



REWILDING EARTH

Rewilding Earth Podcast - Allison Jones

Tue, 8/11 4:50PM 34:13

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

beaver, agencies, utah, rewilding, wildlife, project, restoration, people, beaver dam, big, data, conservation, volunteers, scientists, land, frontlines, study, species, state, human

SPEAKERS

Jack Humphrey, Allison Jones - <https://rewilding.org/pod>



Jack Humphrey 00:15

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Allison Jones 01:45

The project has a lot of really cool studies and projects going on. And maybe the one that leaps to mind right away is our Wasatch wildlife launch. We currently are in about to

launch the third year of this study, which takes place in the central Wasatch Mountains covering about seven canyons mostly on the front side of the Wasatch range of Salt Lake City. And it's a trail camera study. And we have, you know, 100 and something, trail cameras. I think it's 120 this year or something like that. And we have volunteers, one for each camera, who are Han showing those cameras and putting them in their assigned spots, to gather as much information as we can, on the medium to large mammals, the ungulates, and all mammals predators that are moving through the Wasatch range, and each camera is moved twice during the summer. So there's three locations for each camp. So you can do the math, it's a lot of cameras taking a lot of motion triggered photos over the field season, which runs from, you know, May or June, depending on when the folks can get to their assigned site to the mid to late August. And we have billions of images that are being processed and sorted. And this is feeding into actually a PhD study for Austin green at the University of Utah conservation and ecology lab. And basically, what the study is aiming to do is to get the data that the, the planners and the land managers and wildlife managers needed yesterday in terms of the interaction of these species with the wildermann interface, where they're moving that pinch points, important movement corridors, a little bit on relativity. abundances And importantly, which features of the human landscape are affecting the distribution and abundance of these animals. For example, what is it about being closer to the wildermann interface when species X, Y or Z is suddenly not detected by our cameras? Is that human recreation? Is it the trails is it roads is it buildings or density of buildings, etc. All these layers are laid over the occupancy model basically, that Austin green is running. And all this data, the land managers, the Forest Service division of wildlife resources, the Cottonwood, Canyon transportation is process. All this data and the analyses resulting from this data are being funneled to these folks, decision makers, planners and agency people have to make important decisions about humans. Development and importantly, protection of habitat.



Jack Humphrey 05:05

Can you talk about anything that, like an example that's come of this data that if it hadn't existed, things might have gone the other way in terms of development decisions or anything else?



Allison Jones 05:17

Well, we're not quite there yet because the study is not quite done. The initial analyses are being passed on, you know, to the the planners and the folks that need the data, and it will be used soon. And I mentioned the little cottonwood Canyon travel plan, environmental impact statement. This is a really hot issue in the central Wasatch right

now. And how are they going to address the the fact that we're letting these canyons to death you know, here in the Wasatch, be recreation that's up there to ski areas that there was talk of linking ski areas. You know, over to other canyons, parking issues, traffic issues. What are the solutions that we'll be putting into place? Will it be, you know, tunnels? Will it be widening roads? Will it be gondolas? Will things be closed, things like that. So stay tuned that data will be super important in the next year for for this particular decision process in particular,



Jack Humphrey 06:29

as I've talked to more people that are doing this kind of work, you all kind of hang out in the same places. How is this really having a direct effect on policy in general,



Allison Jones 06:39

there's plenty of examples throughout the west where the agencies are really and I mean, the land and wildlife, state and federal management agencies, they're, they're really getting into this advanced technology. Right and using it to make better decisions for the land and, and habitat for wildlife. And so the the motion trigger trail cameras, that's just, you know, one example. Drones are coming into fashion, that's an amazing tool to gather so much data than more than we could have done on the ground in the past, for example. And the the trackers that they're putting on on animals, tiny little, you know, tags around the lakes of birds that only, you know, weigh a few grams and things like that. And I think there's plenty of examples where, you know, some agencies are embracing this technology to, to make better decisions on the ground. And, and I think it also depends kind of which species in which issues You're talking about I think that there's certain, you know, species and habitats that are easy, easier for the agencies to make kind of the, the right planning or management or conservation decision on things like institutions, you know, beavers fish in their habitat, when it comes to, you know, data that might be showing that, you know, wolves are moving to a certain area and need, you know, really important, you know, protections to let them travel then that's where the, you know, the policy might come more into play.



