

Diversifying the American Environmental Movement

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SUMMARY

As the nation continues to diversify, the environmental movement is left with one of the greatest challenges it will face this century. In order to become an influential and sustainable movement for generations to come, it needs to successfully address its diversity crisis. In this essay, the authors analyze the problem, acknowledge past and current diversity efforts, argue that the movement needs a more comprehensive and strategic approach, and stress the importance of diversifying in the right way. They provide action-oriented solutions at the movement, organizational, and individual levels. They emphasize that diversifying is not an option, but rather a necessity, if the American environmental movement is to remain relevant.

KEY WORDS

Diversity, people of color, environment, environmental movement, challenge, conservation, environmental diversity, Latino, African-American, Asian-American, black, Hispanic, race, inclusion, leadership, multicultural, generation, action, solutions, recommendations

One hundred million people . . .

If we had the opportunity, would we, as the American environmental movement, want to engage an additional 100 million people most of whom are ready and willing to support us? The answer should be obvious, yet we are not taking advantage of an opportunity that sits before us. As of July 1, 2006, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that there were over 100 million people of color living in the U.S. We are doing a poor job of connecting them to our cause even though numerous polls and surveys show that people of color support environmental issues, in many cases, at a higher level than the general public.^{1,2,3,4} This lack of inclusion sits at the heart of the movement-wide diversity crisis.

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John Muir said, “Tug on anything at all and you'll find it connected to everything else in the universe.” Therefore, if we are all connected, how is it possible that we have overlooked 100 million people? The environmental movement cannot leave out that many people and expect to succeed. For the most part, today’s movement is not intentionally excluding people of color. However, some of the movement’s and nation’s early histories actually may provide evidence to the contrary and reveal insight explaining our current dilemma.

¹ Fairbank, John, David Metz, and Lori Weigel. 2004. Poll of Hispanic/Latino Voters in Conservation Funding Measures and Land Preservation Efforts for The Nature Conservancy and Trust for Public Land. Oakland, CA: Fairbank, Maslin, Maulin, and Associates.

² Bendixen and Associates. 2002. California Latino Wilderness Public Opinion Survey. Coral Gables, FL: Bendixen and Associates.

³ Los Angeles Times. 2002. (3/7/2002) Exit Poll Voter Demographics: How Propositions 40 and 45 Fared Among Voters. Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles Times. <http://www.latimesinteractive.com/pdfarchive/state/468grph3.pdf> (accessed April 29, 2007).

⁴ Mohai, Paul. 2003. African American Concern for the Environment: Dispelling Old Myths. *Environment*. June. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1076/is_5_45/ai_102681078 (accessed April 29, 2007).

Today's diversity crisis is an issue of invisibility. Ralph Ellison, in his novel *Invisible Man*, states, "I am invisible, understand, because people refuse to see me." In essence, the movement has struggled with diversity because we fail to recognize and value the past and current contributions of people of color. We also fail to realize that diversifying is crucial to the survival of the movement. We are not making a conscientious effort to be inclusive. A number of dedicated individuals and organizations are trying to move the diversity agenda forward. However, diversifying the environmental movement needs to include every organization, business, agency, foundation, and academic institution that is working on environmental issues. If it does not, then we will not succeed. We see other entities and sectors of society attempting to diversify, like corporations, local and federal agencies, and universities. Although they face many challenges, the fact is that they are making an intentional and concerted effort. There is no reason why the environmental movement cannot do it as well.

While understanding the importance of diversity is imperative, the broader issue we should focus on is "How do we respond to one of the environmental movement's greatest challenges of the 21st century?" We need to come to terms with the fact that the U.S. will continue to diversify whether we follow suit or not. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that by 2050, people of color in this nation will more than double, growing to almost 220 million, and will almost certainly comprise the majority of the population. The political and social implications of these changing demographics are vast, and we, as a movement, need to respond accordingly and immediately. We need a movement that appeals to and benefits all Americans from all walks of life. Environmentalism needs to be intertwined in all aspects of American culture. It won't be an easy road to follow, yet change is not a question. It is a "must" if we want a movement that is sustainable and relevant in the public and political consciousness. We have a huge opportunity and responsibility before us. How and when we respond will determine the fate of our movement. It is imperative for us to develop a strategy to sufficiently address the diversity crisis and create sustainable, lasting change.

