

D I A L O G U E

DIVERSIFYING THE OUTDOORS AND PUBLIC LANDS

SUMMARY

Outdoor recreation is regarded as emphasizing sustainability through environmentally conscious branding, promoting healthy activities, and reinforcing appreciation for the natural world. Yet, the outdoor recreation sector has often failed to be representative of a variety of communities, especially non-white participants. On February 11, 2021, the Environmental Law Institute hosted a panel of experts that explored opportunities for improving diversity and inclusion in the outdoors and access to national parks, public lands, and outdoor recreation. Below, we present a transcript of the discussion, which has been edited for style, clarity, and space considerations.

Ryland Li (moderator) is Attorney-Adviser in the Office of General Counsel at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Lise Aangeenbrug is Executive Director of the Outdoor Industry Association.

Laura Edmondson is Corporate Responsibility Manager for Brown Girls Climb.

Ryland Li: Thank you to the Environmental Law Institute for the honor of being able to moderate today's panel. I'm an attorney in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Office of General Counsel. I mostly work on air pollution control and administrative law. I also lead a team in our office for improving diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in our attorney hiring efforts.

We're here to talk about diversifying outdoors and public lands. I'll start by throwing out the statistic that people of color make up roughly 40% of the U.S. population, but approximately 70% of people who visit national forests, wildlife refuges, and parks are white.¹ Among people of color, African Americans tend to be the most underrepresented group in these spaces. So, there are disparities in access. At the same time, I think we all probably share this notion that going to the outdoors and particularly going to public lands by virtue of being public is something that's meant for everybody and should be accessible to everyone.

Why does this disparity exist? Is it really a problem? Why is it a problem and what are we doing about it? This is what we'll be talking about today.

I also think that there is some increased urgency for this topic at this time in part because of the killings of

George Floyd and others last summer, the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement over the past several years, and the increased understanding of systemic racial injustice. We'll see that access to the outdoors and public lands is also part of that fabric.

Another reason for the relevance of this topic today is the profound challenge of climate change that we face and the mobilization of many aspects of society to confront that. Underlying that is a connection between environmental protection policy and people caring about the environment, including people's personal experiences of the outdoors. One big driver for why people care for the environment and care for the climate is that we have meaningful personal experiences in the outdoors that create a sense of connection with these important spaces.

So, let's start with Lise. Lise Aangeenbrug is the Executive Director of the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA). Prior to joining OIA, she served as the Executive Director of the Outdoor Foundation, the philanthropic arm of OIA. She also served as the Executive Vice President for the National Park Foundation and the Executive Director of the Great Outdoors Colorado Trust Fund.

Lise Aangeenbrug: Thank you. I do need to qualify that I would not say I'm an expert on this issue. But it's an issue that I spent the past 10 years thinking about and talking to people about. I'm working with the outdoor industry now on how they can be part of the solution.

I represent the OIA, which is a trade association. We started 30 years ago to work on tax issues. But the industry pretty quickly pivoted to focusing on policy and research around who goes outside and how they connect with the outdoors, and around conservation and outdoor recreation issues more than any other industry in the United States. We are dependent upon people going outside and places being protected to go outside. We're really focused right

1. *Breaking Down the Lack of Diversity in Outdoor Spaces*, NAT'L HEALTH FOUND., July 20, 2020, <https://nationalhealthfoundation.org/breaking-down-lack-diversity-outdoor-spaces/>.

now around thriving business, all people thriving outside, and a thriving planet. Climate is the other issue that is top of mind for us.

We have about 1,200 companies. They range anywhere from very large retailers that you'd be familiar with, like REI and L.L. Bean, to manufacturers like The North Face and Patagonia and smaller companies like BioLite and NEMO Equipment, and then suppliers like Gore-Tex. We're not a regulatory body, but we do a lot of convening. The work that we do is typically arranged around research convening, policy, and action. There are two action areas that we're focused on right now. First, our Climate Action Corps, which is more than 100 of our largest companies that have come together to reduce their own greenhouse gases, measure them, and engage in climate policy.

Then second, on the "thriving people" side, is the work of our foundation. We're expanding that. Our Outdoor Foundation is focused right now on how we can increase the number of children of color who have access to the outdoors.

Ryland Li: Our other speaker is Laura Edmondson. Laura is the Corporate Responsibility Manager at Brown Girls Climb. She is a multiracial, multidiscipline rock climber. Laura grew up in Tennessee, where she fell in love with the outdoors by camping and hiking in the Smoky Mountains. After college, she moved to Jackson, Wyoming, where she was first introduced to climbing.

After taking a year-long climbing trip around the world, Laura settled in the Northeast and now manages a non-profit called Best Buddies. It strives for the social inclusion of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. When she's not working, Laura enjoys exploring her new home in New Hampshire and climbing at Rumney Rocks.

Laura Edmondson: Thank you. As Ryland said, I'm the Corporate Responsibility Manager for Brown Girls Climb, which is a small, mission-driven company. It's all women-of-color owned and operated. We focus on increasing diversity and access to the outdoors, specifically through rock climbing for women, femmes, and non-binary people of color.

A lot of what that looks like publicly is hosting meet-ups and getting women of color into rock climbing gyms or into groups where they can climb outside together. We have scholarship funds for training and certification for women of color, because getting people into positions guiding companies and with other outdoor organizations is really important to what we do and to changing the culture in the outdoors.

Behind the scenes, we do a lot more with sustainability and justice, equity, and inclusion work; with getting outdoor brands kind of caught up; with working in more progressive directions; and things like that. We also host the Color the Crag Climbing Festival every year, which I believe is the first of its kind. It's for climbers of color and any allies who want to attend. We've hosted that three years in a row.

Personally, I also work as a digital educator on Instagram, and I host and created the podcast *Let Us Rest*.

Ryland Li: Our first question is about the different ways in which access to the outdoors may not be as diverse and inclusive as we might want it to be. Both of you and I have already touched a little on this. I think it includes a range of things, from who is visiting public lands and who is participating in particular outdoor activities. But it also includes who is being represented in these outdoors-related professions, particularly in C-suites and other top positions, as well as who people see when they look at advertising or marketing from outdoor companies, and perhaps other things that you'd like to add as well.

