



SIERRA CLUB

TEHIPITE CHAPTER

The Sierra Club's Environmental Protection Mission Necessitates Equity in Hiring

by Gary Lasky

The Sierra Club is unique among "Big Green" environmental non-profits. Founded in 1892, the Club's charter requires it to be a member-led organization. The Club's Council of Club Leaders (CCL) is a volunteer body with 65 appointed delegates, one from each national chapter. Representing more than 800,000 dues-paying members, the CCL meets each September to network, socialize (karaoke late into the night!), and endorse policy resolutions to deliver to the national Club Board of Directors on the final day of our meeting. Tehipite Chapter Conservation Chair Ron Martin and I recently attended the 2023 annual meeting in Chicago, where 45 CCL delegates met on Sep. 6-9. This year, a record 22 resolutions were passed.

This was our first opportunity to meet and listen to Ben Jealous, the Club's new Executive Director. Ben grew up in Pacific

Grove, making annual trips to Yosemite with his family. You may remember him as the NACCP's executive director from 2008 to 2013. A powerful and moving speaker, Ben has quickly established himself in the Club organization, with a budget of \$162 million and more than 500 staff. We are expecting a visit from Ben this November. Stay tuned.

The current news at the meeting was a Washington Post article critical of the Club's efforts to correct racial diversity in hiring. The Club has been in the forefront of Big Green non-profits in its commitment to a racially diverse workforce, understanding that it needs to broaden its base and recruit younger members, as efforts to halt the climate crisis have met with limited success, even with thousands of environmental activists. Last year a majority of new Sierra Club hires were people of Color (POC). Our Club recognizes that, without, a broad-based movement led by activists from communities harmed by toxic industries and most vulnerable to climate change, we will not succeed in halting the destruction of our forests, which needed to mitigate planetary heating, and the burning of fossil fuels, a primary cause the climate crisis. The article shared some of the back story, revealing tensions within the Club over this issue.

Our previous Executive Director Michael Brune, 2011-2021, made equity in hiring a priority, but his methods were viewed as divisive by some. For example, speaking to our Sierra Club California chapters at a retreat in 2013, Brune opened his remarks with "When I look out at this audience today, I see old, white, people." His message was well-intentioned, but the 'shock treatment' had the undesired effect of discouraging support for diversity. In the context of our volunteer-driven Club culture, Brune's message raised uncomfortable truths and put some on the defensive. As with other efforts to repair the trauma in the U.S. created by



Ben Jealous

our legacy of racism, some resisted the possibilities of a bright future in which aging government leaders might turn over their power to a new leadership of young people unafraid of change.

As Executive Director, Ben Jealous has brought aboard an astoundingly talented team of organizers and managers with the passion, skills and experience to manage this stormy transition, as the Sierra Club respects our legacy as the premier environmental protection organization in the U.S., but also takes on the responsibility of representing residents whose communities have been most harmed by the legacy of land destruction, and the climate crisis created by destructive extraction industries, including oil and gas, mining, and logging. I asked Mr Jealous to call on our Tehipite Chapter volunteers to do whatever is needed to organize that movement in Fresno, and the Chapter will need the support of new volunteers and donors to accomplish this ambitious goal.

The Executive Committee of our Sierra Club Tehipite Chapter meets the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 7:00 pm on Zoom. All Sierra Club members are welcome. Text or call Gary Lasky at 559-790-3495 if you are interested in attending.

Oct. 18, 2023 at 7:00 PM via Zoom. The Tehipite Chapter of the Sierra Club presents Dr. Emily Fairfax and "Beavers: building climate resilience across California." Dr. Fairfax is currently an Assistant Professor of Geography at the University of Minnesota.

Beaver dams are gaining popularity as a low-cost, nature-based strategy to build climate resiliency at the landscape scale. California recently established a beaver restoration and conservation program within the Department of Fish and Wildlife to facilitate "re-beavering" the Golden State and building climate resilience. Dr. Fairfax's research has shown that beaver influenced patches of the landscape stay green and can serve as fire refuges, even during megafires.

Visit <http://www.sierraclub.org/tehipite> to register in advance and receive the Zoom link.

