

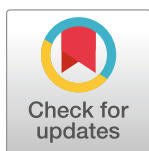
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Finding hope and fulfillment in meaningful work: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of conservation and stewardship practitioners' experience, values, and motivations

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Abstract

Values and motivations can shape natural resource management decision-making as individuals set conservation goals based on diverse, unique backgrounds, histories, and experiences. Recent literature points to the need to understand, evaluate, and articulate practitioner values to make explicit how experiences shape their work. Our research responds to calls to explore a diverse range of values and motivations among conservation practitioners. We used a qualitative approach grounded in phenomenology to advance an in-depth understanding of how conservation and stewardship practitioners experience, acknowledge, and make sense of conservation decision-making in Maine, USA. We interviewed 21 conservation and stewardship practitioners. Our results indicate the presence of complex value systems, including strong biospheric, altruistic, eudaimonic, as well as egoistic values. These values interact and intersect with motivations for participants' careers in conservation in unique ways, driving participant actions and decision-making. Within Maine specifically, our results highlight the many areas for convergence of broad values among seemingly diverse groups that can inform opportunities for collaboration. Participants expressed various pathways to careers in conservation, where their work enables them to make a meaningful contribution to the environment and society. However in situations where personal and organizational values are misaligned, the role of organizational transparency, employee empowerment, and agency are key. Our results have implications for conservation groups seeking to achieve high employee satisfaction, as well as researchers, policymakers, and practitioners who hope to inspire individuals to take on conservation careers to create sustainable and transformative action for the future. Fostering early experiences in place, including interactions with the non-human

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world and local community, are important for influencing and reinforcing values and motivations for conservation action.

Author summary

We interviewed conservation and stewardship professionals in Maine, USA to understand the values and motivations for their work. Interview participants revealed diverse values and motivations grounded in early experiences in nature and among communities. This research responds to a call to understand the complex values and motivations of those that participate in pro-environmental actions. In understanding individual experiences around conservation decision-making and behaviors, we can illuminate opportunities for pathways into the field of conservation. Participants highlighted values related to concern for the environment, others, place and community, and their own personal fulfillment. Participants expressed motivations to protect local ecology, instill a conservation ethic in others, create a space for marginalized voices, and ensure long-term access to outdoor spaces. Our results indicate that participants are motivated to work in conservation as a way to align their personal values with their careers. We also found that early life experiences in nature and community can shape individuals and motivate them to go into the field of conservation where they can make meaningful change.

Introduction

Complex decisions made by individuals and groups determine what is conserved, how it is conserved, and for whom it is conserved. Whom or what benefits are informed by practitioners' experiences, values, motivations, capabilities, social identities, partner interests, legislation, organizational norms, large-scale conservation movements, and more [1–3]. Within the field of conservation, researchers have largely focused on the values that underpin conservation goals, as value systems regarding views on the relationship between people and nature have implications for conservation planning and prioritization [4]. Among natural resource managers, there is the potential for divergences in conservation priorities given unique individual backgrounds, histories, and values. Recent literature points to the need for practitioners and researchers to evaluate and articulate their values [5], as well as practice reflexivity in how experiences, identities, motivations, and values shape their work [1].

This qualitative study uses a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of land conservation and stewardship practitioners in Maine, USA. In doing so, we respond to calls to understand the diverse values, goals, and motivations that different conservation organizations, hereafter groups, and individuals subscribe to [6]. Specifically, we sought to identify the key factors (e.g. experiences, social networks, etc.) that influence practitioners' motivations and values, describe the relationship between these motivations and values, and explore how values and motivations influence decision-making, career pathways, and personal fulfillment in natural resource management contexts.

Literature review

The importance of values and motivations in environmental management. There are multiple catalysts for careers in conservation, including both environmental and social motivations and values [7]. Decisions regarding whom or what benefits emerge from conservation

therefore cannot be separated from the underlying value systems and motivations on which they are based [1,5,8]. The concept of values is used across disciplines with varying definitions and applications [9]. For example, the fields of psychology, sociology, and philosophy use the term value to describe relatively stable preferences that guide decision-making; these disciplines commonly measure a comprehensive set of underlying values for specific concepts [10,11]. These fields acknowledge that values likely develop early in life, as a result of personal and social factors (e.g. childhood experiences, knowledge, education, political views, socio-demographics, culture, etc.) [12–16]. The field of geography focuses on the values that connect people and decision-making by understanding place-based meanings [17], while economics uses the term values in the discussion of societal choice, focusing on measuring monetary values [18].

Within natural resource management and conservation, there is a growing recognition of diverse cultural values related to the natural world [19–21] depending on how people-nature relationships are framed [22]. For example, the languages and cultures of Indigenous peoples carry rich and nuanced notions of sustainability which focus on relational values as the basis for collective well-being versus Western scientific values associated with material and instrumental benefits to local communities [21]. It is important to consider a typology of values that encompasses the richness of people's relationships with nature which can facilitate understanding across cultures [19]. To ensure a diversity of values are captured, we use the concept of broad values, or moral principles and life goals that guide interactions with nature [19,23]. Therefore, given this study's aim of understanding diverse lived experiences using a methodology grounded in psychology, we define values as guiding principles that determine how people consider and act in various situations [24,25].

Researchers have developed various value frameworks to understand pro-environmental behaviors, identity formation, attitudes, and preferences [10,11,25–27] (Table 1). These values frameworks hold many themes in common, and collectively suggest that there are multiple

Table 1. Key types of individual values and motivations related to environmentally friendly behaviors derived from the literature.

Dimension	Definition	References
Values		
Altruistic	Concern for others; related to self-transcendence	[11,10,36]
Biospheric	Concern for the environment; related to self-transcendence	[11,10,36]
Egoistic	Concern for individual wealth, power, and achievement; related to self-enhancement	[11,34]
Hedonic	Enjoying life, and/or fulfilling personal desire; related to self-enhancement	[9,25,12]
Eudaimonic	Living a meaningful life and finding purpose; often related to intrinsic motivations	[29–31]
Motivations		
Frugality	Creating a lifestyle which recognizes finite resources and seeking to reduce use of those resources (e.g. saving money, using resources more effectively, avoiding waste)	[34,35,40]
Fulfilling norms	Desire to convey positive characteristics to others	[34,35]
Participating	Satisfaction from participating in community activities and taking action that makes a difference (e.g. working with others towards a shared goals)	[40,41]
Competence	Desire to foster more effective interactions with the environment; related to satisfaction derived from solving problems and completing tasks	[40,42]
Social justice	Desire to help others; rooted in concern about others, specifically related to human rights, and fairness	[35]
Community	Sense of responsibility or desire to be helpful; growing from a sense of connection (especially at a local scale)	[35]
Personal integrity	Desire to act in accordance with values	[35]

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ways that people value nature [9,28]. Stern et al's¹⁰ tripartite framework—comprised of egoistic, altruistic, and biospheric values—articulated a values basis for environmental concern and action [10]. Steg et al²⁴ suggested a fourth key value, hedonic values [9], which relate to fulfilling personal desire. Hedonic and egoistic values represent a self-enhancement dimension of a general value system [24], which emphasizes private benefits, individual interests, and personal well-being [12], often negatively correlated with pro-environmental behaviors [11]. Alternatively, altruistic and biospheric values represent self-transcendence values, concerned with collective interests [25]. In recent years, some scholars have considered an additional dimension of values—eudaimonia, or eudaimonic values. Eudaimonia refers to the process of living a meaningful life, finding purpose, and realizing one's true potential [29–31]. In the process, happiness and well-being is found as individuals pursue intrinsic aspirations (e.g. giving back to community) [31]. For example, van den Born et al²⁹ conducted interviews with committed environmental actors and found that participants act for nature because it is meaningful to their life and enables them to make a difference [29]. Natural resource management research finds that high altruistic, biospheric, and eudaimonic values correlate with increased pro-environmental behavioral intentions [11,32].

