

2014

A DECADE OF
RACIAL EQUITY WORK

2024



WASHINGTON CONSERVATION ACTION



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**WASHINGTON
CONSERVATION
ACTION**

Protecting People & Nature as One

Transforming our Future Addressing our Past

Welcome to our Racial Equity Report, a review of the work done in the last decade by Washington Conservation Action to embed racial equity into our organization and the work ahead as we commit to being an environmental justice organization.



Leading with Humility, Sparkling Change

Dear friends and colleagues,

Racism is inextricably linked to climate change because it dictates who benefits from activities that produce planet-warming pollution and who suffers the consequences. It disproportionately harms communities of color, Tribal Nations and rural communities.

10 years ago, few organizations were doing the important work of addressing environmental racism. Our organization began by doing internal work. From this, we grew new partnerships, new ways of thinking and working. Eventually, this approach achieved better progress. We remain committed to a future in which anti-racism and equity are the norm in our organization, in our movement, and in our communities.

That's why, I am humbled to share Washington Conservation Action's Racial Equity Report, showcasing our journey and significant advancements since 2014 to advance racial equity in our organization and the environmental movement.

Thanks to our former CEO Joan Crooks, previous board members, and the countless staff who pushed us to stretch and grow. Because of our collective care, our organization's future is on a brighter path.

I would also like to thank our organizational partners across Washington who have encouraged this work and kept us accountable to our ideals.

Further, I appreciate our members, donors, supporters, and activists for their trust, their willingness to learn and grow with us, and their collaboration over the course of this work.

On behalf of the entire WCA leadership team, we will continue to prioritize transparency in what we're doing and a commitment to racial equity. We are building our next racial equity plan and are utilizing the last ten years of work to inform us.

Looking ahead, we remain dedicated to our core values, fostering a culture of learning and growth, and delivering lasting, equitable progress for our communities and the environment. We are excited about the opportunities ahead and are confident that the work we've done over the course of the last decade will help us navigate the evolving landscape of racial equity and anti-racism.

I invite you to delve into the following pages of this report to discover the milestones, achievements, and exciting progress we've made—and the work that still remains.

Alyssa Macy (she/her)

CEO, Washington Conservation Action
Citizen, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Oregon



Our Past Informs our Future

Progress on most issues builds slowly, bit by bit, the product of individual and local work as well as the larger political and social context. Since 2014, Washington Conservation Action has sought to center racial equity, environmental justice, and Tribal sovereignty in everything we do.

Yet this ongoing effort results from years of evolution, as an organization, as a community partner, as a policy leader and as a political force. Because new staffers, collaborators and supporters are continually joining us, this report seeks to be both a resource and record: It provides an accounting of where we have been, where we are now in 2024, the work that remains to be done, and where we hope to go.

This report is not an end point, because this work is never done: We live in a society still dominated by white supremacy, economic inequality, and political tension. We still face the results of unchecked carbon pollution: weather chaos, rising seas, wildfires, and the damaged health and prosperity of frontline communities. At Washington Conservation Action, we believe that all these things are connected. To heal the planet, we must begin to heal ourselves. This account outlines how this organization began that process and how it continues today.

First Steps

The work began around 2014, just after the **Washington Environmental Council and Washington Conservation Voters (WEC/WCV)—the precursors of Washington Conservation Action**—had just begun to work under one CEO, Joan Crooks. WEC/WCV, like most environmental nonprofits then and now, was led by white people. The organization had only a few people of color on staff.

Discussions of “equity,” had begun in the nonprofit world. As part of this conversation, some of WEC/WCV’s leaders participated in equity training, which led to more questions, and more exploration.

“At first, it wasn’t explicitly racial equity, but just equity. We brought in a trainer for a 3-day workshop,” remembers Lennon Bronsema, now vice president for campaigns but then political director. “We considered questions like: What does equity mean? What does environmental justice mean? What is white supremacy? How does it show up in our work? It was the beginning of coming to understand that *if we were going to be stronger, we needed to work across more than just one slice of the population.*”



Many in the environmental movement felt frustrated at this time: At the national level, Congress seemed incapable of passing climate legislation. In Washington state, voters had elected a “climate governor,” Jay Inslee, in 2012, and yet the state Senate remained in Republican control, and the state House did not have a functional Democratic majority. Big ideas on climate, or pollution, stalled.

Making connections

“We were not making progress on traditional environmental issues,” says Crooks. “I’m not sure why a light bulb suddenly went off: It’s the society. It’s the economy. It’s education. It’s so many other things. It’s everything.

“We’d been approaching climate in a very traditional way: as just an environmental issue. We started to move in a different direction: to build a wider coalition around climate. As we started to do that, our staff were being asked to work with partners and with communities in ways that they hadn’t before. They felt really ‘out there,’ and not supported. That was the ‘aha’ moment for me.”

