

REVIEW

An understanding of trust, identity, and power can enhance equitable and resilient conservation partnerships and processes

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Abstract

Conservation practitioners regularly engage in partnerships and processes to develop and achieve important conservation goals aimed at alleviating the biodiversity crisis. These processes, and the partnerships needed for success, are subject to complex social dynamics that can result in negative outcomes if not well understood and addressed. As an illustration, a heavy reliance on authority-based power in a conservation process could lead to alliances with some groups and alienation of others. Such ingroup/outgroup dynamics can prompt threats to one's identity and distrust of others, which may lead to disengagement or active blocking of progress toward goals (e.g., legal action). To support practitioners in addressing the biodiversity crisis, we review key concepts and theory from the literature in relation to how trust, identity, and power operate in the context of conservation partnerships and processes. We further offer a list of considerations for conservation practitioners seeking to co-develop goals that are achievable, equitable, and responsive to the needs of diverse interests, as well as sustainable over time given shifting social and ecological conditions.

KEYWORDS

collaboration, conflict, identity, partnerships, power, processes, trust

1 | INTRODUCTION

Conservation practitioners aim to achieve myriad goals, including to protect endangered species, restore ecosystem function, enhance human livelihoods, prevent habitat loss and fragmentation, reduce human-wildlife conflict, and more. Actions taken to achieve these goals can both positively and negatively impact the diverse array of people who are connected to the conservation “target” (e.g., species, protected area) through spiritual, recreation, economic, or other means (Harrington, Curtis, & Black, 2008). To better understand these connections and potential impacts, and

ultimately achieve conservation goals that benefit people, places, and wild species, practitioners often seek to develop partnerships before or during conservation processes. The development of successful partnerships necessitates an understanding of how to predict, prevent, and resolve conflicts that may arise among partners as processes unfold. The conservation community's interest in building such understanding is evidenced partly by the sustained growth of working groups in the *Society of Conservation Biology* (SCB) focused on social science, conservation marketing, and participatory and citizen science, and the expanding enrollment of conservation practitioners and researchers in social

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science theory and methods courses at conservation-related conferences and meetings. In fact, our experiences learning from participants while teaching some of these courses and workshops informed development of the ideas we share here. Thus, we draw upon our areas of expertise to offer a structured set of suggestions for practitioners in support of building stronger partnerships that can equitably address conservation goals.

In this paper, we treat participation in conservation processes as a basic human right and a necessary component of success. We also define *partners* as two or more entities (i.e., stakeholders) working together in the pursuit of a commonly-defined conservation goal—whether part of or independent from a process—and we define *processes* as organized efforts by an entity (or entities) to engage multiple stakeholders to define and ultimately achieve a conservation goal. Past conservation partnerships and processes have had their share of failures, including the use of exclusionary practices that afforded opportunities and rights to some but not all. Such practices have led to conservation decisions that impact people differently, with some receiving benefits and others subject to consequences (particularly peoples marginalized by the process). Thus, equitable and inclusive participation in conservation processes is not only necessary to foster long-term conservation success but an ostensible extension of basic human rights. In particular, the issue of dignity, and the associated requirement of respect, has often been ignored despite being fundamental to negotiated consensus outcomes. Additionally, many Indigenous peoples have rights according to national constitutions and international accords such as the United Nation's Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) guidelines (<https://www.iucn.org/theme/governance-and-rights/our-work/indigenous-peoples>); however, these international rights have not always been enforced within nations (e.g., Dowie, 2009; Olive & Rabe, 2016; Tauli-Corpuz, Alcorn, Molnar, Healy, & Barrow, 2020). Furthermore, despite recent attention on and commitment to inclusion and equity within conservation, there is yet to be a formal declaration of equitable participation specifically extended to diverse (and oft-marginalized) groups in conservation processes.