Lise Angeenbrug: I love the way you framed that because, when we think about people in the outdoors, it really needs to be a systems approach. It can't just be we're going to hire people, or we're going to get people outdoors, or we're going to focus on policy. It really needs to be all of the above. We, from a research standpoint at the foundation that I used to run, have tracked participation in the outdoors. The way we think about the outdoors is that it's not just the federal lands and further-away nature, but it also includes close-to-home recreation.

Some of the key findings are that we have for years skewed more white, more male, and more wealthy than the rest of the population in terms of who goes outside. The good news is that that is changing. We don't have the results yet for 2020, but in 2019, we saw significant increases in Black and Hispanic populations going outside.² Interestingly enough, the Asian-American population gets outside more than the Caucasian population.³ It's a little-known fact I'd like to share. I think it's changing because of groups like Brown Girls Climb and some of the other groups really working to get people outside.

But as I mentioned, it really is going to take a systems-level approach. When I think about that, the other thing in the research that we found is that people who are taken outdoors as children are much more likely to keep going outside when they become adults.⁴ That's why at the foundation we're very focused on getting children outside, but we also recognize there are already a lot of Black and brown people getting outside through groups like Brown Girls Climb or on their own. Companies need to recognize that, and then consider the pipelines and pathways once the kids have gone through a program that engaged them with the outdoors. What are the pipelines into the outdoor industry or into the federal resource management agencies, and how do we help with that?

Marketing is key because even if you've enjoyed the outdoors, if you don't see yourself and people like you in the marketing material that gets shared by outdoor companies and agencies representing the outdoors, then that's a lost

2. OIA, 2020 OUTDOOR PARTICIPATION REPORT (2020), <https://outdoorindustry.org/resource/2020-outdoor-participation-report/>.

3. *Id.*

4. *Id.*

opportunity. It's a key finding as a barrier to the outdoors, and then as well what companies look like and how they represent the people they are trying to serve, whether that's a federal agency or an outdoor company.

I will say, from the outdoor company perspective, it's something our companies are very focused on. We're about to put out a survey to look at what the composition is throughout all levels and to do a work force survey to try to figure out the jobs that we have, the skills that are needed, and also how well we are represented in terms of DEI within our companies. We're very much looking at it like that system.

The last piece to the system is policy. It is going to take local policy, state policy, and federal policy to change this. An example at the federal level will be the Outdoors for All Act.⁵ There's also an opportunity with 30x30 for nature,⁶ including equitable access to the outdoors. At the state level, similar policies concern the location of the spaces for people to get outdoors. There is data from the Trust for Public Land that indicate that 28 million children and 100 million Americans do not live within a 10-minute walk of a park.⁷ During COVID-19 in particular, having a space somewhere within 10 minutes of your house has become a crucial barometer for whether or not you have access to the outdoors.

Ryland Li: I did not know that there had been a change in the trends of access by people of color in 2019. That's great to hear. I hope that continues.

Laura Edmondson: I look at it from a two-sided approach: you've got access to the outdoors, and then you've got the culture that's going to be greeting you there once you get access. From one perspective, there's a ton of barriers. Not only is there the cost for gear, if you think about who is the most likely to have free time to spend outside. Communities of color are historically denied access at a younger age. As we talked about earlier, childhood experiences in the outdoors lead to more adult experiences as well. So, not getting outdoors at a young age leads to a lack of interest when you get older.

There are cultural narratives that we are told and that we perpetuate ourselves, saying things like "that's not for us. That's not what our people do. That's white people stuff." There are a lot of reasons that access isn't there. But then, for those of us who have made it over those barriers and have found our way into the outdoors, it's not always the most welcoming or safe-feeling culture once you get there. There are expectations for simple etiquette—just being on the trail, there are expectations of how you're going to act that are not necessarily aligned with Black culture. The way the Black community interacts when we're together

may not be what's expected in the outdoors, and so that makes it feel not welcoming.

There are expectations of the level of expertise that you're going to have. That you're going to have to show up and know exactly what you're doing. If you don't, then there's a lot of judgment that you can face. And Lise, you touched on a lot of the things I would have said as well when it comes to representation and who is making the decisions on the representation that we do see. So, I'll second what you said.

Ryland Li: I appreciate how both of you think about this in such a holistic way and see all the different aspects of the problem. I like what Lise suggested: systems thinking.

I want to ask both of you a few more questions to unpack what we've just talked about. Laura, you talked about cultural perceptions about who belongs in the outdoors, or culturally set expectations about it and what it's like for somebody to be in the outdoors. Could you share with us any more thoughts on why these different groups of people have different cultural expectations or perceptions about who belongs and how they should belong?

Laura Edmondson: That's a great question. A lot of it is done on purpose because the Black community does have such a rich history in the outdoors. From working the land to living on the land—the Buffalo Soldiers were a group of Black people who lived on public land. So, we do have this history. But once the infrastructure was there and people started getting outdoors more, as a product of segregation, it became more white and we were pushed out. We weren't allowed in. We weren't welcomed in.

Not only that, but historically. Again, not having the time to get outdoors or not having the agency during the enslavement period, to segregation and Jim Crow. There are all these reasons that play into this systemic lack of access to the outdoors. And once you haven't had access, it becomes part of the culture that we don't even seek it or we tell ourselves we don't want it. It's a very long history, but it was definitely done on purpose. It's not something that just came about spontaneously, but is something that's rooted in fact.

Lise Aangeenbrug: It's interesting. The reason I used "systems" is because of that. It's systemic racism that has created the issue. It's going to take a system—just as Laura talked about—to really think about how we rethink this, how we talk about it, how we act, who we honor, and who we turn the power over to. It's complex. From the outdoor industry standpoint, we're just figuring this out. I have to show some humility here; we do not have all the answers. It's listening to these voices and figuring out how we step aside.