Motivations are reasons for engaging in behaviors, and, while they certainly overlap with values, describe distinct forces which are activated within a social context that includes values and norms [11,33,34] (Table 1). For example, various motives may exist for environmentally friendly behaviors, not necessarily related to biospheric or altruistic values (e.g. saving money, subscribing to group norms, and improving overall health and well-being) [34,35]. In other words, while a motive is similar to a value in that they can both be a reason for action, an individual's values may not necessarily be the motives for their actions. Therefore, it is important to consider both values and motivations to fully understand the reasons for engaging in environmental behaviors [36]. While we describe both values and motivations, it is important to note that not all research makes an empirical distinction between the concepts. For example, individual values have been associated with underlying motivational goals (e.g. self-enhancement values as relating to a motivation for success and ambition) [37–39].

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a way to understand different types of motivations, specifically intrinsic (arising from within an individual) and extrinsic (arising from outside an individual) [43]. Intrinsic motivations are fostered in situations when people feel competent, have autonomy, and feel secure in personal relationships and values [43]. Research has focused on promoting environmentally friendly behaviors by facilitating intrinsic motivations [35], as this type of motivation is strongly related to long-term commitments to the environment [13,44,45], which also leads to enhanced performance, creativity, and self-esteem [43]. For example, Maiteny⁴⁴ interviewed volunteers from an environmental group and found that pro-environmental behavior change endures in the long term when rooted in significant and meaningful experiences that foster intrinsic motivations [44].

Recently, researchers have begun to connect eudaimonic values with SDT [43], such that eudaimonia is driven by basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which often accompany intrinsic motivations [43]. This work further connects values and motivations by suggesting that certain values can be driven by specific motivations. Ryan and Deci⁴⁶ note that an individual living a eudaimonic life will achieve sustainable happiness and well-being, live out their values in a self-determined way, and develop mindfulness and benevolence [43,46]. At the same time, the pursuit of eudaimonia can promote pro-environmental behavior as a means to achieve psychological well-being [43]. For this reason, eudaimonia demonstrates the often complex ways in which values, motivations, and behaviors, are interrelated. Studies have shown that the more an individual possesses altruistic and biospheric values, the more self-determined they are to act pro-environmentally [11,47]. Of course, a value-

action gap can arise due to factors other than values and motivations that influence behavior (e.g. psychological or situational constraints) [48,49].

Finally, researchers have extensively studied sense of place—“the collection of meanings, beliefs, symbols, values, and feelings that individuals and groups associate with a particular locality” [50 pp19]—as it relates to motivations for environmental behaviors and stewardship [51]. Sense of place captures individuals’ cultural, religious, historical, and personal meanings of place [52], which in turn, shape how they perceive their role in local place, including their desire to engage (or not engage) in conservation [51,53]. Sense of place can also serve as an important catalyst for a natural resource career as an individual’s position creates an opportunity and motivation for them to shape their local community [39].

Understanding practitioner experiences

Previous studies explored practitioner perspectives as they relate to values and goals [1,2,54], finding meaning in work [55], and the role of experiences in conservation behaviors [39]. Most of the literature on values and motivations in the context of conservation and stewardship used quantitative measures [2,54–56]. While surveys are important for determining relationships and testing theoretical frameworks, these studies may not capture all the values and motivations that are relevant to practitioners [35]. Additionally, a qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of experiences grounded in participants’ words and stories. With the exception of Conklin⁵⁷ who used a qualitative approach, there is a lack of focus on in-depth understanding of conservation practitioner experiences [57].

Practitioner experiences, perceptions, and well-being regarding the natural environment have the potential to influence decision-making and impact the success of conservation and stewardship efforts [1,3]. At the same time, conservation and stewardship decision-making is rooted in various value systems and motives [36]. However, little is known about the ways in which multiple motives and goals interact [58]. Eudaimonia is also still overlooked in social science [29], and questions remain as to whether eudaimonic values enhance self-enhancement or self-transcendence dimensions of values and motivations [32]. It is therefore important to understand how different types of motivations for conservation (i.e. intrinsic vs. extrinsic) relate to value systems [26].

Maine’s land and waters are owned and managed by a variety of partners, including private corporations, individual family owners, tribal governments, non-profits, and state and federal government agencies [59]. Research has documented perceptions of conservation in the North Maine Woods [60], noting the presence of diverse values and goals among decision-makers. Additionally researchers surveyed the values and perceptions of landowners and forestry professionals [61,62], and Maine residents [63]. Findings from these efforts indicate the importance of values for decision-making, and the complexity and conflict that arises in conservation when diverse values are present. However, a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives, particularly motivations, around conservation in Maine, which also include views of Indigenous peoples, is so far lacking. Given the importance of conservation decision-making to support Maine’s non-human, community, and cultural resources [60], it is critical to explore the experiences of conservation practitioners.

Our study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the values, motivations, and experiences of those responsible for conservation decision-making in the state of Maine. In doing so we also sought to address the following questions: (1) What factors (e.g. experiences, social networks, etc.) inform practitioners’ motivations and values?, (2) What is the connection between practitioners’ values and motivations, and (3) What is the influence of this connection on decision-making at the individual and group scale? Our study responds to calls to explore

Table 2. Participant pseudonyms (all participants' names have been changed to protect identities) and group type.

Pseudonym	Role*	Group Type	Pseudonym	Role	Group Type
Sidney	Stewardship Director	Land trust	Reese	President	Land trust
Larkin	Conservation Director	Land trust	Quinn	Land Director	Private
Emerson	Director	Land trust	Bailey	Director	Non-profit
Morgan	Director	Government	Max	Operations Director	Private
Dana	Director	Government	Taylor	Land Manager	Private
Riley	Conservation Director	Non-profit	Morgan	President	Non-profit
Jordan	Conservation Director	Non-profit	Drew	Director	Government
Parker	Conservation Director	Non-profit	Alex	Coordinator	Tribal
Sam	Conservation Director	Land trust	Skicin	Coordinator	Tribal
Marin	Resource Manager	Government	Casey	Director	Tribal
Ray	Resource Supervisor	Government			

* To preserve participant anonymity, we have renamed job titles as needed; however, each title still captures participants primary role

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the experiences of conservation managers in an effort to reflect on the values currently being conserved in the hopes for conservation organizations to look inward and consider how their values and motives influence decision-making [1,5,6]. For the purposes of this study we use the terms conservation and stewardship interchangeably and acknowledge the multiple interpretations of the term 'conservation' among participants. Not all participants would classify themselves as conservationists given the colonial origins of the term.

