



# 2021 REPORT

## ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND JUSTICE

NORTHEASTERN MINNESOTANS  
FOR WILDERNESS AND THE  
CAMPAIGN TO SAVE THE  
BOUNDARY WATERS



## **BACKGROUND**

A group of Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness/Save the Boundary Waters staff started meeting as a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) workgroup in September 2018. The workgroup developed a DEIJ Commitment Statement and a goals matrix in early 2019. The NMW board formed a DEIJ task force in 2020 that became a permanent board Committee that met throughout the second half of 2020 and through 2021.

## **Letter from the Executive Director**

The team at NMW/Save the Boundary Waters is proud of the progress we have made towards our organizational DEIJ goals. As indicated in the examples throughout this report, we were able to make meaningful strides in the effort to incorporate thoughtful DEIJ principles and activities into our work, both external and internal, group and individual. However, we acknowledge that this is lifelong work, and along with successes and progress come challenges, failures, and important lessons learned. NMW and the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters are committed to this work and to these lessons. We are eager to listen, learn, and engage with the Save the Boundary Waters community and beyond to continue to grow as an organization and as individuals. Our team welcomes your feedback and collaboration.

For the Wilderness & the people it supports,

Ingrid Lyons

Executive Director

Save the Boundary Waters/Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness

## GOAL: STORYTELLING

- Seek out diverse Boundary Waters stories, share images of diverse wilderness users, and uplift the voices of underrepresented individuals and groups
- Use inclusive language and make content accessible to hearing/visually impaired and people with different abilities
- Scrutinize our communications and materials with a DEI lens

### ACTIVITIES AND PROGRESS

- Researched and developed “land acknowledgment” language and practices, included in many written and graphic elements and new website section
- Regularly captioning video content
- New website development with accessibility as key part of new build
- Discussion of and addressing social media hate/trolls on our social media postings around DEI, especially Facebook.
- Staff Podcast discussion group around This Land - about Indian Law in the U.S.
- In our new headquarters building, incorporating Indigenous context and art in interpretive elements
- Telling stories of DEI grant recipients (more below in Grants section)
- Grant funding for short film by founder of Flip the Script queer film fest, featuring two-spirit Lakota poet

### CHALLENGES

- Engaging with trolls and harmful vitriol on our social media accounts in response to posts on DEI-related topics has been a significant challenge, especially for our staff who engage most directly with these platforms.

## GOAL: WORKPLACE CULTURE & LEARNING

- Have tough conversations with respect, and challenge each other and our partners to be good allies with regards to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice
- Provide resources and trainings for our staff on topics including white privilege, allyship, bias, etc. and strive to become actively anti-racist, anti-homophobic and a safe and welcoming organization for all people
- Examine the historical framework that influences contemporary barriers to the accessibility of public lands, increase our knowledge of indigenous history, and understand the demography of current supporters so we can expand to “Boundary Waters for All”

### ACTIVITIES AND PROGRESS

- Held staff sharing meetings to learn about accessibility in design, racism in pregnancy healthcare, Stonewall history, and more
- Encouraged staff to use dedicated staff development budget to participate in DEIJ trainings. Some examples of participation include
- Camber Outdoors women-in-leadership DEIJ mentorship program
- Staff participation in the Camber Outdoors Building Blocks of DEIJ resources
- Participated for second year in Camber Outdoors workplace equity survey, using results & action plan to continue improving
- Staff held discussions on harmful aspects of “white supremacy culture”
- Board conversation with Anna Deschampe, Chief of Interpretation at the Grand Portage National Monument in March 2021 to better understand history of BWCA land

### CHALLENGES

- Prioritization of DEIJ work: It can be difficult to prioritize DEIJ work, initiatives, training opportunities etc when we are so busy with the day-to-day campaign work that is often urgent and time sensitive.
- Trainings: Encouragement may not be enough when it comes to participating in DEIJ trainings. While free and offered to all, these resources have typically seen low participation. In the coming year, we will rethink and discuss the ways these trainings are offered or contextualized.
- Accountability: The team has experienced frustration because we did not hold ourselves accountable to follow-through on some of the 2020 workplace survey action items. Although we did take action on a number of them, it may not have been clearly communicated. We are committed to a transparent and communicative process with the 2021 survey results in 2022.



## GOAL: ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES

- Undertake regular and ongoing review of our DEIJ initiatives & processes to hold ourselves accountable towards goals and metrics. This includes strategic planning, work plans, and annual reviews
- Make “Boundary Waters For All” part of Campaign’s mission and dedicate resources to this important work
- Adjust hiring processes and job descriptions to be inclusive and accessible, minimize bias and work to recruit diverse applicants

### ACTIVITIES AND PROGRESS

- Board task force updated our organization’s mission, vision, and values - now includes specific values around Inclusion and tribal sovereignty
- Completed a revision of our employee handbook that included looking at equity in benefits. Added Juneteenth as holiday and clarified floating holiday use for religious or cultural observances
- Steps to gain greater racial diversity in hiring, including participating in the Capitol Pathways Internship program
- Partnered with consultant on comprehensive evaluation of staff salary ranges to address bias/equity
- Formalized across the organization \$15/hr starting intern wage
- Board increased the budget for our 2022 DEIJ small grants program
- Board DEIJ committee chair wrote blog post on organizational commitment to DEIJ

### CHALLENGES

- Active Recruitment of Diverse Board Members: This year, we were reminded that board recruitment needs to be a bigger priority with a proactive, long-term approach. We missed an opportunity to nominate board candidates in 2021, and will be changing our approach to diversifying our board in 2022.

