

2021

ANNUAL REPORT



Executive Director
Erika Rivers with
Board Chair
Ed Spencer, Jr.



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DEAR FRIENDS,

Throughout 2021, Wilderness Inquiry witnessed continued change and challenges as a result of the pandemic. It was also a year that we strengthened and renewed our focus on the organization's mission and core values. These foundational anchors, alongside our talented staff and unwavering donors, partners, and funders, serve as guideposts as we begin planning for the future.

In November of 2021, I joined Wilderness Inquiry as the new Executive Director, taking the stern from interim Executive Director Kim Keprios. I am humbled and proud to lead our dedicated team, that continuously strives to find innovative ways of engaging those who face some of the most intractable barriers to experiencing the health and wellness benefits of the outdoors.

Reflected across the following pages are the many ways we — together as a community — worked to ensure that **everyone belongs** in the outdoors, through our programs, our commitment to equity, and our core values of **Finding a Way, Seeking the Exceptional**, and **Paddling Together**.

As we continue to move forward, our mission, values, and the communities we serve remain at the heart of all we do.

We are profoundly grateful for the continued support of our entire community of adventurers, partners, donors, volunteers, staff, and all of those who work to ensure that everyone feels connected to one another and welcome in the outdoors.

Erika Rivers
Executive Director

[COVER: **LOCATION:** MINNEAPOLIS // **PHOTOGRAPHER:** MELISSA MURPHY]

[ABOVE: **LOCATION:** MINNEAPOLIS // **PHOTOGRAPHER:** MOLLY STREET]



“

THE WILDERNESS INQUIRY PROGRAM IS ONE OF A KIND.

The staff is well trained and conducts themselves with passion and professionalism. We enjoy working with them every year providing local students with a rare opportunity to paddle the Harlem River, something they will remember the rest of their lives. Kudos to Wilderness Inquiry!”

— JOHN, ROBERTO CLEMENTE STATE PARK



[LOCATION: GLACIER // PHOTOGRAPHER: CLAIRE HASSLER]

MISSION

Connecting people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities to each other and the natural world through shared outdoor adventures

CORE BELIEF

Everyone belongs in the outdoors

CORE VALUES

Paddling Together
Seeking the Exceptional
Finding a Way

EVERYONE BELONGS

WILDERNESS INQUIRY SERVES



80% of participants are under the age of 21



61% of participants experience financial inequity



57% of participants are girls/women



48% of participants identify as BIPOC



12% of participants identify as having a disability

2021 BY THE NUMBERS

17,190 people joined us for immersive and life-changing experiences

11,000+

youth and their families paddled, learned, and explored on their local waterways through Canoemobile, promoting outdoor equity and fostering engagement with the natural world

4,700+

youth and adults participated in live, content-rich, virtual learning and exploration, facilitating outdoor education and reducing social isolation

1,400+

individuals and families joined extended, in-person travel experiences, building confidence and connection



YOUTH PROGRAMS



In 2021, the need to reconnect students, teachers, and families to their studies, one another, and nature was vital to supporting their health and well-being. Through the following safe and meaningful programs, Wilderness Inquiry provided youth — across the country — opportunities to experience the transformative benefits of the outdoors.

[ABOVE: **LOCATION:** INDIANA // **PHOTOGRAPHER:** PETER MACMILLAN]

[LEFT: **LOCATION:** MINNEAPOLIS // **PHOTOGRAPHER:** KAMAAN RICHARDS]

CANOEMOBILE is Wilderness Inquiry's "floating classroom," providing educational outdoor experiences for thousands of youth annually. Students participate in near-nature learning from the seat of a 10-person canoe while paddling on waterways close to where they live.

YOUTH TRIPS include overnight and extended adventures that build upon Canoemobile to provide repeat and reinforcing outdoor experiences for youth that increase comfort, confidence, and connection in the outdoors.

VIRTUAL EXPLORERS, which features the Minnesota Freshwater Quest and Mississippi River Explorers tracks, provides opportunities for youth to explore the outdoors from their classroom or home, learning about science, history, culture, and more.