Jack Humphrey 08:41

You know, when you guys come in with this level of data and irrefutable photographic evidence and tracker data and drone stuff and everything else, it just makes it a lot harder than for people in on the agency side who might politically not want to do or make a decision in a certain direction in the direction of wildlife in protecting that, or restoration, I

mean, it just makes it really, really hard for them, doesn't it?



Allison Jones 09:06

Mm hmm. Oh, I totally agree. Yeah, especially with, again, some of those super rare and controversial species with a trail camera picks out the wolf for links where it was assumed they don't live anymore. You know, the agencies, you know, have to kind of sit up and take notice, especially if it's a federally protected species under the Endangered Species Act, you know, you can't refute a positive ID from the trail camera. Right. Right. But while GitHub project has a long history of, of putting citizen, citizen scientists to work on many of our projects, and it just enables us to collect, you know, 10 2050 times, you know, more data than we would be able to do just with our, you know, staff and a technician or two or an intern or two. It's remarkable there was such work lifewatch trail camera study would absolutely not be possible without our we have roughly 100 volunteers more actually working on that project.



Jack Humphrey 10:10

What's it like to organize an operation like that or a set or I imagine, while you tell it's got a whole bunch of overlapping and different things going on, what give us a sense of what it's like to organize all of that.



Allison Jones 10:23

It can get a little crazy. And we have six separate projects right now. And while these are projects that a US citizen science volunteers, and so basically we divide and conquer Well, I was on staff at while the top project, which was up until just this past January, whether I was the conservation biologist, or in my last six years the director, I was in charge of a couple of the citizen science projects as well. We also have two conservation biologists or ecologist on staff. So we, we, we did a that. So everyone's in charge of, you know, basically two or three projects.



11:14



Allison Jones 11:15

Our summer interns can be helpful and helping to manage our communication directors, the one that's in charge of communications with all these volunteers. So we're kind of a

well oiled machine, but you've, you've gotta be on top of your game. I mean, we had probably, you know, I want to say between 250 and 300 volunteers last year, in one way, shape or form working on something. Yeah, it was pretty crazy.



Jack Humphrey 11:44

So, in terms of like big plans, What is all this? What does all this play into on a on a, on a 3000 foot view of wild Utah project in terms of like restoration rewilding plans that you have proactively not to just I know you guys don't just sit and fight everything, although we need groups and people to do that to stay alert to things that are needing to be dealt with immediately. But how does all of this feed into a bigger larger plan for, you know, half Utah, kind of like the half Earth movement?



Allison Jones 12:19

Yeah, in a in a couple ways. And I think one example I'd like to really touch on is while the chair projects, stream and riparian restoration program, and basically, you know, we've we've done kind of wildland network designs, you know, for you Tom and for the heart of the West region in the northeast corner of the state, and so the Colorado Plateau and so we've you know, we've identified you know, the the core areas, but when it comes to the linkages or corridors between core areas, the riparian linkages are One of the most critical and here's some low hanging fruit in our state and throughout the West, because so many of our riparian corridors are degraded, as you know, for lots of reasons. One of the best restoration tools at our disposal is beaver reintroduction or re colonization, if you can foster or encourage natural recolonization of Beaver to help, you know repair those degraded streams and raise that water table, but also the use of the human made beaver dams the Beaver Dam analogs. And so while you type project is in year, five, four or five as a statewide effort to work with many partners and fellow scientists and states, wildlife and land management agencies sees to tackle in many of our watersheds and streams within those watersheds, that are, again the low hanging fruit that we know are degraded, and that we can, you know, bring the resources together to identify, you know, where we need to use what tools, you know, where it makes sense to try to encourage beaver recovery. We've got the top notch science came up at Utah State University, led by Joe Wheaton and his beaver recovery assessment tool. It's a it's a really cool a modeling exercise they did that shows all the perennial strains in Utah and basically which ones need beaver recovery the most based on their condition. And then while you type project we'll come in and do the the pre restoration Whether we're talking about actual beavers, or the Beaver Dam analogs, we'll do the pre restoration stream and riparian functional assessment, using that rapid stream that carry and assessment protocol, then we'll get the baseline data, then the restoration effort, for example, you know, the Beaver Dam analogues will

