Stewarding stolen lands: Decolonizing conservation organizations

Elizabeth McAllister
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
McAllister, Elizabeth, "Stewarding stolen lands: Decolonizing conservation organizations" (2020).
Graduate Theses and Dissertations. 18356.
https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd/18356

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
Stewarding stolen lands: Decolonizing conservation organizations

by

Elizabeth McAllister

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Education

Program of Study Committee:
Katy Swalwell, Major Professor
Nicolas Tanchuk
Eunjin Bahng

The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2020

Copyright © Elizabeth McAllister, 2020. All rights reserved.
DEDICATION

As an immigrant culture, Americans must start to engage in their own process of becoming indigenous to this place. As we strive to heal not only the land but also our relationship to it, restoration can be the means by which we regain our roles as members of the community. In this way, we can start to develop the intimacy with our land that nurtures a deeper spiritual connection, transforming our forests from natural resources to our home.

- Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positionality</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context of the Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological History of Western Conservation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic National Service</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settler-Colonialism</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decolonial Theory</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEK as a Decolonial Framework</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Methodologies</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection Criteria</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to Nature</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Context</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEK</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization Norms</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iteration</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1. Towards Decolonization</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The LIST OF FIGURES provides an alphabetical list of all figures included in the document, along with their page numbers. In this case, Figure 1. Towards Decolonization is located on page 53.
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Participant Role and Tenure ................................................................. 33
Table 2. 2019 Case 1 and Case 2 Demographic Data ........................................ 36
Table 3. Case 1 and Case 2 Frequency of Terminology to Describe Beliefs and Principles ...... 37
Table 4. Case 1 and Case 2 Participant Interview Theme Count ................................ 38
Table 5. Terminology Codebook ........................................................................... 68
Table 6. Theme Codebook ................................................................................... 69
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without my family, friends and academic community.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my committee chair, Katy Swalwell and my committee members, Eunjin Bahng and Nicolas Tanchuk for their wisdom, patience, guidance and support throughout the course of this research. I am humbled to have been able to learn from them. Each exemplify the attributes of excellent educators and mentors.

To my research participants, I would like to express my deep appreciation for sharing with me their time and offering accounts of their experiences. Each participant taught me lessons beyond what is included in this paper. Their passion, authenticity and generosity reassured me of the good in humanity.

To my dear friends, both near and far, who have been a constant source of support, I am deeply grateful. It was a gift to learn with and from them, and their willingness to challenge me, helped to broaden my understanding of this vast and complex world.

Finally, I want to express my endless gratitude to my family for their love and encouragement. To my husband Zach, for his truly unwavering support in every facet of life, wherein academia is no exception. He kept me going, especially when the end did not feel within reach. To my parents, I owe them so much. Their unconditional love, their curiosity and their willingness to always accept the invitation to go on intellectual journey(s) with me are truly the greatest of gifts. To Ben, Erica and Stella, my brother, sister (in-law) and niece, for their thoughtfulness, wit and humor which brought warmth, comfort and levity when it was needed most. To my sister Annie, for the dedication she demonstrated in her academic pursuits which served as continued inspiration. Words do not do justice to the gratitude I feel for these people.
ABSTRACT

Anthropogenic climate change and environmental degradation are global threats that continue to have disproportionate impacts on Indigenous people. Over countless generations, Indigenous people have demonstrated the ability to sustain and care for the world’s human and non-human communities through Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). Despite this, in the United States, the field of conservation is dominated by Western science. This erasure of Indigenous knowledge is a result of settler-colonialism; it creates epistemic injustice and threatens collective continuance. To solve this problem, conservation organizations, especially those working with youth and young adults, must change their approach. This qualitative study compares two youth and young adult-serving, AmeriCorps-affiliated conservation organizations. Data were collected via staff participant interviews and review of organization artifacts. Framing this research in decolonial theory, and specifically in TEK, a matrix was developed which serves as an entry point for well-meaning, justice-orientated organizations who seek to decolonize their operations and practices. Findings suggest that organizations who decolonize have higher representation of Indigenous people in corps, staff and board positions.

Keywords: climate change, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), Indigenous, conservation, AmeriCorps, national service, decolonial theory, decolonize, sovereignty, Indigenous methodologies, matrix, rubric, youth
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In California, the 2020 fire season has been unprecedented, wreaking havoc for people living in suburban, exurban and rural parts of the state, and creating devastating impacts on the non-human ecosystem. While these fires are most certainly a consequence of climate change, they are also a byproduct of decades of Western, colonial mismanagement of the coniferous forests and chaparral ecosystems which exist across the state. These ecosystems, despite common misconception, need to burn in order to sustain life. California would not be facing this catastrophic reality if Indigenous people were part of the conversation, but historically, Indigenous people’s land sovereignty has been disregarded and conservation practices completely ignored. Ironically, as the state confronts an ominous future where the fire season is expected to be prolonged, decision-makers raised within the Western scientific paradigm, have finally deemed Indigenous people’s conservation practices fit for use. The California governor has signed an executive order which outlines the use of controlled burning, or planned fires, to prevent catastrophic fire seasons in years to come (Vox, 2020). While this might appear as a victory in centering Indigenous wisdom, this action appropriates ancestral ecological knowledge and practices while lacking necessary cultural context. This move seems to negate the ways White, non-native people have ignored land sovereignty of the Karuk, Tongva/Acjachemen and other tribes native to California.

This situation in California is not unique and examples akin to it are occurring throughout the country. Federal, state, local land management agencies and conservation organizations are marshalled within a completely different paradigm, one that is many ways antithetical to Indigenous ecological knowledge and worldviews. Among these entities exists, youth and young adult serving conservation organizations who want to help address these injustices, but they are
missing the mark. As sites of learning and teaching, I am interested in what these organizations teach through their work and how they can address the remnants of colonization that persist today. This project explores AmeriCorps, a program which offers youth and young adults place-based or experiential, service-learning opportunities, sitting outside of the traditional classroom. It also highlights how, both deliberately and unintentionally Western knowledge systems are valued, centered and validated in conservation spaces, while other epistemologies are not (Smith, 2012). Specifically, for Indigenous people in the United States, this injustice has pushed Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)\(^1\) to the margins, harming Indigenous people’s sovereignty.

**Problem Statement**

Indigenous peoples have long been key leaders in environmental justice movements\(^2\), and yet, in a recent study of 191 non-profit environmental organizations, Indigenous people represent less than 1% of staff, a staggeringly low percentage when compared to the 1528, or 88% of White, non-native people holding the same positions (Taylor, 2018)\(^3\). Despite being disproportionately impacted by environmental degradation, “natural resource” exploitation and climate change, Indigenous people are responsible for the least amount of greenhouse gas emissions, the cause of climate change (United Nations, n.d.). Additionally, Indigenous people experience damaging social impacts as a result of the environmental changes. When forced to leave native lands (and waters) as a result of anthropogenic climate change or colonial or imperial efforts, Indigenous people “face double discrimination as both migrants and as

---

\(^1\) TEK is the longstanding knowledge Indigenous people have of plants, animals, and natural patterns as well as techniques used to sustain human and non-human life. It will be further defined in Chapter 3.

\(^2\) The Environmental Protection Agency describes the environmental justice movement as “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, 2019).

\(^3\) These percentages represent staff who have been in their position for 3 years or less. Additionally, while not within the scope of this project, it should be noted that the remaining 11% represent Black and Brown staff members.
indigenous peoples” (United Nations, n.d.). Beyond this discrimination, Indigenous people’s self-determination and resilience are severely threatened.

The bitter irony is that Indigenous people experience the greatest privations of climate change, and also nurture the marginalized knowledge and effective practices which are critical in solving this existential crisis. This issue is both a matter of social justice and a scientific imperative. Including Indigenous people and centering Indigenous knowledge in the canon of climate and conservation work will restore agency where sovereignty has been long disregarded. By changing who and what knowledge is centered we will also rectify problems within conservation organizations⁴ and advance the fight against climate change and environmental degradation. This complex issue requires addressing for the health, safety and well-being of Indigenous people, and for the future of the whole of humanity and the planet.

**Positionality**

Over the past fifteen years I have had the opportunity to study and work within the fields of education and environmental conservation, both in the United States and internationally, and in rural, suburban and urban settings. In 2009, I earned my B.A. in Environmental Studies with a focus on Human Ecology from Pitzer College. This marked my first formal educational experiences within the environmental conservation discipline and where I was first exposed to Indigenous ethics and philosophy. As an undergraduate in that program I also gained experience teaching place-based and environmental education. In the two years following, I served as an AmeriCorps member. I also held staff positions with and now serve on the board of an AmeriCorps-affiliated conservation organization. Those early experiences piqued my interest in

---

⁴ Conservation organizations are key players, typically White, non-native led and establish the norms in the field. They also partner with local, state and federal agencies which dictate policy around use of land. Finally, AmeriCorps-affiliated conservation organizations also have an educational component which increases the impact these norms have on the youth and young adults who are in service programs.
the intersection of these topics and laid the initial groundwork for this research. My professional and academic experiences in the decade since have provided invaluable learning, allowing me to reflect on my privilege, and on my responsibility to address epistemic injustices that exist at the intersection of environmental conservation and education.

An inherently relevant part of this research lies in who I am, or in the identities I hold. I am a White, non-native, trespasser, settler-colonizer (Tuck & Yang, 2012). I am originally from Southern California, which is on Cahuilla, Lizh, Tongva and Yuhaviatam/Maarenga’yam land, and currently reside in Central Iowa upon Ioway, Meskwaki and Sac land. I attended public school in what Indigenous cosmologies refer to as Turtle Island, or as Westerners refer to it, North America, and specifically the United States. I have also spent the years since high school learning and working in a capitalist society and culture. I know this has shaped my unconscious mind and informed, despite a concerted effort, the biases I have about the world around me. My natural way of learning, thinking, understanding and relating to the world is a byproduct of both Western knowledge-production and the Western scientific paradigm. The entire process of this study forced me to interrogate and subsequently reconsider my understanding of what Westerners call “science” and “objective truths.” This breadth of understanding is largely due to the juxtaposition with Indigenous cosmologies, epistemologies, knowledge and worldviews. The process of unlearning habits of capitalism and un-colonizing my approach will undoubtedly take a lifetime. This research became far more than just a project. It started as a thought exercise which eventually changed my epistemological, philosophical, ethical and axiological views of knowledge transmission and honestly, my “being” in the world.

---

5 A settler-colonizer is a person who benefits from or participates in a culture of ongoing assertion of power resulting in displacement, genocide and/or repression of Indigenous people and culture.
6 I intentionally use un-colonizing since using decolonization in that context would be to use it as a metaphor.
As a White, non-native person conducting this research, I do not name my privileges to absolve myself of responsibility, as scholars like Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) warn. Instead, I share it to keep it on the forefront on my mind and to reinforce the idea that un-doing and repairing the harm created by my ancestors and me, requires constant attention. In all aspects of this research I sought to leave no trace; I considered whether I was observing and learning or extracting and appropriating. Despite this pursuit, I recognize, as Tuck (2009) notes, “it can be hard to know what is appropriate or appropriating.” I reflected on these inherent limitations and have a steadfast commitment to honoring Indigenous people’s knowledge sovereignty.

