



SCHOOL OF AQUATIC AND FISHERY SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

2026 Spring Seminar Series

May 21, 4:00PM

Thursday (Th) (FSH 107)

The Socio-Ecological Niche: Environmental Justice and Wildlife Recovery

Alex McInturff

Assistant Unit Leader, Washington Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, and Assistant Professor, School of Environmental and Forest Sciences, University of Washington

Wildlife increasingly share space with people in human-dominated landscapes, generating both conflict and coexistence. Yet standard ecological frameworks have struggled to account for the social forces that shape these encounters. In this talk, I introduce the socio-ecological niche (SEN), a conceptual framework that updates classical niche theory to incorporate the social, cultural, historical, and political dimensions of species–environment relationships. The SEN identifies six key dimensions—history, laws and institutions, economics, politics, discourse and representation, and knowledge—through which human society structures the conditions of wildlife existence and, in turn, the conditions under which people experience wildlife. Applying this framework to human–wildlife conflict reveals that the costs and benefits of living alongside wildlife are not evenly distributed. Marginalized communities frequently bear a disproportionate share of the burdens, while the benefits of wildlife conservation often accrue elsewhere. By centering questions of power alongside ecological process, the SEN offers both a richer theoretical account of human–wildlife dynamics and a realistic foundation for management and policy. I argue that taking the social dimensions of the niche seriously is a practical necessity for conservation that is responsive to the full range of people it affects.

Alex's research uses interdisciplinary approaches to link social and ecological systems with an emphasis on large carnivores, human communities, and environmental justice.

Accommodation requests related to a disability or health condition should be made before the event by contacting Jon Wittouck, Assistant Director, Facilities for SAFS: 206-616-8552/wittouck@uw.edu.

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