

## NATURE AND HEALTH ALLIANCE PLANNING CONFERENCE

May 14th -16th, 2023; Salt Lake City, Utah

### Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Summary of Conference Activities	3
Detailed Session Summaries	4
Acknowledgments	10
Conference Agenda	11
Conference Participants	13
Conference Images	15





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Understanding the potential power of nature engagement to promote health is growing rapidly in many academic fields and in community settings. However, critical gaps remain in access to nature across cultures and populations, and in connecting this understanding to the well-being of the planet.

Inspired by the Nature and Health-University of Washington (NH-UW) group, which pioneered the approach of fostering interdisciplinary and evidence-based knowledge about nature and health (NH), a group of scientists, healthcare researchers, and community practitioners created the Nature and Health-Alliance (NHA) in 2022. They wish to initiate and sustain a national-level movement to enhance understanding and facilitate communication on the relationships between nature and health for all people. In May 2023, co-leaders invited key thinkers in this field for an interdisciplinary, in-person Planning Conference (the Conference).

To develop our mission and vision, and to establish our long- and short-term scopes of work, our five key goals were:

1. Get acquainted with each other professionally and personally;
2. Identify existing programs/resources and existing gaps that the NH ALL might fill;
3. Learn about the structure and dynamics of other social and environmental movements;
4. Identify priorities and tasks for the short- and long-term;
5. Define potential leadership structures and designate actions to fulfill our objective.

Invited participants were: the five co-leaders and the Advisory Committee of the NHA; leaders of key national NH groups; scholars in fields outside but related to traditional NH fields; and program officers for the REI Cooperative Action Fund (REI Fund).

Conference activities resulted in forging strong relationships among participants; identification of existing resources and gaps in the NH field; guidance on approaches in marketing, organizational science, rhetoric, and connections with underrepresented groups; and articulation of priorities we will pursue. We established organizational structures that will sustain collaborative leadership and geographical diversity. We co-generated our draft mission statement: *“To enhance understanding of, foster evidence for, and communicate about the relationships between nature and health.”*

This work has been generously funded by the REI Fund, which supports organizations promoting justice, equity, and belonging in the outdoors to strengthen the health and well-being of people and communities.

## SUMMARY OF CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES

The NH-ALL Conference took place on the University of Utah campus (Day 1) and the Jordan River Nature Center (Day 2), in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Conference Background and Preparations: Organizers provided information on the structure and content of the meeting, and requested that participants read background articles; view videos from spokespeople on relationships of NH with spirituality and with the arts; and contribute to an inventory of existing NH resources.

Pre-Conference: Sunday, May 14, 2023: Participants in the optional field walk in Red Butte Canyon gained a sense of nature surrounding our venue and experienced an example of a field research area contiguous with our urban setting. Dr. Austin Green described his citizen science and research efforts on the impacts of human activities in the Canyon. Formal introductions were made at a group dinner.

Day 1, Monday, May 15<sup>th</sup>: Nalini welcomed the group at the NEXUS center, and Marc emphasized the potential of nature contact to address health challenges and the need for a paradigm shift towards investing in nature. In Session 1, Jennifer facilitated brainstorming our vision, and the group generated ideas on future of the alliance, impacts on human health, impact on the environment/ nature, and equity and belongingness. In Session 2, Nadkarni facilitated review of our partial inventory of existing programs and gaps in NH, highlighting the importance of collaboration and creating a comprehensive resource database. In Session 3, experts from other fields shared their perspectives, including indigenous knowledge, history of social and environmental movements, marketing and public relations, and rhetoric and environmental justice. In Session 4, Josh facilitated the work of prioritizing potential actions and establishing the scope of work, narrowing the scope of the identified goals in relation to the future identity of the group, health, nature, and equity.

