



National
Wildlife
Federation

Creating Safe Spaces

Centering the Voices of Black People to Address Safety and Access for Black Families and Outdoor Enthusiasts



FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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Leadership



ZACH EVANS

Senior Coordinator,
Digital Campaigns



JULIA JEANTY

Coordinator,
International
Programs



SIMONE LIGHTFOOT

Associate Vice President
of Environmental Justice
and Climate Justice



CANDICE MUSHATT

Contractor, Mississippi
River Restoration and
Resilience Initiative



**KASANDRA
RICHARDSON**

Coordinator,
Digital Campaigns



GABRIELLE RIVERA

Coordinator,
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Program



MARISA SANDOVAL

Coordinator,
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REBECA VILLEGAS

Senior Manager,
Environmental Justice
Program



KEITH WARD

Director of Technology
Solutions, Information
Technology

About The Environmental Justice, Climate, and Community Revitalization Program



The Federation's environmental justice initiatives build upon over a decade of relationship building and community engagement. Our environmental justice program is rooted in race and social justice by design.

The program is underpinned by a philosophy of listening before talking, giving before asking, sharing resources, and building community capacity. We intentionally prioritize, amplify, and include policy solutions, views, and voices of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, and people of color and lower wealth communities. We invest the time and cultural respect required to build authentic relationships and connect our policy and advocacy efforts to those communities severely impacted by climate change.

Much of this work operates at the intersection of opportunity and crisis. From pipelines and PFAS to wetlands and water, our environmental justice efforts connect with issues like climate-induced flooding and other natural disasters, infrastructure, poverty, food insecurity, and more. This work connects local conservation concerns and stakeholders with resources and organizations to help them thrive.

As we advocate for much-needed economic stimulus in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have a rich opportunity to create a smarter, more resilient, and nature-based future that builds wealth among vulnerable communities through equitable and just recovery policies and programs. We know that to achieve this, communities most impacted by the climate crisis must be front and center.



For more information on environmental justice initiatives at the National Wildlife Federation, please contact Gabrielle Rivera at

RiveraG@nwf.org

Our Partners

Thank you to our partners for their leadership and contributions to the Creating Safe Spaces initiative.



We are a group of unapologetically Black scientists studying topics in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics-Creators of #BlackBirdersWeek



We're in business to save our home planet, but we can't possibly do this alone. We must focus on those most impacted by the environmental crisis and follow their lead. We are here for the work of forging a more just world.



The Links, Incorporated is an international, not-for-profit corporation, established in 1946.

The membership consists of more

than 16,000 professional women of African descent in 292 chapters located in 41 states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, and the United Kingdom. It is one of the nation's oldest and largest volunteer service organizations of extraordinary women who are committed to enriching, sustaining and ensuring the culture and economic survival of African Americans and other persons of African ancestry. Our core values are friendship, integrity, honesty, service, commitment, family relationships, courage, respect for self and others, legacy, confidentiality, responsibility, and accountability.



Outdoor Afro has become the nation's leading, cutting edge network that celebrates and inspires Black connections and leadership in nature. We are a national not-for-profit organization with leadership networks around the country. With more than 80 leaders in 42 cities around the country,

we connect thousands of people to nature experiences, who are changing the face of conservation. So come out in nature with us, or be a partner to help us grow our work so that we can help lead the way for inclusion in outdoor recreation, nature, and conservation for all!



Recognizing the unique experiences that Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and Pacific Islander communities face in nature and the outdoors, the National Wildlife Federation launched a multi-year initiative focused on engaging experts, policymakers, and activists to elevate issues, concerns, and potential solutions tailored to address the unique challenges and barriers that varying identity groups face when accessing and enjoying the outdoors.



“Like all life there is no one single story or experience... that common thread is a desire for opportunity, for welcome, for safety and yet that desire is not uniformly fulfilled. Places are not always welcoming, safety outdoors is not assured, opportunity to access and enjoy the outdoors is not available to all.”

*– Lynn Scarlett,
Chief External Affairs Officer,
The Nature Conservancy*

To launch our multi-year Creating Safe Spaces initiative, we sought to shed light on the challenges Black people face in safely accessing and enjoying the outdoors. Through a series of roundtables and a national town hall held on May 6, 2021, in partnership with Outdoor Afro, Black AF in STEM, the Links, Incorporated, and Patagonia, the Federation and our partners sought to provide Black experts across professions with the opportunity to share their experiences in navigating green spaces to identify factors that inhibit Black people from navigating the outdoors safely. In addition to discussing challenges and barriers, several solutions and recommendations were raised.