Efforts to develop equitable partnerships under a rights-based approach can be affected by power dynamics and communication conflicts or distrust driven by divergent values and identities (Sterling et al., 2017). These social dynamics can shift over time, raising the need for efforts to be resilient to changing conditions, partners, and structures. Overlooking how these dynamics operate

between partners and within processes, and being unwilling to adapt to changing conditions, can result in goals being stymied or perceived as achievable only through unilateral action, such as enforcement or litigation (López-Bao, Chapron, & Treves, 2017). Thus, an understanding of how to predict, prevent, and manage social conflicts that can arise when working with diverse stakeholder groups could significantly aid achievement of conservation goals and reach equitable solutions. For example, previous studies have suggested that processes characterized by adequate stores of trust, a collective sense of identity, and participatory strategies designed to minimize power asymmetries can improve long-term management and promote resilient collaborations (Coleman & Stern, 2018; Mosimane, Breen, & Nkhata, 2012; Schoon et al., 2015; Stern & Baird, 2015). However, trust, identity, and power are often explored separately without consideration of how dynamic interactions between these concepts collectively impact conservation practices and outcomes.

We meet this need to understand how trust, identity, and power can help practitioners identify where different partners (including themselves) stand in relation to other groups as well as common root causes of social conflict and pathways to address those causes considering different stakeholder interests. Specifically, we first introduce and describe the underlying theory of each concept separately, then explain ways in which these social constructs highlight pathways to establish, build, and even repair relationships among partners and to develop successful processes to achieve conservation goals and build equitable and resilient communities and ecosystems. We additionally address the need to adapt to changing conditions of trust, identity, and power within partnerships and processes over time.

1.1 | Trust

Conservation practitioners often understand that trust builds partnerships and facilitates processes, whereas distrust can lead to disagreements, faction-building, and efforts to thwart processes altogether (Coleman & Stern, 2018; Stern, 2008). Hardin (2002) describes trust as a relationship in which an entity (trustor) accepts vulnerability to another entity (trustee) who acts on behalf of the trustor. Distrust, meanwhile, is a decided unwillingness to accept that vulnerability, which can arise due to any number of reasons, including fear of the unknown and expectations of negative outcomes. We underscore that trust is *a relationship among entities*. Thus, strong resistance on the part of any partner, including conservation practitioners, to accept any degree of vulnerability—by trusting other stakeholders and treating them as equal

partners—can contribute to unhelpful dynamics within processes that delay outcomes or contribute to broader social conflicts among groups over time.

While multiple factors can influence the development or loss of trust, we recommend trust ecology as an approach to considering, diagnosing, and ultimately acting upon trust issues within conservation contexts. Trust ecology defines four types of trust (Stern & Baird, 2015; Stern & Coleman, 2015):

- **Dispositional trust** represents a proclivity to be trusting or distrusting of others based largely on prior experiences and the culture of the potential trustor. Dispositional trust sets the baseline from which other forms of trust (or distrust) may emerge. Dispositional trust changes slowly, due to its development throughout the life of the trustor. In comparison, the other three forms of trust are more mutable through the actions of potential trustees and, as a result, can transform more rapidly.
- **Rational trust** is based on a trustor's predictions of the outcomes of a potential trustee's actions, with rational trust reflecting an expectation of a positive outcome and rational distrust reflecting an expectation of a negative outcome. Expectations are typically grounded in perceptions of competence, prior performance, consistency, and goal alignment of the potential trustee.
- **Affinitive trust** is developed through a general liking of the potential trustee, which can arise through sharing positive social experiences or perceptions of charisma, genuine caring, active listening, or shared identities. In contrast to rational trust, affinitive trust typically does not involve conscious calculation of expected outcomes.
- **Systems-based (or procedural) trust** refers to trust of the system in which the entities (trustor and trustee) interact and typically relies on perceptions of fairness, transparency, and consistently applied procedures and rules. Systems in which rules are jointly developed and agreed upon tend to have positive influences on other forms of trust, whereas systems that feel coercive tend to negatively influence other forms of trust.

