

Finding and Fostering Resiliency in Difficult Times: Reflections from GWS Members

Introduction

FOR NEARLY 40 YEARS, the George Wright Society has been building a global community of people whose passion is the protection of parks, protected areas, and cultural sites. As members of this extended family of professionals, practitioners, and just plain citizens who care about these special places, we are only too aware that all conservation successes are provisional, and many defeats are permanent. The road we are traveling is rewarding but difficult: there's always another hill to climb, and plenty of washboards and potholes along the way.

Moreover, it turns out that we may not even be following the same road we thought we were on. Climate change is here, having made its bewildering presence felt much sooner than many of us imagined. It's no longer a matter of whether global warming will upend long-held ideas of how to protect natural areas and cultural sites; professionals from all walks of place-based heritage conservation already are scrambling to put in place new, more adaptive ways of thinking about and managing resources. On top of that, democratic political ideals and institutions—arguably the guarantors of the social foundations upon which much of the world's protected area estate has been built—are now increasingly being undercut or even openly attacked in many countries. (Rolf Diamant ponders the meaning of this in his Letter from Woodstock in this issue.) It all adds up to an unsettling “new normal” that the global parks community is trying to get a handle on.

But how?

The following set of short essays offer a variety of answers. We asked a cross-section of GWS members—those early on in their journey as well as old hands—to share their personal stories about how they managed to get through rough patches in their career. Specifically, we asked authors to take on two questions:

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- What sources and techniques have you found to be effective in developing resiliency in the face of adversity, especially during periods when the political tides have flowed against conservation ideals?
- If you were advising young professionals in the parks, protected areas, and cultural sites community, what positive steps would you suggest they take as they approach the challenging times in which we find ourselves now?

We also invited them to share what their relationship with GWS has meant to them, giving particular attention to how the Society has helped inform or inspire them to meet challenges, as well as what GWS can do better. All authors are writing in their personal capacity, and their views should not be taken to reflect the official positions of any of their organizational affiliations.

We hope you find their experiences inspiring and useful as you continue your own conservation journey.