“I just need to acknowledge how honored and joyous and emotional I feel from seeing the other Black people on this panel. I think white supremacy has a way of isolating us and making us think that we’re the only ones and I think these panels are so reassuring and healing and so beautiful to see.”

– Grace Anderson, Consultant

We seek to amplify the voices and perspectives from the roundtables and national town hall through our policy advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill. Our long-term goals include hosting annual roundtables, focused on increasing access to the outdoors for different identity groups and implementing on-the-ground activities that provide concrete results to ensure everyone is able to safely access and enjoy green spaces.

+ To view all of the discussions and learn more about the initiative, visit nwf.org/safespaces

Participants

Thank you to our roundtable and national town hall participants for their courage and tenacity to drive forward systemic change.

DECEMBER 8, 2020 ROUNDTABLE PANEL PARTICIPANTS



SHELTON JOHNSON

Park Ranger, National Park Service



CHRIS SCHELL

PhD, Assistant Professor of Urban Ecology, University of Washington Tacoma



HARRISON P. PINCKNEY IV

PhD, Assistant Professor, Clemson University



CANDICE PRICE

Founder and CEO, Urban American Productions, LLC



WAYNE HUBBARD

Host and Producer, Urban American Outdoors TV

JANUARY 12, 2021 ROUNDTABLE PANEL PARTICIPANTS



CORINA NEWSOME

Community Engagement Manager, Georgia Audubon Society



KELLY L. DARDEN JR.

Outdoor Writer, TV Show Host, Former North Carolina Wildlife Federation Board Member, and Former Marine Fisheries Commissioner



ABY SENE-HARPER

PhD, Assistant Professor, Clemson University



CHRISTOPHER JOE

Founder and Owner, Connecting with Birds and Nature Tours, LLC

FEBRUARY 2, 2021 ROUNDTABLE PANEL PARTICIPANTS



TAISHYA ADAMS

Policy Director and Colorado Co-Lead, Outdoor Afro



EARYN MCGEE

PhD Candidate, School of Natural Resources and the Environment, University of Arizona



GRACE ANDERSON

Consultant



MICHELLE RACE

Co-Founder, Black Girls Trekkin'



SCOTT GILMORE

Deputy Executive Director, Parks & Recreation, City and County of Denver, Colorado

MAY 6, 2021 NATIONAL TOWN HALL ON CREATING SAFE SPACES



RUE MAPP

Founder and CEO, Outdoor Afro



CHAD BROWN

Founder and President, Soul River, Inc. and Love is King



EARL B. HUNTER JR.

Founder and President, Black Folks Camp Too



MICHAEL HOWARD

Founder and CEO, Fuller Park Community Development



BEATTRA WILSON

Assistant Director for Cooperative Forestry, United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service



