

Papasian Emma – 1043869 – Masters' Thesis

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is Intersectional Environmental Justice in  
Environmental Conservation: Women of Color and the U.S. National  
Park Service

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## Abstract

Research has shown that quality environmental conservation is powered by human diversity. Specifically, researchers have been highlighting the important role that women of color have always played in preserving resources for generations to come. In the United States (U.S), the National Park Service (NPS) is the leading organization for the preservation of the American landscape and its history. The U.S. population is growing more diverse and yet the users of National Parks remain mostly White. As such, conservationists fear that the NPS is losing relevancy, especially to communities of color. Many mechanisms helping connect all Americans to their National Parks have been studied academically, but not the diversity of NPS employees. Further, most research looking at why National Park users remain mostly White is quantitative. This thesis tries to fill in the gap. As such, it focuses on NPS employee diversity using qualitative methods to try and approach the relevancy problem from a new perspective. As women of color have been historically left out of environmental conservation research yet found to be essential to the movement, this thesis focuses on this group amongst NPS employees. Most NPS employees, despite decades of efforts, also remain White and mostly men. This thesis thus looks at the barriers and opportunities that women of color working in the NPS are facing. The qualitative methods used are Intersectionality, to understand the racial and gender-based oppression that women of color face, Environmental Justice to frame the environmental problem at hand from both a social and ecological perspective, and finally Intersectional Environmental Justice, the blending of the two previous theories into a novel Critical Environmental Justice theory. Using these three theories to analyze ten narrative interviews of women and non-binary persons of color working in the NPS, many barriers and opportunities are found. The main barriers found are intrinsically linked to systemic gender-based racism such as the lack of affordable housing in the remote and White dominated locations where NPS employees work and assumptions that gender minorities of color lack environmental conservation skills and knowledge. The main opportunities found were that women of color felt empowered by paving the way for future peers and the sense of community that was created by the NPS programs focused on hiring diverse recruits. The use of Intersectional Environmental Justice was also found to be useful in filling the gaps that Environmental Justice fails to address. This introductory piece of research on diversity in environmental conservation leaders in the NPS hopes to inspire future academics to focus on this topic before state organizations such as the NPS lose the support of communities of color who have much innovation to bring to environmental conservation.

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## Introduction

Research is highlighting the importance of diversity in the environmental conservation workforce to obtain more sustainable conservation solutions for both nature and humans. In a recent report by Green 2.0 on workforce diversity in environmental organizations, “70 percent of representatives [...] agreed that diversity could help: attack environmental problems from multiple perspectives; increase focus on environmental justice; help brand the movement by making it appear more heterogeneous; increase support for the movement by widening its constituents” (Beasley 2017, p3). Further, environmental conservation academics are recognizing the urgency of preserving indigenous knowledge (Traditional Ecological Knowledge) to better preserve both nature and livelihoods (Pasta et al. 2020; Dowsley 2009; Ramstad et al. 2007). There is even literature linking the loss of cultural diversity to the loss of biological diversity (Dunn 2017; Brosius and Hitchner 2010). An important connection highlighted in that research is that of local language and dialects being linked to local flora and fauna, and thus cultural biodiversity (Dunn 2017; Brosius and Hitchner 2010). In the United States (U.S.) it is also well understood that Native Americans sustainably managed their lands for their needs before colonization and genocide by White Europeans, though it is also noted as equally important to view Native Americans in their whole humanity and not reduce them to noble savages, all-knowing environmental beings (Lewis 1995; Aftandilian 2011; Oswald et al. 2020; Bowcutt 2013). As such, academia admits that quality environmental conservation is powered by human diversity.

Within this realization of the importance of diversity, women’s role in conservation is unequivocal: women have always been essential advocates for the preservation of nature, natural resources conservation, and pollution reduction (Rome 2006; Merchant 1990; Raimi et al. 2019). Women have historically been fuel and food gatherers, water managers, and farmers (Mago and Gunwal 2019). Women help build sustainability in environmental conservation (Byers and Sainju 1994). The UN has highlighted the special role of women presently and historically in the preservation of a clean and healthy natural environment in several reports (United Nations Environment Programme 2004; United Nations Environment Programme et al. 2020). In the U.S., Adam Rome (2006) qualifies middle-class women as “indispensable” in the early twentieth-century American environmental movements (p440). An example of the time is the League of Women Voters, one organization among many named for its essential role in the development of environmental conservation in the U.S, (Schulte 2009). Feminist environmental research has also been looking at the specific role of women in conservation and increasingly on that of women of color. This research has shown the disproportionate absence of women in environmental governance (Pearse 2017; Ravera et al. 2016). Literature reads the importance of gender and race to address environmental problems in their entirety (Gaard 2015; Mann 2011). Women around the world including American women have often been the first exposed to environmental (and now specifically climate) injustices (United Nations Environment Programme et al. 2020). In the U.S. for example, after the end of slavery, some of the only jobs available to Black women in the south were in farming where they were more exposed to chemicals than any other population groups (Saville and Adams 2021). Modern American agriculture, which is undeniably linked to U.S. environmental conservation, “was built upon the backs of Africans who were enslaved upon American soil” (Hinson and Robinson 2008, p299). Literature has also shown the need for women of color to be environmentalists and conservationists to fight environmental racism (D. E. Taylor 1997; Warren 1997; Mann 2011). There would be no environmental justice movement without women of color (Rainey and Johnson 2009; Mann 2011). All in all, many

environmental conservation projects could not have seen the light without women, especially women of color.

A significant problem arises when one looks at the difference between the literature's claim for the need for diversity, women in environmental conservation, and the reality in the field. For example, the League of Women, like many feminist organizations, was advocating for environmental conservation only through the advancement of the rights of middle-class White women (Harley 2019). The League of Women fought for the passing of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment in 1920 that allowed women to vote in the U.S. However, this amendment only signed the end of the suffragist movement for White women (Bailey 2020). Indeed up until 1965, when the Voting Rights Act passed, most Black women still faced discriminating practices when trying to exercise their right to vote (Bailey 2020). As such, much research on the history of environmental conservation in the U.S. has put aside the importance and specific role those American women of color have played. This disconnection is explored here in the U.S through the double diversity problem the National Park Service (NPS) is experiencing, first at their visitor level and second at their workforce level. Women of color are essential actors of environmental conservation that must be present in our national parks. As seen in the next few paragraphs, they are essential to help welcome diverse user groups to NPSU.

In the past 21 years, the U.S. has grown more diverse and is expected to continue to do so (Vespa, Medina, and Armstrong 2020). However, marginalized communities (the poor, women and non-binary persons, the elderly and the youth, people of color, the LGBTQ2S+<sup>1</sup> community, and differently-abled people) are still less likely than their peers to participate in and work for environmental conservation and outdoor recreation (J.-H. Lee, Scott, and Floyd 2001; Shores, Scott, and Floyd 2007; D. E. Taylor 2018b). The NPS is one of the largest outdoor recreation providers in the U.S. and a worldwide example of a large-scale system of environmental conservation. Yet it has failed to diversify the users visiting its National Park System Units (NPSU) and its workforce as both groups remain disproportionately White (P. A. Taylor, Grandjean, and Gramann 2013; Partnership for Public Service 2021). One of the many reasons the NPS should welcome a visitor crowd as diverse as the U.S. population is that “Providing accessible, relevant, and desirable experiences to underserved populations can help to sustain broad public support for national parks [...]” (Taylor, Grandjean, and Gramann 2013, vi). Another reason is that NPSUs are important places where adults and children can learn about the environment in a non-formal way (Johns and Pontes 2019). All in all, the NPS recognizes that they are not attracting a diverse visitor population and are risking not being relevant to Americans (NPS 2019).

The lack of diversity in visitors to NPSU has been widely addressed in the literature. The research is summarized in the Stanfield McCown et al. (2012) model which explains how more diverse communities can be welcomed into NPSU (Fig. 1). Academics have studied all factors that help diversify NPSU visitors in this model, except for (6) workforce diversity. They have looked at (1) marginalized communities' involvement and specific reasons for going/not going to NPSU, be them geographical (Weber and Sultana 2013; Byrne and Wolch 2009), economic (Benson et al. 2013; Tarrant and Cordell 1999; More and Stevens 2000) or a mix of reasons (Camarillo, Stodolska, and Shinew 2020; Whiting et al. 2017; Gómez 2002; Ryan et al. 2020; Philipp 1999); (2) the sustainability of programs set up by or for the NPS (Lee, Casper, and Floyd 2020; Schultz et al. 2019); (3) the rise of inclusive interpretation of history in NPSU (Therault and Mowatt 2020); (4) marketing of NPSU and other outdoor recreation situations (Therault and Burke 2020;

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<sup>1</sup> See Glossary

K. J. Lee, Casper, and Floyd 2020; Martin 2004); and (5) the push for a more inclusive and supportive NPS culture amid the realization of how racialized outdoor recreation is (Davis 2019; Santucci et al. 2014).

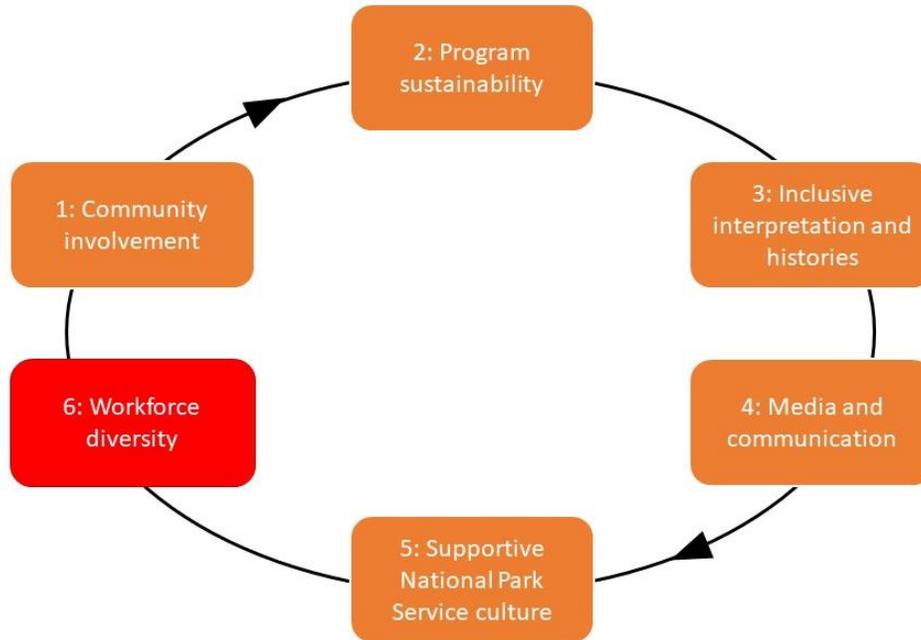


Figure 1. Relevance model adapted from Stanfield McCown et al. (2012).

Several researchers highlight the need for (6) NPS workforce diversity to help diversify NPSU users but none have looked into the barriers that obstruct marginalized people from entering the NPS workforce (Taylor, Grandjean, and Gramann 2013; Lee, Casper, and Floyd 2020; Schultz et al. 2019). Two papers conducted interviews with NPS staff on their opinion of the diversity problem in visitors (Schuett and Bowser 2006; Santucci et al. 2014). The main findings in both papers include increasing the diversity within the staff to better represent the U.S. population diversity and attract more minorities to NPSU (Ibid). These findings echo the earlier work of Taylor (2000) who, when looking at the future demographics of the U.S., called for a change in the NPS to diversify its NPSU visitors by “increasing employment opportunities” (Taylor 2000, 178). As such, the lack of research on the NPS workforce coming from marginalized communities (6), when research has been recommending more workforce diversity for over two decades, has created an academic gap in the field.