Convened over food by Center for Social Inclusion (now Race Forward) and funded by Seattle Venture Partners, Loom Foundation, and Surdna, WEC/WCV, Climate Solutions, and other partners began attending a series of informal meetings with environmental and social justice leaders. At first there was no agenda, rather it was just an effort to get to know people and build relationships.

“I remember Joan Crooks and Becky Kelley participated enthusiastically in those meetings,” says board member Sharon Chen. “They’d ask, ‘Why don’t you trust traditional green organizations? And leaders of BIPOC groups would say that the greens only showed up when they needed something, otherwise they’d ignore communities of color. Joan and Becky did work on themselves as leaders. They brought other leaders along. They brought board members along.”

“We had to get to know people first,” Crooks says. “There had to be a connection before we could get into any conversations about what we might do together.”

Externally, WCV was invited by Washington Community Action Network’s Mauricio Ayon to join into democracy work and voter access that involved questions such as: Who has access to legislative officials? Who do we bring in to testify? Who do we bring to fundraisers?

At the same time, WEC began an effort to create a larger tent, the Climate Alliance for Jobs and Clean Energy. Eventually, this alliance would bring together a coalition of 170 environmental nonprofits, unions, health groups like the American Lung Association and others to push for both a just economy and action on climate change.

As the alliance began to coalesce, it became clear that organizations within communities of color did not have the same level of resources and power that unions and mainstream environmental organizations did. A new non-profit, Front and Centered, formed to leverage the capacity and influence of these groups. Front and Centered is a coalition of more than 70 POC-led community of color organizations across Washington.



“Our partnerships gradually grew more diverse,” remembers Kerry McHugh, who worked at WEC from 2007 to 2016, eventually becoming communications director. “That created a feedback loop. It expanded our thinking. It challenged us to do a little better.”

“The work we were doing forced us to ask ourselves hard questions,” says Bronsema.

Bumpy Beginnings

Even as WEC/WCV tried to grapple with systemic racism within and outside of the organization, the beginnings were fraught and full of mistakes. That is normal, but still uncomfortable and challenging.

When someone at a board meeting suggested consulting Tribes about orca and salmon policy, one board member said he thought the Tribes didn’t care about salmon, apparently unaware that each Tribe is unique and that both orca and salmon have central roles in the cultures and belief systems of many Indigenous peoples in this region. In many instances, there was an assumption that the few people of color on the board would take the lead on racial equity work, rather than that work being something that everyone needed to do.

“I felt very tokenized,” remembers Shin Shin Hsia, who served on the board from 2016 to 2020. “I often felt that I was put in the position of stating what should have been obvious considerations about race and equity.”

Beginning in 2016, WEC/WCV started a year of anti-racism trainings for staff members, working with consultant Heather Hackman. When Hackman first met with the board, it did not go well remembers Sapna Sopori, a diversity, equity and inclusion consultant who also was then on the board.

“Hackman wasn’t even saying anything that challenging, but she made it clear there was still work to do. Some had this idea that just because they were working on it, everything was better,” Sopori says. “People got angry. One board member stormed out of the room. It was classic. The board said it wanted to change, but it wasn’t quite ready. It was in transition.”

“The first thing she had us do was to create a “spine,” a statement of the core purpose of the work we were doing,” says Kat Holmes, now field director but then field organizer attending the trainings. “At that point, we were just finding our way. Not everyone completely bought in. When we felt unsure, we could return to this statement. Like the spine in a body, our spine statement would give us strength, focus our efforts.”



The spine statement that staff drafted was as follows:



WEC and WCV are historically and currently white-led environmental organizations that are operating within a white supremacist system. In order to not perpetuate white supremacy, we recognize that as an organization, we must interrogate and reflect on our whiteness and be actively anti-racist in our policies, practices, and culture. We work with the understanding that the same beliefs, practices and systems that create and perpetuate white supremacy, also create and perpetuate environmental destruction. There is no environmental justice without racial justice and economic justice. Until we address both, we cannot fully achieve our mission.

“The trainings made me delve into things that I had never dealt with before, as a bi-racial person,” says Julie Gonzales-Corbin, then administrative associate and is now the human resources director. “They asked, ‘What is the effect of whiteness on your work?’ It was a growth moment for me.”

“When we were going through the trainings, I encountered concepts like ‘model minority’ and ‘internalized racism’ for the first time,” remembers Kat Holmes. “A light bulb went off. I realized why I’d been ashamed of being half-Asian.”

“There was a lot of soul-searching,” says Becky Kelley, then WEC’s president. “We realized that we needed to have conversations with communities of color. We needed to make amends. Because we hadn’t been good partners. We hadn’t been thinking about the importance of communities of color in the process, or in the policy.”

