

Women in Conservation Rock!

*By Dan Fitts
March 9, 2018*

The Adirondack Research Consortium in partnership with the Adirondack Council held the Women in Conservation Advocacy and Policy Workshop on February 15th, 2018 at Paul Smith's College. Over eighty men and women from the academic, business, NGO, and government sectors attended the event which was sponsored by the Walbridge Fund and the International Paper Foundation. This was the fourth workshop held in the Women in Leadership Series presented by the Consortium to identify opportunities, challenges, and research needs for women pursuing careers in the Adirondacks.

The program featured a presentation by Dr. Jillmarie Murphy, Director of the Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Program, at Union College. Jill is a respected researcher, academic and author. She talked about the Women's Program at Union College, her research in gender equality, and her new book.

A fishbowl panel presentation followed chaired by Diane Fish, Deputy Director of the Adirondack Council and co-organizer of the workshop. The panel included Liz Moran of Environmental Advocates of New York; Jessica Bassett a Communications Consultant; Jessica Ottney Mahar from The Nature Conservancy; and Kathy Regan from the NYS Adirondack Park Agency. Diane led the panel through a series of questions aimed at exploring such topics as access to leadership, acquiring skills, communicating, and sharing power. The panel also answered questions from audience members.

Kathleen M. Moser, Deputy Commissioner, Natural Resources, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, presented a lunchtime keynote talk called, "Supporting Women in Conservation: 30+ Years of Experience, Mistakes and Successes." Kathy talked of the early years in her career working for the Nature Conservancy in Nicaragua. While there she was asked to set up a national park and learned valuable life-long lessons about understanding and appreciating the balance in people living in an area and the impact environmental based decisions may have on their lives. From her many experiences with the Nature Conservancy and the Department, Kathy stressed the need for collaboration in decision making to get things done. She encouraged women to find a rightful place at the table and to be unapologetic about sharing their ideas. She talked about the importance of taking on challenges, learning new skills, and the ability to negotiate. Kathy urged more women to become involved in conservation policy careers, to be sure their voices are heard, and to listen to all sides to reach solutions that work for the majority of people. Olivia Dwyer, a freelance writer, said "I scribbled furious notes as Kathleen Moser shared candid reflections on her career in conservation—and I'll go back to that notebook countless times when I need advice on how to succeed at work or in the field."

Facilitated group discussions followed to identify potential actions and research needs to further gender equity. The topics discussed were data needs, career development ideas, and training and personal development needs. The data discussion results pointed to a need for more qualitative and quantitative information on the number of women in the workforce and in leadership roles, and for better salary information. The career development discussion focused on the need for more mentorship, internship, and networking opportunities, and for more educational training on

specific skills such as fundraising and public speaking. The training and personal development discussions identified the areas of self advocacy and confidence, conflict resolution, and work/home life balance as important educational needs. Finally, a general comment from the discussions was that “Women in Conservation Rock!”

Participants commenting after the workshop said they liked that many women from different organizations were able to attend and learn from one another. It was very empowering experience which provided a good foundation for understanding why women's roles in the workforce are more challenging. Participants enjoyed the panel discussion and each woman's unique background and perspectives on questions. It was encouraging to hear these stories and experiences. The small group discussions generated many ideas about tools which can help women excel in conservation. Participants found the workshop to be a powerful, uplifting , and encouraging experience which gave a whole new avenue in life to explore, a great opportunity to meet many other women working in the various fields of conservation.

Danielle Urich, a Paul Smith's College student attended the workshop. She said, “Overall, this conference was extremely interesting and unlike anything I've been to before. It was great to see so many women from all over the Adirondack Park, and beyond, coming together to discuss the challenges they've faced and what they've learned. As a student, I found it very empowering and encouraging hearing their stories, and I hope that I'll be able to apply their lessons to my own life.”

Olivia Dwyer, said "The workshop was an inspiring day with actionable knowledge shared freely by speakers and attendees. The Adirondacks are a vast and wild space, and this gathering brought women together to share hard-earned experiences and valuable insights that will yield stronger, lasting conservation solutions for the Park."