OUTDOOR CREDIT RECOVERY is an immersive, placed-based education program that helps high school-age youth earn academic credit through hands-on, outdoor learning experiences, with the goal of reducing the opportunity gap faced by youth from racially and ethnically diverse and/or low-income backgrounds.

ADULT AND FAMILY PROGRAMS



In 2021, more than 600 people joined Wilderness Inquiry for extended outdoor adventures to destinations including Glacier National Park, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, the Apostle Islands, and more. These supported, inclusive trips developed community, improved health and wellness, and strengthened social integration, providing participants the opportunity to connect with one another and the outdoors.

[ABOVE: **LOCATION:** APOSTLE ISLANDS // **PHOTOGRAPHER:** ANTJE VEIT]

[LEFT: **LOCATION:** ST. LOUIS // **PHOTOGRAPHER:** JULIA SCHWEITZER]

SHARE THE ADVENTURE

is Wilderness Inquiry's foundational inclusive outdoor program, providing integrated experiences for individuals regardless of ability, background, or income. Trips are designed to be welcoming, inclusive, engaging, and fun for all who join — bringing people together in the outdoors.

FAMILIES INTEGRATING TOGETHER

offers accessible outdoor adventures for families that may not otherwise have the opportunity to travel together, including families that have a child or parent with a disability and families from low-income backgrounds.

GATEWAY TO ADVENTURE

is designed for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, providing supported trips and recreational experiences that build social confidence, and independent living and vocational skills.

BUILDING EQUITABLE ACCESS

In 2021, Wilderness Inquiry continued our commitment toward building a more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible outdoors, and strengthened our partnerships and programs to address systemic barriers to the use of public lands and waterways. Throughout the year, we engaged in several collaborative opportunities to support and elevate the important work accomplished by partner organizations, as highlighted in the following initiatives. At the same time, we continuously recognize the need to better understand the complex dynamics around serving historically and currently underrepresented populations and the continued learning and unlearning we must enact to deliver our mission of inclusion.



PRESENTED ON ACCESSIBILITY IN THE OUTDOORS

to more than 150 people during a National Park Service training workshop, which focused on inclusion, access, and engagement in national parks.

[LOCATION: APOSTLE ISLANDS // PHOTOGRAPHER: CHRISSY ILLIG]



HOSTED THE FIRST AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE DAY ON THE RIVER,

where families and friends of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities joined us to adventure and paddle together on the Mississippi River.

[LOCATION: MISSISSIPPI RIVER // PHOTOGRAPHER: RISS LEITZKE]



Erin Parisi,
Founder,
TranSending



Kareem Neal,
M.Ed., Teacher,
Maryvale High
School

LAUNCHED *THE INQUIRY SERIES*,

an online speaker series featuring leaders in diversity and inclusion from across the country whose stories and work are paving the way for better access, inclusion, and education in the outdoors.



Syren Nagakyrie,
Founder,
Disabled Hikers



Perry Cohen,
Founder,
The Venture
Out Project



James Mills,
Journalist, The Joy
Trip Project



[TOP: **LOCATION:** NEW YORK CITY // **PHOTOGRAPHER:** CHRISTINE RETTLER]
 [ABOVE: **LOCATION:** TWIN CITIES // **PHOTOGRAPHER:** GORDON DIETZMAN]



PADDLING TOGETHER

By paddling together alongside our many partners and community, Wilderness Inquiry continued to move forward with a unified purpose toward shared goals. In 2021, we strengthened existing partnerships and embarked on new collaborative initiatives, including expanded focus on youth and families.

→ The Twin Cities was named one of eight national Thrive Outside communities by the Outdoor Foundation, with Wilderness Inquiry designated as the local backbone facilitator. This multi-year, capacity-building initiative brings together a diverse group of partner organizations to build and strengthen networks that provide children and families with repeat and reinforcing outdoor

experiences, including on the Mississippi River and other waterways.

→ Wilderness Inquiry began a new three-year agreement with the U.S. Forest Service – Urban Connections program, with the goal to expand Canoemobile and foster life-long outdoor engagement in communities across the Forest Service’s Region 9 — extending from Minnesota to Maine. This cooperative agreement will support a progression of outdoor experiences for youth, from introductory Canoemobile adventures in urban areas to immersive trips to national forests and wilderness areas that promote deeper engagement with the natural world.



