

Event 2: Panel Discussion on Equitable Access to Green Space

Moderators: Natalie Friedberg & Shree Mahrotra*

Panelists: Jose G. Gonzalez, ***Emma Blackthorne, *
& Nicole Merino Tsui******

Natalie Friedberg: I'm excited to announce the next panel discussion, which will be facilitated by Shree Mehrotra. Shree is a first-year Berkeley law student. She has recently been elected as the environmental justice editor of ELQ. We're really excited to have her on the board. She has a background in environmental science and human rights, and before law school, she worked as a paralegal in the [United States Department of Justice] (USDOJ) Civil Rights Division, and she completed her master's in Development Studies at Cambridge. Shree will do the introductions of the panelists that we're really excited to have here today.

Shree Mehrotra: Hi, everyone, it would be great if the panelists could come up because I'd love to introduce you with them seeing your faces. I'll start with Jose. Jose G. Gonzalez is a professional educator who currently serves as the equity officer for East Bay Regional Park District. He is the founder of Latino Outdoors, as well as an equity and inclusion consultant with the Averno Group. He's also an illustrator and science communicator. He received his BA from the University of California, Davis with teaching coursework at the Bilingual Multicultural Education Department at Sacramento State, and his MS from the University of Michigan School of Natural Resources and Environment. He serves as a board member for the Parks California as well as a commissioner for the California Boating and Waterways Commission.

Dr. Emma Blackthorne is the senior dean of Research and Planning at Contra Costa Community College District and a professor of anthropology at

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Yuba College. She also serves on the board of the Sutter Buttes Regional Land Trust and Sierra Native Alliance, ensuring that Indigenous voices are elevated in relation to social justice, environmental conservation and stewardship and mental health services in Northern California. She is a citizen of the Bad River Band of the Lake Superior tribe of Chippewa Indians. Dr. Blackthorne earned her bachelor's degree and postgraduate certificate in anthropology and Native American studies from the University of Wisconsin. She holds a master's degree in social work from Rutgers University and a doctorate from Capella University in Minnesota.

Nicole Merino Tsui has over a decade of experience in community development, education, and program design. She currently serves as a senior project manager with the West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project, a community-based environmental justice organization where she works with their Owning Our Air steering committee.

Prior to this, she served as a student success specialist with KIPP Bay Area Public Schools. She holds a master's in development practice with a focus on water, sanitation, and hygiene and disaster relief from Emory University, as well as a bachelor's in English language and literature and political science from our very own UC Berkeley. Please join me in welcoming our panelists.

Shree: Thank you all for being here. Great to meet you all in person. I want to start off the panel with more of an aspirational question. What does equitable access to green space mean to you? What are your goals in your current roles, or you could take it more broadly in terms of what does the ideal scenario look for you beyond your current roles? Anyone can start, whoever feels compelled.

Dr. Emma Blackthorne: That's such a big question. What does that look like? I think for me it looks like an inclusive environment, a place where green spaces are available to everyone, that we use the inviting language, that we talk about all the different perspectives about that landscape, about that open space, about our lives, about our experience, why that's important, and that we share our stories about those spaces.

I think that's the most valuable thing that we can walk away from green spaces, is the imagination and the stories that we can share and tell, and the uplifting feeling that we get. I'm hoping that we can continue to generate inclusive and welcoming spaces and just continue to invite people to join us in that journey.

Jose G. Gonzalez: I agree. Actually, it's a really big, inviting question. I think one way to start, which is interesting, is that this is a new role for me as the equity office. It's a brand-new position at East Bay Regional Park District. It's a brand-new office. This is my third month in. I'm excited because I get to bring in everything that I usually have been working around. Three quick things around that question for me is, one is both not getting stuck in a prescriptive definition of equity, because sometimes that's what's happened, and yet having it mean something. Because then we joke, it becomes like the new coconut water. You just want to put it everywhere. Then realize, yes, it's equity. What does that mean?

That's like what are we grounding it on? Then how is it both new and not new? The second part then is to be able to look at, I use models like the water of systems change to say what are the explicit, semi-explicit, and most implicit elements or your structural relational mental models as Director Quintero was referencing. Yes, what is an actual policy? For me, it's literally that. Is a policy in place or not? Is it resources? Is it not in there? Relational is, how are actual relationships and power dynamics changing?

We could often say that there's power dynamics and they were great. What does it look like? If you were to map it out. It's both real, but also it's not just like a policy you can point to. Then the last one is the mental model, which for me is something like parks is a pretty delineated, it's like maps on a line or lines on a map, excuse me, I don't know if maps on a line, lines on a map, but to me, it's a relationship to land.