It is known that there are still not enough opportunities in conservation and outdoor recreation work for marginalized groups, despite the same level of enthusiasm for these careers amongst minority students (Floyd, Bocarro, and Thompson 2008; Taylor 2018). The 2018 report led by Taylor inspected diversity reporting and transparency of over 2000 non-profit environmental organizations (D. E. Taylor 2018a). Of these organizations, over 500 were labeled as “Natural Resource Conservation and Protection” (D. E.

Taylor 2018a, p3). The main findings of this report were that less than 15% of environmental organizations “engage[d] in some form of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) activity” (D. E. Taylor 2018a, p1). Most of the workforce and staff of these organizations were White (over 80%) whilst males represented 62% of board members “but comprise[d] less than half of the staff of the organizations” (D. E. Taylor 2018a, p1). As compared to the first cited report by Green 2.0, this report inspected many more than the 40 largest environmental organizations inspected by Green 2.0 (Beasley 2017; D. E. Taylor 2018a).

The NPS is no exception to this lack of diversity within its ranks. Indeed, two decades after D. E. Taylor's (2000) work, the NPS workforce is still not nearly as ethnically and racially diverse as the U.S. population. In 2017, there were 61% White in the U.S., whose share of the population is decreasing, when still 78.6% of the NPS workforce was White in 2018 (U.S. Census Bureau 2021; Partnership for Public Service 2021). Black or African American comprised 8% of the NPS staff in 2018, Hispanic or Latino 5.9%, 1.8% were Asian, 2.1% American Indian or Alaska Native, 1.3% multiracial, 0.5% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and 1.8% unspecified (Partnership for Public Service 2021). White Americans are still today overrepresented in the NPS workforce compared to the U.S. population, despite the NPS reducing its workforce numbers from over 16,000 in the early 2000s to under 12,400 in 2018 (Partnership for Public Service 2021). Further, not only are there few people of color working for the NPS despite the need for more diversity, but they may face racism at work. In 2017, 9.5% of employees had indeed experienced racial or ethnic-based harassment (Federal Consulting Group and CFI Group 2017). It is important to note that the technical report at the origin of this statistic obtained an adjusted survey response rate of 49.4% despite sending the survey to all employees at the time. The survey period only lasted 2 months in 2017 and the results were compared to the actual NPS employee population. The comparison showed that the sample population was representative of the surveyed population. However, the data collected referred only to harassment that had occurred in the past 12 months. As such, one can expect the percentage of employees of color having experienced racial or ethnic harassment at work to be higher over their entire career. Finally, people of color were generally given lower positions at the NPS according to Kaufman's (2006) extensive work on the role of women in the NPS. Recent data is not available about the type of position people of color occupy in the NPS (paygrade, seasonality, seniority).

The gender diversity imbalance in the NPS workforce is also striking. In 2018, among 12,363 NPS employees, 37.7% identified as female while in 2019 the U.S. female-identifying population stood at 50.8% (U.S. Census Bureau 2019; Partnership for Public Service 2021). As such, women are not only less likely to visit an NPSU, but they are also disproportionately less likely to work in one (Gray 2016; J.-H. Lee, Scott, and Floyd 2001). This can partially be explained by the fact that women face gender-based discrimination in the outdoor recreation sector (Davies, Potter, and Gray 2019). The same 2017 technical Work Environment Survey as in the previous paragraph highlighted this burden when it accounted for 19.3% of NPS employees having experienced gender harassment in the 12 months preceding the survey, of which most victims were women and non-binary employees (Federal Consulting Group and CFI Group 2017). One can expect this percentage to be higher over the entire career at the NPS of women. Further, though women are employed by the NPS, they are still proportionately less employed than men at higher positions and are paid less (NPS 2011; Kaufman 2006). Recent data is not available about the type of position women occupy in the NPS (paygrade, seasonality, seniority).

As explored above, one key factor to help diversify the visitor crowd of NPSU is to diversify the NPS workforce itself and as per the last two paragraphs, the NPS needs to hire more people of color and more

women to start increasing diversity among staff. Further, as per our first three paragraphs, women of color play an essential role in environmental conservation.

Intersectionality is a concept that is helpful to understand how to bring these race-based and gender-based issues together. The concept was first coined by Crenshaw (1989). In her work, she shows how Black women have been excluded from feminist and anti-racist policies because their experiences were reduced to one struggle or the other instead of being seen as one (Ibid). Through an intersectional lens, one can see how the accumulation of exclusions puts more and different burdens on those individuals at the intersection of these struggles, such as Black women with racism and feminism (Ibid). Intersectionality is, in a way, a means to look at the interdisciplinarity of exclusions. Thus here, it means that men of color will experience different barriers than women or non-binary people of color working for the NPS. Despite studies urging environmental science practitioners and outdoor recreation academics to use intersectionality more in their work to better address contemporary social-environmental problems, the few studies addressing the NPS or general outdoor recreation workforce diversity problem do so either from a race and ethnicity perspective or from a gender perspective (Lloro-Bidart and Finewood 2018; Stodolska 2018; Whitley and Kalof 2020; Schulte 2009). One paper specifically addresses the opportunities and barriers experienced by women leaders in environmental conservation using intersectionality in the U.S. (Jones and Solomon 2019). In this study, the authors choose to interview a variety of women leaders in conservation across the U.S. Though intersectionality is used to understand the interviewees' issues and support systems, most of the women interviewed are White (84%) and all are in a leadership position. As such, the present research will differ from that paper in that the focus will be exclusively put on women of color, in all types of positions in the NPS. Further, the interviewees' answers will be analyzed using both intersectionality and environmental justice theories. Nonetheless, Jones and Solomon's (2019) research will be used as a basis for the methods set up here.

Environmental justice is important to use because this study looks at the experience of a marginalized group, women of color, whose ancestors were killed in genocides by White colonizers, enslaved to these same Europeans, and to this day experience institutionalized racism and sexism in the U.S. As such, when their racial and gendered life experience is related to environmental conservation, concepts of knowledge recognition, participation and distribution of benefits and costs are bound to appear. These three concepts being the foundation of environmental justice (see Theoretical Framework), it seems evident to use this theory to explain the experience of women of color in environmental conservation, though it has yet to be done (Schlosberg 2004).

The literature provided above has shown that there is an academic gap in looking at the NPS's lack of workforce diversity when trying to solve the NPSU lack of visitor diversity issue. Most studies that have looked at this issue have approached it from all factors but the workforce diversity one as presented in the Relevance model of Stanfield McCown et al. (2012, Fig. 1). They have also done research from a mostly quantitative perspective without accounting for the intersectionality of problems experienced by minority groups trying to work for and working for the NPS. Finally, previous research has not emphasized the inherent importance of women of color in environmental conservation. This study will thus explore the lack of workforce diversity within the NPS in a qualitative manner using intersectionality and environmental justice, to make NPSU more relevant for all Americans and highlight what women of color bring to environmental conservation. The focus will be put on women of color<sup>2</sup> working in the NPS as they

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<sup>2</sup> See Glossary

are at the intersection of the race-based and gender-based diversity problems the NPS is experiencing. Further, as per the recognized importance of women of color in environmental conservation exposed in the first two paragraphs, research on their disproportionate absence in the field is needed. Though intersectionality usually also encompasses class-based issues experienced by individuals, the scope of this study is limited in time and will thus focus on gender and race-based oppression.

The research objective identified is to understand women of color's disproportionate absence of environmental conservation in the United States through intersectionality and environmental justice in the National Park Service. To address the research problem exposed in the Introduction and the above objective, the following main research question and sub-questions have been formulated:

**Main Research Question:** What are the barriers and opportunities that women of color working for the National Park Service (study group) face in their environmental conservation work?

**Sub Research Questions:**

1. What barriers and opportunities does the study group identify?
2. What barriers and opportunities do theories of intersectionality and environmental justice identify?
3. What can future policy targeted at increasing NPS workforce diversity learn from the theories used?

## Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality was defined in the Introduction but its specific use and importance are explained here. With our research question in mind, an intersectional approach seems most appropriate as it helps make a finer analysis of sensitive issues related to oppression and offers theoretical explanations for how people experience the world differently from one another depending on who they are and whom they are assumed to be (Atewologun 2018). Choo and Ferree (2010) find there are three types of intersectional research: “group-centered, process-centered and system-centered” (129). These three foci in intersectional research also represent a different aspect of intersectionality each and as such are ultimately needed together to understand any problem at hand. This is the first study of its kind looking at the National Park System Units (NPSU) lack of diversity in the NPS workforce. Since the objective is to highlight the barriers and opportunities women of color face working for the NPS, using the narratives of women of color, a group-centered approach, seems more appropriate. Indeed, this framework aims at putting marginalized groups in the academic spotlight, specifically “women of color while highlighting their unique experiences and standpoints in order to better understand inequality” (Windsong 2018).

With group-centered intersectional theory, the focus of a theoretical analysis remains on one group but can be done in two, complementary ways (Fig 2.). The first way is a life-story approach. In this approach, the different identities that constitute a person can be identified when that person narrates their life-story leading them to a certain point in their life (Christensen and Jensen 2012). Then, one can look at how these identities clash or reinforce each other in these stories as well as examine the importance of each identity for the person and the problems they encountered (Ibid). In this paper’s case, a life-story approach will be useful to assess the difficulties and opportunities women of color experienced when trying to work for, working for, and having worked for the NPS. However, using solely this approach would mean focusing only on the history of the women of color interviewed. To analyze these women’s present situation and see which barriers and opportunities have remained the same in time and which have potentially changed, a second approach will also be used, an everyday life approach. This theory is familiar to feminist works (Ibid). It requires interviewees to relate current events, everyday interactions, and processes they experience, either generally or on a particular topic (Ibid). The advantage of adopting an everyday life approach for interviews is that it is easier for interviewees to relate issues to their identity indirectly and as such to not categorize their experiences as they would when retelling their past (Ibid). The least identity-related categories are used, the more useful is the interview for an intersectional analysis (Ibid). Using the everyday life approach also helps protect the interviewee from prejudiced questions and essentialist assumptions (Christensen and Jensen 2012; Atewologun 2018).

Whilst a group-centered intersectional approach is put in place, Environmental Justice is the tool to dissect the barriers and opportunities discussed by the study group, women of color who have or are working for the NPS. In Schlosberg's (2004) work, environmental justice relies on three pillars. These pillars are that of distribution, recognition, and participation. The author indeed writes that “equity in the distribution of environmental risk, recognition of the diversity of the participants and experiences in affected communities, and participation in the political processes which create and manage environmental policy” is what environmental justice is constituted of (p517). In this paper’s discussion of the barriers and opportunities identified by the study group, the reference to either of these pillars will be highlighted.

Finally, a critical Intersectional Environmental Justice framework is developed to see what the former two theories miss out on. It is based on Malin and Ryder's (2018) work. As such, by using intersectionality and

environmental justice concepts, this paper will be able to recommend policy change based on two theories and a combination of those.