come in. And while the tub project will bring the citizen science volunteers to build those, and you know, with our various partners, division of wildlife resources was a big partner for us on doing these videos. And then we'll wait you know, a couple few years to see how the restoration action is doing in terms of recovering the stream and riparian area and then we'll come in again with the RSA protocol, again with our volunteers who've been trained in the protocol and will get the post restoration data. So it's proof of concept to show that whether it's the real thing beavers or these analogs that it's working, and this is just a great program, a great bang for your buck in terms of restoration, energy and dollars. And we had a lot of work to do in Utah that we're really excited that Utah's on board and the beaver bandwagon, the BDA bandwagon, and it's really exciting.



Jack Humphrey 16:32

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Allison Jones 17:16

Not all ranchers, irrigators, county commissioners, you know, people down in Garfield County, for example, they've not all come to be beaver lovers. And so while the division of wildlife resources I think would love to follow Joe Whelan's brat model and just plunk beavers down wherever Jones model, you know, shows red like really degraded and needing beavers you know, they have to kind of cool their jets and just make sure that people up and down stream and you know, your your gators and farmers and ranchers and the local community are cool with that and Some always the case and when you can kind of get the the same effect, you know in the restorative values and functions with the fake Beaver Dam just go ahead and do those they're cheap they're fun to build you bring in the volunteers and the neat thing is if there happens to be beaver anywhere in that watershed upstream or down they'll eventually you know find your Beaver Dam analogues and maybe settle in maybe if you fix them, redo them they'll probably thinking what were these humans thinking through them right and they'll maintain them. And hopefully by the time the beaver find them and move in, by that time that the community and the

ranchers, the reservoir owners and realized the good effects that these these structures are having on the watershed and that They're not quote unquote stealing water from downstream users. You can basically see with your own eyes that the water trickling in, more or less equals the water trickling out, and they can see the effects of that heightens that phase water table, creating more lush grasses and forbs for grazing cows, for example, the greenbelt extends, you know, wider away from the stream channel because of the raised water table. And the water is delivered downstream to the reservoirs longer because these big beaver dams, the ponds that we create, hold the water long all these great benefits. Hopefully by the time you know the beavers move in and start maintaining them. Then everyone's you know, cool with that because they want to get to the point where everyone wants these ponds. It's not just one or two to do restoration, right? You really kind of need to sew up that that Creek, so the And hopefully I've ever wanted those pawns to stick around, you know what I'm saying?



Jack Humphrey 20:06

Yeah, it's kind of hilarious and somewhat with a dash of sadness that they're cool with you building dams and not worried about you stealing water. But they think beavers somehow have these little, I mean, I just can't imagine what goes on in people's head sometimes. But whatever it takes, right. And it seems to be working.



Allison Jones 20:29

Yeah, here in Utah, a lot of little baby steps, you know, a lot of baby steps and just kind of, you know, working with the different partners and player as best you can. And sometimes just sort of like keeping your head down like, Hey, we're doing we're doing good things for the land and wildlife here. Like, keep your head down and keep doing it.



Jack Humphrey 20:52

Well, what are you so you're a perfect person to ask because you've had enough time on the ground. You in a particular area to probably answer this really well, which is you talk about baby steps, is it gonna have it? Has it had an effect on people that you've known for a long time landowners that you've known for a long time are known of is it? Does it have a cumulative effect?



