



50 Hurt Plaza SE
Suite 980
Atlanta, GA 30303

Phone: 404 254 4827
Email: contact@gyfoundation.org
Website: gyfoundation.org

RE: Sub-Committee Hearing – March 23, 2021. Building Back better: The Past, Present and Future of America’s Public Lands

The Greening Youth Foundation is the leading and longest running youth serving organization in the United States focused on natural resource management careers for diverse, underserved, and underrepresented young adults. Founded in 2007, the Greening Youth Foundation (GYF) started as an environmental education organization conducting conservation lessons in elementary schools throughout Gwinnett County Georgia. Over time, GYF expanded its educational, outreach, and support efforts with its Public-School Initiative, Youth Conservation Corps, and Urban Youth Corps departments. These efforts have resulted in the engagement of thousands of diverse youth participants around the world through environmental education, work and service opportunities, professional development, and mentorship.

The foundation is fortunate to be under the leadership of two of its four founding members. The Chief Executive Officer, Angelou Ezeilo, is the primary founder and tireless leader of the organization. As one of the only African American female executives working in the diversity conversation space, Mrs. Ezeilo understands and accepts the responsibilities associated with the leadership of a ground- breaking movement. Mrs. Ezeilo was named an Ashoka Fellow, and continues to make strides in conservation, access, and youth development. James Ezeilo, is the foundation’s Chief Strategy Officer and serves as the development engine for new programs, projects, and partnerships. His thinking and program design has connected students and young adults of color to careers in conservation and natural resource management for almost two decades.

Disparities in both minority unemployment and income plague the United States. Unemployment among African Americans can be nearly twice that of the general community. According to ACS (Census Reporter) in 2017 the unemployment rate for Atlanta men aged 25-54 was 3.2% while the unemployment rate for African-American, Atlanta men in the same age range, was 5.5%. For young adults ages 20-24, living in Atlanta, the unemployment rate was higher, 9.0% for all young men and that rate for African-American, young black men was almost double, 16.7%.

Green jobs are often cited as an area where there are growing opportunities for employment and specifically minority employment. Minorities, however, are underrepresented in the environmental workforce. The 2011 Census Bureau report, Disparities in STEM Employment by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin, reported that while African Americans comprised 10.8% of the



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workforce, they account for 4.8% of the Natural Science Managers, 3.1% of the Conservation Scientists and Foresters and 2.7% of the Environmental Scientists and Geoscientists. Hispanics, while 14.9% of the workforce, account for 6.8% of the Natural Science Managers, 4.2% of the Conservation Scientists and Foresters and 3.9% of the Environmental Scientists and Geoscientists. These statistics likely hold true for blue color environmental jobs as well.

Many studies have examined the various factors that contribute to the under-representation of minorities in natural resource fields. Most agree that the lack of exposure to nature and wildlife is a major barrier to interest in environmental careers. These studies identify the lack of exposure to natural resource fields during high school, college and post-graduation as a significant barrier. This is despite the reality that environmental hazards have disproportional large negative impacts on communities of color and that people of color poll higher than whites in support of environmental issues.

GYF has an established history of targeted recruitment, workforce development programming, and leadership development training within underserved and underrepresented audiences. By leveraging the expertise gained from placing college students and recent graduates in positions with federal land management partners (i.e. National Park Service, USDA Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, etc.), GYF created the Urban Youth Corps (UYC) program in 2014 to engage opportunity youth between the ages of 18 to 25 with career and leadership opportunities. Through soft skills trainings, certifications, technical skill development, support, and transformational work experiences, their careers, resumes, and life trajectory are transformed.

GYF's Urban Youth Corps is led by Program Manager Daniel Jones, Ph.D. Dr. Jones currently holds a B.S. and M.S. in Recreation, Park and Tourism Administration, and a Ph.D. in Health and Human Performance with a specialization in leisure and youth studies. With a decade of experience of youth engagement, Dr. Jones brings a passion for workforce development, youth leadership, and youth development.

The Greening Youth Foundation has successfully engaged a diverse youth population in the city of Atlanta since the inception of the Urban Youth Corps- a member of the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps. Participants have been engaged and trained in career readiness programming, played an integral part in the development and management of public green spaces, and gone on to secure gainful employment within the conservation sector.



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The GYFted (Greening Youth Foundation: trained, educated and developed) training program is conducted at the foundation's Urban Conservation Training Institute (UCTI), a 4.5-acre farm located in the historic West End of Atlanta. Students are provided training and experiential opportunities in preparation for local and regional service projects. They work full-time and receive a biweekly living stipend for their engagement. Participants also receive intensive and culturally relevant soft skills and technical training throughout their term. These trainings include urban agriculture, tree care management, green infrastructure, sustainable solutions (solar and fire training), historic preservation, landscape design and maintenance, prescribed burn and wildland fire fighting.

For many, this program, will provide opportunities to enhance the natural environment within one's own community, and will be the foundation for a lifelong interest in environmental protection and future employment in natural resources. Others have utilized the opportunity to travel as far as California to work with various land management agencies to manage prescribed burns or fight wildland fires.

The available data more than supports the need for programs that provide job training and employment for low-income, urban youth of color. Programs that introduce them to careers in emerging environmental fields serve as a possible resolution to the economic hardships they currently face. As supporters of the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps Act, GYF looks forward to working with the Biden/Harris Administration as we engage, train and employ even greater numbers of youth and young adults in environmental fields, shrink the opportunity gaps, reduce the harmful effects of climate change and preserve the rich history and legacy of these communities.

In Service,

Angelou C. Ezeilo

Angelou C. Ezeilo, Founder & CEO