**Research Question**

At the onset, my original research question was, *how can youth and young adult-serving, AmeriCorps-affiliated, non-profit conservation organizations increase Native American and Indigenous representation?* Upon further examination, what became clear is that increasing the number of corps, staff and board members who identify as Native American or Indigenous in these organizations is a superficial and perceived “fix” to a systemic injustice and multifaceted problem. What I first saw as the intended outcome does not actually move the needle in or change the field of environmental conservation. I now argue that end could even produce further harm. Instead, I realized that meaningful diversity in these majority White, non-native organizations would arrive only when Indigenous knowledge, skills and worldviews were part of the canon and inclusion, equity and justice became central to organizational operations. I wanted to understand the impacts beyond just having an accepting and tolerant organizational culture but a culture that values diverse knowledge systems and centers Indigenous conservation methods and operational approaches. Today, due to a long history of colonization and imperialism, Western practices permeate the field.
This critical look is necessary in shifting the norm within the conservation field, a change which will benefit human beings and the “natural” environment alike. The iterative approach I took in my inquiry steered my research in a different direction toward understanding how predominantly White, non-native organizations can change to work toward greater justice for and with Indigenous people and the environment, and perhaps, along the way, increase the representation of Indigenous people in corps, staff and board roles. I posit that one way to accomplish this is to examine the ways in which organizational operations and practices can be informed by Indigenous knowledge, skills, and values or, henceforth what will be referred to as “decolonize.” Consequently, my revised research question is, how can majority White, non-native, youth and young adult-serving, AmeriCorps-affiliated, conservation organizations decolonize? While the findings of this study could be useful for many organizations, I specifically set out to address or “talk to” White, non-native environmental conservationists; a demographic which remains the majority in this field.

**Context of the Study**

For those educated within the Western scientific paradigm, the year 2020 marked a watershed moment when anthropogenic climate change and the resulting impacts became difficult to ignore. On June 22, 2020 the temperature in Verkhoyansk, Siberia, a town in the Arctic Circle surpassed 100 degrees Fahrenheit (WMO, 2020). According to CalFire, in the state of California from January-September wildfires swept across 3.1 million acres, 26 times the acreage that burned the previous year (2020). As the fire season progressed, the rest of the West Coast experienced a similar fate. During fire season in Oregon the Air Quality Index (AQI)

---

7 At the onset of this research I used the word *indigenize* but continuously questioned that felt appropriate. Consequently, as I read Indigenous scholars, specifically, Eve Tuck the more I realized that *decolonizing* was a better fit.
reached 505, a measurement off the AQI chart and considered hazardous air to breathe (State of Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, 2020). In September, during the peak of hurricane season, there were five tropical cyclones in the Atlantic Ocean, an event which has only occurred once before (National Hurricane Center, 2020). A more global snapshot was taken, the second Climate Clock was unveiled in New York City showing the time left before average temperature warming exceeds 1.5°C, or the pre-industrial level (Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change, 2020). On September 20, 2020 the time on the clock was less than a decade at seven years and 113 days.

The result of such changes not only creates a lack of biodiversity and overall habitat degradation, it disproportionately impacts communities that have already been harmed by other forms of marginalization. In particular, the United Nations (2020) reports that Indigenous peoples are likely the first to experience the effects of climate change. This impact is felt because of the nearly four hundred million Indigenous people globally who interact with 80 percent of the planet’s biodiversity and 22 percent of the world’s land surface (Whyte, 2018). Environmental degradation and “climate change exacerbate the difficulties already faced by Indigenous communities including political and economic marginalization, loss of land and resources, human rights violations, discrimination and unemployment” (United Nations, 2020). In the United States the forced removal of Indigenous people dates to Columbus’ arrival and continues today; this has not only posed significant threats to self-determination and resilience, it has fueled the erasure of Indigenous culture (Smith, 2012).

Like the environment, industrialization, development and settlement of previously conserved lands impact human health too. Previously, there were animals living in remote areas and only rarely seen by humans. Human encroachment and development of these lands creates
more frequent interactions with wild species, in turn creating a greater risk of the transmission of zoonotic diseases (Little Bear, 2020). For decades, researchers concerned by unsustainable development made unsettling predictions about the continued risk of zoonoses. Unfortunately, those predictions became a reality. At the time of this research, COVID-19, a zoonotic disease believed to have been transmitted via human contact with bats, swept the globe (Lu et al., 2020). By November 2020, in the United States alone, the novel coronavirus took the lives of a quarter of a million people and disproportionately impacted Indigenous communities. When compared to White, non-native people, Indigenous people experience hospitalization five times more often, and diagnosed cases result in death nearly one and a half times that of the White, non-native population (CDC, 2020).

The ongoing effects of anthropogenic climate change and environmental degradation have impacts beyond Indigenous people’s health. Changing landscapes jeopardize Indigenous people’s political sovereignty, the right to self-govern. In recent years though there have been successful efforts to restore these rights, in local and national politics. In a federal case, the Supreme Court ruled Eastern Oklahoma part of Muscogee (Creek) Nation (National Indian Law Library, 2020). There has also been an increased awareness of social changes that need to occur, like the renaming of sports teams. Despite these wins, the fight is far from over, and conservation organizations have a role to play. By decolonizing conservation organizations, Indigenous people’s knowledge can be honored, and sovereignty can be restored through decision-making concerning the care of land.

---

8 While Indigenous people are disproportionately impacted by climate change, so too are all communities of color.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ideological History of Western Conservation

The void of TEK within the environmental conservation field is a direct result of Manifest Destiny, the term coined by journalist John O’Sullivan in 1845 to describe the belief of White, non-native Americans of their God-given right to expansionism and imperialism. It was unambiguously racist, no Indigenous person or person of color had right to own land. As a result, leaders like President James K. Polk, promoted the act of White, non-native people usurping, colonizing and settling upon Indigenous people’s home (Scott, 2013, P.1). In the decade prior, transcendentalism, a transformative religious and philosophical movement took root among White, non-native “Americans.” The ethos of the nearly two and half decade movement which reconstituted a new national identity centered on equality, individualism, self-reliance, integrity and optimism with a profound focus on the importance of the “natural” world. Transcendentalists believed in nature’s piety, perceiving humans as separate from, not part of the “natural” world (Manzari, 2012).

Born out of that movement were some of the nation’s most prominent White, non-native nature writers and philosophers. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau articulated and endorsed the idea that nature was pure and that human interaction with the “natural” world would taint it. These thought leaders, among others, of the mid to late-1800s informed and inspired the early White, non-native American environmental conservationists including but certainly not limited to Gifford Pinchot, John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt.

Gifford Pinchot is credited with urging President Theodore Roosevelt to create the U.S. Forest Service in 1905, an agency where he sat at the helm for many years. Pinchot held a set of beliefs about nature which departed from his contemporaries—he thought people and “natural”
resources were interdependent. This informed the sense of responsibility he felt to maintain and care for the “natural” world (National Wildlife Federation, n.d.) Despite his more progressive philosophy which was perhaps more akin to Indigenous worldviews, Pinchot was responsible for articulating the boundaries of what would become land under the U.S. Forest Service management, ignoring land sovereignty of the Cherokee, Eastern Shoshone, Ute, Cheyenne and Sioux, among countless others.

John Muir, sometimes referred to as the “Wilderness Prophet” or “Father of National Parks” was a close friend of both President Theodore Roosevelt and Madison Grant, zoologist and author of the infamous The Passing of the Great Race (National Wildlife Federation, n.d.). John Muir was a conservationist who wrote about his admiration of lands and waters originally home to the Central Sierra Miwok, Ohlone and Tamyen, and what later became Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks. He also founded the Sierra Club in 1892 promoting the idea that the “natural” world was for the enjoyment of some, typically white, non-native people, and often prioritized the well-being of non-human life over people.

From 1901-1909 President Theodore Roosevelt was responsible for establishing five national parks, which could be described as a rare monument to American foresight and restraint in the face of what would be the continuous industrialization of native lands. The establishment of U.S. National Park Service, the formal agency created under President Woodrow Wilson’s administration, displaced of hundreds of tribes throughout the country. In Yellowstone National Park alone, twenty-six tribes, the Assiniboine and Sioux, Blackfeet, Cheyenne River Sioux, Coeur d’Alene, Comanche, Colville Reservation, Crow, Crow Creek Sioux, Eastern Shoshone, Flandreau Santee Sioux, Gros Ventre and Assiniboine, Kiowa, Lower Brule Sioux, Nez Perce, Northern Arapaho, Northern Cheyenne, Oglala Sioux, Rosebud Sioux, Salish and Kootenai,
Shoshone–Bannock, Sisseton Wahpeton, Spirit Lake, Standing Rock Sioux, Turtle Mountain Band of the Chippewa, Umatilla Reservation and Yankton Sioux, call the land and water within park’s boundaries an ancestral home (NPS, 2020). The development of the parks alone failed to recognize Indigenous people’s sovereignty though what compounded the problem was the accompanying federal oversight through this agency.

After the establishment of the U.S. National Park service, more federal and state agencies cropped up including the Bureau of Land Management in 1946. Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, state level agencies like the Department of Natural Resources or Department of Forestry and Fire Protection were established in each of the fifty states. These agencies coupled with policy decisions like the Endangered Species Act, prescribed how land, water and other “natural” resources were to be controlled, managed and used, a philosophical and ethical approach antithetical to Indigenous people and worldview (U.S. Fish and Wildlife, 2020).

These institutions, agencies, organizations and their respective leaders, among others, created an environmental conservation culture that, at best concealed its White supremacist and racist ideologies which were the underpinning to their colonialist methods. At worst, it was teeming with White, non-native, mostly male, elite settlers who advocated for the colonization of Indigenous lands, promoted scientific racism and were actively involved in the eugenics movement (National Wildlife Federation, n.d.).

The field of environmental conservation today is not a perfect reflection of its beginnings—progress has been made and there is certainly more diversity now than existed in its early years. Perhaps an example of such progress is the Great American Outdoors Act, recent conservation legislation which will provide up to $1.9 billion per year for up to five years to support American Indian Schools and address the deferred maintenance of national forest,
national parks, wildlife refuges in partnership with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This legislation seems innocuous and even beneficial; however, the large sum of money will be made possible via energy development. This law is shortsighted, incomplete and does nothing to discontinue the harm created in Indigenous communities as a result of large-scale energy development (Congress.gov, 2020).

The culture of contemporary environmental conservation is a byproduct of modern Western science, and Great American Outdoors Act is no different. Modern Western science promotes a mindset, and values and knowledge systems which conflict with TEK. Modern Western conservation ecology is too cartesian and materialist leaving no room for “unproven” truths or the inherent sanctity of the natural world to be valued. Western science is rooted in quantitative data collection and promotes reductionist methods to understand the “natural” world—boiling down phenomena to the simplest explanation. Often, Western scientists view themselves as ethically separate from nature, or the “object” of study (Mazzocchi, 2006).

**Domestic National Service**

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was the first national service program in the United States, created in 1933 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as part of the New Deal to stimulate the economy after the Great Depression. CCC hired, albeit at a very low wage, young, mostly White, non-native men ages 18-25 to address two concerns at the time, staggering unemployment and lack of national infrastructure. The participants in CCC constructed roads, trails, shelters, picnic areas, buildings, and dams while also bringing plumbing to remote areas. While the work was diverse, CCC is often most known for the role it played in curating an inviting experience for visitors to the National Parks (NPS, 2015).

While CCC was taking place so too was the Civilian Conservation Corps Indian Division (CCC-ID) or what was known for a brief time as the Indian Emergency Conservation Work
(IECW) program. John Collier, a White, non-native American sociologist and self-proclaimed advocate of Indigenous people, was instrumental to the launch of this program, pressuring president Franklin D. Roosevelt to provide funding. At the time of the program’s inception Collier was the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) commissioner and pushed for the president to sign the Wheeler-Howard Act, reversing the harmful, assimilationist legislation, the Dawes Act of 1887. It could be argued that the creation of this employment program coupled with the legislation were a “win” for Indigenous people. Nearly 80,000 men were employed in the program, with oversight from tribal councils and the support of the BIA. The CCC-ID, a part of what Collier referred to as the Indian New Deal, was different from CCC in several important ways. Instead of CCC’s more militaristic operational approach, CCC-ID had no age requirements, arranged for participants to work specifically on tribal land, provided three culturally responsive domicile options to accommodate the needs of participants and paid participants twenty percent higher than counterparts in CCC. The act promoted Indigenous self-determination by allowing tribes to establish governments and manage resources. By many standards CCC-ID was a positive step forward for Indigenous people, after decades of oppression. Unfortunately, CCC-ID just like CCC was terminated in 1942 at the onset of WWII (Gower, 1972).