How is a relationship to land in parks an invitation to that knowing that beyond that line it's this broader picture of how are we changing as Director Quintero mentioned, what does it mean that equity is a redefining of not just the definitions but the relationships, the experiences, and even interrogating what we have inherited, and what does that look like for the future?

Nicole Merino Tsui: I would say equitable access, what it would truly look like. We wouldn't have a panel like this, first and foremost. Also, so I'm representing West Oakland. I work there, and I also live there. My involvement really stems from the fact that I have two small kids and lots of options. I chose to live in West Oakland. West Oakland is extremely unique. We have, in terms of the city, 20 percent permanent low-income housing. What that means is as demographics change and our median household income also changes, we will continually have a population that does not have access to green space.

I'm fortunate, along with other neighbors, to have a backyard. What equitable access looks like is all of West Oakland, not just a swath or not just a mile of designated zoned land is actually green. We're not even looking at vegetative buffers for emissions reduction. We're planting trees because we can afford to plant trees. That's what access would look like in West Oakland, not as a mitigation project, but as a simple beautification project. I look forward to that day. I do imagine that happening in the next ten years because I can't do this work forever. Ten years is the timeline I'm giving for that to happen for that community, for my community.

Shree: Yes, thank you so much for those comments. That's a great segue also into my next question. I like that you talked about that it's not just about climate change mitigation and what are the benefits to other people broadly, but what is the benefit to the community directly there? Whether it's beautification or other things, I want to segue into what you all see of the tangible benefits to green space for these communities and what drives you to do this work, essentially?

Jose: I'll go off of that because I think I really appreciate that response. One of the things is when I've been engaging with groups, and they're trying to, okay, well, why do we have to do this? Everyone's welcome at parks. We're not

discriminating anyone from coming. I was like, okay, let me look at starting, what are they seeing, what are they not seeing? That's why it's often been helpful to say, let's start with something that's pretty research-based now, which is redlining maps.

You look at a place like Oakland, or the whole East Bay, and you go back and see what the redlining maps were. Even though those were grounded in housing, of course, what we see now is, those correlate with just about anything. You look at urban heat, visitations to emergency rooms, with COVID pandemic, and it all just maps out, pun intended, in that sense of, you see it. For me, it's that question of insight. If we don't actively then, redesigning, challenging redesigning, and, interrupting these maps, then we can't be surprised they're going to continue to show up in different ways like a lack of all of the benefits of green space, which is, you name it.

Green space heals physically, cognitively, mentally, spiritually, you name it. It's also not just purely a recreational benefit. It is that and more. That's why we try to expand from that and say, access to nature, and that's not a nicety, it's a necessity. It's a way that they're not extraneous. It's essential just so that people don't think, oh, parks, that should be the first thing we can cut on the budget. They're not as important as schools or as public safety. No, it's quite the opposite. For me, the final piece on that is to say, then that's the invitation to say, then what do the maps of 2050 look like instead of purely just perpetuating the maps of 1950?

Dr. Blackthorne: That's a really important question. I had a very different experience while growing up. I grew up on a reservation in northern Wisconsin, Bad River, in the small town of Odena. I was on the shores of Lake Superior. When I left the reservation, it was weird. That's when I learned about parks. In my seven-year-old brain, what is a park? That made no sense to me. Having access to natural landscapes, having access to ancestral berry collection gardens, that was just part of how I grew up. Then also having the language that went along with that.

I do speak my native language. The language connects to the landscape, connects to the activity. Everything about my culture was set in this landscape, this space, for thousands of years. One of the things that I work toward is to see all of our Indigenous youth have that opportunity as well, to be able to have the language, to have the experience, to have the opportunity to visit their sacred spaces, their ancestral lands, and just to have that be part of who they are. I have so many stories that I get to share with my children about my experience growing up in this very natural landscape, traditional landscape.

It's something that it's hard for me to see so many of my cousins, my Indigenous cousins, and relatives here in California, they don't have that access like what I did. I feel very, very privileged in relation to what I see happening here. One of the places I work right now where I'm a director on a nonprofit board, the Sutter Buttes Regional Land Trust, first of all, the name Sutter in of itself, if you're not familiar with that individual, I know you probably are very

familiar with that individual, had some really horrific, horrifying things that he did to the Indigenous people.

Just the name in of itself, I find incredibly offensive and wish we could just change that. Please, [laughter] I'm really working really hard. Maybe I found my person to change that. Also, I know State Parks has this segment of land in the Buttes. The Buttes are very sacred to many of the Indigenous people throughout California. Parks has land, but we don't have access. It's been very difficult. It's something that I'm actively working toward trying to reconnect our Indigenous people, especially our youth, the youth I work with at Sierra Native Alliance, just want to have access, to see.

