

CICR CONNECTIONS

SUMMER 2026

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CICR Affiliate Gathering, April 21, 2026. Photo: Wezddy Del Toro Orozco

Fifth ICC focuses on Centering Community

ICC 2026
Planning
Committee

In February of this year CICR hosted the fifth biennial Integrative Conservation Conference (ICC), which brought together over 110 students, faculty, and practitioner participants from more than 30 academic institutions and representatives of tribal agencies, government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector. This year's theme of "Centering Community," was meant to challenge participants to engage with the varied human, more-than-human, and beyond-human communities - communities of people, plants, wildlife, fungi, microbes, and beyond. ICC provides an opportunity to foster dialogue across natural and social sciences, humanities, and the arts. This year was no different, and we saw presenters incorporating narrative storytelling, music, and photos into their presentations. We kicked off the event with a session featuring research posters and Photovoice exhibit. The conference concluded with a collaborative concert, bringing together music and composition students with graduate students and faculty in the Integrative Conservation PhD program.

We are immensely grateful to our keynote speaker, Dr. Anand Pandian (Johns Hopkins University) and all our panelists and presenters for sharing their time and insights with us all to facilitate these conversations. This event would not have been possible without the leadership and commitment from the ICON student co-chairs (Eileen Joseph and Akanksha Sharma) and organizing committee (including Bhavya Iyer and Aharna Sarkar) of this year's ICC and to the many students who volunteered their time and energy to support the event. We are very grateful this year's ICC sponsors for making the conference possible: the Owens Institute for Behavioral Research, the Department of Geography, the UGA Graduate School, the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, the Odum School of Ecology, and the Paul D. Coverdell Center for Biomedical and Health Sciences. Thank you to our partners, the UGA Arts Collaborative, an interdisciplinary initiative for advanced research in the arts, and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI), for their support. We look forward to convening ICC 2028!



Attendees of the Integrative Conservation Conference, after the opening keynote on Friday, February 27, 2026.

Scenes from ICC 2026

Photos by Alyssa Quan, Matt Tatz, and Akanksha Sharma



Putting Pluralism Into Practice

Ravneet Kaur
Lizzie King

Pluralism is a key tenet of CICR and the ICON PhD program. A half-day symposium and workshop explored what that really means in practice.



From left: Ravneet Kaur, Justin Raycraft, Mark Callahan, Aireona Raschke, Anand Pandian, Cassandra Johnson-Gaither, and Lizzie King. Photo: Aharna Sarkar.

Pluralism has become a buzz-word in environmental, political, social, and cultural advocacy arenas. In conservation arenas, biodiversity challenges are shaped by diverse cultural, social, and ecological contexts. Because of that diversity, pluralism in conservation recognizes that multiple knowledge systems and values are valid and must be integrated. Embracing diversity can help overcome the persistent challenges in natural resource policy and governance by promoting equitable decision-making and preventing further marginalization of vulnerable groups. However, a key challenge remains: how to effectively translate the conceptual framework into conservation research and practice?

To explore challenges and progress toward putting pluralism into practice, Ravneet Kaur and Lizzie King organized a half-day symposium and workshop at the 2026 Integrative Conservation Conference, which included presentations, panel discussion, and interactive arts-based activity.

Lizzie King (UGA) presented a review of the diverse meanings and reasons for invoking pluralism in current literature about environmental problem solving. Aireona Raschke (Colorado State Univ.) discussed pluralism in terms of inclusivity toward people living with disabilities in environmental research and access to nature. Justin Raycraft (McGill Univ.) discussed pluralism in terms of devolving power in conservation decision-making to include the values and priorities of Maasai agropastoralists in the governance of a Tanzanian Wildlife Management Area. Aharna Sarkar (UGA) discussed how pluralism shaped the methodology of her research on climate, water, and environmental change in the Great Basin National Park, Nevada. In a creative multimedia presentation, Akanksha Sharma (UGA) used pluralistic lenses to explore Tasar silk production and evolving Indigenous relationships due to climate change in the land of Singhbhum - “Sun God” - in the state of Jharkhand, India.

The presentations were followed by a panel discussion with some session presenters, as well as keynote speaker Anand Pandian, USFS social scientist Cassandra Johnson-Gaither, and UGA Arts Collaborative Director Mark Callahan. Questions probed how and why the panelists have addressed or embraced pluralism in their work, as well as challenges and barriers they've experienced. Finally, to actively and creatively engage workshop participants in experiencing and practicing pluralism, Mark Callahan led an arts-based activity, in which groups of 5-6 people collectively worked to find -- and visually represent -- meaning and relationships between a set of 20 words related to environmental stewardship and human-nature relations.