The modern-day equivalent to CCC and CCC-ID is the Corps Network, or the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps. These organizations fall under a larger, federally funded national service umbrella called AmeriCorps. For the purpose of this research, I will refer to all Corps Network organizations as AmeriCorps-affiliated, since one of the important attributes and commonalities of these programs is the funding they receive from the state and
federal governments. The money defines the scope of work, informs policies and regulates elements that influence culture and operations of these organizations.

Participants or corps members in AmeriCorps, tutor and mentor in academic settings, address community needs in low income areas, aid in natural disasters, engage in “natural resource” management and sustain national parks within the United States. AmeriCorps-affiliated organizations depart from their origins. Today they have an ethos of service-learning, experiential education, civic engagement and leadership with a stated commitment to improving lives of corps members and the communities in which corps members work.

Youth and young adults ages 14-24 years old are enrolled for different lengths of time, ranging from one month to a year. During the term of service, corps members receive a stipend, a modest sum of money which equates to less than their respective state’s poverty line. Although arguably fraught with error, the guiding philosophy for the low stipend is to provide corps members an experience enabling them to understand the lives of the people and communities in which they serve.\(^9\)

Like the environmental conservation movement, the national service movement is complex. Depending on program, proponents argue that the work of AmeriCorps-affiliated organizations promote a sort of critical civic praxis, what Ginwright and Cammarota (2007) describe as:

>a process that develops critical consciousness and builds the capacity for young people to respond and change oppressive conditions in their environment. In other words, critical

---

\(^9\)This information about AmeriCorps and national service comes from my personal experience as an AmeriCorps member, program manager, program director, alumni advisory board and board member at AmeriCorps-affiliated organizations. The details were fact checked on the CNCS, now called AmeriCorps, website. [https://www.nationalservice.gov/about/who-we-are/national-service-timeline](https://www.nationalservice.gov/about/who-we-are/national-service-timeline)
civic praxis is the organizational processes that promote civic engagement among youth and elevate their critical consciousness and capacities for social justice activism. (p. 699)

Despite this, AmeriCorps-affiliated programs are not immune to controversy and critique. The programs have seemingly harmless pursuits and publicly claim to address societal injustices, yet some researchers argue they participate “in reproductive praxis, ultimately reproducing already existing inequalities within U.S. society” (Carpenter, 2012, p. 58). I would argue that both interpretations of AmeriCorps programs are true—most people are drawn to the work with the goal of making positive change but do not think about the important historical context which impacts the work being done.

In recent years it appears that an awakening has started to occur. In 2019 the Corps Network for 21st Century Conservation Service Corps Act was signed into law. This bipartisan legislation recognizes the need for a different approach to conservation, recreation and forestry by suggesting more flexible guidelines. It also aims to increase the enrollment of Indigenous youth by establishing an Indian Youth Service Corps. While this relatively new law seems promising for Indigenous youth and young adults, especially since it calls for the creation of new Indigenous youth corps, existing conservation corps still struggle to create meaningful opportunities for Indigenous youth and young adults\(^\text{10}\).

Over the course of half a century, White, settler-colonizers have oppressed Indigenous people and created an erasure of collective knowledge. Indigenous people have been disproportionately impacted by policy in the United States. Such impact, caused by White, non-native, settler colonizers, has been researched. So too has the effectiveness of TEK which has led to increased popularity over the past two decades. Less explored is the convergence of settler

\(^{10}\) This was a sentiment shared by one of the participants in the study.
colonialism, environmental conservation and (domestic) national service. Specifically, there exists a gap in research examining the use of TEK in decolonizing AmeriCorps-affiliated, youth and young adult-serving conservation organizations.

I sought to address this problem by conducting a cross-case study of two AmeriCorps-affiliated conservation organizations, examining organizational artifacts and conducting staff interviews. The third chapter explores the decolonial theoretical framework for this research, where I further define colonialism, settler colonialism, decolonization and TEK. The following chapter details the methodological approach I took to examine this complex problem. The fifth chapter describes the findings of the project, whereas the penultimate chapter discusses those findings and is presented, in part, in the form of a matrix, a tool for AmeriCorps-affiliated conservation organizations (and Indigenous stakeholders) who aim to change or decolonize practices, operations and culture. The seventh and final chapter discusses the limitations of my research and topics which call for further study.
CHAPTER 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Settler-Colonialism

This project addresses the White, non-native, trespassing, settler-colonialism that exists in youth and young adult-serving AmeriCorps-affiliated conservation organizations. Prior to seeking a solution, I further define one primary part of the problem, settler-colonialism. The broader term, colonialism, is a global political and economic phenomenon of declaring control over another country, territory or entity. It is illustrated further by the evocative words of Frantz Fanon in his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverse logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts it, disfigures and destroys it. (1963, p. 210-11)

*Settler-colonialism* is a more recent term whose definition builds upon colonialism. It is defined as the ongoing assertion of power resulting in displacement, genocide and/or repression of Indigenous people and culture. It replaces Indigenous communities with settlers and creates new norms, importantly including the exploitation of the natural world (Wolfe, 2006). Settler-colonialism is a continued act which “commits environmental injustice through the violent disruption of human relationships to the environment” (Whyte, 2018, p. 1). It also interrupts *collective continuance*, a term coined by Whyte (2018) to describe Indigenous peoples’ self-determination and social resilience.

Settler-colonialism not only creates environmental injustice but other social concerns as well. For example, Tuck and Yang describe the settler colonialism in the context of educational spaces on both the micro and macro levels:
the invisibilized dynamics of settler colonialism mark the organization, governance, curricula, and assessment of compulsory learning, the other concerned with how settler perspectives and worldviews get to count as knowledge and research and how these perspectives – repackaged as data and findings – are activated in order to rationalize and maintain unfair social structures. (2012, p.2)

While Tuck and Yang’s description is focused on formal educational environments, the description holds true for the context of this research. Described above as the “organization, governance, curricula and assessment” is equivalent to the quantitative outcomes closely monitored by AmeriCorps grants and partnering government agencies, where “knowledge and research” are analogous to the ways in which TEK is not valued as “real science” in conservation organizations. In both formal and informal learning environments, it is evident that settler-colonialism is not just a single event that occurred centuries ago, but rather an ongoing structure—one that governs the culture and operations of many spaces, including youth and young adult-serving AmeriCorps-affiliated conservation organizations (Wolfe, 1999).

The manifestation of the colonial history in both AmeriCorps-affiliated and conservation spaces produces compounding negative impacts for the Indigenous youth and young adult participants. It reproduces epistemic injustice, both in the form of what Fricker (2007) refers to as testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice, where the former is “caused by prejudice in the economy of credibility” and the latter is “caused by structural prejudice in the economy of collective hermeneutical resources” (p. 1). In this research setting testimonial injustice occurs when the TEK or cultural knowledge of the youth and young adults who participate in these

---

11 AmeriCorps funding requires that organizations follow strict guidelines, particularly regarding what is and what is not consider work, and therefore what counts as service hours. Funding is tied Euro Western-centric goals of community, education and the environment.
programs, is not considered valid, because they are Indigenous and therefore evinces an identity-based prejudice. Hermeneutical injustice is created when Indigenous youth and young adults are required to adopt AmeriCorps organizational policies that are formed against the backdrop of an institutional history that excluded Indigenous participation due to racist prejudice. The result of this racist history is policies that do not align with Indigenous culture and institutions and institutional actors that lack the requisite concepts to understand Indigenous perspectives on matters of importance. For example, consider the disregard of an important part of Indigenous culture, like the use of tobacco for ceremonial burning. AmeriCorps states tobacco and tobacco products are not permitted on project sites. This policy is not rooted in moral correctness, but an arbitrary determination of “appropriate” behavior that nowhere reflects an understanding of the Indigenous cosmologies within which tobacco burning is an integral part. These policies and organizational norms, which are ill-informed on core concepts of Indigenous traditions disallow Indigenous youth and young adults the opportunity to see their culture in these organizations, to make meaning of their experience, and to communicate with institutional authorities on matters of experience\textsuperscript{12}.

Decolonial Theory

Recognizing the omnipresence of colonization, the only way to dismantle these pervasive patterns is through a decolonial framework. Decolonial theory is an alternative to Western hegemonic ways of thinking and centers non-Eurocentric ideas that historically sit in the margins of thought (Escobar, 2007). This theory, as defined by scholars like Walter Mignolo, Anibal Quilano and Ernesto Dussel, describe a reality where there is not just one but a multiplicity of

\textsuperscript{12} This framing of epistemic injustice as a consideration in Indigenizing colonized institutions is credited to and relies on the work of Tanchuk, Kruse and McDonough (2018).
knowledge systems (Escobar, 2007). Decolonial theory offers an entirely different way of conceptualizing knowledge production.

Recently, the word *decolonization* has been used in education and in other social “science” disciplines. Its use is commonplace and often used more as a metaphor for other forms of social justice or critical work rather than in seeking justice for Indigenous people. Some scholars, like Tuck and Yang argue the weight of the word has been lost and in fact, by misusing the word, White, non-native, trespasser, settler-colonizers can evade the difficult work of decolonizing (Tuck & Yang, 2012). They make a case for a refined definition of decolonization wherein, simply put it, “brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life” (2012, p. 1). I agree, in using decolonization metaphorically and as a synonym for other forms of justice work, it can detract from the hard work that needs to be done by White, non-native, settler-colonizers. I also hold the belief that in order to realize a long-term goal of decolonization, incremental changes are required to loosen the grip of colonization both in the mind and in practice. While decolonization has a single and significant end, *to restore life and life to Indigenous people*, a single means by which to arrive at this end, does not exist. Decolonization, just like colonization, is not a single act but rather a series of actions which together can restore agency and decision-making about life and land to Indigenous people.

**TEK as a Decolonial Framework**

I argue one way to decolonize youth and young adult-serving AmeriCorps-affiliated conservation organizations is through Traditional Ecological Knowledge. I will offer a “practical” explanation of TEK and how it differs from Western conservation, after which I will describe how TEK is a manifestation of a decolonial framework.

It is important to recognize that in both the social and natural sciences there are many descriptions of TEK and scholars agree that defining it can be a problematic pursuit because,
“those who are possessors of this knowledge often cannot categorize it in Eurocentric thought, partly because the process of categorizations are not part of Indigenous thought” (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 35). What these authors allude to is that while categories exist in both Indigenous and Eurocentric thought, the categories themselves and the pathways to arrive at them are different. Despite challenges in defining the concept, Indigenous scholars often describe TEK as the longstanding knowledge Indigenous people have of plants, animals, and natural patterns as well as techniques used to sustain human and non-human life (Whyte, 2016). This knowledge and the techniques are a result of direct and longstanding contact with the natural world and are rooted in Indigenous worldview (Berkes, 1993). TEK is often described as parallel to the Western discipline of ecology since they both rely on the systematic observations which provide empirical “data” about phenomena and relationships within ecosystems (Kimmerer, 2002).

Despite that similarity, TEK and Western science disciplines are quite dissimilar. There are four significant differences. First, TEK imparts value on subjective experience as a means of obtaining knowledge, whereas Western science emphasizes objectivity as the principal epistemic tool in ecology. Second, in TEK the empirical and the sacred are not separated and instead carefully intertwined (Nakashima & Roué, 2002). In Western science only the observable, and not the sacred, is deemed as knowledge versus a subjective belief. Third, TEK is intuitive and supports a more holistic view of ecosystems and all the human and non-human things of which they are comprised (Mazzocchi, 2006). The Western science paradigm instead is comprised of distinct disciplines. Fourth, TEK does not observe reality in linear way, where there is a single cause for an effect, like Western science. Instead, in TEK the world is understood as cyclical and
bears in mind the interconnectedness of all human and non-human life (Freeman, 1992; Whyte, video).