Having worked for the federal government and for state government, I know that it's not just printing a brochure in Spanish or changing a park entrance sign that makes it welcoming. That's not a cultural change. That's a Band-Aid. I don't know another word to call that. We need to really think about how to rely on the organizations, like

5. S. 1458, 116th Cong. (2019).

6. Campaign for Nature, *Home Page*, <https://www.campaignfornature.org/> (last visited Mar. 17, 2021).

7. Trust for Public Land, *Parks Unite Us*, <https://www.tpl.org/parks-unite-us> (last visited Mar. 17, 2021).

Brown Girls Climb, that are doing the work, and bring them into the fold. We don't need to create new programs within every state, federal, and local agency. There are a lot of organizations that are Black-run, or brown-led, or women-led that are doing this work. How do we make sure they are driving the work?

Ryland Li: Sometimes, I have conversations about the outdoors and access to public lands. Folks will say, well, there's a park. It's there. Everybody can go visit it. So, then why aren't they doing that? Maybe it's their fault that they're not doing that, right? I think your responses highlight that we can look at things as they are now, but we have to understand them in the context of history.

There are so many historical forces that really shape how people experience the world today. That history remains very much real and alive. We might not have legally enforced segregation of public spaces like we did before the Civil Rights Act, but the legacy of that really remains in how people perceive things and the cultural expectations. That's a very important point that shouldn't be lost.

I'll start the next question for Lise. Earlier you talked about employment in outdoors-related professions and trying to increase diversity and inclusion in these professions. Could you share any more thoughts about that? Why is it that historically minorities have been disproportionately underrepresented in these professions? What's being done about that?

Lise Aangeenbrug: I don't know that I have the answer, but I think back to the fact that I started in the natural resources world almost 30 years ago. At that time, women weren't even a predominant force within the outdoor industry, and certainly not within natural resource management. It's different from the issues surrounding race and equity, but what we have to remember is where we started. It was not great either.

There have been some big strides made, but just within the past few years it's really being heard and something significant is being done. It certainly accelerated as a result of the traumas that were experienced last summer. I don't think we have a perfect solution yet. I can't speak for the federal management agencies, but I know, for outdoor companies, many of them are trying very hard. Some are struggling.

The other organization that is supported by the outdoor industry is Camber Outdoors, which was started 20 years ago to increase the number of women working in the outdoor industry and in the C-suite. About four years ago, they shifted their focus to increasing diversity in the workplace and created a program for outdoor companies to have basically a consultancy that helps them not just attract diversity, but to really make sure inclusion is happening. It's not enough just to hire that first or second person. If they don't feel welcomed and included, they're not going to stay.

This is very much what Camber is focused on. Many of our companies are focused on this. We have some companies that are doing a fantastic job. Like the VF Corporation,

which includes brands like The North Face, Timberland, Vans, and Supreme, which is a streetwear company. They've really focused on this. I think every brand is tackling it in the way that they can, and Camber is the accelerator.

Laura Edmondson: It's something that we're trying to support at Brown Girls Climb as well. It's getting more people of color, specifically women, into positions of leadership in the outdoor industry. Some of the barriers that are coming to mind for me are the certifications. The education that's required can sometimes be a barrier, so we need to work with organizations to find ways around those, like supporting people if they need a higher degree.

Do you have to hire someone with a master's degree already, or could you offer support for that person to get that degree as part of their role at the company? Can you offer scholarships for certain certification and courses to help people get the qualifications that they would need, like Camber is doing, to connect people with job opportunities? A lot of people who are new to the industry and want to get involved may not even know where to look. Those are just a few of the things Brown Girls Climb is doing.

Lise Aangeenbrug: I should add there's another group that we are working with, that I think Brown Girls Climb is familiar with, that has worked with federal agencies. That's the Greening Youth Foundation based in Atlanta. They have done a great job of connecting people to those entry-level internship experiences in the federal government, but now what they're looking at is how to take the people who have had the internship experiences and connect them to long-term, full-time jobs either in the federal agencies or within outdoor companies.

There are a lot of different grassroots or national groups working to help make this connection, because the outdoor companies are starting to realize that they don't know what they don't know and we should be looking to groups like Brown Girls Climb and the Greening Youth Foundation to help us.

Ryland Li: Since we're talking about hiring and retaining people, I'll share a bit of my own experience. As I mentioned, I lead a team of folks in EPA's Office of General Counsel. I'm working on improving DEI on hiring. We are attempting to do or have been doing a number of different things.

One important initiative is trying to pay our interns. We used to pay our interns about 10 years ago and then we stopped in part due to budgetary reasons, in part due to new regulatory barriers that were erected. We're working on finding how to pay our clerks despite all those barriers. I think that's so important because, if you have an unpaid internship, folks who don't have that wealth, who need to work to make money over the summer are not going to be able to do that. That has pretty obvious effects down the road where they don't have an experience so they're less qualified, perhaps, to work for that organization or for that sector in the future. They also know fewer people who are in that organization and sector.

Another thing that we are doing is thinking very hard about our criteria for hiring. Historically, there has been interest in hiring people who have previous government experience since we're a government agency and we value public service. Also, we're hiring people with environmental experience particularly for jobs that are specifically focused on environmental protection.

I think those are legitimate criteria, of course. At the same time, they also pose a real risk of winnowing people out who may very well be interested and a good fit for the organization but simply haven't been able to have those experiences, those government internships because a lot of those are unpaid, or the environmental internships, because perhaps they found something that's better paying over the summer or perhaps for some of the cultural expectation reasons Laura mentioned earlier. I think we've seen that folks from other backgrounds as well can equally have an interest and a commitment to public service in protecting the environment and can bring their own perspectives from a previous industry or sector to our workplace.

The final thing that we're doing—which I think many folks are also doing—is making it really clear in our job announcements that we value diversity, why we care about diversity, and why it's important. We think diversity will improve the substantive outcomes of our legal advice. By having multiple perspectives in the room, we can generate more creative ideas and come up with more holistic solutions. Also, as a government agency, we think that our work force should reflect the demographics of the people we serve, which is all Americans.

