



# Center for Whole Communities

## On Land, Race, Power and Privilege: An organizational statement of values

### Background

This statement is part of our ongoing process as an organization to identify and articulate our deepest-held values and to put forth in the world why we do the work that we do and how we might strive to do it better. With that in mind this is an evolving statement, as we ourselves evolve. It felt most pressing to us to begin with a statement on race, power and privilege for many of the reasons articulated below.

### Our Statement

We, as a primarily white organization, stand in a place of privilege and opportunity that was afforded to us partly through a long history of exploitation, racism and inequality in this country. Even as we seek to understand more deeply this history and its implications, we know that we cannot become the honest and far-reaching organization we wish to be without acknowledging that fact and beginning to try to address it. Understanding the history of this country as it plays out around land use and land access is a first step toward being a social change organization with integrity.

We hold that healthy relationships between people and the land are an essential piece of creating a more tolerant, generous and inclusive culture in this country. We aspire to strengthen American communities by building healthier, more enduring relationships between people and the land. But one cannot talk authentically about land in this country without addressing issues of oppression and inequality. We believe that all people deserve equal access to land and equal opportunities for healthy relationships with land. With this, we assert that issues of racism, power and privilege as they play out in relationship to land must be challenged, and continuing inequities and injustices must be reconciled and healed.

Understanding our own personal and instructional connections to race, class and privilege is a fundamental and ongoing part of Center for Whole Communities' (CWC's) work. If we are to forge a new land movement in America – one that recognizes the centrality of our human relationship to nature, that recaptures lost moral ground, and that defeats the narrowness of its own special interests – then we must speak honestly and passionately about race, class and privilege in our movement and in our country. And we must do CWC's work in a way that resolves and bridges these divides, or we must accept that we are very likely creating further divides.

Center for Whole Communities is striving to be an anti-racist organization.<sup>1</sup> We are doing this in many ways, all expanding and evolving as we learn:

1. Our staff and board are examining how racism and privilege operate within our organization's walls, coming to a deeper understanding of how they frame our decisions and determine the culture of our organization and learning how to change that culture.
2. We are striving to diversify the leadership of our programs and the audiences they serve. We hold a standard of having at least one faculty member and at least 30 percent of the participants of our retreats be people of color.
3. We offer full fellowships to our programs to remove financial barriers for participation, and we make available our facilities to groups working specifically on issues of race, power and privilege.
4. We actively seek alliances with any organization working to overcome present injustices in the structure of land use and land access in this country.
5. In all of our programs, we are committed to raise awareness about issues of oppression, power and privilege and to galvanize change around those issues within the environmental movement.

In the future, we intend to offer identity caucuses and training opportunities to encourage discussions about racism, white privilege and power. We will create the internal forums that set accountability and clear standards for inclusion at all levels of the organization, and which annually review the mission, vision, policies, procedures, board agreements, etc. to ensure that this commitment to end racism is a consistent part of our culture.

Only when we have built a shared and strong analysis of race and privilege within ourselves and helped to build it within the environmental movement will our mission of building healthy, whole communities be authentic and possible.

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<sup>1</sup> We use this somewhat inadequate term for now, while acknowledging that we are still looking for a way to fully express what we mean by an organization that opposes oppression in all forms. Ideally, this could be stated in a positive way, yet language is a barrier. It is a bit like the dilemma of making a stand for "non-violence," which is different than "peace," but which lacks its own identity in our language. How can we talk about non-violence, or anti-oppression, as a thing in itself?