



American
Bryological and
Lichenological
Society



Dear Botany Community,

As many of you know and have been following closely, there are some legislators in the United States—including those in Idaho—that have approved or are considering discriminatory laws and measures that conflict with core values of the Botanical Society of America. The program committee for the Botany conference recognizes the harmful impact of this legislation and of subsequent actions taken by civic leaders and university administrators that negatively impact the human and civil rights of the people of Idaho. Why then, you may wonder, is Botany 2023 being held in Boise?

Our contract with Boise was entered into several years ago before the political landscape in Idaho changed. We had originally planned to hold the Botany conference in Idaho in 2021, and in 2018 we entered into a contractual agreement with the selected conference venue, where we had enjoyed a successful Botany conference in 2014 (complete with a visit from the mayor of Boise, who greeted us before the opening plenary with a clear message that Boise is a welcoming and accepting city that stands out for its openness and inclusivity). The pandemic forced the cancellation of the 2020 and 2021 in-person conferences and gave us a temporary delay in that contract, with an obligation to hold the meeting in Boise in 2023. Breaking this contract would result in the redirection of hundreds of thousands of member dollars from our educational, outreach, and scholarly programs, and would be fiscally irresponsible and financially devastating for most—if not all—our partnering societies. Please see the official conference location policy here: http://2019.botanyconference.org/file.php?file=SiteAssets/WebTravel_Ban.pdf

It is our intent that Botany conferences be safe and welcoming to all attendees. As a community, we are working together to use this event as an opportunity to support the rights, safety, and well-being of marginalized people in the state of Idaho and beyond. We are also working to ensure that each attendee can take full advantage of the academic and social benefits that are embodied in the annual Botany conference. The program committee (made up of representation from BSA and our partnering societies) discussed the concept of an inclusive conference during our planning meetings last July and again in November, when we met in Boise. During those planning sessions, we made a conscious decision to take steps that will make our commitment to diversity and inclusion clear: that we as a community support the rights of women, people of color, and the LGBTQ+ community – and that we are not afraid to be vocal about our shared values.

When the planning committee selected, with community input, the theme for this year's Botany Conference—One World—it was with an eye toward inclusivity and celebration, not simply for botanical diversity but for our human inclusivity as well.

Here are a few action items we are currently pursuing for Botany 2023. We invite you to join those of interest to you, and we encourage you to recommend or organize more activities as you define your goals for impact:

- Providing a free booth in the Exhibit Hall to local inclusive and civil rights organizations so they can share information with conference attendees
- Obtaining a list of LGBTQ+, indigenous, and other minority-owned and ally businesses in Boise and promoting the frequenting of these businesses during the conference
- Including activities throughout the conference that actively promote inclusion, such as affinity group networking opportunities and meet-ups (BIPOC, Disabled, AAPI, LGBTQ+, Indigenous, among others)
- Hosting a social action project on July 27 with a local human/civil rights organization

- Broadly publicizing our event Code of Conduct and taking steps to enable the reporting of any concerns or violations

Boycotting an event location can ultimately hurt the very people we wish to engage, including BIPOC and LGBTQ+ hospitality workers, local students, colleagues, collaborators, and business owners. While we cannot control the government's actions in Idaho, the Botany conference can work to make this a safe and inclusive space and to make a difference by being conscious of the actions we take and the voices we raise while in Boise.

We also want to let you know that we are aware of the importance of site selection when it comes to organizing an accessible and inclusive conference going forward. The BSA is participating in the ROOT and SHOOT RCN (see https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=2134321&HistoricalAwards=false) and several BSA members, including me, are part of the Inclusive Conferences Working Group. By the end of our process, our Working Group will have guidelines to offer the botanical community for planning inclusive conferences, from site selection all the way to accessibility considerations during the conference itself.

All of us have work to do and it will take us some time to realize our goals, but we are certainly working toward our goals of being a more welcoming, inclusive professional society wherein all our members thrive.

We hope you will join us in Boise!

Best,
Melanie Link-Perez
Conference Program Director (BSA)