Another related thing we've done to our job postings is, under the qualification section, we list diversity as a qualification. We say that people who have a strong ability to work with others from different backgrounds and perspectives is something that we are explicitly looking for. In fact, that's always been an important skill because there are lots of different people who work in the federal government and there's obviously a lot of diversity in the stakeholders that we interact with. So, we recognize that more explicitly now in our more recent job postings. That's some of what we're trying to do at my organization to improve diversity in the profession.

Lise Aangeenbrug: I'm glad you brought up the pay issue. I hope Laura can address this as well. Again, when you think about this system and I think back on my career, I had an internship on Capitol Hill that paid nothing. So, that's a barrier. Not many people can do that. To be a cocktail waitress at night, I don't wish that on anybody. Then, I had an internship at EPA that was paid, so I'm sad to hear that they've become unpaid. Everyone is promoting Climate Corps and Conservation Corps, which is great, but some of those corps jobs are capped at \$15,000 a year. That's a barrier for many people.

Then, for our industry, the pay issue has come up with influencers and athletes. Our industry really had an issue with not having to pay influencers and athletes and is having to do that now because, again, that was a barrier.

Laura Edmondson: I can definitely speak to this, like you were saying, not only paying people but paying people well. Not only do we need to be paid for our work, but Black women specifically carry more student debt than, I believe, any other marginalized group. So making sure that we not only can pay our current bills, but also to offset the cost of qualifying for the job that we are taking at your company, is something to consider. And speaking as someone who has partnered with brands on Instagram and other social media platforms, there is this culture of expecting people to work for free, which is just not equitable and doesn't make much sense.

Ryland Li: Our next question is more of a conceptual 30,000-foot question. Why does all of this matter? Why does it matter that there's a lack of diversity and inclusion in some of these areas? I'm not asking to be glib, I'm asking to really have this unpacked. What are all the reasons it matters?

Lise Aangeenbrug: I talk about this all the time. At its most basic level, we should care because we're humans. It should be the right of everybody to have access to clean air, clean water, protected lands, places to go, and jobs. That should just be a human right. But at an economic level, on a long-term conservation-durability level, we also need to be concerned. The future of America is not white. We need to be thinking about future customers, future voters.

Again, I put it first as a human right, but this economic argument is real. From a workplace standpoint, there's a lot of data from McKinsey around how more diverse workplaces make better decisions.⁸ Then, if you're from a conservation organization or you're working in a federal agency on natural resource management issues, if people don't know about an issue and experience the outdoors and fall in love with it, they're not going to fight to protect it. I think, as we saw recently with some federal policies that I hope are changed—in fact, I know they're going to be changed—if people don't care about it, they're not going to vote for it. Protection of land is a legal construct that can be taken away, and so voters need to care about this issue.

Laura Edmondson: I would second all of that. Getting people onto land is important because it should be a human right. As you said, access to fresh air and clean water. I know I find a lot of peace and joy from being outdoors. That's something that I would love everyone to have access to. And right, no one is going to fight against climate change to protect the planet if they don't care about it. If they don't care about other people getting the experiences that they've had, they haven't necessarily experienced the beauty that there is in the world. Also, like you said, ensuring your customer base for the future.

There are only going to be more people of color coming to the outdoors. Do you want them to buy from

8. McKinsey & Company, *Diversity and Inclusion*, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion> (last visited Apr. 5, 2021).

your company or not, because they're going to be buying from somewhere?

I remember what I wanted to share about paying folks. If you're going to hire a more diverse staff, that's wonderful. Speaking as someone who was brought into an organization with the intention of diversifying their work force, it can often fall on us to push the company forward, to lead the employee resource groups, to be on the diversity and equity committees. That is all work that should be paid as well. There are people whose entire job it is to do work like that. So, expecting folks to do that on top of their other role at your company should be compensated.

Ryland Li: I completely agree with that. In my current position, for instance, I'm basically volunteering to lead this team that's improving diversity in our hiring efforts. In a sense, that's great, right? There are a lot of folks on the team who are also attorneys, who work on all sorts of things, who are volunteering. There's a sense that a lot of people who are working here care about it. It's not just this one person who's in charge and doing all the DEI work and everybody else can just carry on with business as usual.

There's definitely the other side of that as well. I and my colleagues have a lot of other work to do, so it's hard for us to dedicate time to thinking about these issues and to figuring out solutions for them. They're tough issues, right? Maybe as tough as any of the legal problems that we work with on a daily basis. They do require expertise and time to think about it and work on it.

Laura Edmondson: They're very tough. They're also very personal. Bringing something so personal to you to work is taxing.

Ryland Li: Everything you both said about why this is important and why this matters resonated with me. I'll also add a few things. One is that there is a lot of research in psychology and public health about how having an interaction with nature supports your physical, mental, and emotional health. Some of that research looks at, if you've had a long day at work and you feel like your attention and willpower are drained, if you take a walk in the woods, in a natural area, that can rejuvenate your attention and cognitive abilities, in a way that walking down the street in a busy city does not.⁹

There's also interesting research about hospitals showing that, if you're a patient there and you're in a room that's dark and not very interesting, with lots of boring walls, that's not quite as good for your health outcome as if you have a view of a natural space or even a painting or a photograph of a natural space. Just being able to look at that has measurable impacts on people's health outcomes.¹⁰

9. Stephen Kaplan, *The Restorative Benefits of Nature: Toward an Integrative Framework*, 15 J. ENV'T PSYCH. 169 (1995), available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/0272494495900012>.

10. Hyunju Jo et al., *Physiological Benefits of Viewing Nature: A Systematic Review of Indoor Experiments*, 16 INT'L J. ENV'T RSCH. & PUB. HEALTH 4739 (2019), available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6926748/>.

I think of access to the outdoors as definitely a human right, as Lise said. But it also has, maybe as part of being a human right, real, measurable impacts on people's physical and mental health. In a sense, it's a public health issue.