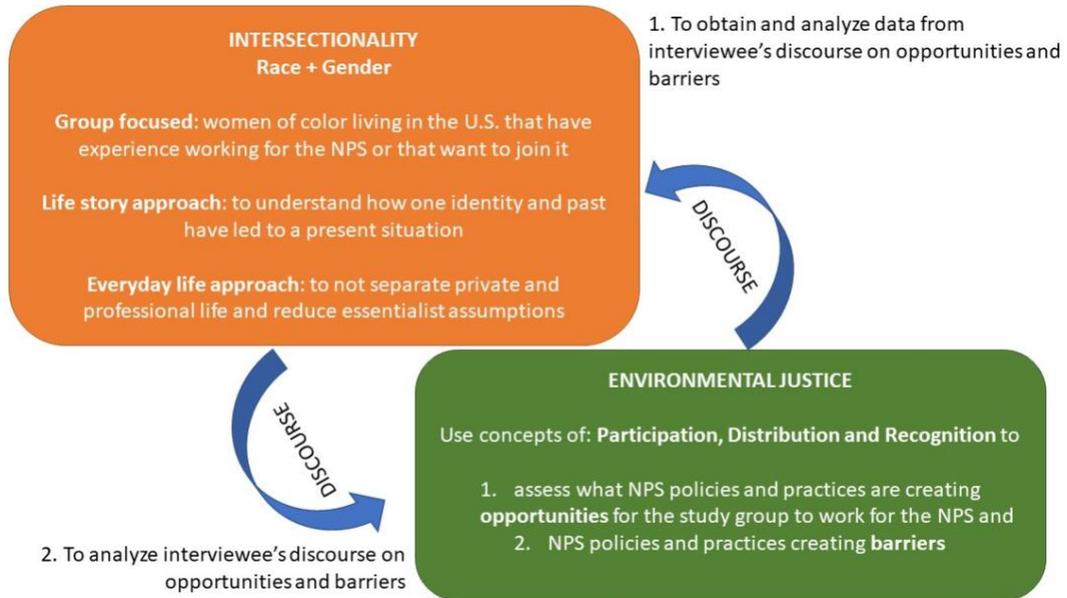


Figure 2. Theoretical framework

## Research Methodology

### Research design

To answer the research problem, the experience of women of color who are working in NPSU is investigated in this paper. The chosen study group is women of color who are currently working for or have worked for the NPS in a position in the field of conservation. Here the term women of color refers to any women-identifying person of color, including White Hispanic women. One interviewee identified as non-binary and although this study is focused on women, their input was valuable and provided another lens to look at the barriers experienced by gender minorities in the NPS. One interviewee identified as White and was excluded from the analysis. At first, this paper was going to focus on the experience of women of color working at NPSU in Montana. After connecting with NPSU in Montana however it turned out that many interested interviewees were working in NPSU outside of Montana. Since this is the first study of its kind it felt more meaningful to interview any women of color interested before future research focuses on specific U.S. states or regions.

### Data collection

#### 1. Contacting groups to look for interviewees

First I contacted via email all the employee resource groups the NPS has. These are: the Office of Relevancy, Diversity, and Inclusion (RDI) of the NPS (Allies for Inclusion: [NPS\\_Allies@nps.gov](mailto:NPS_Allies@nps.gov)), Women's Employee Resource Group (Contact at: <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1244/ergs.htm>), Council for Indigenous, Relevance, Communication, Leadership and Excellence (CIRCLE, [CIRCLE@nps.gov](mailto:CIRCLE@nps.gov)), Employee Empowerment Collective (focus on Black and African American employees and visitors, [employee\\_empowerment\\_collective@nps.gov](mailto:employee_empowerment_collective@nps.gov)), Hispanic Organization on Relevancy, Advising, Leadership, and Excellence (HORALE, [HORALE@nps.gov](mailto:HORALE@nps.gov)), Innovative Leadership Network (ILN) (focus on changing the work culture at the NPS, [Innovative\\_Leadership\\_Network@nps.gov](mailto:Innovative_Leadership_Network@nps.gov)), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Employee Resource Group ([LGBTQ\\_ERG@nps.gov](mailto:LGBTQ_ERG@nps.gov)). These resource groups, very busy in the summer months, did not end up helping me reach out to interviewees. Word of mouth and emailing various NPSU research coordinators wound up being more fruitful.

#### 2. Obtaining research permits

Through IRMA I applied for research permits in all eight NPSU of Montana, as my case study was at first focused on that state. My permit was approved for Fort Union Trading Post, then Yellowstone followed up requesting additional documentation. After getting the approval of the ethics committee of WUR I got my permit to interview Yellowstone employees and established contact with someone who connected me with potential interviewees. I got an answer from Glacier telling me they did not need the permit and would help me get interviewees through word of mouth and using their private employee social media groups. By doing so, participants also reached out to me from NPSU from outside of the state of Montana.

#### 3. Interviews

Many qualitative methods fit group-centered intersectionality theory such as “focus groups, narrative interviews, action research, and observations” as they all focus on giving a voice to the often marginalized respondent (Atewologun 2018, 1). Here, narrative interviews with several women of color currently working in or who have worked in various NPSUs were conducted. The interviewees part of the study group were identified using a mix of purposive and snowball sampling methods (Russell Bernard 2017). As many interviewees as possible within this thesis’ timeframe were interviewed to collect their personal

experiences analyzed using intersectionality and environmental justice concepts. In total, eleven interviews were conducted. Ten were kept for analysis as one interviewee identified as a White Caucasian woman and was not part of the study group.

The priority was to preserve the anonymity of the respondents. Windsong's (2018) interview methods were used. Before letting the interviewee talk in a non-structured way, questions about race and gender were asked to specify the interviewees' views of race and gender (Windsong 2018). In the second part of the interview, the interviewees were free to talk about their experience working for the NPS, using or not racial and gender concepts discussed before (Ibid). Guiding questions helped interviewees develop both a life story and an everyday life narration. The interviews are anonymous to protect the interviewees and the data produced (Aagaard-Hansen and Johansen 2008).

I redacted and sent for review my informed consent form to my supervisor. The WUR ethics committee approved it and I got interviewees to sign it, apart for the ones from Yellowstone as the park did not want them to sign it. Interviews were set up via email and took place either through phone calls or video calls. All interviews' audio was saved on two different devices with password access for safety. The audio recordings were transcribed using Amberscript.

### **Data analysis**

From these recorded, safely stored, and transcribed interviews, theme coding identified the perspectives used by these women to describe their experience and what takeaways should be taken into account for future policymaking (Paltridge 2012; Bernard 2017b). Barriers and opportunities experienced by the study group were the focus of the analysis. Then, using Jones and Solomon's themes (2019) as inspiration, sub-categories were identified to classify these experiences and perspectives. On top of that, both inductive and deductive theme coding techniques will be applied as recommended by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) to produce rigorous themes. The coding scheme was created based on the theory of Intersectionality, the three pillars of Environmental Justice, and a developed version of Intersectional Environmental Justice (Malin and Ryder 2018; Schlosberg 2004).

Lastly, this thesis is limited in looking at the experience of women of color through the specific intersection of oppression they face because of the addition of their gender and their race. Women of color do not all, however, experience the same barriers and opportunities as class and ability, other systematic modes of oppression, can also intersect in adding further barriers and opportunities (Davies, Potter, and Gray 2019). Another limitation to this study to note is that the researcher of this thesis is a White cis-gendered bi-cultural (French and American) able-bodied woman who grew up middle class in France. This background will inherently influence the way this thesis is conducted.

## Results

First, the discourse around the intersectional identity of the participants informs us of the barriers and opportunities they have encountered. Second, classic Environmental Justice is used to examining the latter. Third, the two are incorporated into Intersectional Environmental Justice to touch upon barriers and opportunities that were not previously identified and trace a way forward. The numbers referenced refer to the interviews that pieces of knowledge were pulled from.

### Intersectional identities

In this section, the intersectional identities of the participants help identify the barriers and opportunities they face in working in environmental conservation with the NPS. Participants found that some barriers they faced came from the perception of other co-workers and users of NPSU of their race and ethnicity. Some participants indeed found that they were perceived as lacking environmental conservation knowledge and not being credible because of their race and ethnicity by NPSU users (1,2).

*“I’ve definitely been in situations where um it’s like it’s assumed that I just don’t know something because of my background” (2)*

Assumptions from users go even further. Most participants can recall at least one time when a user tried to guess their race and ethnicity (1,2,4,8,9). It was important for participants to correct users when they did not guess their racial or ethnic identity correctly (3,5,9,11). Further, as park rangers work closely with the public, they all wear their name on their uniforms. From this, users have assumed that a participant spoke Spanish when she did not (10). Participants also noted that barriers arose in White-dominated spaces because being in a White-dominated space made them think about their race and ethnicity as part of their identity more than when they were in more diverse environments (2,3).

*“I feel like I stand out a lot. Not just because of how I look, but because of how obviously Asian my name is as well.” “it’s incredibly isolating.” (3)*

In more diverse environments, participants shared they felt more focused on their tasks than their identity. A diverse workplace was said to create a sense of comfort in participants, provide a safe place, and a participant even mentioned having a craving for it (2). At a work training, a participant talked about being the only Black person of a GS12 (higher position<sup>3</sup>) (5). All other Black colleagues had lower positions and were stuck in positions that were much less management-oriented (5). Another participant mentioned how hard it was at times to be presented as the only “tribal member”<sup>4</sup> of the team (6). She wished to be presented to new colleagues through her qualities, not just her blood quantum<sup>5</sup> (6). Some participants noted that many tasks fell upon them because of their race and ethnicity. A participant found that she was often asked to contact Native American/tribal members on behalf of colleagues because she is a tribal member herself, even if that Native American person was not from the same tribe as her. She was frustrated that her colleagues could not do the work themselves (6). Alternatively, a Native American participant felt that it was her duty to share knowledge on her identity with visitors. She recounted their questions on what “real” Native Americans are like (4). It was important for her to tell them that her life

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<sup>3</sup> See Glossary

<sup>4</sup> See Glossary

<sup>5</sup> See Glossary

was not like what was depicted in movies, and that “all indigenous people are different” (4). She also felt like she represented the land because of her indigenous identity and because the park, like all NPSU, was located on indigenous land (4).

*“So I think it just naturally falls on us, like: Hey we have a duty we're in this role we're reaching this huge, diverse audience because for our little park we do get people from all over the world, all ages, all backgrounds. So it's important for us to share that knowledge with them.” (4)*

Finally, participants felt that they had to justify their racial and ethnic identity within the workplace. A participant talked about the duality of being White yet also identifying as a person of color because of her Latinx<sup>6</sup>/Hispanic ethnicity (11). A White passing<sup>7</sup> Native American felt it was important for her to bring up her identity with other Native Americans to make the work atmosphere friendlier (6). Overall, participants shared many experiences of discomfort, barriers, in their work because of how colleagues and NPSU users perceived them as environmental conservation workers through their race and ethnicity. One Indigenous American participant identified an opportunity in her feeling of stewardship for the land her NPSU sits on.

Participants also identified opportunities in their work because of how their gender affected their feeling of belonging in this workforce. Many characterized environmental conservation and the NPS as a masculine, male-dominated field. On the one hand, being “a masculine female” (8), “a rebel” (10), and growing up a “tomboy” (3) made some participants feel comfortable, and created opportunities for them in a field dominated by White men.

*“I've always been really interested in maybe things that are like associated with masculinity, like backcountry skiing and climbing and running.” (8)*

On the other, identifying as a woman, and being “totally feminine” (1) were important to other participants (1,2,3,4,6,11). They felt like they were creating a space for femininity and “unconventional” “feminine characteristics” in this workforce (11). Many participants also felt that exhibiting masculine and feminine traits was a positive for them (2,5,8,9). A participant identifying as non-binary mentioned how their gender fluidity helped them perform tasks (9):

*“I worked as a wildlife like technician and then fisheries, and those are typically more masculine, like more men usually work in those fields, and so I would... So there's moments where like in those fields, where I would be more masculine.” “on the other hand I also they identify with motherly, like caring, like more feminine traits” (9)*

Participants then talked about how being a man was seen as more competent, having more knowledge, that what users imagine as a park ranger is a White man (1,2). At times, some participants felt like their opinions did not matter, but could not tell for sure if it was because of their gender (10). Many participants felt that users and coworkers had an assumption of them and their work based on their gender. A participant felt that others assumed they were “accommodating” or more “adaptive” because of their gender, or that they were not capable of doing physical tasks, which are numerous in environmental conservation (9). Participants’ bodies were also judged by users who thought they could bully shorter

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<sup>6</sup> See Glossary

<sup>7</sup> See Glossary

women park rangers into getting what they needed (3). Participants mentioned that others viewed Women as lacking environmental conservation knowledge, not being able “to hike as many miles: (8), and not being as “hardcore” (8), a trait seen as needed for this work (2,8). This career was not seen as fitting the “traditional female role” (10). In choosing a career in environmental conservation, participants had to explain themselves to older relatives (10). Participants noted that gender roles appeared in the workspace (11,1,4). A participant was asked to care for an NPSU user’s children and had to explain that park rangers are not babysitters (1). Another participant noticed that most often when groups of children were visiting the park, it befell on women park rangers to care for those groups (4).

