environmental benefits that greater equity brings. The racial and ethnic composition of the boards of directors and staff of environmental nonprofits indicates that the sector does have an issue with being disproportionately white. Statistics Canada only began a crowdsourcing initiative in late 2020 to better understand what nonprofit boards look like. While it may not be entirely accurate, it proposes that the boards of environmental nonprofit boards are made up of only 11% visible minorities and 2% identify as Indigenous (Statistics Canada, 2021). This is considerably lower than their composition within the Canadian population where they comprised 22% and 4.9%, respectively in 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2017a; Statistics Canada, 2017b). Beyond that, only a minority of organizations (28.6%) have written policies about diversity on their board of directors (Statistics Canada, 2021). Accurate Canadian data on equity-seeking in the environmental sector is quite slim. Little data has been collected, making it even more challenging to understand where Canadian organizations currently stand and where they are able to go.

Beyond the benefits that equity brings to conservation, there are many reasons why equity should be considered in the staff and board of directors of environmental organizations. Diversity in leadership has the ability to increase innovative solutions, improve the strength of decision-making, create more socially aware approaches to problems, and develop opportunities for relationship building with various communities, funders, and collaborators (Grant Thorton LLP, 2019; National Council of Nonprofits, n.d.; Krywulak, 2008) . Surveys conducted in the United States suggest that the lack of diversity and equity in the leadership of nonprofit organizations may not be due to ignorance of its importance. Instead, it may be because organizations do not have the knowledge or skills to build it, resulting in a lack of long term commitments to changing the pattern of whiteness (Brennan & Forbes, 2019). Particular to the environmental sector, leadership may feel that working towards social justice objectives distracts from their environmental goals (Taylor et al., 2019).

Clearly, building equity and diversity requires more than an immediate desire for a quick fix. Barriers to equity may look different internally within conservation organizations than what barriers look like in work with various communities. Due to Canada's colonial history, sentiment of white supremacy, and global patriarchal power, opportunities and challenges may present differently, both between communities and within communities. What is considered equitable to one group or one individual may not be considered equitable to another (Klein et al., 2015). Depending on the lack of equity a community has faced and the current implications of it, they may need outcomes that go beyond a simple equal division of benefits and burdens. This presents itself even clearer when considered alongside intergenerational environmental concerns. Middle aged individuals may have more ease

accessing workplaces and decision-making processes for environmental conservation as ; what may be the most equitable outcomes for them may not be for the generations that come behind them.

Around the world, Indigenous communities are fighting for sovereignty and the upholding of their land and human rights. It appears that conservation organizations have been more motivated to develop meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities. That does not mean that all projects have been successful, socially or environmentally. It does mean that work in this area is developing, giving a better basis for understanding community collaboration and building out the academic research that may reinforce its importance to leaders in the environmental sector. In the following subsections, there will be a predominant focus placed on challenges and opportunities in co-creating equitable conservation projects in Canada.

Barriers

The existing challenges in creating a more equitable conservation sector are complex, with issues often intertwining with one another. Due to this, it is important to understand that one barrier may be reinforcing another. This requires returning to the dimensions of equity to further break down where these barriers exist and how they interact with other barriers. With this in mind, all types of equity must be meaningfully considered and integrated into a particular approach. Focusing on procedural equity, without having any focus on distributive or contextual equity may yield negligible results, and any results seen may be short-term and unsustainable.

Recognitional and contextual equity are an important baseline for any work taking place within conservation. This can look many different ways. It is most simply suggested, it may include acknowledging the history of the land and the people in the region in which work is being done. I disagree that this is ever an adequate approach to including recognitional or contextual equity. When marginalized communities, specifically Indigenous peoples, have faced centuries of oppression at the hands of colonialism, acknowledging the land alone will come off as meaningless and performative. Even this basic step has been ignored in conservation work and research (Schang et al., 2020). Building equity in these areas requires careful consideration and deep intentionality. There are some pertinent understandings for conservation organizations to have in their external operations. Indigenous peoples are not a homogenous group and should not be treated as such (Leonard et al., 2020). Meaning that, if every Indigenous community is assumed to have experienced oppression and inequity the same way or to hold the same values or viewpoints, recognitional and contextual equity cannot exist. To neglect contextual and recognitional equity-seeking approaches in procedures will lead to inequitable outcomes. Without these two concepts being well understood within their particular context, it will also be more challenging for an organization to assess whether equitable outcomes have been achieved.