Initiative 732, Resisting Urgency

Elsewhere in the traditionally white environmental community, people were getting antsy about moving forward with more climate legislation. Eventually, this coalesced into collecting signatures for ballot Initiative 732, which proposed a carbon tax that would be used to reduce the state sales tax and to fund rebates for working families. Carbon Washington, a group founded by environmental economist Yoram Bauman, provided the major push behind I-732.

“I remember having conversations with those folks, and saying, ‘We’re working to build this larger coalition,’” says Crooks. “They said, ‘We’ll believe it when we see it, and we’re not interested in waiting.’”

Kelley adds, “The staff trainings, the alliance, 732—it was all happening at the same time. We were learning about how urgency is a part of white supremacy culture. Paternalistically saying, we have the answers, and we don’t have time to wait. We were seeing the theory come to life.”

As they reached out to a broader coalition and to new partners, WEC/WCV staffers were hearing that what was needed was a collective investment that works for communities. Solutions needed to reach people adequately. Policy discussions shouldn’t be top-down.

WEC/WCV, along with Climate Solutions and a handful of other Washington environmental groups, publicly chose not to support I-732 when it was on the ballot in 2016 because it did not address racial equity in process or content. Nor did it incorporate a just transition for workers in the fossil fuel industry. WEC/WCV’s decision prompted loud criticisms, stories in the national press, outraged emails from longtime members saying they were writing WEC out of their will, or that they would never give to the organization again. Donors and foundations protested.



"It was a fraught, busy time, organizing other board members, convincing them not to support I-732," says Chen, a current board member. "Some on the board were really upset that we didn't support it, but I'm proud of the work we did. I'm proud of our decision then."

"It was intense," remembers Crooks. "We'd been working to get a big climate initiative on the ballot since 2008. Finally, there's something on the ballot, and we're saying, 'This isn't it.' It blew people's minds."

"The organization had courage of conviction," says Holmes. "It forced everyone on the staff to articulate why we weren't supporting a climate ballot measure. We lost some donors; but we gained others."

Crooks credits both the WEC and WCV boards with supporting the evolution that staff were pushing. Both boards had engaged in racial equity training, separate from staffers. Not everyone on the boards felt enthusiastic about the new direction.

"There was a natural evolution," Crooks remembers. "A few board members who didn't want to go this direction, they left. But on the flip side, we started to attract more board members of color. Before, they hadn't been interested."

Kelley says the board support of the decision not to back I-732 was also a turning point.

"People were telling us, 'Don't write policy for us, that you think is good for poor people or people of color,'" Kelley explains. "We need to be part of crafting these solutions...I don't think the alliance would have survived if we had supported 732. They would have said, 'Oh, that was all talk. See ya later.'"

When I-732 failed and Donald Trump was elected president in November 2016, the climate kerfuffle instantly faded into the background. But WEC/WCV's new partners stuck around.

"They stayed at the table," Kelley says. "I think that was a direct result of our showing up."

First Racial Equity Plan

In March 2017, WEC/WCV adopted a one-year Racial Equity Action Plan that set goals in three areas: Organizational Culture, Coalitions and Partnerships, and External Communication/Member Engagement and Education.

As an organization, WEC/WCV's plan sought to address the development gap for People of Color/Native organizations by exploring ways to support mentorship and fellowships. It sought to normalize racial equity for board members by regularly presenting on these issues. It also invited board members to educational events such as staff learning lunches focused on equity issues. It made inclusiveness a goal, surveying staff for feedback, allocating a budget for things like office changes and social gatherings to break down barriers and build community. It tried to counter white supremacy culture in the work environment by making appreciation and recognition part of office norms. It set goals for normalizing the discussion of racial equity and for integrating racial equity into the work, including staff goals, work plans and job descriptions.



During the rest of the year, staff developed four racial equity working groups: organizational culture, human resources, member education, and coalitions and partnerships. The organization also began to draft a 3-year racial equity plan.

All these changes made communications and member education crucial, and the plan called for a continuation and expansion of member outreach, including meetups, emails and social media content that highlighted racial justice. It set goals of reaching a broader audience and integrating a wider set of media outlets into communications. It also encouraged internal conversations about equity, such as accessibility issues at events.

New Partners: Changing How We Work

Looking outward, the WEC/WCV plan sought to make it a priority to be involved in intersectional efforts such as the Washington Voting Justice Coalition. Within historically white-led collaborations such as the Environmental Priorities Coalition, a statewide block of environmental groups, the organization sought to use a racial justice lens to advocate for voices that needed to be heard.

