

WESTERN COLLABORATIVE CONSERVATION NETWORK



Confluence

2022

Key Takeaways

September 19-21, 2022 | Chico Hot Springs Resort | Pray, Montana



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Find the full Confluence 2022 Program with
schedule and speaker biographies [here](#).

Confluence 2022 Keynote Speakers

Cam Sholly spoke about his work as Superintendent of Yellowstone National Park, the first protected area in the USA designated as a "National Park" in 1872.

He opened by saying *"a lot of what we do [in the park] is heavily predicated on relationships and partnerships; there's not a single thing that the Park Service does by itself."* Cam continued by saying that the most important thing is *"to agree on solutions for the future, collaborate, partner and reconcile divergent opinions when they exist."*

Sholly did not fail to mention the misguided decisions of Yellowstone National Park's leadership in the past, including the extermination of wolves and other key predators, the decimation of bison, and the irresponsible feeding of bears. Within the last 50 years, Yellowstone has come a long way from the conservation errors of the past. Biologists state that

the park ecosystem is healthier than it has been since its establishment as a protected area including the highest number of bison since 1872 (6,000+).

Superintendent Sholly envisions a future for Yellowstone National Park which includes increased partnerships with Native American Tribes, bison roaming freely through park boundaries, adaptive bison population management, the resurgence of cutthroat trout, and a sustainable and enjoyable visitor experience, all while keeping in mind the predominate mission of conservation and preservation.

Currently, a major threat to one of America's most beloved ecosystems is climate change. In June of this year, a portion of the park and visitor infrastructure was demolished due to a ["500 year flood event"](#), resulting in temporary isolation of nearby communities and a major reduction in the number of annual park visitors. Cam called for action: *"we need to think about moving forward in the next 150 years... conversations must be heavily focused on how climate change is going to impact the condition of [our park] ecosystems... and we need to continue, even when it looks like it's impossible, to try to make progress together."*

Cam Sholly



**Cam Sholly, Superintendent of
Yellowstone National Park**

Confluence 2022 Keynote Speakers

Marj Nelson



Marj Nelson, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Deputy Assistant Regional Director

We had the honor of hosting Marj Nelson, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Deputy Assistant Regional Director, for Confluence's opening keynote. Marj spoke about the success and challenges of the [Upper Colorado Endangered Fish Recovery Program](#), established in 1988. The goal of the program is to fully recover four federally listed endangered fish species in the upper basin—humpback chub, bonytail, Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker—while enabling ESA compliance by water users and developers.

Marj's keynote focused on the [razorback sucker](#) (pictured right), a cute brown-colored suckerfish native to the Colorado River.



During the 1970s and 80s, changes in water management resulted in the disappearance of juvenile razorback suckers and difficulties in fish reproduction in the Upper Colorado Basin. Marj spoke about the importance of visionary collaboration and the group's inspirational goal to delist the fish species from the Endangered Species list and to ensure a healthy and vibrant population. Since 1988, the program has made great strides forward towards full fish recovery but is still working hard to achieve their goals. Marj hopes they are close to the finish and encourages everyone to stay tuned!

She says, "In closing, it is a collective, voluntary commitment to the longer term goal and the actions provide the broad benefits. We have water users, endangered species, and the communities in that basin building their identities around the rivers. The flows support the fish, recreation, downtown development, parks and recreation, economic opportunities, and we're doing this all while recovering the fish— and that is a key component that all of the partners view as essential and have committed to into the future".

Key Takeaways

Confluence 2022 Thoughts from Our Speakers

"What messages and takeaways do you want participants to leave with, and stay involved in the conversation?"

Jessica Archibald, Program Associate & Facilitator at Southwest Decision Resources, AZ

"First, that emerging leadership in collaborative conservation is not just for "young" people. Second, that mentorship is crucial to fostering more collaborative conservation in the world and also for improving the current state of collaborative conservation. Third, that there are significant barriers to entry for collaborative conservation, especially in consideration of JEDI.

And fourth and finally, that there is value in bringing together people with diverse stages of their career and life experience to discuss the state of collaborative conservation and strategize ways to improve it. Stay involved in our ongoing emerging leader conservation by joining the WCCN Emerging Leaders Working Group! Contact [Travis Anklam](#) for more information."

Aaron Clausen, Senior Program Officer for World Wildlife Fund's Sustainable Ranching Initiative, Northern Great Plains, MT

"That community-based conservation is the path forward for landscape-scale conservation in the short-grass prairies of the Northern Great Plains. People can stay involved by [reaching out to me directly](#) or signing up for our newsletter in the bottom right corner of our [webpage](#)! "



John Sanderson, Executive Director of the Center for Collaborative Conservation, CO

"In philanthropy, as with all collaborative conservation, relationships are key. We all can continue this conversation by joining the WCCN Sustainable Funding Working Group. [Contact me](#) to get involved!"

