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Understanding the outdoors and conservation through a queer lens

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## Understanding the outdoors and conservation through a queer lens

BRIAN FORIST, SANDY HEATH, AND FORREST KING-CORTES

It is with great pride that we offer this special issue of *Parks Stewardship Forum* focusing on LGBTQIA+ experiences and expertise in the outdoors and in conservation. We are humbled by the brilliance and the depth of experience and expertise provided by the scholars, artists, practitioners, writers, activists, and others whose work is featured here. Presented are research articles, theoretical pieces, deeply personal stories, art, science, and history. What they all share in common is the essential beauty and insight that comes from applying a queer lens to our critical understanding of the outdoors and conservation. At once peering from the margins of society and taking center stage, the LGBTQIA+ contributors to this issue provide a personal, practical, and assertive understanding that queering of place-based conservation is a very good thing. It is an important thing. It is an essential thing. It can help save places. It can save lives!

The work in this special issue is done by and for LGBTQIA+ practitioners in the outdoors and conservation and supported by powerful allies. We have learned important lessons from each author and artist over the many months we have been working on this special issue. Now that it has come to fruition, we look forward to the continued lessons learned as our colleagues collectively apply a queer lens to the protection of parks and green spaces, the facilitation of LGBTQIA+ experiences in the outdoors, and the conservation movement as a whole.

With gratitude, we thank the artist Henry Crawford Adams for their kind permission to use their Tarot-inspired artwork on the cover, and as introductions to the three sections into which we have divided the contributions to this special issue (see below). The guest editors and co-publishers also thank The Nature Conservancy; the Indiana University Program in Parks, Recreation, & the Outdoors; and several individual donors for supporting the provision of honoraria to the contributing authors.

This special issue is a call to recognize the expertise, stories, and presence of our communities in the outdoors and conservation, while recognizing the expression and communication of research, theory, narrative, art, and history to transcend formats to which we have become accustomed. It's a call for organizations and individuals alike to be clear and consistent in their allyship in the rooms and green spaces where conservation takes place, and to be present, visible, and working hard as allies in the public discourse around trans rights, and the continued fight for equal freedoms for LGBTQIA+ people. Remember us in your planning for green spaces and programming, at the table where decisions are made, and when you cast your vote. Our well-being and the well-being of our planet depend on it.

Artwork by Henry Crawford Adams divides the contributions into three sections, representing Strength, Traditions / Sticking to One's Path, and Confidence / Directionality.



Brian Forist (he/him/his) worked in national parks and other protected areas for four decades and now teaches at Indiana University. Sandy Heath (they/she/he) worked as a (dis)ability rights advocate and now teaches and is building a research program at Northern Arizona University and the Institute for Human Development. Forrest King-Cortes (he/el) has worked in community-centered conservation for over ten years and co-founded Out In Nature, an outdoor meetup group for LGBTQIA+ people, with his husband.



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*Parks Stewardship Forum* explores innovative thinking and offers enduring perspectives on critical issues of place-based heritage management and stewardship. Interdisciplinary in nature, the journal gathers insights from all fields related to parks, protected/conserved areas, cultural sites, and other place-based forms of conservation. The scope of the journal is international. It is dedicated to the legacy of **George Meléndez Wright**, a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, and pioneer in conservation of national parks.

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**On the cover of this issue**

“Strength,” a Tarot illustration representing a radiation of power coupled with inner understanding and love. | [HENRY CRAWFORD ADAMS](#)