

**DRAFT / working copy** (BB 7/2023)

## Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Environmental Justice Resolution

### Background

**WHEREAS** OWEB’s mission is “to help protect and restore healthy watersheds and natural habitats that support thriving communities and strong economies.”

WHEREAS the intersection of impacts from climate change, biodiversity loss, and the movement for social justice has increased our awareness of the need for transformational change. Our conservation and restoration work has shown us the interdependence of all species, and that action or inaction in one area affects the outcome in others. To help protect and restore healthy watersheds and natural habitats that support thriving communities and strong economies, our work must fully integrate and balance environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

WHEREAS protection and restoration of healthy watersheds and natural habitats relies on robust ecosystem biodiversity for stability and resilience.

WHEREAS a multi-dimensional diversity of people, including ethnicities, identities, backgrounds, experiences, perspectives, cultural values and practices, local and indigenous environmental knowledge, and values of nature all contribute to the collective wisdom and stewardship needed for achieving long-term sustainability and resilience in our watershed restoration and conservation work.

WHEREAS while everyone lives in a watershed, not all Oregonians or their communities are starting from the same place due to historic and current embedded biases in society’s structure and institutional systems of oppression, including inequities in policies, practices, processes, and the distribution of resources, benefits, and burdens.

WHEREAS ~~not all systemic biases and inequities may be easily recognized due to their ingrained and widespread nature, yet their existence has clearly~~ **have** produced advantages for some while disadvantaging others and perpetuated ~~a systemic an~~ imbalance of power resulting in the unfair treatment and silencing of too many people and communities ~~over time~~; the devaluation of identities, disregard for experiences, and exclusion of perspectives tears through the fabric of our humanity and weakens our collective stability, which has become most apparent in the face of biodiversity loss and climate change.

WHEREAS we recognize that different levels of support are needed for those affected by historic and current inequities so that fairness in access and outcomes can be realized, and that empowerment of those most impacted ~~includes~~ the redistribution of resources, power, and opportunity.

WHEREAS many communities rely on relatively stable ecosystems for their health and livelihoods and are therefore uniquely vulnerable to changes in their environment caused by climate change, such as food and water insecurity, sea-level rise, ocean health, extreme heat, drought, flooding, wildfire, smoke and other air pollution, and loss of traditional cultural resources or foods.

WHEREAS communities that have traditionally been underrepresented, underinvested, and underserved bear additional environmental burdens such as living in areas vulnerable to extreme weather or have increased

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health risks due to being overburdened by pollution, declines in ecosystem services, or through their inability to access basic services; where more than one of these apply, the burdens are cumulative and intensify these risks.

WHEREAS the most severe and immediate impacts of climate change such as heat waves, poor air quality, and flooding, compound the risks of vulnerable communities and disproportionately affect those who are the least able to prepare for and recover from these impacts.

WHEREAS these communities are diverse in many ways, including their ethnicities, cultures, nations of origin, race, immigration status, and levels of income; all deserving environmental justice of equal protection, fair treatment, and involvement in decision-making regarding policies affecting their environment without discrimination.

WHEREAS we acknowledge the dispossession of indigenous communities of land ownership, Oregon's history of racism, and systemic injustices that have excluded many Oregonians from the benefits and opportunities afforded others.

WHEREAS while OWEB enjoys strong public support for its contributions to community-based conservation, watershed health, and local economies, our culture of continuous improvement allows us to self-examine and recognize some of our structural biases and institutional policies, practices, and processes that help perpetuate inequities; that while some of these may fall outside of our authority, they do not absolve us of our need for change. Included among these are limitations in diversity for representation at decision-making levels, disparities in distribution of resources and benefits between landowners and non-landowners, lack of project types to accommodate the potential needs of urban communities, limited diversity in types of partners in project development and stewardship, processes that perpetuate barriers to program access and resources available for traditionally underrepresented and underserved communities, and limited methods of outreach to increase more Oregonians' awareness of OWEB and the support we can provide.

WHEREAS humans shape landscapes as much as they shape us, and degradation of both the natural world and our social systems are intertwined; achieving our mission demands we consider all actions within our authority to restore and protect, and as our name implies improve the health of our watersheds for the ~~well-being and~~ benefit of all.