Results

Participants represented a diversity of groups (Table 2), and roles such as executive directors, conservation directors, officials, coordinators, managers, presidents, etc. In addition to these primary roles, participants may have had other roles within their community, personal life, and work. Many participants therefore have multiple roles and identities that intersect, and hence inform their experiences. We interviewed 10 males and 11 females. Participants had at least 10 years of experience working in conservation, with up to 40+ years of experience (median of 23 years). Participants ranged in age from mid-twenties to seventies, while having a diversity of educational backgrounds (e.g. environmental studies, ecology, forestry, biology, history, environmental policy, etc.) and degrees (i.e. nine participants received a B.A./B.S., eight received a M.S., 3 received a Ph.D., and one received a law degree). Participants also represented groups from across the state, such that we interviewed participants from southern, coastal, central, western, and northern Maine across a rural, suburban, and urban spectrum.

We identified two major themes that describe the values, motivations, and experiences of practitioners as well as the ways in which individual's values, beliefs, and motivations integrate into group decision making spaces. For each major theme, we describe several subthemes (Fig 1).

Theme 1: Values, diverse and rooted in experiences, motivate individuals to seek out work that allows them to conserve what they care most about

"Knowing how important the outdoors was for me as an urban kid; thinking about opportunities to instill a outdoor ethic in young people, particularly people who come from a background like mine. . . I think that's vital to just kind of a future conservation ethic is to get people who are urban and suburban dwellers to appreciate the outdoors. Cause I know that

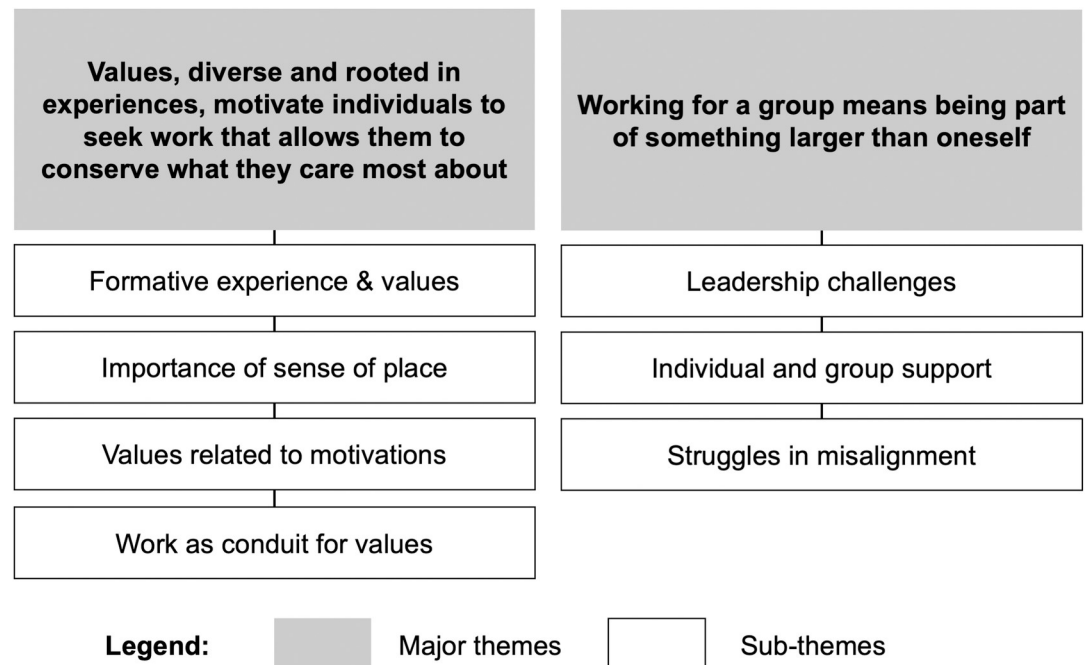


Fig 1. Overview of major themes with sub-themes specified. Grey boxes represent major themes, white boxes represent sub-themes.

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was like a life changer for me, so that's one of the reasons I like both the [ability to conserve land and offer recreational opportunities]" (Dana)

As described by Dana, several participants share important life experiences that have become intertwined with their complex value systems and motivations. For participants, experiences serve a central role in informing and reinforcing values, which are connected to their motivations for their work. When participants find a place to work, or create a role for themselves in a group, they can channel those values and motivations into a professional career. While participants recognize the larger socio-environmental context in which they live, alongside the limitations of conservation action, their work generates a personal sense of fulfillment, hope, and optimism as they make a difference.

Formative experiences can inform and reinforce values. Experience plays a critical role in an individual's values and ultimately their motivations for the work. A biospheric orientation, often described as a love for the outdoors, grew early on for many participants. This biospheric orientation was fostered by having access to outdoor places growing up as described by Sam,

Our family home was on property that was abutting conservation land, and it never really registered. . . but now coming back to it thinking that's interesting that that sort of paved the way (laughs) having that in my backyard. And the chance to get down to a river and walk through the woods. . . and now being able to do that for other people is a great thing. (Sam)

In this quote, Sam recollects the importance of nature access growing up and the ways that this access inspires their work today. Ray additionally discusses the importance of family members in fostering an interest in the outdoors, "[my mother] instilled a real interest in being outdoors and messing around with wildlife" (Ray). The unique experiences of participants inform

their values, such that Sam works for a land trust focusing on community conservation, while Ray works in wildlife management, seeking to conserve various species.

Many participants developed a similar personal connection to the outdoors, and for a couple, a connection to a specific place, community, and/or group of people. Altruistic values, similar to biospheric values, appear to be fostered from early experiences. For example, Marin describes a motivation to "reduce barriers around access and use, particularly for Indigenous people in Maine on their ancestral homelands" based on early experiences working with Indigenous elders.

These early experiences can create a sense of commitment—a commitment to protect biodiversity, access, Indigenous rights, wildlife, etc.—such as that described in the opening quote from Dana. Morgan also describes a commitment to working lands instilled from early experiences,

I always viewed [conservation and economic development] as going hand in hand. I come from modest means, my father was a Lutheran minister, and I've always had to work, I've worked hard and I worked in natural resources, I worked on the farm for a while, and I've done some forestry, I've done a lot of things, so I understand very much the importance of working lands. (Morgan)

For Morgan, their childhood upbringing, as well as diverse experiences and social networks have influenced their decisions around protecting working lands and collaborating with diverse groups.

Similar experiences, however, can lead to variations in values and ultimately motivations for the type of work an individual does. For example, Larkin shared similar experiences to Dana,

I remember the ozone alerts in the 60s and 70s, where you literally could not breathe well, you would [makes inhaling noise] if you breathe deeply, you seize up because the ozone was so so bad. And I can feel that sense ever since. I also kinda was somewhat oblivious of it at the time, but they used to come wandering through with this big truck fogging the whole landscape with DDT. And we, I can almost taste it now, I remember the sticky sweetness to it. . . but, I sort of grew up in these two worlds, one where it was very evident that the planet was getting hammered and the other, where it was very wild and water resources were very pure. And, so, I think, as a result, I was kind of always oriented towards conservation stuff and I was oriented towards wilder landscapes. (Larkin)

The visceral childhood experiences are still vivid to Larkin 50 years later as they recall the environmental degradation they observed. Yet, Larkin became committed to wilderness protection, while Dana became committed to ensuring long-term access. Biospheric and altruistic values are not mutually exclusive. Intersecting identities and experiences therefore come together to create complex altruistic and biospheric values and in return, commitments. Additionally, important early experiences may go unnoticed at the time, yet it is not until reflection that the clear pathway becomes evident for participants, as described by Larkin and Sam not realizing their significance as youth.