PRESTON COLE

Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources



MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS

Councilmember (10th District), City of Los Angeles



CHANDRA TAYLOR

Senior Attorney, Southern Environmental Law Center



DUDLEY EDMONDSON

Photographer and Author, The Black & Brown Faces in America's Wild Places



CHRISTIAN COOPER

Freelance Writer/Editor



Lack of Representation



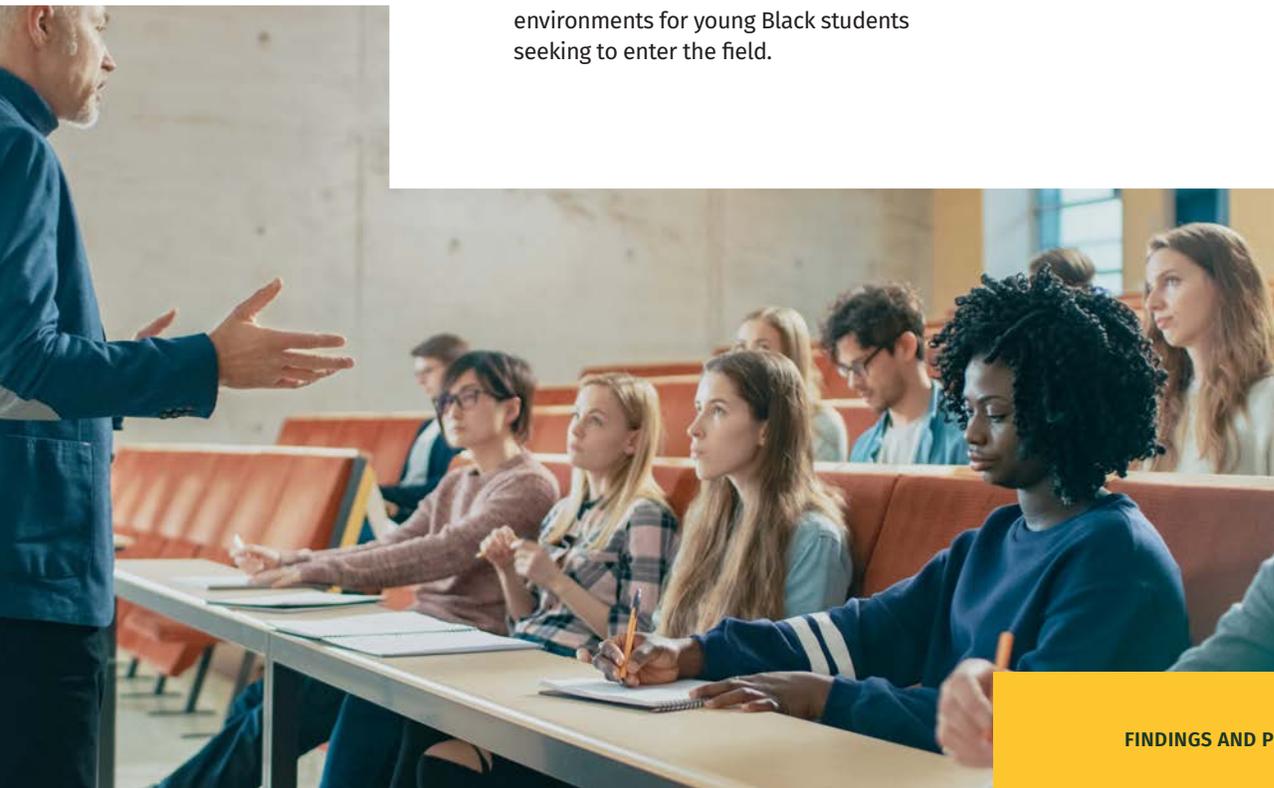
I think people can acknowledge that, when they see one Black person in a room, they know that there is an issue there but they don't always know what that issue is because there's not overt racism happening in front of their eyes. And one thing that I like to bring up is that in those spaces there's a lot of 'othering' that happens.

– Michelle Race, Black Girls Trekin'



According to our roundtable participants

- Historically, there is a lack of representation in the media of Black people, especially Black women, in nature. This creates flawed perceptions among Black youth about what careers and recreational activities are possible for them to pursue.
- Black people lack representation in natural resources and conservation fields, including academia. This lack of representation creates feelings of isolation and disconnect for those in the field and creates hostile environments for young Black students seeking to enter the field.
- Representation is needed at every stage, from childhood experiences to professional settings and policy making.
- Being the only Black person in a space, either in nature or in a professional setting, often leads to issues of "othering," if not overt racism.
- Safety courses are not led by culturally aware individuals.



Physical Safety



There are legitimate reasons why we feel unsafe in those spaces ...Nature has been used to subjugate Black bodies, through slavery, through lynching. But also they've been intentionally excluded from public lands. When public lands were being established there was no room for non-whites including African Americans. And Native Americans were completely dislocated from those spaces.

– Aby Sene-Harper, PhD, Clemson University



According to our roundtable participants

- Black people often encounter discrimination, harassment, and both physical and mental abuse when in rural and natural spaces.
- When one is clearly unwelcome in an area, it is hard to feel safe.
- Nature has been used to subjugate Black people through slavery, harassment, and lynching. Even the creation of national parks has a history rooted in white supremacy through Indigenous land theft and forced displacement of Native peoples.
- Being a Black woman in rural and natural spaces is especially worrisome. It is important to recognize that both racism and sexism contribute to issues of safety and comfort in
- Black students may not feel safe collecting specimens and engaging in other academic-related activities in or near residential areas out of fear of harassment.
- Many white people are oblivious to the dangers Black people face in outdoor spaces and specifically the dangers they face from other white people.
- Feeling truly safe means not having to worry about one's blackness when outdoors, including in remote areas.



