

# Press Advisory



## Could More Diversity Break Conservation's Polarizing Debate?

240 Leading Conservationists Say 'Yes' in New Open Letter

*Lead Scientist of The Nature Conservancy, Former Administrator of NOAA, Director of the Center for Conservation Biology at Stanford, and Director of the Natural Capital Project Call in the Journal Nature for a 'Unified and Diverse Conservation Ethic', Say 'Gender and Cultural Bias Continue to Hinder Conservation'*

STANFORD, CA November 6, 2014 A [new letter](#) published in the journal *Nature* today from 240 leading conservationists argues that conservation's impact on the world is being hindered by the field's lack of inclusiveness - particularly of the many different values people hold for nature, and of the viewpoints of women and diverse ethnicities and cultures.

"This situation is stifling productive discourse, inhibiting funding, and halting progress," argue the letter's authors, which include former NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco; Heather Tallis, lead scientist of The Nature Conservancy; and Gretchen Daily, Director of the Center for Conservation Biology at Stanford; and Mary Ruckelshaus, Managing Director of the Natural Capital Project.

In particular, the letter aims to move conservation beyond a "vitriolic, personal" debate that has polarized and dominated the field in recent years - pitting the idea that we must protect nature to help ourselves (nature's "instrumental value") against the idea that nature should be protected for its own sake ("intrinsic value").

"This debate presses at the core of why we do conservation - it's such a significant issue, yet there are almost no female voices speaking out," says Tallis, lead author of the *Nature* letter. "Even though women hold more than half of leadership positions in U.S. conservation organizations and top positions in many key international conservation initiatives, we're not hearing them."

"Conservation has always been good at saving a diversity of species, and if we look back in history 100 years of so, it was also good at embracing a diversity of values," she adds. "We want to get back to that, and do it with a diverse set of people that represent the world we live in, the world where we need conservation to

succeed."

"The Earth's natural life support systems are being destroyed faster than we can protect or restore them," says Ruckelshaus, "The scientific community needs to embrace the wonderful diversity in arguments for nature protection, and use every experiment, model, and compelling story line we can muster before it's too late!"

#### **Proposed: A 'Unified and Diverse Conservation Ethic'**

The field of conservation is facing two massive issues at once, says Tallis: a clash of core values, and persistent gender and cultural bias. The letter's authors aim to address both by raising the voices of women and men from around the world in support of a "unified and diverse conservation ethic" that "recognizes and accepts all values of nature from intrinsic to instrumental" and can align with "the values of the many audiences we need to engage."

"We will continue to face hard conservation problems, and all values will not be equally served in every context," the letter states. "Approaching these issues with representative perspectives and a broad base of respect, trust, pragmatism and shared understanding will more quickly and effectively advance our shared vision of a thriving planet."

Tallis says such inclusiveness of values is already being embraced by key efforts for conservation such as the Convention on Biological Diversity. And she adds that many rank-and-file conservationists men as well as women - are ready to move past the "instrumental vs. intrinsic value" divide.

"I started this letter to raise the voices of women, but quickly found just as many men in conservation who are passionate about broadening the kinds of values and people we embrace," she says. "They see that we can only meet the great challenges we face by including many values and many perspectives."

#### **Steps Toward a Truly Global Conservation Ethic**

To rectify the lack of diversity in values and voices, the letter's 240 signatories propose a set of specific measures, including:

- Portraying the global history of the field and its centuries of diverse approaches to students training to be conservation scientists;
- Using social media, journals and conference fora to elevating the voices of scientists and practitioners from underrepresented genders, cultures and contexts;
- Embracing "all plausible conservation actors" - including corporations, government agencies, and faith-based organizations;
- Bringing media attention to the full breadth of conservation scientists and practitioners to counter the few polarized voices that are now gathering headlines.

"We also need to focus more on building the evidence base for conservation," says Tallis, "so we can move away from these abstract debates toward knowledge of what really solves problems and creates change on

the ground."

Conservationists can now add their names to the letter and learn more about next steps toward bringing greater diversity to conservation values and voices at <http://diverseconservation.org>.

--- ### ---

*Authors available for interviews:*

**Dr. Mary Ruckelshaus:** Managing Director, Natural Capital Project, Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment, [206.271.6858](tel:206.271.6858), [mary.ruckelshaus@stanford.edu](mailto:mary.ruckelshaus@stanford.edu)

**Dr. Gretchen Daily:** Stanford University Bing Professor of Environmental Science, Senior Fellow in the Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment, and Director of the Center for Conservation Biology, [gdaily@stanford.edu](mailto:gdaily@stanford.edu)

## Contact

Elizabeth Rauer  
Communications Manager, Natural  
Capital Project  
[650.724.3108](tel:650.724.3108)  
[Elizabeth.Rauer@stanford.edu](mailto:Elizabeth.Rauer@stanford.edu)

## Follow the Natural Capital Project



[Natural Capital Project](#)

[Newsletter](#)

[Contact Us](#)