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WHEREAS we acknowledge that diversity, equity, and inclusion are interconnected, that none can thrive without the presence of the other, and that together with environmental justice they must be front and center in all of our board decisions, policy making, processes, and practices, as these considerations are essential for the restoration, protection, and long-term sustainability of our ecosystems, their wildlife populations and communities.

## Resolution

**Be it resolved** that the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board will:

- Integrate and prioritize diversity, equity, inclusion, and environmental justice in all of our board decisions, policy making, processes, and other practices by:
  - Eliminating disparities in distribution of resources and benefits between landowners and non-landowners.
  - Increasing project types to accommodate the ~~potential~~ needs of urban communities.

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- ~~Increasing diversity in Building a more inclusive grantmaking process to reflect a broader diversity of applicants, grantees, and~~ types of partners in project development and stewardship, including community-based organizations and other private sector groups, businesses, and organizations that have not traditionally been engaged in this work.
- ~~Amending and/or modifying OWEB's grantmaking processes to remove barriers to program access and resources available, including those for traditionally underrepresented and underserved communities.~~
- Increasing & improving methods and diversifying targets of outreach and access to information so that all Oregonians can become ~~more~~ aware of OWEB and the support we can provide.
- Allowing for the tailoring of projects and processes to ~~redress~~ ~~address~~ locally expressed inequities ~~and priorities~~ while keeping in mind that some community-identified solutions may differ from what we prioritize yet still yield co-benefits beyond that of a singular outcome.
- Identifying and implementing methods to ~~increase engagement and~~ strengthen public involvement, ~~improve~~ access to information, ~~and provide more inclusive~~ decision-making opportunities, ~~and increase community engagement through creative forms of community engagement that consider their special interests, value of time, and barriers to participation. that values the needs, priorities, and solutions expressed by the community, as well as their time and resources making it possible to participate.~~
- ~~Encouraging our grantees to allocate resources to fairly compensate the expertise and participation of new partners and environmental justice communities.~~
- Recognizing and incorporating the inextricable link between cultural and biological diversity as part of our community-based conservation, including the varying cultural values of and relationships with nature and the holistic approaches of indigenous peoples and local communities.
- Recognizing the unique role Oregon's nine federally recognized tribes play in the conservation, stewardship, and restoration of natural resources, and with their permission and counsel, work to incorporate their tribal knowledge, experience, cultural, and spiritual values into our grantmaking processes.
- ~~Provide encouragement, support, and incentives for grantees to resource project development from local labor and businesses. While in some cases this may require training, it will build up local economies and skills such as grant writing and on-site skills which will also be more readily available for future use. Consider use of a pilot program to assess the impact of this approach. Motivate grantees to enlist, train, and fairly compensate partners in project development from local labor and businesses to strengthen local economies and skills.~~
- Continue to challenge our perspectives and positions; recognize and overcome our biases; look for ways we are limiting awareness of OWEB and access to resources from those outside our sphere; and work to counteract and dismantle institutional racism while advancing racial equity. Translate these findings into changes in policy, processes, and practices.

It is further resolved that the above resolutions will be implemented through applicable strategies within OWEB's authorities. Strategies include but are not limited to:

- ~~Using Oregon's 'Environmental Justice Mapping Tool' to assist in determining areas for increased and improved outreach and meaningful community engagement.~~
- Participating at least annually in intercultural competency and racial justice workshops, including training for all staff ~~and Board Members.~~
- Rulemaking to reduce the match requirement for some grant types.
- ~~Simplifying OWEB's application to reduce the amount of time it takes to write and submit an application. Amending OWEB's application and grantmaking processes to be easily accessible, time-considerate.~~

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inclusive of a broader range of effective land-stewardship practices, and vigilant to the needs of vulnerable and traditionally underserved communities, including providing training and assistance.

- Developing an annual agency Diversity Equity, Inclusion, and Environmental Justice Action Plan, which includes agency-level goals, actions, and measures of success.
- Amending budget and budgeting process to address inequities in the distribution of resources, including the limited types of grants and projects available for traditionally underrepresented, underserved, and climate-vulnerable communities.
- Improving OWEB's communications to meet the needs of Oregon's diverse population and updating the website to be intuitively navigable, user-friendly, and resource-rich, including tools and guidance for translating this resolution into action.

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