“It was a different way of partnering, where the partners decided on the policy together,” says Crooks. “In the past, [WEC/WCV] had played the role of the policy expert, with partners providing other types of expertise (organizing, communications, connections to certain networks). But now we began to really emphasize listening to partners and having them provide policy ideas where they had specific expertise while we provided policy ideas where we had specific expertise.”

Staff began to work a lot with new partners such as One America, Front and Centered, Puget Sound Sage and Community to Community farm worker groups. While progress was made, it could sometimes be bumpy and contentious.

WEC/WCV also set a goal of developing authentic relationships with the federally-recognized Tribes of Washington. This included educating staffers on the history and context of Pacific Northwest Tribes as well as issues such as Tribal sovereignty and treaty rights. The plan also sought to expand relationships with groups not historically led by white people, and to find ways to speak up against injustice in non-traditional issue areas such as voting rights, immigration issues, and labor practices.

Building Momentum: Initiative 1631

With these new partners, the Climate Alliance began to work on another climate ballot proposal, Initiative 1631, which proposed to levy a fee on greenhouse gas emissions, and use the money to fund clean air and clean energy projects.

“Drafting 1631 was a long, slow process during which we realized that our attempts to reach out to Tribes had really broken some bridges,” says Kelley, WEC’s president. “Those bridges had to be rebuilt through really detailed discussions.”

One Tribal leader publicly challenged the Alliance for Jobs and Clean Energy for not fully consulting Tribal Nations while drafting I-1631. Some Tribes felt strongly enough to consider putting forth competing climate ballot measures. The Alliance responded by requesting formal consultation with Tribes to make sure that their concerns were addressed in the final policy.



Throughout the process, some members of the alliance worried that polling suggested that a ballot measure might not win, and others suggested that maybe a legislative measure might be a better strategy. In many organizations, there was internal pressure to do something after sitting out the last time. There was also fear that losing might set climate progress back. Perfectionism, urgency, fear—most aspects of white supremacy culture ran deep.

But communities of color pushed for making the effort, for trying. Win or lose, it was said, the campaign would be a way to educate the public, to build support for climate action over the long haul.

“Some of the most important conversations I had in my career were with partners of color around that table,” says Kelley. “Leaders from communities of color said, ‘You know, we lose all the time. We lose, and we fight until we win. And our people are losing every day from the status quo.’ They were unafraid of losing because they saw it as part of how you win. Just think of the civil rights movement: A lot of people lost on the way to winning.”

Later in 2018, Initiative 1631 failed at the ballot box. But as it turns out, it did indeed build momentum that would lead to success later. In a report analyzing the effort, the alliance credited the solidarity and strength that emerged during the I-1631 campaign with helping to achieve the legislative successes of the next few years, such as the Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act, and the 100% clean energy bill, the Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA).

First 3-year Equity Plan

In 2018, WEC/WCV adopted the 2018-2020 Racial Equity Action Plan. This plan incorporated the goals of the one-year plan, addressing organizational culture, partnerships/coalitions, and member education. It also added new goals, such as identifying whiteness and its impact personally, in our work and in our community.

The plan also added a whole section addressing human resources, stating the goal to “dismantle systemic barriers to employing people of color at WEC and WCV and advance equitable hiring practices. Develop a Fair Hiring Kit that ensures a fair process and results in a diverse applicant pool and new staff.” This part of the plan called for various measures to be implemented, such as benchmarking and sharing the rationale on raises and salary ranges, implementing a scoring matrix for job applicants to ensure more objectivity in hiring, more investment in staff development and retention.

“I remember at the time, we were trying to consider the whole employee experience, beginning with hiring,” says Julie Gonzales-Corbin. “Back then, it was really scary just to put a salary range on a job advertisement. No one else was doing it. We also gave applicants interview questions in advance. No one was doing that either. But afterward, we thought, ‘What were we afraid of?’ And applicants recognized that we were trying to make the process equitable.”

“One of the earliest things we did, we started to look at job announcements and apply a racial equity lens,” says Holmes, who served on the HR racial equity group. “We looked at things that might have been barriers. Does a person really need a master’s degree for this position?”



The 3-year-plan was more granular. Rather than setting broad goals and suggested actions, this document broke down each desired outcome into a series of steps. It also detailed ways to measure progress. For instance, rather than just broadly saying that racial equity should inform the work, the plan set out specific steps such as “Carve out specific time in individual work plans, check-ins and reviews to include racial justice.” Then, the plan outlines specific ways to follow up, such as “Did each manager and staff person discuss racial justice work monthly?” and “Did the Executive Team evaluate trends and staff prioritization of racial justice work across the organization?”

Still a Work in Progress

While WEC/WCV had come a long way in four years, it was, in 2018, still largely a white organization, especially at the leadership level. That was the first year that HR began to track race, with 28.9% of staff identifying as BIPOC. The national percentage of BIPOC people that year was 41%.