Lise Aangeenbrug: I think what we're seeing during COVID-19 in particular is that it is sometimes the only thing people can do with their mental health, to get outside. It's low-cost. You strap on whatever tennis shoes you've got and you can be walking—again, if you've got a safe place to go and you feel welcome. But it's one of the few things you can do.

There's not enough money from health care, whether it's health care companies or federal dollars that go for health care. A lot of times, people just think about it as a physical health benefit. But you've pointed out something really important: its very significant mental health benefits. When I think of a human right, I think of mental health as a human right. We need to be investing more and not depending on the small budgets that come from the federal government for these natural resource agencies and the small budgets that typically exist for parks and trails. Corporate dollars are going into this, but is there a way health care dollars could contribute to this to create an outdoors for all?

Ryland Li: I'll add to a point that both of you made earlier about access to the outdoors as a way of getting people to care about the outdoors and the environment and getting them to want to protect it both as a matter of how we're voting, but also as a matter of personal life habits in terms of resource and energy conservation. I think about the history of the environmental movement in the United States and how in the 1960s and the 1970s, when environmentalism was becoming more of a thing, that a lot of folks at the forefront were white. Many of them were from middle- and upper-class backgrounds.

That, along with other things, has resulted in environmental protection as a partisan and even polarizing issue when in fact it shouldn't be. Of course, we can debate about how much money we put on environmental protection versus other things. That's always legitimate. But the very concept of environmental protection I think is something that everybody should be behind because we're all breathing the air, we all drink the water, we all live on the land. We all receive benefits from being in nature.

When I think about the more recent movements surrounding climate change, I feel more heartened that there's much more diverse representation than there was 50 or 60 years ago. I think that access to the outdoors for all people is a significant building block of making that happen.

Let's move on to the next question. This dovetails to one of the questions an audience member asked. We've talked about policy. We've talked about what different companies and organizations are doing. What about the role of average individuals? People living in America, what can we do as individuals to make a difference on this issue? A subquestion is how in particular can non-

people of color individuals advocate for and be allies to underrepresented communities without inappropriately speaking for them or taking away leadership opportunities from them?

Laura Edmondson: A great question and one I get often. There are so many answers. I would advise if you see people of color or other marginalized identities, when you're doing your outdoor activity, just give a little wave. Make people feel welcome in that way. Sometimes, people take it a little too far and get to the point where they're overly excited about seeing someone. That can feel a little off-putting. Or maybe there's an assumption that you're new to what you're doing and so they want to be helpful by making you feel welcome by offering advice where maybe you don't need it. So, make sure, when you are reaching out to people, that you're doing it in a way that is actually going to make people feel comfortable.

Share opportunities about your sport or activity that you hear of. If you have friends from marginalized identities, make sure that you're passing it on to them, inviting them to come outdoors with you to help break that stigma that only certain groups get outdoors. Those are a few of the things that come to mind.

Support organizations like Outdoor Afro and Melanin Base Camp. There are a lot of people doing similar things to Brown Girls Climb in other sports or in the outdoors in general. So, look for organizations like that that you can support. If you're in a position to hire someone, make sure that you're pulling from a diverse candidate pool. If you have a way to lower a barrier for someone, take it upon yourself to do that.

Lise Aangeenbrug: That's a great list, all of the above. The other thing I'd say is use your voice at the local, state, and federal levels with your policymakers about making sure you have green space not just in your neighborhood, but in all neighborhoods. Advocate at the state level for funding to go toward creating an outdoors for all. Certainly, use your voice at the federal level with your congresspeople and senators when bills come up, like *Outdoors for All*.

Outdoor Afro and some of the other groups have policy web pages. It makes it easy for you to identify the policies that are going to most benefit these organizations and these populations.

Ryland Li: That was a pretty big list of solutions for people to think about in daily life. We'll turn now from individual action to more social action. Lise, toward the beginning of our talk, you listed a number of federal, state, and local policies in this area. I wanted us to spend some time talking more about these. Maybe you could share which policies you feel are most effective and needed. Are there policies that should be enacted that you think would be really helpful?

Lise Aangeenbrug: Boy, there are so many and some really good examples that are happening at both the state and federal levels. For example, the New Mexico Legis-

lature created the Outdoor Equity Fund.¹¹ They've not gotten the kind of money from the legislature that would really advance that, so corporate donations have come in. And then, Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) is championing the creation of a federal fund similar to Outdoor Equity,¹² which would, as I understand it, have a board that would really represent the groups they're trying to serve and ensure that there's some money going directly to these grassroots organizations that are working within communities to get both children and adults, and families, outdoors for repeat and reinforcing experiences.

I think we tend to think of these sweeping state and federal policies that we can pass, but it's also the everyday actions of the employees within the parks departments, state parks departments, and the National Park Service. Making it a priority that people take this seriously. Also, break down that barrier because that can be something that can be not welcoming. That's an internal policy thing, but it also needs to be paid attention to.

Laura Edmondson: Brown Girls Climb doesn't do a ton of policy work ourselves, but we have been doing some work to get folks connected with resources so they can get more involved in the policy side of things. We host an event every year called Pancakes and Policy where we bring in experts on environmental policy and policy that's going to affect the outdoors and open it up to our community. They can come in, ask questions, and get more informed that way.

Lise Aangeenbrug: I should also add the thing we're really excited about: the president issued an Executive Order on January 27 around 30x30 for nature.¹³ It very explicitly calls for the inclusion of equity groups and tribal and indigenous interests. We see that as a real opportunity, whether at the federal or state level, to start thinking about how we protect land, how it's used, and how we can create land that both provides for biodiversity protection and outdoor access, but also can be used to help provide natural climate solutions to reduce greenhouse gases by improving forestry practices and so on.

The devil's in the details, but it's something we're really excited about. It would go across all federal agencies. We know we have several governors that are excited. It's the first time to my knowledge that the engagement of equity and tribal interests has been centered in a national policy like this.

Ryland Li: I have great expectations for what will come out of that. I think this is a good time to turn to audience questions.