Day 2, Tuesday, May 16<sup>th</sup>: Tim introduced us to the Jordan River Nature Center (JRNC), recognizing its location on traditional Indigenous land and, currently, its populations of underserved groups (e.g., Hispanics, refugees) on the West Side of our city. Howie led a reflection session, emphasizing the importance of good thinking partners, embracing different paradigms, and identifying the group's products and theories of change. A facilitated nature walk on the Jordan River provided insights on research by JRNC staff and Jeff Rose (supported by NHH-Utah) on the perception of nature among unhoused individuals. In Session 5, Bitia facilitated the development of a mission statement. Jay Maddock then suggested an organizational and leadership structure, goals, and timeline for year 1. He successfully solicited individuals to take on leadership positions of subcommittees. Nalini provided closing remarks, which expressed gratitude for the participants and highlighted hope that our collective work will contribute to improved health and health justice for humans and for the environment.

Overall, the Conference emphasized the importance of collaboration, inclusivity, and equitable access to nature for the well-being of individuals, communities, and the natural world. The Conference outcomes included the selection of new leadership, the establishment of subcommittees, and the affirmation of the NHA's commitment to rigorous and collaborative research towards the goal of promoting nature and health.



## DETAILED SESSION SUMMARIES

### DAY 1: Monday, May 15th - Agenda

- Welcoming Remarks from Co-leader Conference Organizer – *Nalini Nadkarni*
- Introduction from Our Sponsor - *Marc Berejka*
- Session 1: Brainstorming our Vision - *Jennifer Roberts*
- Session 2: Identifying Existing Programs and Remaining Gaps in NH - *Nalini Nadkarni*
- Session 3: Extending Capacity by Drawing on Other Sources - *Nalini Nadkarni*
  - Session 3a: Indigenous Perspectives - *Heather Tanana*
  - Session 3b: History of Social and Environmental Movements - *Edward Walker*
  - Session 3c: Tactics from Marketing and Public Relations - *Eric VanEpps*
  - Session 3d: Approaches of Rhetoric and Environmental Justice - *Danielle Endres*
- Session 4: Prioritizing and Establishing Scope of Work - *Josh Lawler*

### **Welcoming Remarks**

We welcome participants of the Nature and Health Alliance (NHA) Planning Conference to Salt Lake City from around the country. We begin with the acknowledgement that this land, which is named for the Ute Tribe, is the traditional and ancestral homeland of the Shoshone, Paiute, Goshute, and Ute Tribes. We recognize and respect sovereign relationship between tribes, states, and the federal government, and the enduring relationship that exists between many Indigenous peoples and their traditional homelands.

We live in world of increasing stress, loneliness, suicide rates, and societal divisiveness; shrinking wildlands; greater virtual vs real nature experiences; larger number of people living and working in nature-deficit spaces, continued inequity in access to health care and nature among cultures, ethnic groups, people of differing physical capacity. So understanding and communication about nature and health is both timely and urgent.

Our understanding of NH is burgeoning around the world. The roots of the NHA come from the Nature and Health group at the University of Washington, led by Josh Lawler, who recognized the need to work across academic disciplines and societal sectors to identify and fill knowledge gaps and fill areas of inequity that exist in this field.

We have invited key thinkers from many disciplines and ways of knowing in the field of nature and health (NH) to collectively launch our efforts and fulfill five Conference goals: 1) get acquainted with each other professionally and personally; 2) identify existing programs/resource and existing gaps that the NH-ALL might fill; 3) learn from representatives from other ways of understanding and communicating NH; 4) identify priorities for the long- and short-term; and 5) define potential leadership structures and designate key objectives and actions to fulfill our goals. This will lead to developing our mission and vision statements, and articulating strategic and actions plans, which will be refined after the meeting.

Despite the darkness, there are bright spots: burgeoning research in NH from many academic fields; increasing awareness of benefits of urban parks and the inequitable ways they are currently distributed; and greater public understanding of joys and values of the outdoors. Many groups at local, regional, national levels have directed efforts to connecting people with nature, such as the Children and Nature Network, and Parks RX America.

These two days are our time to think, collaborate, plan, argue, and discuss on how we can enhance our understanding and communicate that engagement with nature can foster human physical, mental, social, and spiritual health. This conference is a different kind of gatherings of scientific societies. We chose not to present results of particular research or practice programs, activities that are well-covered in the meetings offered by NH-UW and other medical, environmental, and policy societies.