Key takeaways:

An overarching take-away from the half-day session is that pluralism occurs in many forms, including pluralism of identity, epistemology, and values, as well as different ways of engaging through language and media. The literature review also helped clarify the different ways in which pluralism can enhance outcomes of research and environmental projects, as well as the equity and justice of research and collaborative processes. For Integrative Conservation PhD students, who strive to embrace pluralism in their dissertation research, the symposium offered new insights into the diversity of possible ways that pluralism can enter into their work.

The hands-on, tactile, creative, open-ended exercise, in which all participants see how differently each person conceptualizes their world, really crystallized the importance of thinking deliberately and reflexively about pluralism. While discussing how to lay out the words and relationships, participants encountered differences in their initial assumptions about relationships between words. For instance, when members of one group discussed whether to associate the word "conflict" with humans and wildlife it drew attention to the problem of assuming that everyone shares a worldview that sees human-wildlife relations as conflict, and thus the need to approach engagements with diverse communities with a very open mind and awareness of our own assumptions.

Increased connectivity of social, economic, and ecological systems in the current global state makes it imperative to continuously engage with dimensions of pluralism. This session not only offered insights into processes of pluralism but also helped illustrate the small steps that researchers, policymakers and managers in natural-resource governance space can take to create more inclusive and just outcomes.

New paper provides framework for understanding oppression in the field of conservation

Sarah
Buckleitner

The following article has been shortened for inclusion in this newsletter; you can [read the full piece by Sarah Buckleitner here](#), and [watch some of the co-authors discuss the framework here](#).

Science—the process of asking and testing questions to better understand the world around us—has long been a guiding force of Western Civilization. It has guided everything from the development of the world’s largest cities to the ways that natural spaces are handled outside those cities.

The institution of science remains crucial for making wise management decisions, particularly in the field of conservation, which has gained importance as rapid development and degradation shrink natural spaces and species numbers around the world. However, science as we know it is borne of the Western colonization of the rest of the world. As such, even as scientists and practitioners work hard to make the world a better place, science wields authority to dominate what happens in colonized places, which can displace, erase, and oppress the colonized.

A new paper, [Conservation and environmental management reimagined: Toward anti-oppressive futures](#), recently published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS) by University of Georgia researchers and their colleagues, unpacks the ways in which common conservation practices may oppress Indigenous Peoples and others with intimate ties to these places, and disrupt the ecological relations they are a part of.

“This is part of the legacy of conservation—that it reifies the same types of authority and dominance that were occurring in landscapes and politics, where it was assumed that those who were arriving knew best,” explained Dr. Lizzie King, Associate Professor at Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources and the Odum School of Ecology. “As a result, society has given full reign to science to be the basis of a lot of decisions. And these decisions are influenced by past beliefs about who deserves to be on pieces of land, and whose ways of using land represent progress or backwardness.”

In what started as a series of round table conversations at the Center for Integrative Conservation Research (CICR) about the topic, the authors constructed a framework for understanding how the authority of conservation and environmental agendas may contribute to forms of oppression of people with longstanding ties to place, while disrupting the ecological relationships they have long nurtured.

Common themes emerged into **four dimensions (see table below)**, some more visible than others, but all equally problematic in terms of justice. Their framework also emphasizes the complex ways these forms of oppression are linked to each other, which often go unrecognized and therefore un-addressed as sources of injustice. The purpose of the paper is to help environmental scientists and practitioners recognize their tacit forms of authority and the negative unintended consequences they may have for people and the very ecosystems they seek to conserve.

Physical dimension	The physical or material manifestations of conservation and environmental management, and how that displaces existing people, practices and ecosystems
Knowledge dimension	The knowledge practices and assumptions that inform and underpin conservation and environmental visions and decision-making, and how that displaces existing knowledges
Governance dimension	The modes of governance associated with conservation and environmental practice, and how that displaces existing governance forms
Human-environmental relations dimension	The ways people envision and practice their relationships to the environment, including forms of relationship implicitly and explicitly endorsed and/or imposed in conservation and other environmental arenas

Catalytic Conversations: Interdisciplinary Dialogue on Wildland Fire

Laura German

Wildland fire is a topic and arena in need of innovative thinking and approaches. In light of this need and with a recognition that more innovative work is often done through pluralistic approaches integrating distinctive disciplinary perspectives, Laura German and Doug Aubrey initiated an interdisciplinary discussion group on wildland fire this spring involving UGA faculty and Athens-based USDA Forest Service scientists. The initiative had multiple goals:

- *To foster understanding of the diversity of work being done on wildland fire by Athens-based colleagues.*
- *To expand the conceptual space of wildland fire research through interdisciplinary dialogue.*
- *To jointly envision possible future collaboration on fire (e.g., collaborative grant writing, collaborative writing, fostering synergies with the proposed sustainability institute and the shifting federal fire landscape, the establishment of a regional fire hub at UGA).*
- *To identify and prioritize gaps in wildland fire science expertise, capacity, and partnerships at UGA, and implement targeted faculty hiring, program development, and strategic collaborations that position the university to function as a regional and national academic leader in wildland fire science (within the next 5-10 years).*

So far, we have facilitated a common understanding of the breadth of work on the topic being done at UGA; shared thoughts on the issues and topics in the wildland fire space that need priority attention (and began to map their relationship to one another); and developed a white paper to articulate a vision for a regional wildland fire science hub at UGA. This work will continue next year and shows much promise for its ability to explore the potential for interdisciplinary synergy and institutional leadership on wildland fire.



Photo: Joe O'Brien

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Rethinking Restoration: A CICR discussion series

Lizzie King

Over the course of Spring Semester, CICR affiliates focused their curiosity and critical attention on a new and timely theme: Integrative Restoration.

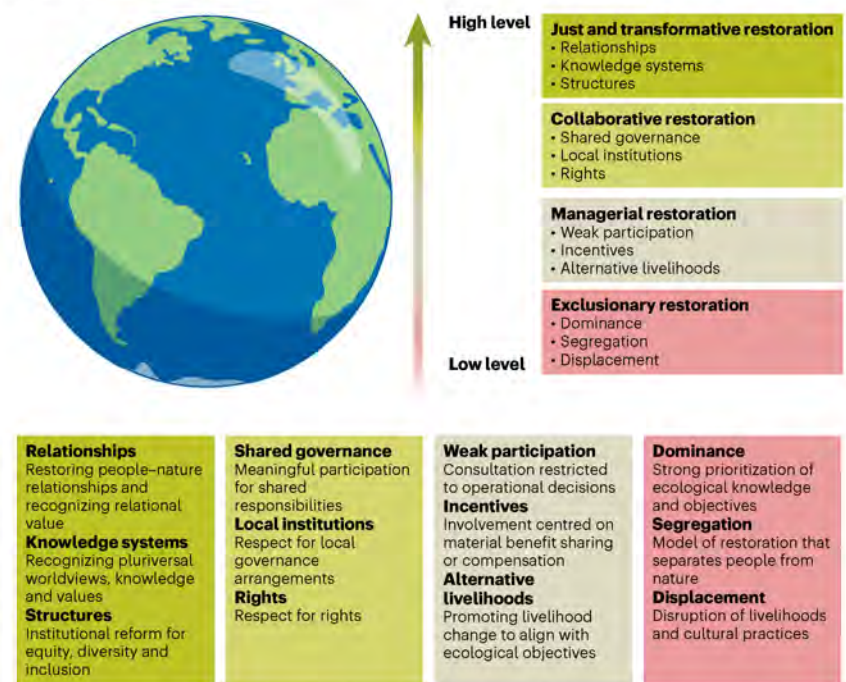
CICR is founded on the value and vital need for integrative approaches to conservation. Ecological restoration is a complementary field, aimed at repairing rather than stemming ecological degradation and loss. Restoration faces many of the same complexities as conservation: diverse human-nature relations, value-laden assumptions, tradeoffs, and huge implications for social and environmental justice. And like conservation, mainstream restoration needs some critical re-thinking and integrative approaches to meet today's challenges.

For starters, the term “restoration” itself connotes a return to past conditions. But for any number of reasons – both ecological and social – that goal may not be achievable or even desirable. This raises a weighty question facing ecological restoration today, “**If we're not trying to go back, where exactly ARE we trying to go?**”

To explore this question, Lizzie King organized a biweekly discussion group, open to all CICR affiliates, ICON students, and non-academic partners. The group discussed current articles that offer new ideas and insights for rethinking restoration from multiple disciplinary perspectives. Topics included: alternative ecological objectives (other than historic ecosystems); reframing restoration in terms of social-ecological dynamics; braiding local and indigenous knowledge to better understand past and future desired conditions; restoration for environmental justice; and the rationale for transparent, values-based decision making processes.

Each session was a lively, open-ended discussion with 5-10 participants, including the off-campus author (D. Martin) of one week's commentary article. The discussion series created a meaningful space to step back, broaden our perspectives, and reflect on how to strengthen our restoration-related endeavors through integrative re-thinking.

Fig. 2 | Levels of justice required for transformative restoration. Typology of the approaches for integrating social justice concerns into restoration practice. The approaches are listed from high- to low-level integration.



