



SOUTHEAST & CARIBBEAN ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE



SUMMARY OF WINTER 2020 MEETINGS

NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION LAUNCHES ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE PARTNERSHIP WITH NOAA, PUERTO RICO, VIRGIN ISLANDS, COASTAL STATES



The National Wildlife Federation, through its urban initiatives and environmental justice program, launched a new partnership today with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Office for Coastal Management Southeast and Caribbean Team to create the Southeast and Caribbean Environmental Justice Community of Practice.

The Community of Practice provides a forum for individuals from frontline communities, local, state, and federal government, academia, the private sector, faith and nonprofit organizations in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi and the Caribbean. Participants center environmental justice, climate science and solutions to the needs of coastal communities and ecosystem challenges exacerbated by climate change.



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The Community of Practice participants address federal, state and local policy solutions, community-based discoveries and best practices related to environmental justice, mitigation, and adaptation. They share educational tools and opportunities to increase awareness, coordinate communication related to climate change and influence public policy.

“During these challenging times, our environment, public health and human life, require an all-hands-on-deck approach to re-envision and renew our national environmental justice commitment to community-based solutions, steeped in science, data, stats and facts,” said Simone Lightfoot, National Director of Urban Initiatives and Environmental Justice for the National Wildlife Federation. “It’s also essential that our efforts honor the existing work, lived experience and expertise of frontline communities as we help strengthen and expedite connections to conservation, federal and environmental justice resources.”

“The thoughtfulness, intentionality, and intersectionality of this Community of Practice is unique, timely, and purposeful”, said David Ruseell of Birmingham, Ala., a participant and managing director of Synergy Consulting, LLC.

“Given the impacts of climate change and potential environmental justice ramifications faced by frontline communities, our mission is to provide a safe space for partnering and pooling expertise, imagination, policy solutions and opportunities for adaptation, readiness, and inquiry – all needed to protect our communities. It is critical that we focus on stakeholders that need this capacity the most. At the same time, where appropriate, we include federal, state, non governmental organizations, academia, local community leaders and other stakeholders to ensure that all perspectives are included,” said Makeda Okolo, Southeast and Caribbean Regional Lead for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Office for Coastal Management.

The National Wildlife Federation is the United States' largest private, nonprofit conservation education and advocacy organization, with more than 6 million members and supporters, and 53 state and territorial affiliated organizations, including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is housed within the U.S. Department of Commerce. Located in all 50 states, every U.S. territory, and more than 86 countries, the scientific agency focuses on the conditions of the oceans, major waterways, and the atmosphere. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration provides timely and reliable information related to daily weather forecasts, severe storm warnings, and climate monitoring to fisheries management, coastal restoration and supporting marine commerce.

The Southeast and Caribbean Environmental Justice Community of Practice, with the support of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the National Wildlife Federation, will host bi-monthly convenings designed to share resources, tools, and trainings specific to the states and territories of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

In December, the Southeast and Caribbean Environmental Justice Community of Practice will hear from the National Academies of Sciences. Participants include faith-based and grassroots community organizations, nonprofits, and academia as well as state and local government.

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WINTER 2020 MEETINGS

The partnership between the National Wildlife Federation environmental justice program and the NOAA Office for Coastal Management has pursued broad participation to create the Southeast and Caribbean (SE&C) Environmental Justice (EJ) Community of Practice (CoP).

With intentionality and intersectionality, NOAA and the National Wildlife Federation structured these regular meetings in a way that creates a safe space to share and honors the existing work of frontline communities. Guest presenters are sometimes invited to share.

The goals and commitments of the CoP center around equity and efforts to:

- Foster an open, welcoming environment marked by trust and open sharing.
- Build the capacity of community leaders to incorporate resilience planning in organizational priorities.
- Learn from community leaders about real-time challenges resulting from climate change.
- Share timely resources like funding and learning opportunities.
- Identify strategies, actions, and approaches for achieving mutual and broad benefit.
- Increase understanding of the equity issues and capacity needs that arise as communities face coastal hazard and climate impacts.

To date, the bi-monthly convenings have ensured a consistent and regular opportunity for sharing and learning across the states and territories of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Participants include federal, state, NGO, academic, and frontline communities — including low-wealth communities, communities of color, Indigenous peoples and Tribal nations, and immigrant communities who suffer first and worst from climate disasters.

The one and a half hour meetings are held virtually, using a widely accessible platform, and feature guest speakers, community updates, sharing of best practices, and coming soon, technical training.

**Guests:
THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES
GULF RESEARCH PROGRAM**

The inaugural presentation for the Southeast and Caribbean Environmental Justice Community of Practice came from the Gulf Research Program (GRP) of the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine.

Representatives of the GRP shared insight into their work along the Gulf Coast and their commitment to include principles of equity and justice into the National Academies priorities and grant making.