Instead, we have created an arena to envision what we might become; provide ways to both build on what we are aware of as existing knowledge and then identify gaps. We'll then provide expertise about what it will take to create an efficient and effective way to implement a national movement by including expertise of those in Native American studies, the history of social and environmental movements, marketing, and rhetoric. Then, through collective reflection and discussions, we will develop a set of potential activities and prioritize those. Finally, we will work through the leadership and organizational structure that will facilitate these actions, in the short and long term. That is much to do in 48 hours. But there will be just enough time for all of it. This is the first meeting, and many others will follow.

Throughout the development of NHA, The REI Cooperative Action Fund (REI Fund) has provided generous support and key guidance. Their leaders and program officers have been intertwined with the conceptual development, forging of key collegial connections, and logistics of our activities. We look forward to their continuing involvement with NHA.

Thank you for your presence here, and for your work to make the NHA a reality.

### **Introduction from Our Sponsor**

Marc provided an introduction to the goals of the REI Fund, which promotes the potential of nature contact to address health challenges. He identified the advantages it offers, highlighting its potential to reduce healthcare costs. He offered the provocative idea of the NHA to propel a paradigm shift towards investing in nature. He underscored the importance of experts, connectors, and advocates in promoting the findings of NH and engaging with diverse target audiences for broader societal impacts.

### **Session 1: Brainstorming our Vision**

Jennifer facilitated generating a broad vision for NHA, with an overview of its future goals and objectives that touch upon health, environment/nature, and equity/belongingness. Participants engaged in a small-group brainstorming activity to generate and categorize ideas. These included: creating a collaborative nationwide hub of knowledge, research, and advocacy; addressing health issues such as healthy babies and chronic diseases; advocating for more public land and biodiversity; and promoting

equity and belonging through coalition-building and education. The session emphasized the need for practical recommendations, policy change, academic research, and inclusivity.

## **Session 2: Identifying Existing Programs and Remaining Gaps in Nature and Health**

The NHA wishes to avoid replication and redundancy with existing NH groups. Nalini facilitated a session to identify existing programs and gaps in NH by applying the metaphor of a tapestry, in which NHA serves as the loom to weave various threads that represent constituent categories of NH (*effects of nature on human health; healthcare and public health; policy; equity, diversity and inclusion; conservation; public engagement; and training and careers*). Participants discussed potential collaborations, resources, and creating a database to catalog existing NH work. We emphasized the need for a systematic approach and suggested the formation of working groups to address specific areas, potentially in collaboration with existing NH groups (e.g., Children & Nature Network).

## **Session 3: Extending Capacity by Drawing on Other Sources**

### Session 3a: Drawing upon Indigenous Perspectives

Heather focused on Indigenous approaches to NH from a legal perspective, covering the history of Indigenous peoples in the US, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and working with Indigenous communities. The session highlighted the negative impacts of the Doctrine of Discovery and the government's history of eradicating tribal nations, leading to trauma and ongoing challenges. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is a valuable Indigenous science that addresses complex issues such as climate change. Heather encouraged NH groups who work with Indigenous communities to educate themselves, find shared experiences, listen actively, commit to real collaboration and consultation, invest in tribal futures, and understand the history and relationships of those communities with the state.

### Session 3b: Drawing Upon the History of Social and Environmental Movements

Ed presented aspects of the history of social and environmental movement that helped us understand the language and key concepts of social movements and the factors that contribute to successful movements. Two case studies highlighted positive examples (housing advocacy, the anti-fracking movement), and two movements were cited as not successful (climate movement, Occupy Wall Street). Ed noted the importance of robust organization, mobilization, and framing for movement success, and acknowledged the complexities and unique factors in health and environmental movements.

### Session 3c: Drawing Upon Tactics from Marketing and Public Relations

Eric presented concepts of marketing orientation, market segmentation, target markets, and users, influencers, and deciders, and highlighted characteristics that make a market segment attractive. The influence of social factors and the complexity of messaging in society are important considerations in marketing strategies. He emphasized the importance of understanding the environment, audience, place, and product. The usage segmentation approach and the hierarchy of effects in marketing may be useful in developing the NHA movement.

