



**Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Conservation Sciences**  
Oregon State University, 104 Nash Hall, Corvallis, Oregon 97331-3803  
T 541-737-4531 | F 541-737-3590 | <http://fwcs.oregonstate.edu>

**PhD in Relational Organizing to Reduce Human-Bear Conflict**  
Oregon Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit and Human Dimensions Lab  
Oregon State University Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Conservation Sciences  
Corvallis, OR

**Position description:** The Oregon Coop Unit and Human Dimensions Lab at Oregon State University are seeking an outstanding PhD student to contribute to applied research on relational organizing to reduce human-bear conflict. The PhD student will help design and conduct applied research to a) understand the social-psychological barriers to relational organizing (i.e. outreach by motivated volunteers to encourage others in their social networks to change their behavior), and b) implement and evaluate a communications campaign to support community volunteers to engage in relational organizing to reduce human-bear conflict. The student will be expected to play an active role in collaborative research and project management. They will receive 4 years of funding (3 years of teaching assistantship and 1 year of research assistantship) and will develop and implement a project-related dissertation in collaboration with Dr. Megan Jones and Dr. Kelly Biedenweg.

**Start date:** September 21, 2022

**Funding:** 3 years of TA and 1 year of RA that covers tuition, benefits and stipend

**Expectations:**

- Design and conduct original, empirical research combining experimental design, quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, and the delivery and design of outreach materials for messaging experiments
- Build and sustain partnerships with agency and nonprofit stakeholders
- Teach 2-4 e-campus courses per year in Communication Skills for Fisheries and Wildlife Professionals and the Psychology of Environmental Decisions
- Mentor undergraduate students on small-scale projects related to the PhD student's research
- Co-author ~1 manuscript every two years with Dr. Jones
- Submit proposals to obtain additional research funding support
- Contribute to a culture of diversity, equity, inclusion and justice in the graduate student community
- Share findings through oral presentations (e.g. at conferences) and outreach materials
- Follow departmental guidelines to meet graduation requirements in about 4 years

**Minimum requirements:** Applicants must meet the OSU Graduate School minimum requirements for admission (found at: <https://gradschool.oregonstate.edu/admissions/academic-requirements>). Qualified applicants will have a Master's degree in a field within or related to

conservation social science, e.g. psychology, communications studies, anthropology, geography, sociology, political science, human dimensions of natural resources, etc. by the expected start date. This position requires strong verbal and written communication skills, and the ability to effectively collaborate with agency and nonprofit stakeholders. The Oregon Coop Unit, Human Dimensions Lab and partner agencies are dedicated to supporting the diverse needs of our students and employees. Applicants from historically excluded groups (e.g., Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, LGBTQ+, women, first-generation college students, and those from underserved communities) are particularly encouraged to apply.

**To apply:** Please send a CV with the names of 3 references, a cover letter describing your interest in this project, and a 3-4 page research proposal describing (in general) the research you would like to conduct, including hypotheses/questions, methods, justification, and intended products to Dr. Megan Jones, [Megan.Jones@oregonstate.edu](mailto:Megan.Jones@oregonstate.edu). Applications accepted until filled. Please reach out with questions.

### **Further information about the project**

A core challenge for motivating collective, coordinated action for wildlife conservation is the issue of preaching to the choir: many existing outreach and education campaigns engage only a small population of already motivated individuals, and fail to achieve a normative shift that reaches less engaged or unengaged members of the community. This is particularly important when there are ecological thresholds below which any one individual's efforts are minimally impactful, as is the case for human-bear conflict. Relational organizing can help address this gap by increasing the chance that behavioral information will reach hard-to-reach audiences who are not seeking out information, increasing the social pressure people feel to act, since they are learning about the action from someone they already know, and by signaling to people that a relatively novel behavior (such as using bear-resistant garbage bins) is becoming more and more common, which can increase people's likelihood of adopting the behavior.

In the case of human-bear coexistence, motivated community members can use relational organizing practices to encourage their friends, neighbors and others in their social network to adopt personal conservation behaviors. These target behaviors include acquiring and properly using residential bear-resistant garbage bins, and bear-proofing other food sources such as fruit orchards, vegetable gardens, chicken coops and birdfeeders. Relational organizing can also focus on civic action to build community movements around adoption of stronger local policies for human-bear coexistence, e.g. to improve security of municipal garbage dumps, make residential bear-resistant garbage bins more affordable or useable, provide resources for securing human food sources (e.g. offering trainings on electric fence installation and discounted or free equipment), or strengthen regulations for local businesses.

These kinds of community-wide changes are crucial for preventing bears from becoming habituated to human foods and losing their fear of people, which can often lead to bears being killed, and social conflict over appropriate management strategies. These issues affect management of both black bears (*Ursus americanus*) in much of the lower US and grizzly bears (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) in Montana, Wyoming, Idaho and Washington.

This research project has two objectives:

- 1) Understand the barriers, motivations, and opportunities influencing whether residents in the western United States engage in relational organizing on the topic of securing



**Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Conservation Sciences**

Oregon State University, 104 Nash Hall, Corvallis, Oregon 97331-3803

T 541-737-4531 | F 541-737-3590 | <http://fwcs.oregonstate.edu>

attractants for bears through individual voluntary behavior change and/or collective policy change.

- 2) Design, implement, and evaluate a community leader program in collaboration with partners in one or two focal communities to train and encourage leaders to participate in relational organizing.

Potential collaborators in this project include the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Humane Society of the United States, Boulder Bear Coalition, Colorado Bear Coalition, Wyoming Wildlife Advocates, the Sierra Club, Socio-Ecological Solutions LLC, and the Center for Human-Carnivore Coexistence at Colorado State University.