From: Martin (2025) Toward just and transformative social-ecological restoration. *Nature Sustainability* 9: 353-359

[Click here for the Spring 2026 reading list](#)

CICR welcomes new Director

Laura German
Lizzie King

Dr. Lizzie King will begin her tenure as the next Director of the Center for Integrative Conservation Research effective July 1, 2026.

A note from Dr. Laura German, outgoing CICR Director: At the end of June, I will step down as CICR Director. I will have served in this capacity for five years. When I assumed this position, I had four main goals, as articulated in my statement of interest: 1) to elevate CICR's presence in the national and global conversation surrounding conservation futures, with a focus on addressing the troubled histories (and present) of the field; 2) to build synergies across UGA's environmental centers and institutes to raise the national profile of UGA's work in the environmental arena while addressing structural constraints that hinder CICR's ability to innovate and grow; 3) to re-think CICR identity and aspirations in dialogue with the Executive Committee, as a way to establish and communicate a unique identity or "brand"; and 4) to position faculty and students to make meaningful contributions to addressing "grand challenges."



Dr. Laura German

These were ambitious goals, and the record is admittedly patchy, but it was an honor and privilege to have been in conversation on these and other important topics with all of you over the past five years. I also look forward to where this next stage of leadership takes us, with such an exceptionally well-qualified and visionary leader at the helm. I couldn't be more certain that this transition is the right thing for CICR at this time.



Dr. Lizzie King

I am honored and excited to serve as CICR's next director. I came to UGA in 2012 with a dual appointment in the Odum School of Ecology and the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, but for me, the most compelling part of the opportunity was to be involved with CICR and the ICON PhD Program. They have remained the most inspiring and rewarding aspects of being at UGA.

I joined the UGA faculty at the same time as my friend, colleague, and CICR's outgoing Director, Laura German. I've learned a great deal from Laura as we've ideated, written, taught, mentored, traveled, and celebrated together over the years. Laura's capable leadership helped crystallize CICR's identity in terms of how we think and how we collaborate. Last year, the Executive Committee arrived at a new articulation of our value as a Center: "To inspire new visions for conservation and environmental decision-making by putting pluralism into practice."

This articulation creates a clearer pathway for translating what we think and value into what we do – wherever we are working, with whomever we are collaborating, we put CICR's principles and values into practice. Thus, my vision for CICR (beyond curating one of the most visionary PhD programs on the planet!) is to become more outwardly engaged with that mission by (a) elevating our stature as an internationally recognized Center that champions and advances pluralistic integrative research, and (b) creating more events, venues, and communities of practice for sharing our approaches and expertise to promote integrative inquiry and problem-solving in conservation and sustainability arenas everywhere.

Integrative Conservation PhD Defenses, Spring 2026



Jill Gambill | PhD, ICON & Geography, Major Professor: Nik Heynen

"Embodied Adaptation: Community-Driven Sea Level Rise and Resilience Planning in Coastal Georgia"



Kristen Morrow | PhD, ICON & Anthropology, Major Professor: Roberta Salmi

"Tracing Primate Presence in Central Kalimantan's Unprotected Forests: Encounters, Governance, and Acoustic Monitoring in Changing Landscapes"



Shinyeong Park | PhD, ICON & Forestry and Natural Resources, Major Professors: Jesse Abrams & James Beasley

"Borderland Relationality and Multispecies Co-flourishing: Ethical, Political, and Ecological Entanglements near the Korean Demilitarized Zone"



Shishir Rao | PhD, ICON & Ecology, Major Professor: Seth Wenger

"Hydropower Development in the Western Ghats of India Through an Integrative Lens"

Meet our new CICR Faculty Affiliates



Franklin Earl Leach III | Assistant Professor, Department of Chemistry

What drew you to CICR? *The opportunity to actively engage and interact with a dynamic, open-minded community that is built upon mutual respect and works together to face modern environmental challenges that are bigger than ourselves.*

Jimmy Nelson | Assistant Professor, Department of Marine Sciences

CICR drew me because its integrative approach matches how I think about conservation: ecological change, human decisions, and environmental policy are tightly coupled. I'm excited to connect marine ecosystem science with broader conversations about sustainable, just conservation practice.



Tao Liu | Assistant Professor of Precision Forestry, Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources

CICR's interdisciplinary approach to conservation attracts me. My background in remote sensing provides digital techniques to this mission. For example, recently our lab released Tree Health Map (<https://www.treehealthmap.com/>) and Smart Forestry (<https://www.smart-forestry.org/>), enabling forest health monitoring and individual tree analysis.