Other opportunities linked to gender in environmental conservation were also identified. A participant shared that for her, although being a woman came with discrimination at work it also came with privileges (11). Participants were indeed eager to share how being in workspaces that were more women-dominated created comfort. Women co-workers and leaders were said to create more non-discriminatory, positive work environments, safe, inspiring, and inclusive spaces (1,2,3,8). Participants said that women made great leaders as they help other women advance further in their careers (3). Participants felt “really lucky” (9) when they got to work with other women, especially when women were in a position of leadership (3,9). Furthermore, a participant shared that she felt like a role model of what girls and women can do which she noted was especially important for young girls visiting NPSU (10). The same participant also highlighted the fact that, especially in more conservative parks, hiring a woman into a position of power was a huge deal (10). Another participant noted how within the park service, different units had different proportions of women (3). Archives had more women for instance than law enforcement, scientific and resources management units seemed well-balanced whereas upper administration was dominated by men (3). Nonetheless, it was noted that even if they were more women in some workspaces, few were women of color and, those that were, were new hires and not in leadership positions (11).

With intersectionality, other barriers that would have been missed had the focus just been on race and gender separately are identified. This emerges particularly here since environmental conservation, as noted by participants, is White and dominated by men, especially as you go up in leadership (1,2,9). A participant noted that she was perceived as not credible as a young woman of color, especially when she was interpreting history deemed “controversial” to users (1). Another participant felt that the public imagines most park rangers to be White men and that when they see a White man park ranger they assume that he is her superior (5). Further, participants find it difficult to connect with women of color in the workplace as they are so few of them, it feels isolating (3). Another participant shared an experience of not being heard as the youngest and only woman of color in the group:

*“I just remember going out with my crew and we were doing, like some navigating and it was off trail and trying to find a way to this lake that nobody had ever been to before and I really, just like, I felt like no one heard what I was saying, like I have experience in this stuff, but you know I'm like trying to chime in and like share, share my opinion and share what I think and like point at the map, but like everyone sort of just ignored me” (8)*

In the previous paragraph on gender, several barriers in the form of expectations of roles the participants should play were discussed. Here the roles women of color must play depend not only on their gender

but more so on the addition of their gender and racial/ethnic identity. Indeed, a participant described how her Native American identity affected her gender identity. She talked about having some male and female in her, no matter her gender (4). She related feeling empowered as a woman because her culture is matriarchal (4). A participant that identifies as Latina mentioned that gender roles and expectations were amplified by her Mexican parents and culture (11). Another tribal member participant shared that men tribal elders would not share certain information with a woman tribal member (6). This made her work of trying to collaborate on environmental conservation projects together more difficult. Other participants struggled with defining themselves. One participant wanted to reclaim the term Chicana in the past but noticed that people still viewed the word negatively (10). She felt comfortable identifying as Latinx yet noted that because she was not from Latin America she usually preferred listing which countries her parents were from if someone asked about her ethnic and racial identity (10). A participant noted that being first-generation was important to her identity and work, whilst another said that being an adoptee was intrinsic to who they were and how they could feel a sense of belonging (10,9). A Black woman participant recounted a moment when she and a colleague were discussing the lack of other women of color in their workspace. The colleague said they appreciated her and saw her as a “truth-teller” (5). Yet the participant noticed that no other women of color were being sought after for open positions and started questioning whether her colleagues appreciated her honesty or perceive her as an “angry Black woman”, a racist stereotype that Black women voicing their opinions often hear and an oppressive mechanism called tone policing (5). Overall, participants had a difficult time separating their racial, ethnic, and gender identities and highlighted that depending on what stood out more about them in their specific work environment, they would think about that aspect of their identity more (10). If the participant was White passing, being a woman would create more barriers at their work; if they were not White passing, being a person of color was more preoccupying (5,10,2). Some participants felt like they were being tokenized in this work environment (8):

*“I felt like they were almost tokenizing me for being a person of color in the National Park Service. Like after my internship, I was asked to be involved in this video to help them get more funding for that park, which was basically like me talking about my ethnicity and my involvement in the Park Service.” (8)*

Many participants were appreciative of the women of color that have pioneered environmental conservation workspaces and are following in their footsteps (11). A participant shared that she also felt like she had to pave the way and do extra because of her identity (2). Finally, participants recognized how women of color make great leaders, especially in inspiring other younger women of color in the field (4,1). Specifically, one participant noted that women of color showed “more empathy” and the ability to connect with more users (4). All in all, intersectionality helped draw the framework with which to identify the barriers and opportunities experienced by women of color in environmental conservation.

### Environmental justice

In this section, the focus is on what barriers and opportunities Environmental Justice helps identify. Before doing so, the environmental problem at hand is deconstructed using the three pillars that form the theory. Here the larger Environmental Justice problem is the lack of a diverse workforce in environmental conservation. The environmental benefits and costs first talked about in (a) are the benefits and costs that

a diverse set of employees brings to environmental conservation in their NPSU. The affected communities in (b) are women of color, the study group of this paper. Participation in the political process in (c) refers to the presence of the study group in all types of positions in the NPS.

a. Equity in the distribution of environmental benefits and costs

Thanks to environmental justice, it was possible to see that the distribution of the environmental benefits of having a diverse workforce and the costs of not having a diverse workforce were dependent on three factors. First, is the seasonality of the workforce. Several participants mentioned that the NPS workforce became significantly more diverse in the summer season, during which seasonal, non-permanent staff and interns are most hired (2,10,11). In the winter, the same participants noted the staff reverting to a work environment dominated by White men and felt like they stood out more. Second, is the GS level. Participants noted that as the ranks went up, the staff became Whiter and there were more men than women (1,2,8). Third, how progressive or conservative the park is. Indeed, it was noted by a participant who had worked in leadership positions at different NPSU that some parks were a lot more progressive than others that were “steeped in tradition” (10). She noted that the latter ones were less likely to put in place programs to hire more diverse staff than the former.

These three factors contributed to numerous environmental costs. In most cases, the NPS workforce is not diverse, as seen in the Introduction and as highlighted by the interviewees (2,3).

*“I think it's obvious I think if anyone is to lie and say that there is diversity in our staff they're straight up lying. There is absolutely, like it's just there's just no diversity.” (2)*

A participant said that, in the least diverse park she had worked at, she noticed that the NPSU was stuck trying to solve the same environmental conservation problems it had been facing for years and years (10):

*“we're dealing with so many problems and issues in this park that have been the same for years and years. So so overall it speaks to me as, well: I guess if you were more open to hiring a diverse staff, you would get different solutions that might help these problems on a bigger scale.” (10)*

As said by another participant, in a White-dominated environment she was not able to feel comfortable sharing her traditional beliefs (4):

*“I went to school with nothing but other indigenous students. So it was, it was definitely a culture shock. And it does make you feel out of place. And that you can't really speak up to certain things just based on maybe your own traditional beliefs, and you don't think others would understand just because they didn't have the same upbringing as you.” (4)*

In the more diverse park this previous participant had worked at she noticed how solutions to conservation problems were innovative and diverse (10). For instance, she recalls implementing a program to get local Native Americans NPS jobs by going to their reservation and walking them through the process. It worked well and she found that they “know the park well already and are great advocates for the park.” (10).

When some level of a diverse workforce is achieved there are several environmental benefits to see. Many participants mention connecting with visitors who share a part of their identity, their lived experience, more than with those they do not (2,3,8,9,11). When they connect more to visitors, participants say they

are better able to convey why it is so important to protect these places through NPSU and what the users can do to help protect these resources sustainably (10). Specifically, this participant said she was teaching these users to be better stewards of the park, and better advocates (10). What was important, as told by another participant, was to disconnect the concept of wilderness, the outdoors, belonging to or being a place where only White people could feel comfortable (8). As a woman of color whose parents have no concept of what environmental conservation is, this participant noted how she was trying to show them the value of her work (8). Another participant who works as a tribal liaison talked about how the Native Americans she worked with had a vision of environmental conservation (6). Instead of thinking like an NPS worker within a budget and short period, they talked about how to preserve the same resources for their future generations, not just themselves (6).

*“he [a Native American man she was working with] says we’re looking at developing things for generations to come. And so I think often like the park service the way we get funding is like: oh, you got funding, surprise, it’ll be here, you know, in a couple of months and you have to spend it in a couple of months. And so hopefully you had a plan or can think of a plan rather rapidly on how to spend that money, whereas tribes are thinking, you know, generations ahead.” (6)*

Each park is not only comprised of various environmental ecosystems but it is also made up of a history of human interaction, from particular communities over time with a landscape. As such, having a diverse workforce ensures that the many communities that have interacted with that landscape over time are included in the present management of the resource, and what is said to users about the park. In a comparison, a participant said that when thinking about how to preserve a forest you had to make sure that you maintained forest diversity because that is how ecosystems work and how their health is assessed, by how diverse they are at different levels (8). Similarly, the people protecting those forests and mountains and other ecosystems had to be diverse. At various levels diversity needs to be found to have a functioning conservation ecosystem (8):

*“if you think of a forest having a forest full of, like the same age tree, doesn’t provide a great ecosystem for many animals and like, if you have a forest that has much more like stand structure and heterogeneity, you have so much more, so much more wildlife, so much more diversity. So I think just having people from across the board is important.” (8)*

- b. Knowledge recognition of the diversity of participants and experiences in affected communities

As mentioned at the start of the Intersectionality part of this results section, participants’ environmental conservation knowledge and aptitudes are questioned by users and co-workers. Park users try to guess participants’ race and ethnicity whilst others would avoid talking about the latter (1,2,4,8,9). Thankfully, users of color tend to recognize the diversity in the NPS staff when they see it and express joy in seeing themselves represented (1,2). This especially happens with younger users, who expressed feeling inspired and being able to see environmental conservation as a job opportunity for them too, not just for White men (1,2):

*“what’s really nice is like especially when moms or like and their daughters will flag me down and be like I’ve never seen a female Ranger before let alone like a Latina Ranger” (1)*

A participant explained that as the U.S. is becoming more diverse so should the NPS staff to create a “safe environment for visitors” (9). With a diverse staff, multiple stories can be told to users about how a landscape was used and protected over time from NPS staff that connect with these stories personally, instead of glorifying only one version of the history of management of a landscape (3). If that is not done, the knowledge of that diverse staff is not recognized. Sometimes the staff diversity, when it is there, is recognized but can hurt that same staff. For instance, a participant noticed how whenever the NPS knew that a staff member was part of an indigenous tribe they would openly use that information to market the fact that the NPS works with marginalized communities (6). This participant felt used, tokenized, by this message as a tribal member herself. She also felt that users of the NPSU often assumed she possessed knowledge as a tribal member instead of asking her directly what she knew and what she did not (6). Lastly, there is a lack of knowledge recognition from the NPS side on the women of color applying to work for the park service. Indeed, from the perspective of a participant, she noticed how White colleagues wondered why people of color did not apply more to the open positions (2). Participation in the environmental policy process is explored in the next part.

c. Participation in political processes to create and manage environmental policy

The participation of women of color in the political processes of creating and managing NPS environmental policy is hindered by various barriers which are first looked at. Second, what their participation looks like is explored.