With a previous emphasis on research focused grants, the GRP is working to center new approaches to real time issues faced by coastal communities (Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas), which include human health and environmental justice.

The Gulf Research Program team acknowledged that connecting directly with communities and making grants available to organizations that are working inside the community, is key. They also shared their intent to work with organizations already dedicated to building the capacity among young people in the stewardship space.

The GRP EnCoRe program, which stands for enhancing community resilience, focuses on efforts on the ground and may very well include direct, long term partnership opportunities.

Link:

<https://www.nationalacademies.org/gulf-research-program>

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SURVEY FINDINGS & TRAINING INTERESTS

The Southeast and Caribbean Environmental Justice Community of Practice (CoP), completed a short survey among participants, to help guide their work. With such a diverse body of experts and broad organizational representation, the findings and topics of opportunity were illuminating. They include:

WHERE OPPORTUNITIES EXIST

• COMMUNITY

- Address this work through a community lens versus a project lens.
- Develop pipelines for applicants of color that are populated by interest generated from the community level and historic institutions.
- Recognize that Black Indigenous and Latino communities matter.
- Have priority shown to organizations with smaller budgets to receive larger scale funding and not perpetuate a "have and have nots" relationship.
- Pursue policies that center safe drinking water and sewer connections for racially marginalized communities.
- Pursue affordability, resilience and greenhouse gas mitigation along with access to affordable renewable energy.
- Tell more shared stories of success and triumph.
- Prioritize regard for the impacts of development, maintenance and disaster on Indigenous and historic, African American land.
- Work with and convince local government to map key advocacy and policy that centers compassionate, affordable and accessible water services in different cities.
- Address needs related to substandard housing, trailer parks, protected lands, water streams, small farms, churches and cemeteries.
- Engage community around environmental threats, climate change mitigation, youth engagement, medical waste concerns and compliance and enforcement of environmental justice regulations.

• COLLABORATION

- Implement cross sector collaboration between utilities, community organizations and environmental justice groups.
- Around block grant funding for safe water, sewerage, long-term planning, zoning and land use.
- Develop a more comprehensive approach to public works projects that include better collaboration across municipal and state departments (planning and zoning departments, water, sewer and housing departments).

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- Prioritize partner selection and engagement to better ensure intentionality, intersectionality and specific competencies are at any planning table and provide for everyone to work in their lane of expertise while being agile.
- Support education and capacity building in conjunction with supporting young people with work and projects already underway on the ground.
- Develop effective outreach programming to deliver information to the public regarding marine studies, advancing scientific research of human health, community resilience, capacity building and coral reefs (diseases, wetlands, blue carbon marine debris).

• CREATIVITY

- Resist exploitative and capitalist practices of using the ideas, experiences, and other intellectual property of community members and CoP participants without permission. Instead, respect and compensate, especially people of color, for their subject matter expertise as valued practitioners.
- Pay for the competencies sought and found in communities and at the practitioner level to compile, craft and share information, best practices and develop greater coordination among communities throughout the region.
- Value and leave room for pivots in the work. Reduce very restrictive and regimented directives that do not leave room for communities to be creative and flexible.
- Reimagine grant deliverables in a virtual world.

• CONTINUED OUTREACH

- North Carolina is home to eight state recognized Tribes, which is the largest population east of the Mississippi. The state also has a North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs, which is a focus point to submit information to all the Tribes in the state.
- To the Black church which continues to be an under-tapped partner in helping to advance the green movement, educate and empower the African American communities around issues of environmental justice and climate change.
- To grassroots organizers that are members of forward moving networks and tailor opportunities with specific types of expertise in mind.
- Be explicitly and specifically clear regarding the criteria and type of opportunity, work and requirements for grassroots organizations (Ex: youth engagement vs. youth organizing).
- Honor and respect existing groups of community members that have been working together for a long time (Ex: Gullah-Geechee, Puerto Rico and Virgin Island Communities).
- Define, build and grow pipelines of advocacy and information sharing.

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TRAINING TOPICS OF INTEREST

• TRAININGS

1. Tips and Tools to understand flood and sea level rise risk
2. Risk communication
3. Virtual facilitation training
4. Planning effective projects
5. Grant writing
6. Business continuity planning

• ADDITIONAL TRAININGS

1. Political organizing and working to put 'just' policies in place
2. Alternatives to Zoom fatigue
3. How to implement racial equity

• EXTENSIVE INTEREST

1. Issues that have an impact on infrastructure and communities where we live, learn, work and worship and recreate.
2. How to implement racial equity training and limit community burnout.
3. How to foster, elevate and support Black, Latinx and Tribal leadership.

NEXT MEETING:

To join the Southeast and Caribbean Environmental Justice Community of Practice, please contact **Makeda Okolo (Makeda.Okolo@noaa.gov)** and **Simone Lightfoot (LightfootS@nwf.org)** for more information.

Technical and creative support by:
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