

Minorities aren't well represented in environmental groups, study says

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Minorities and people of color have not managed to break the "green ceiling" inside environmental organizations, and remain underrepresented on their staffs, according to a report released Monday.

The report found that while people of color make up about 38 percent of the U.S. population, they represent 12 percent to 15.5 percent of the staffs of environmentally focused foundations, nonprofits and government agencies.

None of the largest environmental organizations has a person of color as president, vice president or assistant/associate director, according to the study, which was conducted by University of Michigan professor Dorceta Taylor and commissioned by Green 2.0, a working group focused on addressing diversity challenges in the environmental movement.

"The numbers don't lie," Taylor said. "Even more troubling, although most of the survey respondents expressed an interest in bridging this diversity gap, they admit their organizations are unlikely to take the necessary steps to do so."

Environmental organizations surveyed attributed the lack of staff diversity to a shortage of open positions and qualified applicants.

The study found minority and low-income communities are more likely to support increased funding for environmental initiatives.

"When you survey African-American and Hispanic communities, they are more likely to say, 'Spend money on environmental issues,'" Taylor said. "From a political perspective, it makes sense for environmental groups to engage low-income communities because a lot of political support sits in those communities."

Minorities also remain disproportionately affected by health issues related to environmental pollution. According to the Office of Minority Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, African-Americans were 20 percent more likely to have asthma than non-Hispanic whites in 2011. Hispanics were 30 percent more likely to visit the hospital for asthma, compared with non-Hispanic whites.

"It's an aggressive public health issue," said Mark Magana, founder and principal of the Hispanic Strategy Group, a consulting firm. "I think the green groups need to utilize our community to get the word out."

In response to the study, [environmental group](#) leaders acknowledged their organizations need to do more to increase diversity.

"We believe this report is critically needed and very timely," said Trip Van Noppen in a statement. Van Noppen is president of Earthjustice, a public interest legal organization focused on environmental issues.

"Our movement, and indeed our own organization, have a serious problem in that we don't yet reflect the rich diversity of our nation, or even the [diversity](#) of groups we represent in our work to protect the environment for all people," he said.

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