“When I started in 2018, the staff was a lot less diverse than it is now,” says Tony Ivey, who worked as a field organizer until 2020, then returned to the organization in 2022 as political and civic engagement manager. “It was very white. But they were talking about the racial equity spine. I remember at the time being surprised that there were teams diving into that.”

“We started to realize that we had addressed the easiest stuff: We’d made the connection, ‘Your policies are bad for the environment, and they’re also bad for frontline communities.’” says Bronsema, vice president of campaigns. “But we had much bigger issues to address: For instance, we had white guys in leadership. If you want to work in these communities, do you send the old white guy? He can’t go to Hilltop in Tacoma, an historically Black community in Washington, and talk about clean water, speak to their experience. Where are those experts in the field who aren’t white? It’s a real problem, for instance, at forestry schools, which are 98% white men.”

In 2019, Joan Crooks decided to step down as CEO. “We had legislative wins like 100% clean energy, other wins, and a couple for Puget Sound,” Crooks says. “We’d just made some really good progress, but I knew the next phase of the organization was to continue in racial equity work and broader view of environmentalism in the state. The future was a more diverse organization, racially, in terms of board, staff and approach to the work. The organization needed new thinking.”

New CEO, New Direction

Crooks’ announcement led to a year-long search for a new CEO, which attracted a broad and diverse pool of applicants. In the end, Alyssa Macy rose to the top of that pool. She had most recently been the chief operations officer for her Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Oregon, managing a budget of \$33 million.

“Five years earlier, I don’t think we would have gotten such a response to the job announcement,” Crooks says.

The selection committee committed to finding a qualified person of color despite challenging dynamics among board and staff. Some on the hiring committee felt it disheartening that the hiring consultant could not find a single BIPOC candidate in Washington and that some of the comments and questions posed to Alyssa were condescending. Still, in the end, the board of a major, historically white-led, mainstream environmental organization chose an Indigenous female leader to be the CEO.



"The best proof that our organization's racial equity work had had an effect is the hiring of Alyssa," says Bronsema. "Our process had changed profoundly. We worked to make sure we reached a diverse pool of candidates and we made it clear that we were centering racial equity both in our hiring and our policy work. That evolution made us aware of Alyssa's work but also made our organization more attractive to someone like Alyssa."

When Alyssa Macy started as CEO in January 2020, there were no other Indigenous people on staff. WEC/WCV was still an overwhelmingly white organization with board still predominantly made up of donors, but it was an organization that had created an opportunity for a new leader of color to take a statewide organization and do something different.

"They had already started the racial equity work. Enough had been done that it felt like it would be a safe place for me to be," says Macy. "I really commend the folks that were here before, who were mostly white and who got the ball rolling. It was brave and necessary. They recognized that things were changing. They could evolve or get left behind. I felt I could help move that needle."

2020 Challenges: Pandemic, Racial Discord

Just a couple months later, the whole world went on lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic. For a while WEC/WCV wrestled with all the problems that every other institution faced at that time: How do we work from home? How do we keep people employed?

Macy emphasized doing internal work as a starting point. ***"We all need to do the work," Macy explains. "Inclusion and equity is not a 9-to-5 thing. It's a commitment you make to lifelong learning and effort. When you do that, you reflect that out into the community. There have been starts and stops as we dealt with the traumas of 2020 and 2021."***

In May 2020, George Floyd was killed by a police officer in Minneapolis. Racial and economic justice took the foreground once again. Everyone was asking, "What are you doing about racial justice?"

Macy wanted to do more in that space. She led WEC/WCV to stand in solidarity with both the national Black Lives Matter movement and with Washington for Black Lives. WEC/WCV sent emails encouraging members to donate to racial justice organizations so that they could weather the financial storm created by COVID.

Climate Commitment Act

Then, in 2021, it became clear that the Climate Commitment Act (CCA), a groundbreaking carbon pricing law, had a good chance of passing in the legislature. This created another fraught situation for the organization: Front and Centered, an important environmental justice partner, elevated real concerns about environmental justice and that it did not best serve frontline communities.

At the same time, Macy and other WEC/WCV staffers were talking to Tribal Nations leaders and other Black-led groups. They were hearing different points of view.

"Alyssa was talking to Tribes, and they were saying, 'The CCA can be transformative and positive—if not historic. It will give us money. It will address years of harm,'" remembers Bronsema. "Washington Build Back Black Alliance also said they thought the bill was pretty good."



WEC/WCV ended up supporting the CCA, which helped to pass this historic measure, but also divided the staff and impacted the working relationship and strained the partnership with Front and Centered.

