EXECUTIVE SUMMARY :: JANUARY 2021

Breaking Through

ADVANCING EQUITY IN NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN OREGON

Oregon families, businesses and Tribal Nations rely heavily on the state’s abundant natural systems for their health, wealth and well-being. Oregon’s clean air and water, wildlife and open lands provide outdoor recreation opportunities, spiritual connection, food and forest products and more.

An array of state boards and commissions oversee decisions related to how natural systems are managed and their decisions have a huge impact on the lives and livelihoods of millions of Oregon’s diverse inhabitants. In Oregon — as throughout the country — communities of color and Tribal Nations suffer disparities in health, economic prosperity and access to resources due to a long and well-documented history of racial oppression. These communities disproportionately suffer environmental harm from pollution and other forms of environmental degradation and have less access to the benefits of healthy natural systems or environmental protection. At the same time, Oregon’s Tribal communities and nine Tribal nations, which have a special government-to-government relationship with the state and are co-managers of state resources, bring substantial expertise in natural resource management and the ability to leverage additional funding and technical expertise.

Tribes and communities of color have a unique and valuable perspective when it comes to the work of Oregon’s environmental boards and commissions and a disproportionate stake in outcomes of their decisions.

Their persistent underrepresentation on Oregon’s environmental boards and commissions is a serious issue that warrants immediate attention.

KEVIN PRICE, the only Black manager in Oregon State Parks’ history, leading a tour to Lower Latourell Falls in 2011.

THEIR PERSISTENT UNDERREPRESENTATION ON OREGON’S ENVIRONMENTAL BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS IS A SERIOUS ISSUE THAT WARRANTS IMMEDIATE ATTENTION.
INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In developing its Healthy Environment program, Meyer Memorial Trust gathered input from Oregon’s environmental justice leaders about their aspirations and the challenges they face.

The group identified lack of representation on environmental boards, agencies and commissions — the decision-making and agenda-setting bodies when it comes to environmental issues in the state — as one of the most significant challenges.

To rectify this problem, Meyer Memorial Trust commissioned a two-phased analysis to identify factors inhibiting more diverse representation and strategies to achieve progress. The second phase of research was grounded in conversations with Oregon’s leading environmental justice organizations, including Verde, Portland African American Leadership Forum, Coalition of Communities of Color, Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, Oregon Environmental Council and Oregon League of Conservation Voters. The research process was led by Greg Wolley, principal and founder of Creating Tomorrow’s Workforce, a consultancy that works with natural resource agencies, nonprofit organizations and environmental firms to support efforts to diversify their workforces. The research included interviews with state board and commission members, agency leaders and community partners; a review of agency strategic plans and affirmative action plans; and a review of demographic data from the Governor’s Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

“The report provides a roadmap to achieve a more equitable and just decision making process for Oregon’s natural resource boards and commissions.”
A variety of factors contribute to underrepresentation by communities of color and Tribal nations on Oregon’s natural resource boards and commissions. The report identified several challenges that persist across most of Oregon’s boards and commissions, including:

1. **DEI staffing and funding gap**
   Most boards and commissions and their associated agencies lack dedicated funding for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) staff positions, which hinders their ability to engage communities of color and provide equity-focused policy analyses to inform decision-making.

2. **Board/commission position limitations**
   The set-up for many boards and commissions favors older and wealthier individuals who are not constrained by work and family obligations. People with children at home or less flexible jobs or work schedules are limited in their ability to attend meetings during the week and the lack of compensation or stipends to cover expenses incurred due to board responsibilities or to offset the use of personal leave to participate is a barrier for many potential candidates of color and Tribal members.

3. **Lack of intentional recruitment strategy**
   Many of Oregon’s boards and commissions lack intentional strategies for recruiting and retaining people of color and Tribal members. The report identified many missed opportunities to expand the networks tapped for potential candidates to reach more people of color and Tribal candidates with the required expertise.

4. **Lack of policy-making authority**
   Finally, the report noted that the Environmental Justice Task Force, which is specifically dedicated to addressing environmental justice issues, is the only body reviewed by the report that lacks policy-making authority, which limits its effectiveness.
The report identified several specific areas for immediate focus by state leaders, including:

**Dedicated funding for DEI positions**

Relevant natural resource agencies should fund dedicated DEI positions to support engagement with impacted community members, provide DEI training for members of boards and commissions and agency staff and conduct DEI-focused policy analyses to inform board/commission decision-making.

**Intentional recruitment strategy**

State officials should develop an intentional recruitment strategy for each board and commission with established targets for representation by people of color and Tribal nations.