Both recognitional and contextual equity should be addressed in the internal operations of an organization as well. Primarily, these dimensions of equity are addressed within hiring practices. Building a diverse staff and board has numerous benefits such as developing an organization's network with communities and professionals, incorporating a wider range of perspectives into decision making, and stronger innovation skills (Krywulak & Sisco, 2008; Coleman & Knutson, 2018; Hiriji, 2020). What may prevent an organization from building a diverse and equitable workplace? Implicit biases may be present here. Biases may prevent the right individuals from being hired based on assumptions about the ethnic origin of their name or they may also influence preferences for a candidate based on their educational background (Brennan, 2019; Feng et al., 2020). Given that inequitable access to formal and colonial education streams has precluded individuals and communities from being hired, conservation organizations may benefit from hiring based on skills and valuable lived experience (Katena, n.d.).

If recognitional and contextual barriers are addressed, procedural equity has a better chance of flourishing. Conservation has much to gain with the inclusion of Indigenous ecological knowledge. The benefits of this are challenging to harvest if these communities are not involved in the development and delivery processes, or have been not engaged for the right reasons (Land Needs Guardians, n.d.). An organization cannot seek to "tick off" the box of consulting with Indigenous peoples without also having a desire to maintain a mutual relationship of sharing interests, criticisms, plans, and goals (Ontario Professional Planners Institute, 2019). This is not legitimately addressing procedural equity. Given how conservation efforts and organizations are funded, a challenge to procedural equity may be having adequate time, money, and resources to properly enable it.

Procedural equity within an organization's internal operations is usually related back to board and staff diversity. As previously mentioned, a diverse team has numerous benefits. There can be a great importance set on the presence of community members on nonprofit staff. Should staff and board members be from marginalized groups, there can be additional barriers to ensuring procedural equity. Legitimate and meaningful engagement in decision-making processes may be quashed by existing power structures in the workplace. Lastly, distributional equity tends to have a greater focus due to its more identifiable and measurable outcomes. Challenges within this area may include a disproportionate burden versus benefit for a community (Boyd, 2019). In a later section of this paper, the concept of overlapping identities and inequity will be discussed.

How Equity and Conservation Have Previously Come Together

I believe that having a strong understanding of what may be preventing equitable outcomes is key to develop stronger social plans in environmental projects. Various organizations and governments have done their work to understand these barriers and to address them directly through their work. Unfortunately within a Canadian context, finding extensive examples of this is challenging. There seems to be a lack of transparency about equity-seeking practices in conservation organizations, particularly within Alberta. There are many potential reasons for this. This may be because organizations do not want to share this information or it could be that this work is not yet being done. Nonetheless, there are several organizations who have built environmental and social success through their approaches.

Environmental organizations may not only be connected to environmental success, but also to perpetuating environmental and social violence against Indigenous communities. This is the particular case with the Nature Conservancy and the World Wildlife Fund, among other large-scale international environmental organizations (Stevens, 2010). The colonial roots of Western conservation efforts suggest that these organizations are not likely to be the only ones with a similar history. Previous and on-going social and racial violence within this sector must be called out. These organizations have a responsibility to people and the planet to commit to reviews of their unethical practices and make actionable commitments to improving their impacts. Communities should be under no obligation to forgive and forget the injustices led and supported by any environmental organization. If organizations have genuinely followed through on working to embed and uphold equity in their operations, it is up to communities to decide what is safe and reasonable with regards to engaging with controversial organizations.