Historically, throughout the world, there are myriad instances to highlight the efficacy of TEK in “attentive caring for the intertwined needs of human and non-human communities” while also adapting to ecosystem deviations and preventing climate change (Whyte & Cuomo, 2017, p.5). For example, TEK has been used to adapt to extreme weather by having multi-species diversity which creates ecosystem resiliency (UNESCO, 2012). When TEK guides practices in conservation organizations, the outcomes are positive because of the following four reasons:

First, people have the capacity to elaborate knowledge about ecosystems by testing it iteratively, as well as to learn from crises and management mistakes. Second, they are able to transmit and guard it locally, with the aim of adjusting management practices to new social-ecological states arising after perturbations. Third, an appropriate interpretation of ecosystem change is related to the traditional ceremonies and rituals that contribute to the cultural internalization of conservation rules. And fourth, such rules are the basis of flexible decision making. (Ruiz-Mallé & Corbera, 2013, p. 13)

These characteristics are necessary considerations for conservation organizations and for communities to adapt to a changing climate. These traits are unique to TEK though; Western conservation agencies are generally ill-equipped to address climate and ecosystem change in this way due to the limitations of Western culture and patterns of knowledge transmission (Whyte, 2016).

TEK is a practical solution, but I suggest it can also be applied as a framework; one that is a manifestation of decolonial theory. My rationale for this is twofold. Indigenous scholars help
to paint a fuller picture of TEK, not merely as a set of effective conservation practices but part of a decolonial framework. For example, Whyte (2013) posits:

TEK should be understood as a collaborative concept. It serves to invite diverse populations to continually learn from one another about how each approaches the very question of “knowledge” in the first place, and how these different approaches can work together to better steward and manage the environment and natural resources. Therefore, any understanding of the meaning of TEK is acceptable only so long as it plays the role of bringing different people working for different institutions closer to a degree of mutual respect for one another’s sources of knowledge. (p. 2)

This philosophical positioning of TEK as collaborative concept represents a potential alternate future; one where epistemic justice is restored to Indigenous peoples. When Western science no longer dominates the conservation canon, space is created to instead center Indigenous knowledge. This suggested change promotes a necessary shift towards reestablishing Indigenous sovereignty by returning decision-making regarding life and land to Indigenous people. Meaning, by doing this, Indigenous people’s voice will determine human relationship with and to land, and therefore better reflect Indigenous culture and values.

Second, I suggest TEK as a framework because it is more than a set of methods or practices by which to do conservation or climate adaptation work, it is a worldview from which such approaches stem. Robin Wall Kimmerer (2002; 2000), a scholar, botanist and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, describes TEK as the knowledge Indigenous people acquire through a longstanding “intimacy and attentiveness to a homeland” which “arise[s] wherever people are materially and spiritually integrated with their landscape” (p. 9). As a result, TEK
theorizes that humans and nature are engaged in a symbiotic relationship, and therefore nature is not commodified (Mazzocchi, 2006).

Integral to TEK are feelings of animacy, respect and kinship among human and non-human parts of an ecosystem. Kimmerer helps to paint a picture of these ideas using a linguistic example. She refers to the pronoun *it* and describes, “we never refer to a member of our family, or indeed to any person, as *it*…we use the same words to address the living world as we use for our family. Because they are our family” (2013, p.55). Finally, central to this worldview is *care ethics*, a philosophical ideal which Whyte and Cuomo (2017) describe as the collection of practices, knowledge and virtues that rule moral life and community which lead to the successful care(taking) of self and others.

Despite Indigenous people’s extensive experience sustaining life, caring for the non-human environment and adapting to a changing climate, TEK sits in the margins of the conservation field. Additionally, Indigenous people will continue to be disproportionately impacted by environmental degradation. To change this, I suggest a decolonial approach wherein predominantly White, non-native conservation organizations center Traditional Ecological Knowledge; the opportunity to create justice for Indigenous people and the environment.
CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY

Indigenous Methodologies

The approach I took reflected Indigenous methodologies, inasmuch is possible for a White, non-native researcher. This methodological approach was applied throughout the process, from learning about TEK, Indigenous worldviews, knowledge and culture through the work of Indigenous researchers and scholars, juxtaposing interviews with non-Indigenous participants who aspired to decolonize their organizations. Importantly, as articulated by Michael Anthony Hart and Shawn Wilson (2001), this approach incorporates not only methodology but ontology, epistemology and axiology. As a result, Indigenous methodologies are diverse and vast in their scope.

Given the expansiveness of this methodological approach, I will detail five tenets or principles that I considered throughout the research process. First, it is important for researchers to recognize and discuss their own subjectivity (Hart, 2010). While I aim to be objective, there might be unintended ways in which I am not, due to both human nature and my positionality. Regarding the latter, my identity as a White, non-native researcher necessitated an even more thoughtful approach. My mind is trained within the Western scientific paradigm, and with that comes a distinct set of ontological, axiological and cosmological beliefs, therefore I experience inherent limitations in conceptualizing TEK. I may not be able to fully understand it until my own thinking has been un-colonized. Despite this unreconcilable truth, using decolonial theory and TEK as frameworks fostered metacognitive thinking throughout the process which I feel prepared me to experience knowledge in a new way. I hope this approach invites others, specifically, White, non-native people to understand these concepts and research.
Second, Indigenous methodology encourages researchers to ensure safety and respect of those participating and to avoid intrusive methods. While this typically refers to participants (within) a study, I borrowed this approach to deepening my understanding of TEK and Indigenous worldviews and cultures. I considered the potential repercussions of my research and reported findings in such a way which I hope results in meaningful and respectful collaboration, a primary goal of TEK as outlined by Whyte (2017). I applied this principle while interviewing participants, and while all participants identified as White, non-native, I felt this was an important moral consideration, regardless of identity. Specifically, to ensure safety and respect of all participants, I considered risks associated with participation and choose not to include organization names and personal identifiers of staff members who were interviewed.

Third, Hart (2010) suggests an approach that fosters “deep listening and hearing with more than the ears, where one would carefully listen and pay attention to how his/her heart and sense of being is emotionally and spiritually moved” (p.10). While I do not claim, nor can never expect to fully understand, particularly on a spiritual level, Indigenous worldviews and TEK, I accepted this approach as a reflective guidepost. As a researcher, I learned from my discomfort and let it guide me to deeper learning. I also experienced cognitive dissonance, resulting from my training within the Western scientific paradigm and then immersing myself in Indigenous and TEK literature.

Related in some ways, the fourth principle encourages a balance of the cognitive and emotional, where the connection of the mind and heart are recognized (Hart, 2010). I understand this tenet to be a reminder of the importance of authenticity during the research process. One important way of carrying this element throughout is by using the first person. This posed

---

13 While this is an excerpt from another author, I want to acknowledge “their” as a personal pronoun option.
challenges for me because of my Western science training; I am not accustomed to bringing my “voice” into academia but recognize the role it plays in maintaining a balance of heart and mind, or emotional and cognitive.

Finally, the fifth idea is “that knowledge gained will be utilized practically” (Hart, 2010, p. 9). This concept encouraged me to strive to create a practical tool for others. The matrix I developed is intended for AmeriCorps-affiliated, youth and young-adult serving, conservation organizations who seek to decolonize for the benefit of people and the non-human world. While important to utilize knowledge gained, I also felt this required intentionality in order to avoid appropriating Indigenous knowledge and culture. One way I aimed to address this was by intentionally not detailing Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) conservation practices. I did this to encourage authentic cooperation of White, non-native people who are leading and working in conservation organizations. If I included specific practices, a reader might implement the TEK practice, rather than undertaking the requisite work to create meaningful change in their organization and in the field of conservation. Additionally, by not including specifics I also hoped to avoid creating a monolithic Indigenous or pan-Indian identity. While worldviews and values may be similar, tribes, nations and Indigenous communities are unique, therefore a specific practice or approach might be deemed successful in one context, but not generalizable.

Methods

Within the Western research paradigm, this study follows a cross-case qualitative design. I used this approach to examine two youth and young adult serving, AmeriCorps affiliated conservation organizations and to understand how organizations of this kind can decolonize, or how their operations and practices can be informed by Indigenous knowledge, skills, and values. Each case or unit is a conservation organization. I collected data for this study in the summer and fall of 2020 by gathering organizational artifacts, demographic data and conducting participant
interviews. The artifacts were a combination of information and documents that govern the operations and culture of the organizations. The participant interviews were conducted to understand broader organization history, context and organizational use of artifacts.

**Selection Criteria**

The selection criteria for the study included the following: multi-state conservation organizations established prior to 2010 with headquarters and regional offices within the United States, that (1) receive grant money from AmeriCorps, (2) partner with multiple agencies (i.e. local, state, federal, tribal) (3) have youth and young adult programs for ages 14-25, (4) have a stated commitment to justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI), and (5) have 30-40 staff members. Additionally, the two organizations needed to be different in one important way. One of the two organizations needed to have low, if any, participation of Indigenous youth and young adults in the program. This organization is referred to as Case 1 (C1). The other organization needed to have either an established tribal crew\(^{14}\) or be perceived by peer organizations as worthy of inclusion based on the study description. This organization is called Case 2 (C2).

Case 1 organization was founded in the 1990s initially serving one state but has since broadened its geographic and community impact, now with offices in two bordering states and serving upwards of thirteen additional states each year. The organization has a staff of 34 with 13 board of directors, wherein 100% of staff and board are non-native\(^{15}\). In the decades since its founding, the organization has developed differentiated programs; currently they operate youth, individual placement, career pathway and regionally based field crew programs. The youth programs offer a residential opportunity for those ages 14-17 work and learn outdoors during the

\(^{14}\) Tribal crews are what conservation organizations often call crews specifically intended for Indigenous peoples.

\(^{15}\) One board member during the 2019 year *may* identify as Indigenous but if so not Indigenous within the context of the United States.
summer months. The individual placement programs place corps members at sites with partnering agencies to gain professional experience in conservation. The career pathway program supports young adults interested in the fields of environment and natural resources and specifically women, individuals with differing abilities, and those who are racial and ethnic minorities. The regionally based field crew programs are for 18-25 year old corps members who serve on crews, or small teams, to carry out a variety of conservation projects. During hitches\(^{16}\) or projects, corps members camp residing outdoors. The organization previously had an identity crew, one specifically for Indigenous young adults, however the program has since ended. This identity crew was made possible through multiyear grant money, but the funding expired.

Case 2 was established in 1990 and first received AmeriCorps funding in 1993; an opportunity which doubled its budget and allowed for the establishment of regional offices. In the past decade the organization has grown significantly, currently with 30 staff members and 16 board of directors, wherein 100% and 87.5% are non-native, respectively. With a multimillion-dollar operating budget it offers leadership development, young adult, youth, Indigenous and individual placement programs. The leadership development program trains the young adults who, later in the year, will be serving in and leading the other four programs. Young adult programs are for 18-25 year old corps members who serve on crews, or small teams, to carry out a variety of conservation projects. During hitches or projects, corps members camp and reside outdoors. The youth programs offer young people, ages 14-17, the opportunity to live, work and learn outdoors during the summer months. Within the Indigenous programs, there are two specialized programs for Native youth and young adults which allow corps members to gain leadership experience by doing diverse conservation work on ancestral lands. The individual

\(^{16}\) A hitch is a multi-day project, where corps members camp at project site.
placement programs are nearly year-long positions wherein corps members serve at partnering agencies to gain professional experience in conservation. Additionally, they have a program that is based in a large school district which engages Indigenous middle and high school students in service-learning opportunities via summer enrichment and after-school programming.