**Build and nurture a pipeline**

As part of a more intentional recruitment approach, state officials should build and cultivate relationships with professional bodies and other entities to expand the network of candidates for recruitment, including:

- Forestry schools that have more diverse student bodies, such as those in the southeast.
- Tribal Councils and Tribal Youth Councils;
- Relevant departments at historically black colleges and universities and other educational institutions with diverse student bodies;
- The American Planning Association and specifically divisions focused on planners of color, including African American and Latinx planners;
- Organizations like Blacks in Government, Diversity Joint Venture for Conservation Careers, Minorities in Natural Resources, the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers and the National Society of Black Engineers.

**Expand supports for members**

Agencies should dedicate funding for stipends and other financial support for board and commission members whose jobs or child care responsibilities make participation a financial hardship.

**Policy-making authority**

The Environmental Justice Task Force — the only natural resource body solely dedicated to addressing environmental justice issues — should be granted policy-making authority to ensure it is fully empowered to carry out its mission.

Other recommendations specific to each agency and board are summarized below.
## AT A GLANCE

### OREGON’S NATURAL RESOURCE BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

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<tr>
<th>Board or Commission</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Make-up</th>
<th>Summary recommendations</th>
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| **Board of Agriculture**  | Advises the Oregon Department of Agriculture on policy issues, develops recommendations on key agricultural issues and provides advocacy of the state’s agricultural industry. | 12   | 4 BIPOC, 8 White | • Fill upcoming vacancies with people of color, including one member representing an immigrant background.  
• Establish an advisory committee comprised of people of color to help achieve specific goals within the 5-year strategic plan  
• Support passage of legislation to support BIPOC farmers  
• Develop a database for all POC-owned farms in OR  
• Increase partnerships with OSU Extension and Small Farms Program  
• Update ODA Strategic Plan to reflect importance of farmworkers to OR economy  
• Support efforts of small urban farms                                                       |
| **Environmental Quality Commission** | Serves as the policy- and rule-making board for the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. | 5    | 2 BIPOC, 3 White | • Hire environmental justice manager  
• Provide stipends/support for members  
• Cultivate a more diverse candidate pipeline  
• Cultivate relationship with Oregon EJ organizations                                          |
| **Fish and Wildlife Commission** | Formulates general state programs and policies concerning management and conservation of fish and wildlife resources and establishes seasons, methods and bag limits for recreational and commercial take. | 7    | 1 BIPOC, 5 White, 1 Vacant | • Cultivate a more diverse candidate pipeline  
• Fill currently open positions with candidates of color and at least one Tribal representative |
| **State Board of Forestry** | Implement policies and programs that promote sustainable management of Oregon’s public and private forests. | 7    | 7 White        | • Cultivate a more diverse candidate pipeline  
• Engage with Tribes to ensure adequate representation  
• Develop a new work plan focused on inclusive community engagement and diversifying the board |
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| **Land Conservation and Development Commission**        | Adopts state land-use goals and implements rules, assures local plan compliance, coordinates state and local planning and oversees the coastal zone management program. | 7    | 2 BIPOC, 4 White, 1 Vacant | • Cultivate a more diverse candidate pipeline  
• Fill upcoming vacancies with candidates of color |
| **Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board**                  | Provides grants to protect and restore healthy watersheds and natural habitats that support thriving communities and strong economies. | 11** | 11 White      | • Cultivate a more diverse candidate pipeline  
• Diversify the composition of OWEB  
• Update web page to include board member terms  
• Create a fund to support projects developed by communities of color  
• Accelerate timeline for stated DEI goals  
• Appoint someone from the Advancing Equity in Environmental Leadership Project on OWEB's Advisory Board |
| **Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission**              | Establishes policies, adopts rules necessary to execute the duties of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, sets fees, acquires property, promotes Oregon’s outdoor recreation policy and appoints the OPRD director. | 7    | 2 BIPOC, 5 White | • Update Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan Report to address needs of a broader range of people of color  
• Develop a workforce development plan to increase employees of color in State Parks, focusing on leadership positions.  
• Update State Parks website to be more welcoming to communities of color  
• Fill upcoming vacancies with people of color  
• Require training for staff to address unique experiences of communities of color in remote parks  
• Advocate for funding of an Equity Manager position |
| **Environmental Justice Task Force**                    | Advises the Governor and natural resource agencies on environmental justice issues, including community concerns and public participation processes. | 12   | 6 BIPOC, 4 White, 2 Vacant | • Grant policy-making authority  
• Assign a EJTF liaison in the Governor’s Office  
• Provide funding/stipends for members |

*Demographic data provided by Oregon’s Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, updated January 2021.  
**OWEB is comprised of 11 voting members and 7 non-voting members. Demographic information is only available for voting members.

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