### Session 3d: Drawing Upon Tactics from Rhetoric and Environmental Justice

Danielle described the critical role of rhetoric in environmental movements, which involves using symbols and language to influence and persuade audiences. Rhetoric encompasses diverse forms of

communication, and includes key concepts such as ethos, pathos, logos, framing, and the rhetorical situation. She put forward rhetorical frames that are used in environmental movements, and successes in movement rhetoric, as well as cautionary tales and limitations.

#### **Session 4: Prioritizing and Establishing Scope of Work**

Josh suggested the need to determine the group's goals before creating action items. These are also determined by the future identity of the group, human health, nature/environment, and equity. Our discussion directed us toward work on: 1) the distinction between our foci of human health and nature; 2) legal protections for nature's health; 3) equity related to nature engagement. Our vision could envision a future in which the group is involved in research and knowledge production, communication, and advocacy, with consideration of the potential tension between research and advocacy. The group may also create a repository for research, and translate/curate it to promote a social movement.

#### **DAY 2: Tuesday, May 16th - Agenda**

- Introduction to Jordan River Nature Center - *Tim Brown, Marissa Beckstrom, Daniel Hernandez*
- Facilitated Nature Walk - *Jeff Rose and Marissa Beckstrom*
- Reflections from Day 1 - *Howie Frumkin*
- Session 5: Action Plan for Year 1, Leadership Structures, and Logistics for Moving Forward
  - Mission, Structure, Goals, and Timeline - *Bita Kash*
  - Leadership and Structure - *Jay Maddock*
  - Action Plan - *Bita Kash*
- Closing Remarks - *Nalini Nadkarni*

#### **Introduction to Jordan River Nature Center**

The Jordan River Nature Center (JRNC) is situated on the West side of Salt Lake City (SLC), which has diverse socioeconomic demographics. Daniel acknowledged the center's location on Shoshone, Goshute, Paiute, and Ute land, and recognized the significance of names, Pia Okwai (Jordan River), Soonkahni (Salt Lake City), and Piapaa (Great Salt Lake). The center aims to address the neglect the Jordan River has faced and the lack of educational resources for people who live on the West side. JRNC strives to co-create with the community, prioritize equity, and redefine accessibility to the outdoors, and considers the community's needs and perspectives in decision-making processes.

Tim gave a brief history of and rationale for the creation of the JRNC, which was established in 2020 to connect people with the birds and nature of the Jordan River. The Nature Center serves as a community gathering place, education resource, and a wildlife oasis nestled in the heart of the Salt Lake Valley. He described the Tracy Aviary's seven-year efforts to coordinate the establishment of a facility that will enhance access and nature education to SLC, particularly, its West Side populations.

#### **Reflections**

Howie discussed the strong foundation, aspirational future, and trusting relationships that the JRNC represents. He identified three ingredients for good thinking: being in nature, walking, and having good

thinking partners. He posed what NH might create: a new paradigm, an academic field, a practice norm, and/or a movement -- and that these are not mutually exclusive. Participants discussed boundaries encompassing health, well-being, thriving, economic benefits, and ecosystem health, with considerations of equity. They emphasized the importance of embracing multiple paradigms, e.g., scientific Western medicine and Traditional Ecological Knowledge. Howie outlined theories of change and pathways to achieve the potential goals of NHA. The group identified their potential work as: generating evidence; aggregating, curating, applying, and disseminating evidence; and advocating for greenspaces. They highlighted evidence-based design guidelines, engaging park and land managers, influencing policy makers and health professionals, mobilizing voters, and increasing public use of greenspaces. Research questions to address focused on consequential, community-based, and solution-oriented inquiries related to park prescriptions, street trees, phytoncides, park programming, and resource allocation. They emphasized vigilance to recognize mutual dependency among group members, obligations to diverse stakeholders, considerations of reciprocity, and the need for pragmatism. Finally, participants emphasized equity, belongingness, and the involvement of both academics and community members.