THE PROBLEM

The Problem within Organizations

While 100 million people of color amounts to about 33 percent of the U.S. population, environmental organizations severely lack an

equitable representation. In a study examining diversity in 158 environmental institutions, the Minority Environmental Leadership Development Initiative found that 33 percent of mainstream environmental organizations and 22 percent of government agencies had no people of color on staff.⁵ Another study found that people of color make up only 11 percent of the staff and 9 percent of the boards for organizations that are members of the Natural Resources Council of America.⁶ To many environmental leaders, this last set of statistics actually seems high and does not reflect other considerable problems among environmental institutions that go much deeper than numbers. People of color are often hired as support staff and placed into positions not marked for leadership potential. The few people of color who are a part of a professional staff often leave environmental organizations (and at times the movement altogether) because of unfortunate experiences. Many feel unwelcome and uncomfortable in institutions because of the homogeneous culture both within organizations and the movement.

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Most organizations fall short in devoting adequate staff time, money, and resources to improve their diversity situations. Organizations that want to diversify often do not know what to do, where to start, and eventually either do nothing or venture down a path destined for failure.

Movement-Wide Problems

The diversity crisis goes further than issues within organizations. First, substantial gains on outreach to communities and groups of color,

⁵ Taylor, Dorceta. 2005. *Diversity in Environmental Institutions: Summary Results of the MELDI Studies*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan School of Natural Resources and Environment.

⁶ Stanton, Robert. 2002. *Environmental Stewardship for the 21st Century: Opportunities and Actions for Improving Cultural Diversity in Conservation Organizations and Programs*. Washington, DC: Natural Resources Council of America.

especially in the areas of cultural competency and equitable collaboration, have yet to be achieved. Second, tension between mainstream environmental organizations and environmental justice groups is still prevalent. A widespread belief is that people of color are not an important constituency because it is assumed that they do not care about the environment. However, polls and studies reveal the contrary. For example, a recent poll showed 77 percent of Latino voters (versus 65 percent of all voters) support “a small increase in taxes” to “protect water quality, natural areas, lakes rivers or beaches, neighborhood parks and wildlife habitat.”⁷

An exit poll for a 2002 California \$2.6 billion bond issue for water quality enhancement and open space protection revealed 77 percent of Blacks, 74 percent of Latinos, and 60 percent of Asians (as opposed to 56 percent of Whites) voted “yes”.⁸ Furthermore, organizations and professionals do not feel they have time to work on diversity issues, especially since many mistakenly believe it to be an option. Also, diversity activities are not well publicized among the environmental community. For instance, not many environmental professionals have heard of the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services’ Building Capacity Through Diversity Project⁹ or The Nature Conservancy’s Building Relationships with Communities of Color Western States Diversity Project.¹⁰

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These projects reveal insightful information about various diversity issues, including partnerships and outreach. Finally, a lack of funding

⁷ Fairbank, Metz, and Weigel. Poll of Hispanic/Latino Voters in Conservation Funding Measures and Land Preservation Efforts for The Nature Conservancy and Trust for Public Land.

⁸ Los Angeles Times. (3/7/2002) Exit Poll Voter Demographics: How Propositions 40 and 45 Fared Among Voters.

⁹ Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services. 2005. Building Capacity Through Diversity: Towards a More Diverse and Just Environmental Movement in Michigan. Dearborn, MI: Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services.

¹⁰ Pyramid Communications. 2005. Building Relationships with Communities of Color: The Western States Diversity Project. San Francisco, CA: The Nature Conservancy.

dedicated towards diversity efforts in environmental organizations severely limits the movement's scope to diversify.

Past and Current Diversity Efforts

Working on improving diversity issues in the environmental movement is not new. Organizations such as Outward Bound Adventures (since 1962) and the Environmental Careers Organization (1990-2007) have worked for years, providing young people of color with positive outdoor and work experiences. Diversity issues in the environmental field received national attention in 1990 when civil rights organizations wrote a letter to "the Big 10" (a group of large influential mainstream environmental organizations), challenging them on their ignorance of environmental issues afflicting communities of color and calling on them to hire more people of color onto their staffs and boards of directors. The environmental justice movement began in 1991 to combat the environmentally racist actions of corporations and governments. There have also been a number of articles, research, and discussion sessions since the 1980s devoted to the topic.¹¹ A late 1980s survey revealed that many leaders from over 500 environmental organizations "feel that the lack of racial and cultural diversity in their own organizations and throughout the environmental movement makes the movement less powerful and less effective in accomplishing its goals."¹² There is no doubt that these early efforts raised awareness on diversity issues, yet the same patterns, behaviors, and experiences within the movement continue to contribute to the diversity crisis. Emerging leaders from the younger generations are facing and reliving the same diversity challenges as the established leaders of the Baby Boomer generation. We need to break this cycle of exclusion.

