

**Sierra Club Board of Directors Nominee Questionnaire
Responses to 10 Questions from Maya Khosla**

Question 1: As a Director, what are the top conservation and other organizational priorities that you would like to see Sierra Club focus on for the next three years?

As a Director, I would focus on three main conservation priorities, and on critical connections between them. I would prioritize efforts to keep wild places intact, expand on the existing support for clean energy resources, integral to addressing climate change, and strongly support environmental justice efforts. Essential organizational priorities would include developing workable budgets for those conservation priorities.

Sierra Club needs to place additional focus on project-specific actions protecting wild places, which keep the carbon in the ground and support all manner of life that can be regarded as wild elders. Where intact, places including forests, deserts, mangroves, and other wetlands, fortify us against climate change, and guarantee incredible experiences while exploring them.

We in Sierra Club recognize the increasing need for clean energy, including solar and wind energy. We can work to promote project placement close to existing developments, with the goal of preventing new projects from encroaching on wild lands that support biodiversity. Sierra Club can also work with other organizations to ensure new projects do not usurp critical habitats including flyways for migrating birds, and desert habitats for imperiled life.

Sierra Club members and leaders hold the collective wisdom of decades; we recognize that destructive industries such as wood pellet industries are responsible for large-scale deforestation. Our knowledge base can be used to work alongside frontline communities and environmental justice groups that face polluting facilities that cause serious harms. My work as a director would be to collaborate in finding solutions to these challenges.

Question 2: What experience do you have that prepares you for the responsibility of helping Sierra Club stay fiscally sound for years to come, including but not limited to experience with internal information sharing and turnover?

Managing projects as an independent biologist, I have tracked schedules and budgets for dozens of project supported by Save Our Seas Foundation (for community outreach efforts based in the east and west coasts of India), by Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation (for a film based on Sierra Nevada forests in the process of natural regeneration, post-fire) and many other organizations. As a consultant, I have tracked budgets and schedules for projects assessing soil toxicity in Hunters Point Shipyard (San Francisco) and in Stege Marsh (Richmond). Most recently, I have managed a project documenting the rise of forest biomass energy industries in the American West and British Columbia. My work includes senior review, quality control of deliverables, and extensive interface with agencies and partner non-profit groups.

Question 3: What steps would you take as a Board Director to tangibly lead Sierra Club in lifting up environmental justice/vulnerable communities and supporting them in tackling climate change, pollution, and other environmental issues that impact these communities and stifle their voices?

Engaging with environmental justice (EJ) groups for a deeper understanding of critical issues is a powerful way for Sierra Club members to be effective advocates. As a documentary filmmaker, one way I can offer expertise to Sierra Club members interested in assisting EJ groups and vulnerable communities, overburdened by pollution, is by working together to create strong platforms where community voices are heard. I am currently documenting multiple groups fighting against polluting technologies in California's Central Valley, including Central California Environmental Justice Network (CCEJN), Valley Improvement Projects (VIP) and Central Valley Air Quality Coalition (CVAC). As a Director, I would bring recent experiences to Sierra Club members interested in working with and lifting the voices of EJ groups.

The Sierra Club has become increasingly good at identifying the plight of frontline communities facing environmental threats, pollution, and dangers associated with technologies such as risky pipelines and carbon capture and storage (CCS), which are ineffective at recapturing the emissions arising from fuel-burning technologies (fossil fuels, forest-based fuels). Despite the threats, accidents, and health harms that have resulted, new facilities are being proposed. For Sierra Club, it's a matter of continuing to work closely with those communities, of promoting regular dialogue, and of joining in opposition to existing and proposed projects that exacerbate environmental conditions. Sierra Club has experience working on these issues; we simply need to engage more, to show up so it is clear to communities that we are making sure they are heard.

Question 4: How would you promote collaboration on behalf of Sierra Club with other allied long-standing non-profit organizations to maximize practical gains and mutual success in a landscape of increasing needs for funds and attention?

The Sierra Club continues to excel in collaborating with long-standing organizations including Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) and many smaller well-established organizations. One area that could strengthen our efforts is collaboration with long-standing organizations that are working closely with local EJ organizations, a few of which have been in existence for a long time (e.g., Central Valley Air Quality Coalition). Many challenges we face in states such as California are applicable to other parts of the US; we can work together to maximize effectiveness of campaigns with other organizations.

