



The Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society

Building a More Inclusive Chapter: ***Priority Action Items Identified from our 2021 Member Survey***

Background

Beginning in spring 2020, societal issues began to challenge us all like never before: the onset of a global pandemic that changed our lives completely nearly overnight, another death of a person of color while in the custody of law enforcement and resultant civil protests throughout the country, and a very divisive political election season on the national, state, and local stages. Each of these experiences unfolded in tandem before our eyes, and issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI; see Appendix 1 for important definitions) have been front and center in our public discourse each step of the way. As a result, leadership of the Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society (MN TWS) began providing a forum to discuss these issues and their impacts on our members and our work. Initially just a space to talk, the informal group agreed there was a need to formalize into a MN TWS DEI Committee.

The DEI Committee saw the need for DEI efforts within our profession but recognized that we had limited resources at hand to prioritize our work. As a first step, we developed a non-scientific survey (see Appendix 2) that was emailed to MN TWS members in April 2021 with the following objectives:

- Assess members' experiences with and knowledge of harassment and discrimination occurring in the wildlife field.
- Assess members' support of and interest in DEI issues.
- Solicit ideas for steps we can take as a chapter to work towards diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Our goal was to better understand our membership and help identify tangible actions we can take to incorporate DEI into our work, ultimately benefitting our mission: *To inspire, empower, and enable wildlife professionals to sustain wildlife populations and habitats through science-based management and conservation in Minnesota.*

Survey Participation and Summary Results

We heard from 66 members, representing approximately 40% of our paid membership. We were encouraged by this response rate, as survey response rates are typically lower.

Additionally, we were encouraged that 52 members provided their names and email addresses because they wanted to be included in DEI Committee efforts and communications in the future.

Experiences with Harassment and Discrimination

More than half of respondents (55%) reported that they had personally experienced some kind of harassment or discrimination in the wildlife field. Moreover, 83% of respondents reported that they had personally witnessed or overheard harassing or discriminatory behaviors towards others within the wildlife field, and nearly all (92%) respondents reported hearing about stories of harassment or discrimination in the wildlife field. Although the questions may seem rather simplistic, gathering this data from our membership helps put real numbers to the problems of equity and inclusion in our field.

Survey respondents provided a diverse set of comments to explain their experiences with harassment and discrimination. Experiences with general sexism/misogynistic harassment and discrimination led the way, followed by racial/ethnic/indigenous harassment and discrimination (ranging from outright racism to daily microaggressions). A few respondents also indicated experiencing, witnessing, or hearing about harassment and discrimination based on sexual identity (LGBTQ+), student status, parental status, and age. Two respondents also felt they had experienced reverse discrimination (e.g., being passed over for a job despite being [over]qualified). A few respondents also shared their thoughts that harassment and discrimination still occurs, but things have gotten better over time. This perspective from our more tenured members gives us hope even as we recognize the long road we have ahead of us to effect change!

Current Involvement in DEI Efforts

The vast majority (87%) of respondents indicated that their school or organization was currently working on DEI-related efforts. However, only about 52% of respondents said they were actively involved in these efforts. Of those respondents who left comments in this section of the survey (n=22), 50% had suggestions for our committee, 45% had gratitude for our efforts. Only 2 respondents expressed frustration with our efforts.

We are unclear on what it means that a majority of respondents have some DEI efforts occurring at their school/work but that fewer are involved in these efforts. Potential explanations include lack of access, lack of interest, lack of time, or disenfranchisement with the direction of these efforts.