Allison Jones 21:18

I think so. Again, you know, I'm mostly seeing this from, like, the agency standpoint, you

know, the division of wildlife resources as well then two years ago didn't even have Yeah, they didn't have a deeper conservation and management plan. And now they they do that, you know, you can I think there's a pretty good shot, you know, our fourth grade curriculum is good and, you know, ecology and environment, field trips and, you know, looking at things holistically and I can only hope you know, that the tides sort of turning a little bit on, you know, not only the beaver issue, but um Climate change, believe it or not, is still a matter of some debate here, especially with our oddly our legislature, you know, the value of, you know, public lands and an open space in our state of Utah, that's not always celebrated as it should be. But, you know, that tides turning as well because our, you know, a billion dollar recreation economy in the West. Utah's just smack in the middle of that and and people are starting to wake up to the fact that we've got to not nibble away at or, you know, sell off or give to the states or any crazy idea like that we need to continue to preserve and carefully manage, you know, these public lands because they're so critical to Utah's tourism and recreation economy. And if we can do that, you know, the conservation groups of the rewilding Institute and wireless network and the conservation organizations thinking really big can, you know be like, yes. And you know, we have to, you know, connect them to again, kind of baby steps Keep your head down. Yeah.



Jack Humphrey 23:17

Well, in so many ways I've always viewed Utah is one of the as the frontlines on public lands fights in so many ways. And it's always in the center of something. And one of the things that you don't get to see on social media updates or newspaper headlines is the feedback from people like you who worked so hard and have for so many years, the reaction to lands You were so diplomatic there but lands just being completely ripped, freshly put into protection and then ripped right back out of our hands or wildlife hands. Really. I mean, you could you could have gone a little harder on that if you wanted to, but I will. And and yeah, go Looks like as you see that that big huge amount of money that's spent the outdoor recreation is no joke in Utah i mean i don't know if you've ever seen a comparison study of other states but you have to be in the in the top five or 10 in western states money that you guys that that your wild places draw. So but but from the headlines and everything it looked like you were just another helpless state in federal policy just switching idea on Bureau of Land Management land and all that their ideology is just completely different from anything that's ever come before it. And what does a strong state like yours feel like when you live there? What was the backlash? Like or what is it ever like when people really make big threats toward big chunks of your public lands there?



Allison Jones 24:54

Oh, yeah. And I and I think that the the groups that are assuming To You know, reenact the original boundaries of the grand staircase and Bears Ears national monuments such as southern Utah wilderness Alliance and Utah chapter of the Sierra Club, etc. I think they're they're confident that the law is on their side that that what was done was illegal and it might need to, you know, wait for a hopeful new administration that will come in next year with With any luck. And so it seems to me and again, I'm not on the frontline of that fight noise wildlife project, but it seems to me that the environmental attorneys overseeing that are, are pretty confident. So they're just letting that work its way through and they're working on the other, more immediate, you know, brush fires, you know, Southern Utah wilderness Alliance is, you know, activated and deployed to fight for every unit. As the the Red Rock wilderness proposal that's in Congress, and when, you know, new oil and gas drilling is going to eat away at the boundaries of one of those units, Suez, they're, you know fighting that. So I think the really big picture, things like you're talking about with those two monuments that's sort of being just, it's going that's churning through the legal process. And other groups are working on, you know, some other really big issues regarding the Oh, sage grouse conservation plans that have been just a, you know, a ping pong ball and that's at the national level across the wide range of the sage grouse. That's been a real mess. You know, BLM grazing management. And, yeah, there's, there's so many big issues that our partner organizations are are working on right now. And it's certainly Not not just us. Hmm.