Case 1 and 2 organizations both describe their programs as providing youth and young adults civic engagement, leadership development and environmental job-skills training by engaging them in hands-on conservation service. The youth and young adults who are recruited and participate in these programs come from diverse backgrounds, with myriad reasons for participating. The youth programs typically recruit from adjacent communities and reflect the race, ethnic and socio-economic demographics of those localities. The young adult programs are diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, education and socio-economic status; the participants come to the organizations from across the country but must hold one of the following citizenship or legal residency statuses: US citizen, US National, Lawful Permanent Resident, and persons legally residing within a state. The youth and young adults enroll for some of the following reasons: to participate in service, build their résumé, work on diverse teams, conserve the natural world, receive the Segal Education Award and defer student loans.

The young adult programs, as determined by AmeriCorps, require that corps members spend 20% of their time on training and educational activities and 80% on service. Together, the training and educational activities and service fulfill the organizations’ goals relating both to the natural environment and the youth and young adult participants. The programs’ training and

---

17 While not the scope of this project, it should be noted that the citizenship or legal residency status requirement serves as a barrier to participation for young adults who do not have or are seeking legal documents.
18 During training and educational activities, service hours and when wearing the AmeriCorps logo, members are prohibited from activities, including but not limited to influencing legislation, organizing protests, and engaging in political activities.
educational activities are comprised of topics including but not limited to conservation techniques, tool safety, history of national service and land, importance of civic engagement, team building exercises, self-reflection activities and professional development workshops. While not the purpose of this research, it should be noted that while these activities are well-intentioned, they are rooted in Western culture and ideals, therefore can perpetuate harmful experiences for the youth and young adult participants.

**Recruitment**

Initially I sent a recruitment email to senior leadership or key decision-makers at two youth-serving, nonprofit, AmeriCorps-affiliated organizations in the United States. The organizations were not randomly selected since they were initially chosen based on preexisting professional relationships, a factor which I believe leads to greater trust and in turn, candor. In spring 2020 I contacted two organizations to begin participation in the study in the summer of 2020; both agreed. Between the invitation to participate and the start of the study, the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. This created impact significant enough to one of the organizations that participation was no longer possible. Consequently, I applied the approach of progressive network referrals for two additional organizations, wherein one responded, and one did not respond. The primary contacts were the senior leaders of the two participating organizations. They granted permission for their respective organization’s participation in the study and agreed to serve as liaison to staff whom I interviewed.

In both cases, the primary contact sent an informational email about the study to staff members within the organization. Inclusion criteria for the study was staff members 18 years old or older and currently employed by the organization. Another selection criterion was added by primary contacts; each limited the potential participants by selecting staff members who they perceived as being in an appropriate or relevant role and employed by the organization no less
than a year and long enough to be able to sufficiently answer interview questions\(^\text{19}\). I requested from the primary contacts to select as many staff members as were eligible for participation.

In order to maintain participant confidentiality\(^\text{20}\) within the organization I encouraged the primary contact at each organization to (1) create a list of eligible staff members, (2) send an email to eligible staff members wherein all were blind copied indicating that I would be reaching out individually, (3) and state that not all potential participants would be interviewed for the study. Case 1 followed this process, whereas in the Case 2 did not follow this process. Case 2 primary contact selected staff, sent informational email to potential participants and copied me on an email. For Case 1, after the list of potential participants was separated into field and office-based staff, I used simple random sampling to identify interview participants. In both cases, once the email was sent by the primary contact, I sent an Informed Consent document to the identified interview participants. Given constraints presented by COVID-19, participants signed the document and confirmed they were over the age of 18 years old by replying to the email with a typed sentence with their name typed which I supplied. After I received participant consent, I emailed questions to the participants and they were given two options to complete the interview questions: (1) recorded Zoom meeting, or (2) written response. If participants chose to be interviewed via recorded Zoom, the questions were sent at least 48 hours in advance. In Case 1, nine staff members agreed to participate, whereas three agreed to participate in the Case 2. Although a third as many participants were interviewed in Case 2 organization as were in Case 1, the tenure of participants in staff positions in the Case 2 was approximately five years longer

\(^{19}\) Questions can be found in the Appendix.

\(^{20}\) Maintaining participant confidentiality was an imperative since staff members were asked information that could be perceived as jeopardizing their reputation.
than that of Case 1; Case 2 cumulative tenure was 13.3 and 8.2 years in Case 1. A snapshot of both organization’s staff research participation is provided below.

Table 1. Participant Role and Tenure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case 1</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>Entry</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carly</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>Entry</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenn</td>
<td>Entry</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>Entry</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case 2</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinn</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above shows participants’ pseudonym, role, tenure and organization affiliation. The three types of staff positions above are entry-level, mid-level and senior level. Entry-level is defined as not having management responsibility, mid-level is defined as managing 1-2 people and oversight of a program, and senior level has management responsibility of three or more people and oversees a department within the organization or the organization itself. Tenure is presented in years with AmeriCorps service with the organization is not included in the total. All participants in both cases are White and non-native.

Collection

I collected three types of data. First, I conducted participant interviews in single sittings wherein all interviews lasted between 40-90 minutes. I asked all Case 1 and Case 2 interview participants the same questions, however I posed one additional question to Case 2 participants
given organization reputation; the organization was deemed worthy of inclusion in this study by peer organization. I followed the Interview Protocols using questions for the respective cases to ensure reliability of responses. Nine staff members from Case 1 were interviewed, wherein two opted to write responses and seven participated in a recorded Zoom interview. Three staff members from the Case 2 were interviewed and all three participated in a recorded Zoom interview. These interviews served to provide organization history and culture, as well as context for artifacts.

Second, I collected organizational artifacts which included, (1) mission statement, (2) organizational chart, (3) board planning documents (i.e. strategic plan), (4) belief statements or values, and (5) program documents. The artifacts were selected because these govern the operations which inform the organizational culture. Additionally, these are a combination of strategic and tactical documents which are often created by staff in entry-level to senior-level positions. The mission statement, organization structure and belief statements and values were publicly available on each organizations’ websites. When artifacts were not available on the website the primary contact or interview participants supplied me with the information via email.

Third, I collected quantitative data points for each organization. I requested demographic information, specifically the number of people who identified as native versus non-native in corps, staff and board positions in each organization. I collected data from 2019, since 2020 was severely impacted by COVID-19 and therefore the data would not have been an accurate representation of each organization.

Together, the artifacts, participant interviews and demographic information offered a holistic picture of each organization’s operational approach and culture. Solely focusing on artifacts would not allow me, as a researcher, to understand the ways in which those accurately
or inaccurately represent the organization. Similarly, exclusively conducting participant interviews would have made it difficult to determine to participant perception versus organization directives. Finally, the demographic information from each organization helped to determine correlations between organizational practices and the representation, or lack thereof, of Indigenous people within each organization.

**Analysis**

I used a non-experimental, exploratory approach since I sought to find correlations between the qualitative and quantitative data. The interviews were transcribed and resulted in 62 pages of single-spaced transcribed text to be used for analysis. For both the participant interviews and artifacts, I applied quantitative and qualitative content analysis to identify trends within and across each case. I produced a list of key words and themes. From those lists and corresponding data points, I pulled out detailed approaches and specific practices. Given study sample size (n=12) and inclusion criteria added by the primary contacts, when more than one staff member in each case reported the same concept, idea or practice, I considered it significant enough to warrant inclusion in the findings. When a more generalizable approach was mentioned by two or more participants, either from the same or different organization, this data informed the categories in the matrix.

I analyzed the demographic data to determine which organization had a higher number or percentage of Indigenous people in each of the three roles. The data for each of the organizations is presented below followed by a few important considerations.
Table 2. 2019 Case 1 and Case 2 Demographic Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Native</th>
<th>Non-Native</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corps</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Case 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corps</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since this information is from 2019, it’s important to note that in 2017 and 2018 the number of Indigenous youth and young adult corps members in Case 1 was 11 and 7, respectively. While this study specifically explored the percentage of Indigenous people, Case 1 had notable enrollment of Black/African American and Asian youth and young adult participants, and staff members. In Case 2 it is worth noting that the one Indigenous staff member has since left and there are currently two active board members, with recruitment of a third Indigenous board member in progress. The primary contact noted that the organization previously had other Indigenous board members, but all only served in one, three-year term; an issue that the staff member suggested might be tied to observed “experiences of tokenism.”

In concert with each organization’s corps, staff and board demographic information, I used transcripts to identify the frequency of word use as well to identify themes. In both cases I reviewed the transcripts to clean the data to ensure words were appropriately included or removed. Themes emerged from initial reading of data. I also looked for correlations between

---

These descriptors come from the organizations. The data are typically collected this way since it is typically the way AmeriCorps grants require it to be reported.
greater representation of Indigenous people in the organization and the tactic or approach used by the organization.

Table 3. Case 1 and Case 2 Frequency of Terminology to Describe Beliefs and Principles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terminology</th>
<th>Participant Use of Terminology in Case 1</th>
<th>Participant Use of Terminology in Case 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural resource</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>management</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewardship</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scared</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public lands</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoors</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth development</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth mindset</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JEDI</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above shows how often these concepts were used to describe Case 1 (n=9) and Case 2 (n=3) guiding beliefs and principles. The coding included slight differences in the word, including denormalizations, nominalizations, participles and shifts in tense. Three words were coded as categories since they included a synonym or like concept.

I conducted additional content analysis to identify emergent themes throughout each case. Themes were identified using an iterative process. The first themes surfaced in the interviews and in the initial reading transcripts. Afterward, themes became clearer after I coded words and phrases to create categories. As would be expected, this required further analysis to understand context of participant responses. Included below is the frequency by which important themes arose in participant interviews.
Table 4. Case 1 and Case 2 Participant Interview Theme Count

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Case 1</th>
<th>Case 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical context</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEK practice</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization norms</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iteration</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above shows how often these themes were used in response to questions three, four, five and for Case 2, question six. In both cases I reviewed the transcripts to ensure words and phrases were grouped appropriately to accurately draw out the themes. The Codebook for themes can be in the Appendix.

This form of analysis seemed most suitable for two reasons. First, this is an approach adopted and successfully used by researchers seeking the same outcome, to analyze patterns and trends from interviews. For this study this approach is particularly helpful because attributes of organizational approach or culture can often feel like an unseen and unnamed force. Calling attention to word or theme frequency can help make the invisible norms or patterns in an organization more visible. Second, this way of analyzing the data yields the greatest potential for creating a tool based on study findings.

**Limitations**

There are three primary limitations to this study. The first is centered on whose voice is represented. A significant limitation in this study is my positionality as a White, non-native researcher. Related, is the void of Indigenous staff member participants. Although my intended audience is White, non-native-led organizations and the White, non-native people leading and
making decisions within them, this fact could impact the validity of my findings. A key element of Indigenous methodologies is giving control to Indigenous people; having Indigenous people either develop, approve or conduct research (Wilson, 2003; Hart, 2010). Initially, one of the two participating organizations was predominantly Indigenous, and I already began soliciting feedback about my research topic and methods. I also made plans to conduct a site visit in May 2020. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 the organization and staff were severely impacted and unable to continue with participation in the study. While persistent outreach to the same organization could have yielded different outcomes, I reflected on the guiding principles of Indigenous methodologies and felt pursuing the organizations further could be intrusive, disrespectful and would have been motivated more by individual than communal benefits.

The second limitation of this study lies in the brevity of interviews. Like many methodological approaches and avenues of data collection these participant interviews represent a snapshot in time and therefore should be treated as such. Related, the number of interviews conducted for each case could be a limiting factor since the sample was not the same for both. This could result in a deeper understanding of one organization over another.