Why Should DEI be Included or Left Out of MN TWS Efforts

A majority of survey respondents (67%) ranked DEI efforts of our chapter as a high priority (i.e., rank of 6 or 5) and another 15% ranked efforts as a medium-high priority (i.e., rank of 4). These respondents acknowledged that the more organizations that prioritize DEI efforts, the more normalized it will become (with the goal of hopefully not needing any effort to achieve these goals someday). Others emphasized representation, citing that our profession must reflect the

demographics of our state and country to remain relevant and effective. They also highlighted the fact that we need to add diversity to our profession to meet this goal. Approximately 8% of respondents ranked our DEI efforts as a medium priority (i.e., rank of 3), indicating that diversity, equity, and inclusion was important but should not be an all-consuming goal. A few of the respondents in this category highlighted hiring concerns and indicated that diversity should not be a primary reason for hiring but rather that groups should hire qualified candidates that can get the work done with limited resources. Approximately 5% of respondents ranked DEI efforts as a low priority and commented that these efforts should not occur at the cost of wildlife work getting done. They felt that wildlife and science were not the place for DEI-focused work.

How Do Our Members Identify Themselves?

Rather than asking standard demographic questions at the end of our survey, we instead asked respondents to describe themselves in terms of DEI. Responses mentioned gender or sex 79 times, race or ethnicity 55 times, age 39 times, relationship status 30 times, sexual orientation 14 times, career stage 8 times, parental status 5 times, religious information 3 times, and neurodiversity 2 times. Non-disabled, parent of diverse children, low-income, in recovery, and ally were all terms used 1 time each by respondents in describing themselves.

Priority Action Items

In addition to helping us understand the DEI issues that our chapter members often face and their desired support for DEI efforts, we wanted to develop a roadmap to building a more inclusive MN TWS chapter. Below is a list of priority action items that were identified from survey respondents' input:

General Action Items

- Include pronouns:
 - Include in signature lines in emails, with names on video calls, and in your verbal self-introductions during meetings.
- Recruitment focused on historically marginalized students and groups:
 - Expand networks of schools, organizations, and industries that we interact with.
 - Visit high schools and colleges to educate historically marginalized students about our work.
 - Advertise and recruit from historically black colleges and universities and other places where black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) individuals may be more likely to see those postings.
- Provide scholarships or other financial support for historically marginalized groups to attend conferences and meetings, including lodging and transportation.
- Volunteers, interns, and other early-career positions:
 - Sponsor paid positions.
 - Finalize and distribute position statement on unpaid/underpaid positions.

- Take an inclusive lens to all work that we do in wildlife and natural resources, including language, images, and who speaks and is promoted in conferences and communications.
- Do more to incorporate Traditional Indigenous Knowledge in our work. Ask indigenous communities in your area to address any land acknowledgement process and language.
- Provide more opportunities at all levels to help everyone grow in their understanding of DEI issues and the intersection of DEI with the work of wildlife and natural resource conservation and management.
- When talking about DEI issues, take care not to speak for marginalized groups. Try to have them represented in the room.
 - When/where possible, have at least a minimum number of marginalized individuals in rooms to minimize tokenism.
- Encourage and create engagement opportunities for people of varied identity and background to interact in order to promote learning and relationship building.

Conference-specific Action Items

- Incorporate pronouns on name badges.
- Promote use of Out in the Field (OitF) and/or Ally buttons/flags.
- Strive for diversity within plenary speakers.
- Include non-hunting/angling themes in state meetings. Be inclusive of all outdoor activities.
- Designate gender neutral bathrooms in addition to gender-specific bathrooms.
 - If conference center does not already have these, ask them to accommodate our request.
 - Have gender neutral bathrooms nearby the main area but also a bit out of way to allow for attendees to feel safe/comfortable entering/leaving these rooms.
- Integrate Women of Wildlife, OitF, and other DEI-based meetings into the main conference agenda rather than at the start or end so that attendees can easily participate without having to worry about fitting it into their carpool travel arrangements.
- Support small businesses (particularly LGBTQ+ and/or BIPOC-owned ones) in our planning, contracting, and purchasing for the meetings.
 - If food/catering is already covered by the conference center, reach out to these other businesses for other items (e.g., printed conference materials, swag bag flyers or items).
- Provide an appropriate lactation room for nursing mothers.