Barriers to Access and Participation



We are in the frontlines of all of the passion and the joy of many of these Black kids loving nature being wrung out of them as they go through the pipeline and we have to stop that, meaning fixing the leaky pipeline. Talking about deconstruction, reconciliation, community mobilization, completely changing the way in which we do the academy, completely changing the way in which we evaluate what talent is. Because there's a whole bunch of talent out there but unfortunately many of the structures that are put in place are white supremacy and they're systemically unjust.

– Chris Schell, PhD, University of Washington Tacoma



According to our roundtable participants

- Many Black youth, especially in urban areas, lack access to experiential learning and recreation in the outdoors due to lack of funding, transportation, and opportunity.
- A lack of information means that many people don't know where to go to safely enjoy the outdoors for birding, fishing, hunting, or other recreational activities.
- Too much funding is going to larger white-led organizations instead of people of color-led organizations that are best equipped to solve the problems around access and participation in their own communities.
- Access is important, but so is the quality of the experience. A dirt field is not a park and it does not provide the same level of experiences as a well-maintained public park.
- Terminology is important when conveying information and opportunities. There are different ideas and interpretations of what "green" means or looks like, for example.
- Outdoor recreation can take place in many forms that may not be considered traditional. The connection to land and nature can take place in different forms and professionals in these spaces need to expand their cultural awareness.



History and Education



African American history is very much present in these outdoor spaces within these public lands. How do we make that visible? How do we tell their stories, highlight them, to really give folks, African Americans particularly, a reason that's more than just camping or hiking to visit those places? Understanding what their history is and what their ancestors have done to help shape these American landscapes.

– Aby Sene-Harper, PhD, Assistant Professor, Clemson University



According to our roundtable participants

- African Americans have always had a connection to the outdoors because nature was a place of refuge for enslaved Africans. However, after emancipation, people of color were barred from entering parks and lakes.
- Black, Brown, and Indigenous history is rooted in these natural spaces, even if commonly taught history ignores that.
- Lack of historical understanding about the contributions of Black people, and people of color, in natural spaces leads to feelings of a lack of ownership over public lands.



Policy and Program Recommendations

Legislation to consider:

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FOR ALL ACT

The Act includes a series of policies that have been developed through frontline community engagement. Provisions include programs to increase access to parks, outdoor spaces, and public recreational opportunities, among other key provisions to address a fair and equitable transition away from fossil fuels that have historically overburdened Black, Indigenous, people of color, and lower wealth communities.



TRANSFORM, HEAL, AND RENEW BY INVESTING IN A VIBRANT ECONOMY (THRIVE) ACT

The Act includes several policies to guide transformational economic recovery by providing funds to certain Federal investment programs that meet related labor, equity, and environmental standards. Provisions include direct funding to support and expand public services at the state and local levels to address health, environmental, and socioeconomic impacts of the climate crisis by supporting access to nature, among other key policies.

JUSTICE40 INITIATIVE

Through the new Justice 40 initiative, the Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, and the National Climate Advisor, in consultation with the Advisory Council, will publish recommendations to dedicate 40 percent of overall Federal investment benefits to underserved communities. This set of recommendations will be used to increase investments in: clean energy, energy efficiency, clean transit, affordable and sustainable housing, training and workforce development, the remediation and reduction of legacy pollution, and clean water infrastructure development.

Incorporate policies that:

- **Enable additional funding and support** for communities that have been historically marginalized to provide transportation, education, and ongoing services to increase opportunities for Black youth to engage in natural outdoor spaces outside of their community.
- **Ensure publicly accessible tracking and reporting mechanisms** to evaluate how federal and state funds are distributed among institutions and communities.
- **Reduce reporting and collaboration impediments** that hinder organizations that do not have the capacity to adhere to project or program requests and deliverables.
- **Support Black-owned businesses**, including businesses in the clean economy and outdoor industry.
- **Enforce training for outdoor leaders** to ensure people are equipped with the tools and resources necessary to de-escalate situations, including bystander intervention.
- **Create safety mechanisms and processes** in camp sites and other outdoor spaces across the country to ensure people feel safe to explore and understand the procedures to undergo if they encounter an issue.
- **Infuse the use of environmental justice screening and mapping tools** to show where work needs to be done to improve access to natural spaces for Black people and to serve as metrics to track improvement over time.
- **Bolster land-use policies and targeted development** that can be used to increase connectivity and access between natural spaces and community members that reside across urban, rural, and coastal landscapes.
- **Address infrastructure needs** in outdoor and natural spaces to accommodate people with disabilities.
- **Establish coalitions and bring together stakeholders** across a given community to build authentic partnerships and relationships between government agencies and community leaders.