Similar to diversity in an ecosystem, trust diversity enables one form of trust to buffer the system in the case of disturbance to any other form. For example, if the policy landscape changes or the system otherwise faces a large-scale disturbance, interpersonal forms of trust (rational and affinitive trust) can enable collaboration while systems-based trust is re-built (Baral & Stern, 2011). Similarly, interpersonal conflict can often be assuaged by external facilitation and the development of

clear procedures for debate and disagreement (systems-based trust; Coleman & Stern, 2018). Developing clear procedures can also help stakeholders to navigate the loss of affinitive or rational trust in the case of turnover of key personnel (Coleman & Stern, 2018).

Whereas trust is regularly perceived by conservationists to be an ideal outcome, some scholars suggest that too much trust can inhibit engagement in processes and should not be the sole goal (see summary by Petts, 2008). Specifically, if a trustor feels that a trustee will represent their voice without their presence, then the trustor may reason that engagement is an unnecessary use of resources. Stern and Baird (2015) refer to this as a *complacency threshold*. Others (e.g., Parkins et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2013) have suggested that skepticism can, in some cases, contribute to increased interest in participation. Poortinga and Pidgeon (2003, 970) specifically note that distrust is “an essential component of political accountability in a participatory democracy.” Applied to conservation contexts, stakeholder engagement efforts commonly include participants with a high degree of skepticism about the decision making process (Smith et al., 2013). Such engagement raises the potential for social conflict among groups with disparate perspectives, especially in cases of active distrust. These situations often involve perceived threats to the identities of participants, which can further complicate the achievement of conservation goals.

1.2 | Identity

Identity influences what it means to be part of a group, including the kinds of attitudes, emotions, and behaviors that are “appropriate” for group members depending on context (Hornsey, 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Being part of (i.e., conforming to) a social group has provided evolutionary advantages throughout human history (e.g., food in times of scarcity, protection from threats) with norms prescribing socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. Norms can be informally enforced (through group members' responses to behavior deemed inappropriate) or formally codified within the laws and policies of institutions that have authority to regulate specific behaviors (McElreath, Boyd, & Richerson, 2003; Richerson & Henrich, 2012; Waring, Goff, & Smaldino, 2017). An informal sanction may include the future exclusion of a group member who was quite vocal during a conservation process, if the group deems what was said or how the person acted to be unfavorable. Alternatively, that person may be rewarded with improved standing within the group if speaking up enhances the group's desired outcomes. In addition to providing information

about “appropriate” beliefs and behaviors one should follow, norms exert significant pressure on individuals to conform to group behavior even when the person would not act the same alone (Cramer, Kennedy, Krannich, & Quigley, 1993; Nolan et al., 2008).

Participation in multi-stakeholder conservation processes that assumes individuals should represent specific interest groups promotes the alignment of individuals' normative commitments to those in-groups they are tasked with representing. Perceived identity-related threats often prevent reasonable debate and inhibit successful conservation action because individuals are essentially encouraged to take positions in contrast to other out-groups (Fielding & Hornsey, 2016). Stalemates and other suboptimal solutions are easily visible in these situations, with an obvious case-in-point reflected by partisan politics in the United States (U.S.), the United Kingdom, and elsewhere. Even where agreement on issues could exist, compromising with the out-group may be perceived as defeat. As people feel threatened and leaders of certain groups draw clearer distinctions between in-group and out-group membership, the perceived need to demonstrate alliances can drive outcomes more than a desire to work collaboratively or “problem-solve” (particularly when the problem is ill-defined). In conservation efforts, this typically leads to social conflict that stalls progress and can result in actions that inevitably maintain positionality rather than produce resilient outcomes (Fielding & Hornsey, 2016). As an illustration, fencing is often promoted by conservationists (in accordance with IUCN interests of balancing human population growth and biodiversity conservation) as ways to reduce crop-raiding and other human-wildlife conflicts worldwide; however such programs invite debates of animal rights vs. human rights with conservationists, particularly those from colonizing countries, often viewed as protecting charismatic wildlife despite the very real threats to human life (Somers & Hayward, 2012). In short, competing identity-related commitments can preclude honest deliberation between stakeholder groups, regardless of their underlying conservation-related interests. Such divisions are often sewn by those with power, necessitating a discussion of different power sources.

