



Introductory remarks by Karin Riley and Toddi Steelman for the Inclusivity in Fire Management and Science Panel

Hello, I am Karin Riley, the Vice President of Association for Fire Ecology. I'm joined by Toddi Steelman, the Vice President of International Association for Wildland Fire. It's our honor to introduce this plenary session on inclusivity today.

First, a little background. Last winter, IAWF and AFE received a letter signed by over 50 people ranging from research to land management to the non-profit sector in at least three countries. The letter stated that, "Over the past several AFE and IAWF conferences, a disproportionate number of plenary speaking roles have been awarded to non-minority male scientists. For example, at the recent AFE Orlando conference, only 4 of 19 plenary speakers were women, and minority scientists were strikingly underrepresented. Our profession is growing, and many distinguished colleagues are not being recognized at these conferences. ... As ecologists, we understand that strength and capacity exists in diversity, not only in ecosystems, but also in societies and associations."

The letter spurred me to investigate plenary sessions in other recent AFE conferences. I found that this ratio (1 in 5) was not an aberration. It also prompted me to examine how unconscious bias might shape the choices made by the conference organizing committees. I had a role in choosing plenary speakers for this conference, and I had the painful realization that when I picture a "plenary speaker", I picture a later-career Caucasian male scientist or land manager. That's a result of our history, but now it's time for us to change that, so that the next generation of fire ecologists is as likely to picture a woman or a person of color as anyone else when they hear the words "plenary speaker".

As a result of the letter, IAWF and AFE have both passed resolutions stating that diversity and inclusivity across gender and a variety of ethnicities shall be a priority in all that the two organizations do, including leadership, membership, programs, and activities including recruiting Board members, Associate Journal Editors, and reviewers. IAWF and AFE are working on a charter to start a joint committee on inclusivity.

I want to be clear about a few things that this initiative is not. It's not about blaming any one group or person for the situation. It is about all of us coming together to shine a light on how conscious and unconscious biases harm our profession. It isn't about displacing qualified speakers or editors and substituting those who are unqualified. It is about ensuring that differences are embraced, all community members are welcomed, included, and valued, and that we have participation from the widest and most diverse range of wildfire professionals possible.

We begin this campaign in earnest today, with this plenary session. This session is admittedly short, as a result of carving space for it in a schedule that was already very full when we received the letter. But it symbolizes the beginning.

Next, Dr. Steelman will outline some key principles we have been considering...

+++++

We do not value diversity, equity and inclusivity for their own sake. We value them because they make us better in what we do.

Greater equity in management will make for better management. Greater diversity in science will make for better science. Greater inclusivity in all we practice will make us better practitioners.

Our Associations affirm to increase representation in ideas, viewpoints, gender, sexual orientation, culture, race, age and experience to ensure equal opportunities to participate and contribute.

We strive to create a fire community where all members feel welcome, safe and valued. In making this statement, it is important for us to acknowledge that sometimes we have fostered a culture of exclusion, harassment and in even in some cases, sexual violence in our professions. The path to rectifying these patterns of behavior will not be easy. But we are committed to doing better.

This will mean promoting diversity and inclusivity in all our Association activities, monitoring our progress, reporting on it publicly, rooting out structural barriers that inhibit progress and holding ourselves accountable for continuous improvement.

This is a collective effort.

We are keen to hear your thoughts and encourage you to address the two questions we have posed:

- What is your general reaction to this initiative?
- What are specific things AFE and IAWF could be doing to address inclusion issues?

+++++

Feedback regarding the two questions above was collected at the conference, and we are still interested in hearing from you. To provide your input as both organizations move forward with inclusivity efforts, [please click here.](#)