

Sierra Club Board of Directors Nominee Questionnaire And Responses and hyperlinks from Maya Khosla

Question 1: The mission of the Sierra Club is “to explore, enjoy and protect the planet. To practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out those objectives.” Why do you want to run as a Director for the Sierra Club Board?

As a biologist and writer, I have explored and enjoyed many parts of the planet including [forests in the Sierra Nevada](#), Cascades and Coast Ranges of the American West and [sea turtle nesting beaches of the Andaman Islands](#) and Odisha in India – hundreds of miles on foot. My work to protect the planet and promote responsible coexistence with the natural world includes filming and [writing](#) about the impacts of climate change, the high biodiversity of intact post-fire forests, sea turtle nesting, hatchlings making their way to sea, and hatchling rescues by rural communities. Informed by a wide range of projects and experiences in the US and other countries, I am eager to run as a Director of the Sierra Club and will be pleased to contribute and assist in its tasks.

Question 2: The function of boards is to provide high-level oversight to organizations. Describe your leadership skills and type of experience you bring to this role, and how will it help you fulfil your position on the board?

My work has provided multiple opportunities to provide oversight to local organizations such as Sonoma Clean Power, and to larger organizations such as the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. My work in environmental sciences has given me opportunities to conduct oversight to ensure the appropriate use of water quality datasets, toxicity studies, wildlife protections under the Endangered Species Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. Recently, I joined 18 organizations and over 150 individuals concerned about Sonoma County’s interest in burning forest-based biomass for energy generation (facilities which [emit more carbon dioxide than coal burning facilities](#)). In a letter to Sonoma Clean Power, we highlighted case studies of biomass burning pollutants including benzene, formaldehyde, and dioxins, which disproportionately impact low-income Latinx communities located close to the energy generation facilities in Northern California.

Question 3: Sierra Club recently adopted new [values](#) (Anti-racism, Balance, Collaboration, Justice and Transformation). Can you give an example of a time when you have lived out these values?

As a woman of East Indian origin, I am eager to join in the Sierra Club's efforts to build ways to transform the existing power structure, to achieve balance through unique partnerships and collaborations, and most of all to work towards questioning racism in all its forms in the US and also elsewhere in the world. So far, there are few women of color in the United States who pursue field-based biology and documentations, and I am working to change that. My own focus is to reach out and train younger people of color in field-based documentations, most recently in remote trail-camera work.

Question 4: Sierra Club is committed to equity, inclusion and justice in all aspects of endeavors and at all levels, internally and externally.

- a. How do you incorporate active anti-racism into your leadership with volunteers and staff?
- b. How do you ensure an equitable and just transition to tackling climate change?

a. Displays of racism can be overt but it's often quite subtle, so I feel the need to approach racist attitudes question by question, or by showing respectful behavior rather than talking about it. I have faced race-based discrimination in the recent past, and strive to confront it at every level. It's a tough, long journey. There are too few people of color in Sonoma County's chapter of the Sierra Club – and productive communication is where I begin to confront what I have faced. My work pushes me to act locally while thinking more globally.

b. Climate change is affecting extreme weather, floods and fire; vulnerable communities must come first. I believe in work that contributes to increased safety and increased understanding based on the best available science. [Immediately after the 2017 wildfires in Sonoma County](#), which burned Coffey Park and many other areas, I was selected to serve as the County's Poet Laureate. I served as a spokesperson for the community – and brought the community together for over 30 poetry events – to bring hope in life after the fires.

After a recent interview, Black News Channel (BNC) expressed great interest in interviewing others who are fighting for the rights of immigrant workers to evacuate during a wildfire (they were being asked to stay at vineyards where they worked rather than evacuating), and I am reaching out to the organizations who are fighting for immigrant worker rights, so they can speak on BNC.

Question 5: One of the significant ways Sierra Club accomplishes its mission is through political engagement. What can Sierra Club do better to develop a more energized and robust grassroots movement that will participate in the political process?

Sierra Club field trips are one of its strengths. I would be pleased to extend the concept of field trips to field-based explorations that can energize and galvanize grassroots movements.

Field-based explorations have deeply informed my writing and filmmaking endeavors. Without years of first-hand experiences in the field, I would not have believed in the beauty

and high diversity of intact post-fire forests and chaparral habitats. Without witnessing the extreme emissions, I might not have fully understood the impacts of forest-based biomass facilities on human communities. The simple acts of setting foot in the field can deeply inform us, so we can make informed and compassionate decisions based on the best available science while participating in the political process.

Question 6: Frontline communities are experiencing the adverse effects of climate change, environmental pollution, and limited access to resources. What types of relationships does Sierra Club need to nurture in order to be effective in advocating for environmental justice?

We are truly empowered by experiences. Direct experiences and communications are among the most powerful ways of nurturing effective advocacy.

In January 2021, I helped to organize, bring speakers together and present recent findings at the [Sonoma County Climate Activists Community Summit \(Climate Summit\)](#), hosted by SOCOCAN! and attended by over 400 participants in the community. The real impacts of the Climate Summit were after the event itself – when groups of us visited some regions impacted by 2017 and 2020 wildfires. We went as far as visiting and documenting the forest biomass processing facilities in Sonoma and in Chinese Camp, west of Yosemite.

Question 7: One of Sierra Club’s most unique and powerful assets is its vast grassroots network and its ability to address a wide variety of issues and concerns nationwide. What are your priorities to maximize the impact of our grassroots volunteers?

My priorities are to support the work of grassroots volunteers through powerful writing and video documentation – two ways that have helped me to deepen the impacts of my efforts and the impact of volunteer efforts. I’ll be pleased to share my own work and to assist people on their path of maximizing the visibility and impacts of their grassroots efforts.

Question 8: Good communication strategies are one key to environmental and political success. How can communication and messaging be improved to reach a broader audience, including raising brand awareness?

I am very interested in interviews and live conversations as productive formats for communications, and have interviewed dozens of people for my short films. [Firewise: The Scientists Speak](#) is a project-in-progress. Live conversations can reach broader audiences very quickly, I would be very interested in raising awareness through projects that can bolster an environmental movement and educate the public.

Question 9: Volunteer leaders are a critical part of Sierra Club. Traditionally, non-Board of Director volunteers have been closely involved in the national decision-making process for Sierra Club. How would you enhance and grow volunteer participation and ensure that they continue to play a central role in the governance of Sierra Club?

In a world that is being impacted by covid-19, the least risky way to grow volunteer participation may be outdoor activities that follow all the local and regional regulations for safe interactions. I would start with the outdoor activities, and would like to combine them with online meetings.

Question 10: If you were elected, how would you address the Board's accountability for how Directors work together, treat each other, and fulfill their duty to the organization as a whole?

I would work within the existing rules observed and accepted by Sierra Club, and would encourage respectful behavior and good documentation throughout. Most members understand that the content of the minutes speak volumes about the sincerity of Board members.