1.3 | Power

Power dynamics can significantly impact partnerships and processes (Bixler, Wald, Leong, Ogden, & Johnston, 2016), requiring careful consideration of how such dynamics operate within conservation (Sterling et al., 2017). To be clear, power and its definition are context dependent and complicated. In the context of multi-stakeholder

conservation processes, previous scholars have largely defined power as the ability to control resources and influence decisions. Here, we explore these traditional definitions while also elevating awareness of an underexamined, yet often effective source of power. Thus, we outline three sources—authority, resource-based power, and discursive legitimacy (Purdy, 2012)—through which power operates, then conclude with how these sources can be employed in relation to trust and identity to improve conservation partnerships and processes.

Authority is derived from social acceptance and affords specific entities the power to pass judgment, lead decisions, and act (Greenwald, 2008). This is akin to Weber's sociological concept of legal-rational authority, which refers to power that is based on one's title, role, or formal position (Spencer, 1970). For example, the Public Trust Doctrine assigns authority to governments in the U.S. to sustainably manage publicly-owned resources (Batcheller et al., 2010). Such authority is conferred through policy, yet regularly negotiated, contested, and manufactured through social and political processes (Decker et al., 2016; Leong, Emmerson, & Byron, 2011; Manfredo, Teel, Sullivan, & Dietsch, 2017; Raik, Wilson, & Decker, 2008). As a form of power over others, authoritative entities can reinforce shared objectives or concerns and enforce group decisions and processes. Additionally, authoritative sources typically have the legal means by which to design and conduct processes, which can result in certain participants being favored or excluded (Purdy, 2012).

Purdy (2012) refers to *resource-based power* as the tangible (e.g., wealth, staff, technology, materials) and intangible resources (e.g., information, expertise, relationships) that can facilitate conservation partnerships and processes in various ways, including bringing groups together, mobilizing specific participants to engage in processes, or otherwise influencing efforts (e.g., hiring of experts or legal representation). The application of resource-based power can occur overtly or through “behind-the-scenes” negotiation, as has been documented in health policy contexts in Malawi, South Sudan and Zambia (Harris, 2019; Storeng, Palmer, Daire, & Kloster, 2019). Resource imbalances can unintentionally (or intentionally) impact relationships and, ultimately, decision outcomes. For example, Wald, Segal, Johnston, and Vinze (2017) found that loss of control over water resources during a public goods experiment reduced participants' ability to consider the interests of other players and increased behavior that benefitted in-group positionality.

Discursive legitimacy, or an ability to “speak on behalf of an issue in the public sphere” (Purdy, 2012, p. 411), is often conferred on a group or organization that pursues (or is perceived as pursuing) socially desirable values and

TABLE 1 Template for practitioners to evaluate trust, identity, and power for conservation success

	Questions to consider	Strengths: Areas of leverage	Gaps: Potential areas of conflict	Taking action to address gaps Example actions to foster success
Trust	Which trust forms are expected to exist or be lacking with each stakeholder? <i>Consider current dynamics, previous experiences, and natural wariness of new people and things.</i>	Forms of trust that likely exist:	Forms of trust that may be lacking:	<i>What will you do to build or repair trust?</i> Examples: Low rational trust? Seek opportunities for stakeholders to promote successes and demonstrate competence. Low affiliative trust? Seek opportunities for stakeholders to share personal stories and share informal social time; facilitate activities that demonstrate common core interests. Take time to agree upon norms for interaction and decision-making; establish shared criteria by which to evaluate potential actions to build systems-based trust.
Identity	What are the different identities of key stakeholders? What underlying belief systems (e.g., values, moral foundations) might be at the root of each group's position or interests?	Overlapping, collaborative beliefs:	Beliefs likely to conflict with one another:	<i>Which shared identities and values/moral foundations can be leveraged to establish common ground?</i> Examples: Take time to understand the interests, common language, and triggers for each stakeholder group. Adjust language to avoid triggers and address underlying moral concerns. Remind participants of their positive identities outside of the debate through humanizing icebreakers. Co-develop rules for interaction that include expressing merit in the ideas of others.
Power	Which sources of power (authority, resource-based, discursive legitimacy) exist and who holds those sources? Where (in partners, processes, or content) may there be an imbalance of power that has not been previously agreed upon or decided by all parties?	Sources of power that can empower marginalized groups:	Sources of power that may reinforce power inequities:	<i>How can the process create a more balanced power dynamic that allows all voices to be heard?</i> Examples: Develop stakeholder assessments that consider what each group has at risk, their accountabilities to other parties, their degree of influence, and their level of engagement in the issue (e.g., use power mapping or an equity analysis). Elevate marginalized voices, and those who have high risk but (perceived) little influence. Encourage stakeholders to share information about each other's accountabilities and risks to enable joint problem-solving that addresses each other's interests.