11. S.B. 462, 54th Leg., First Sess. (N.M. 2019).

12. Press Release, Office of Senator Martin Heinrich, Heinrich Welcomes Launch of National Outdoor Equity Initiative (Jan. 14, 2021), <https://www.heinrich.senate.gov/press-releases/heinrich-welcomes-launch-of-national-outdoor-equity-initiative>.

13. Exec. Order No. 14008, 86 Fed. Reg. 7619 (Feb. 1, 2021).

The first question says, a lot of the discussion so far has focused on what the participant called a higher level of outdoors activity, like backpacking, camping, climbing, as well as the employment of professionals in outdoors industries. What about more basic opportunities for those who aren't interested in doing these more strenuous things, such as visiting a cannonball national park or other parks focused on historical events? Is this part of the discussion? How, if at all, are the diversity issues different for these kinds of less strenuous outdoor activities?

Laura Edmondson: This is definitely part of the discussion. Something that I like talking about is reframing the narrative about what is considered outdoorsy. So, going to your local city park for a picnic or throwing a baseball around, is that outdoorsy? I would say yes, but sometimes, it's not. I mean it's not what you're going to see on the cover of an outdoor magazine. We talked earlier about shifting the representation, and I would love to also change the representation on what sports or activities are represented in the outdoors.

Something else that's important to note is safety concerns when you're considering going outdoors. As someone from the Black community, experiencing racism is something I have to consider when I go outdoors. If you think about the spate of people calling the police on Black folks in their park, just a guy who is out birding, the family who was having a barbecue, they had the police called on them. If you can't safely experience these less-intense outdoor activities, then what is going to encourage you to go out further away from home into an area you're less familiar with? It is really important that we bring these conversations to more local, less-intense outdoor activities.

Lise Aangeenbrug: This has been a recent shift for the outdoor industry. People tend to think of Alex Honnold climbing the wall. That's an intimidating image to a family thinking about their child going outside for the first time. So, we need to rethink and focus on close-to-home outdoor recreation and see that going to a park or going for a walk is the outdoors as much as rock climbing. We want all of these activities to occur and then also think about gateways that one didn't start as a child. Well, most people didn't. There are some. Most people as children don't start out in an extreme outdoor activity. They start out on a walk with their family or a visit to a park.

Thinking about the outdoors as this continuum of experiences, it's okay if you never become an ice climber or a downhill skier. All of it is good and I really think that's a shift. I thought about it a lot during COVID-19, why a company doesn't come up with a marketing campaign for their shoe. The ad would show a half-screen of a person walking in their neighborhood and the other half of them using that same shoe on a more remote trail.

To me, that's how my life is. I am not in faraway nature every day. I don't know many people who are. I don't live somewhere where that's super easy to access, but it's pretty easy access. When you think about this mental health issue

or families with little time, it is that close-to-home experience that's usually the thing that happens most.

Ryland Li: Laura, as you were talking, I was thinking about what you were saying earlier about cultural perceptions and expectations about who belongs in the outdoors. I think by seeing these closer-to-home experiences as also part of the outdoors, that might be a way to shift some of those perceptions. It's not that the outdoors is a space for somebody else and I don't feel included, because in fact, I'm already using those spaces. It might be a local park where you're doing a barbecue or a local stream where I'm going fishing as opposed to a national park, but this is kind of my inroad to accessing some of those other spaces as well.

Another idea that came to mind as both of you were talking was there was a scholar in the 1970s, Robert Pyle, who came up with the term "extinction of experience."¹⁴ He used this term to refer to people having fewer and fewer experiences of wild nature, such as those provided by a national park or a wilderness area, as urbanization increases. People have fewer experiences of those things, but our perception of the normal level of nature becomes more and more urbanized. There is, as a result, less of a sense of urgency in protecting wild spaces where there's very limited or no human development.

I would say it's definitely great to have access to these more local resources, but it's also important for people to have access to these more wild spaces where they can be more immersed in the natural environment without human development. I think that's important from both a personal experience perspective and from the perspective of having people believe that these areas are important to conserve.

Let's go to a question. Are there efforts by your organizations or other groups that incorporate outdoor access and outdoor education into school curricula?

Lise Aangeenbrug: With regard to the work of the Outdoor Foundation, it didn't have much money to start, so it had to pick a lane. The lane that it picked was to focus on kids because of this desire to give them the experience. According to the data, if you don't experience it as a child, you're less likely to experience it as an adult. The Foundation is organizing the work around Thrive Outside communities and turning the money over to local communities to figure out what groups should be involved and what network to create so that kids have experience in schools.

Kids have experiences through Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs, as well as outdoor-focused nonprofits, whether that's Outdoor Outreach in San Diego or the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance in Atlanta. So, schools are a part of it. It's not a big focus necessarily for us except through these local efforts. There is a big national movement though—I

14. Marianne Krasny, *Extinction of Experience: Does It Matter?*, NATURE OF CITIES, Mar. 15, 2015, <https://www.thenatureofcities.com/2015/03/15/extinction-of-experience-does-it-matter/>.

used to work on this in Colorado—to create more natural play spaces near schools to help with the outdoor curriculum that’s in schools. For many children, the only outdoor time they ever have is on the school playground.

Back in the 1970s, a decision was made somewhere to make school playgrounds essentially asphalt islands. There’s a real movement to turn them back into more natural spaces, so that when you want to teach an outdoor class, you have that urban garden or a more natural play space. That’s part of what we’re funding through Thrive, but there’s a big national movement through something called the Children and Nature Network to focus on these schools. The Trust for Public Land has a similar focus.

Laura Edmondson: Brown Girls Climb hasn’t worked directly with any schools as of yet. I would love to. I have a background working with students. I worked as a summer camp counselor all through high school and college. So, working in the outdoors with children is something I’m really passionate about. Being a nature guide is basically the role that I was fulfilling. It looked like for some of our participants from more marginalized backgrounds it made the experience different for them. I know it did for me as a child as well—like going camping for the first time and being able to ask what am I supposed to do with my hair?

