LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Twenty-two years ago, Laura Tyson founded Women’s Wilderness as a pioneering gender-informed, outdoor service organization in the U.S. Today, I occasionally get asked the question -- does gender still matter in this work? In a recent strategic planning process, we debated inclusion and how to orient our work for today’s context. We take a gender-expansive approach and have explicit LGBTQ+ programming because gender justice is not just about women and girls and precisely because gender still matters.

Here’s why:
• Access: Significant gender barriers exist in the U.S. to accessing both outdoor recreation and sports broadly. Girls participate in outdoor recreation at significantly lower rates than boys (Outdoor Fdn. 2017). Annually, boys get 11.3 million more sport opportunities than girls (NFSHSA, 2019). When you layer in race, socioeconomics and other intersectional discriminations, access is further diminished.
• Process: Going into the wilderness is just different with groups of girls, women and queer people. In our courses, the ways justifies the means. We don’t teach environmental respect by conquering mountains and “bagging” peaks. We don’t support leadership development by having instructors commandeer all decisions and urge participants to follow. We practice conscious choice, collaboration and shared leadership. We use the course experience to build connections to ourselves, each other and the land.
• Outcomes: Our courses aim to offer access TO the outdoors and growth THROUGH the experience. When you ask what girls, women and LGBTQ+ people need to gain from a transformative outdoor experience, you inherently come up with different answers than you would if you were serving people with dominant identities. After all, we still live in an inequitable society. Our approach aims to support micro and macro equity building in everything from women’s confidence in placing rock climbing anchors to supporting leadership of immigrant and refugee girls.

As I write this, we are navigating unprecedented uncertainty and suffering in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is far too little being said about gender and how girls, women and LGBTQ+ people are impacted uniquely by this crisis. To survive and thrive, adaptation is the natural response. Women’s Wilderness is leaning into the moment. We are finding new ways to support our community while grounding in our historical expertise. With gratitude to all of you who have been and will be part of this collective effort.

Sarah Murray, Executive Director
OUR VALUES

We believe **ACCESS TO NATURE IS A RIGHT** and being outdoors has transformative potential for us all.

We **WELCOME UNIQUE AND DIVERSE IDENTITIES**, experiences, and ideas and rely on them to do our best work.

We **COLLABORATE CONTINUOUSLY** in partnership and community.

We **LEAD** from out front, from behind, but most importantly, from within.

We **HUSTLE** for ourselves and for each other — and after the hustle, we celebrate.

We **EVOLVE AND ADAPT** individually and collectively in the face of our dynamic world.

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OUR VISION

A socially just and environmentally sustainable society.

OUR MISSION

To support girls, women and LGBTQ+ people in accessing their power and improving their health through connections to the outdoors and community.

Women’s Wilderness, a registered 501c3 nonprofit, was founded and is led by LGBTQ+ identified women. The organization exists to provide a powerful space for girls, women, and LGBTQ+ people to learn from role models that look like them and in a style specifically crafted for them with their cultural experiences in mind. By looking at the outdoor experience through a lens of social justice, we are changing the way that people connect with nature, each other, and the power within themselves. Our headquarters is located in Boulder, Colorado and are fortunate to base our local (day and after school experiences) in the Front Range with a strong emphasis on the Denver Metro area. Our overnight and expedition-length experiences take place throughout the high alpine, canyon and desert environments of Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah.
WHY WE DO THIS

A Girl's Reality
Girls today face a unique set of challenges as they navigate adolescence, ranging from cyber bullying, complex racial dynamics, internalized pressure to be “perfect,” and increased rates of depression and suicidality. Although all demographics of girls are exposed to these (and other) challenges, those from low-income families, girls of color and LGBTQ+ youth are particularly at-risk for mental and physical health challenges due to the fact they are less likely to access services that can help develop protective assets.

- High school girls report significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms than boys (Status of Women and Girls in CO, 2013).
- The 2015 Boulder County Healthy Kids Survey found a pronounced gap between girls’ and boys’ mental health, with girls reporting depression symptoms at 37% as compared to 18% of all boys.

The Outdoor Antidote
The physical and mental health benefits of outdoor recreation are well documented and broad. A study found that adolescents who regularly exercise had lower Body Mass Index than those who did not exercise. (Ziyagil et al., 2011). Unlike exercise indoors, proximity to nature has been associated with lower levels of stress (Thompson et al., 2012) and reduced symptomology for depression and anxiety (Beyer et al., 2014).

Inequitable Access
In spite of the proven benefits of spending time outside, outdoor culture and spaces can be very exclusive. Colorado is known for providing a variety of outdoor sports and recreation opportunities. But for whom? Denver Public School students are roughly 76% Latinx, African-American, and Asian. We know that only 8% of Hispanic people participated in outdoor sports (2014). 3% of climbers are Latinx and <1% are African American or Asian.

Outdoor culture is exclusive. This exclusion disproportionately impacts girls, who are less likely than boys to participate in any sport. The attrition rates for girls between 8th and 12th grade in all sports are 3 times higher than among boys.

