



Preparing for a Queer-Minded Field Season

Compiled March 2023

To make forestry and fieldwork more accessible to LGBTQ+ people, we must think outside the binary box. Personal safety while out in the field is the first priority for any forester, ecologist, botanist, or other natural resources practitioner and there are additional measures to be taken into consideration for LGBTQ+ individuals. The Seeing the Forest for the Queers community compiled advice based on their experiences and supplemental papers to support the planning and navigation of fieldwork.

Planning a Field Season

As field crew supervisors, mentors and institutions have a responsibility to keep all employees safe. To make forestry and fieldwork more accessible to LGBTQ+ people, implementing best practices that alleviate common barriers and affirm LGBTQ+ identities is crucial. Institutions should provide options for inclusive housing and bathrooms, and follow robust safety procedures while asking for alternatives and feedback rather than wait for LGBTQ+ individuals to bring up their needs.

Actions that institutions and supervisors can take to create more accessible fieldwork:

- Create a **safety procedure** that includes descriptions of daily activities and communications plans.
 - Consider access to emergency health care, particularly in rural areas where cis/heteronormative expectations are strong, in case of the situation where a LGBTQ+ individual were to need medical care.
 - Include what is known about local attitudes and laws, such as criminalization of LGBTQ+ identities.
 - Include a plan for when a potentially hostile situation occurs and provide radios for quick and reliable communication.
- Understand that members of fieldwork teams are unique and have unique needs. **Do not assume** gender identity or heteronormativity.
- Allow individuals to choose the **housing** option that feels safest to them. Often, housing is segregated based on binary gender (M/F) and that can create undesirable situations. Additionally, make sure there is access to refrigeration for medications.
- When in the field without access to toilets, there should be **bathroom breaks** and clear communication for how bathroom stops will work, regardless of perceived identities of the team. Bathroom stress is common among many fieldworkers and not just LGBTQ+ individuals.

Navigating a Field Season

Personal safety is often on the mind of LGBTQ+ individuals, whether conducting fieldwork or not. Sometimes, safety recommendations can be in conflict with self-expression and identity acceptance. We've all been there! You belong in the field of natural resources, and progress is happening. Here we provide advice on navigating a field season as an LGBTQ+ person, compiled by LGBTQ+ individuals.

- It's okay to share your identity selectively. It can be a balancing act to keep yourself safe while maintaining your truth. Sometimes, "going the safe route" might mean conforming to preconceived notions about cis/heteronormativity. **This is completely okay.** You do not need to carry shame or guilt for keeping yourself safe in a potentially unsupportive or hostile environment.
- Find your **solidarity**. Whether it be with coworkers or other colleagues, having at least one on-the-job trusted person to share experiences with will help to alleviate feelings of isolation. But also...
- Keep in touch with **support systems**. Oftentimes, fieldwork occurs in small teams in rural locations. These areas may not always have LGBTQ+ community groups readily accessible. Keeping in touch with support systems and community back home will help to alleviate feelings of isolation.
- Be aware of **location-sharing apps**. Apps that share identity and location information, such as dating apps, may unintentionally 'out' you in certain settings.
- Do your **research** and **ask the right questions**. During the interview process, ask about lodging arrangements, travel locations, and safety plans. You should also find out what is known about local attitudes and laws of field locations, such as criminalization of LGBTQ+ identities, to make the most informed decision about accepting a position.
- **Communicate** with supervisors to find solutions. Remember, if you don't ask, the answer is always 'no.'
- Remember that **change happens overtime!** There will be times when there is low risk in proudly sharing your identity, and there will be times when selectively disclosing your identity feels like the safer option. As we all work towards increasing the visibility of LGBTQ+ people in forestry and natural resources, we will continue to increase the accessibility of fieldwork.

References and Further Resources

Coon et al 2022. *Best practices for LGBTQ+ inclusion during ecological fieldwork: Considering safety, cis/heteronormativity and structural barriers*. Journal of Applied Ecology.

Demery and Pipkin 2021. *Safe fieldwork strategies for at-risk individuals, their supervisors and institutions*. Nature Ecology & Evolution.

Forest Stewards Guild 2023. *Seeing the Forest for the Queers community meeting*.