SEEKING THE EXCEPTIONAL

Through creativity, grit, and a commitment to one another, Wilderness Inquiry worked to push toward new heights in 2021. In seeking the exceptional, we aimed to be better and do better, as demonstrated in the following powerful highlights.

➔ For 10 years, Canoemobile has been paddling on the Harlem River, connecting youth from schools in the Bronx to this storied waterway. Among the hundreds of explorers and paddlers joining us in 2021 was Meisha Ross Porter, then Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education, who grew up in New York City and had never paddled on the Harlem River. She shared, “Our students are the next leaders of New York City, and initiatives like this will empower them with the knowledge to care for our environment and inspire responsible stewardship.”

➔ Engaging generations of families in the outdoors is a key part of our mission. In 2021, Wilderness Inquiry and Tickets for Kids teamed up in an effort to expand outdoor access for families. From virtual programs to family trips in the Boundary Waters, this partnership provided an introduction to the outdoors and helped build confidence and connection for families.



[TOP: **LOCATION:** HARLEM RIVER // **PHOTOGRAPHER:** CHRISTINE RETTLER]

[MIDDLE: **LOCATION:** BOUNDARY WATERS // **PHOTOGRAPHER:** TICKETS FOR KIDS]

[BOTTOM: **LOCATION:** BRONX // **PHOTOGRAPHER:** NYC DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION]



FINDING A WAY

Throughout 2021, Wilderness Inquiry continuously strived for positive solutions. We honed our tools, networks, and resources to help in finding a way to engage thousands in outdoor adventure. And we persevered, together, including through the following programs and events.



➔ The Great River Race — Wilderness Inquiry's biggest annual event — returned to the water in 2021 after a one-year hiatus due to COVID-19. This day of fun, purpose, impact, and camaraderie brought together more than 300 paddlers, volunteers, sponsors, and supporters on the Mississippi River in support of Canoemobile and youth programs that provide equitable learning opportunities in the outdoors.

[**LOCATION:** MISSISSIPPI RIVER // **PHOTOGRAPHER:** PAYTON RADEMACHER]



➔ Wilderness Inquiry partners with schools across the nation to deliver our mission of supporting the health and well-being of youth and educators. In 2021, we teamed up with Great MN Schools to create a one-of-a-kind outdoor summer educational program. Centered on developing deeper connections with their peers and nature, students participated in place-based, interactive activities covering science, math, art, social studies, literacy, and outdoor recreation skills.

[**LOCATION:** TWIN CITIES // **PHOTOGRAPHER:** PETER MACMILLAN]



➔ Throughout 2021, Wilderness Inquiry safely led extended outdoor trips that engaged participants of all abilities and backgrounds. By breaking down barriers to the natural world, these trips focused on social integration and facilitating outdoor connections. Reflecting on her trip to the Apostle Islands, participant Elsa noted, "As one of a group of older women, some of whom are very seasoned and comfortable in the outdoors and some whom are novices, you were able to guide in a way that respected our knowledge and experience."

[**LOCATION:** APOSTLE ISLANDS // **PHOTOGRAPHER:** KATE HAYES]

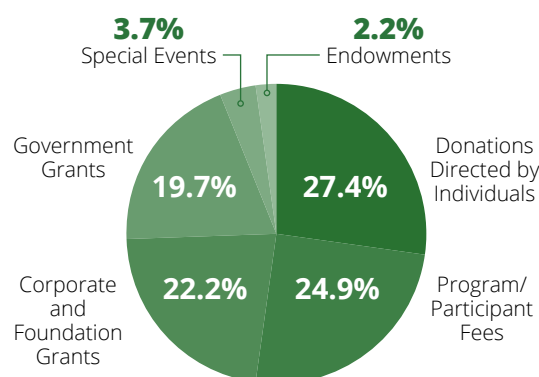
FINANCIAL SUMMARY

"Wilderness Inquiry ended 2021 with sustained growth and on firm financial footing, maintaining the organization's fiscal responsibility and good stewardship of donor and stakeholder resources. The organization sold its former headquarters building and proceeds from the sale were used to create the Wilderness Inquiry Foundation, which oversees the management of these funds to support Wilderness Inquiry's future capital and operational needs. The 2021 audit is considered a consolidated audit showing both organizations' financial position." — JOHN BUTLER, BOARD TREASURER