With this in mind, it is worth noting that these organizations have larger financial resources, and therefore have more resources to invest in a wider array of environmental projects with potentially more opportunities for innovative solutions. There are select cases of equity being positively included in environmental projects. I would like to review certain projects that suggest some change in approaches from these organizations. There is a potential opportunity to learn from their successes in social and environmental justice, without reproducing their histories.

Nature Conservancy of Canada

The damning criticism of their parent organization, the Nature Conservancy, calls for caution when looking at the work the organization suggests it is doing in its Canadian chapter (Stevens, 2010). The country's chapter claims that their work with Indigenous communities is centered on strong relationships (Nature Conservancy, 2020). Each dimension of equity is addressed in the organization's framework for Indigenous engagement in conservation. By increasing the staff's capacity in understanding Indigenous history and culture, acknowledging the coexistence of knowledge systems, and understanding the extent to which Indigenous voices have been excluded, they address contextual and recognitional equity (Nature Conservancy of Canada, 2019). Procedural equity is developed through strong relationship building with Indigenous communities and advisors that come from it, ensuring that knowledge built over time is consistently factored into site-specific conservation planning, and that communities have access to the Nature Conservancy of Canada's technical knowledge for use in Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA)(Nature Conservancy of Canada, 2019). A framework can aim to accomplish various outcomes related to distributional equity, but it is much harder to understand the legitimate level of distributional equity borne from a project from this alone.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada's work in Old Man on His Back (OMB) Prairie and Heritage Conservation Area is a strong example of Indigenous co-creation within conservation. Cultural and ecological factors are weighed equally in protecting this area and in the reintroduction of bison. This conservation project is one of many that is led and directed by a group of Indigenous advisors, who meet at least annually to discuss the project, any changes that may be needed, and support that is requested from the Nature Conservancy of Canada. This ten year project began in 2020, so long-standing distributional equity is challenging to assess at this time (Nature Conservancy of Canada, n.d.). Nature Conservancy of Canada's distributional goals includes engaging young people in cultural and ecological knowledge of this site, ensuring that Indigenous peoples have access to bison for cultural and spiritual, and sustenance needs, and introducing additional bison to the area as needed (Nature Conservancy of Canada, n.d.).
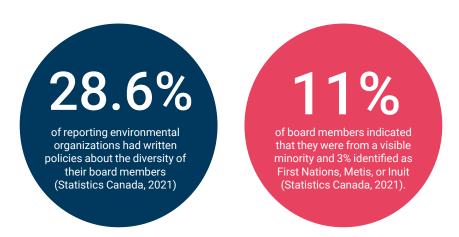
World Wildlife Fund

The World Wildlife Fund has a particularly controversial past, given their dispossession of Indigenous people's lands and accusations of poor oversight on anti-poaching programs (Stevens, 2010; Beaumont, 2020). With caution in mind, their work in South America, particularly on the Predio Putumayo Indigenous Reserve, is strong evidence of collaborative effort within communities. They put a heavy emphasis on supporting the local peoples but not taking over projects for them. Within the small town of La Chorrera, they have been working alongside a local organization and the Indigenous community on conservation projects to ensure the long-term environmental sustainability of traditional plants (Duran, 2021). This region is at risk of being used for extractive industries but the Bora, Muinane, Ocaina, and Uitoto peoples have played the most fundamental role in building sustained environmental health in the region. Carrying on traditional ways of life, they have ensured the ecological health of their land, water, and forests (World Wildlife Fund, n.d.; Londono Calle, 2018).

A major aspect of the World Wildlife Fund support in this region is the use of both Western and Indigenous knowledge in assessing ecosystems. Trying not to interfere with traditional knowledge systems and ways of knowing, the World Wildlife Fund provided access to technical measurement knowledge and devices, such as GPS, so that communities could develop a full ecosystem assessment system from the Indigenous perspective (Londono Calle, 2018). In doing this, the World Wildlife Fund achieves their environmental goals and communities play an active role in deciding how this is best done. Here, the World Wildlife Fund has considered recognitional/contextual equity in the design of the program and procedural equity by empowering communities but not taking over for them. Distributive equity can and will be understood over time, but the additional inclusion of intergenerational equity work in La Chorrera is worth noting. It does indicate that there are opportunities for advancement in equity for all ages within a community (De La Rosa et al., 2019).