A third potential limitation of this study is my role as a board member of the Case 1 organization. This proximity could have impacted the research process. For example, I could have unintentionally used my positionality to engage more participants and understand one case more comprehensively than another. Similarly, my personal experience in conservation work and with AmeriCorps could affect impartiality. I have spent a cumulative seven years within AmeriCorps-affiliated organizations, serving as an AmeriCorps member, a staff member and a board member. In each of those roles I observed the work from a different viewpoint, sometimes leaning towards unwarranted criticism and sometimes tending towards unwarranted praise.
CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS

This study reveals themes both within and across the two youth and young adults-serving, AmeriCorps-affiliated conservation organizations. The themes, patterns and practices mentioned in this section were gleaned from staff member participant interviews and from artifacts from each organization. Overall, the organization that had a higher cumulative enrollment of Indigenous corps, staff and board and appeared to take a (more) decolonizing approach. The findings suggest that the decolonizing approach and the enrollment of Indigenous people are correlated\(^{22}\). The findings from this research are presented by theme. Across both organizations, one theme was determined deductively whereas the remaining three were identified inductively.

**Relationship to Nature**

As I examined the mission statement of the organizations, I asked participants from each case to describe the guiding beliefs and principles of the organization to understand the broader ethos. While *relationship to nature* was a deductive theme, the words that were coded were derived from organizational mission statement and from participant interviews. In the Case 1 case, the three concepts which appeared most often were *leadership*, *natural resource management* and *JEDI*. In the Case 2 case, *stewardship*, *youth development*, *leadership*, *empowerment* and *JEDI* were all used by all participants. The acronym *JEDI* was commonly used in both organizations which is unsurprising given the criteria for inclusion in this study, yet this could demonstrate a more authentic desire for and understanding of the importance of these principles than just for superficial reasons or to decrease reputational risk. For the Case 1 the frequency of *natural resource management* reveals the organizations ideas about and

\(^{22}\) Still unclear is whether decolonizing organizational approach and practices leads to greater enrollment of Indigenous people, or whether greater enrollment of Indigenous people causes decolonization in these organizations.
relationship to nature; it is rooted in a Western-scientific and utilitarian conceptualization of nature as a commodity. The frequency of the word *stewardship* in Case 2 demonstrates a relationship to nature more akin to TEK than the Case 1 organization.

**Historical Context**

The first inductive theme across both organizations was the need to recognize the history of America, and therefore the treatment and experiences of Indigenous people. A participant from Case 1 summed up it well when she said, “we have to be aware of the history of lands…and there are] a lot of historical wrongs to address and to do something about. Not just, ‘let’s go plant some trees.’” Many participants shared this sentiment; White, non-native and well-meaning people are trying but still miss the mark. One participant from the Case 2 stated: “there’s 400 years of White people ‘offering good things,’ what we think are good things, for Indigenous people that may not necessarily address the needs as defined by the community itself…which may not cultivate leadership of their young people.” The same participant shared a specific example of what he later realized was the organization’s misguided approach in recruiting Indigenous youth. He said, their recruitment message was akin to, “gives us your kids for four weeks and we will teach them.” He went on to say, “that thinking is so off...think about historical trauma and, like, taking kids away to ‘teach’ them. No wonder we’re having problem with consistent recruitment.” Another participant in Case 2 described how the field crew work requires physical labor, getting dirty and having to go days without showering. The participant noted, “it’s a badge of honor that White, non-native folks get from being dirty for days on end,” however for the tribe they were working with, Indigenous corps members shared the sentiment that it’s “not a sign of advancement and adventure, and not positive in any way.”
TEK

The second theme that emerged was in response to the third interview question regarding how Indigenous ecological knowledge, skills, values or TEK informs the way the organization does its work. I used the board planning and program documents to set the context for this question. Participants in both cases shared similar sentiments, although highlighted nuanced differences between the two organizations. Participants in Case 1 described the role of TEK in guiding the organization, as “very little, not explicitly” or “that’s an area for growth and exploration” and “right now, I don’t feel there’s Traditional Ecological Knowledge guiding our practices” and “I’m not sure it has a lot of influence.” A field-based staff member elaborated, “I can’t say that’s ever been part of any conversation I’ve had, any high-level conversation, honestly…maybe casually but we use what’s used by other White people.” One participant with historical knowledge of the Case 1 organization agreed with colleagues noting that there are not direct efforts being made, however did illuminate something not previously mentioned:

I don’t believe there are many instances of direct efforts to inform our work with Indigenous knowledge, skills and values on an organizational level. I believe there are aspects of Indigenous or traditional knowledge and values inherent in some aspects of modern conservation practices as the field has moved towards more restorative and ‘natural’ methods for restoration and the Corps is often at the forefront of implementing these newer methods of looking back at traditional ecological systems to solve present day problems as we have a more flexible organization and are more focused on education than many of the governmental and other organizations we partner with.

As noted by this Case 1 participant, Indigenous ecological knowledge, skills, values or TEK do not appear to be guiding organizational work, however practices could be in effect, and are. In
the Case 1 controlled burns\textsuperscript{23} are commonplace, yet none of the participants used it as an example of a conservation practice in TEK, which indeed it is.

One participant in Case 2 expressed that TEK is, “not a conscious decision…we are acknowledging that it exists that we value it…we invite Indigenous speakers to come talk to staff to educate them and discuss the ways [Indigenous] people are seeing these lands…including on reservation communities.” The participant went on to say they are “seeking understanding but that’s different from having it influence, yet, how we do our work.” Another participant in Case 2 continued, highlighting the epistemological challenge for people like him, the well-intentioned White, non-native, settler-colonizers in the field of conservation:

We can value it and understand it, intellectually, but we have a lot to do before we can fundamentally experience that knowledge…We can understand it from a scientific or a storyteller mind, but it’s not just about being more diverse, or more equitable and inclusive. It’s really being able to experience a different worldview and how that changes our thinking. And, perhaps our organizational and leadership choices.

In both Case 1 and 2 staff members shared that there is still ongoing harm created and work to be done to center and honor TEK, however in Case 2 there appears to be a deeper understanding of what that would actually require.

**Program**

In both the Case 1 and 2, the topic of program surfaced many times. Participants in both cases mentioned program content and program design and describe instances when curriculum in the program needed to change. In Case 1, a participant described an activity that instructed corps members to select a spirit animal and resulted in discomfort from White leaders in facilitating the

\textsuperscript{23} A controlled burn, or prescribed burn, is a technique wherein fires are planned to maintain the health of ecosystems.
exercise. The participant said, “we removed what felt strongly like cultural appropriation and instead replaced it with historical information that celebrated Indigenous communities and recognize that they’re still present in society.”

A participant responsible for curricular work in Case 2 said, “one of the goals of curriculum and program work is to try to infuse more Indigenous perspective into every day, not just as a curricular event” allowing “both perspectives to be available to kids.” As a result, “we have in our manuals TEK and different teachings from elders,” and they also have this reflected in these places to “honor the culture of kids participating…by having rituals like smudging sweetgrass, and honoring the gifts of what their culture brings to what they’re learning about.” Other programmatic elements in Case 2 were described as an Indigenous youth summit and an Indigenous cultures panel wherein Case 2 was viewed as an earth stewardship organization by a nearby Indigenous community. The panel was comprised of Indigenous students in the Native American Studies Program at the local university. A participant reported that one student panelist said to Case 2 staff in attendance, “please recognize the land you’re on.” The Case 2 participant said, “I know it sounds minimal but…it is an important step in recognizing that there even is TEK, and that is identifying and recognizing the land we are on. And, that it is ancestral lands.” This feedback resulted in a change in operational approach; the participant noted, “…now, on our project information sheets which go out with every single crew requires the staff to identify the ancestral lands that you are going to be working on…it’s small but it feels like a starting place.”

24 The smudging was led by a member of the Indigenous community.
25 This yearly gathering brings together Indigenous youth from nearby reservations and regions in an effort to foster leadership development and build community.
In Case 2, another participant said there was more to do in making their leadership development program “relevant and transferrable to…Indigenous communities.” He later expressed that not a single Indigenous person has made it through that program, because of different conceptions of leadership. These responses across organizations show an awareness of the harm being done and the need for change in both cases, but demonstrate that the curricular changes being made in Case 2 are more comprehensive and larger in scale than the isolated instances in the Case 1.

Program design seems at times in harmony and other times at odds with Indigenous communities and culture. In Case 2, a participant talked about problems “specifically, distance from reservation” as a contributing factor to low enrollment of Indigenous youth and young adults. An example of alignment was in relation to the duration of hitches; this appeared to be a positive attribute of the program. The youth and young adults in one program are from a tribe that is nomadic, therefore the program design of going out to do a project and returning after several weeks aligned well with the tribe’s norms and patterns.

Policy

Participants in both Case 1 and 2 described policy concerns in the context of engagement of Indigenous youth and young adults. Two of the three examples were with handbooks. In Case 1, a staff member who, at the time, worked closely with the tribal crew shared about their AmeriCorps member handbook, “…[there’s] a clear line drawn about tobacco use and any tobacco products not allowed on job sites… exceptions were made, recognizing use of tobacco in some rituals and things that might be part of one’s day and project at a site…really good steps but I don’t know how authentic that may have come across or felt.” In Case 2, the participant whose role entailed an overhaul of the organization handbook, described an effort to “to remove punitive [Western] language.” This language and the accompanying policies, typically associated
with AmeriCorps requirements, center a Western, and often militaristic approach. In Case 2 a staff member described an emerging program and the application form young adults needed to complete. They worked on this program with a government agency and described a valuable lesson learned about speaking up in the process. The participant shared:

They wanted to demand that participants show tribal ID, and like, to demonstrate that they were part of a tribe in order to participate and, this application…it made it until the ninth, tenth, eleventh hour and then finally someone from [partnering agency’s] own ethics department said like ‘woah, you can’t do that’…the question, ‘are you a member of a tribe’ is fraught. We had no idea just how fraught that was. We’re getting into blood quantum and we don’t want any part of that.

The description this participant provided illuminates the ways both Case 1 and 2 staff members reflected on the formal elements of their respective organizations that unintentionally created barriers for Indigenous youth and young adults to participate.

**Organization Norms**

Similarly, another topic surfaced in response to the question about TEK which centered on organization norms. One Case 1 participant described what is deemed “professional” communication within the organization and how that has negative impacts on staff. The participant described, “different cultures find different kinds of communication appropriate, and at [the organization] the communication style is not recognized as ‘White’…and [therefore] not seen as *cultural* communication.” In Case 2, a participant discussed how the organization expected youth and young adults to have the necessary equipment to go on hitches and yet those items “cost a lot of money.” They found that youth and young adults were not able to afford some of those items. After learning from this, Case 2 developed a fund which helped youth and young adults acquire necessary equipment.
Overall, staff members in both organizations seemed to have awareness of some of the ways in which White, non-native, Western norms and economic privileges dictate the culture, however the disparity in response among the participants demonstrates that missteps changed Case 2 organizationally but have not become a Case 1 organizational directive.

**Process**

The third overarching theme that was identified was regarding process. This surfaced in responses to interview questions four and five wherein I asked them to share how, if applicable, collaboration with Indigenous people started, what they considered successes, any missteps along the way, what resources were needed to create partnerships and recommendations for other organizations. To understand the organizational context for the participant responses, I reviewed board planning documents, program documents, and the organizational chart. The third interview question regarding how Indigenous ecological knowledge, skills, values or TEK informs the way the organization does its work. I used the board planning and program documents to set the context for this question.