Seven out of the ten participants did not take part in the hiring of NPS staff as they were interns, in seasonal or entry-level positions, though some had an advising role in hiring (1,2,3,4,8,9,11). One participant noted that the NPS was trying to hire an intern tasked to recruit more diverse volunteers for the NPSU (2). Another participant remarked that as important as recruitment was, it then took time for women of color to get leadership positions (1). One said that women were not given many opportunities to advance (3). Participants felt that excuses were being made, that management said time and funding were lacking when participants felt that what was lacking was making diversity hiring a priority (2). All participants talked about the difficulty of the application process. Specifically, participants noted the lack of knowledge on how to apply on the website USA jobs, the lack of information on how to write a federal resume, and a large amount of paperwork which makes it more difficult for people to apply (5,8,9,11).

*“So I do feel like it's a networking, situation it's like America's best kept secret, and it makes it hard for people of color to get into those positions” (5)*

*“If you are just a person, like a person in the public, didn't have any coaching, 100% wouldn't make it through.” (8)*

*“sometimes I wonder if, like the NPS hiring process is like purposely hostile or... yeah complicated” (9)*

Participants said that overall, more transparency was needed, especially on how to get one’s resume from Human Resources into the hands of the actual hiring officers (3,8,10). Many said coaching and word of mouth were necessary to get your application through the hiring officers (5,8,10). A skills assessment is now needed to work at a certain GS (5). A participant mentioned that the veteran hiring preference was “messed up” (8). She had gotten confirmation that a job would be hers, but a veteran applied, and she

could not qualify for the job anymore (8). A participant talked about how many NPS staff were retiring but that replacement was not being recruited right away if it could wait, limiting the number of new permanent staff recruits (6). Recruitment was criticized by all participants, among many reasons was that communities of color need more specific information about the type of jobs available in the NPS (5). This participant gave the example that Black Americans tended to only work in Human Resources or administration because it is not well known in their communities what types of jobs are available (5). Finally, there was the question of actively hiring for diversity or hiring the best candidate for the position. Some participants are calling for more deliberate hiring of diversity in a candidate that may not have the better experience but show potential compared to those who were privileged with previous work experiences in environmental conservation, but who do not provide a new way of looking at conservation problems (11).

*“Are these things that people can learn while they're here? What does it mean to have the most qualified person? And are those, are those, the job descriptions like, a barrier in itself from getting people to, to not apply because they won't think that they're capable.” (11)*

A participant recounted how upper management was more willing to higher diverse staff than middle management that had been here for years and did not want workspaces to change (10). When working in a crew that was not very diverse, a participant insisted that it mattered whether the hiring manager showed they cared about diversity and choose to hire people that were respectful (11). The importance of hiring and recruiting adequately was highlighted by a participant through a comparison. For tribal consultation on an environmental conservation project, the NPS needs to make sure that the right liaison person, communication, and settings are in place for the collaboration to go well. As one would not go to recruit someone to work on a Sunday at church, similarly, it is important to think about who someone is, how what they value is linked to their identity, before hiring them to work in a setting where they will have to connect deeply with various Native American communities (5).

When a diverse workforce is hired, many participants noted it was taking years for people of color, especially women of color, to get permanent positions if they were hired at all, and then many more years for them to be in management and hiring positions (5,9). Many women of color interviewed were or had been until recently stuck doing internships, although experienced and qualified (8,11). Even whilst knowing hiring managers, being qualified, and having done multiple internships with the NPS already, many could not get even a seasonal job because of the different hiring authorities and the veteran status having priority over any other applicants (8). A participant questioned whether women of color were given the same opportunities as their peers to move up (5). This was particularly noted during a peer-mentor management and leadership training in a larger group when only one woman of color was a mentor amongst a group of 40, and only one of the trainees was a man of color (5). In a separate training this time on the topic of diversity, a participant found that non-mixity helped create a comfortable situation where ideas could be shared more freely:

*“And at the end they were like: hey, would you feel comfortable, let's do some breakout groups. Would you feel comfortable if it was just people of color in this group and then every single like person of color in the room, they all raised their hands like yes, we want to do that. And then, so we went into a group and it was just all of the White people on the other group. And when we*

*were talking everybody felt really comfortable, saying whatever they wanted to say. And that's what they just kept saying it was just like oh I feel like I can talk about this and this and this without feeling any like type of judgment or feeling guilty about speaking up on this perspective.” (4)*

Another question is retention, which participants, most in entry-level positions, did not know details about but said that it could be hard to stay in White spaces without support (discussed in Intersectional Environmental Justice) (3,11). The opportunities created by having women of color participate in the environmental policymaking of the NPS are profound. A participant having secured a permanent, year-round management position talked about how great it was to be able to work in different areas of her park depending on the season (10). Another worked with underserved youth that does not usually go to NPSU (11). She taught them how to engage with their communities back home to bring them outdoors and care about environmental conservation (11). Finally, another permanent, management-level participant talked about the many hats she wears and how she can care for both people as a tribal liaison and the environment through her supervision of many conservation projects (6). Further connections between environmental conservation and human diversity are made in the next section.

### Intersectional environmental justice

In this section, Intersectionality is blended with Environmental Justice to (a) recognize and analyze the multiple oppressive structures at play in the presence of barriers/opportunities for women of color working in the NPS. How injustices are embedded in social inequalities is also looked at in this first part. Then (b) the mechanisms and forms of environmental (in)justices are investigated before seeing how (c) defining intersectional environmentalism shows its role in addressing environmental injustices in conservation sustainably.

- a. Recognition and analysis of the multiple oppressive structures and social inequalities that injustices are embedded in

The first injustice embedded in oppressive structures investigated is the lack of affordable housing (1,2,8,10). In the remote places where NPS staff live, most housing is expensive (2). One participant talked about how her NPSU had been trying to specifically hire an intern of color (2). However, she noted that they were not going to pay that intern much on top of not offering them housing (2). She knew that they were not going to fill the position because this is already a hard place to find housing, the intern will probably have to come from far because of how isolated the park is (2). The cost of relocation, which is not covered as a seasonal worker, housing, and paying off student debt, for these new hires adds up quickly (2,11). The participant also recounted how many of her peers had had to work multiple jobs to be able to afford to work in the NPS (2):

*“I mean I couldn't find housing and I work three jobs to you know pay my bills and stuff like that to, and I am one of the higher paid GS levels for biotechs and so to think that an intern was going be able to afford housing outside the park is really not being inclusive and considering diverse backgrounds.” (2)*

Entry-level environmental conservation jobs require a lot of experience, mostly unpaid internships, to get into the field (1). One has to sacrifice time and sleep to get another job to afford to do those internships or give up the opportunity altogether even if they are accepted into these selective programs (1).

*“you gotta like sacrifice your time and your sleep like in college I worked two jobs and went to school full time so there was no way I could have accepted an unpaid internship.” (1)*

When one adds to those costs the fact that women and gender minorities of colors are systematically paid less for the same jobs (Jones and Solomon 2019), that working in environmental conservation does not pay much, and that most jobs offered by the NPS are seasonal, it is no wonder there is little diversity in the NPS workforce (2,11). To top it off, one of the roles of the first intern mentioned was to recruit a more diverse set of volunteers (2). The position was not filled (2). Another oppressive structure to the living conditions of NPS staff is the White communities surrounding the NPSU. As previously said, it is expensive to live around NPSU. As such, most of the people living close to NPSU are White and wealthy (10,11). In one interview, a participant talked about the wide economic disparity between the people working in the service industry, Latinx and lower class, and the people using these services, White and upper class (11). These White and wealthy communities are not comfortable safe spaces for women of color to live in because of the lack of people that can relate to their lived experiences and support them (3,9). One could argue that cheaper housing is available further away, but that would increase the commute expenses and duration for these communities (6). Finally, a participant said that being able to work for an NPSU close to family helped make sure that one had a community around them to rely on (10). She also shared that local Indigenous people often were great advocates for the NPSU and environmental conservation since they lived in the same ecosystem like that of the park, and a Native American participant added that she felt it was easier for her to work for the NPSU since she was local to the area (4,10).

The second injustice looked at is the intersectional, systematic racism experienced by women of color working in environmental conservation for the NPS. In this section, one sees that racism is about more than not getting callbacks after interviews, though that is part of the problem (1,8). As environmental conservation workers, many of the participants regularly go backcountry. As mentioned in the Introduction, backcountry sports have, up until recently, been marketed toward White people only, removing people of color from that space. One participant recounted how White-washed the ads from outdoor companies have been, and still are (3). In her opinion, this gives the image that the outdoors belongs to White people, it is not inviting people of color to join in (3). Outdoor recreation being focused on White people has also desensitized some people of color to environmental conservation. One participant shared how her parents do not think that working in environmental conservation is a legitimate career by continuously asking her when she will get a “real job” (8). Another participant shared how the more backcountry she went, either for herself or work, the less diverse the users were and the more she stuck out (2). Users of color stay on shorter trails, perhaps because they have less experience being in NPSU, they do not feel welcomed, or have less income to spend on expensive outdoor gear (2). Indeed, a participant recounted how the knowledge and experience of going to NPSU had been kept to White communities for a long time, so communities of color now have more work to do to access NPSU in the first place, on top of these places being expensive and not feeling welcomed because of how White-dominated they are (2). The experience for communities of color is according to her thus less enjoyable, and they are less likely to come back (2). She also recounts a personal story in which she was stopped by a White man who also worked for the NPS from going into the backcountry for work, this was a time when the backcountry was closed to the general public, as he did not believe she also worked for the NPSU (2).

*“last season um I was going into the backcountry and there was you know no one was allowed out there yet unless you were working and I'm a non-uniform employee I don't have to wear uniform and so I was about to hop onto the trail but this Backcountry Ranger had stop me and was like well where do you think you're going, like what are you doing and he was this white male and I am like oh like I work for so and so like I'm going out to do field surveys out there and he really was just very rude and did not believe that I worked for the park and I'm like... it was a, it was a very frustrating situation” (2)*

Another participant confirms that people of color are interested in environmental conservation, environmental science, and in being outside, but the problem of White dominance in the outdoors continues beyond feelings of belonging (5). As this participant who is a manager and participates in the hiring of staff recalls, she often gets White people applying for jobs designed for people of color (5). In her opinion, to be able to change things, White people need to be able to hear people of color talking about White people as a general group (5). It does not make sense that White people can generalize about Black people if the same cannot be done about White people (5). In this she means that White folks need to be able to hear criticism to change, that systematic racist behavior and environments need to be talked about for one not to delude themselves that there is no problem (5). A participant noted that everyone has biases but being aware of those is essential to move past them (11). These behaviors are part of the oppressive mechanism of color-blindness and are particularly discussed in hiring. Another recommendation she has is that hiring the “most qualified” is often used as an excuse to hire the same type of staff that already exists within the NPS instead of hiring someone who has great potential with great and different characteristics that might need more guidance to catch up on skills they could be lacking (11). Participants feel that hiring a diverse workforce is not a priority (3).

More direct racism is present too. Co-workers have said some inappropriate remarks about Native Americans in front of a White passing tribal member (6). This bothers this participant who wishes that her co-workers would be respectful, before her having to tell them off and sharing part of her identity with them (6). She also remembers times supervising archeology sites where staff joked about digging up Native American bodies (6). Systematic, intersectional racism needs to be addressed but the work cannot come from people of color. As participants said, the blame and responsibility cannot be continuously put on communities of color, they should not be the ones to change to create a safe and inclusive space (9,11).