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS)

Across Canada, CPAWS has made good strides in equity-seeking work. This is particularly true in their work alongside Indigenous communities. CPAWS seems to work with a rights-based approach to Indigenous equity within conservation. Indigenous equity is core to the organization's mandate, development, and delivery of efforts. In 2011, CPAWS Manitoba and the Fisher River Cree Nation established the Fisher Bay Provincial Park. Due to the collaborative effort, the Fisher River Cree Nation continues to have land available for traditional cultural activities, while also having the land recognized and protected by the provincial government (Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, 2016). Active co-creation with Indigenous communities in the area of Banff National Park is central to the CPAWS management strategy(Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society- Southern Alberta Chapter, n.d.). The organization understands that Indigenous peoples have previously been dispossessed of this landscape and that their on-going collaboration strengthens the plan and environment (Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society- Southern Alberta Chapter, n.d.).

The CPAWS chapter in British Columbia in particular has reinforced equity-seeking behaviours by hiring its first Indigenous executive director (Simmons, 2021). Annita McPhee, a Tahltan woman, was hired to the position in December of 2020, bringing forward a motivation to create better relationships between environmental organizations, Indigenous people, and the government (Simmons, 2021). This is an indicator that CPAWS values the voices and leadership of Indigeous peoples, whether that be through collaborative efforts or within the leadership of the organization itself. Finally, the chapter also has included intentional and meaningful collaboration and co-creation with Indigenous communities extensively throughout its mandate (Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - British Columbia Chapter, n.d.).

28.6%
of reporting environmental organizations had written policies about the diversity of their board members (Statistics Canada, 2021)

11%
of board members indicated that they were from a visible minority and 3% identified as First Nations, Metis, or Inuit (Statistics Canada, 2021).

Different Equities for Different Peoples

Another US study shows that, of reporting organizations

89% full time staff

83% board members

87.2% senior staff **are all white.** (Taylor, 2018).

Communities and populations are affected by oppression and resulting inequities differently. The colonial aspect of Canada has had significant intergenerational impacts on Indigenous communities. Additionally, Canada is known to some to be a country of inclusivity and diversity, but a true conversation about equity cannot take place without acknowledging the challenges faced by immigrants and new Canadians. Besides cultural differences, there is also the consideration of age. Given the nature of the Earth and the current struggle with climate change, intergenerational equity also becomes a main component within this dialogue. Within a patriarchal society, women also often find themselves at certain disadvantages.

There are numerous communities and demographics that exist under inequitable social, economic, political, and environmental structures. In many cases, individuals will find that these identities intersect.

As shown through a study completed by Klein et al. in 2015, achieving social equity through multiple groups may prove to be difficult. That is because what is viewed as an equitable process and outcome to some, may not be considered the same way by others. This research further categorizes the dimensions of equity that we mentioned earlier. Here, recognitional and procedural equity become input equity, and distributional equity becomes output equity. Klein et al. make some important designations, by further dividing output equity into the three categories below:

- **Absolute equity** - everyone receives the same benefit
- **Relative equity** - receiving a certain amount based on a predetermined variable
- **Perceived equity** - the perception of the benefits when compared to other beneficiaries

This further categorization may assist when determining equitable environmental benefits and burdens, within and between communities, through the input process. With regard to conservation, input equity addresses the representation, cooperation, and diversity within the process of project development, but output equity can directly speak to equitable environmental outcomes.