Through time spent in place, people develop a deep understanding and engagement with wildlife and people. Participants have a complex sense of place, and as such, a deep understanding of the people, community, and wildlife in that area. Place acts as a cornerstone of personal and group goals as the attributes of place—whether that's the wildlife present in place, or the community values that make up the place—inform motivations and goals. For example, Emerson discusses the ways in which the place they work shaped their approach to conservation,

I got to know this landscape more, and knew why it was so special. . . we have the greatest diversity of plant and animal species. . . this area is so deserving of our protection efforts and it's a huge job but I think that's still what fuels my passion every day. (Emerson)

For Emerson, the unique qualities of place reinforce their motivations to conserve the local wildlife. As a result, Emerson feels a sense of personal responsibility for the well-being of the ecology where she lives and works.

Maintaining relationships in place over time means the development of respect, responsibility, and understanding. A deep understanding of local values, history, and ecology fostered by long-term relationships emerges, which participants describe as an asset for them in their work. Casey describes how an understanding of place enables them to ask the right questions,

When I'm hunting and I see something that's off to me or different, or if I go to an area where there's been deer and then all of a sudden there's no deer there, the biggest light that goes off in my head it's like, why are they gone?...And so I try to kind of I guess work backwards in my head from that. (Casey)

Participants are attuned to the happenings in place, as illustrated by Casey, and in the following observation by Sam,

What I have appreciated is being in this area for so long is being able to add that personal piece of knowledge of people, and personalities, and landscapes, of having a sense of what's important to protect and what isn't. (Sam)

Sam describes their development of sense of place which informs their conservation priorities. Understanding gleaned from time in place enables deep knowledge of people and wildlife. For Sam, a sense of what's important for a place shapes what is perceived to be important for conservation actions.

Values are related to an individual's personal and professional motivations. Participants are motivated to conserve what they care most about. Participants describe motivations as more specific concrete desires as compared to broad values, including where participants seek work (e.g. geographically, and/or type of group) and aspects of their work they are most passionate about. Participants each have their own motivations for doing their work; whether that's love of the natural world and/or deep care for communities and people (Table 3). For the majority of participants, mentions of what they love (e.g. land, wild places, wildlife, Maine, people, home) are nearly synonymous with the motivations for the work that they do. Participants express values—egoistic, altruistic, biospheric, and eudaimonic values—which then guide, interact, and overlap with individual motivations. For example, participants who express biospheric values also often express motivations to protect land or wildlife and foster connections between people and nature in an attempt to increase support for land and water conservation, see quote from Emerson in Table 3 as an example. Various value systems and motivations are not mutually exclusive and individuals subscribe to dynamic ethical and moral obligations. Our results suggest that for those that seek power or influence (or have egoistic values), these values are present alongside a motivation to use that power, leadership, decision-making authority, etc. to make space for others, see Bailey quote in Table 3 as an example. In doing so, participants seek power as a means to push forward their social and ecological concerns. This result demonstrates the need to understand both values *and* motivations to contextualize people's experiences in decision-making.

Work is a conduit for individuals to act on their values, creating a sense of fulfillment, hope, and optimism. When an individual finds a place to work, or as Larkin describes, "I feel like I've finally arrived at a place where that's where I fit in best. . . that is home," they are

Table 3. Illustrative quotes of diverse motivations and values.

	Illustrative quote
Values*	
Altruistic (concern for others)	"We're looking at the question in our forest and forests and lands team about how do we make priorities right now, does it include human well-being, and is it equitable among different kinds of people" (Riley)
Biospheric (concern for the environment)	"Just having forests that are not going to be managed, they're not going to be set back by harvesting that starts the process all over again, will be sequestering carbon at a time, this planet desperately needs it, and we desperately need forests to grow to old growth. Because that's the best way to set aside and protect carbon, sequester it for the tumultuous time ahead." (Larkin)
Egoistic (concern for self)	"So it was it was a little selfish and, like, I just wanted to be paid to be outside, but also, I wanted to have a deeper understanding and appreciation of the place, and get some skills in that understanding. . .But it was, and I'm from here, I moved back here, I stay here by choice. I care about the place this is what I grew up doing. And so carving that space out as a as a job was was top of mind" (Bailey)
Eudaimonic	"Why do I do this? I mean sometimes if you're doing bird surveys you're getting up at 2:30 in the morning to count birds and it's like what am I doing? This is insane! It's like miserable, buggy, hot, so you have to be passionate about about why you do this, and you know. . .for me I've been I'm so fortunate that I've been able to kind of mesh my personal why with my professional why" (Drew)
Motivations	
Creating a space for diverse voice	"I use the sort of accolades I get as a way for people to listen to me, but really I'm just making space for other native people to express themselves, and giving credence to it. . .because they weren't given that space before, and so learning to create that space for people it's really important to maintain um cultural connections and that sort of cultural values." (Alex)
Fostering connections between people and land	"That connection with land is vital to the success of long-term land conservation. If Maine's population doesn't care about land, they're gonna just change the laws and all this protected land won't be protected anymore. . .So, the community work is pretty important." (Sidney)
Making a difference and/or contributing to a greater good	"Always the reward is incredible because for me it's about the people that I engage with, and the people who make that commitment to permanent conservation that is just very rewarding because those those people make a commitment, it's their legacy. . .but that relationship with the people um to make a difference is what personally, I find the most rewarding." (Sam)
Protecting land and wildlife	"I just love all the critters that we are providing habitat for. I'm such a big birder and I just love the wildlife, the native wildlife, that's here and I just want to make sure that they have a place to thrive in the future, and that means protecting a lot more of their habitat." (Emerson)
Conserving local places and values	Ecological: "Maine has a big old hunk of resilient natural forest systems that are intact forest systems. . .so place based priorities" (Riley) Cultural: "Moose is one of our, you know, obviously pretty important animal in the tribe for sustenance. Deer as well, so we always try to, you know, like deer wintering areas and stuff, you know, we actually we harvest in those but only to improve the deer wintering area" (Casey) Social/community: "We want to make sure that what we're doing fits still fits the community" (Bailey)
Providing community benefits	"I'm just conscious that the people in our communities that do the most tend to have the least capacity because of that, and so at the same time I'm not trying to create new projects but I'm trying to see what ideas and what energies are already working towards reestablishing those food systems and how can I support those." (Skicin)

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued)

	Illustrative quote
Values*	
Ability to have decision-making power or authority	"I also appreciate that this is a position that allows me to use a lot of creativity and be around creative people. . . sometimes we just sit down and have open-ended conversations about some tangential topic that will spawn some idea and we have the latitude and the support from the board to kind of pursue those things" (Reese)