EMPOWERMENT CONGRESS

Empowerment Congress is a nonprofit in Los Angeles, CA that is dedicated to providing community members the opportunity to learn how to work effectively with government officials and agencies. It is composed of a broad-based and diverse set of constituents that include, but are not limited to, community residents, neighborhood council representatives, block club representatives, human service organizations, academic and religious institutions, business interests, and individual citizens. By getting involved within the organization, community members can increase their literacy in areas fixated on policy and make governmental processes more transparent.

Support programs and/or projects that:

- **Encourage municipalities and counties to play an active role in purchasing and remediating land** to transform landscapes into recreational spaces with amenities for community members to build relationships and spur economic development.
- **Provide opportunities** for institutions, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and other stakeholders to build relationships with one another to discover common values and shared priorities.
- **Enhance mentorship opportunities for Black youth** to engage in the conservation movement, such as the Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS); the Doris Duke Scholars Program; and the Environmental Fellows Program.
- **Increase Black business ownership and entrepreneurship** among outdoor industries that are predominantly white to increase representation and enhance opportunities for Black people to connect with nature. By cultivating safe spaces with Black leaders, Black families and outdoor recreationists will feel more comfortable and inclined to explore nature and green spaces, ultimately becoming stewards of the land.
- **Finance community development and revitalization programs** that transform vacant and abandoned land into green spaces that residents can access and enjoy in their communities. Through the implementation of natural infrastructure and use of native plants, these green spaces can be repurposed into community gardens and urban farms, ecosystems to reduce flooding, and wildlife habitats for insects and other species.
- **Cultivate innovative and targeted messaging** around connections and relationships between people and natural spaces by working with Black-led organizations. Doing so advances inclusivity and builds new narratives that are more representative about how people can engage and connect with outdoor spaces.
- **Provide community members with the tools and resources necessary** to organize and collectively work together to move forward community projects and initiatives, including opportunities to convene and support collaboration among communities and Black-led organizations across the public and private sector.

FULLER PARK COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: EDEN PLACE NATURE CENTER

Eden Place Nature Center is a shining example of how Black-led urban space transformations can successfully create green recreational spaces for Black community members. For the past 20 years in the South Side of Chicago, Eden Place Nature Center has offered green spaces to thousands of families per year where people can come, learn how to become stewards of the land, and engage in urban farming. Located on a 35-year-old recaptured dumpsite, Eden Place Nature Center works to transform vacant lots into open green spaces. In its over 300 recaptured vacant lots, and through partnerships with government agencies such as the US Forest Service, they have created monarch butterfly habitats in an international effort to support the butterfly population, and they have created a 3.5-acre farm which now serves to grow food for local families.

- **Provide resources** and capacity building for Black-owned businesses, both in the nonprofit and for-profit sectors, to strengthen business operations, which may include creating professional pathways for leaders across sectors to cultivate relationships.
- **Facilitate one-on-one interactions** and coaching to enable the ability for people that have not yet engaged in nature to immerse themselves in the outdoors with the support of more experienced outdoor recreationists.
- **Work with minority-serving institutions**, such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), to recruit students, cover tuition and living expenses, and enhance opportunities for Black students to gain valuable experience in the conservation field.

“I’m a first-generation college student and a product of when ‘it’ works. When investment in opportunities for people of color lead to representation and a path forward. I attended Southern University, an HBCU, with the nation’s only urban forestry degree program. After twenty years I now lead the same program that found me in rural Louisiana. Proof that the system works when we have people and agencies pushing for progress and accountability.”

– Beatra Wilson, United States Forest Service



To address a lack of representation, people and institutions can:

- **Hire more Black people**, especially in leadership roles and ensure incoming, non-Black staff possess justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion competencies. In addition to recruitment and hiring, institutions need to focus on retention by providing pathways for promotion, decision-making power, and budgetary authority.
- **Provide funding and/or access to communication platforms** to increase representation of Black people, especially women, in the media engaging in recreational and professional activities in natural spaces.
- **Increase educational opportunities for Black youth** to engage with and learn about the outdoors and employment opportunities in natural resource fields. These programs should include Black leadership so that the youth can see themselves represented.
- **Create mentorship opportunities** between Black professionals and Black students to help encourage and engage students to thrive in their fields.
- **Work with and uplift** Black-owned environmental and conservation-based businesses.
- **Help by not trying to speak on behalf of Black people** and instead, giving the microphone to the people who are being harmed in these spaces—listening and not being dismissive is key to being a true ally.