*“so yes, I think that we should hire more diverse staff. But I also think that that comes with like an asterix that like they have to do the work to understand that gender diversity inclusion, like those aspects in the workplace. To like, make that, to like, make it a safe environment for everyone and also not put all the work on women of color, people of color.” (9)*

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is about more than hiring diverse staff, and the work should not be put on people of color (9). Another participant argued that work needs to be done by White people as they thought of a time when some White women were too afraid of trying to make a change in an organization for women NPS staff to be more welcoming of non-binary people (9). Instead of trying to change things, risking making a mistake, they preferred not changing anything. Taking risks is part of trying to do better, however. In the next section, the drivers and forms (in)justices take are explored.

b. Investigation of the mechanisms and forms of environmental (in)justices

In this section, the previously highlighted oppressive structures are further explored to the drivers and form environmental (in)justices can take in environmental conservation. To start, the NPS has some programs targeted at hiring more diversity. Participants mentioned the following programs which they thought helpful in increasing NPS staff diversity: the programs are Pathways (4), Youth Conservation Corps (4), Local Hiring Authority (4,6), Indigenous Hiring Preference with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (4), the National Park Service Academy (9,11) and the college degrees in Parks and Recreation Management (4). Participants also found that some NPSUs were using these programs less or more than others. Specifically, a participant having worked at different NPSU in management positions noticed that the more traditional and conservative park justified their lack of use of these programs because of a lack of time and housing for the recruits (10). However, she thought that these programs would be great tools to hire the seasonal staff the park otherwise hires every year (10):

*“We can fill these same positions using different recruitment techniques to be able to hire diverse staff and people” (10)*

Another participant highlighted that a language requirement had been helpful in her getting her first job with the NPS (1). The NPSU was hiring park rangers that spoke specific languages, one of which she spoke which helped not only distinguish herself amongst other park ranger applicants but also helped the park receive applicants of various races and ethnicities (1). Another applicant added that during and after recruitment it was important to show the various career paths available in the NPS to motivate women of color to stay (6). She also made sure to tell interns she worked with that in the private sector they were not as likely to earn the same pay as men for the same job whereas they were guaranteed the same pay for the same GS level with the NPS (6). However, another participant argued that it was easy for people of color to look at other environmental organizations that are more diverse and want to work for them (9). The participants hired through these special programs enjoyed staying in touch with other alumni from their program that worked in the same NPSU as them (9). They indeed form a community that supports and understands each other (9). Some participants worry that people of color are only hired through these programs though and end up stuck in a lower position (8). Another participant adds that stamina and supportive managers, who want a diverse NPS crew, are necessary to continue working in the NPS after those programs (9). They also talked about how these programs helped give tips and tricks to overcome the “hostile bureaucracy” of the NPS to get hired later on, on top of preparing with experience and knowledge for their future positions in the NPS (9,10). Finally, a participant felt guilty because she felt she had to use her tribal member credentials to work for the NPS (6). Seeing as getting your foot in the door is so difficult with the NPS though she recognized that it was necessary for her (6).

Another form of justice present around women of color working for the NPS is the connection they form with users of color. Many felt that their presence in the park helped not only connect the user to the NPSU but also to show them that this was not just a space for White people (4,8). In welcoming and interacting with school groups, participants were able to reach and engage with a more diverse group of users, which participants are often on the lookout for (2,3). A Native American participant became more interested in working in the NPSU she was interning at because of the diverse visitors it attracted and how curious they were to learn about the history of her community (4). Another participant recognized that Native Americans have profound ties to the land management and history of NPSU and that users enjoyed asking

questions to someone with those ties (10). Users seem to indeed see the connection to the land as something positive, they learn that environmental conservation is about more than preserving a landscape but also the history of the people that have managed it and lived the landscape (4,10). The participant shared that she had formed deeper connections to her Native American identity through her work in the NPS (4).

*“And I was just like hey like that's really interesting that these people travel all the way here. It's like the middle of nowhere, but travel all the way here to learn about this place and learn about the plants, the animals, the environment and again the tribes that are here.” (4)*

She especially wants to keep her family legacy of park rangers going, as many family members worked in this park before her (4). However, she also highlighted the importance of listening to indigenous people, and other communities of color instead of imposing solutions to the environmental conservation problems faced in and around NPSU (4). These interviews showed how Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion promote innovation in environmental conservation. Participants indeed insisted that women of color co-workers and leaders in the NPS create a positive, welcoming, and innovative work environment (1). Women have stories to tell about the changing gender roles they filled historically in environmental conservation (10). Further, after having experienced the barriers to working in the NPS firsthand, women of color want to help other people of color get these jobs without these barriers, even if their main tasks are focused on environmental conservation (11). They indeed inspire other people and show that environmental conservation can be a job you are being paid for instead of being a vocation like many communities of color have thought for years (5). Thanks to the presence of more environmental studies programs in colleges, more people of color are applying for these conservation jobs which was not the case before, recognizes a participant (2,5). This participant knows that Black people are specifically concerned with environmental justice issues as many have experienced them firsthand, but not many have gone to school for it (5).

Without DEI, the NPS is not a safe enough space for people of color to be authentic and bring change and innovation to environmental conservation problems. To be able to challenge the status quo, the participants need to know that others share their lived experiences and as such will support their ideas (3,11). Many feel exhausted from having to code-switch constantly at work to accommodate the predominant White culture, on top of looking out for other people of color and pioneering the space to make it safe for them (3,11). These are lonely endeavors that can consume women of color and burden them with having to be the person of color to do the DEI work when it is not their primary function (2,11). With all this extra work, having a community that shares what you have been through and what you experience every day helps lessen the load, it creates a support system (8). In these isolated towns, not being White or a man makes one stand out not only because of what you look like but also because of one's name, or not being able to find the food that you usually eat in the limited selection of the grocery stores in these isolated towns (3,11). Participants can feel, as such, out of place and judged in these towns (3,8). Their workplace becomes their community, which is another reason why having a diverse workforce is so important (8,9). Older and more traditional NPSUs especially need to change as participants are not satisfied with the lack of community (10).

*“both like productivity wise and like community wise is super important and community in like the Park Service is like half the work, like the workforce is your community.” (9)*

Again, if the NPS does not apply DEI more throughout all its NPSU, as the country becomes more and more diverse, the NPS will lose its relevancy and the next generation will be disconnected from how the U.S. has historically implemented environmental conservation (11). In the next section, intersectional solutions brought up by the participants are studied.

c. Intersectional environmentalism and its role in addressing injustices sustainably

In this last section, the role of intersectional environmentalism in solution making is developed. To start with, it is essential to show that everyone can work for the NPS in environmental conservation. In using relevancy to connect users to ecological conservation and the outdoors, the NPS will ensure that more people care about preserving nature. A participant shared that by hiring more people of color, more communities will benefit from their knowledge of environmental science (2). Better scientific understanding she explains, is connected to better decision-making at home about what one can do to protect our planet (2). The importance of a diverse workforce also comes in to connect users better with history through their and the NPS staff's identity (6). The participant in question possessed much oral history that was passed on in her culture and her spiritual connection to the land (6). Unfortunately, many Native Americans that also possess oral and Traditional Ecological Knowledge are not going into the NPSU of another participant, unless they worked for the park, because they have the same landscape in their backyard, they have their oral history, and they did not feel the need to go into the park to learn about themselves (4):

*“Like I'd drive by it everyday and: oh that's just the park like... I have trees and canyons like that in my house so no need to stop there, and I think that's the mindset of a majority of the local population.” (4)*

As introduced above, representation matters in leading more people to enjoying the outdoors and seeing the benefits of it, feeling welcomed, and making it a space for all (1,3). Employing women of color, shares a participant, helps push what the norms are for women of color, inspire and show them that they can do hard backcountry environmental conservation work (8). A participant shares that she grew up visiting NPSU but never envisioned to work at one and accidentally found a position open in her field (3). Since she saw NPSU as places of leisure only, not a serious place to work for, she had never considered looking for jobs with the NPS (3). Further than users feeling welcomed, diversity is necessary to better environmental conservation as explained in (a) of the Environmental Justice section. Each person possesses a different puzzle piece, adds a different view to environmental conservation solutions, the history of the landscape that gets interpreted (1,2,3,6,9). There are many stories to be told about the U.S. landscape and the NPS needs different people to tell those stories, as participants find it more enriching for users (1,2,3,6,9). When there are few people of color interpreting the landscape's history to users, they are expected to speak on behalf of someone else's history (1,2,3,6,9). As the NPS recognizes, not only do they have to preserve the environment, but they must also tell the story of the U.S. through its NPSU, which is impossible to do without incorporating different perspectives (3). More than stories though, participants argue that diversity creates more creative and innovative work environments (3,9,11). Participants believe that better decisions are made when more than one idea, perspective, is being

discussed on the table (5,8). One feels more productive in their work (9). Others insist that it shows that the NPS is open to new ideas and to change the way it approaches environmental conservation, that it can be challenged to think differently, especially when it has been resistant and making excuses when dealing with same issues for years and years (10,11). She argues that new and different solutions to solve problems on a larger scale could be considered (10).

Another major solution that must be put in place would address the social injustices driving the lack of diversity in the NPS workforce. As said by a participant herself, without addressing housing, low wages, experience differences with White applicants it will be hard to recruit and retain women of color in the NPS (2). Creating more long-term permanent positions and less seasonal positions, changing the employment structure, is also part of this solution. Not only because working in environmental conservation then becomes more financially sustainable for women of color, but also because they then have a chance of making a larger impact on the communities and the landscape they work with (6). Applying DEI policies throughout all NPSU is also essential to improve retention of the women of color that do get hired. Many of the participants deeply enjoy their career, are fulfilled and know their ideas are often taken seriously but would only consider staying if they had a permanent position, a safe workplace community and opportunities to advance, which all fall under Equity and Inclusion policies<sup>8</sup> (3,6,9,11). A participant experienced fruitful discussions on identity amongst NPS staff in which she learned and reflected about her own identity within her role in environmental conservation (10). This is what a supportive community can look like. In sum, with social injustices addressed, an innovative environmental conservation organization would have women of color at all levels of leadership, and would not be satisfied with, as one participant put it, just White women in leadership (11).

*“Because oftentimes when you ask the national park service about their diversity, they point to the fact that they have, they have a lot of women. But the women tend to be White women. [...] that's like where they stop. They're just like we did it, we've done it like, look at our leadership. There's all these White women on here, and they're bringing diversity here. [...] Yeah, I think that intersectionality piece is really important because a White woman has a completely different experience than a woman of color, for many reasons.” (11)*

All in all, it would be beneficial for the NPS to start viewing environmental conservation problems from an intersectional environmentalist perspective. A tribal liaison participant exemplifies the benefits of it when she recalls not being able to distinguish between the cultural and the natural because her job blends tasks doing both, holistically (6). Looking at the landscape as an organism that encompasses people and nature was important to the local tribes involved in this environmental conservation project (6).

*“when you're a tribal liaison there there really isn't any distinction between culture and natural, it's all one thing. And so with that piece I get to hear about what are the grizzly bears doing today or what are the marmots up to? And you know what types of weeds are in the park or what types of plants are flowering? You know it's, it's really that holistic picture of just what's going on in the natural world in the park.” (6)*

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<sup>8</sup> See Glossary.

In this project, NPS biologist were working closely with Tribal Fish and Game workers who were leading the project (6). This participant also noticed in working with other tribal members that they tended to plan environmental conservation projects for generations to come and benefit from whereas NPS limited themselves to a given timeframe and budget (6). She also noticed having to change her working pace whenever she collaborated with tribal elders (6). She had to adapt to the people speaking to, here the elders who were often unbothered with deadlines knowing that those always come back around (6). Finally, it is essential that discussions around identity are incorporated into environmental conservation discussion. Participants recalled how their identity affected how they were going to approach an environmental conservation topic at work and made them have to wear different hats (6,10). In another discussion where race and ethnicity were discussed, a participant learned more about her own heritage, how diverse it could be and the different knowledges that Native American brought to the table (6). To better value these knowledges in their environmental conservation work, a participant suggested that more recruitment go through affinity groups that bring together people of similar identities that are interested in the outdoors (9). Finally, though the NPS has long expected women of color to tell the story of how they came to work for in NPSU their way, women of color are now taking back control of the narrative in an effort to better represent their community's needs in the outdoors (11).