We could do more to strengthen our coalition working with long-standing and local organizations on critical issues such as increased public transportation infrastructure, clean water, forest-based biomass energy, and Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) projects that threaten communities. As a Director, I would further the Sierra Club's work, promoting dialogue on project-specific collaborations with other organizations.

Another area where we could strengthen our work with long-standing organizations is in supporting movements, alongside other organizations, to declare National Monuments and other protected spaces. Recently, I joined Sierra Club staff and volunteers to stand with and document the Pit River Tribe and Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center in speaking out for Medicine Lake and Satitla National Monument. Satitla was declared as a National Monument during the last few days of the Biden Administration. We can continue to strengthen our relationship with the Tribe and local organizations as they shape the new National Monument.

Question 5: What is the role of Sierra Club leadership, including the Board of Directors, in creating partnerships and supporting the health and work of Sierra Club at all levels of the organization, including Groups, Chapters, teams, and staff?

We in Sierra Club are responsible for fostering partnerships and for supporting the Club's work at all levels. Much work remains to be done in bringing voices together from different parts of the Club. The more specific the tasks at hand, the stronger the possibility of building partnerships. Three areas where I have experienced the growing strength of partnerships between Sierra Club groups are: interdisciplinary presentations (and related discussions), outings or field trips, and project-specific work. Platforms like the Sierra Club California Forest Forum series provides space for members and experts outside the Club to present and to participate in interdisciplinary presentations outside their regular work areas. For example, the efforts of the Forest Forum organizers and presenters have fostered excellent partnerships with energy-focused members of the Club. These efforts have led to multiple field-based experiences together. The Forest Forum and related discussions resulted in working together in the Sierra Club campaign opposing a massive wood pellet project that has been proposed by the Golden State Natural Resources. Sierra Club Staff and volunteers have been working closely on this project, in partnership with multiple coalition organizations.

I am eager to join in the Sierra Club's efforts to work together through this challenging political moment in the US. This is a moment when we have to be diplomatic, to stand with our colleagues among staff, volunteers, and volunteer leaders, because the basic tenets that unite us may appear threatening to others – especially in the current political climate.

Question 6: What experience with grassroots, particularly environmental justice, efforts do you bring, and how do you plan to support this work of Sierra Club?

We are empowered by our experiences. For the past few years, working on a film about the rise of forest biomass energy industries, I have worked to bring greater visibility to grassroots environmental justice efforts in the Central Valley and across Northern California. Listening to leaders working on environmental justice issues has shaped my work and made me realize how powerful our work could be, how much further our efforts could go, if we collaborated closely. My work includes creating a short film featuring organizations working for environmental justice, and reaching out to communities with Spanish subtitles, parts of a larger film project.

Recently, the Sierra Club joined over a dozen other core organizations in a campaign opposing two proposed wood pellet production facilities (that would be among the Nation's largest), for a project proposed by Golden State Natural Resources. Their plan is to convert most of the forests of Northern California, Southern Oregon and Nevada into wood pellets for export and incineration in power plants overseas. The joint work of the coalition work includes regular meetings to support local environmental justice efforts, and greater visibility to local efforts and voices. Opposition efforts have included public meetings, letters (signed by over 180 organizations), and related efforts – as well as related film materials I have made available to the coalition.

Question 7: What specific work should Sierra Club undertake to engage members and involve volunteer leaders in planning and strategic decision making to help address expressed feelings of disenfranchisement among Sierra Club's base?

Sierra Club leaders need to be aware about the level of frustration felt by longtime members who find themselves without a volunteer position or impeded in their efforts to organize outings. Outings are one of the greatest strengths of the Sierra Club, deepening connections between leaders at all levels. We need to increase the ease with which members can join or lead field trips. Members in different parts of the country have been safely leading private trips, and the Club could make it easier for leaders to organize outings, so they could serve as official trips. As a Director, I would work to create an atmosphere of camaraderie, to increase the ease of organizing outings.

Towards that idea, I would be pleased to extend the concept of outings to an expanded array of possible field trips and field-based explorations that can galvanize grassroots movements. With tens of thousands of remote camera operation hours behind me, I can assist members interested in learning the art of camera work – an exciting way to understand the secrets of the wild in Parks, National Monuments and Wilderness Areas.