norms. Discursive legitimacy can also include influence over the presentation and distribution of information (related to sharing of content). Groups with limited resource-based power or authority have successfully leveraged this form of power, whether by withholding trust (Stern, 2018) or by mobilizing people around culturally powerful messages as witnessed by grassroots social

movements of various sizes. Examples include Rare Pride campaigns aimed at fostering conservation outcomes in diverse communities (<https://rare.org/>), as well as recent efforts in Guam (Sablan, 2018) and Hawai'i (Warner & Kinslow, 2013) to oppose government actions that are perceived as detrimental to culturally important plants and animals, among others.

2 | APPLYING TRUST, IDENTITY, AND POWER TO CONSERVATION

Development of equitable and resilient partnerships and processes that consider a rights-based approach to achieve conservation goals requires serious consideration of how trust, identity, and power function and interact across time. Conservation processes, ranging from the simplest day-long volunteer arrangements to complex multi-year, multi-stakeholder collaborations, can experience in-group and out-group dynamics, variable levels of trust among participants, and different types and degrees of power, any of which can exhaust conservationists aiming to expediently address different aspects of the biodiversity crisis (Reed, 2008). To help practitioners work through each concept and their associated dynamics, we outline important questions and considerations related to trust, identity, and power that draw from our collective experiences in conservation-related research and practice (Table 1). Our efforts also draw from conversations we had with participants in courses we have held at annual meetings for the *Society of Conservation Biology* during the past decade. Participants regularly emphasize wanting to know more why stakeholders behave in the ways they do, and how to employ social science methods to better understand the social dimensions of conservation work. We also regularly hear from practitioners about a need to build trust with stakeholders across various contexts. Thus, we summarize some key recommendations from theory and empirical research that we believe can improve conservation processes by minimizing power inequities, enhancing shared identity, and building trust.

2.1 | Check your positionality

Conservationists may (accidentally or otherwise) overlook their position as a stakeholder in a complex process - who they trust or not, their identity and expectations regarding outcomes, and levels of power. Thus, we first encourage conservationists to consider (and check) themselves before proceeding. For example, groups that have the legal jurisdiction for organizing processes, including inviting partners, and determining content (e.g., what information is shared with others) wield authority-based power, though such groups are not the only participant of a process who can or even should wield such power in some cases. Groups with authority-based power also tend to set the agenda, which leverages power by determining what will be covered during discussions (Purdy, 2012). However, such top-down “problem framing” approaches may inadvertently (or worse, purposely) cause in-group and out-group conflicts, as groups seek to establish their position in relation to

the pre-defined “problem.” For example, fisheries managers in the Gulf of Mexico who hailed from an organization perceived as an outsider were stymied despite attempting to implement a rights-based approach to fish within an appropriate allowable catch because local fishers did not believe the approach was necessary, needed, or applicable to their experiences (Leal & Maharaj, 2009). Stakeholders opposed to a top-down stance or policy may ignore or deny it, discredit other groups who accept it, limit the ability for adaptation to current conditions, or, in extreme cases, threaten or actively pursue economic, legal, or political action (Cook, 2015; Davis & Hoffer, 2012). Numerous examples exist where authoritative entities have diluted trust, ignored competing identities, or misapplied power with unintended outcomes (e.g., Cook, 2015; EDF, 2013), and working directly with communities in an equitable way can help conservationists to understand (and overcome) their own positionality.