Girls from lower socioeconomic backgrounds experience more emotional health problems, are less likely to have health insurance, and have less access to extracurricular activities such as sports (State of Girls Report, 2017). The result is reduced uptake in physical activity, including outdoor sports, amongst these populations of girls which ultimately leads to disparities in both mental and physical health. Our girls, especially girls of color, are missing out on the documented and critical benefits that go along with playing in the wild that can have a huge impact on their development as individuals and leaders. Women’s Wilderness does this work to support girls, women, and LGBTQ+ people and remedy this situation with the hopes of creating a healthier, more equitable society.
2019 IMPACT

We evaluate our impact based on a framework that looks at how participation in a Women’s Wilderness course changes someone’s behavior, attitude, condition, knowledge and status. Sometimes, our goal is to support technical skill development (like through our women’s climbing courses). In other programs, such as our girls’ after school and summer programs, we look for positive changes in mental or physical health indicators.

783 Participants Served

92% felt more confident and capable accomplishing difficult things

86% felt more comfortable being themselves

88% felt a greater ability to recognize their needs and work towards getting them met

92% felt stronger and proud of their physical abilities

65% of participants annually receive financial aid

30% of participants in 2019 identify as people of color

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30% of participants in 2019 identify as people of color
“Honestly, I don’t quite understand it but the last few days I have felt the most comfortable in my own skin than I ever have before. There is something about being completely away from society surrounded by beautiful mountains and trees, being supported by complete strangers (at first), and pushing myself to become stronger than I think I am.”

“I learned to believe in myself because I have great friends. I also learned to be proud of who I am and where I come from.”

“I am capable of a lot more than I think I am. When I shared my life story and was super vulnerable with my group, I was greeted with love and acceptance and that made me feel amazing.”

“I’ve never felt more safe in the dangers that can come along with nature. Not to mention the girls who have accompanied me. I’ve made the truest friendships within a course of 8 days.”

“On top of the mountain we hiked on Wednesday I felt so proud and brave.”
2019 COURSES

Adult
Intro to Trad Leading*
Gym to Crag*
Shelter-Craft for Survival
Core Survival Basics
Intro to Climbing
Women's Crack Climbing Workshop
Sport Leading 201
Advanced Anchor-Building
Trad 2.0: Multi-Pitch Skills
Knots, Hitches & Lashings for Survival
The Craft of Fire Making
Summit Sisters

Youth
Girls Lead for Life* (5th-7th grade)
Adventure Days* (3rd-5th grade)
Adventure Climbing Camp (6th-8th grade)
Rock Climbing Camp (9th-12th grade)
Adventure Camp* (6th-8th grade)
Backpacking & Rock Climbing: Find Your Voice (9th-12th grade)
Backpacking: Find Your Path (9th-12th grade)

Trailblazers
A Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Outdoor Leadership Program that aims to close the gap of underrepresentation of BIPOC who participate in outdoor activities and work in the outdoor sector.

Queer Wilderness Project
A safe and empowering space for the LGBTQ+ community to connect outdoors. Programs focus on earth-based ancestral skills, survival skills, naturalist knowledge and crafts.

Family Courses
Opportunities for families to spend time together in nature. Family courses offer skills such as canoeing and an accessible entry-point into the Women's Wilderness programs.

Custom Courses
Custom designed and led outdoor courses for a variety of businesses, nonprofits and schools, including Davita (a Fortune 500 health company), Naropa University and Hanuman Yoga & Music Festival.
FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Income

- Individual: 26.0%
- Grants: 25.0%
- Corporate: 8.0%
- Events: 8.0%
- In-Kind Donations: 8.0%
- Other: 1.0%
- Programs: 23.0%

Total: $474,460.19

Expenses

- Programs: 60.0%
- Marketing and Operations: 16.0%
- Fundraising: 7.0%
- Administration: 6.0%

Total: $390,538.00
THANK YOU

The work we do at Women’s Wilderness is, and has always been, fueled by a community of passionate supporters. Through the contributions of the following individuals, families, companies and institutions, we’ve been able to create a positive impact on hundreds of people. We offer gratitude to the following folks who helped make our work possible in 2019...

**Individual and Family Supporters**


**Government**

**Foundations**

**Corporate Partners**
Our vision is a "socially just and environmentally sustainable society." The role we play in contributing to that vision is our mission, which is to "support girls, women and LGBTQ+ people in accessing their power and improving their health through connections to the outdoors and community."

STRATEGY

In 2019, we undertook an ambitious strategic planning exercise in consultation with over 100 team members (current and past), donors, partners, alumni participants and volunteers.

We conducted a deep retrospective analysis of our 22-year herstory, then assessed the current landscape for opportunities and challenges in alignment with our strengths, capacity, and shared vision for the future. The result is our 2020-2022 Strategic Plan, which we're excited to share with our community.
CORE GOALS

Our core goals that will support the pursuit of our mission and primary modalities that we plan to employ

Goal 1: Individual girls, women, LGBTQ+ people have improved health, access and agency
We provide immersive outdoor experiences
- Girls’ programs (ages 8-18)
- LGBTQ+ adult and youth programs
- Programs for Black and Indigenous People of Color
- Custom courses
- Women’s programs

Goal 2: Leadership pipelines accelerate the skills and influence of girls, women, LGBTQ+ people in mission-aligned sectors
We deliver leadership-oriented programs
- Apprentice and mentorship programs
- Exchange programs
- Certifications

Goal 3: Organizations have improved capacity to implement quality outdoor programming for people with non-dominant identities
We deliver resources rooted in experience
- Curricula development
- Toolkits and guidelines
- Training of trainers
- Strategic consulting
- Fiscal sponsorship

ENABLING FUNCTIONS

Areas of investment in support of our goals

Marketing, Outreach, Community Engagement
Robust resource mobilization
Rigorous impact measurement and learning loops
Diligent governance
Effective finance, HR, Operations