There's so much history and stories that go along with that space, and to be able to help be part of making that, reconnecting people that way. What I had, and it wasn't taken away from me. It's a very interesting difference in experience from what I see where I grew up versus what I see here.

Nicole: The co-benefit of green space is specifically kids get to be kids. Technology, all of that fun stuff, doesn't help. Being able to be outside and play safely is a right that many kids in urban areas or areas where you're Black, Brown, and poor simply doesn't exist. West Oakland has, I believe, four parks, possibly five. From those parks, only one of them is actually safe and accessible. That's the one a block from my house, which means everyone who lives in West Oakland, we have about 22,000 people, access this one park called Mini Willow Park. It's a small park. It's in the name.

Co-benefits of green space and accessibility is that basically kids in the hood get to have a graceful transition into adulthood because they're allowed to have a childhood. Right now, we're not seeing that because something as simple as a park doesn't exist. In addition to the fact that Oakland simply doesn't have the staffing or the infrastructure. I don't know if it's a will or skill. Either way, something's lacking in this major city that doesn't allow our parks to be maintained.

To that point about green infrastructure, the city has two arborists for the entire city, which makes maintaining trees extremely difficult and tricky. Every tree that's planted in Oakland requires a permit. The City of Oakland is behind in every permitting aspect that comes to their table.

Dr. Blackthorne: Permits for trees?

Nicole: Yes, there are permits for trees.

Dr. Blackthorne: This is just mind-blowing to me. That would be so bizarre. It's like the same thing that when I left the reservation. A fishing license? What? What is it? You have to take a test for this? How do you get a fishing license? Very bizarre. Permits.

Nicole: Yes. The co-benefits for Oakland is that kids get to be kids and parents are actually allowed to witness and be a part of that in a space that's safe. We don't think of parks as being monumental to childhood. They absolutely, absolutely are.

Shree: Yes. Thank you for that. I really appreciate your discussion of intersecting and overlapping forms of inequity. I wanted to drive the

conversation back to something you touched on earlier, a few of you, in terms of a little more about the history of the U.S. conservation movement and how it's impacted conservation space today. How would you frame these problems today? I know we touched on Native history and heritage and practice and how that has shifted as a result, as well as the history of racism and redlining in West Oakland. It would be great to pull out some of those threads.

Jose: I'll start. I guess I'll ask this room. What year was it that banning of DDT by the [Environmental Protection Agency] (EPA)? 1971? Is anyone out here? I think it was 1971, around that. I want to use these as two quick examples. One of them is, I often use that because when you, I say that the narrative, the story still matters because it informs who gets to be seen, to count, to feel like they're a part of the environmental or conservation movement, how that's affirmed.

Banning of DDT, I can throw out names like Rachel Carson and say *Silent Spring*, and if you have taken all those environmental classes, you get to fill in the picture. You say, got it, yes, this was an important call to action and it was an environmental success and that went to court [through the] Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), and got DDT banned. Does anyone know what was the case from California on DDT?

Audience Member: Kesterson?

Jose: I think it was that, even more so. Actually, I don't remember the exact case name, but who was the agency or the nonprofit that filed a lawsuit? California Rural Legal Assistance, if you're familiar with that. Which was new to me when I first was— Because I was familiar with the Rachel Carson story, I'm like, yes. It doesn't take away from that, just to be clear, because she had, obviously in terms of sexism, she had to put up with a lot for that. What's interesting is that there was a lawsuit on behalf of migrant farm workers in California.

Here's the impacts of DDT. As you know, who gets standing in court? It's a whole history of trying to say, how does nature get standing in court? How would the trees get standing in court? You have to be able to anchor it on a person, on how are people being harmed? It's interesting to know that the people, in terms of migrant farm workers, that standing, because these cases ended up being combined, but the story that makes it out is we won for the birds.

I'm always asked, so what happened in terms of the migrant farm workers? Written out of the story, there's whole reasons for that. Power dynamics in California with agriculture, I'm sure you're all familiar. Of course, it's taken so much longer to really lift that up and get some wins for farm workers in terms of pesticides. That's an example for me that I've always used to say, this is both the need and the power of the law, but also the story that gets to support that. For what you show up, because I tell people like, people are familiar with EDF, and they've done a lot of good work. They're really well-funded.