2.2 | Be attentive to diverse partners

Careful design of processes includes inviting partners that represent the full range of public interests (López-Bao et al., 2017) and communities of interest (Harrington et al., 2008), including those who represent different forms of power (authority, resource-based, and discursive legitimacy). For example, Purdy (2012) describes how the frequency, duration, and location of meetings; expectations about the type of interactions that might occur; and the communication modes used by participants throughout a process can reinforce or help distribute power among participants. These considerations may also powerfully influence trust assessments between parties and perceptions of ingroup/outgroup dynamics. Careful attention should be paid, particularly by authority-based power groups, to decisions regarding where and when meetings are held, what content is shared between meetings, and whether expectations of outcomes have been pre-determined (see Lichtenfeld, Naro, & Snowden, 2019 and Creger, 2020 for equitable approaches to developing partnerships among diverse groups). While a full review of tools for power analysis is outside of the scope of this paper, we note that power mapping (Noy, 2008) was originally proposed by Hagan and Smail (1997) to assess individual resources and forms of power. Example tools exist (see <https://trainings.350.org/?resource=power-mapping-activity>), and the approach has been applied to understanding team and network power dynamics (e.g., Harris, 2019; Littman et al. 2021; Schiffer, 2007). Power maps have also been employed in tandem with Participatory Impact Pathways Analysis (PIPA), to plan, manage, and evaluate complex development projects (Alvarez et al., 2010). To date, these methods

are not widely employed in conservation contexts, but could provide important insight into the causes and consequences of network capture and sources of power in conservation partnerships and processes. There is no panacea in terms of how processes should operate, but rather a need to consider when lessons learned through previous efforts apply to ongoing efforts or new approaches are necessary (Reed, 2008).

2.3 | Offer opportunities to share your power

Power imbalances are often apparent in the implementation and post-implementation phases of conservation processes. Fisher, Ury, and Patton (1991) note that authority-based partners or those who wield resource-based power (in the form of money, time, knowledge, etc.) can intentionally encourage a more equitable distribution of power among partners by encouraging or privileging other forms of power, such as content-based power or discursive legitimacy. Examples of content-based power include producing meeting records or being the media contact, and using intangible resources such as knowledge or culture that serve as discursive legitimacy. When working in power-diverse teams, it is important to ensure all team members are on the same page about public presentations and roles to avoid situations that might cause less-powerful members discomfort or feelings of vulnerability (Littman et al., 2020). Ensuring such opportunities, particularly if invited from an authority-based power group, are and remain voluntary rather than coercive is crucial (Booher, 2004). Additionally, Bowie, Dietrich, Cassey, and Verissimo (2020) found that sharing power in the form of co-designing behavioral interventions is particularly effective in determining solutions for conscious, high-cognitive-load decision making, such as coffee consumers deliberating various sustainable options consisting of multiple attributes. Additional resources for learning more about co-design approaches include Antioch's webinar on "5 Principles of Co-Designing Conservation WITH (not for) the Community" (<https://www.antioch.edu/new-england/2020/03/10/5-principles-of-co-designing-conservation-with-not-for-the-community-conservation-psychology-institute-webinar-series/>).

2.4 | Collaboratively develop guidelines for deliberation

Principled negotiation (Fisher et al., 1991) provides some guidance for empowering multiple parties in transparent decision-making processes, suggesting that facilitators establish clear rules for deliberation that provide more equal grounding to all voices and prohibit personal attacks

(e.g., Dryzek & Braithwaite, 2000; Lundmark & Matti, 2015; López-Bao et al., 2017). Participants are guided toward expressing their interests, rather than their positions. Positions are predetermined desired outcomes, such as the establishment of a protected area or a road. Interests are the reasons that underlie those positions, such as concerns about rare biodiversity or local livelihoods. Focusing on positions typically leads to win-lose arguments that perpetuate pre-existing power differentials. Focusing on interests can enable groups to establish shared criteria by which to evaluate potential courses of action, enabling new solutions to arise that address a wider array of concerns. Effective processes create safe spaces for disagreement. Specific rules for interaction that require participants to identify and express merit in the arguments of their counterparts can help to diffuse identity threats and distrust between parties (Fisher & Shapiro, 2005). If stakeholders can trust the system (the procedures) to reduce their feelings of risk, other forms of trust can emerge in the process as they acknowledge common elements of underlying interests.

