



August 12, 2020

Dear PARC Members and Amphibian and Reptile Conservationists:

PARC strives to be a leader in providing inclusive spaces and a diverse network for participating in herpetofaunal conservation. Over the last few months, we have taken some time to pause and reflect on our organizational structure, network, partnerships, policies, and procedures to identify areas where we can improve with respect to equity. To all past, current, and future members of PARC, we recognize that historic and current racism in society and in the field of conservation negatively affects our members and our partners; we acknowledge our role in the problem, and we accept the challenge of creating a more supportive network for our members. Silence is compliance with racism and white privilege, both of which not only actively work against inclusion and equity in our own field of herpetofaunal conservation but also against the everyday wellbeing of marginalized communities. PARC will not be silent on these issues. We write to you, PARC membership and the broader herpetology community, to show that PARC is committed to evaluating and making the changes necessary to address systemic racism and the effects of white privilege within our network.

During a time when connecting with nature and being outdoors is important for maintaining our health and wellbeing, we know that racialized minorities are less likely to have safe access to green spaces. Part of making PARC better, part of making conservation more successful and more accessible, is realizing our own roles in how we shape the culture and systems around us. Our network is between [83 and 87% white](#). We encourage our members, particularly members in this majority, to self-educate about antiracism and share what they've learned within their social circles. We also encourage our members to become advocates for equity and inclusion in their community and professional activities. We've included resources at the bottom of this letter for self-educational reading and promoting equitable conservation. We all have a responsibility to dismantle racial injustice. We all have a responsibility to make sure Black Lives Matter. Inclusion cannot be an empty word.

PARC strives to remove the barriers marginalized people face when trying to join the field of conservation and when participating within our network. We want to amplify the voices of marginalized groups of people in conservation so they can be heard, and contribute to meaningful changes that shift power and decision-making dynamics. We know that marginalized groups of people are more negatively affected by poor environmental quality and lack of access to nature. They also suffer from racism and microaggressions from others when in nature. It is

no longer enough to offer a seat at the table; we need these voices and perspectives at the head of the table, leading and making decisions that have greater impacts on our community.

PARC's unique standing as a network of volunteers adds additional challenges to inclusion because not all who wish to participate have the ability, capacity, and/or privilege to donate their time. PARC has struggled with how to address this reality, and as such, we will approach our challenges with creativity, innovation, open-mindedness, and seek widespread input.

We have already taken a number of actions. We present this list not to claim that we have done all of the work that needs to be done, but to communicate where we stand, where our efforts have focused, and where we are going. We have:

- Created a [Code of Conduct](#) for all meetings
- Formed a [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Team](#) (est. 2017), which has:
 - Led presentations and working group sessions related to diversity, equity and inclusion at regional PARC meetings
 - Conducted annual DEI workshops at the in-person Joint National Steering Committee & Federal Agency Steering Committee meetings
 - Created and distributed national PARC demographic and inclusion surveys at regional meetings & created an infographic of results hosted on PARC's website
 - Created the @herpetALLogy social media campaigns
 - Founded the PARC Increasing Participation Award for members of traditionally underrepresented groups to attend in-person PARC meetings and receive mentorship

We acknowledge the motivating force that is the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Team in driving many of the above initiatives and keeping PARC learning and growing. We encourage all members to support and aid this team in its work to improve PARC.

However, we have more work to do. The last few months highlights that PARC, similar to many organizations, is acknowledging our past inaction in some areas and the message that sends to our members and partners; however, we are dedicated to continued progress and support. Looking ahead to our next year of growth, we are committed to the following and will continue to periodically update the PARC community on our progress:

- Assess and disclose demographic metrics of PARC's leadership and awardees on PARC's website.
- Seek opportunities and identify strategies that recruit and support people who have been racially marginalized to serve in leadership positions throughout the network
- Create mechanisms (e.g. new member feedback tools, teams, or other strategies) to solicit and generate ideas for change for a more inclusive, barrier-free network
- Encourage PARC leadership and membership to develop ideas, strategies and/or actions that will shift PARC towards a more equitable network structure
- Develop inclusive meeting guidelines
- Embed transparency and accountability in our actions (e.g. developing transparent communication platforms and mechanisms).

Racial equity is an essential part of conservation and outdoor engagement, and conservation success is integrally tied to environmental and societal justice. To engage in meaningful conservation, our PARC community demands and requires diverse perspectives, safe places, and trust.

Biodiversity and ecosystem health benefits when a system experiences moderate frequencies of change. We feel that PARC has the opportunity to take advantage of the self-reflection on equality occurring across the United States and around the world. Doing so will strengthen the network and provide needed change. Together we can make PARC, conservation, and society a place of belonging, dignity, and respect for all.

-PARC's Joint National Steering Committee and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Team

Resources:

Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America

by Ibram X. Kendi

How to be an Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi

So You Want to Talk About Race Ijeoma Oluo

White Fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism by Robin DiAngelo

The Rise of the American Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege, and Environmental Protection by Dorceta Taylor

Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors by Carolyn Finney