Questions

Through the last year, it has felt as if conversations about racial equity are appearing everywhere. The shift to online socialization during the COVID-19 pandemic has filled up my social media and news channels with information and advocacy for numerous communities. Calls to action from Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) have kick-started many questions about the colonial, capitalist, and white supremacist foundations within so many of our systems. With more dialogue and information brings more questions, too. At the very least, I think it is best that questions are not left uninvestigated. Every inquiry may not give way to obvious, easy, or comfortable answers. In my search for clarity, I acknowledge that answers must centre the voices of the often ignored or silenced. Oftentimes, this means re-evaluating the structures and systems that are prevalent around us every day.

Within the following section is a list of questions that were raised through the process of this research. There may be partial answers, answers that are in development, or there may be no settled answer at all. It is my hope that we can utilize the wealth of available information to answer some of the remaining questions. Creating opportunities to have on-going conversations about other questions will additionally fill gaps in our understanding. The questions below surfaced for me over the duration of the Catamount Fellowship, I feel that they may be important in informing the next steps in the solution landscape.

What can equity look like in the policies of organizations?

I am unsurprised that environmental organizations struggle with diversity, equity, and inclusion within their organizations including their board of directors. After hours of research across several months, I have seldom found Canadian environmental organizations with publicly available documentation of diversity, equity, and inclusion-focused bylaws and policies. Many of the policies that are available for viewing include general language around diversity. This may look like a simple indication that the organization is non-discriminatory in their hiring practices.

The Athabasca Watershed Council breaks away from this slightly. In their board policy, they indicate that three seats on the board of directors are to be elected to First Nations and Metis individuals (Athabasca Watershed Council, 2016). This seems to be motivated more so by representation of various affected groups, rather than by the inclusion of diverse voices. The organization also makes decisions based on consensus agreements (Athabasca Watershed Council, 2016). Consensus-style decision making may be a good option to drive inclusive dialogue; diverse dissenting voices are not able to be overshadowed by a potentially homogenous

majority. Consensus-style decision-making is not entirely rare. Friends of the Earth Australia also employ this practice for the aforementioned reasons (n.d.).

Ecojustice displays on their website that they are an Imagine Canada accredited organization, which gives accreditation to organizations based on the presence of certain standards, such as good governing practices, staff management, and fundraising, among others (Imagine Canada, 2018). Here, there is no mention of any standards relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. The closest that the program gets is that human rights laws must be followed in the hiring practices at minimum (Imagine Canada, 2018).

There are some examples of diversity and inclusion policies within the environmental sector. The Environmental Justice Foundation from the United Kingdom has a comprehensive policy publicly displayed. Their policy factors in strong recognitional and contextual equity by acknowledging the inequities and oppression faced by marginalized groups not only in the environment, but also in the workplace (Environmental Justice Foundation, n.d.). Although this feature focuses primarily on disparities between men and women, it could certainly be adapted to include immigrants, Indigenous peoples, and other racialized communities within Canada. The policy further outlines how it will achieve equitable opportunities, processes, and outcomes for all employees. A few of these include:

- "Creating an environment in which individual differences and the contributions of all team members are recognised and valued." (Environmental Justice Foundation, n.d.)

- "Supporting and empower anyone who feels they have been subject to discrimination in the workplace to raise their concerns so we can apply corrective measures." (Environmental Justice Foundation, n.d.)

- "Making training, development, and progression opportunities available to all staff." (Environmental Justice Foundation, n.d.)

- "Mainstreaming gender in recruitment to our campaigns, programmes and projects, and ensuring that our communications with communities and grassroots networks in particular reflect the needs and aspirations of women and girls." (Environmental Justice Foundation, n.d.)

There are also numerous resources full of recommendations that are available for those who are looking to embark on equity-seeking journeys within their organizations. Policies are a way to lay out the expectations of a workplace, but I believe that building an equitable and inclusive organization will require that organizations ensure that policies are actionable. Like the policies of the EJF, policies need to be specific about the work environment and culture an organization would like to create. This is where having a strong understanding of what equity is could be important. Having agreed-upon terminology ensures that the organization and employees all understand the basis of choices and actions (Pillar Nonprofit Network, n.d.). When an organization's communications, such as policies, effectively demonstrate that they are motivated to build a more diverse and inclusive staff, it may become easier to attract diverse applicants as networks are expanded and intentional recruiting begins (Bridgestar, 2009).