I'll say, why is that not the case with California Rural Legal Assistance in the same way? Ralph Abascal, as I'm sure you're familiar with, that was an individual there. Then very quickly, lastly, for me, it's a reminder that

conservation, as a word, can have a lot of value, but depending on what community you're in, people hear conservation, and they receive a very different thing. It's both hard, I know, because our legal system is set up to play with what we have, and can sometimes be challenged to expand from that.

That's the thing for me, where say we've overlaid this idea of private property and first water rights on a natural landscape, that communities would ask like, why? How does that make sense? Trying to both work with how we've inherited that and try to expand from that so that even though the law may sometimes take longer to catch up, I think that what we're in service of can hopefully advance beyond that. As an example, for me, it's an invitation when you're getting asked to think, we've called them natural resources. What happens when you think about them as natural relatives? It doesn't take utility away, but your sense of responsibility with and for them begins to shift.

Dr. Blackthorne: Yes, the language we use matters. Being the anthropologist, the language that we use has an impact on how we think about something. That's really important. I love that you point that out. Thank you for that. Land disposition has been difficult. We have a long history here in the United States of taking away or not seeing or attributing the value or understanding the value that Indigenous persons have in relation to their homes. In some ways, parks have worsened that situation. I take the example of, for example, Devil's Tower. It's a very sacred site. There are some sites in various Indigenous cultures that see certain landscapes as you don't interfere with what's happening there.

It's so powerful. It's so sacred. It has such enormous life and energy that to go there is dangerous, or to damage it or to change it is dangerous, Devil's Tower being one of those places. Yet, with the federal park, we allow people to drive in stakes, to do mountain climbing, and people recreate on this space. Can you imagine for a moment if we said, oh yes, of course, you can go ahead and climb, scale the synagogue anytime you like, or go and scale this temple, or go drive things and nails into this being.

I think we would all be horrified and fairly offended, but yet, when it comes to Indigenous perspectives, it's okay just to wipe that aside and say, we will harm your ancestors, and we will harm your landscapes and your culture, and take that away from you, and you don't have a choice. I think it's hard for most people to stop and realize how, or to understand what it means not to have voice. You're here at Berkeley. You guys all have a voice.

It's hard to imagine for most people not having that, and our Indigenous communities have struggled to have that voice and to protect their landscapes, protect their sites, their spiritual places. We have language lost because of the loss of access to certain landscapes and to certain sites. We have loss of language. We have loss of cultural knowledge, all of which we're desperately trying to recreate and find and rediscover. It's nice to also hear and to see what's happened here in California, the leadership that is happening, with developing those relationships and that understanding. Gosh, the federal government has a lot to learn from us in that way.

It's so refreshing and nice to hear. Same thing with other state agencies, like engaging with, and I'm trying not to take your topics from you, Curtis, but to see the state agencies even taking into consideration that traditional ecological knowledge that exists and that there's science, that Indigenous people have science, but we haven't been able to practice our science because we had this land taken away from us. Part of our history and healing process needs to be about reconnecting to those spaces, reconnecting to that language, and reconnecting to those traditions, and providing the stewardship that is important for protecting those spaces.

Nicole: I will note that in my work in environmental justice, conservation isn't a word that we lead with, and it has a lot to do with the race-based power that it has. Who's very focused on littering? It tends to be white people. They're indignant about littering. In composting, it's white people. Who bears the brunt of redlining and having their economic well-being cut off from the rest of a city? Tends to be Black people. West Oakland, quick geography, it is a neighborhood that is surrounded by three freeways.

One freeway, 980, was built specifically to connect the 24 to 880 quickly. Again, cut off an economic powerhouse for Black West Oakland residents, and I would argue that the city has never recovered, or that neighborhood has never recovered from that. Again, conservation, not something I can comment on in a fair manner. I can comment on environmental justice and what we can do moving forward.

Part of that would be demanding that the Port of Oakland, which is another West Oakland neighbor, I don't want to forget them, demanding that they actually show up in good faith. The Port of Oakland, unlike other cities, I'm thinking Long Beach, which is where I grew up, the Port of Oakland is not in any way monitored or advised by the City of Oakland. They are their own entity. When asked about truck traffic or traffic-related air pollution or any of those things, their response is they cannot control what trucks do simply because they are the landlords. They rent out space to logistics companies. That's the extent of their responsibility.

When I think of environmental justice or conservation, which is simply having a chance to breathe clean air, what that would look like is the City of Oakland. Caltrans, which is another entity since we're surrounded by three freeways, and the Port of Oakland all behaving in a way that made it so that when all of these things become published in the next few years, they are on the right side of history.

Jose: A reminder why those trucks are not on the 580.

