

We are excited to announce our Keynote speaker James Edward Mills!

The Path of Convergence: Navigating the Flow of Synergy Through The Adventure Gap



As the United States population grows to become more urban and disconnected from the natural world there is an expanding divide between those who spend time in the outdoors and those who do not. With rising disparities of economic opportunity and political influence that still fall along racial lines, people of color are disproportionately under represented among citizens for whom outdoor recreation and environmental protection are personal imperatives. This fissure, described by journalist and photographer James Edward Mills as The Adventure Gap, is spreading to include disenfranchised white people as well. Anyone, regardless of their race or ethnicity, who lacks the privileges of social mobility, disposable income and leisure time to enjoy the so-called “Great Outdoors” will find it difficult to invest what few resources they have to protect and preserve it.

Modern organizations charged with the mission of environmental conservation must shift their priorities to equitably include the diverse interests of an emerging population of citizens who are increasingly people of color, urban and economically challenged. In order to become more culturally and socially relevant throughout a broad cross-section of the American public these agencies are working to shrink the Adventure Gap by engaging a new audience of potential allies. As groups like the Sierra Club, the Trust For Public Land, the National Park Foundation and many others recognize the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion in their efforts to build communities of environmental stewardship, there are a growing number of opportunities to create synergy toward a national movement.

Like the course of free-flowing rivers across North America local and national initiatives toward diversity, equity and inclusion can begin to converge. Through mutually beneficial relationships that emphasize the shared importance of environmental protection, conservation groups as well as conscientious individuals

can work toward making the natural world more accessible and welcoming to everyone.

After a long career in the outdoor recreation industry James Edward Mills has learned to navigate the troubled waters of diversity, equity and inclusion. Through his work as a journalist and storyteller he has crafted a compelling narrative that details some of projects and programs across the country, including a few here in Wisconsin, which aim to bring people together to work effectively toward the creation of a natural environment that blends and balances the economic and ecological interests of the American people. In his presentation at the Wisconsin Association of Environmental Educators Annual Conference Mills will guide the way along the path this convergence may flow.