### **Facilitated Nature Walk – *Field Walk***

The group walked the paved trail adjacent to the Jordan River, observing the riparian habitat and the types of people who are using the trail. Marissa gave an overview of her work with unsheltered individuals and shared JRNC's burgeoning efforts to tailor programming to occupants of the adjacent Men's Resource Center. Jeff shared insights from his social science research on how unhoused individuals perceive and experience nature, work that is supported by a pilot grant from the Nature and Human Health-Utah group.

## **Session 5: Action Plan for Year 1, Leadership Structures and Logistics for Moving Forward**

### Mission, Structure, Goals, and Timeline

Bitá proposed a draft mission statement that focused on partnering with practitioners and policy makers in the U.S. to provide evidence-based information on NH. Proposed NHA values included co-creation of knowledge, respect for planetary health, equity, trust, collaboration, solution-oriented approach, pluralism, and community focus.

### Leadership and Structure

Jay proposed a potential structure for leadership and organizational forms for the future NHA. Nalini's term as Chair ends on December 1, 2023. With minimal discussion, Jay was designated as the new Chair. The leadership structure consists of a Chair for a two-year term, with an Executive Committee (EC) whose members contribute with specific roles and responsibilities. Membership includes institutional members and all conference attendees, with plans to systematically invite new members. A Secretariat will handle financial and administrative matters to provide organizational stability, as Chairs will rotate geographically and institutionally. The upcoming leadership transition involves Jay as Future Chair, Jennifer as the Chair-Elect, and Nalini as Post-Chair in December 2023.

### Action Plan

Bitá emphasized that goals for the NHA Action Plan should be tailored to each Subcommittee (Chair): Membership (Nooshin Razani); Governance (Bitá Kash); Pluralism/Equity;

Communication/Marketing (Dart Schmalz); Research (including Shared Measures, Sara Lo Templo, with members Josh Lawler and Carlos Andres Gallegos-RioFrio); and Journal (Peter Kahn). Future Subcommittees may include: Fundraising; Training and Education; Conference; and Policy. Chairs are tasked with recruiting members and creating agendas, with the EC responsible for approving decisions made by the Subcommittees.

### **Closing Remarks**

The Conference brought together researchers, community practitioners, and organizations, who recognize the phenomenal power of nature to prevent disease and promote health. This group has taken on the charge and challenges to help establish NH as a critical area of study and practice. The NHA addresses a critical gap by promoting pluralism and access to nature, particularly for BIPOC and marginalized communities. The JRNC's efforts were viewed as a model for community engagement and collaboration that can inspire similar initiatives in other locations. Key outcomes of the conference included the selection of Jay Maddock as the upcoming chair of NHA, the establishment of NHA structure, with rotating leadership, a Secretariat, and guiding Subcommittees, and the affirmation of the need for equitable access to nature for human health and the overall well-being of the world. Nalini expressed gratitude to the participants, the support of the REI Fund, and the individuals and organizations for their contributions. She articulated a sense of hope, believing that collective work at the Conference will contribute to the improved health of all beings.

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*Notes taken by Fiona Summers, Natalie Slater, and Myra Gerst; edited and submitted by Nalini Nadkarni*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We acknowledge, with gratitude, the many people and organizations that contributed to this Conference. We thank all of the participants for their respectful attentiveness and thoughtful insights. We were inspired and informed by the visionary work of Josh Lawler, Howie Frumkin, and their colleagues in Nature and Health-UW, which brought together people from many disciplines and ways of knowing about NH. Their Advisory Committee advanced the idea and spirit of the NHA.

We thank the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism and the UU School of Biological Sciences at the University of Utah for administrative support. The NEXUS Center (Center for the Interdisciplinary Exchange of Utah Science) provided space and support under the leadership of Lori Kowaleski-Jones and with the logistical help of Marisa Brunsvik.

Under the leadership of Tim Brown, The Tracy Aviary and the Jordan River Nature Center provided space, valuable content, and a model for regional activities that embody NHA's values. The Nature and Human Health-Utah program, supported by the REI Fund and an anonymous donor, demonstrated the potential capacity of a "sister" chapter to the NHA. We are grateful to Wendy Wischer and George Handley, who provided stimulating materials to foster deeper inclusion of the arts and spirituality in the future. Our runners, Natalie Slater and Fiona Summers, helped with note-taking and logistics. Myra Gerst, NHA Program Manager, provided essential support and contributed to the conceptual development of the Conference.

