

# Social Justice in the Great Lakes Areas of Concern


## Impacts of Marginalization

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The views expressed in this presentation are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the US Government, The Environmental Protection Agency or the NMC .



# Acknowledging the land and those who have come before, and those who live among us...

We acknowledge that our homes and offices, from where we conduct our research, are on the traditional, ancestral, and contemporary lands of the Anishinaabe-Ojibwe people. We acknowledge that these lands are also historically connected to the Dakota and Northern Cheyenne people, and other Native peoples from time immemorial. Although ceded with the 1854 treaty, this land holds great significance for the Indigenous peoples of this region. We strive to honor and protect the physical, cultural and spiritual as interconnected and inseparable elements of our socio-ecological research.





# Elements of Justice

- Distributional justice.
  - Procedural justice.
  - Interactional justice.
- } Recognitional justice.

Rigolon, Alessandro, Mariela Fernandez, Brandon Harris, and William Stewart. "An ecological model of environmental justice for recreation." *Leisure Sciences* (2019): 5-13.

Preston, Christopher, and Wylie Carr. "Recognitional justice, climate engineering, and the care approach." *Ethics, Policy & Environment* 21, no. 3 (2018): 308-323.

Whyte, Kyle Powys. "An environmental justice framework for indigenous tourism." *Environmental Philosophy* 7, no. 2 (2010): 75-92.



# Great Lakes Areas of Concern (GL-AOCs)

Established in 1987 under Annex 1 of the bi-national Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA) to protect and restore the health of the Great Lakes

What?

- Mitigate or eliminate specific historical contamination

Why?

- Restore specific beneficial uses to the area  
(e.g. beaches and swimming areas open for use, fish that are safe to consume, healthy wildlife populations, and so on)





# Great Lakes Areas of Concern (GL-AOCs) - continued

How does an AOC-community benefit?

- Physical remediation and restoration presumably increases benefit and well-being by eliminating or reducing harmful exposure to hazardous contaminants.

What is the process?

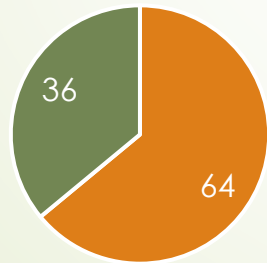
- Remedial Action Plans (RAPs)
  - Collaborative partnerships
    - State, federal, tribal, city, business, organizations and residents
    - Members of the community - CACS



# Equity: engagement and benefits

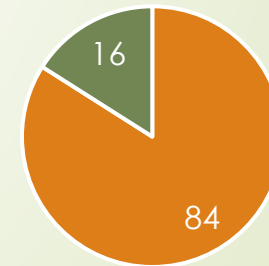
- Who participates?
- Why does it matter?
  - Under-represented voices in environmental organizations
  - Whose values, interests, concerns, priorities and goals are represented?

U.S. Population



Representation in U.S. Environmental Initiatives

■ White  
■ People of color

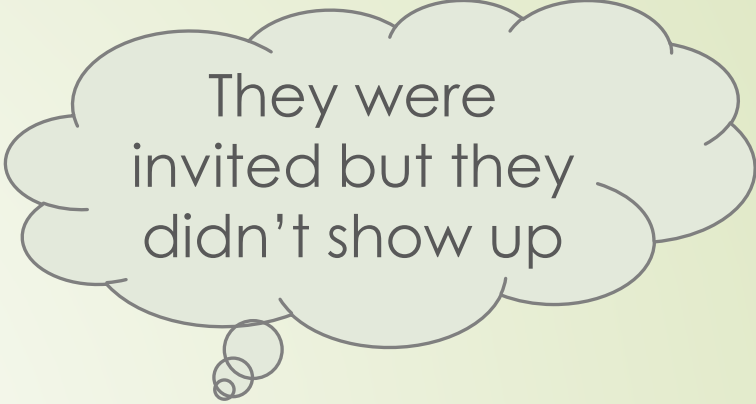


Taylor, Dorceta E. *The state of diversity in environmental organizations*. Green 2.0 working group, 2014.