*"I have to figure out of like am I representing the national parks service, or am I representing my community and their needs? And when am I just like repeating what the national park service wants me to say versus when am I actually being authentic and trying to connect them in a way that is beneficial for, for them." (11)*

As this happens, the NPS better hope that these women of color have good things to say about working in environmental conservation as minorities.

### Summary of findings

Using Intersectionality, the identities of the participant were shown to inform their experience as NPS staff and their work in environmental conservation. Using Environmental Justice, the benefits of the NPS implementing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) were identified. Finally with Intersectional Environmental Justice, the mechanisms behind the barriers these participants experienced, how they were embedded in social injustice, what form they took, and how they could be overcome was established.

Many barriers that women of color face when working for the NPS were found, as well as some opportunities (Table 1). Not only was it found that these barriers slow down the careers of women of color in the NPS and reduce DEI in the workforce, but it was also shown that these barriers put a significant brake to innovation in environmental conservation. It was indeed further established that DEI in the NPS leads to more innovative environmental conservation. Seeing as humanity is in a state of emergency when it comes to protecting the environment, innovation is essential to ensuring that the methods of and solutions to environmental conservation are as much up to date and diverse as possible (IPCC 2022). With the multitude of problems that the earth is facing, many different solutions are necessary. That is why DEI is so important to environmental conservation. With it, all chances are used to preserve our environment and its resources. In this result section the importance of Intersectional Environmental Justice, or

Intersectional Environmentalism in creating innovation in environmental conservation was introduced. In the next section, the Discussion, this finding will be explored in more depth and in dialogue with literature.

*Table 1. Main six barriers and opportunities experienced by women of color in the NPS.*

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
<p>Expectations from NPSU users and co-workers that women of color lack knowledge and skills to work in environmental conservation. This career does not fit the racial, ethnic and gender roles that others have for them.</p>	<p>Indigenous American identity can create a feeling of stewardship towards native land and the NPSU being protected. Some Native Americans can feel a duty of conservation and sharing of their knowledge.</p>
<p>Women and other gender minorities of color feel discomfort and isolated in a White man dominated field because of the lack of other peers of color.</p>	<p>Gender fluidity brings opportunities to women and gender minorities of color to better fit in this man dominated field.</p>
<p>Conservative NPSU may not implement programs to hire more diverse staff as much as more progressive NPSU because of not wanting to change the way things are traditionally done.</p>	<p>Women and gender minorities of color feel empowered to both follow in the footsteps of peers that paved the way in environmental conservation, and by paving the way themselves for future generation of conservationists of color and marginalized users.</p>
<p>Recruitment, hiring and retention need to focus more on Equity and Inclusion to help women of color not be stuck in lower positions.</p>	<p>Promoting different stories of environmental conservation helps all NPSU users connect to nature and care more about protecting it.</p>
<p>Financial barriers due to expensive housing, relocation costs, low pay, the experience needed to get your first job in the NPS and other intersectional financial barriers.</p>	<p>Environmental conservation innovation led by diversity is motivating for marginalized folks working in conservation.</p>
<p>Intersectional, systemic racist and sexist behavior at work from co-workers and users, and during the recruitment, hiring and retention processes.</p>	<p>Programs that help hire more diverse staff also help build community.</p>

## Discussion and Conclusion

As presented above, the interviews of the participants and their analysis using Intersectionality and Environmental Justice helped determine answers to the research questions presented in the Introduction. The main barriers and opportunities that women of color experience when working for the NPS are summarized in the previous table (Table 1). To answer the research question of this thesis; what are the barriers and opportunities that women of color working for the National Park Service (study group) face in their environmental conservation work; the sub research questions are first answered. For the first sub research question, what barriers and opportunities does the study group identify, using Intersectionality theory, the study group identified mainly barriers in the hiring and recruiting process, and the lack of shared lived experience in the community of the NPS workforce. Intersectionality theory identified many systematic barriers linked to the participants gender, race, ethnicity, and specifically how women of color experience specific kinds of oppressions due to their identity. The second sub research question was: What barriers and opportunities do theories of intersectionality and environmental justice identify? Environmental Justice helped identify opportunities in the programs helping to hire more people of color but also shows the limitation of those programs in only targeting Diversity, not Equity nor Inclusion. The theory specifically highlighted the special knowledges women of color bring to environmental conservation but also how they get stuck in lower, seasonal positions. Further, oppressive mechanisms leading to barriers such as tone policing, color-blindness and tokenizing were identified with these theories. Finally, the third sub research question, what can future policy targeted at increasing NPS workforce diversity learn from the theories used, was mostly answered through the blending of the two previous theories into Intersectional Environmental Justice. Indeed, the blending of the two previous theories into Intersectional Environmental Justice helps shape what future environmental policy targeted at increasing NPS workforce diversity can look like. These policies are based on values of Intersectional Environmentalism where both people and the planet are accounted for in sustainable solution making. After looking at how the sub research questions were answered, the main research can be addressed. The main barriers experienced by women of color in the NPS come from systemic race based sexist power dynamics in the conservation industry. Mechanisms that are part of the creation of those barriers are designed to deny the existence of those power dynamics, color blindness, to diminish the voice of women of color, tone policing, and to utilize these women for their identity and not their value in environmental conservation as people, tokenizing. The main opportunities experience by women of color in the NPS come from communities of color working alongside them or visiting NPSU. These peers bring innovation to the field of conservation, empower women of color to further pioneer environmental conservation, and create a sense of belonging in outdoors. The next section focuses on how the theories used dialogue with the rest of the academic research on environmental conservation that employ Intersectionality, Environmental Justice and Intersectional Environmental Justice theories.

In this thesis, the theory of Environmental Justice was used differently from its main uses in academic literature. While Intersectionality had been previously used to assess barriers and opportunities experienced by women in environmental conservation, Environmental Justice is usually employed to address environmental pollution problems (Mann 2011). This study shows that it can also be used when the environmental problem is not a straightforward pollution case to dissect. This thesis is arguably the first case of employing Intersectional Environmental Justice when diversity in environmental conservationist is examined. Other studies have looked at the link between conservation of biological diversity and cultural diversity through for instance the production of a Mexican drink (Valenzuela Zapata

and Gaytán 2016). This paper also adds to the rest of the literature criticizing Environmental Justice in its limited ability to analyze the source of the problems it dissects. This study instead finds that Intersectional Environmental Justice, a Critical Environmental Justice theory, is another tool for researchers wanting to not only understand environmental problems but understand the shape sustainable solutions can take. At heart Intersectional Environmental Justice is the theoretical application of Intersectional Environmentalism, a version of environmentalism more focused on linking people and nature, to create sustainable environmental solutions that account for both the social, human side of any environmental problem, and the natural one.

This thesis falls into the field of critical environmental justice studies as it looked at barriers affecting women of color who experience multiple forms of inequality; pushed Environmental Justice to look beyond matters of knowledge recognition, participation and distribution but also at the mechanisms and forms that environmental injustice takes; and asked how considering social and environmental justice could be done together to form sustainable solutions (Pellow 2016). As Pellow (2016) puts it, it paints a picture of what Environmental Justice could be. Intersectional Environmental Justice appeared in literature before with Ducre (2018) for instance who used and added to it when looking at lower class Black American women and their perception of environmental degradation in their communities. Other than the latter paper, Intersectional Environmental Justice has not been developed extensively in environmental conservation yet.

However, there has been some research on climate change that has used Intersectionality. These papers have been fundamental in helping shape more environmental research through Intersectionality. Kaijser and Kronsell (2014) for instance used an intersectional lens to approach climate change and called for more focus and questioning on the relationship and portrayal of human and the natural. Ecofeminism and intersectional feminism are other branches of Critical Environmental Justice that have been using Intersectionality in their analysis of human-environmental problems, showing how interlinked the two are (Kings 2017; Lloro-Bidart and Finewood 2018). Environmental Justice theory itself has been called to be more intersectional to better analyze environmental issues and how connected to social and societal problems these are (Malin and Ryder 2018). This thesis pushed the already critical theory of intersectionality forward by using it to “theoretically advancing understanding of the simultaneous forces of privilege and penalty in the workplace” (Atewologun 2018). However this thesis goes beyond that as it moves the use of intersectionality outside the traditional workplace organization into the field of environmental conservation in which each cultural group has their own knowledge, personal stories and myths that connect them to the land they protect (Aftandilian 2011).

The methods used were also unusual for a study on the NPS. Indeed, as put in the Introduction, most research done on the NPS’ lack of user diversity has been quantitative, not qualitative. Consequently, this paper invites more external academic parties to produce qualitative research on the functioning of the NPS, or other large conservation organizations, through its employees and how it could be improved to better conserve the American outdoors and appeal to all Americans. This study did not achieve some goals set in the research proposal. For instance, no group discussion was organized between the study group due to a lack of time. Interview participants were eager to participate in a group discussion and as such it is a shame it could not be conducted. A major limitation in this study is that the use of the theory was limited to gender and race and ethnicity. Other systems of oppressions were raised by participants such

as class, which is a major systematic source of many barriers for some communities of color. In the next section the findings are discussed in dialogue with other research pieces on barriers and opportunities within environmental conservation employment.

In this section, the extent to which new barriers and opportunities found in this thesis that have not yet been described in other literature is discussed. Jones and Solomon (2019) found similar barriers based on the exclusion of women and assumptions from users and co-workers. When focusing on the women of color in the paper this thesis found specifically the same intersectional barriers, such as racial and ethnic based assumptions that women of color lack skills to work in environmental conservation and lacking a sense of belonging in this White space. Similar opportunities were also found by Jones and Solomon (2019) such as how Diversity, Equity and Inclusion trainings and relational support created by other women of color in the field empower women of color. However, this thesis also found the benefits of gender fluidity, NPS programs to recruit more diverse staff and the work itself of women of color being empowering to them. This thesis also focused more on the mechanisms behind those barriers and opportunities, such as tokenizing, whereas Jones and Solomon (2019) just looked at the barriers. Another Masters' thesis looked at gender diversity in the NPS staff and the barriers experienced by women (Orr 2019). However, Orr (2019) focused on gender whereas in this thesis gender, race and ethnicity are explored intersectionally. Further, this thesis linked staff diversity to quality environmental conservation whereas Orr's (2019) focus was to explore the work culture and employment in the NPS for women. The barriers and opportunities identified through intersectionality echo the findings of Davies, Potter, and Gray (2019). Indeed, they find that women and gender fluid outdoor education leaders experience much sexism in their workspace. They also found that breaking gender norms was positive and helped create more inclusive environments, similarly to what the participants of this thesis found (Davies, Potter, and Gray 2019). Santucci et al. (2014) also found that the lack of funding was a problem in implementing more programs to be relevant to and cultivate relationships with a more diverse audience. However, Santucci et al. (2014) focused on diversifying users through programming and not staff diversity. Further, Santucci et al. (2014) and Schuett and Bowser's research (2006), like many others on the topic of user diversity, focused on diversity issues in urban NPSU only. Though urban settings being important, this thesis' focus on non-urban parks helps in identifying other barriers and opportunities for communities of color. Gray (2016) shows that, though the paper focuses on gender without addressing race, women are under-valued and recognized in outdoor education due to widespread discriminatory practices, such as an emphasis on men academics in the field. This thesis found that asking questions to women of color who do conservation work in the NPS already was helpful in highlighting why they want to work in environmental conservation in the first place. This echoes the work of Davis (2019) who sought the perspectives of Black Americans that participate in outdoor recreation in non-urban settings. Davis (2019) also found a similar barrier raised by participants of this thesis. In the backcountry, the "wildlands" for Davis, Whiteness dominates the space from which people of color were displaced. In the paper, it is noted how some Black folks are reappropriating for themselves the comfort of practicing activities in the outdoors, similarly to how participants of this thesis were reclaiming the backcountry as their workspace and backcountry activities as theirs (Davis 2019).

