Making Connections: Supporting the Conservation Social Sciences

Session Organizers:
Dr. Devin Holterman, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Northern British Columbia and the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, devin.holterman@unbc.ca
Dr. Zoë A Meletis, Associate Professor, University of Northern British Columbia, zoe.meletis@unbc.ca

Abstract: Many governments have set ambitious conservation targets, which must be supported with social science and alternative forms of knowledge if the goals are to be achieved and the interventions effective. As such, we echo now decades-old calls for social science and interdisciplinary approaches to conservation scholarship and practice grounded in real and dynamic contexts. Recognizing that community-building in North America is key for a sound conservation future, we look to gather to amplify existing efforts and strengthen the community among researchers, scholars and practitioners working to understand and conserve our world. We aim to convene this community in an interactive and social way, taking stock of work being done, and identifying strengths, weaknesses, and needs, as a step towards building an interdisciplinary and interconnected network of professionals, experts, students, and decision-makers across Canada, and beyond. Complete abstract:
https://www.xcdsystem.com/scbna/program/R8bSS6t/index.cfm

Number of participants: 21

Activities: After a brief introduction to the session, a run through of the organizer's UNBC research ethics board approval for the project, and a round of questions from the participants, we began the session activities. Each table in the conference room had one discussion topic each. Participants were given 15 minutes to discuss the question amongst the participants at the table and note down any key insights on the large paper provided. At the end of the 15 minutes, participants moved to another table and repeated the process with a different discussion question. Three rounds of this break out discussion were conducted. The questions were as follows:

- How do social scientists connect with each other to keep contemporary North American conservation scholarship nimble? (i.e.: What networks, activities, and practices support this?)
- What types of actors, institutions, and venues exist? And how/why are they critical for advancing the conservation social sciences across North America? (i.e.: key leaders,
- community identified institutions and venues as stand out examples, why/how do these make a difference?)
- What are our community strengths and weaknesses (e.g. re: connecting with each other; conducting research; sharing knowledge within and beyond our community)?
- Who are some of the leading experts at all career stages in the conservation social sciences in North America? How can experts connect across generations, schools of thought, and geographic regions? (Please identify the leaders and means of connecting)
- How do we stay current in terms of new research, ideas, and leaders in our fields? (i.e: what activities are helpful? Resources? Tips/tricks?) What examples exist with respect to bridging academia and applied conservation, including Indigenous leadership and programs?

After these three rounds of discussion and note taking, each participant walked the room and, using stickers that were provided, ranked the ideas listed in the following categories: strength,

weakness, or needs to be prioritized. Participants were also able to add any final comments to the large papers containing the group reflections.

Results: the discussions at both the individual tables and as a larger group provided rich insights into the strengths, weaknesses, and areas that the conservation social science community can improve upon as we strive to enhance the broader communities' contributions to the conservation of biodiversity. It was largely agreed upon by the participants that spaces for discussion, networking, and innovation need to be continuously facilitated and nurtured to ensure the community advances forward and supports each other. The organizers are currently in the process of reviewing the information from the session in more detail and intend to publish the results by early 2025. The organizers will provide the NACCB with a copy of these insights for posting on the website when they become available. The organizers have also been in discussion with the Societies' Social Science Working Group on sharing the results of this discussion as the SSWG prepares its new strategic plan. The organizers intend to explore the potential for future sessions at conservation-related conferences and workshops throughout North America to build upon the momentum from the session in June at the NACCB, including future versions of the NACCB.