## Barriers to Engagement:

- ▶ We're familiar with practical reasons that people miss meetings:
  - disinterest, schedule conflicts, transportation barriers, childcare issues
- ▶ What are some barriers that are less talked about?
  - Privileged professional spaces
  - Privileged recreational spaces
  - Previous adverse experiences
  - Lack of trust



They were invited but they didn't show up





# Examples of Harmful Discrimination

- ▶ racial profiling and privileged entitlement to public spaces and recreational activities
- ▶ hiring and promotion bias
- ▶ inequitable service or access to high-quality food
- ▶ non-inclusive language and style of communication in meetings and workshops
- ▶ lack of access to high-quality educational resources
- ▶ intimidation and physical violence
- ▶ poor access to healthcare







# Communities in AOCs -

## Disproportionate exposure to harmful contaminants

### ➤ Other disproportionate exposures?

In just healthcare alone, discriminatory treatment has been well-documented from clinical care to major surgical or advanced procedural interventions.

It's not just mortality that is affected when healthcare is inequitable. The conditions that lead to early mortality live with the individual and with the community and add to the burdens they bear daily; the conditions that allow discriminatory treatment

# Negative Impacts - Some examples

## Historical Trauma is linked to:

- Depression, anxiety, PTSD, ADHD, fatigue, rage
- Heart disease, negative auto-immune response
- Substance abuse, suicide

## Potential Impact of Historical Trauma

- physiological, chemical and neurological processes
- capacity to trust, learn, plan, act, hope, remember, and thrive
- conditions to meet universal human needs:
  - Physical conditions to survive.
  - Safe, stable environment.
  - Opportunities to develop self-esteem and social support.





# Contextual Challenges of **Environmental Justice** in AOCs

- Unique worldviews
- Unique cultural and community experiences
- Complexity of
  - under-representation,
  - disproportionate burden, and
  - marginalization





# Integrating worldviews, methods and “sound science”

Whose traditions, knowledge systems, values and interests are considered?

## Considerations of Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Western Science

- How do we validate data methods, collection and analysis?
- What criteria is used to define ecosystem approaches?
- What assumptions influence knowledge transmission and translation?





# EPA's Environmental Justice: defined

~Interactional  
Justice

- The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies”.

EPA. “Environmental Justice”. <[epa.gov/environmentaljustice](https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice)>.

EPA, <<https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/learn-about-environmental-justice>>.






# Environmental Justice – defined


Equitable distribution of burden  
...and benefit?

~Distributional  
justice.

- No group of people...should bear a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal programs and policies”.





Procedural Justice  Meaningful involvement means that “ decision makers seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected”, and that all community residents be given “appropriate opportunity to participate in decisions...that will affect their environment and/or health”, so that their “contribution(s) can influence the regulatory agency’s decisions”.





# Bridging Initiative

## Cream City Conservation

A Milwaukee organization offering consultation workshops and trainings for local environmental industries interested in increasing internal equity and inclusion.

Cream City Consultation is also addressing the diversity gap in environmental initiatives through a training-to-employment program for young adults from under-represented populations.







# Bridging Initiatives

## N.E.A.R.

- Neurobiology
- Epigenetics,
- Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and
- Resiliency

## NEAR Science & Community Wisdom Project

- A collaborative project to build the capacity of their communities to address the challenging Indigenous health and social issues related to ACEs.





# Bridging Initiative

## Conservation Through Reconciliation Partnership

It endeavors to restore and protect the environment through the complementary models of Ethical Space and Two-Eyed Seeing.

Practicing an Ethical Space approach fosters deep respect for different knowledge systems and worldviews, and it rewards transparent, honest, and authentic dialogue.

Two-Eyed Seeing is the practice of learning and using multiple learning systems, reconciling indigenous local knowledge with Western science.



# Conclusion

- AOC projects link community health, well-being, and benefits directly to remediated and restored environmental conditions.
- Conditions that create and support marginalization can diminish benefit distribution, inhibit community engagement in decision-making (e.g. RAP processes), and enable harmful discrimination that negatively impacts health and well-being of marginalized populations.
- Identifying when, where, how and why harmful discrimination occurs and co-create strategies to break the cycle of marginalization is a critical step towards creating equitable and just environments.
- A genuine commitment to inclusive community collaborations requires new innovative ways of engaging individuals and communities across a broad spectrum of socio-economic and cultural differences.





Thank you.