Retaining diversity within an organization needs to span beyond policies and into practices. I have found more difficulty finding publicized examples of organizations' internal actions to increase diversity, beyond mentions of participation in diversity, equity, and inclusion training, and the creation of diversity, equity and inclusion committees. This does not mean that there is no meaningful guidance available to develop internal action plans around inclusion. Various resources suggest that mentorship opportunities and professional development support all employees (University Health Services, 2013). This may create additional attraction to an organization, as employees understand that they will receive equitable opportunities for progression in their work.

How is equity evaluated?

Now that there is a better understanding of what equity is, what it may look like, and who it may involve, this seems like a logical follow-up. If something, such as grants, may spur on motivation to increase equity-seeking behaviour, how would grant-makers assess whether the actions or goals assessed are legitimately equitable? How do organizations evaluate their work surrounding social justice?

Some barriers to building an evaluation method have been identified. In particular, equity can be difficult to define universally. There is no absolute definition of it, and the understanding of what it is and what it looks like can be influenced by cultural differences. Considering the proliferation of the three core dimensions of equity, it may serve as a good platform upon which to develop a shared definition of equity with communities being engaged in conservation work (Francis et al., 2018). Proper evaluation of equity may be further stumped by conflicting goals and outcomes. It is inevitable that this challenge will arise (Law et al., 2017). Equity-seeking is deeply complex work and evaluations may also grossly oversimplify the complexities of it (Frykberg, 2017).

Commonly used evaluation systems may also be an extension of colonial influence. Evaluation systems, particularly ones that are created solely by a settler may neglect to include knowledge systems of engaged or affected communities. In order to prevent settler bias, an evaluation method may be built collaboratively with an affected or engaged community. This, however, cannot be the only way to prevent settler colonial bias in conservation evaluation. It is argued that, if evaluation is completed by a settler, the carefully crafted evaluation method is devoid of value and further perpetuates colonial power (McKegg, 2019; Andrews, 2009). This is an area where an organization can deeply benefit from having community members on the board or employed with them, so long as these individuals are properly supported and compensated, and not tokenized. This results in poor contextual, recognitional, and distributive equity.

What differences exist between Indigenous stewardship of the land and settler conservation? What opportunities does this bring about?

There are many differences in the outlooks on nature between Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians. Historically, whether it be through the exploration of Norseman or through French and English colonization, settlers have regarded land as being something to conquer, control, and to reap the benefits of (MacDowell, 2014). The colonial concept of wilderness, land untouched by any human, is imagined (Smith, 2014). There is value to be found in the land so far as it can be extracted and utilized. This is unfortunately not the case. There seems to have been little historical thought as to the impact that this environmental approach would have on future generations. This puts the settler association with land into a more economical, individualized position.

Even today, many settler Canadians experience stress watching the natural environment around them deteriorate. Much of this stress will be framed around the loss of potential enjoyment on the land, loss of biodiversity, loss of livelihood, and loss of natural beauty. For Indigenous peoples living in what is now known as Canada, the relationship with land is far different and unique to each Nation. For the Blackfoot peoples, there is an intertwined relationship between knowledge systems, scientific understanding, and spirituality. A connection with the land is woven through each of these areas and then interrelated between them (Bastien, 2004). Beyond the land itself, there is a cultural, epistemological, and ontological connection to all living things. This is exemplified by their relationship with the buffalo (Van Beek, 2019). Dr. Leroy Little Bear indicates that Blackfoot peoples have a mutual relationship with the land, and that separation from it has and does cause deep emotional and spiritual rifts (2009). Due to this, there seems to be an importance in ensuring that future generations have the opportunity to develop their own unique connection to the land. This results in good stewardship, adaptability, and a long-term approach when it comes to ecological and cultural conservation.