Building Deeper Relationships

Meanwhile, internally, WEC/WCV had been meeting in caucus groups since early 2020. However, tensions flared when the caucus was broad, involving the whole staff. In response, the caucuses were organized by race and seniority so that staff could have a safe space to discuss and work on things that might not be appropriate, or that might impose emotional burdens, if discussed in the wider group. The white caucus tackled issues that they needed to work on their own. Topics might include things such as power hoarding, or gatekeeping or grappling with white supremacy. The BIPOC caucus sought to create a supportive community in which emergent topics could be discussed confidentially. By 2022, some of the caucuses had stopped meeting. The path forward for them remains unclear and is still being discussed.

“The last few years have been this constant swirling of heavy things,” says Macy. “We and everyone else need to continue the internal work. We may have difficult conversations, but we have to lean into those moments. That’s how we learn and grow. If we can land that, then when we step out into the world, we do so from a place of honesty and respect.”

Through the work in the caucuses and working through the 3-year racial equity plan, racial equity, environmental justice, and Tribal sovereignty were centered in the 5-year strategic documents for 2021 through 2025. The collaboration between board and staff on the strategic plans embodied a new way forward that ensures the organization can achieve its goal and truly be an environmental justice leader in the environmental movement.

For many years, organizations led by communities of color had criticized the one-off nature of standard political organizing and fundraising: the frantic rush to raise money and support for one-time events like passing I-1631. These voices held that the path to more profound, just change should involve multi-year efforts to build relationships and move the base. WEC/WCV began to move in this direction, starting several long-term initiatives to develop deep connections with frontline communities around the state.

In 2022 WEC/WCV became a backer of Native Vote Washington. Founded in 2008, Native Vote seeks to support Native voters in finding their voice and their power in the political process. As it had with Front and Centered, WEC/WCV became a fiscal sponsor of Native Vote Washington. Alyssa Macy became the CEO of Native Vote with Kady Titus as a senior organizer in eastern Washington, and Mikayla Flores as digital field organizer in Puyallup. As of March 2024, we are in the process of hiring a Field Director for Native Vote Washington.

In 2022, WCV brought on Joy Stanford as its first Black political director, and rehired Tony Ivey as political and civic engagement manager.

“I had never worked for a woman of color,” says Stanford. “I knew these were my people.”

Stanford and Ivey work around the state to identify and support diverse political candidates who will champion the environment. With the field team, they are working to build long-term relationships in communities like Vancouver in the southwest and Yakima, in central Washington.



We Become More Diverse

Jody Olney that year brought the number of Indigenous staff to five including Zachary Pullin, communications director, and Tanya Eison, executive assistant and board liaison. Olney joined WEC as the first Tribal government liaison.

Alyssa came to WEC/WCV with an idea to work with Tribal nations on environmental issues. She knew there needed to be grounding in the relationships and protocols before that work could thrive. She raised funds and worked with Pyramid Communications to organize a comprehensive training on how environmental groups should work with Tribes. In the fall of 2022 and early 2023, Macy and Olney led three webinars on Working with Tribes, which reached 300+ professionals in government, politics, and nonprofits.

In late 2022, Macy reached out and worked to have WEC/WCV join Green 2.0's annual survey, which is an annual survey of environmental nonprofits across the country on board and staff demographics, about what the organizations' racial equity work looks like in practice, and benefits. She wanted full transparency around racial equity work and Green 2.0 has a helpful diversity evaluation tool. Green 2.0 also helped with data collection, improvements for our surveys, and many resources to bring into the organization.

These measures were important to Macy because she'd experienced pay inequity and other issues in previous jobs. She wanted WEC/WCV to be inclusive for POC employees. And she wanted to ensure the organizations' role was creating an environment where POC employees are treated and compensated fairly.

By the end of 2022, 39% of WEC/WCV staff self-identified as BIPOC, up from 32% in 2021. At the senior management level, 46% self-identified as BIPOC. Likewise, the boards of both organizations have also become more diverse: Where there had only been a small number of board members of color at the beginning of the racial equity work, half of our board members were BIPOC.

"We are now much more diverse in every way," says Ken Lederman, WCA's board president in 2023. "Those linkages and ideas rocketed forward after Alyssa came on board. She helped to draft a strategic framework that puts environmental justice at the core of everything we do. If we're not looking at things through the lens of justice, we risk being irrelevant."

As of 2024, both WCA boards are now 60% people of color. Members hail from all over the state: from Seattle of course, but now also from Spokane to Bellingham, from Tacoma to Methow Valley, from Suquamish to Yakima. Board members now also come from a variety of economic realities, recruited not just for their ability to raise, or to donate, money but also for their leadership and their networks of connection and influence.