Apart from barriers and opportunities faced by women of color in environmental conservation, this thesis found similar benefits of diversity for environmental conservation that Beasley (2017) did, even if this was not the research objective of this work. For Beasley (2017), successful conservation is to: "attack

environmental problems from multiple perspectives; increase focus on environmental justice; help brand the movement by making it appear more heterogeneous; increase support for the movement by widening its constituents”. Further, Aftandilian (2011) found by examining what non-indigenous Americans can learn from Native Americans that non-Natives should form their own connection to nature instead of trying to learn lessons about indigenous environmental conservation. The paper highlights the benefits of creating or sharing your own personal story of connection to the land around you to improve the care for this land, and share stories connected to different cultural heritage. Dunn (2017) also highlights the importance of linking conservation to the “human experience” when researching botanical gardens, the loss of plant diversity and cultural diversity. Similarly, Johns and Pontes (2019) found that adding an emphasis on the human agency in conservation is important when trying to improve users ecoliteracy.

Women’s presence and importance in conservation outside of the U.S. is also explored by Raimi et al. (2019) and Mago and Gunwal (2019). These authors’ work highlight the global needs for women and gender minorities leaders in environmental conservation. The NPS has done many things right over the past decades. It supports various resource groups to represent different marginalized groups interest in the workforce, it has created many programs targeted at hiring people of color and started hiring more women in leadership positions. Schultz et al. (2019) reviewed many of these programs. However, the NPS has failed to think intersectionally and as such has not been able to sustainably hire people of color, especially women of color. In this thesis, the potential of thinking intersectionally for the NPS’s continued relevancy is emphasized. Another finding of this thesis raised by the interviewees was the benefit of different forms of diversity for environmental conservation. Participants indeed noted that the NPS could benefit from other forms of diversity within its rank. Those forms of diversity were age, class, abilities. A paper on an outdoor leadership program explained that it was essential to allow for a diverse set of discourses on wilderness to exist for more people to personally connect with the outdoors, no matter their economic background (Gress and Hall 2017). More research on the benefits of multiple levels of diversity for environmental conservation is needed as most papers focus either on gender or race and ethnicity (Philpott 2017; Rogers, Taylor, and Rose 2019). In the next section, the final recommendations are given.

Looking at existing research, many have already listed recommendations for the NPS. A Native-American participant called for more cooperation on environmental conservation projects between non-Indigenous Americans and Indigenous Americans. Dowsley (2009) already listed five steps to improve co-management of environmental resources between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Americans. Ryan et al. (2020) also suggest more cooperation between NPS staff and their local marginalized communities through focus group and involvement in decision making and planning through representation. Schultz et al. (2019) recommended already that the NPS programs to hire more diversity focus on different types of diversity. This thesis goes further in arguing that these programs need to be used more homogeneously across NPSU, instead of the majority of them being “located in three regions: Northeast (n = 364; 26.8%), Midwest (n = 247; 18.2%), and Intermountain (n = 225; 16.6%)” (Schultz et al. 2019).

Looking at the findings of this paper, the main recommendations for the NPS are as follows:

- Hiring
  - o More affordable housing and paying seasonal workers to move;
  - o Extension of the use of existing programs to hire people of color to more NPSU;

- Retention
  - o Less seasonal and more permanent positions;
  - o Use of DEI trainings to highlight the benefits of a diverse staff for environmental conservation.

As mentioned in the Introduction, this thesis was designed as an introductory piece of research. Much more work needs to be done to assess barriers and opportunities that women of color face in the NPS, as well as other marginalized groups. It is recommended that future research study clusters of NPSU per regions of the U.S. to identify what regions are doing well with their employees, and what could be learned from them. Future research should also examine how other systems of oppressions of marginalized groups affect their presence in environmental conservation such as class, differently abled people, etc. Further, here women of color of all races and ethnicities were part of the study group. It would be wise to look at what different types of barriers women and gender minorities experience based on what race and ethnicity they identify with, and their cultural upbringing. As summarized by Gaard (2022), true social and environmental justice results from the sum of many justices, such as queer, age, (dis)ability, species, and multispecies justice.

In conclusion, this thesis highlighted the main barriers and opportunities experienced by women of color and non-binary people working for the NPS in environmental conservation through narrative interviews. The interviews were analyzed using Intersectionality theory, Environmental Justice theory and Intersectional Environmental Justice. It was found that the main barriers that women of color face are the hostile hiring process, the lack of a sense of community in the NPS, unaffordable housing and the low number of permanent positions available. As for opportunities, there are many programs that help hire women of color and those need to be put in place in all NPSU, not just a select few. Another finding that confirmed previous research is that women of color are important persons to have in environmental conservation to keep the field innovative and relatable to all Americans. Finally, it was found that combining Intersectionality and Environmental Justice theory into Intersectional Environmental Justice was helpful to highlight what sustainable solutions can help diversify the workforce long term to improve environmental conservation. These solutions can look like the more widespread implementation of pre-existing diversity hiring programs, the reduction of seasonal positions in favor of the increase of year-round permanent positions, better paid internships, and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion education to all staff, including education on the benefits of a diverse workforce for improved environmental conservation quality and long-term efficiency.

## Glossary

**American:** the term is used here to refer to individuals living in the United States of America.

**Backcountry:** here the remote and undeveloped areas of nature in and around NPSU.

**Blood Quantum:** “a strategy used by the [U.S.] government and tribes to authenticate the amount of “Native blood” a person has by tracing individual and group ancestry” (Rice n.d.).

**Codeswitch (to):** “the practice of selecting or altering linguistic elements so as to contextualize talk in interaction” (Nilep 2006).

### **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEI):**

“(b) The term “diversity” means the practice of including the many communities, identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures, and beliefs of the American people, including underserved communities.

(c) The term “equity” means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment.

(d) The term “inclusion” means the recognition, appreciation, and use of the talents and skills of employees of all backgrounds.

(e) The term “accessibility” means the design, construction, development, and maintenance of facilities, information and communication technology, programs, and services so that all people, including people with disabilities, can fully and independently use them. Accessibility includes the provision of accommodations and modifications to ensure equal access to employment and participation in activities for people with disabilities, the reduction or elimination of physical and attitudinal barriers to equitable opportunities, a commitment to ensuring that people with disabilities can independently access every outward-facing and internal activity or electronic space, and the pursuit of best practices such as universal design.” (Executive Order 14035 2021).

**Environmental conservation:** here the term refers to any and all practices whose goal is to protect and preserve a particular landscape.

**Ethnicity:** according to U.S. census, Hispanic or Latino, or Not Hispanic or Latino.

**Gender:** a person’s gender is the identity they build based on their body, their “internal sense of self”, and how they present themselves in the world (Gender Spectrum 2022). These can be man, woman, nonbinary or ungendered (Gender Spectrum 2022).

**GS:** General Schedule Classification and Pay is a pay structure system used by the U.S. government for most Federal employees (OPM 2022).

**Interpretation/to interpret:** “catalyst in creating opportunities for audience members to make their own intellectual and emotional connections to the meanings of park resources.” (NPS 2021).

**Latinx/Latine:** inclusive ways of writing and referring to Latino folks.

**LGBTQ2S+:** LGBTQ2S+ stands for Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans Queer Two-Spirit people. The term is used to refer to the alliance of Queer folks.

**National Park Service (NPS):** organization that cares for U.S. National Parks.

**National Park System Units (NPSU):** here all parks that are part of the National Park system. Parks in the National Park system can be monuments, trails, historical sites, recreational areas, battlefield, etc.

**Outdoors (the):** “the places outside where people can enjoy nature” (“The Outdoors” 2022).

**Park ranger:** “Park rangers are responsible for protecting our state and national parks; the natural resources, ecosystems, and wildlife within them; and the people who visit them. Park rangers may serve as law enforcement officers, environmental experts, historians or a combination of the three.” (“What Is a Park Ranger?” 2014).

**Participant:** here someone that was interviewed for the purpose of this study.

**People of color:** here someone who does not identify as White and Caucasian.

**Race:** social construct based on someone’s skin color and physical features. According to the U.S. census it can be one or a mix of the following: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White, Other.

**Tokenism:** “the policy or practice of making only a symbolic effort (as to desegregate)” (“Tokenism” 2022).

**Tribal member:** here someone that is enrolled with a Native American tribe.

**User:** here a visitor to a NPSU.

**White passing:** here a person of color whose light skin tone could pass them off as White.

**Woman of color:** refers to any women-identifying person of color, including White Hispanic women.

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## Appendix I: Interview Questions Guide

### Administrative:

- Review informed consent form for individual interview together
- Inform interviewee about recording format

### Employment Warm Up Questions

- What is your current employment position? Can you briefly describe your daily activities?
- How long have you held this position for?
- What previous positions in environmental conservation did you hold?
- Do you take part in the hiring of new staff members?

### Questions Race and Gender (from Windsong 2016)

- To start with, I'm going to ask you questions about racial and/or ethnic identity. How would you define race and ethnicity? What do they mean to you?
- Can you tell me how you identify yourself racially or ethnically?
  - o Do you think of your race and ethnicity as separate identities? Why or why not?
- How do other people usually identify you in terms of race and ethnicity? If it's different from how you identify yourself, do you ever correct them?
- Now, I would like to ask you a few questions about gender. How would you define gender? What does gender mean to you?
- What gender do you identify with?
- Generally, we think of characteristics as masculine or feminine. When you think of these characteristics, do you think you have a lot of characteristics of either masculinity or femininity? Can you tell me more about those characteristics?
- Have you ever been misidentified?

For the next set of questions, I want you think about both your race/ethnicity and your gender. However, if you find that either race or gender seems more relevant, you can talk about that.

- Do you think your gender identity means more to you than your racial/ethnic identity or vice versa or is it difficult to think of these as separate identities? Why?
  - o Can you tell me about situations when your gender or race is more important? Why?
- Do you think other people at work expect certain behaviors from you because of your gender/race/ethnicity? Can you tell me about those?

### **Everyday life approach**

- Do you think you are ever treated differently because of your race and gender at work? If so, could you elaborate?

(For instance, you identified as (RACE) and (GENDER). Do you think you are ever treated differently because you are (RACE)? Do you think this is also tied to being (GENDER)?)

- When you think of work, do you notice any patterns of what types of sectors people work in?

(For instance, do you notice women work in some sectors more than men? Do you notice that Hispanic women participate in some sectors different from white women? Do you notice Hispanics participate in some sectors more than whites?)

- How diverse would you describe your workforce environment as? Why is it that way according to you?
- In what ways do you think a diverse workforce is important or not to the work you do every day?

### **Life story approach**

- Have your race/ethnicity and gender played a role in applying to work for the National Park Service in your experience? In what way?
- In what way would your path leading you to work for the National Park Service have been different or similar had you been of a different race/ethnicity or gender?

(Guesswork to reflect on one's identity)

- Do you think the National Park Service should be hiring more women of color? Why / why not?
- Do you think the National Park Service hiring process or other policies should change to employ more women of color? If so in what ways?
- In your opinion what are the advantages/disadvantages of hiring women of color in your field of work?

Feedback for me?

Interested in focus group discussion?

## Appendix 2: Coding Scheme

- Intersectional identities
  
- Environmental benefit and/or cost
- Knowledge recognition
- Participation in political processes
  
- Oppressive structures
- Environmental injustice mechanisms
- Intersectional environmentalist solution-making