



## OUR COMMITMENT TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND INCLUSION

The Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM) recognizes that environmental issues affect communities differently and that, historically, environmental policies and practices have not been equitable to all. To address these injustices, NRCM is committed to providing all Maine residents and visitors with clean water, clean air, and healthy forests. We recognize that NRCM's mission — to protect, restore, and conserve Maine's environment, now and for future generations — is best advanced by the leadership, experiences, and values of people from diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and cultures. Threats to the environment disproportionately impact historically marginalized communities.<sup>1</sup> We envision and work toward a Maine that recognizes the effect environmental degradation has on its inhabitants and whose residents feel empowered to participate in the protection and conservation of their state's natural heritage.<sup>2</sup>

### Our Commitment to Environmental Justice

#### *Actions in Support of Environmental Justice*

Today, some communities continue to face greater environmental burdens than others. Below are some areas of inequity that NRCM's advocates are actively working to address:

- **Energy Costs:** Low-income Mainers carry a disproportionate energy burden that could be eased by renewable energy policies, resources, and financial assistance.
- **Accessible Public Transportation:** Mainers who either live in more remote areas and/or do not own or cannot use a car are negatively affected by the lack of transportation choices. Seventy-two percent of older Mainers live outside a fixed or flexed transit route.<sup>3</sup>
- **Water Quality:** Polluted waters affect Maine tribes who depend on a healthy fish habitat as well as safe drinking water; farms have been contaminated by the spread of toxic chemicals known as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS); and communities that depend on water recreation for their economy.
- **Landfills:** Landfills are traditionally located in lower-income communities and expose nearby areas, as well as adjoining waterways, to toxic groundwater, soil contamination, and disruption to ecosystem. The resulting lower property values contribute negative impacts on local economic development.
- **Access to the Legislative Process:** Because of geographic location or technology constraints, not all Mainers have the same opportunity to share their experiences and suggestions for solutions.

## *A Brief History*

Although environmental injustices have always existed in the United States, 1960s farm labor leader Cesar Chavez, who later fought against exposure of farm workers to toxic pesticides, is among the first environmental activists. Today's environmental justice movement emerged in the 1980s with the exposure of how environmental degradation and pollution disproportionately affect minority and low-income communities. In 1982 a small, predominately African American community was designated as the site of a landfill to accept soil contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB). A massive sit-in against Warren County, North Carolina, resulted. Although the protest failed to prevent the siting of the landfill, it did spark the environmental justice movement. By 1990, leaders began to look for allies among traditional, mostly white environmental organizations, whose efforts largely ignored the struggles of people who lived near and worked in places like hazardous landfills, radioactive waste storage facilities, and chemical manufacturers. A widely publicized letter to the top 10 environmental and conservation organizations accused them of policies with racial bias, lack of diversity in their staff and boards, and ignoring environmental hazards in communities and workplaces of people of color and the poor.<sup>4</sup> As a result, some organizations began developing initiatives to increase their commitment to issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ).

## *Environmental Injustices in Maine*

In Maine, the challenges to improve and maintain a clean and healthful environment persist for those who live, work, and play closest to the sources of pollution. Maine has a particularly shameful history of persecution of tribal members and destruction of tribal lands. The 1980 Maine Indian Land Claims Settlement Act and resultant disputes related to water access are prominent in Maine's recent environmental justice history.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Maine's historical demographic patterns created disparity in the ability of non-white, low-income, rural and/or other under-represented residents to access and experience healthful environmental conditions.

In April 2022 the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources passed LD 2018 (HP1500), "An Act to Implement Recommendations Regarding the Incorporation of Equity Considerations in Regulatory Decision Making." In this bill, environmental justice is defined as "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, rules, regulations and policies."

## Our Commitment to Inclusion

In addition to the bills we support, NRCM is committed to embracing diversity and inclusion in the ways we conduct ourselves as Maine's largest environmental advocacy nonprofit organization. We strive to amplify voices that are often excluded from environmental conversations. By honoring and celebrating people's diversity, NRCM can bring new creativity, effectiveness, and leadership to our work throughout the state. Achieving diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice is a continuous process, which, we believe, will contribute to a sustainable and peaceful world.

We demonstrate this commitment through the following specific actions: Providing a fair process of candidate recruitment and evaluation and a working environment that recognizes the variety of backgrounds and needs of our employees; employing and partnering with minority-owned businesses; and welcoming discussions with members whose views on NRCM's priority issues differ from the positions we hold.

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<sup>1</sup>[Racial Disparities and Climate Change — PSCI \(princeton.edu\)](#)

<sup>2</sup><https://www.nrcm.org/about-nrcm/vision-for-maine/>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.maine.gov/mdot/planning/docs/FinalStrategicPlan.pdf>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.ejnet.org/ej/swop.pdf>

<sup>5</sup><https://intercontinentalcry.org/maine-tribes-lose-authority-to-regulate-water-on-tribal-lands/>