"Who your board members are, how they identify, how they lead, where they live, the networks they have built throughout their lives, you can't monetize that," says Macy. "In fact, it's priceless."

**In January 2023, WEC/WCV unified under one brand name, Washington Conservation Action.**

The new brand name is an embodiment of both more than a decade of intention and work, but also the racial equity journey. Even the logo and tagline, Protecting people and nature as one. The brand would never have come to life if WCA had started the process earlier in the racial equity journey. The elevation beyond trees and animals and waters to include people into the brand DNA of the organization illustrates the depth of the organization's commitment to racial equity and environmental justice.

The Tribal Nations program formally launched in June 2023, and Olney became director of the program, hiring Stephanie Masterman as senior manager. Native Vote Washington continued to grow, adding Mikayla Flores as a digital organizer just outside Tacoma. Native Vote is working around the state to encourage political participation. At the end of 2023, Indigenous staff numbered seven.

And the Work Continues

The entire staff and board began a year-long process of working with the Center for Diversity and the Environment (CDE). "We have a strategic plan and a mission statement, but we also need shared values. We need a shared foundation," explains Bronsema. "CDE will help us define our values so that we all can get on the same page. From there, we can build out a plan for the next three years."

Another avenue of work taking place was around pay equity in the organization. A conversation started after Macy worked to join the Green 2.0 annual survey in 2022, she felt compelled to go a step further.

In late 2023, Alyssa Macy coordinated WCA to sign Green 2.0's Pay Equity Pledge, which is a campaign to increase pay equity for people of color—particularly women of color—in environmental organizations. The wage gap that exists means that women of color make significantly less than their peers. Environmental organizations cannot promote diversity, equity, inclusion, or justice if they are still paying their staff of color, and especially women of color, less than their white or male colleagues. There is ongoing work associated with this pledge with an official announcement in March 2024.

In 2024, the board and staff of WCA have no illusions that it's all sorted, that there isn't still much to do. But we're committed to continuing to make the effort.

"I don't think that WCA's journey is any different from that of many organizations, the thing that's different is that y'all are sticking with it. The staff is sticking with it. The board is working at it," says Sopori, the former board member. "There's no playbook for this. It's challenging and uncomfortable. That's a lot of the reason that as a society we're comfortable with innovation in everything but racial justice."

"Racial equity work is about building from a foundation of respect and love," says Macy. "This planet needs us to work together, to face the urgency of the climate crisis, to figure out the best solutions to the problems we face, to learn to be better partners, to be better leaders, to be better listeners. That comes from a commitment to always learning, always growing, from pushing into places that are a little uncomfortable because often progress happens right there."



This racial equity journey has not been neat, nor has it been linear. Ten years ago, we did not get it right. We made mistakes, we fumbled, we put off some of the people that we care about. We had to continuously adjust our approach to be even better for all of our staff and board. The constant throughout all this was an effort to be honest: to admit when we didn't know, to acknowledge mistakes.

Some people stayed with us, some people left. We are so grateful to our board, partners, colleagues, and staff who brought this work forward and challenged us. This commitment pushed us out of our comfort zone and held us accountable about the right way forward. This work forced us to grow and to keep growing.

We are committed to growing—and to racial equity and environmental justice—now and in the future.





A Timeline of Significant Milestones

Delve into our easy-to-read timeline on Washington Conservation Action's significant milestones and accomplishments to pursue racial equity as an organization.



Honoring Progress

Inspiring Evolution

2014

- WEC/WCV leadership begins equity training.

2015

- WEC begins informal meetings with community groups, getting to know people and to identify areas of possible collaboration.
- Front and Centered, a new nonprofit bringing together communities of color and environmental justice groups, forms.
- WEC/WCV, with partners, begins to try to create a “larger tent” for climate action. Climate Alliance for Jobs and Clean Energy eventually brings together 170 groups, including environmental nonprofits, unions, health groups like the American Lung Association, and others to push for both a just economy and action on climate change.



2016

- WEC/WCV begins a year-long anti-racism training with Hackman Consulting Group, which specializes in diversity, equity and social justice consulting.
- The boards of WEC/WCV start anti-racism training at the same time.
- Carbon Washington begins push for climate law, ballot Initiative 732. After consulting with frontline communities, WEC/WCV makes the bold decision not to support I-732 because it did not adequately address environmental justice and other issues.
- I-732 fails in the November election.

2017

- In March, WEC/WCV adopts a one-year racial equity plan that sets goals in three areas: Organizational Culture, Coalitions and Partnerships, and External Communication/Member Engagement and Education.
- WEC/WCV becomes involved in intersectional efforts such as the Washington Voting Justice Coalition.
- Within historically white-led groups such as the Environmental Priorities Coalition WEC/WCV begins to use a racial justice lens and to highlight voices long ignored.
- WEC/WCV sets a goal to develop authentic relationships with Tribes and starts staff education on key issues such as Tribal sovereignty and treaty rights.
- WEC/WCV begins to work with a wider group of partners such as One America, Front and Centered and various labor groups.