I do think that these conversations are important to bring into the narratives that we’re telling our students and children about.

Ryland Li: Our next question asks something that I think is very important. We’ve talked a lot about access to the outdoors and how that may be different for people of different races, or for men versus women, or based on socioeconomic background. This question asks about people with disabilities and their ability to access outdoor spaces. What is the conversation about that and what, if anything, is being done to include these people?

Lise Aangeenbrug: For us, when we think about DEI, it includes not just racial diversity, but also gender preference, gender identification, being differently abled. It’s part of our Thrive Outside communities. It’s certainly something we’re thinking about. I can’t think of a specific policy at the federal level that we’re focusing on right now. But the example I would give from work I did at the state level, again, has to do with school playgrounds.

Many of them moved from asphalt to using pea gravel. It was pointed out to us that autistic children often would pick up the pea gravel and put it in their mouths. This is a real safety hazard. It was actually the kids at the school that were not autistic that brought up the fact that their peers were having this experience. Also, it’s very difficult for wheelchairs to get through. So, we worked a lot on a campaign to change the school playgrounds from this pea gravel, or materials that make it very difficult for differently abled people to experience school playgrounds.

I know this is a focus also in some state parks. Here in Colorado, we have a new state park that we created called Staunton, where the state put a lot of investment into a

different kind of wheelchair access further into the park, using Action Trackchairs to explore designated trails. What tends to happen in state and national parks is you can only go that first half-mile or have that first paved experience, so how do you find different ways for people to access more backcountry experiences?

Laura Edmondson: Vasu Sojitra is a ski athlete for The North Face. He’s an adaptive skier and does a lot of work around creating access and disability awareness in the outdoors. Kareemah Batts is another great advocate. She runs a climbing program for climbers with disabilities and does a lot around creating access as well. I recommend checking out their work and the organizations that they’re a part of.

Ryland Li: Thank you both for those ideas and resources. Our next question centers around another marginalized group, which are native people. The question asks if we can speak more to the use of outdoors by native people and the potential for native groups to be a bridge for non-native people of color to feel welcome in outdoor spaces.

Laura Edmondson: I think it’s very important to include native people in these conversations. Not only include them, but they should be the ones leading the conversations around what takes place on native land. We’re all on native lands here in the United States. Every city, every town, every outdoor landscape is home to native people that have been systemically displaced and denied access. Part of our role in creating access to more marginalized people is to also know when to step away. If you haven’t already, I would encourage folks to read more about the LANDBACK movement, which is about giving native people control over their land again.

As far as them being a bridge to the outdoors, personally I’ve experienced that. I’ve always been welcomed by indigenous people. But I think it’s on those of us who are not native to this land to learn how we can move through the outdoors with respect to indigenous sovereignty and with indigenous protocol in mind, making sure that we’re not going into sacred places where we aren’t welcomed, making sure that we’re doing research ahead of time to make sure that we are showing respect in the best way possible.

Lise Aangeenbrug: I completely agree. Again, I mentioned 30x30. It’s really centering on indigenous people in that conversation. I would be remiss if I didn’t note we have a Secretary of the Interior nominee for the first time who is from the Taos Pueblo. It would be incredibly historic to have someone leading the agency that doesn’t just oversee federal lands, but also oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs for the first time in the history of the United States. We are very supportive of Rep. Deb Haaland (D-N.M.) becoming the Secretary of the Interior for that reason.¹⁵

15. The Senate confirmed Rep. Haaland as Secretary of the Interior on March 15, 2021.

Ryland Li: Our next question is about something quite different. This goes back to our conversation about folks who are leading DEI efforts in their organizations or folks who are working in environmental justice spaces. Do you have any suggestions or best practices for negotiating compensation for leading work on environmental justice or DEI? The participant also asks if there is a baseline for the number, which I think refers to the salary amount.

Laura Edmondson: I would suggest research on people who hold those positions already. As I said, positions like diversity manager or diversity officer. There are different titles. A corporate responsibility manager, which is my role at Brown Girls Climb, can sometimes oversee initiatives like that within an organization. I would do some research and find out how people are compensated for that role, and then what that would translate to as the amount of time you are putting in at your organization.

This is, like I said, a paid position at many organizations. This is something for which you can get a bachelor's, master's, or doctorate degree. There are several certifications that they can get to qualify themselves to do this work. It is a professional skill. You don't have DEI expertise just because you come from a marginalized identity. Sure, you have expertise in your experience. But that doesn't mean that you can lead the initiative for your entire organization simply because you come from that background.

It is important to have the qualifications and the know-how to do what you're doing, and it is important to recognize those qualifications by compensating you for your work. So, like I said, I would recommend getting some research on other salaries. You can look at sites like Glassdoor or LinkedIn. In any place that you would find a job posting, look at what the salary is and then translate to the amount of time that you are putting in at your organization. That would be my advice.

Lise Aangeenbrug: There's an organization that I think is collecting some of this information, called the In Solidarity Project, which was started by Teresa Baker. It's got a matching program for employers and employees. I know we have leaned on them in the past when we needed to hire somebody.

Ryland Li: Our next question is also about money, which of course is very important. Could you talk more about lines of outdoor gear that might be lower in cost and more welcoming to folks who are from lower-income backgrounds or just newer to outdoor recreation and want to spend less?

Lise Aangeenbrug: I'm pleased by the movement both from a climate perspective and a cost perspective that many in our industry are looking at reuse and retooling of gear. There is rental gear and a whole nonprofit concept behind gear libraries and how we can make those available in communities.

So, when somebody through an organization like the YMCA or a local organization is trying climbing for the

first time or trying camping for the first time, they not only have access to gear at lower or no cost, but also get some resources to help teach how to use them safely, which is really important. This is a movement that I think is happening. I also think many outdoor companies are looking at lower lines of gear because they see that there's a huge potential for the entry-level participants.