**Collaboration**

Collaboration was a salient theme, although the collaboration that occurs among Indigenous communities and each organization varies notably. In Case 1 collaboration is perhaps best summarized by one Case 1 participant, who described [the organization’s] approach as “ad hoc.” Another field-based staff member shared, “I have close interaction with an Indigenous tribe…not so much [organizationally]. We do weeks’ worth of contracting with them every year. I have a great relationship with [their] resource specialist and have met with the tribal council.” The work referenced was described by the participant as an effort to “restore land to pre-settlement” and described by another participant as “habitat maintenance in the form of removal of invasive species and other undesirable woody cover on natural areas on community
lands.” Several participants felt that if there was more autonomy to allow staff to build relationships that could further collaboration with Indigenous communities. There appeared to be a perception that building relationships was not considered “work.” In Case 1, one tribal crew program was a result of a grant and an agreement between multiple parties. It existed for a few years and after the first year the organization struggled to recruit AmeriCorps members and crew leaders. One participant noted, despite efforts to build a different kind of program she wondered if, “it still felt like too much like [our] program” and all along the approach to engagement was “transactional.”

In Case 2, one participant said the collaboration was developed both intentionally and organically because they were working on the adjacent land and alongside the same agencies. One of the Case 2 participants shared, “we have a stakeholder group” comprised of Indigenous people, tribal members, interested parties26 and an “advisory group that meets twice a year to steer the direction of the program.” Additionally, prior to “running a crew,” as the participant said, “we go to the tribal council and receiv[e] their blessing.”

A participant within in Case 2 shared what was learned form a former colleague who is Indigenous and who played an instrumental role in cultivating collaboration, “she would always say, slow down, DEI work tends to want to go fast, and she would often say it’s okay if it needs to go slow…meet the teachers, meet the kids, the land agency folks.” The same participant described the tendency in Western culture, “it’s unconscious, it’s part of the dominant culture to go and get it done. [White, non-native] People don’t know what to do in that space…typical Western culture is like, we’ve got the money, we’ve got the grant, go make that Indigenous crew happen.” The expediency appears to create a disconnect in the way relationships are built.

26 The interested parties could be non-native or native people. The organization saw the composition of that group change over time to skew towards the majority being Indigenous people.
Related to collaboration was the idea of trust. One participant in Case 1 stated we have “work to do to gain trust…and it may not have financial return right now” to describe the perceived shift that may need to occur to foster collaboration. Multiple Case 1 participants reported a similar sentiment; one participant said, we need to “build relationship, build trust” to ensure meaningful collaboration. A participant in Case 2 recognized the difference between White, non-native and native communities; speaking about the local tribe, “they show gratitude and thanks” and gave the example of bringing food to meetings and how that demonstrates appreciation of people’s time. Another participant in Case 2 shared that the organization still needs to figure out a way to “invest our resources in their community” but admitted, “I haven’t found a way to put money into the [tribal] community directly.”

While partnerships exist in both organizations, they appear to be inconsistent and more transactional in Case 1 than in the Case 2 wherein Indigenous people are more a part of decision-making. While current and future-state collaboration looks different for the organizations, both seemed cognizant of the need for trust and, as one participant put it, “coming into relationship with each other” for meaningful collaboration to occur.

**Iteration**

Within the context of process another theme emerged, wherein participants discussed a need for progress over perfection, one that allows White, non-native people to take small steps forward with the understanding that mistakes will likely be made in the process, and that should not halt progress altogether. One participant in Case 1 said, “we [White, non-native people] need to be okay with being uncomfortable…we need to accept rejection and try again” while another said, “it lies in White supremacy that we don’t want to do something until it’s perfect. We struggle to truly move forward in our commitment to equity.” The two participants summed up what many others expressed; there exists a discomfort, a hesitancy and a sincere question of how...
to successfully collaborate. In Case 2 a participant suggested taking small steps, “refining and taking an iterative approach.” This appeared in the way the other two Case 2 participants described changes made in the organization over time.

**Decision Making**

Case 1 and 2 participants described decision making needing to change. In Case 1, one participant talked about decision making in the organization, saying about the direction of programs, “I want to know from leaders in the Indigenous communities.” In Case 2 participants said successful relationships in the future are contingent upon White people, “giv[ing] up our vision and allow their vision to emerge.” This idea was illustrated by two participants each of whom used a metaphor. One participant questioned rhetorically, “how can we serve as a catalyst versus a chemical ingredient…how can we make the reaction happen without actually being part of it, in a chemical sense.” Another participant said, we need to figure out how to “be on the bus but not in the driver’s seat.” These participants demonstrate an awareness and desire to shift the decision-making structure.
CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION

Four themes emerged through interviews of staff members and the examination of organization artifacts, relationship to nature, historical context, TEK and process. The latter two themes, TEK and process are broader and have three sub-categories. For TEK, it is evident that program, policy and organization norms were influential factors leading to or prohibiting the centering of TEK and Indigenous culture. For process, collaboration, iteration and decision-making are sub-categories. TEK addresses “what” organizations do and process addresses “how” organizations do their work and participate in decolonization.

The themes emerging from interviews and artifacts informed the matrix, or the tool that I created (below). To develop the matrix, I mapped out the emergent themes to create a continuum of organizational characteristics. These represent past, current or aspirational characteristics of the cases. The aspirational characteristics were included because they were suggestions and feedback given to the organizations by the Indigenous community, from former staff, board members or external stakeholders. Where there were gaps along the continuum, I referenced Indigenous scholars and TEK literature. When I reference the literature versus findings from Case 1 and Case 2 organizations, I included a footnote, along with a citation to denote this.

An important disclaimer, especially given the context of this research, is for whom this tool is intended and how to this tool is to be used. This tool is intended for majority White, non-native organizations that remain uncertain on the initial steps to take to decolonize their operations, practices and culture. This is a tool for assessment and improvement, and not intended to create undue complacency. This tool is for use at all levels within an organization, therefore I encourage youth, young adult AmeriCorps members, staff and board members to have access to and use the matrix. This tool is not to be used in a silo, wherein White, non-native
people utilize it exclusively and in place of creating and fostering respectful and meaningful relationships with Indigenous partners and communities. It is also context specific since the tool is best used when an organization’s social, political and environmental contexts are considered, especially in relation to Indigenous communities and partners. The context which this tool is used should align with the context of the organizations which were included in this study. It should be used thoughtfully, and unintended consequences should be considered. Finally, this tool must be used as more than a self-assessment for organizations; it is a collaborative tool to use with Indigenous partners. It could be used as a way for Indigenous partners to measure an organization’s path towards decolonization.

Rather than using all data to inform the creation of this matrix, I utilized themes which are replicable for other organizations. Based on the findings, the matrix outlines opportunities for organizations to decolonize in the following five domains: (1) day-to-day operations, (2) organizational ethos, (3) strategic priorities content and creation, (4) conservation approach, and (5) field crew programs. Within and across these five domains, organizations can fall within the continuum. The matrix has a progressive scale. The first level on the scale is unilateral trespasser, the second is contiguous visitor, the third is contingent guest and the fourth is synergistic co-habitant. The first part of the descriptor is a spatial word which is intended to evoke the feeling of space, land and place, an ideal inherent to Indigenous culture. The second is relational and describes the kind of partnership an organization has with the Indigenous community. Each of these four descriptors are associated with a numerical value, wherein the number “1” is the minimum and “4” is the maximum.

---

27 I considered removing the numerical values, however feedback from participants and other reviewers suggested a preference for numerical value in assessing organizations.

28 The scale starts at “1” since this would be the minimum starting place for organizations with stated focus on justice, equity, diversity and inclusion.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unilateral Trespasser</th>
<th>Contiguous Visitor</th>
<th>Contingent Guest</th>
<th>Synergistic Co-habitant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Day-to-Day Operations</strong></td>
<td>Decision made by organization with concern for impacted populations</td>
<td>Decision made by organization and feedback is solicited from one or members of Indigenous community</td>
<td>Decision made collaboratively by organization and Indigenous community</td>
<td>Decision made by Indigenous community and implemented by organization Indigenous people are compensated (monetarily) for time and knowledge shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational Ethos</strong></td>
<td>Nature is managed by people Nature is “subject”</td>
<td>Nature is stewarded by people</td>
<td>Nature and people are interrelated and therefore there exists a responsibility of people to care for it</td>
<td>Nature is sacred; reciprocal relationship where “resources” are regarded as gifts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic Priorities</strong></td>
<td>Vision set by organization</td>
<td>Vision set by organization with feedback solicited by one member of Indigenous community</td>
<td>Vision set by organization and Indigenous community</td>
<td>Vision set by Indigenous community and implemented by organization Indigenous people are compensated (monetarily) for time and knowledge shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Criteria</strong></td>
<td>Includes focus on diversity in youth and young adult programs</td>
<td>Includes focus on creation of programs specifically for Indigenous youth and young adults</td>
<td>Includes focus on recruitment and addresses removal barriers and providing requisite resources</td>
<td>Includes focus on funding for programs for Indigenous youth and young adults over other akin programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conservation Approach</strong></td>
<td>TEK is not used and Western science/ecological practices are centered</td>
<td>TEK is used but not named as such</td>
<td>TEK is used and the organization recognizes uses of TEK</td>
<td>TEK is part of the norm and the organization recognizes use of TEK Cultural context and historical information about TEK is provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Field Crew Programs</strong></td>
<td>Project idea generated by organization with concern for impacted populations</td>
<td>Project idea generated by organization with blessing or support of Indigenous community</td>
<td>Project idea generated collaboratively by organization and Indigenous community</td>
<td>Project idea generated by Indigenous community/project host and carried out by organization Spiritual and culture rituals are incorporated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Towards Decolonization

---

29 This conceptualization is based on research by Jostad, McAvoy & McDonald (1996).
30 This conceptualization is based on the work and writings of Kimmerer (2014).
The two cases in this study, Case 1 and Case 2 serve as reference points in the spectrum, although not necessarily representing unilateral trespasser (1) and synergistic co-habitant (4) respectively. The practices and approaches I observed in each organization make it so both cases fall on various numerical points on the scale, depending on category. This scale is based on organization-wide adoption, rather than isolated cases wherein approaches, tactics and practices appear to be present. Further, for an organization to ascend along the continuum, they would need to meet all criteria in the category.

To illustrate how to apply this tool within an organizational context, I will use it to measure both cases. In Case 1, for the first category, day-to-day operations, the organization is a unilateral trespasser (1) since decisions are made internally, however there exists an awareness of who is impacted by the organization. For the second category, organizational ethos, it is a unilateral trespasser (1) since participants describe “natural resource management” as one of the guiding principles. For the third category, strategic priorities, the organization scores as a unilateral trespasser (1) for both content and creation. The rationale for this is that the organization’s strategic priorities say, “develop new approaches aimed at attracting young people from more diverse backgrounds” but there is not a specific focus on programs tailored to Indigenous youth and young adults, rather they are included in “diverse backgrounds.”

Regarding creation of the strategic priorities, the vision is set by the organization and no feedback is solicited by Indigenous community. For the fourth category, conservation approach, the organization scores as a contiguous visitor (2) because TEK is used within the organization. Four participants described the use of controlled burns, but apart from one participant, the remaining eights participants did not acknowledge controlled burns as conservation practices
within TEK\(^{31}\). If Case 3 used TEK, acknowledged it and it was situated within the broader framework then the organization would be described as a *contingent guest*. For the final category, field crew programs, the organization scores as a *unilateral trespasser* (1) although two participants from the same field-based crew program described partnerships wherein tribal council members sought them out and generated the idea for the project. This would be closer to *contingent guest* (3) or *synergistic co-habitant* (4) on the scale, however those examples appear to be specific to that region\(^ {32}\) and not organization wide. Future discussions and best practice sharing across the organization could lead to a significantly higher score in that category.

Overall, Case 1 has an average numerical score of 1.3 on the 4.0 scale therefore would be categorized as a *unilateral trespasser* since only the criteria in that category is fully met.

