

We are outraged and heartbroken as we grieve for Black lives lost to police brutality, COVID-19, and over 400 years of systemic racism in our country. The Alliance for Watershed Education of the Delaware River stands in solidarity with the black community as they have been experiencing systemic oppression for many years. We stand for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice in our centers, and in our communities.

The deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and the galvanizing experience of fellow birder, Christian Cooper are the most recent examples of the adversity and racial injustice that Black Americans still face today. We must challenge ourselves to ask the tough questions of ourselves: What are we personally doing to combat racial injustice and acknowledge how we are supporting it? What are we doing to diversify our staff and programming? What can we do in our own sphere of influence to have and/or change the conversation, which can bring about change? What can we do to ensure that everyone, including systematically excluded people (Native Americans, African Americans, Latino Americans, etc.), are involved in shaping our mission and working in our industry?

Why, as an environmental organization, are we commenting on this issue? We have a responsibility to NOT remain silent about an issue that has so deeply affected our colleagues and our community. Systematically excluded people have been largely left out of the conservation movement, often as a result of discriminatory practices, despite being the most vulnerable to experience the negative effects of water pollution and other environmental hazards. The resulting environmental, social and economic inequities have deepened the distrust and distance between many systematically excluded people and the traditional environmental movement. This deprives environmental groups of ideas and energies that would help the movement achieve greater success, and inevitably it sends a message that conservation is an exclusionary, White society. It should be understood that there are a variety of reasons that this happens, which include an oversight of these groups by conservation agencies, implicit bias on the part of conservation agencies, and deliberate exclusion of the groups. As such, some groups may in turn have reason to avoid the environmental field. Our desire is to acknowledge this and work to heal these relationships with humility and intentionality.

The Alliance for Watershed Education has begun taking steps to address disparities in equitable access and inclusion, though there is much more to be done. We articulated our collective commitment to equity in our Alliance goals, but now we must see those commitments come to fruition. The DEI and Network Development work groups are challenging and equipping AWE members to do this work, by providing training and tools to better understand power, privilege, and implicit bias. It's our job to continue to learn, apply what we've learned, make mistakes, and learn from them with humility. Our programs, including the Watershed Fellowship and River Days, seek to build relationships with communities that our organizations have historically failed to engage and systematically excluded. We are challenging and equipping our network of 23 environmental education centers with the resources and training required to better engage and activate urban communities of color to explore and steward their local waterways and trails. Our work includes staff training to identify and respond to the unique barriers facing

marginalized communities in the Delaware River watershed, and to the development of new, community-focused conservation programs with the purpose of strengthening the connection with systematically excluded people to nature. Each year, we have the responsibility to see how we can further improve these efforts and shift power more equitably within our partnerships. While we are proud of our first steps, these initial efforts fall short of what is needed. We acknowledge that we have much more work to do to recognize and dismantle systems of oppression in the field, in our organizations, and in ourselves.

AWE is comprised of a dedicated and passionate group of educators and conservationists, committed to fostering a safer place to live, and to leaving the world better than we found it. This includes socially responsible practices toward a healthier natural environment, especially for those who have been subjugated and oppressed for far too long.

*AWE has taken steps to provide space for dialogue on this issue among our member centers, Watershed Fellows, and stakeholders to strengthen and grow our work in this area. To everyone who is suffering in sadness, anger and fear, know that we see you, we hear you, and we pledge to work even harder towards achieving an equitable and just society.*

If you have thoughts or perspectives please reply back to this email so that we may continue this meaningful dialogue. -

We stand in solidarity,

The Alliance for Watershed Education of the Delaware River