* Note: we did not find evidence of hedonic values among participant interviews

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able to merge their personal values with their professional careers. In doing so, participants express sentiments of loving what they do, and feeling grateful for their careers, as described by Morgan,

I've had such a fortunate life to be able to apply my interest in my everyday, my work. . . And I'm just very grateful, and, there've been only a few times when I was like I can't stand it, but even in those times I did feel that I was doing the right thing. (Morgan)

Morgan is fulfilled in their work and their ability to mesh their personal values with their career, even when reflecting that the job is tough. Morgan acknowledges the challenges of their job, yet this is overshadowed by their satisfaction with the compatibility of their values and workplace. This sentiment is similar to the expression of eudaimonic values as described by Drew in Table 3 above, as work allows participants to live out their values in a way that their environmental identities (and sense of self more broadly) are aligned. Within their jobs, a couple of participants describe how they feel personally connected to the conservation outcomes of their groups,

We have the ability, as a really big conservation organization to make real change [which] feels good to be a part of. . . I think that the [group] does a good job of helping all staff feel a connection to the greater good, of the greater work that the organization is doing. (Riley)

Riley highlights an important consideration for organizations to ensure that employees feel part of the change that is occurring. Through transparent organizational decision-making processes, participants can fully see their contributions and realize eudaimonia.

Despite feelings of pride in their contributions to conservation efforts, participants also express feelings of pessimism, urgency, and climate anxiety around the field of conservation given their concerns for the planet's future. However, their work allows them to take action in an otherwise difficult socio-environmental context. Marin expresses a sense of urgency and frustration in the current state of the environment,

You know, it's just, it's hard. The puffin success this summer was on some islands was 2%. You know, that's not sustainable. . . So anyway that's a downer thing but it's like those are the challenges. (Marin)

This quote from Marin articulates the sense of matter-of-factness participants have when describing a changing climate and loss of biodiversity, that coincides with their own anxiety and fears. Yet, these statements of concern, urgency, and despair are often followed by expressions of optimism. For example, after describing the challenges of climate change Parker says, "it's gonna get worse, and we know that, so that is really discouraging but at the same time, you know we got to keep working at it" (Parker). Participants' work therefore allows them to feel like they have some agency in making a difference, even though they recognize there are

limitations. For example, Morgan describes their concerns that Maine's forest could vanish "if we don't work hard, and if we don't have funding," yet shortly thereafter reflects,

It would be nice to do some more couple big deals, and that would be wonderful. . . I think if we could bring a little more stability to Maine's forest with a few more big deals, I would feel blessed, I would feel hopeful and I would be joyful. (Morgan)

Participants work, often aligning with their values and motivations, therefore provides a sense of stability, control, hope, fulfillment, and gratification despite the present socio-cultural and environmental contexts. Having a career in the environmental field enables individuals to channel, or work towards, their values despite (or in part, because of), the perceived state of the world.

Theme 2: Working for a group means being part of something larger than oneself

"I'm the primary representative for the organization. Sometimes there are decisions made that I don't 100% agree with but it's my job, and I will disagree here in this room in this table, but once the decision is made it's my job to go out and champion it. And that also means that then, you know, I'm the one that gets [blamed] if it turns south." (Reese)

While many participants describe the love for the work that they do, and the compatibility of their motivations, and values; the exact degree to which their motivations and values align with their organization's values and actions varies. Occasionally individual and work values, motivation, and commitments are not always in complete alignment despite generally shared high environmental and altruistic values. In these cases, discord, or internal conflict, may arise. Tensions exist due to the complexity and social nature of environmental decision-making, as diverse individuals are involved in the process. Individuals experience misalignment of values differently, as power and role within a group can influence how that tension is expressed.

Being a leader requires making difficult decisions and navigating complex commitments. Participants who are the primary decision-maker, or leader, of a group, express unique challenges of decision-making. First, participants take on a personal responsibility that comes with their positions, as Dana says "I love Maine and I love the lands that we manage and I really enjoy working with the people I do. It's a big responsibility and one I take really seriously" (Dana). When an individual's identity, values, and social networks conflict with other staff or organizational priorities, this creates complexities for that individual that are not always easily resolved, such as that described in the realities of leading an organization in the opening quote from Reese. Being a leader involves trusting others, delegating, and accounting for personal values and organizational direction. There is therefore tension experienced by leaders given the power these participants hold, as described by Casey,

I think I submitted some testimony for neither for nor against, for that [omitted] bill. . . On paper, it looked like it was to protect forest jobs, but once you get into the nitty gritty of it you realized that it was really to protect. . . every dam in the state. . . But then navigating [the state capital] is kind of tricky sometimes too, because some of our allies were part of that, and as a forester I didn't really feel comfortable. . . going full bore against it because it's protecting forest jobs. And (laughs) you see where it doesn't look great but, but once I started reading into it I'm like oh yeah, we need to say something we can't sit here on the sidelines. (Casey)

As described by Casey, as a leader they must balance multiple values beyond just their own motivations, which can conflict with personal identities, social networks, and organizational priorities.

Participants also describe the perceived risk of being able to decide, and with that pressure, a desire to make the best decision they possibly can make. Therefore, reasons exist (i.e. balancing multiple values within a group, taking advantage of opportunities in terms of funding and legislation, the accounting for a lack of available data or resources) that may hinder an individual to act on their own personal values. Additionally, participants' power as well as their personal sense of responsibility can create situations where they view the groups' success as a reflection of their own success,

I never think we're doing a good enough job (laughs). And I think it's because you know there's 10,000 people that say great job and there's the one that's like *hmm*. And so I'm always holding that and carrying that which is my own problem (laughs). (Bailey)

Bailey illustrates the tensions in running an organization on their own, versus distributing the power, responsibility, and even blame when the success of a group does not depend solely on them.

Struggles can arise when individual and organizational values are misaligned. As participants note, differences in values are an opportunity as they allow a diversity of conservation goals and values both within the same place and across a landscape. As Morgan says, "So we all kind of bring our values to the table. . . [and] it's reflected in the diversity of projects we get" (Morgan). However, participants also describe the challenges that occur when there is a mismatch in their personal values and the group's values of which they are a part. This misalignment can lead to an internal conflict, discord, and even an emotional struggle. For example, as described in the opening quote from Reese, despite them holding a director position there are some decisions for which they do not have a final say. In these situations, the individual may disagree with a decision that was made, or grapple with the extent to which ecological or social values inform conservation decisions. This is also shared by Sidney as they describe a decision to convert a meadow into a public park, "So that was one [decision] where you know, ecologically we're, I mean, it was a beautiful meadow (laughs) now it gets mowed. But that's a real community benefit" (Sidney). Here, Sidney discusses a group decision at odds with their own personal ecological orientation to conservation. While Sidney recognizes the benefits of the decision that was made, they still recall their own personal disappointment.