Acknowledgments

We are extremely appreciative of the chapter members who took the time to respond to our survey and shared their experiences, thoughts, and feedback that led to this report and list of priority action items. The MN TWS Governing Board, particularly Kyle Daly and Brian Hiller, provided the initial space for members to come together to talk about the issues we were facing in 2020 and 2021, and they continue to champion the resultant DEI efforts within our

chapter. Several members have contributed to the DEI Committee's efforts, including development of the survey, summarization of its results, and this report (listed here in alphabetical order): Ellen Chandler, Kyle Daly, Nicole Davros, Michelle Doerr, Kristin Hall, Mark Hove, and Megan Howard.

For More Information

If you have questions, comments, or want further information, please contact any member of our DEI Committee.

Note that the committee maintains a MN TWS DEI Ally email listserv; please reach out to Nicole Davros if you would like to be added to it.

Appendix 1. Important definitions related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Harassment: Any unwelcome conduct or communication (e.g., offensive jokes, slurs, name calling, intimidation, ridicule or mockery, insults, offensive objects or pictures) that is based on actual or perceived membership in a protected class, including stereotypes of protected classes, that has a negative effect or is likely to have a negative effect on the complainant and/or on the workplace or public service environment. Protected classes include, but are not limited to: race/color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, pregnancy status, marital status, familial status, disability, and age.

Discrimination: The act of treating an individual differently and unfairly because of the individual's protected class status.

Diversity: Psychological, physical, and social differences that occur among any and all individuals, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, mental or physical ability, life experience, ideas, knowledge and learning styles.

Equity: Achieving successful systems and structures that offer fair treatment for all, ensuring access, opportunity, advancement and full participation by individuals and groups. The principle of equity acknowledges that there are historically under-served and underrepresented populations and requires that these inequities be addressed.

Inclusion: The act of creating environments in which any individual or group is and feels welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully and authentically participate. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and encourages all people to demonstrate respect in their words, actions and thoughts.

Appendix 2. Survey sent out to MN TWS members to gather feedback on their experiences and opinions of diversity, equity, and inclusion topics and their feedback for the MN TWS DEI Committee's efforts.

Welcome and thanks for your feedback.

Our goal through this survey is to better understand our membership and help identify tangible actions we can take to incorporate DEI into our work, ultimately benefitting our mission: To inspire, empower, and enable wildlife professionals to sustain wildlife populations and habitats through science-based management and conservation in Minnesota.

This survey should take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Your responses will be confidential. Data will be aggregated and results shared with MN TWS Chapter members in a summary report. Thank you for taking the time to contribute to this work!

* 1. Have you personally ever experienced harassment or discrimination of any kind within the wildlife field?

- Yes
- No

Comments

* 2. Have you ever witnessed or overheard any form of harassment or discrimination of any kind towards someone else within the wildlife field?

- Yes
- No

Comments

3. Have you ever heard about stories of harassment or discrimination through other people in the wildlife field?

- Yes
- No

4. If so, without thinking about it too hard, approximately how many different stories have you heard?

- 1
- 3-5
- 6-10
- >10

Comments

* 5. Is your school or organization currently working on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion-related efforts?

- Yes
- No

Comments

6. Are you actively involved in these efforts?

- Yes
- No

* 7. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work are critical to what makes work in wildlife relevant.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neutral
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

* 8. On a scale of 1-6 (with 1=low importance and 6=high importance), how important is it to you for MN TWS to focus efforts on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion?

A horizontal scale from 0 to 6. The scale is represented by a grey bar with a white circle at 0, a tick mark at 3, and a tick mark at 6. To the right of the bar is a white text input box.

9. Why should Diversity, Equity and Inclusion be included or left out of MN TWS efforts?

10. The MN TWS DEI Committee is considering activities to support more inclusive chapter meetings and experiences. Please share your ideas to promote a welcoming environment.

* 11. Would you be interested in learning more about Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives within MN TWS?

- Yes
- No

12. If so, please provide your name and email address.

13. Rather than asking standard demographic questions, we would like to know how you identify yourself when it comes to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. For example, I am white, female, cisgender, partnered, and middle-aged.

14. Please leave any other comments here.

Thank you for taking the time to provide MN TWS with some important feedback. We look forward to more inclusive workplaces for the ultimate benefit of our members and wildlife.