Jack Humphrey 27:02

One thing I always worry about is scientists mental health in a time when when you guys aren't appreciated it like you have ever been in the past. And that's going to go away. We'll have another administration, hopefully, we'll go back to listening to scientists again. But on a big level on the big picture, it just feels like everybody's gotten thrown under the bus. If you have any kind of a degree or experience or formerly were the person to ask about conservation issues, and now you're being passed up for a politician or somebody a stakeholder with an obvious beef against conservation and everything. How has that been for for you guys in terms of is it that way on the ground? Is it that bad on the ground? Or are there people in agencies that are just kind of keeping their heads down agreeing with you, but trying to keep their jobs to



Allison Jones 27:56

Yes, and I I very much and you know, I can't really speak from the perspective of the career, you know, professional agency, you know, biologists and ecologists right now. And

I feel for them, they are in a tough spot that you kind of hit the nail on the head here in Utah. With some of these. I mean, there are some great scientists and biologists in these federal agencies, and they, it does feel like they're kind of, you know, keeping their head down and they're reaching out actually, more than before, to groups like, while you type projects, who can, you know, bring resources, we can bring an army of citizen scientists, these agencies are having their budgets slashed. You know, the US Fish and Wildlife Service field office when someone quits or leaves there's there's never money to rehire. Everyone's doing two or three people's jobs. It's It's awful. And so we are. I'm finding that these, you know, career professionals here in Utah are reaching out for collaborative partnerships more than before, and everyone's kind of keeping their head down. So it's a really tough time for those agency scientists right now. I really do feel for them.



Jack Humphrey 29:24

That's interesting. I wonder if something will happen in the future, that we'll be able to get a little bit of space in perspective, looking back at this and find that they pushed people who were formerly more staunchly very conservative in the agency wanting to protect their jobs and everything into the arms of the conservation movement.



Allison Jones 29:44

Yeah, I hope. I hope so. But in the meantime, the, you know, the the frontline defense environmental groups, then, you know, suing agencies right and left as they said, when the agency abandons sound policy breaks the law or So there is no rules or regulations out the window is, you know, unfortunately been seeing all of that. And so yeah, I mean groups like us that are left in the middle, you know, are looking for opportunities for partnering despite



30:17

all that.



Jack Humphrey 30:18

So what's next for you?



Allison Jones 30:20

Well, it's just been a few months and I'm, I'm still involved in while the top project they're

killing the bear this extraordinary. So I'm on the you know, website and you can still reach me at my while detail project.org email, and there's fear for, you know, manuscripts publications from various projects I'm wrapping up and submitting right now. We have a big long term study at the Kennecott copper mining and actually that's looking at the long term interaction between these sagebrush treatments and the return of livestock grazing, some still kind of hunting that project that'll that's a 20 year project will be a lot of publications. Last month, I spent two or three weeks intensely at our legislature, first fighting and then working to fix a pretty bad wildlife Bill davidsonville bill was going to basically call on the division of wildlife to have to put bluntly, kill a lot more predators in the deer hunting units that are below objective. So we worked with scientists at USU and kind of Ori colleges and specific legislators to soften some language in there to bring it more in line with what the division of wildlife already does regards to managing predators. So we We didn't totally castrator the straight bill, but we definitely went a long way towards that. So, we are basically proclaiming, you know, sort of a small victory on that. And with our legislature, it's, it's often about kind of damage control. And again, it's unfortunate that our legislature takes it upon itself to tell division of wildlife resources, staffed by very capable biologists on how to do their job and they don't do a good job telling our wildlife agency to do their job in my opinion. So that's something I wouldn't have been able to really jump in with both feet at at wildlife project we really, you know, get involved at the the hill like that, but but now I can. Well, I can't wait to see



Jack Humphrey 32:56

what other adventures you get into as you transition into this new found freedom and and a ability to move and play in places that you weren't before and, and also including rewilding Leadership Council. So I can't wait to see what we all do together. And I want to thank you so much for being on the show today. I know you're super busy. So thank you so much for being on rewilding earth.



Allison Jones 33:23

And thank you, jack. It's my pleasure. Let's do it again Wednesday.



Jack Humphrey 33:29

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