Nicole: Yes, there is actually a ban for the 580 because those populations have a lot more political power than those who live in the flatlands. Thank you for that reminder.

Shree: I really appreciate the way you said that there's race-based power in the word conservation. Because as a person coming also with an environmental justice lens, to my work, I've always stayed away from conservation/had no interest, really. The taking on this panel has been really interesting because I was

like, I should educate myself more on the intersection of those things, because I really only saw it with Indigenous issues. Going beyond that, so I appreciate this conversation.

I think a number of you have talked about this tension between conservation and equity. Especially with our history, I think it's important to recognize how much the narrative around conservation has been ruled really by white people. I appreciate talking about native dispossession and how these untouched national parks were really lived on for thousands of years, and were by no means untouched, but people were taking care of them with their Indigenous knowledge.

I want to talk a little bit more about this tension between equity and conservation because they are often painted as competing interests. Do you think that's a false dichotomy? Do you think that's true? I think we've touched on that a little bit, but also in terms of maybe looking towards more solutions of how we can balance these competing concerns on the land, in terms of equitable access to green space, as well as conservation, but maybe change the word conservation to a meaning that makes more sense for our communities living in these spaces.

Jose: I guess I will note that in the "conservation community" is that conversation to like, what does conservation stewardship mean? These words that we've used? What is actually defended? I think for me is like, well, what do you get into a deep meaning? That's what I said, like relationship with the land, what does that look like? Two things for me are one is to continue to interrogate and see what it leads you to see what is the logic that has framed both definitions and ways to approach that ending up in statute, like something what is defined as wilderness.

Then all of a sudden, that begins to guide how you "manage a landscape," why this is designated wilderness and why this is not. Part of that is, how is that going to change? Actually, wilderness maybe shouldn't mean no people or only people in this way. What if wilderness meant people in this way, but really, it's a reconnection, or the way that I've used it, it's a healing, a severed connection, to really look at what that relationship with the landscape looks like, that can be very different than the picture that we've held.

To get a little meta with you all, sometimes I tell people, try to at least start with seeing how a reductive mechanistic logic guided so much of the way that we relate with each other and with the land, but it's also justified being able to steal land and steal labor, for example. What happens when we re-shifted to a life logic, like a landscape logic? As an example, if you've ever heard, hey, your team is functioning like a well-oiled machine. You've heard that it's like, "Oh, awesome. We're doing great. Keep it up." It doesn't mean oh, machine bad automatically. If I were to come back and say, "Hey, your team, your team is functioning like a well-nurtured meadow, like a thriving meadow."

You're like, "Well, that sounds weird." Why is the machine better than the meadow? Are you going to go to the meadow and say, I can't believe you're not meadowing enough today? I need you to meadow better tomorrow. It's being efficient. It gets you to now begin to think what is the relationship with each

other in leadership and outputs ways to approach that. Sometimes for me, it's helpful to pause that to then be able to unpack and think then what are we creating and how and why and in ways that reinforces social constructs like racism, that even though they're social construct, they still have a very direct impact on life and well-being.

That's for me it's that imitation because it's a social construct. It also means we can change these. We can undo them. It can take a long time. That's where I try to guide conservation to say, if we're going to practice conservation in the way we've done it before, I can't be surprised that harm will still come out of that. Because what that meant was people bad, keep them out. Then maybe only these people in, and then we've developed things like leave no trace as a way to say, this is how we're protecting the landscape.

Your logic from where that is very different. It's almost an insult to apply that to a native community as if you're understanding the logic they're coming from. Something like the tragedy of the commons, actually, it's only true if it is a European mindset. It's not true, if it's like a native mindset from California. This, for me, it's the way to really challenge and push the way we've framed that because it's still grounded, as you say. You have to have a neighborhood where people can have that and not have them think you can only get that if you go way out there and if you have the economic and political willpower.

Dr. Blackthorne: I do agree that there is a false dichotomy between these two issues. I think that they're absolutely interrelated. We live in living ecosystems. Everything around us is alive. Everything around us is even moving. Taking time to adjust our language to think about that as everything, atoms and everything is alive and moving. I think that's something that I grew up with, a perspective. I see everything very differently than I think the majority of folks, non-reservation living individuals see the rest of the world. They see it as stagnant and permanent. This is, this is a table and this is hard, it's not alive. You can't hurt the table, but you can. You can hurt it.