Key Takeaways

Confluence 2022 Thoughts from Our Speakers

"What messages and takeaways do you want participants to leave with, and stay involved in the conversation?"

Rebecca Ramsey, Executive Director of Swan Valley Connections, MT

"Collaboration is necessary, and not always easy. It takes patience, time and a tremendous amount of deep breathing. And even if it takes more time and patience than you could anticipate, if you stick with it, the outcome is the best available. Additionally, recreation and tourism are opportunities for economic prosperity (neck to neck with agriculture for top economy in our state), but are also threats to nature. Working with our Indigenous neighbors is of the utmost importance.

To stay involved, keep watching the [Life in the Land series](#) as it progresses. Get involved in the things you care about and remember to keep an open mind. Folks are welcome to [contact me](#), join our mailing (send me a request), or visit to our [website](#) and social media channels to stay engaged and participate in opportunities for learning."

Caroline Byrd, Former Executive Director of the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, MT

"The paper we worked on together titled, [Best Practices for Collaborative Conservation Philanthropy](#), was driven by the work of the WCCN and defines eight best practices for collaborative conservation and philanthropy." Please share with both practitioners and funders.



Key Takeaways

Confluence 2022 Thoughts from Our Speakers

"What messages and takeaways do you want participants to leave with, and stay involved in the conversation?"

Jaimie Baxter, Masters Student in Environmental Studies at Western Washington University, CA

"We are setting up research interviews and focus groups currently for the California Landscape Stewardship Network's [study on Collaborative Capacity & Infrastructure](#). If anyone is interested in participating, we would love to hear from you! Please reach out to me, [Jaimie Baxter](#), to get involved. Once our paper is finished next summer, we plan to host webinars and hope to see members of the WCCN there."



Confluence 2022 Reflections: Kristen Kipp

The WCCN's Awareness & Engagement Working Group had the pleasure of chatting with Confluence speaker Kristen Kipp, Montana Rancher, mother of three, Blackfeet Tribal Member, and Producer Outreach Manager for the [Piikani Lodge Health Institute](#). We asked Kristen about her experience at Confluence– what she liked, what knowledge and connections she took away, and what inspired her.

"I don't meet a lot of people like me," she told us. "It [felt] so good to be surrounded by people doing the same stuff, that care about the same things, that are passionate, and who come here with good hearts. You don't always have that."

"I left feeling on top of the world... I was so inspired. Hearing different perspectives really opened my eyes [and] for the first time, I placed more value on these kinds of [events] and decided I would make more of an effort to communicate with others doing similar work."

Read about Kristen's hopes for the future and other thoughts regarding Confluence in our [recent WCCN blog post](#).



Confluence 2022 Reflections: Marj Nelson

Reflecting on her experience, Marj shared how Confluence, as an interactive conference, gave her the opportunity to engage with people outside her agency. Her interview has been shortened for brevity:



Marj pictured left

"Getting snippets of different ideas, like folks working on mentoring and those conversations that they're having, or listening to folks about engaging with tribes, and the engagement with tribal members during the confluence was very insightful as we're trying to do a better job engaging with tribes.

That [was pretty cool, to] mix and match so you are able to engage in different topics and with different people and different perspectives, isn't that the whole point of collaboration?

[Another takeaway from Confluence was that] People are trying to figure this out, we're not alone and there are a lot of resources out there, at least mental resources out there to tap into... It was nice to make some connections outside the agency and get a different take on it, just to stir up creativity.

[The WCCN] struck me as something very different. [...] It struck me as a philosophy of teaching people how to collaborate rather than doing it for them."

Confluence 2022 Reflections: Lara Tomov

Montana-based filmmaker and communications consultant, Lara Tomov, is the director and cinematographer of [Life in the Land](#), a documentary film and podcast series that shares stories of those who interact with the complexities of Montana's land, waters, and communities, looking at the success and value in holistic approaches & locally-led initiatives. Life in the Land films and podcasts are free and available to the public.

During Confluence, Lara co-hosted a workshop titled, Crafting Your Collaborative Conservation Story which provided tools and advice for effective communication and storytelling for collaborative conservationists. Read through Lara's notes and [workshop materials here](#) to refresh your memory or learn more.

Find more information about Lara Tomov and links to access the Life in the Land series in [this blog post](#).





Confluence

Key Takeaways

Collaborative conservation and events like Confluence 2022 would not be possible without the generosity and support of our sponsors and funders.

Thank you for supporting communities throughout the American West to steward the lands and waters that sustain the quality of life of people and planet!

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