Case 2 score is *contiguous visitor* (2) in day-to-day operations since feedback is routinely solicited from the Indigenous community in the form of what participants called “stakeholder groups” and “advisory groups.” Regarding organizational ethos, Case 2 scores as a *contiguous visitor* (2) since participants use the work “stewardship” as a guiding principle. For the category focused on strategic priorities, they score as a *synergistic co-habitant* (4) since organization artifacts state, a willingness to “drop field crews to focus on tribal crews.” For the creation of the strategic priorities, they are a *contiguous visitor* (2) since the overall vision is set by organization but feedback from Indigenous communities is sought. In specific cases, it appears some programs are collaboratively designed, however that was not endemic. The conservation approach would score as a *contingent guest* (3) since participants said, “we have in our manuals TEK and different teachings from elders” so there exists both use and acknowledgement of use

\(^{31}\) The use of controlled burns as an isolated practice, not grounded or contextualized within in a broader TEK framework, is the appropriation of Indigenous knowledge.

\(^{32}\) This does not appear to be a regional practice of the organization rather the way in which the particular field crew project hosts collaborate with Case 1.
of TEK. According to all three participants it is not widespread, however each participant described where in the organization it did exist. Finally, for the category focused on field crew programs, they are a contiguous visitor (2) since across the organization, project ideas are generated by organization with support from Indigenous community. In Case 2, they also were invited to participate in a blessing ritual when conducting a project with tribal members and on tribal land. Overall, Case 2 has a mean score of 2.5 on the 4.0 scale which means they are categorized as a contiguous visitor since only the criteria in that category is fully met.

The scores for each case demonstrate a correlation between decolonizing practices as outlined in the matrix and the representation of Indigenous peoples in corps, staff and board positions. The organization referred to as Case 2 has a higher score (contiguous visitor, 2.5) than Case 1 (unilateral trespasser, 1.3) and has higher participation of Indigenous people in board and youth and young corps members.

**Considerations**

There are several important considerations to note in the application of this tool. Foremost, it is important to note that tool assumes three things. First, that the organization has a stated commitment to justice, equity, diversity and inclusion work. Second, that there are no Indigenous people within the organization. Third, even if there are Indigenous people in the organization, it is not appropriate to ask that individual to do this work (unpaid) or to be the “resident expert.” When asked to fulfil that role, staff members could feel tokenized. When one person or a small group is asked to speak on behalf of a population, it could promote the problematic idea of a pan-Indian identity.

Next, this tool is not comprehensive and positive outcomes are most likely achieved when organizations use this tool as prescribed previously by pairing it with authentic dialogue with Indigenous communities. Additionally, while this study asks whether TEK is used within
organizations, the specific practices or methods of environmental conservation employed in TEK is intentionally not included. The rationale for this is to promote White, non-native people learning, inquiring, engaging and collaborating with Indigenous communities; providing TEK practices could unintentionally lead to the misuse of the information.

Finally, this tool and research suggest that dialogue and collaboration will create meaningful partnerships and lead to decolonization of conservation organizations, therefore it is important for this tool to mirror that approach. It was reviewed by a conservation organization wherein the majority of youth, young adults and staff are Indigenous. This is a critical part of the process; it will not only create a more valid tool, it also will ensure alignment with the needs and wants of the Indigenous communities.
CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

The effects of climate change, phenomenon including extreme weather, rising sea levels and desertification of regions continue to disproportionately impact Indigenous people, the world over. Meanwhile, Indigenous people’s traditional knowledge, skills and values have proven to be successful in the mitigation of and adaptation to a changing environment. Despite this, TEK, Indigenous values and Indigenous worldviews remain in the margins of the conservation field. For the sake of both human beings and planet, a change in approach must occur. Leroy Little Bear describes the change:

We need the reconciliation of measurement and relationship, in other words Western science [is about measurement] and Native science is about relationship. If we can bring those two together, we can open new conservation and science doors. Only using one door is limiting. (Crown of the Continent, 2020)

The reconciliation is mandatory. Further, from an ethical perspective, “the Euro-American scientific-utilitarian model of land ethics is only a partial view of reality” (Jostad et al., 1996, p. 577). One step towards opening these “doors” and seeing a fuller view of reality is through decolonizing conservation organizations. These organizations must initiative and experience a change, one where dominant organizational culture shifts and White, non-native people honor and defer to Indigenous knowledge, decision-making and sovereignty.

This study suggests there are tangible ways to decolonize AmeriCorps-affiliated, youth and young adult serving conservation organizations, although this research could have implications for other organizations. For example, this matrix could be adapted for organizations in other disciplines outside of conservation. It could prove useful for organizations working
towards decentering the colonizing, Euro-Western norms and instead centering Indigenous knowledge and culture.

During this research process a few important topics surfaced. First, during interviews participants mentioned gender dynamics within the field of conservation. This topic is worthwhile to explore, especially within the context of Indigenous axiology and epistemology. Some researchers have explored the intersection of decolonial and feminist theories. These theoretical framings could offer interesting insights into the intersection of gender, TEK, decolonization and conservation. A second area of future study could offer greater understanding of whether decolonization leads to an increase in the representation of Indigenous people in these organizations or the greater representation of Indigenous people promote acts of decolonization. Third, building upon this research, I believe a more advanced tool could be developed. This research examined two organizations in a field that has 130, therefore a more comprehensive study is warranted. These findings beg for further research in this arena to determine applicability and usefulness of the matrix. The project covers the requisite change White, non-native people must make to decolonize and adopt TEK, however further philosophical work could be done in this context to shift the burden of proof away from Indigenous epistemologies and onto Western science. Finally, I recommend a study which engages the youth and young adults served in these conservation organizations. Specifically, there would be great value in Youth Participatory Action Research, a method that is well aligned with Indigenous methodologies.

While this research is not comprehensive and there is undoubtedly a need for further research, this project does provide tangible steps for organizations who seek to decolonize. It also sheds light on the promising work that is already being done. I suggest we adopt Whyte’s
(2016) positioning of TEK as a collaborative concept, the only approach to conservation that will support Indigenous people, the whole of humanity and the environment in the years to come.
REFERENCES


http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511807763


http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/mandestiny.htm


https://journals.sfu.ca/pie/index.php/pie/article/view/1076


APPENDIX A. CASE 1 INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Talk to me about what in your past or what about your identity inspires your work in conservation.
2. How would you describe the guiding beliefs and principles of the organization?
3. Can you talk about how, if at all, Indigenous ecological knowledge, skills, and values (or Traditional Ecological Knowledge) inform the way the organization does its work?
4. What does collaboration look like between the organization and the local/nearby Indigenous communities?
   a. How did the collaboration start? Describe pivotal moments in the collaboration.
   b. What did/does success look like?
   c. What resources are/were needed?
   d. Have there been any missteps?
5. Is there anything else you would like to share that you think would be helpful for me to know as I try to understand how to help conservation organizations be more impactful?
APPENDIX B. CASE 2 INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Talk to me about what in your past or what about your identity inspires your work in conservation.
2. How would you describe the guiding beliefs and principles of the organization?
3. Can you talk about how, if at all, Indigenous ecological knowledge, skills, and values (or Traditional Ecological Knowledge) inform the way the organization does its work?
4. What does collaboration look like between the organization and the local/nearby Indigenous communities?
   a. How did the collaboration start? Describe pivotal moments in the collaboration.
   b. What did/does success look like?
   c. What resources are/were needed?
   d. Have there been any missteps?
5. What recommendations would you make to another youth serving conservation non-profit who hopes to foster engagement with local/nearby Indigenous communities and build Indigenous knowledge, skills and values into their organizational culture and practices? What would you recommend they do and don’t do?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share that you think would be helpful for me to know as I try to understand how to help conservation organizations be more impactful?
### APPENDIX C. TERMINOLOGY CODEBOOK

Table 5. Terminology Codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terminology</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural resource management</td>
<td>Natural resource management, natural resource manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation</td>
<td>Conserve, conservation, conservationist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewardship</td>
<td>Steward, stewards, stewardship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred</td>
<td>Scared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public lands</td>
<td>Public land, public land management, public land manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoors</td>
<td>Outdoors, outdoor, outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth development</td>
<td>Youth development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Lead, lead, leaders, leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Empower, empowerment, empowered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth Mindset</td>
<td>Growth mindset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JEDI</td>
<td>Justice, equity, diversity, diverse, inclusion, access, fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Safe, safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Public service, community service, national service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential</td>
<td>Service-learning, hands-on</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX D. THEME CODEBOOK

Table 6. Theme Codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TEK</td>
<td>TEK</td>
<td>“controlled burns” “I don’t believe there are many instances of direct efforts to inform our work with Indigenous knowledge, skills and values on an organizational level”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous knowledge, traditional science, native science, controlled burn(s) and prescribed burn(s), ritual(s), smudging(s), blessing(s), sweetgrass, tobacco, land acknowledgement(s), nomadic, spiritual, cultural, communal</td>
<td>Program</td>
<td>“one of the goals of curriculum and program work is to try to infuse more Indigenous perspective into every day, not just as a curricular event”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricular, manual(s), handbook(s), project(s), program(s)</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>“they wanted to demand that participants show tribal ID”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID, application(s), policy, policies, rule(s), guideline(s)</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>“the communication style is not recognized as ‘White’…and [therefore] not seen as cultural communication”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, professionalism, norm(s), privilege, Whiteness, culture</td>
<td>Organization norms</td>
<td>“the communication style is not recognized as ‘White’…and [therefore] not seen as cultural communication”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribal council, stakeholder(s), partnership, partner, transactional, community, reservation, invest, money, Blackfeet, Piikani, Fond du Lac, Chippewa</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>“advisory group that meets twice a year to steer the direction of the program”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misstep, small changes, steps, improvements, try again, refine, refining</td>
<td>Iteration</td>
<td>“refining and taking an iterative approach”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision, decision, led, lead, turnover</td>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td>“giv[ing] up our vision and allow their vision to emerge”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Process

### Historical context

| White supremacy, history, trauma, colonialism, blood quantum, tokenism, Western, dominant | Historical context | “that thinking is so off...think about historical trauma and, like, taking kids away to ‘teach’ them. No wonder we’re having problem with consistent recruitment.” |
APPENDIX E. IRB EXEMPTION LETTER

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice President for Research
2420 Lincoln Way, Suite 202
Ames, Iowa 50014
515 294-4566

Date: 07/09/2020
To: Katy Swalwell
From: Office for Responsible Research
Title: Comparative Case Study of Conservation Organizations
IRB ID: 20-232
Submission Type: Initial Submission
Exemption Date: 07/09/2020

The project referenced above has been declared exempt from most requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.104 or 21 CFR 56.104 because it meets the following federal requirements for exemption:

2018 - 2 (iii): Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) when the information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a LIMITED IRB REVIEW to [determine there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain confidentiality of the data].

The determination of exemption means that:

- You do not need to submit an application for continuing review. Instead, you will receive a request for a brief status update every three years. The status update is intended to verify that the study is still ongoing.

- You must carry out the research as described in the IRB application. Review by IRB staff is required prior to implementing modifications that may change the exempt status of the research. In general, review is required for any modifications to the research procedures (e.g., method of data collection, nature or scope of information to be collected, nature or duration of behavioral interventions, use of deception, etc.), any change in privacy or confidentiality protections, modifications that result in the inclusion of participants from vulnerable populations, removing plans for informing participants about the study, any change that may increase the risk or discomfort to participants, and/or any change such that the revised procedures do not fall into one or more of the regulatory exemption categories. The purpose of review is to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption.

- All changes to key personnel must receive prior approval.

- Promptly inform the IRB of any addition of or change in federal funding for this study. Approval of the protocol referenced above applies only to funding sources that are specifically identified in the corresponding IRB application.

IRB 10/2019