Laura Edmondson: I'd love to give a shout-out to Indigenous Women Hike. Founder Jolie Varela has an amazing gear library for her community. She even provides gift cards for gas and food when she can to families who are checking out gear. She's setting a really great example. If you're interested in learning what a gear library looks like in practice, Indigenous Women Hike is your platform. There's also gear that you can find that's been used or refurbished. I know REI does nationwide "garage sales" where you can get returned gear that's often brand new for lower cost.

Most big-box stores have gear. I would recommend reading their reviews because I like to go with brands that specialize in outdoor gear. I know it's not going to last, but we have to make do where we can, and it's pretty easy to find used gear on sites like Craigslist and OfferUp. I would recommend the REI garage sale as well because, again, you can get some brand new gear for little cost.

Ryland Li: Our next question specifically asks, are places like Access Fund doing enough to ensure not only access to climbing areas, but that the access is equitable as well? Any views you'd like to share about that?

Laura Edmondson: I can speak to what Access Fund has done with Brown Girls Climb. They create and maintain access to outdoor spaces; they've partnered with us on several events, like the Color the Crag Climbing Festival that we put on. They've hosted or co-hosted some of our virtual events with us during COVID-19. But I think, like a lot of outdoor organizations, there's always more that can be done.

Ryland Li: Our next question is, what do you think of programs that close down city streets for pedestrians to walk on as a bridge to getting people outdoors in different settings?

Lise Aangeenbrug: Well, the outdoor industry doesn't have an official policy on it. I've seen it in action in the city and county of Denver. Particularly during COVID-19, it was amazing. It was a way for people to socially distance while providing immediate access. I think it's a great thing for every city to look at as a way to provide their citizens access close to home.

Laura Edmondson: I'm 100% in favor.

Ryland Li: I wholeheartedly agree as well. You've got to start somewhere with the outdoors, and that's the easiest place to start. It feels relatively easy, especially during COVID times, to start there.

Our next question is a bit more conceptual and philosophical. How do we explain the word “justice” in the context of diversifying the outdoors? This participant says justice can be a polarizing term and one that can also be thought of in a law-and-order frame. What in your view is a more accurate understanding of justice in diversifying the outdoors?

Laura Edmondson: For me, justice does not lie with the legal system. Thinking from the systems perspective that we were talking about earlier, the current justice system that’s in place is not working in favor of anyone from a marginalized identity. For me, what justice in the outdoors would look like would be returning control of the land to its original inhabitants and letting those folks decide what justice, access, inclusion, and diversity look like.

I think the reason that it can be so polarizing is because, when you actually break down justice as more of a philosophical thing outside of our justice system, it seems very extreme. It seems very extreme to some people to consider giving full and complete control back to a group of people who have been removed from their homeland. But I think if we take justice literally, that’s what it looks like for me.

Lise Aangeenbrug: I haven’t thought of it that way, so it’s very interesting. I guess I’ve thought about it in a similar vein in that you can be inclusive, which is more about welcoming, and respecting, and acknowledging people-lived histories. You can be equitable, which means providing the same. What justice really gets at is the historical inequities and how you do more than just be equitable to make up for this long history of inequity.

Ryland Li: I’d add that, when I think about justice, law and order is obviously a part of that. Criminal justice is a part of that. But I think about justice generally as, you have a group of people or even just people and the environment. You have different beings kind of being together in a community. Are people being treated fairly? Are people receiving equitable access to resources? Those resources of course include access to the outdoors and all the benefits that we mentioned earlier.

For me, justice encompasses the non-human members of our community as well. Are we making the right efforts to protect them and honor their right to be, to just exist? I think of justice in a very holistic way.

This question is a little bit more general. What are some best practices you would suggest or resources for implementing DEI in small startup businesses specifically?

Lise Aangeenbrug: This isn’t my area of expertise. There is something called the Outdoors Empowered Network, which works on gear libraries and DEI issues and really helps people starting this to think about best practices and how to do this. I would defer to them. They’re a great resource. They’re nonprofit. That would be where I would go first.

I know some of our companies, like REI, have contributed to gear libraries and so they might have some thoughts on this. Or there are probably some gear library community organizations that are not part of the Outdoors Empowered Network. I don’t know if the one that Laura mentioned is. There are so many of these community gear libraries that focus on, as I mentioned, providing the gear but also training in the gear, which is really important. Just speaking with others who have walked before you to give you their experience on how to do this I think is the best approach.

Laura Edmondson: I was going to add the suggestion to build relationships with people in your local community. The people that you’re looking to reach with your organization, build relationships with them and see what is needed because it’s always better than having to guess.

Ryland Li: Our next question is also a very practical one. We’ve talked a lot about recruiting diverse candidates for jobs in the outdoors industry. The participant asks, where do you suggest posting these job postings so you can reach a wider and more diverse audience?

Lise Aangeenbrug: I have to give another shout-out to the In Solidarity Project. They keep a job board. There are lots of job boards, but that one seems to be the most national and the most focused on this issue. There’s also Basecamp. It’s an online-only job connector. I wouldn’t call it a job board. I see it on Facebook and in Clubhouse, but I haven’t used it. We’ve used the In Solidarity Project.

Laura Edmondson: The last time I was looking for a job in the outdoor industry, I think Camber had a job board. Then, at Brown Girls Climb, we also have a newsletter that we send out monthly with outdoor industry jobs. Those are two other resources I’d suggest.

Ryland Li: Places that we post to or have thought about posting to include the environmental boards that we can think of. There’s a lot of bar associations in the legal area that have those. It’s mailing lists that you can post to. In addition, when we’re recruiting attorneys, we e-mail all of the law schools. Sometimes, we also focus on particular faculty members or minority student associations at those law schools.

You can have particular connections with these more diverse communities at the national level. There are also minority bar associations like the National Bar Association, which is an association of predominantly African Americans. There’s the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association, the Hispanic National Bar Association, and many more. That’s a very legal industry-specific answer. But I imagine, for a lot of postings, you might also have these affinity groups in your area.

That wraps it up for us today. Lise and Laura, I learned a huge amount from both of you. I’m wowed by your knowledge and by how much there is going on with this issue.