Given the complexities of individual value systems coming together in shared decision-making spaces, tensions are unsurprising in the field of conservation and stewardship. Participants, as indicated by Sidney in the quote above, as well as expressed by Ray below, justify their groups' decisions while also expressing their own beliefs,

I don't in anyway feel that the science should totally override the interests of whatever public we're dealing with. There's got to be that balance. . . But I think there's got to be sideboards that we as scientists—as individuals—that are basically the voice of these critters, for these critters, need to stand tall about. (Ray)

For Ray, the inner conflict may not be consciously known for the participant, as they grapple with balancing the views of the public, the need for public support, and the needs of wildlife based on western science. In Ray's career they can inform wildlife decisions, despite the policies of the group which heavily consider socio-cultural and public values. Therefore, participants express the importance of agency and their views being valued by the group in situations when a diversity of perspectives is present. As a powerholder, Sam creates spaces for discussion and conversation,

Those are always good, because you come out the other side of that with a slightly different perspective than you went in, you know, if you if you remain open to listening to what the other side has to say (laughs). (Sam)

It is therefore the norms and culture of a group that can facilitate shared understanding and conversations where values become explicit.

Individuals and groups can support each other and grow together. Participants describe diverse ways that their own personal values have aligned with their professional careers and groups' values. For participants who embed their own values within the group, they create a legacy for ideas including public participation, stakeholder engagement, cultural priorities, and wildlife conservation. Specifically, participants who were involved with the initiation of the group and carry positions of power describe how they have shaped the direction of organizational growth, as Bailey reflects,

I grew up on a tree farm; my dad worked at the saw mill. . . I just wanted to I think just reflect that [understanding of forest products] in this role. . . this organization is shaped into that a little bit and I'm, I don't really apologize for it, because it is the reflection of the place. (Bailey)

In this way, these participants have *created* a home for themselves where their careers align with their values (see also discussion of eudaimonia values in the first theme).

Other participants describe a series of events leading them to *find* a home, or a place where their values align with where they work. While past work experiences may have been negative, given differences in individual and organizational values, they are now happy and self-aware of their values and needs. For example, Jordan describes,

I've really appreciated the opportunity to do is to develop and bake in our management plan a process where, you know, right in the guiding principles of our property that those often unspoken local values and opinions. (Jordan)

Jordan was able to embed their own values into the group; of course, this was possible given the flexibility and trust endowed to him by those in even higher positions of power.

At the same time, as the organization evolves in their commitments, so too do individuals, especially for those individuals not at the top of the organizational hierarchy. While it is unclear the direction of growth (i.e. whether individuals influence group values, or groups influence individual values, or some combination), individual and group values can reinforce each other to meet shared needs and motivations, for example Marin says, "Where I work now that gets me really excited is to be able to bring, include, incorporate, and privilege that [Indigenous] knowledge and the those rights [here]" (Marin). As described in the first theme, autonomy in decision-making and ability to contribute to a greater cause within a group can empower an individual to incorporate their own personal values into the group even if the group has a long history and established norms and values. As individuals and groups grow together over time, there can be a sharing of values and interests, as reflected by Riley, "It's been really rewarding to work on the Indigenous peoples work. . . [our] focus on Indigenous peoples has been an incredible alignment so I've been really, um it's filled my mind and heart a lot lately" (Riley). Therefore, multiple pathways exist through which individuals and group values can come into alignment. As individuals' personal values, experiences, and motivations are nested within groups' values and priorities, misalignment may lead to tensions, while alignment can facilitate empowerment, action, and individual and group transformation (Fig 2).

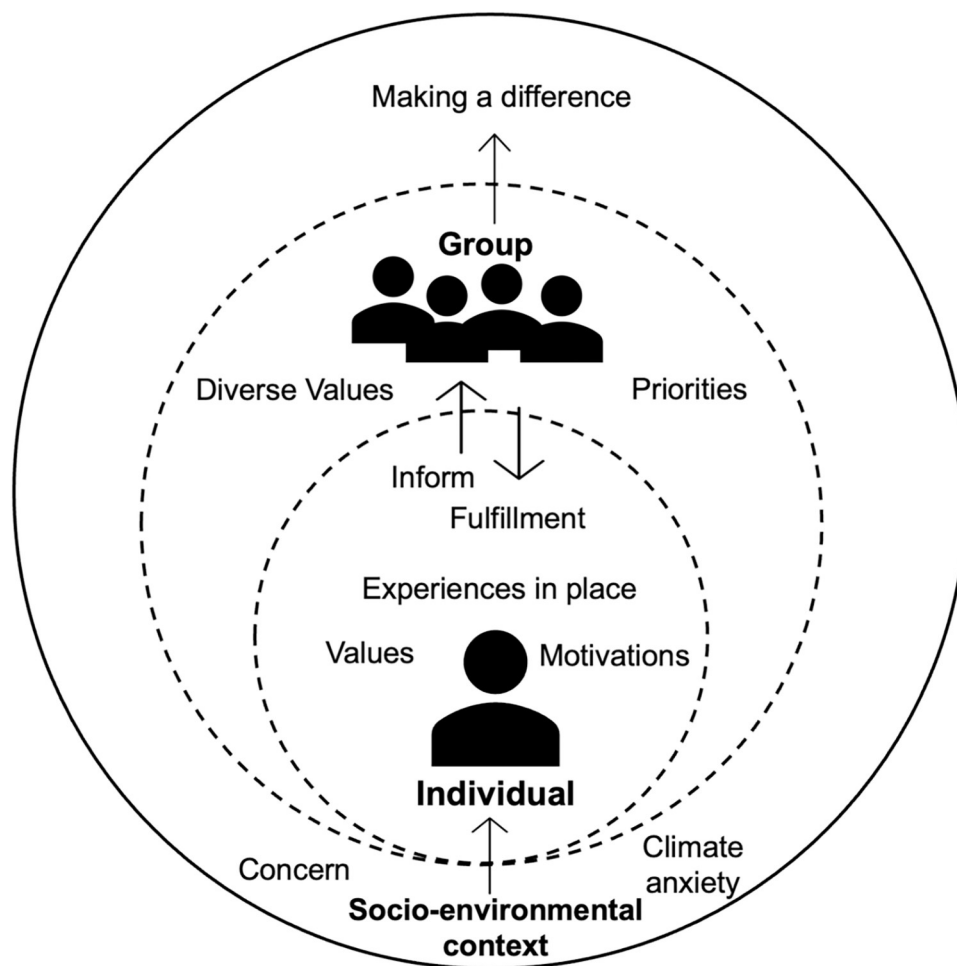


Fig 2. Depiction of the nested nature of the individual within larger work and socio-cultural and environmental contexts.

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Discussion

Experiential pathways

Working within larger socio-cultural and environmental contexts, participants experienced their own interactions with communities, place, people, and the non-human world. Experiences, such as being outside as a kid, having access to outdoor places, being in community with others, or observing environmental degradation, fostered and reinforced values. Participants expressed complex value systems, which include dynamic biospheric, altruistic, egoistic, and eudaimonic values, that interacted with individual motivations and actions.