Field-based explorations can deeply inform and increase engagement. Trainings – beyond the essential first aid trainings – can diversify Sierra Club's offerings in outdoor explorations. We could also work towards creating new levels of outings – focusing on photography or footage. I am interested in supporting the work of grassroots volunteers interested in visual and written documentations, which can deepen the impacts of volunteers.

Question 8: In your opinion, how should Sierra Club manage potential conflicting agendas among Board members and across conservation policy priorities, such as protecting our wild public lands while meeting renewable energy needs?

Some conservation policy priorities that are perceived as conflicts may not necessarily be so. Essentially, we in Sierra Club are in the process of recognizing that wild public lands can be protected while also promoting renewable energy expansion efforts – we do not have to make a choice about this. Renewable energy goals can be achieved readily, side by side with protecting our wild public lands. There is a similar apparent conflict in developing solar energy. Solar farms can be placed in locations that are partially or completely developed as opposed to taking up massive swaths of habitat – so that imperiled wildlife can persist. Our Renewable Energy Siting Policy is an excellent document to work from, to inspire good decisions.

We have to work closely together, to trust diligent organizations and academics in universities, who have real measurements informing us about the carbon emissions arising from new developments that can displace or even destroy parts of the natural world, while also destroying its capacity for carbon sequestration and carbon storage. We are also beginning to understand that industrial interests have worked to create misinformation. Forest biomass energy industries are an example – they are currently being categorized as carbon neutral, as renewable energy, when in fact they are more like coal-burning energy industries. Biomass energy depends on heavy subsidies, is highly toxic for communities and destructive for forests. We can work together to object to harmful projects. There's no conflict here – we can promote clean renewable energy and promote the protection of wild lands at the same time.

Question 9: The Sierra Club structure has changed in recent years; how would you use your role as a Board Director to help Sierra Club to move forward together and make the many entities within Sierra Club operate seamlessly, supportively, and effectively?

Engaging in open, respectful, dialogue is often a positive way for all concerned parties to work together. This is one of the reasons why the outings are so important – they are enjoyable, they can foster teamwork and result in productive collaborations. In the past, members have shared experiences that left them experiencing extreme isolation because of their beliefs. Activists, hikers, backpackers, and respected John Muir scholars, some of whom are affiliated with universities, have felt cross-examined and deprecated for their work and beliefs. Some of these divisions could be seen as similar to religious belief systems that build intolerance for each other.

It is much easier and more productive for us to respect the views of other members who have taken the time and trouble act in ways that are consistent with the Sierra Club's policies, to take a real, close, look at the difficulties members are facing, and to work with them. In the long run, we may even gain more members that way! As long as we are taking the time, it's much more far-reaching to build bridges than walls.

In a time like we are now facing, standing united is far more important than delving into divisions. Respecting members, who are in good standing, is key. As a Director, I would work to personalize our exchanges as much as possible, to reach out and make sure club members feel respected for their values. I would actively work to reduce divisions.

Question 10: Sierra Club has engaged in a great deal of internal and external equity and justice work in the past few years, shifting its focus and terminology in various ways. Even as its focus has changed and evolved, what areas of equity has Sierra Club continued to overlook?

Our levels of collaboration with others are gaining momentum. Where Sierra Club entities – chapters, groups and committees – did not engage with other important organizations in the past, there is a marked change and we are able to reach out to others engaging in environmental justice and conservation issues, to pool our resources and bring a new level of impact and media attention to our campaigns. Also important, there are deep connections between environmental justice (EJ) issues and conservation issues – and EJ organizations are well aware of these connections. We in Sierra Club can assist by recognizing and acknowledging the connections openly. The more we build the necessary dialogue, the better we can serve the interests of Sierra Club and other organizations with whom we collaborate.

Within the Sierra Club, leaders could also give other members a chance to express themselves – so that their role in committees is more than nominal. With some basic guidelines and policies in place, leaders can work so volunteer-led efforts can thrive – and volunteers can get the credit they deserve for their accomplishments. Overall, leaders could be more keenly aware of how successful our campaigns could be, when open collaboration is encouraged.