2.5 | Identify core values and communicate at a deeper level

Many areas of disagreements may stem from perceived underlying belief systems, such as values (Schwartz et al., 2012) or moral foundations (Haidt & Graham, 2009), both of which generally reflect participants' beliefs about right and wrong or good and bad. The specific values or moral foundations emphasized by an individual are typically based on their commitments to important groups with whom they identify (e.g., environmentalists, local farmers, Republicans). Understanding the values or moral foundations of participating stakeholders can help to re-orient interactions in two ways: through communicative framing (which can help to de-polarize conflicts) and through identifying common values (which can help to build trust). Scholarship from the field of communication highlights how message framing, or the selection and packaging of key information, can strongly influence responses. For example, Wolsko, Ariceaga, and Seiden (2016) found political conservatives to be more willing to adopt pro-environmental attitudes when framed in terms of sanctity/purity rather than as an issue of loyalty vs. betrayal as in-group ("conservative") vs. out-group ("liberal"). This approach does not suggest that people need to change values or adopt new foundations; rather, understanding where others are coming from and tailoring messages to appeal to existing beliefs can encourage message acceptance. Similarly, certain language (i.e., key phrases) can trigger ingroup/outgroup dynamics and diminish collective perceptions of feeling heard. For example, in the U.S., terms, such as *environmental justice* or *harm to the*

most vulnerable populations, commonly used by liberals can signal outgroup identification to conservatives due to repetition of these terms and their politicization, setting up a barrier to engagement before earnest consideration of ideas even begins despite conservatives' interests in the same issues (Hurst et al., 2020). In conservation settings around the world, terms such as *biodiversity*, *endangered species*, or *regulation* may function similarly. Thus, understanding how language and frames intersect with and reinforce group identity can help facilitators navigate partnerships successfully and enable participants to speak to each other's concerns without triggering identity threats (Lakoff, 2014). Moral foundations and values theory can help practitioners frame messaging in less polarizing ways and find common core beliefs that run deeper than the seeming issue at hand, encouraging participants to see others as moral people rather than adversaries. For more detail and specific examples about moral framing, see Feinberg and Willer (2013), Haidt (2012), Hurst and Stern (2020), Hurst et al. (2020), Kidwell, Farmer, and Hardesty (2013), Stern (2018), and Wolsko et al. (2016).

2.6 | Attend to pre-existing distrust

We recommend embracing the likelihood of pre-existing distrust. Certain stakeholders (particularly conservationists, industry groups, and government agencies) may experience high levels of distrust from others or directed at others due to past actions, and various circumstances or power differentials can generate overall acrimony or malaise before a process even begins. Outright denying responsibility for pre-existing distrust is rarely productive (Susskind & Field, 1996). Processes built on the assumption of some degree of distrust involve a different set of procedural strategies, messages, and partners than processes dominated by trusting participants. For example, processes that assume distrust between managers and the public could focus on distrust-reducing strategies that directly address participants' skepticism, as well as perceptions of managers' credibility, bias, and vested interest. Repairing trust requires attention both to demonstrating trustworthiness and reducing the possibility for future trust violations. However, exploring the underlying reasons for distrust and demonstrating trustworthiness, including both rational and affinitive components, may not always lead to trust being developed right away. Time is required to co-create the voluntary collaborative monitoring systems that empower participants, reduce identity threats, and address distrust (Gillespie & Dietz, 2009). Such approaches are likely particularly true for traditionally marginalized groups, such as indigenous communities, who are invited to participate in developing programs already in the works, which keeps the power and control over the program design within the implementing organization, and may result in systemic

design issues being retained. In contrast, the Greenlining Institute (Creger, 2020) underscores a five-step process to (a) understand the context (past and present), (b) review challenges and best practices for centering equity, (c) conduct an internal equity audit/assessment, (d) partner with *and pay* marginalized partners, and (e) co-create the questions and solutions that work with those partners to truly be equitable.