Researchers have extensively studied the role of significant life experiences, especially exposure to nature in childhood [13,15,27,64]. Repeated experiences in nature can reinforce a person's disposition to associate self with nature [65], influence biospheric values [13] and motivations [47], and create a pillar for environmental self-identity and pro-environmental behaviors [27,66]. The work on significant life experiences largely originated by Tanner¹⁵ who surveyed conservation professionals in the US found that experiences in 'natural areas' were the primary influence in career choice [15]. More recently, Howell & Allen³⁵ surveyed those working on climate change in the UK and found that life experiences, including education,

work, media, groups, and outdoor nature experiences played a role in forming individuals' values and motivations [35]. Our results also indicate the critical role of outdoor nature experiences, as participants described vivid memories of childhood nature camps, family trips, and backyard adventures. A couple of participants also described the instrumental role of family and social groups in facilitating nature experiences, suggesting that a mix of experience and norms are formative for individual values and motivations.

Social justice-oriented experiences also played a role in influencing individuals' career pathway to environmentalism [13,14,34,35]. Formative experiences with community, as well as sustained engagement with place over time, served as key motivations for individuals. Participants described wanting to give back to their communities, conserve community values, and make space for diverse voices in land conservation and stewardship. A commitment or understanding of place emerged as an important component of an individual's approach to their work and motivations, suggesting that sense of place is also important in informing conservation practitioners' work. Our findings therefore point to the role of multiple pathways, or experiences, that may foster diverse values and lead an individual to pursue a career in conservation and stewardship [8]. Our results also demonstrate that it is not only significant early childhood experiences that can lead to a career in conservation or stewardship. Participants described experiences later in life as well. Specifically, over long periods of time in place, participants developed deep understanding and engagement. Therefore, it is important to consider the full range of potential lifelong experiences that can impact an individual's actions.

Values, motivations, and eudaimonia

As individuals can channel their values into the work that they do, they quell feelings of fear and concern around the social and ecological state of the world. Previous research explored the diverse motivations among those working in natural resource management, including: furthering curiosity and learning [29,49], living a worthwhile life [29,49,67], conserving nature for future generations [49], doing things with others [49,67], giving back [67], and getting outside [67]. With a focus on understanding perceptions of the meaningfulness of work and the notion of calling, Conklin⁵⁷ additionally found that participants working in land and water conservation believed that they were pursuing work to which they were called [57]. Our results are largely aligned with these previous studies, and suggest the importance of the following motivations established in the literature: competence [40,42], giving back to community [36], social justice [36], and personal integrity [36]. Participants mostly expressed autonomous motivations [68], that were intrinsic in nature and aligned with self-interests and inherent satisfaction [46]. Our results therefore support SDT [31,43]. When participants have autonomy in their groups and feel secure in their values, the more they are motivated to pursue their goals. Participants described their work as a way to live their values—whether that be valuing nature and conserving it for future generations or giving back to a community and place. This finding, and previous research on the environmental motivations [11,13,15,40,42], suggest the critical importance of eudaimonic values and motivations for practitioners as they are able to find purpose and meaning, and maintain autonomy [30]. A desire to live a meaningful life with purpose appears to guide participants to seek work that allows them to conserve what they care about the most. A focus on eudaimonia can also provide a framework to consider how those working in the environmental field grapple with ecological grief and climate anxiety [69]; yet, find hope, fulfillment, stability, and gratification in their personal and professional lives.

While eudaimonia may receive considerably less attention in the field of conservation than other values (i.e. biospheric, egoistic, altruistic, etc.) [29], it is possible some

conceptualizations, or operationalizations, of egoistic values have actually measured elements of eudaimonia. For example, Pienkowski⁷⁰ used the tripartite values framework and VBN theory to operationalize individual and collective conservation practitioner goals and values [70]. The egoistic values, or individual goals as they described them, included making a meaningful contribution to conservation, which describes living a eudaimonic life. Nearly all participants (94%) surveyed (among over 2000 conservation practitioners globally), indicated that making a meaningful contribution to conservation was important to them. We also found that participants highly valued contributing to the ‘greater good,’ and stated that making a difference was a reason for continuing to stay in the profession. We additionally found evidence of egoistic values, such as being a leader [70], in motivating individuals to pursue a career that allows them to have decision-making power in spaces they are passionate about. The distinction between eudaimonic values and egoistic values has largely been unanswered in the literature, as questions remain as to whether eudaimonic values are more about living a meaningful life that contributes to altruistic and biospheric goals (self-transcendence), or personal growth and well-being in the process of finding meaning (self-enhancement) [32]. Our results suggest that eudaimonic values and egoistic values can be distinguished, but also co-exist with a variety of motivations. For example, egoistic values related to social power, authority, or influence can serve intrinsic motivations that allow individuals to live their values, maintain autonomy, and even support others from their communities whom they feel do not have power or voice. The presence of eudaimonia was often discussed as a way for an individual to attain personal meaning, hope, and fulfillment (self-enhancement); however, in such a way that allowed them to also live out their altruistic and biospheric goals, contributing to collective concerns (self-transcendence). Finally, despite the presence of hedonic values in the literature on environmental behaviors [10], participants did not describe the importance of short-term happiness in their conservation experiences. While participants described aspects of their job they enjoyed (e.g. getting outside, working with people), these small moments of joy did not influence their decision-making. Rather, a couple of participants expressed short-term unhappiness, such as discomfort with day-to-day work. Participants justified their unhappiness because their job enabled them to experience long-term fulfillment and satisfaction.

Organizational and individual alignment

In a group, multiple values, identities, and goals come together in shared decision-making spaces. Participants, especially those in leadership roles, balanced sometimes conflicting values, experiences, and identities from those around them with their own personal values, motivations, and identity. In negotiating management decisions that balanced these different identities, values, legislation, funding, and environmental constraints participants’ values did not always align with their actions [48]. Therefore, situations existed where participants expressed signs of internal conflict due to misalignment of their personal values and actions and/or group values. Literature on authenticity and identity in the workplace suggests that when an individual’s internal experiences (e.g. values, feelings, thoughts) are aligned with external expressions (behaviors) they are experiencing authenticity [71]. Our results support the critical role of authenticity in identity conflict. In situations where participants felt like they could not fully live their values (or align their internal experiences and external expressions) they experienced identity conflict. While in some cases, differences in values can provide meaning for individuals as they seek to understand themselves and others [55], the threat of identity conflict emerges in situations when identities are very important to individuals (e.g. having to enact social goals when an individual has high biospheric values and an environmental identity). Our results suggest that finding meaning in work is dynamic and negotiated over time as

Attending to values: Key takeaways for conservation practitioners



Understand individuals' varied pathways, experiences, and backgrounds that influence their values, motivations, and conservation career choices



Create opportunities for individuals to express their autonomy and pursue personal goals within conservation groups



Embrace diverse values within a group, while attending to the potential for identity conflict for individuals, by practicing reflexivity, transparency, and conflict resolution

Fig 3. Overview of key takeaways for conservation practitioners. Important concepts to ensure long-term mutual growth and support between individuals and groups within conservation.

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individuals and groups grow together and support each other. Differences in values can lead to self-awareness and growth [55,71], but it is important to consider the possible negative implications of identity conflict in the field of conservation.