Today's climate of diversity activities is promising. Dialogue and interest have been more prevalent recently. Regional collaborative diversity efforts in Washington, D.C., Boston, and Michigan have been effective in engaging environmental organizations in various diversity efforts, such as creating multi-cultural environments, catalyzing collaborations, and inspiring other diversity initiatives. On a national level, a growing number of organizations, including Trust for Public

¹¹ Jordan, Charles, and Donald Snow. 1992. Diversification, Minorities, and the Mainstream Environmental Movement. In *Voices from the Environmental Movement: Perspectives for a New Era*, Donald Snow, ed. Washington, DC: Island Press: 71-109.

¹² *Ibid.*

Land, National Audubon Society, Land Trust Alliance, and the Environmental Leadership Program have been initiating organizational diversity assessments and initiatives. Recently, numerous conferences and workshops, such as the *National Summit on Diversity in the Environmental Field*, *Diversity in the Environment for the Next Generation*, and the *Diverse Partners for Environmental Progress* series of national summits and regional roundtables, have taken place to address a broad spectrum of diversity issues. These include diverse partnerships, internal organizational diversity issues, and specific issues that people of color encounter while working for environmental organizations.

Clearly, there has been a recent groundswell of activities and interest in moving diversity issues forward. Unfortunately, these activities still are not enough. We need them to feed into a comprehensive, strategic, and effective approach, and we need every environmental institution's commitment to work on diversity issues. Working together, we can most efficiently use our resources and build on each other's accomplishments and strengths. We are not effectively using existing information from past and current efforts, organizations, and people. One of our main challenges will be to figure out how to collect, synthesize, and disseminate that information in order to effectively facilitate change and progress.

The Next Ten Years

The next ten years will be crucial in terms of whether we get it right or not. We need to ride the wave of momentum of the numerous diversity activities and take advantage of pushing diversity issues forward while the interest is high. Over the next ten years, many in the Baby Boomer generation are expected to retire, thus passing the mantle of leadership to the younger generation. While in their existing leadership roles, the Baby Boomers need to build a foundation and pass their wisdom to the next generation. Their experiences and lessons learned are crucial to making substantial headway. As the nation grows, so will its diversity, and we do not want to fall further behind. By 2020, the population of people of color will rise to an estimated 135 million and comprise 37.5 percent of the nation's citizens. In ten years, if we find ourselves in a similar place, facing the same diversity issues as today, then we have failed miserably and the sustainability and relevance of our movement will be gravely at risk.

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THE BENEFITS OF DIVERSIFYING

The Right Thing to Do

Many in the movement believe that diversifying is our moral responsibility. They feel that the current state of diversity in the movement does not accurately represent their beliefs and values. We need to create a movement that parallels and promotes our ideals and our vision of the world. Achieving an equitable, inclusive, unified, and democratic movement is our moral imperative. Peter Forbes, Executive Director of the Center for Whole Communities, supports this notion. He states, “We have a moral responsibility and a higher standard of fairness to meet because our work is about something that is as important as the land. Because of our success and maturity as a movement, we have a moral responsibility now to think and act differently.”¹³

A New Constituency

Diversifying is not only an ethical decision, but a wise one as well. As the nation’s population of people of color continues to grow, communities of color will continue to have mounting influence on society and politics, including the distribution of public finances, the way cities develop and grow, and the strength and creation of environmental laws and policies. We must work with these communities if we are to succeed. Diversifying the environmental movement means expanding our constituency base, translating into political wins, higher public support, more members, a larger volunteer base, richer partnerships, and more financial support. In California, the Latino and African-American voters were critical for the approval of the state’s \$2.6 billion bond measure for open space protection in 2002.¹⁴ Diversifying the environmental movement will provide us with mass appeal and keep us relevant far into the future.

¹³ Soto, Christina. 2006. Fostering Inclusiveness in the Land Conservation Community. *Exchange*. 25 (1): 8-13.