2018

- WEC/WCV adopts the 2018-2020 Racial Equity Action Plan. This plan incorporates the goals of the 2017 one-year plan, addressing organizational culture, partnerships/coalitions and member education. It also adds new goals, such as identifying whiteness and its impact personally, in our work and in our community. The plan also includes goals to restructure human resources, to make hiring and other processes more inclusive and transparent.

2019

- Joan Crooks decides to step down as CEO of WEC/WCV, saying, “The future is a more diverse organization, racially, in terms of board and staff and approach to the work. I feel the organization needs new thinking.”
- A year-long search for a new CEO begins.

2020

- Alyssa Macy—who had worked on Indigenous issues in various roles for the United Nations and who most recently had been chief operating officer of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs in Oregon—starts as the new CEO of WEC/WCV.
- WEC/WCV stands in solidarity with the national Black Lives Matter movement and with Washington for Black Lives.



2021

- WEC/WCV faces another challenge over a climate bill. Front and Centered, an important partner on environmental justice, opposes the Climate Commitment Act (CCA). After conferring with Tribes and groups like Washington Build Back Black, WEC/WCV decides to support the CCA. The groundbreaking cap and invest law passes later that year.
- WEC/WCV incorporates racial equity into its strategic vision document for 2021.
- 31% of WEC/WCV staff self-identify as BIPOC.
- The WCV political team improves the endorsement process by including racial equity and tribal sovereignty questions as well as updating the process to be more inclusive of Black and brown candidates.
- In September, WEC and WCV voluntarily recognizes the Evergreen Workers Union (EWU), a staff union organized through the Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 7800.

2022

- WEC/WCV hires its first Black political director.
- New tribal government liaison begins laying groundwork for the Tribal Nations Program.
- WEC/WCV supports and partners with Native Vote Washington.
- 39% of WEC/WCV staff self-identify as BIPOC.
- 52% of WEC/WCV board members self-identify as BIPOC.



2022 (cont.)

- Racial equity is again incorporated into the strategic vision for the year.
- WEC/WCV and Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, enter in a memorandum of understanding in support of the Tribal Government Liaison role and to support closer collaboration between the organizations. Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) is a nonprofit organization representing 57 Northwest Tribal governments from Oregon, Idaho, Washington, southeast Alaska, Northern California and Western Montana. ATNI is dedicated to Tribal sovereignty and self-determination and provides information and spaces to support information sharing and coordination among its members.
- WEC works with Montlake Consulting Group, a University of Washington student-run consultancy, to lay the groundwork for a public racial equity report. Montlake also made recommendations for DEI Improvement Strategies.
- BIPOC Board Members, with the support of Sapna Strategies, LLC, develop a foundational document to provide clarity for the BIPOC Board members group.
- WEC/WCV add environmental justice and Tribal sovereignty to our annual State of our Forests and Public Lands report to address racial equity in our reporting.
- WEC/WCV participate in the national Green 2.0 2022 NGO & Foundation Transparency Report Card, becoming the first state organization of the Conversation Voters Movement to do so, as well as the first Washington-based organization.



2023

- WEC/WCV join under one brand, Washington Conservation Action.
- Staff begins a year-long training with Center for Diversity and the Environment. This effort will inform the drafting of a new, 3-year racial equity plan.
- Tribal Nations Program formally launches.
- WEC/WCV participates in the national Green 2.0 NGO & Foundation Transparency Report Card.
- White ally board members began race-based causing as part of their commitment to racial equity work.
- WCA/WCAEF add 2 youth positions (18-25) to the board and began recruiting young people to serve in these roles.
- WCA/WCAEF develops first donor gift acceptance policy which will the board of directors will review and accept in early 2024.
- Christina Wong – who previously worked at Northwest Harvest leading their advocacy and policy efforts, joins the organization as the vice president of programs. As an Asian American, she is the second person of color to join the executive team at the organization.
- WCA and EWU/CWA finalize the organizations first collective bargaining agreement (CBA). The CBA includes what is believed to be the first union contract nationally that recognizes tribal sovereignty and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) for Native People who are citizens of Tribal nations.



2024

- WCA signs the Pay Equity Pledge, part of Green 2.0, which is a campaign to increase pay equity for people of color—particularly women of color—in environmental organizations
- Both Boards of Directors—Washington Conservation Action and Washington Conservation Action Education Fund—now at 60% people of color.



**WASHINGTON
CONSERVATION
ACTION**

Protecting People & Nature as One