Organizational alignment is the degree to which needs, goals, strategy, culture, demands, structures, and individuals are internally consistent [72]. An important element of alignment is the social and cultural processes that can facilitate shared understanding between individual values, norms, motivations, and beliefs and those of the organization [72]. Our research provides some support for the importance of organizational alignment in the well-being of organizational members and organizational efficiency, as well as greater individual efficiency [73]. When individuals experience a state of authenticity, similar to eudaimonia, psychological well-being can be achieved. However, being in a state of organizational alignment does not necessarily translate to improved effectiveness or performance. Participants acknowledged the diversity of values that can exist within their organization, and the benefits of conversation, compromise, and learning. While they recognize that cooperation does take time, difference, or misalignment, in values, backgrounds, norms, cultures, and experiences can be transformative in how an organization operates and grows. Taken together, our results therefore highlight several key ways in which conservation practitioners and groups can attend to their diverse core values in an effort to articulate their motivations, practice reflexivity, and inform decision-making (Fig 3).

Limitations and next steps

Our findings represent an in-depth qualitative understanding of a group of 21 conservation practitioners in Maine, USA. In certain contexts, our results have the potential to shed light on conservation and stewardship values, experiences, and motivations, yet qualitative research does not seek transferability in results. While participants represented a diversity of organizational types, we had to balance the breadth of perspectives with depth of understanding given the prolonged engagement and idiographic approach to Interpretative Phenomenological

Analysis (IPA). The conservation and scientific communities would benefit from additional exploration of individuals from certain organization types, most notably tribal and forest industry groups—for which we interviewed three participants from each.

We have also just begun to connect the concept of eudaimonia to motivations of conservation practitioners. Further empirical research is needed to distinguish between biospheric, altruistic, egoistic, and eudaimonic values in relation to diverse conservation motivations. Our results also suggest the need to explore elements of conservation practitioner experiences. We found that for some participants they found work that aligned with their values, either by an increased self-awareness of values gleaned from multiple prior positions where there was not a good fit, or by taking on a leadership role that allowed them to shape the organization to fit their motivations and values. For others, value alignment and authenticity were not actualized in their current positions. Given the importance of psychological well-being to job satisfaction, retention, and hope in environmental careers, exploring misalignment of individual and group values requires additional empirical research.

Methods: Approach to inquiry

We used the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology, which draws on the theoretical contributions of phenomenology (a philosophical approach to study human experience), hermeneutics (a theory of interpretation), and idiography (a concern with the particular) [74]. IPA allowed us to assess rich details of the participants' ways of making meaning, grounded in participants' words and experiences [75]. The approach enabled a rich description of the phenomenon of *being a conservation practitioner responsible for making decisions*, while also allowing us to explore a range of perspectives [74,76].

Data generation

We conducted 21 in-depth semi-structured interviews [77] with conservation and stewardship practitioners. The interviews focused on capturing the experience of acknowledging and undertaking the responsibility of conserving Maine's lands, waters, and communities, while seeking to understand the ways in which individual experiences, beliefs, values, and motivations play a role in individual and group decision-making. The inquiry adapted to participant experiences and context by maintaining a high degree of flexibility [78].

We conducted interviews in person or via video call between August 2021 and March 2022. Interviews lasted between 30 and 95 minutes (average of 55 minutes), depending on participant availability and depth of responses. Participants first answered questions regarding their use of goals in decision-making and their role in decision-making, then reflected on their experiences working in the field of conservation and stewardship. We used a combination of criteria selection, maximum variation, and snowball sampling to select participants [78,79]. We used criteria selection to identify potential participants: 1) individuals that have been working in conservation or stewardship in Maine for at least 5 years, and 2) individuals that manage, own, or facilitate the management of land for conservation or stewardship purposes. We sought to understand multiple perspectives via maximum variation to ensure participants covered a range of groups in the state, including non-profits, land trusts, federal and state government, Indigenous government, and private landowners, as well as a range of geographic regions, and sociodemographic backgrounds.

Data analysis

Data analysis occurred concurrently with data collection [66,67]; interview recordings were transcribed verbatim [80,81], and entered into an NVivo database for analysis [82]. IPA was

used to iteratively analyze data [60] by using codes [66] that emerged from the participants' words inductively before moving on to cross-cutting similarities and differences among participants to reach higher levels of abstraction and interpretation in the hermeneutic circle [76]. Taking both an empathetic and suspicious stance through interpretation allowed to make sense of what it is like to be the participants, while being critical in ways individuals may be unable to do themselves [83]. Queries and data displays in NVivo facilitated a deeper understanding of the relationships between codes and themes [77,80,84]. Finally, recording of participant characteristics and socio-demographics including position, organization type, size, and geographical range, educational background, and years of experience enabled exploration of the similarities and differences across participant socio-demographics for different codes.

Methodological integrity

We practiced fidelity and utility in our study [85] to ensure methodological integrity and coherence. Specifically, we used qualitative methods grounded in phenomenology to address our research aims—ensuring that our literature review, methods, and findings were aligned with our research questions and overarching inquiry approach, while also being sensitive to context. We practiced reflexivity by keeping a reflective journal [86], and constantly being cognizant of the researchers' roles in data generation and interpretation to ensure perspective management [80,87]. We also engaged in de-briefing to discuss emerging insights, codes, categories, and themes [88]. Our findings are grounded in participants' reconstructions and reflections [85]; though we acknowledge that the meanings are a function of the participants' interactions with the researchers [78,89]. We sought an in-depth understanding of each participant through multiple rounds of reading and noting before moving on to the next over the course of a year, to ensure prolonged engagement with the data, and a sensitivity to their accounts [76]. Finally, we conducted a process of member checking to ensure our descriptions were complete and realistic, and the interpretations fair [90] based on feedback from a short report which shared the findings with participants [91].

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for research on human subjects. The IRB approved oral informed consent, given the structure of the interviews. We use pseudonyms to protect the privacy of all participants [92].

Conclusion

Differences in values continue to persist among conservation practitioners. These differences, however, do not need to be minimized or negated in favor of a single unified conservation ethic. We found that a diversity of values and motivations enabled a multitude of projects that conserved people, places, wildlife, and communities. Conservation practitioners held biospheric, altruistic, egoistic, and eudaimonic values that intersected with dynamic motivations, leading them to find work that allowed them to conserve what they cared most about. Of course, in shared decision making spaces individuals experienced differences in values between themselves and others within the groups that they work. Conservation practitioners can experience identity conflict, or tensions and challenges, in these situations. However, participants noted that diversity in values serves a transformative, learning role in organizational growth. As Hunter et al⁴ wrote, "The conservation arena is large enough to accommodate many people and organizations whose diverse values lead them to different niches that can, with good will and foresight, be far more complementary than competitive" [4 pp644]. However, it is important to acknowledge that 'conservation' means different things to different people and articulating who benefits and by what means remains critical. The conservation community would advance from a meaningful conversation around differences in values,

epistemologies, and cultures. Within Maine specifically, our results highlight the many areas for convergence of broad values among seemingly diverse groups which can inform opportunities for collaboration.

Our results have implications for conservation organizations seeking to foster eudaimonic values and promote authenticity among their members. By enabling workers to express their internal experiences, people are able to embrace and realize their potential to create value for themselves and for the world. At an organizational level, when differences in values exist, workplace transparency, empowerment, and autonomy are important.

Supporting information

S1 Table. Additional quotes corresponding to each theme.
(DOCX)

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