## GOAL: OUTREACH & PARTNERSHIPS

- Recruit and work with a diverse pool of people as interns, spokespersons, etc.
- Find groups to work with without tokenizing, build relationships with Indigenous groups, people of color, and others
- Learn from and partner with other organizations doing this work to expand to supporters beyond the “outdoorsy” stereotype
- Choose and highlight businesses and partners with diverse owners
- Make the organization (and the Boundary Waters) welcoming and accessible to all, including hold events more accessible to all people

### ACTIVITIES AND PROGRESS

- New grants program (see section below)
- Partnered with Outside Safe Space, queer-owned outfitting business, and several outdoor brands to organize a Queer Boundary Waters trip - postponed to fall 2022 because of Wilderness wildfire closures in 2021
- Partnered to lead advocacy training program with MIGIZI, a Native-American non-profit with the mission of providing a strong circle of support that nurtures the educational, social, economic, and cultural development of American Indian youth.
- Selling LGBTQ+-welcoming Outside Safe Space stickers/pins in our online merchandise shop
- Worked with local, black-owned print shop for print jobs this year
- Engaged with the US Forest Service in Eastern States around their expanding Urban Connections wilderness access program
- Our Policy Committee consulted with Tribal authorities around some new issues on which we took positions, like Moose Mountain/ski resort expansion controversy
- Established a new program called Boundary Waters Connect focusing on sustainable rural community development

### CHALLENGES

Time Restrictions: While we are very proud of our burgeoning grant program, soliciting applications, reviewing them, funding, and supporting grantees requires significant time. As a result, the DEIJ board committee spent many of the meetings this year on this effort.





Boyz N The Wood Retreat

## 2021 was the first year of our new DEIJ grants program!

### **Summary/purpose:**

Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness (NMW) and the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters (the Campaign) is committed to diversity, equity, inclusion and justice in all aspects of the organization as it works to protect this special place for everyone and for generations to come. This grant program is one small outcome of this commitment and we look forward to building meaningful partnerships with individuals, organizations, businesses, etc. who share in this vision of an equitable approach to Wilderness protection.

### Grant criteria:

- Supports people or communities that are often disenfranchised within and excluded from the effort to protect the Boundary Waters due to their race, sexuality, ability, size, gender identity or expression, religion, culture, or anything else,
- Prioritizes visiting the Boundary Waters or other outdoor spaces, fostering connections to nature, and/or advocating on behalf of the Boundary Waters , and
- Creates and/or fosters mutually beneficial relationships

**\$20,000 available in 2021. Board committee decided to do both a summer and a winter round.**

- 1st round - April/May 2021, \$3000 max per proposal
  - Staff developed a prospect list to send information about our grant opportunity and invite them to apply. Staff organized and held an informational zoom session for anyone interested in the grants
  - 6 applicants, 5 projects selected for funding
    - **Circle Of Discipline** - Boundary Waters camping trip with inner-city youth and young adults
    - **Kyle Rucker/Ruck B Media** - Film for elementary students featuring young Black adventurer
    - **Victoria Carpenter** - Short film by founder of Flip the Script queer film fest, featuring two-spirit Lakota poet Brave Crow
    - **Wilderness Canoe Base** - Trip with LGBTQ+ Augsburg College students
    - **YMCA Camp Menogyn** - DEIJ consultant and summer camp evaluation and training
- 2nd/Winter round - October 2021, \$2500 max per proposal
  - 5 applications, 3 funded
    - **Ely Folk School** - Traditional Anishinaabe storytelling nights series led by a tribal elder from Bois Forte Band of Chippewa (Ojibwe)
    - **Vermilion Community College** - LGBTQ+ student group winter Boundary Waters activities
    - **Voyageur Outward Bound School** - Scholarship for Black leader's dog-sledding expedition

**Learnings/going forward for DEIJ grant program**

- Very exciting projects and partnerships, but just getting started
- Increase: \$30,000 approved budget for the DEIJ small grants program in 2023
- Need to work quicker given the late January permit-opening date for summer BWCA trips
- \$3,000 amounts might not be enough for some organizations/groups trips realistically
- Desire to do survey/get feedback from grantees on our process
- Better system & planning to administer grants and the time on staff/board part to develop and cultivate relationships with grantee partners
- How could we most effectively we strengthen the “advocacy” portion of the grant requirement? Has been a challenge to figure out what assets, sharing, meet-ups etc. happen since each project/grantee is very different. Don't want to have one-size-fits-all yet maybe needs more structure?