¹⁴ *Los Angeles Times*. (3/7/2002) Exit Poll Voter Demographics: How Propositions 40 and 45 Fared Among Voters

More Effective Organizations

Diversity can also improve the effectiveness of the movement and organizations. A diverse workforce may provide more creative approaches, enhance innovation and problem-solving, and produce higher quality ideas. It brings a broader base of experiences, perspectives, and knowledge to help with organizational strategies, problems, and activities. Diversity also builds broader networks and taps new resources. Diversifying will improve the quality of staff, expand our connections to funding sources, and increase our effectiveness in working with communities and organizations of color.¹⁵

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As we continue to gain a better understanding about the importance of diversity and begin to convince our leaders that this is crucial, we will find an increasing amount of entities wanting to diversify. The next step will be trying to figure out not only how to diversify, but how to diversify in the right way.

HOW DO WE DIVERSIFY?

Wanting to diversify and figuring out how to do it are two separate notions. Addressing “how” to diversify is a difficult, ongoing, transformative journey. However, we cannot rush the process. We will not completely diversify the movement before our tenures are over. We need to take our time and build a strong and sturdy foundation so that the following generations have something with which to work. We need to trust that the following generations will value what we have done and will continue to build upon what we have started.

In order for diversity efforts to be sustainable, leaders need to view diversity as a top priority. Diversity needs to be interwoven throughout organizational operations, such as programs, projects, initiatives, mission and policy statements, recruitment, staff retention,

¹⁵ Cox, Taylor. 2001. *Creating the Multicultural Organization: A Strategy for Capturing the Power of Diversity*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

partnerships and collaborations, outreach, and work experiences for young people.

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Cultural Change

Creating cultural change within environmental institutions and the movement is imperative to diversifying, and especially retaining people of color. It could be daunting to be the single person of color or one of a few in an organization that is homogenous in its appearance as well as thinking and culture. Transforming into a multicultural movement requires actively addressing diversity on an ongoing basis and providing workplaces where all staff feel comfortable and are attaining their true potential. It entails becoming culturally competent and adept at understanding different ways of acting and communicating. A multicultural organization provides various diversity trainings and regular times for open discussions. Environmental institutions that become multicultural will discover that people of color will want to work for them and stay for the long term and will find it easier to work with all communities and organizations.

Recruitment

Recruitment is the main area in which many environmental organizations focus their diversity efforts. Hiring people of color at all levels, including the executive level and board, is essential. However, the amount of energy many organizations put into recruiting a diverse staff may be misplaced. Organizations will most likely find more success in recruiting people of color and diversifying if they work on diversity on multiple fronts, including changing the organizational culture and working equitably with communities and organizations of color. Limiting diversity efforts to recruitment, especially at only entry level positions or for support staff, is insufficient and will fail almost every time.

Outreach

Diversifying also means effectively reaching out to communities of color. If we want to start engaging people of color, we need to meet them where they are and speak to their environmental values. We will

need to invest time building relationships and start early. We must also choose our messengers wisely because the messenger may actually be more important than the message. We will need to understand and work through the community's main information sources, which may be the local church or the lady who lives on the corner. We must be prepared by understanding the generalities of polls and research, but not making generalizations and assumptions with the individuals we meet. We will need to realize that language matters, whether communicating in another language or simplifying our environmental language. For example, instead of using the term "non-point-source pollution," talk about clean water. Instead of saying, "biodiversity," mention animals and plants.

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Partnerships and Collaborations

To effectively reach out to communities of color, environmental institutions will need to expand their partnerships and collaborations. They will need to work with groups that already effectively work with communities of color, including organizations of color, such as Latino Issues Forum, urban parks, and schools. These groups, many of which are led by people of color, have a proven track record of successfully working with communities of color. They have earned the respect and gained the trust of these communities. Most importantly, these partnerships need to be based on equity, meaning all parties equally share resources, power, and decision-making responsibilities.

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Environmental institutions seeking to diversify will need to partner and work together to share information, efforts, and lessons learned about diversifying while more efficiently using resources and keeping costs down. Diversifying on your own is extremely difficult. We often find organizations that are attempting to diversify, essentially trying to reinvent the wheel and aborting their effort because the hill became too difficult to climb. Working together will ease the difficulty and provide more lasting results.

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Foundations are an integral part of diversifying, not merely because they can provide much needed funds but because they are another segment of the movement looking for diversity guidance. The Environmental Grantmakers Association (EGA), a leader in promoting diversity in its over 250 foundation members, has found that many environmental foundations want to diversify. According to a recent survey, 75 percent of EGA members agreed that “‘increasing diversity in the field of environmental philanthropy’ [is] either extremely important or somewhat important.”¹⁶ If foundations see this diversity need in their funded organizations as well, then they can work on making progress together.