There are clearly foundational differences in how conservation may be seen between the two cultures. Settler conservation has historically involved the displacement of Indigenous communities. This has been done by cordoning off protected areas, therefore strangling Indigenous communities' relationship to their livelihoods, traditional lands, and spiritual connections. Settler conservation with its basis of Western science, focuses on written, observed, and measured physical evidence and has the tendency of looking at things in a more isolated fashion.

Indigenous science, and therefore conservation, sees this information in a different way. In various explanations, Indigenous science seems to have three consistent components. Firstly, it is holistic. Indigenous science understands the individual, community, animal, plant, and atmosphere in relation to one another (Little Bear, 2019). Secondly, this knowledge is experienced and then passed down orally (Buck, 2019). This allows for a much more personal understanding of the world and self. Lastly, Indigenous science, as Little Bear explains, is understood "in constant flux" (BanffEvents, 2014). As the world shifts and changes socially, economically, politically, and environmentally, Indigenous science is adaptive and cognisant of the impacts and effects on other elements of the system (BanffEvents, 2014). These components of knowledge systems influence conservation practices. In addition, there must be an acknowledgement that there will be variations on the above concepts as Indigeneity is not homogenous.

There is opportunity to enmesh these two scientific foundations for conservation practice. For one, it offers Western conservation practice the opportunity to learn from interconnections between all living things. Through the concepts of Indigenous science and knowledge, there is a distinct opportunity to learn about how conservation further affects other elements of the system, such as well-being

and health, language, politics, and more. These two ways of knowing are, in many ways, complimentary. Traditional knowledge of these lands certainly improves the available historical knowledge from which conservationists can better understand climatic shifts and ecological progression or digression. There is opportunity here, too, for Indigenous communities to leverage their knowledge and govern their own lands. Conservation organizations can relinquish some control over the approach, process, maintenance, and on-going evaluation of these ecosystems. Both of these areas of science are valid and there is benefit to seeing both within conservation, whether that be directly together or mutually interspersed through the environment.

A modern example of this within Canada is the Edéhzhíe Protected Area in the Northwest Territories. After several decades of collaboration, this became the first Indigenous Protected Area within Canada in 2018 (Environment and Natural Resources, n.d.). This arrangement is both environmentally and culturally beneficial. This area is home to many species that are at-risk and to key headwaters for the region (Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2018). In addition to the rich biodiversity in Edéhzhíe, the area also hosts deep spiritual connections and is the location of many Dene legends (Lavoie, 2018). In control of the research, monitoring, and future stewardship mentoring is the Dehcho K'éhodi Stewardship & Guardian Program (CPAWSNAB, n.d.). This combines the stewardship of land according to Dene Law, with the ability to sustain cultural and linguistic strengthening (CPAWSNAB, n.d.). This project draws on the data collection methods of Western science, while using the Dehcho First Nations' intimate relationship with the lands for management (Lavoie, 2018). Indigenous Protected Areas have been seen in other nations, including New Zealand (Mason, 2018) These are crucial examples of how Indigenous knowledge and Western science can be used together meaningfully to protect the land and rights of Indigenous peoples.

In Conclusion- Where do we go from here?

My research question, "how might we embed equity into the practices of environmental serving organizations?" was a greater and more complex challenge than I could have anticipated when I started my research in the Fall of 2020. Navigating this complexity, including having frank dialogue with community members about inequities and having my outlook checked by mentors and peers, has been an eye-opening experience. I knew social inequity, racism, white supremacy, and colonialism were pervasive. After this project, I am so much more aware of how these mental models connect, intersect, and overlap.