CONSOLIDATED BALANCE SHEET

| Assets | 2021 | 2020 |
|---|---------------------|--------------------|
| Cash & Cash Equivalents | \$450,836 | \$791,293 |
| Short Term Investments | \$1,239,271 | \$1,158,879 |
| Other Current Assets | \$379,140 | \$380,026 |
| Property & Equipment | \$860,463 | \$1,774,833 |
| Endowments & Investments | \$2,610,295 | \$2,096,557 |
| Long Term Investment - WI Foundation | \$6,000,097 | |
| Total Assets | \$11,540,102 | \$6,201,588 |
| Liabilities & Net Assets | 2021 | 2020 |
| Current Liabilities | | |
| Accrued Expenses | \$277,377 | \$331,740 |
| Deferred Revenue | \$84,804 | \$575,993 |
| Total Current Liabilities | \$362,181 | \$907,733 |
| Long Term Liabilities | \$582,547 | \$499,913 |
| Net Assets | \$10,595,374 | \$4,793,942 |
| Total Liabilities & Net Assets | \$11,540,102 | \$6,201,588 |

2021 Earned Revenue and Contributions



CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

| Support & Revenue | 2021 | 2020 |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|
| Grants, Contributions, Gifts | \$1,534,396 | \$2,129,324 |
| Government Grants | \$551,488 | \$502,558 |
| Program Fees | \$695,523 | \$371,366 |
| Endowment Payment | \$60,794 | \$60,777 |
| Special Event & Miscellaneous Income | \$143,052 | \$68,776 |
| Total Support and Revenue | \$2,985,253 | \$3,132,801 |
| Expenses | 2021 | 2020 |
| Program Services | \$2,791,470 | \$2,171,592 |
| Share the Adventure | \$800,931 | \$810,102 |
| Canoemobile | \$1,437,062 | \$908,633 |
| Individuals & Families with Disabilities | \$553,477 | \$452,857 |
| Management & General | \$639,906 | \$712,243 |
| Fundraising | \$263,491 | \$228,268 |
| Total Expenses | \$3,694,867 | \$3,112,103 |



In our opinion, the consolidated financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Wilderness Inquiry, Inc. as of December 31, 2021 and 2020 and the changes in its net assets and its cash flows for the years then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America." - Carpenter, Evert & Associates, Certified Public Accountants, March 2022

WILDERNESS INQUIRY FINANCIAL SUPPORTERS

Contributions from generous donors and supporters power our mission and provide outdoor experiences that are inclusive, welcoming, and transformative for all. **Thank you** to the many individuals, families, and corporate, foundation, and government partners whose investment in and commitment to our work enables Wilderness Inquiry to remain an important connection to community and the outdoors.

LOCATION:
TWIN CITIES

PHOTOGRAPHER:
CLAIRE HASSLER



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Every effort is made to ensure accurate listings. If we did not attribute your donation correctly, or if you have other questions or comments, please contact Development Director Willy Tully at (612) 676-9430 or willy@wildernessinquiry.org.

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 Walker Foundation

Thank you to our federal partners, agencies, and their staff for Paddling Together in 2021! Through valued public-private partnerships, Wilderness Inquiry is able to scale our programs to serve thousands of youth and adults, provide inclusive adventures from coast to coast, and ensure that our nation's public lands, waterways, and national parks and forests are accessible for all.



**US Army Corps
of Engineers.**



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Julie Gillette Johns
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LOCATION:
INDIANA

PHOTOGRAPHER:
PETER MACMILLAN

Canoemobile's "floating classroom" engages youth across Minnesota to experience place-based, environmental, and STEM learning in the outdoors. Thanks to the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR). Since 2017, more than 26,500 youth from across Minnesota have explored local ecosystems and the species that depend on healthy watersheds in our headquarters state.



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