You can break it and change things. When we start looking at things as if it is alive, that that's something that will change how we interact with those landscapes and with those spaces. I'm going to teach you all Ojibwe. There's a word that I love. I really like the idea of meadowing. I'm going to meadow really well today. I like that. It feels good. There's action in that. Because you think about a meadow and it has action. Similar to that, but it's an Ojibwe word, *bimaadiziwin*, which means living in a good way and doing things in a good way, living a good life.

That also means every moment, you need to be present and mindful and thoughtful and bring a kindness and gentleness to each and every one of those moments. Maybe that sounds really woo-woo, okay, we can't really live there. That's really nice. I'm having a terrific, great dream. I think it does ground us when we start thinking about things that way. How can I live in a good way in this moment and interact with everything around me in a positive and thoughtful way? I like that word, *bimaadiziwin*. I'm happy to write it out for you if you ever

want to and repeat it often because the language that we use it needs to change. We need to look at things as if they are alive, just like we are.

I don't mean to anthropomorphize anything, but it's true that everything deserves respect. Everything came from something. It is alive. It's moving. If we start treating it and engaging with our environments that way, I think good things will come of that. It's just my pipe dream, but I really believe that.

Nicole: Huge fan of the word justice because it implies and reminds us that there is something that needs to be fixed. Conservation for me is still very status quo, and what are we preserving and for who and to what end. I think we know what conservation is and who it's for. Since it wasn't designed with me in mind or my children, I'm going to stick with environmental justice.

Part of teaching kids what environmental justice is starting with the fact that we talk about Mother Earth. My children are Spanish and Cantonese speakers. We use that language with them, and both those languages are a lot more soft and gentle and loving than I'd argue the English language. Again, with environmental justice, it's allowing people to know that they have the choice to make a decision and letting people know that, yes, harm has been done. What does love look like? What does repair look like?

Inviting people to the table. Anytime we have these types of conversations or I'm in any space, my first question is who is not here, and who did we not think to set a plate out for? Environmental justice is that reminder that we're not dealing with a piece of the pie. The pie can always become bigger. It's about who we are allowing to access those types of resources, those types of opportunities, and those types of choices because if you don't have any choice, then you don't have any freedom.

We cannot, as community members, think about conservation or even environmental justice if we feel like we don't have any voice or any power or our basic needs aren't met. I'd encourage us to, when possible and when appropriate, use environmental justice as long as we are acutely aware of who's not at the table and who, in our positions of power, we can hold the door open for until they're able to walk in.

Shree: I really appreciate you calling out the word justice and the power that it has. I know a lot of groups at Berkeley have been thinking about this. I'm also on the gender journal. Here is called the Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law & Justice. We purposely separate out law and justice because we recognize it's not the same thing. We similarly have a Criminal Law & Justice Center that has just been started this year, and they purposely did the same thing. I'm excited to see this trend of people discussing that way.

I'm going to ask one last question of our panelists so everyone can start thinking about their own questions from the audience. We spent a lot of time talking about what change could possibly look like, and I wanted to talk a little bit more about the tools we have to address this more concretely. I'm happy if you can tie it to your own work or other things that your community has been working on in this space to make these goals a reality.

Dr. Blackthorne: There is so much to be done. Pick a spot and start. From a legal perspective, some of the things that I would love to see happen and continue to grow is seeing our natural resources and bestowing on them, even though they already have it, personhood. The rivers, these are moving living beings. Personhood is important. I think because we have to be real, we're not going to suddenly shift into an Indigenous perspective, the Western perspective.

What we've built is here and it's going to stay, but how do we inform it and use it wisely to create something better for the future? Personhood for our resources and our landscapes I think is important because when you start thinking about these landscapes as beings, as a person, I think you tend to be a little bit more careful with them and you treat them with greater respect. Personhood, please keep working on that. I would love to see that grow and continue. Not just rivers, but mountain ranges, like the buttes, it's a living being. It would be nice to see it treated that way.

Jose: Especially corporations.

Dr. Blackthorne: That's a whole other conversation.

Nicole: I would say zoning. Zoning is a big issue in Oakland, and I imagine in other places. Specifically, changing or helping the city which is, they're in the process of writing their general plan which tends to last twenty to twenty-five years. I would love any legal guidance that's available from this group of intelligent folks around what land use and zoning could look like to allow for actual housing to be built in West Oakland and how do we change parcels that are zoned for industrial use that should never, ever be paired with human beings. Unfortunately, West Oakland, that is the situation that we're in. How do we change that?

West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project loves CEQA, and we love NEPA. At the same time, we are seeing that in the last couple of years, CEQA has been used to actually harm the community, which as I will say, a new tactic, but it's being done. It's being done by our own city council. I think that if we can figure out zoning and land use in West Oakland specifically, we would have a lot more legal power to stop that behavior.