The environmental sector has a diversity problem (Taylor, 2014). This paper has focused on a number of topics, such as the language surrounding equity, the challenges and opportunities that equity-seeking presents, how equity looks as it is applied, and the remaining questions that I have after engaging with the research. With these all in mind, there are a number of areas that I feel that the environmental sector has the opportunity to grow and develop in. They are as follows:

Making a Commitment to Social Equity

Organizations preparing to become involved in greater equity-seeking work is essential. It is important for them to not stagnate in a state of "always preparing". I believe that it is essential for the leadership of these organizations to create an action plan for their commitment to equity. Top leadership and the board of directors must understand the implications of making this commitment; it is not something that is driven by conversation alone and will take time to develop. Stepping into the commitment should include building an agreed-upon definition of what equity is for the organization to follow. This is where understanding the difference between equity and equality is imperative. The four frames of equity may serve as a productive way for an organization to check in with the alignment of the goals they are setting. Leveraging the knowledge of leadership, directors, employees, and potentially the community can shape an understanding of equity that organizations can support.

Being Transparent about Equity-Seeking

A major challenge presented through this research was all of the gaps in data on Canadian organizations and what they are doing to build equity. I understand that there can be some hesitancy to share this information, especially when organizations are unsure if they are doing enough or if they have not quite started this work. Sharing this information with each other creates an environment that allows us to see where work is needed and where innovation is possible. Although Canada does not have a website for nonprofit data collection like the United States' GuideStar, ensuring that your organization's bylaws, policies, and diversity, equity and inclusion data is available to the public and other organizations is helpful. Building a better comprehension of how equity looks in organizations around the country does not have to be done alone. Higher transparency may hold you accountable for any downfalls or gaps; if this is something holding you back, it is likely a wise idea for the organization to review why it is looking to engage in this work in the first place.

Work that is "With" and "Of" the Community

I can understand the shock that some organizations may feel when their eyes are opened to inequities that are both internal and external to the environmental sector. It is key here that this feeling fuels an organization's continued commitment to equity and to equitable practices and relationships with the communities around them. A possible issue that could arise here is the urgent desire to jump in and try to "fix" the problem for everyone affected. This can continue the perpetuation of colonialism and white saviorism, and patriarchy in some instances.

Instead, this is another opportunity to utilize the skills, lived experiences, and knowledge of affected communities alongside the technical expertise of environmental organizations. Caution should be applied here; equitable relationships with community members will take time, intention, and resources to build. Organizations must be prepared to develop mutual and reciprocal relationships. When a relationship has developed, there are considerably more opportunities for collaboration and co-creation across projects. Organizations should stay away from approaches that only communicate with communities to receive approval on projects that will be completed alone. Consent is also a rising theme here, especially with the Land Back movement in North America. Organizations should operate from the standpoint of receiving consent from Indigenous communities while engaging with environmental projects on their traditional ancestral lands.

Indigenous Leadership and Knowledge Systems

The environmental sector has an opportunity to work under and with the leadership of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous communities are the original stewards of these lands, and their wealth of long-term, generation knowledge serves to be beneficial for the planet. Through the mutually cultivated relationships, environmental organizations may have the opportunity to integrate Indigenous knowledge systems with Western science. This may be applied through the planning and implementation processes, as well as in the monitoring and evaluation process of conservation initiatives. To deny the relevance and applicability of Indigenous knowledge in conservation continues colonial violence. Settler-based environmental organizations must be wary about creating a hierarchy of knowledge systems - observations made through the lens of Western science are not more useful, powerful, or valid than Indigenous perspectives on land stewardship.

The Equity-Seeking Process

The use of organizational resources and emotional and mental energy are key parts of the equity-seeking journey. Organizations and their staff have to be willing to invest these things on an on-going basis. There is no singular policy, training session, or resource that begins and ends the journey of building equity. Oftentimes, this is a jarring and uncomfortable experience for settlers. Understanding privilege, unconscious biases, and how settlers are the beneficiaries of centuries of racially oppressive practices is a wholly necessary component of equity-seeking. It may be challenging, however, for individuals in an organization to know where to start by themselves. This is where it is imperative that organizations seek out and provide staff with an array of equity-focused learning and professional development opportunities.

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