

TWS Early Career Professional Working Group Resolution

regarding

Un-paid and Under-paid Work Within the Wildlife Profession

Effective conservation and management of wildlife depends upon the hard work and fair treatment of dedicated professionals. Dedicated wildlife workers have often lacked fair treatment, especially regarding monetary compensation (enough to pay for costs of living), despite contributing substantial amounts of labor meant primarily to benefit a wildlife-focused organization. By substantially contributing to a project (herein: at least 20 hours per week), un-paid and under-paid (see definition below) wildlife workers are often unable to acquire the means to monetarily support themselves from other sources or are unduly challenged in their ability to do so. This exploitative and ethical problem, if not addressed by members of the ECP Working Group, will undermine efforts to foster a more inclusive, safe, and impactful wildlife profession and will harm the lives of people attempting to enter it.

Historically, many people in the beginning stages of wildlife careers have agreed to receive little or no monetary compensation from wildlife-focused organizations in exchange for substantial labor. Some have even paid to gain wildlife work experience and many have been expected to supply their own vehicle, cell phone, and/or other expensive equipment. The primary motivation of these volunteers has often been to acquire networking opportunities and relevant experiences to demonstrate a degree of professional dedication which could subsequently be used to convince potential employers to fairly compensate them for similar work. Many people equally dedicated to becoming wildlife professionals, including those from groups currently under-represented in the wildlife profession, have been financially unable to work without fair

monetary compensation and so have not been able to establish wildlife careers. Many, due to challenges such as student loan debt, have been required to accept jobs outside of the wildlife profession. Consequently, their unique and valuable perspectives regarding important issues, including fair compensation of wildlife workers, have been missing from professional discourse, which has perpetuated a lack of human diversity in the wildlife profession. The ECP Working Group is dedicated to increasing human diversity in the wildlife profession and recognizes that the continued use of un-paid and under-paid work for substantial, wildlife-focused labor is one of numerous impediments to achieving this goal.

Those who work in exchange for no or insufficient pay often lack protections, beyond monetary payment, required for mental and physical safety. Due to a lack of ‘employee’ status, volunteers contributing substantial labor may lack, among other benefits, 1.) health insurance, 2.) protections against workplace harassment, and 3.) workers compensation for on-the-job injuries. The often isolated and strenuous nature of wildlife-focused work necessitates these protections and unacceptably heightens risk for those who work without being employees. The ECP Working Group recognizes that, to create a safe and secure work environment, the profession will benefit from ensuring fair monetary compensation and employee status for all wildlife workers who contribute 20 or more work hours per week. Thus, volunteer work is acceptable only if it requires less than 20 work hours per week.

Fair monetary compensation will foster recruitment and retention of high-quality wildlife workers and the completion of high-quality, impactful work. Workers who are monetarily compensated will be better able to take care of themselves and so will be better able to contribute to the conservation and management of wildlife resources. Therefore, the ECP Working Group recognizes that conservation and management goals will be achieved more effectively and the

wildlife profession will be stronger if all wildlife workers who work 20 hours or more per week are fairly compensated monetarily.

As a working group, we formally recognize ‘under-paid’ work to be any labor (including un-paid labor) that lasts for weeks, months, or longer and requires at least 20 work hours per week without monetary payment of at least the local jurisdiction’s minimum wage for every hour worked. We do not consider housing or food to be compensation.