Jose: I will say this in two ways. One of them is the three questions that I often ask to just even assess and guide where we are, one is, what power are you willing to give up or, conversely, what power do you so want to hold on to that it harms others, like CEQA as an example. Sometimes the question is just there for people. They don't know what power that they have, or they see that as a loss rather than an expansion of power.

I think that can be really helpful as people think about how you wield and yield your privilege. To be a lawyer it has a lot of power and can do a lot of good, just as you know, can do a lot of not good. Hence, the second question is that, in service of what? I think asking in service of what can unpack that a little bit like what's the path? What does this lead mean? Is this what I want to be in service of?

The third one is, what heals the harm? Because the reality is we have inherited a lot of spaces that have all of this harm. Justice-oriented work is about

preparing that because sometimes I say, “Look at injustice as was taken away. Justice—how does it make it whole? What does that really look like?” Some of it is going to be very long-term, like Land Back, in different ways. Some of it you can start today.

The point about zoning and permitting, all of these things can make a huge impact within an administration or election cycle where others will be generational. To close that, with that for me in my role at the district, I try to hold that as well my impatience of wishing that I could just like, boom, here it is but also realizing, okay, there I go again with what is my policies and structures, what is going to be my relational, and then what is going to be the mental models so that no matter who is there in that position, that it shouldn’t be dependent on an individual and it’s actually owned.

That line on the map that delineates a park or a park district doesn’t become an excuse to say, “Oh, West Oakland is not our issue.” I’m like, “Quite the opposite. Literally an issue because minimum, those are taxpaying residents. If they can’t have access to that, then what are we doing?”

Shree: Thank you so much for that framing of what we can do short-term and long-term. I think it’s good to hold both of those goals at the same time and work simultaneously towards them. I want to open up the conversation.

Natalie: Does anybody have questions for the panelists as a whole or for any of the individual panelists? Go ahead and raise your hand. I can start with one that I have, which is I’m curious. Specifically, I am thinking of you, Dr. Blackthorne, but it could be for anyone on the panel, which is you spoke about the competing interests of recreation and conservation and Indigenous land use. I’m wondering, in your experience as somebody who’s involved with a land trust, how do you navigate that specific balance of uses for a space? What are your thoughts on that conflict?

Dr. Blackthorne: It is a very delicate process. I think it begins with having greater respect for divergent views. Coming to the table and being present at the table—first of all, we need to be invited to the table. Let’s start there with having Indigenous voices included off the bat when we’re talking about environmental justice. I like that. Environmental justice. When we’re talking about that issue, invite us. Don’t just exclude our voice. I think that’s the first step.

The second step is when we talk about our sacred spaces and the landscapes and things of that nature, and we talk about them as our relatives, as our cousins, as our family members. It’s painful to see the dismissiveness on the faces of everybody else as if looking at a natural landscape as a relative is somehow ridiculous, childish, meaningless. These are our family members. Right off the bat, when we’re finally invited to the table and actually sit down and we have that perspective just shoved aside and that’s ridiculous, why would we continue to collaborate or contribute to the solution? You’re already telling us that we have idiotic notions. I think that greater care needs to be taken there.

Audience Member: I think it’s been already talked about and touched on, but something that I think about a lot coming from a community who similarly has not historically been very connected to nature and hasn’t been afforded that

opportunity. Coming from that community, a lot of the understanding about why nature is important or why access to these spaces is important or why should we even care is not understood.

Even coming into this field of work, I had a lot of people asking me like, “What are you doing?” “Why do you care?” Really just not understanding. My question is, do you see ways to rebuild that knowledge and connection for communities that have really just not been afforded the opportunity, have not been socialized to understand how these spaces interact with their daily lives? Why care, even in the context of, why should we be paying attention to things like climate change and the effects that it will have? Something in that realm.

Nicole: [West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project] (WOEIP)’s work focuses on air quality. I will say that after twenty-five years of our co-founders, Brian Beveridge and Ms. Margaret Gordon, doing that work, I think in terms of the legislature, we will get there in the next ten years. California Air Resource Board, moving away from diesel, all of those fun things. Air quality, I think, will be figured out in the next ten years.

To your point about, essentially, it’s the so what. What I’m slowly shifting us into is energy resilience, and that is actually something that’s bringing people into these conversations. By people I mean, people that look like me into these conversations about climate change. Everyone knows it’s happening. There’s no hesitation there. The hesitation becomes, what power do I have to change this? This, again, ties into green spaces. This ties into environmental justice, all of it.