Educational Pipeline

Working along the educational pipeline by providing opportunities for young people of color from kindergarten to graduate school is essential to achieving a diverse environmental community for generations to come. We need more organizations like Environmental Learning for Kids in Denver and Outward Bound Adventures in the Los Angeles area who help raise the next generation of environmental

¹⁶ Goldstein, Rachel. 2003. Casting a Wider Net: Over a Decade of Diversity Commitment at Environmental Grantmakers Association. Environmental Grantmakers Association Newsletter. Winter. <http://www.ega.org/resources/newsletters/win2003/diversity.html> (accessed April 29, 2007).

stewards by providing positive outdoor experiences, specifically for young people of color. Organizations can utilize the services of the Student Conservation Association who help place college and graduate students of color in internships in various environmental organizations and government agencies across the nation. It is essential for organizations to provide paid internships devoted specifically to people of color since a number of students of color come from low to middle income backgrounds and need a paying job to survive.

A Sustainable Approach

Diversifying on many fronts, especially on cultural change, recruitment, outreach, partnerships, and the educational pipeline, will be more sustainable than focusing a diversity effort in one area. Leadership buy-in and dedicated resources (i.e., staff time and money) are also critical to maintaining a diversity initiative. On the other hand a lack of resources should not keep an organization from making headway. Although limited in effectiveness, organizations can still make steps forward by working within existing programs and policies. This could entail providing diversity sessions or workshops at annual conferences or expanding outreach to communities of color.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSIFYING THE RIGHT WAY

Simply working on diversity issues is not enough. We need to make sure we are doing it the right way, or we may actually hinder progress rather than help. For example, do not engage communities of color only when we want something and do not take without expecting to give something of value in return. This approach may not only inhibit future relationships with that community but may also discourage the community from working on any environmental issue. Diversifying the environmental movement may call for a different approach. We must have humility and courage to approach communities and work with people that are new to us. We must also understand that the situation for every environmental institution is not the same and that approaches need to adjust accordingly. Our reasons to diversify need to be genuine and focused to be successful. We need to move forward with good will, good intentions, and humility.

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Sometimes organizations are apprehensive to take the first step because diversity is a complex issue to grasp and because they are afraid to proceed in a wrong way. These trepidations, while understandable, should not be excuses from diversifying. However, as we proceed cautiously, we need to recognize when we are traveling down a wrong road, admit fault, and change our course of action. Franklin D. Roosevelt provides some excellent advice, “[i]t is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something.”

In order to diversify the right way, we will need to utilize existing resources and learn from past and current efforts. There are organizations and projects, such as Diversity Matters, the Kenian Group, and the Center for Diversity & the Environment, that are devoted to helping the movement diversify. Numerous diversity consultants, some specializing in working with environmental institutions, are also excellent resources. Learning from past diversity efforts will give us insight into challenges and opportunities as well. We can learn from the experiences of organizations who have attempted to diversify or who are currently pursuing diversity initiatives. People of color, communities of color, and organizations who work with communities of color may provide very important advice and feedback on diversity efforts. Using these resources will help us diversify and give us insight into whether we are proceeding in the right way or not.

As we proceed cautiously, we need to recognize when we are traveling down a wrong road, admit fault, and change our course of action.

As the movement continues to diversify, we will need to create accountability measures and/or measures of diversity (both quantitative and qualitative) that will help us ensure that we are following the right path. An organization or partnership devoted to

providing technical assistance on what to do and how to do it would be extremely useful.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

Many of us are motivated, highly interested, and ready to move forward, but need to figure out what exactly needs to be done and how to do it. Each organization, institution, and sector is unique and may have specific ways of diversifying that logically fits within their current paradigm. Some may concentrate on outreach, while others may concentrate on internal organizational issues because they struggle with organizational effectiveness. However, as a movement, we must focus our energy in four major areas in order to initiate effective change:

- (1) **Cultural change** (in the environmental movement and within environmental institutions.) We need to start creating a multicultural movement that is relevant to all Americans.
- (2) **Partnerships and collaborations.** We need to seek strategic alliances both within and outside the movement. Within the movement we need to collaborate with each other on our diversity efforts, so we can move forward synergistically and grow exponentially. We have a great deal of catching up to do. We also need to work across movements, including the labor movement, civil rights movement, and faith movement. Expanding our list of partners will lengthen our reach, improve our understanding, and ensure our relevance.
- (3) **Engage young people.** We need to connect young people of color to nature through environmental education programs and organizations and provide work experiences for high school, college, and graduate level students. We currently have a major opportunity to help mold the youngest generation of environmental stewards, since the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 45 percent of children under age five are people of color.
- (4) **Connect the generations.** We need to unify the generations that are currently working within our movement and cultivate emerging leaders of color. Experiences, wisdom, and lessons learned need to be passed on from one generation to another if we are to effectively move forward

on the diversity continuum. There are numerous established leaders from the Baby Boomer generation who have worked on diversity issues, yet there is a gap in the passing of that knowledge to the next generation of emerging leaders. Many emerging leaders are discouraged by and uncomfortable with the current state of the movement. It does not represent their values and their view of America. Many hope, but wonder, if the Baby Boomers will provide the leadership that is adequately needed to move us in the right direction. There are a number of inspirational and good-hearted people in the Baby Boomer generation who are doing some excellent work on diversity. Each one of them needs to take it upon themselves to identify and mentor emerging leaders that can carry the mantle forward.

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In order for the movement to carry out these recommendations, we will need adequate funding and an organization (whether a new or existing one, a partnership, or council) that can serve as the central hub for diversifying the movement. It will be charged with carrying out movement-wide diversity actions and periodically assessing our progress on achieving diversity goals. The organization's responsibilities could include:

- Providing technical assistance and guidance on what to do and how to do it in the right way.
- Facilitating the creation of accountability measures and/or measures of diversity (both quantitative and qualitative) that will help us ensure that we are following the right path.
- Reporting on the “state of diversity in the environment,” (i.e., measuring the movement’s progress and recommending where we need to adapt accordingly).
- Providing information and resources that will help organizations diversify.

- Disseminating funds strategically towards diversity efforts.
- Facilitating information exchange and networks of those working on diversity issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Every organization, including large and small non-profits, businesses, academic institutions, and government agencies, has the potential and capability to move forward on diversity issues. Before they can proceed, they must first attain leadership support and a commitment of money, staff time, and resources. While organizations may need to devote funds from their operational budget, foundations also have a responsibility in providing grants that will help organizations diversify. Once an organization is ready to start working on diversity issues, its first step should be to conduct a diversity assessment to establish a baseline from which to work. The assessment would help identify where the organization currently stands on diversity issues, its needs, its goals, and tools to diversify. It may also include researching the diversity activities of other similar organizations. Resources, such as the Center for Diversity & the Environment (www.environmentaldiversity.org), can help inform organizations of the array of efforts occurring. A diversity action plan should then be created to implement the assessment's recommendations. The plan should include periodic evaluations of progress towards diversity goals. Diversifying the environmental movement requires a commitment from every organization and individual in every sector and segment.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS

We, as individuals within the movement, have the most important roles and the greatest responsibility. Our individual beliefs, values, thought processes and actions make-up the movement. Therefore, we need to hold ourselves accountable for transforming the environmental movement. While it is urgent to begin diversifying our movement immediately, we should not feel that we have to do it all now. This will be a long process. Even small steps from each of us can take us a long way. Here are some actions we, as individuals, can take to push forward on diversity issues:

- **Find opportunities to diversify within your spheres of influence.** Figure out what you can start doing today. For example, if you have access to discretionary funds or control of budgets, earmark money towards diversity activities. If you work on outreach, learn how to become culturally competent and expand your outreach activities to include communities of color. If you participate in an organizational strategic planning process, incorporate diversity strategies and language into vision statements, the mission, and goals of the organization. Of course, if you are someone who has major authority, you can start implementing the broader recommendations for the movement and organizations described earlier.
- **Broaden your thought processes.** Think long term and with an expansive vision. Constantly question your business as usual. Ask yourself questions, like “For whom are you protecting these lands?” “What kind of movement are you going to hand over to your children and grandchildren?” “When thinking of the communities or constituencies you serve, who do you think of? Who should you think of?” “When you advertise a job opening to your network, who is included (or not included) in that network?” “What type of people would find working at your workplace appealing or not appealing? Why?”
- **Find allies.** Talk to others at your workplace and to people working on diversity issues outside your organization. Find and/or create a network of folks with which you can comfortably discuss diversity issues. Organize a diversity council at your workplace or organize a regular gathering of like-minded folks outside of your organization. For example, a group of environmentalists of color in Portland, Oregon, called the Young Environmental Professionals of Color, meet monthly to connect and discuss various diversity and environmental topics that affect them.
- **Engage organizational leadership.** Ask them to adopt diversity as an organizational priority. Ask for a commitment of resources, especially money and staff time.
- **Start building relationships with communities and organizations of color now, especially before you may actually need their help.** Offer something that may be useful to them.