2.7 | Adapt to changing conditions

Conservation processes require an adaptive approach, as promoted by the open standards for conservation (<http://cmp-openstandards.org/>) due to their cross-sectoral complexity, challenges regarding problem definition, and the ever-changing nature of natural and social contexts. An adaptive approach considers multiple definitions of the "problem" and facilitates the collaborative development of solutions. For productive deliberation and equitable collaboration between parties to take place, processes must be developed in which partners feel safe to share diverse forms of knowledge, talents, and skills, and openly and honestly divulge concerns before process begin and as conditions change within the process over time.

3 | CONCLUSION

The urgency of achieving goals is readily apparent to conservation practitioners, yet such urgency should not preclude taking the time necessary to incorporate the interests and needs of others and forge equitable partnerships that honor a rights-based approach and the dignity of diverse stakeholder groups. Ignoring these interests can entrench one-sided positions and create enduring conservation conflicts marked by polarized debate (López-Bao et al., 2017). We believe that conservation goals could more readily be achieved by engaging in formal consideration of the arenas where power dynamics, identity, and trust have the potential to create conflict among stakeholders, including conservationists as a stakeholder, and acting to address these considerations.

Here, we highlighted a need to understand and evaluate the types of trust, identities, and power dynamics that can emerge during processes, as these dynamics can aid or inhibit participant diversity, collaboration, conflict, and the success of outcomes. As examples of how these concepts may interact: first, trust can help to lessen the negative impacts of power differences. Second, exposing common belief systems (e.g., values, moral foundations) and reducing identity threats can pave the way for trust to form or be re-established and potentially mitigate the

unintentional fortification of power dynamics often rooted in authority. Third, softening of in-group/out-group distinctions through collaborative processes that heighten opportunities to understand the moral self of all participants through common interests (e.g., values, moral foundations) can help to mitigate perceptions of fairness related to power differentials. Finally, providing opportunities for groups to participate equitably as part of deliberative processes in relation to their resource- and content-related power (or lack thereof) can increase perceived procedural fairness and system-based trust, as well as increase the resilience of conservation outcomes (Schoon et al., 2015). As part of such assessments, conservation practitioners could identify several possible actions to take before and during the process to avoid exacerbating existing conflicts and/or creating new conflicts associated with these social dynamics (examples outlined in Table 1).

The approach we outline draws upon our collective experiences in conservation research and practice to summarize common challenges associated with multi-stakeholder conservation processes and to offer example paths forward to address those challenges. We recognize that trust, identity, and power are key - but not always the only - considerations at hand in such processes, and honor that other approaches can work. We further acknowledge that processes which prevent or repair social conflict among groups require patience, empathy, and time, and regularly necessitate leadership that can empower diverse stakeholders in ways that overcome power inequalities, build trust, and enhance shared understanding (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Schuckman, 2001). Additionally, the dynamics of trust, identity, and power are likely to shift across the lifespan of a conservation program, and concerted efforts to evaluate these dynamics over time can help pinpoint when and what type of intervention can be used to address sources of conflict as they occur. Thus, we believe that concerted and ongoing effort to evaluate these dynamics over time will bring about successful, resilient, and equitable conservation outcomes.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None of the authors report any conflicts of interest in conceptualizing or writing of this manuscript.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Alia M. Dietsch, Dara M. Wald, Marc J. Stern, and Brooke Tully all contributed to conceptualization of the manuscript, writing of the manuscript, and sourcing related citations to support written materials. Alia M. Dietsch revised earlier drafts sourced from material provided by all authors, as well as edited and responded to reviewers.

ETHICS STATEMENT

We do not report original results from primary data collection efforts, and therefore were not subject to appropriate IRB review.

DATA ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

The ideas presented in this manuscript were based on collective experiences and reviews of previously published material available via institutional search engines (e.g., Web of Science).

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