

Prichard Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity Statement

I am passionate about championing and actively fostering diversity, equity and inclusivity. For me, two experiences – one old and another relatively new – have helped to reinforce that it is not enough to feel strongly about DEI and social justice. My DEI work is action oriented and guided by a conviction that I can and must actively grow as authentic and reliable ally, mentor, teacher and colleague for people from a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives. As a fire ecologist, I have deep respect for Indigenous stewardship and fire science. I am strongly committed to advocating for Indigenous rights and supporting the revitalization of cultural burning practices.

Nearly twenty years ago, I travelled several times with my Seattle-based postdoc supervisor to the southeastern US to offer training on decision support tools to prescribed fire managers. Wildland fire is still a male-dominated field, and especially in the rural south, I wasn't surprised to be the only female scientist or land manager in the room; I had spent many happy field seasons before as the sole woman on summer a trail crew and ecology field crews. However, on my first work trip to southern Georgia, I found myself on a screened-in porch, attempting to drink a Coors Light and chat with a group of older men who leaned back on white plastic chair in Nomex pants and wildland fire boots with an ease of knowing each other as they set in for a long, social evening. Every single one of us in the wildland fire research and manager group was white, while in the background, an all-black staff quietly prepared a buffet for dinner. Nothing about the situation was comfortable for me. I sat within the half circle of chairs but stayed out of the banter. Conventional American beer has never been my thing, and the open can remained untouched in my hands. One of older guys probably took pity on me and tried to draw me into the conversation. "What does your husband do, and how's he holding up with the kids back home?" Such a simple set of questions it seemed, but inwardly, I cringed. My wife was back home with our new baby and toddler, and she would have raised her eyebrows to hear my noncommittal answer. "Um – wildlife biologist. Doing just fine."

I've relived that moment countless times. I was raised in a military town in western Washington State that was far from perfect but at its core was multicultural and diverse. My school mates and I were from military and schoolteacher families with similar jobs and economic realities. At that remote research station in Georgia, the sharp division between the loud, boisterous white men and the silent all-black staff – and the disquieting absence of conversation between the two – felt like something out of the 1950s and was deeply unfamiliar and unsettling. Then there was my part in it. When faced with an awkward question from one of the guys, I chose to pass so that the divisions I already acutely felt that evening didn't widen.

I recently listened to an interview on the topic of regret. It struck me to learn that regret stays with us as an unusually clear memory that never fades – and that the sharp feeling associated with an experience can remind us to be a better person next time. That moment, as soon as I experienced it, made me realize two things at once. First was the privilege I have in the world as a white academic woman: at most moments in my life, I could choose to either share my identity with others or choose to hide. Second was that I would never hide again. For me, masking my identity feels deeply disrespectful of the many people in this world who based on their appearance, accent, religious and cultural identities do not have that option.

In my work today, my experiences as a regular outsider help me to feel compassion for others who are sidelined and not included for being different in some way from the dominant group. As a manager of

several large research teams, I intentionally draw underrepresented members into the central planning team and offer leadership and presentation opportunities to students and early career scientists. I strongly believe that we all thrive best in work environments in which we can be completely ourselves. As such, my mentoring style is holistic and respectful of how people I work with have home lives, past experiences, and challenges that are part of them and are to be honored and celebrated – certainly not something they should feel they need to set aside as we work together.

The second experience represents some of the stellar work that our colleagues within SEFS are doing to foster greater and more impactful DEI work within the SEFS and broader communities. I want to preface this reflection by the reality that I have some great colleagues. My close colleagues, most of whom are men, are scattered throughout the US and Canada and regularly take time out to reach out on both personal and professional levels. The deep respect of others that I actively bring to my work has often been shaped by what many of them also do in their lives and careers. At the same time, the privileges that they have been afforded are distinctly different than what is often granted to people of color and women in the same profession, including myself.

Privilege was once described to me as having the wind at one's back – one might feel it from time to time, but it is easy to forget that exists and makes the journey easier. In contrast, for someone travelling into the wind, it is impossible to ignore. Given how much I love my research and my solid track record in science, I have struggled to explain why my career was in a proverbial head wind. It wasn't until Van Kane and Monika Moskal reached out to me to ask me if I wanted to join their team that I realized the type of mentoring and support I lacked. Within the Precision Forestry Cooperative (PFC), I rapidly joined a team of colleagues who elevate each other's voices, cooperatively attend anti-racist and DEI trainings, discuss mental health issues during this isolating time of the COVID-19 pandemic, and recognize the value of each person's contributions. I found colleagues who quickly advocated for me and helped me to remove barriers that had long stood in my way. Within months of working with the PFC, I applied for PI status within SEFS, joined graduate student committees, and began actively funding and mentoring students – all of which I had previously been told were not possible for SEFS research scientists. These changes are now allowing me to more fully integrate within the SEFS community to foster collaborative, interdisciplinary research.

The fact that my PFC colleagues took time to extend a helping hand to me when I really needed one will stay with me for the rest of my career. What is most surprising about this story is that Van and Monika didn't even know me. They knew my reputation as a fire ecologist and that I could use some colleagues and mentoring. The difference they made in my career was pronounced, and it further inspires me to deeply engage in DEI and social justice work and support early career scientists and colleagues from a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives. I am thankful for the long-term commitment that UW and SEFS are making to DEI and social justice work and proud to join in that effort.