To address physical safety, people and institutions can:

- **Listen to Black experiences** and try to understand the inherent validity of their fears around safety in rural and natural spaces.
- **Acknowledge the safety risks that Black people face** when going into the field and provide resources and procedures to help.
- **Partner with organizations made by people of color**, for people of color to create safe spaces and the ability to experience the outdoors while feeling at ease.
- **Cultivate a welcoming space for Black people** when in the outdoors through positive body gestures and/or words of affirmation.
- **Fund and support programs** that increase Black representation in the legal sector.



MARSHALL-MOTLEY SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Legal scholarships, such as the Marshall-Motley Scholars Program, combat the heightened difficulties that Black students face in being able to attain an affordable legal education, and they increase the disproportionately low number of Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOCs) in legal educational spaces. Over 5 years, this program has donated \$40 million towards supporting 50 Black students studying to be civil rights attorneys by covering the cost of housing as well as supporting a fellowship and 8 years of field experience during the postgraduate period. Donating to legal scholarships ensures that a future generation of Black lawyers can pursue careers in legal fields such as civil rights, conservation, and natural resources law.

To address barriers to access and participation, people and institutions can:

- **Examine intersectional issues** such as racism, mass incarceration, lack of affordable housing, and lack of living wages and how they impact the experiences of Black people and their access to green spaces and jobs in natural resource fields.
- **Fund Black-led organizations** that are already doing this work in communities across the country.
- **Meet people where they are** by funneling resources, such as money or programs, to establish green-related projects and work opportunities within Black communities.
- **Incorporate culturally competent messaging** and planning to engage people in traditional forms of outdoor recreation, such as fishing, camping, and hiking by working with Black-led organizations. For example, hosting nature walks on times other than Sunday morning (a typical Christian mass attendance time) can help to increase Black attendance to such events.
- **Enhance leadership and collaboration** among faith-based organizations that have established relationships with community members and already consider themselves stewards of the land.
- **Utilize spaces** to uplift the intersections of the arts, culture, and the outdoors to establish welcoming spaces for all community members to find value in. Black representation and leadership throughout the philanthropic process and community engagement are key to the success of these spaces.

To address history and education, people and institutions can:

- **Uplift stories** that center the contributions of Black people in conservation in an effort to reclaim narratives and provide a more representative picture of Black legacies to educate the public.
- **Reframe the national historical narrative** surrounding Black people's relationship with conservation and the outdoors to represent engagement with the natural world as always having been part of Black heritage.
- **Include more on-site information** in public spaces about the influence and impact that Black people have had in those areas.
- **Communicate more broadly** about the history of white supremacy and its legacy on public lands (through the displacement of people of color) and impact on the conservation field.
- **Acknowledge historical and current intersectionality** of racism outside of natural areas and their impact on access.

Resources

Organizations and Groups

[3rd Rock Hip Hop](#)

[Black AF in STEM](#)

[Black Birders Week](#)

[@BlackGirlEnvironmentalist](#)

[Black Girls Trekkin'](#)

[BlackOak](#)

[Connecting with Birds and Nature Tours, LLC](#)

[Environmental Learning for Kids](#)

[Green 2.0](#)

[Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences](#)

[Outdoor Afro](#)

[The Links, Incorporated](#)

[Urban American Outdoors](#)

Researchers

Dr. Bunyan Bryant

Dr. Harrison P. Pinckney IV

Dr. Aby Sene-Harper

Dr. Chris Shell

Dr. Dorceta Taylor

Books and Publications

Black Faces, White Spaces by Dr. Carolyn Finney

Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry by Camille T. Dungy

Books by N.K. Jemisin

Children of the Blood and Bone by Tomi Adeyemi

“Green 2.0 Transparency Report”

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave by Frederick Douglass

Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice

Movements by Walidah Imarisha

“Safe fieldwork strategies for at-risk individuals, their supervisors and institutions” by Amelia-Juliette Claire Demery and Monique Avery Pipkin

The Black and Brown Faces in America's Wild Places by Dudley Edmondson

“The State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations” by Dr. Dorceta Taylor

The Year of Yes by Shonda Rhimes

Undercurrents of Power Aquatic Culture in the African Diaspora by Kevin Dawson



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nwf.org/DonateNow