We acknowledge, with thanks, the financial and intellectual contributions of the REI Cooperative Action Fund. We thank Mark Berejka and Janelle Hillhouse for their unflagging support for this work.

## CONFERENCE AGENDA

**DAY 1: Sunday, May 14<sup>th</sup>****4:00-5:30pm: Nature Walk @ Red Butte Canyon (Optional, with ornithologist Dr. Austin Green)**

6:00pm: Pick up at hotel

**6:15pm: Dinner at Tucci's Cucina Italiana**

- Introductions (*Nalini*)
  - Your name, institution, areas of interest, scholarly background, NH connections
  - What research questions/projects are you working on?
  - 2-3 interesting facts about yourself (hobbies, interests outside academics)

8:00pm- Return to hotel

6:00pm: Monday Dinner (*Hosted by Jack and Nalini*)

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**DAY 2: Monday, May 15<sup>th</sup>**

6:30-8:00am: Breakfast at hotel available

8:00am: Pick up at hotel

8:30am: Conference Begins

- Introduction to meeting and quick participant introductions [*Nalini*]
- Introduction from Marc Berejka [*Marc Berejka*]

**9:00am: Session 1: Brainstorming our Vision [*Jen*]****10:00am: Session 2: Identifying Existing Programs and Remaining Gaps in NH:**“Gallery Walk” and Extending Capacity from Other Sources [*Nalini*]

10:45am: Break/snacks

**11:00am: Session 3a: Drawing upon Indigenous Perspectives [*Dr. Heather Tanana*]****11:45pm: Session 3b: Drawing Upon the History of Social and Environmental Movements [*Dr. Edward Walker*]**

12:30pm: Lunch

**1:00 pm Session 3c: Drawing Upon Tactics from Marketing and Public Relations [*Dr. Eric VanEpps*]****1:45pm: Session 3d: Drawing Upon Tactics from Rhetoric and Environmental Justice [*Dr. Danielle Endres*]****2:30pm: Session 3: Integration and Questions**

2:45pm: Break

**3:15pm: Session 4: Prioritizing and Establishing Scope of Work [*Josh*]**

4:30pm: Return to hotel

5:45pm: Pick up at hotel

6:00pm: Monday Dinner (*Hosted by Jack and Nalini*)

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**DAY 3: Tuesday, May 16<sup>th</sup>**

6:30-8:00am: Breakfast at Hotel

8:00am: Pick up at hotel

8:30am: Arrive at Jordan River Nature Center, Introduction to JRNC [*Tim Brown*]**9:00am: Facilitated Nature Walk at Jordan River Nature Center [*Daniel Hernandez, Jeff Rose*]**



10:30am: Break

**10:45am: Synthesis of Mission and Objectives [Josh]**

**11:00am: Reflections from Day 1 [Howie]**

12:00pm: Lunch

**12:30pm: Session 5: Action Plan for Year One, Leadership Structures, and Logistics for Moving Forward [Jay/Bita]**

- Task list, Timeline, Budget, Website, Communication, Future meetings

**3:15pm: Closing Remarks [Nalini]**

3:30pm: Break and transport to reception

4:00pm: Reception at Spencer Fox Eccles Business Building

6:00pm: Return to Hotel

7:15pm: Pick up at hotel (optional)

7:30pm: Dinner at Oasis Café (optional)

### CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

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CONFERENCE PHOTOS



Field Trip to Red Butte Canyon



Field Trip to Red Butte Canyon



Day 1 Discussions



Day 1 Discussions



Group Dinner at Nalini's home



Group Dinner at Nalini's home





**Group Dinner at Nalini's home**



**Group Dinner at Nalini's home**



**Jordan River Nature Center**



**Discussion in Jordan River Nature Center**



**Nature Walk along Jordan River**



**Nature Walk along Jordan River**





**Nature Walk along Jordan River**



**Group on the UU Campus**

**Nature Walk along Jordan River**



**Final Reception**



**Group Photo**