

In our recent Open Letter, I indicated, on behalf of our Board, that we would take specific measures to ensure that the comments received about the 2020 Symposium were heard and that the mistakes made will not be repeated.

Those measures are all now well underway. Among other things:

- (i) TSA has formed an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee, and that Committee's mandate is posted on our website. The Committee is chaired by a Board member, and its membership includes other Board members, TSA employees and individuals from outside TSA. The Committee is now working to revise and strengthen our Annual Symposium Code of Conduct. It will contain penalties and sanctions for misconduct. When completed and reviewed by our external legal counsel (specialists in harassment matters), the new Code of Conduct will be posted on our website. We expect that this will happen before the Virtual Conference concludes.
- (ii) Our Governance Committee has revised its mandate to include a supervisory role over all TSA events, including the annual Symposium.
- (iii) Our recently completed Board survey indicates that two-thirds of our current Board members have received training relating to equity, diversity and inclusion, and many of those individuals receive ongoing annual training from zoos, universities, research institutes and other organizations. We will mandate education in this area for those Board members who do not receive regular annual training as well as for our Chief Operating Officer and our Director of the Turtle Survival Center (TSC).
- (iv) We are updating our Code of Ethics and our employee manual to ensure that these are as up to date as possible in dealing with equity, diversity and inclusion. Our external legal counsel will be involved in this process.

Importantly, in dealing with comments from the turtle and tortoise community, it has become clear to us that there are misconceptions about who TSA is (and is not), how we work, and our values. We feel that we must correct these.

**First, who we are:** TSA is a small, dynamic non-profit corporation with a modest annual budget. Our mission is to prevent freshwater turtle and tortoise extinctions. We are one of a number of non-profit organizations focused on chelonians, all with differing missions, objectives, financial resources, and ways of working. These include the IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group (TFTSG), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Turtle Conservation Fund, Chelonian Research Foundation, Turtle Conservancy, and Global Wildlife Conservation, to name only a few. TSA is not affiliated in any way with any such other organization save and except for specific work we do with them under grant agreements and MOUs. Although some of our Board members also serve on

boards of other specialist turtle research or turtle conservation organizations, the majority of our Board members do not.

TSA is **not** an “industry” association or networking organization for the scientific or conservation community. While we would like to think that we play an important role in turtle and tortoise conservation, including the service we provide by organizing the annual Symposium for the global scientific community and others interested in learning about turtles, we are only one part of a large scientific and conservation community.

Our Board includes five members who identify as women (28 % of the Board). Our Board has been chaired by one of these women for six years, and another chairs our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee. We have tenure limits, and our Governance Committee is charged with identifying suitable new candidates annually, taking into account diversity in all its broad aspects as well as commitment to philanthropy. As is the case with most US-based conservation non-profits, our Board members are required to make a minimum specified annual financial contribution to TSA and are encouraged to give more generously. We are very grateful for contributions from our Board members which, ultimately, have allowed us to apply 100% of all other donations to TSA directly to conservation action.

**Second, how we work:** TSA’s decisions with respect to the programs with which we involve ourselves, which organizations we work with, and which organizations and individuals we fund, are made by our Board. Other than through public sources, TSA is not aware of, nor do we take part in, decisions that other turtle research or conservation organizations make about their work, their people, or their funding programs.

TSA’s conservation business focusses on three areas: (i) management of critical collections of endangered species at the TSC; (ii) international rescue efforts following confiscations and recovery plans (especially Madagascar); and (iii) field programs outside the US where meaningful *in situ* work can be carried out.

TSA operates very efficiently, currently with eight employees in the US, including those at the TSC. Three of them identify as women. The TSC is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), and we operate under their rules and policies applicable to us. In particular, we endorse AZA’s Statement on Social and Racial Justice, Inclusion and Equality. For international rescue efforts, we initially deploy some US employees, and convene, mobilize, and supervise multi-faceted international efforts involving zoos and NGOs from around the globe. In recovery efforts, we typically build rescue and recovery facilities and then work directly with local people, governments and wildlife officials, as well as NGOs already based in or working in the relevant country. In Madagascar, a unique situation where we are currently protecting over 25,000 rescued animals,

we are working directly with local communities and local wildlife officials who have invited us to work with them. We employ a well-regarded Malagasy conservationist to run our operations, and he has 52 Malagasy employees, male and female, reporting to him.

For field programs, TSA's model is different. In each of our larger, established programs, we partner directly with an NGO based in and working in the relevant country, or directly with local wildlife officials. In our smaller programs, we simply enable the work of local NGOs, local scientists or researchers by providing them with funding, including funding that will allow them to come and present their work to the scientific community at the Annual Symposium. We do **not** have TSA field or regional offices. Because we do **not** manage any field program workplace, the cultural competency of our local NGO partners in our field programs is critical to us. We will not work with an NGO partner who does not exhibit strong values in this regard.

In many of the countries where we have larger programs, notably India, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam and Colombia, we are currently partnered with WCS and their on-ground field operations. All staff in those countries work in WCS-managed workplaces, except for the Behler Award-winning female Myanmar conservationist Kalyar Platt, who we are delighted to work with as an independent contractor to TSA. WCS makes Respect in the Workplace training mandatory for all its regions. As well, WCS has made a diversity and inclusion curriculum available and we understand that it is being rolled out in those regions.

**Third, our values:** TSA has formal employment policies and a Code of Ethics that promote the importance of providing equal opportunities to all, and deal explicitly with harassment, including sexual harassment.

Our Whistleblower Policy allows complaints of wrongdoing or improper behavior to be made in person or anonymously, as long as there is sufficient information to identify the conduct being impugned. We believe that any such complaint must be investigated and that the process must be proper and fair. Given our small number of employees and the dynamics of a small workplace, if a report or complaint of harassment is made against another employee, a Board member, or an officer, we will engage a law firm with special expertise and experience in this area to carry out a thorough and independent investigation. Matters are only resolvable when informed decisions can be made. We have only ever received one such complaint (and it was **not** a complaint relating to an individual outside the US). That complaint was resolved.

Our values show in other ways. As only one example, TSA has historically provided some financial assistance to allow students, researchers and others who are not part of our field programs to attend the live annual Symposia. Our criteria for awarding funding include financial need as well as gender, nationality, ethnicity and racial considerations. Last year, we awarded travel grants to 23

individuals, the majority of whom identified as female, and eight of whom were from outside North America (China, Africa, South America and Central America).

We hope that the information above will help to promote more effective dialogue in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Patricia A. Koval". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P".

Patricia A. Koval,  
Chair of the Board of Directors  
Turtle Survival Alliance