- **Seek opportunities to broaden your experience, expand your network, and continue learning.** Some conferences, such as the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference and the Environmental Grantmakers Association annual conferences, have offered one-day pre-conference diversity workshops and trainings. Other conferences may provide individual, or a series of, diversity sessions. The Conservation Fund and Land Trust Alliance have started offering a diversity training course for land conservation organizations. Become involved in efforts that bring a broad range of organizations and people together, such as the Environmental Diversity Working Group in Washington, DC, and the Diverse Partners for Environmental Progress national summits and regional roundtables. Numerous diversity resources can be found on the websites of organizations, such as the Center for Diversity & the Environment, and the Minority Environmental Leadership Development Initiative. Reading reports, such as the *Soul of Environment-alism and Environmental Stewardship for the 21st Century: Opportunities and Actions for Improving Cultural Diversity in Conservation Organizations and Programs*, provide beneficial learning opportunities.

We can all do our part on an individual, organizational, and movement-wide level. We need to immediately take advantage of our willingness to diversify and to understand diversity. We have a great deal of work to do. However, we are not as far behind as we may think. We are only three to four strategic moves away from making major headway. Remember we can do more by working together than we can alone. We must keep our efforts simple, continue to move forward, make sure we diversify in the right way, and we will make important progress.

CONCLUSION

As the nation continues to diversify, the environmental movement is left with one of the greatest challenges it will face this century. Will we diversify so that we can be successful and relevant for generations to come or do we continue along our path of diversification apathy to our own peril? We have no choice. Diversifying is not an option. It is a necessity. In the very least, it means survival of the environmental movement. At most, it means creating a healthy, influential and sustainable movement. Our response to the diversity challenge today

will have reverberations and repercussions for generations to come. We must invest our resources at once or our children and grandchildren may inherit a world with dwindling resources and a movement with no significance in the modern world. Rabbi Abraham Heschel, a civil rights activist, once said, “the opposite of good is not evil, the opposite of good is indifference.” Apathy has ruled our approach to diversity for too long. It is time to move from inaction to action. We owe it to ourselves, the environmental movement, and the American people to get it right. The future of environmentalism and our future generations are at stake.

If nothing else, we need to remind ourselves of one thing – 100 million people . . . and counting.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Marcelo Bonta is the Director of the Center for Diversity & the Environment (www.environmentaldiversity.org), a website that provides information about strategies, efforts, research, people, and organizations that are diversifying the environmental movement. He consults with environmental organizations and institutions on diversity issues and has organized numerous workshops, conferences, and trainings. He has also worked on various biodiversity

conservation issues, such as developing large-scale conservation strategies, endangered species recovery, and conservation policy and planning. Mr. Bonta is an Environmental Leadership Program Senior Fellow and the Founder of the Young Environmental Professionals of Color. He received a joint master’s degree in environmental policy and biology from Tufts University and a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Yale University.

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Charles Jordan has devoted his professional life to public service and is recognized both for his leadership and responsiveness to the diverse publics he serves. He has initiated and implemented successful programs in the areas of parks and recreation, human resources, public safety, neighborhood organizations, and the environment. Mr. Jordan is the Chairman of The Conservation Fund's Board of Directors, where he has played a leadership role in

helping the Fund and its partners protect more than 880,000 acres of wildlife habitat, historic sites, greenways, wetlands and public open space. As the Director of Portland Parks and Recreation from 1989 to 2003, he worked closely with the National Association of State Outdoor Recreation Liaison Officers, local directors of Parks and Recreation around the nation, federal agencies, and non-governmental organizations to ensure that our nation's legacy is no less than our inheritance. He was appointed by President Reagan to the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors, by President Clinton to the American Heritage Rivers Advisory Committee and has also served on the National Forest Foundation Board, the National Park System Advisory Board, the Land Trust Alliance Board of Directors, and Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon Board of Directors. An inspirational speaker and compelling advocate, Mr. Jordan has spoken at numerous events and has written several articles on people of color and the environmental movement.

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