Inviting people into this conversation around resilience, I think, really changes how people respond to it because it’s no longer something that’s exclusionary. Resilience means building a muscle to fight back. The reason I bring up energy resilience is because we’re seeing, especially in under-resourced communities, that those bills are rising, and people can feel that. That impact on climate change, under the guise of PG&E needing more money because they’re a mom-and-pop type of entity. People are seeing that, and they’re able to make that connection that climate change, environmental justice, all of this impacts me, and it impacts my pocketbook.

When you get people into conversations that directly impact their daily lives, all of the other things about tree planting or having a safe place to enjoy yourself, all of that, it’s an entry point that conveniently, I suppose, is bringing communities of colors to this table around environmental justice, which has, again, historically excluded them because they’ve never felt like they have power. Rahm Emanuel said, never let a good crisis go to waste, and that’s exactly what we’re trying to do in terms of engagement. Bringing people to the table with something that they understand, which is, unfortunately, higher energy cost.

Jose: I think what I would add—thank you for the question. I would say we welcome rough-draft thinking, knowing that sometimes the expectation is you’re supposed to have a polished thought. One of the couple of things that I take away from that is that “both and,” but sometimes we say it’s attention as if it’s bad, but sometimes the reality is attention is holding that space.

Sometimes it's seemingly contradictory to be able to say, "Oh, communities of color don't care." "They're not showing up." "How do we get them to?" I've always said we'll reframe the question to say how are they already involved in ways that you may not know, are unfamiliar, or that you're not attuned to where they are to start there, because you can have the "both and." You can look at a variety of surveys that show that actually communities of color show up the most in terms of care, concern, willingness, have best policies on everything from climate change to conservation, environmental policies, you name it.

You can look at that and say, "Whoa, how is that true, and why are they not present in these ways?" Hence that question of power. Now, think about power, though, as you have power shifts, it brings up a lot of things that we're going through now, which was, how have we seen power in a way that's a zero-sum and therefore traditional power is threatened by that as opposed to a power expansion and power with, I say with the reality that, one, again, the demographics of 2050 are going to be very different than 1950. If you're still stuck on trying to frame it in that way, we're actually losing a lot of the opportunity that comes with the value add of social diversity.

I think that's part of the struggle. For me, I look at all the ways to be able to reconnect when we're talking about nature, outdoor, recreation, conservation, say it's been there, but you've had this historical and structural severing in different ways. The reality, I think of having that connection still there. Two quick examples I'll share is the 2017 Nature of American Studies. One of those, they asked a series of questions, what is your interest in the following activities?

When they asked, what is your interest in hiking? One of the takeaways from that question it says, interest in hiking lowest among Black adults. Because it was the lowest at 19 percent compared to others. When they asked the question, "What is your interest in walking outdoors?" They all shoot up. It's like, okay, so what's the difference between hiking and walking outdoors?

Semi rhetorical. Because in terms of what you're inviting your body to do, it's the same thing, but that social construct of all, well, who's hiking for and in what ways? If I say I am hiking, how is that going to be affirmed or not affirmed, depending on who I'm with and all of that? Sometimes that is where, "Within the community," I've had to go back and say, okay, here's the reality.

For me this community, they've experienced the outdoors as labor. If I don't really work with that, I'm being dismissive of that reality, or not really building those connections to be able to say, what does it look like to go from outdoor labor to outdoor leisure and outdoor love and have all of those be real for it and not as if like it's a zero-sum or loss, or I have to convert them in a way that that's not fair.

Dr. Blackthorne: If you're living hand to mouth, if you're struggling to feed yourself, you're struggling to find a home, you're struggling to find other things, talking about conservation and stewardship or enjoying green spaces, it's probably pretty low on your priority schedule, right? You think about it. If you're answering the question of your daily survival every day in West Oakland,

perhaps you're probably not going to be too interested in whether or not you can get a tree permit. Sorry.

Nicole: It's true.

Dr. Blackthorne: Probably not high on your priority list. You're not going to care as much. That's part of the problem. That's the social justice piece of this. That is really important to environmental justice. When people are in survival mode, thinking about what's next, and I see this a lot throughout my experiences on the reservation. That comes in the form of picking between the poison and picking food, right?

Picking poison. Meaning do we just let the copper mine come on to the land and do mining and pay us, and now that they've left it, here's the Superfund site, have fun? Because now we've just poisoned your entire community for generations to come. I think when you're asking people to pick between thinking about good stewardship in thoughtful environmental behavior and then picking whether or not they can feed their families or their communities, I think that that's a really unfair choice and we need to fix that. That's what I have to say about that.