

Patrick Shults ([00:13](#)):

Welcome to the Forest Over Story podcast. This podcast explores forest stewardship in the Pacific Northwest, helping landowners and professionals gain new insights and information in the field of forest management. The forest over story is a product of the Washington State University Extension Forestry Program, and it's supported by the Washington Department of Natural Resources and the Society of American Foresters. All right, well, welcome back to the Forest Overstory. I'm your host, Patrick Schultz, extension forester with Washington State University. I'm excited to be back in the interview chair after taking a little break. I hope you all are doing well. Getting ready to shake off the winter. Things will be green and growing here before you know it, which I know keeps this crowd particularly busy. Before we get to our guest today, I want to quickly remind folks, and I know I haven't done this in a while, but there is a survey on our website that you can take to tell us how we're doing on the podcast.

([01:11](#)):

We want to know that the podcast is helpful to people, and since this is a one-way medium that can be a little tricky. So I really encourage you to go to forestry.wsu.edu/forest-overstory, and at the top of the page, you'll find a link to an anonymous, very short survey to give us your feedback. You can even suggest future topics to cover and other episodes. And if I do something crazy on Mike or something that drives you crazy, that's your chance to let me know too. So I really encourage you to fill that out. All right, with that out of the way, I want to introduce our very exciting guest. She works for the Washington Department of Natural Resources as an environmental justice planner, and we're going to be discussing that very topic with her. So Ashley Bina is with us today. How are you doing, Ashley?

Ashley Blazina ([02:06](#)):

Great. Yeah, glad to be here, Patrick. Thanks for having me.

Patrick Shults ([02:10](#)):

This is a long time coming. I think I say that for every guest, but it's always genuine because when we started this podcast, we had a hundred people that we really knew would make for good interviews, and you were on that list as soon as I heard about you getting in this role. Before we get into your role, I wonder if we could start just by defining environmental justice. It occurs to me that not everybody's probably familiar with this topic.

Ashley Blazina ([02:42](#)):

Yeah, no, that's great. I think that's a great place to start. And it's interesting just because my role is looking at the intersection of environmental justice and forest resilience, and so both of those terms are kind of nebulous at times. And so yeah, happy to share what that is, and I'll probably just share what the definition is straight from the Heal Act, which is the Healthy Environments for All Act, which passed in our state in 2021. I'll get into that a little bit later, but I'll just take that direct definition. So environmental justice means that fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, rules and policies, environmental justice includes addressing disproportionate and environmental health impacts and all laws, rules and policies with environmental impacts by prioritizing vulnerable populations and overburdened communities and the equitable distribution of resources and benefits and eliminating harms associated.

Patrick Shults ([03:51](#)):

All right, good. I mean, that bit of a mouthful I think. Yeah, I think it clears it up. Clears up the question for sure. I'm surprised you haven't memorized that yet. That's funny. Yeah, no, I appreciate that. I do. I think not everyone is familiar with the concept of environmental justice, which we may just shorthand as

EJ for this conversation. That's what I'm doing in some of my notes, but it's something that's really important, like you said, compensating in some of these efforts around forest resilience for vulnerable populations that are vulnerable as a result of lots of different actions over the course of the last few centuries. And we can dig into that, but I'm really curious, what is your position with the DNR and what's the scope of that?

Ashley Blazina ([04:44](#)):

Yeah, sure. So I work in the Forest Resilience Division, which is a little bit different from some of the other divisions at Department of Natural Resources just because we focus on all land ownerships that encompass forests and associated ecosystems to forests across the state. So we look at federal lands, private lands, tribal lands, and really thinking about what are the different challenges, opportunities for looking at how to manage all these lands more resiliently sustainably into the future. So I work on a team of four planners that are really trying to figure out taking different data science and looking at different analyses and then thinking about what are all the cultural, social, political facets of the areas where these forests reside in our state, and then what are really the opportunities that exist, how might we fill different gaps that exist in these different efforts? And so my topical focus is environmental justice, and so looking at who historically are the folks who have been underrepresented in a lot of these spaces who haven't been at the table, so to speak, when we're thinking about management of forests, what's really come to the forefront in terms of stewardship and what are really the values that we're focusing on for our forests.

([06:21](#)):

And so my job is really to figure out, to learn and listen and really be an advocate for a lot of the different populations who have historically been underrepresented or aren't even represented now in a lot of these spaces.

Patrick Shults ([06:41](#)):

That's super exciting that that position exists, and it is kind of a newer position. Are you the first one in this role?

Ashley Blazina ([06:48](#)):

I am, yeah. Yeah. So we're a team of five planners. We have four that are kind of spread across the state, and the Environmental Justice planner position came up as part of the Heal Act, which is where that definition that I share that was kind of long-winded came from. And so I think the first resilience division after the Heal Act passed in 2021, they decided that a position focused around really implementing the principles of the healthy environments for all act was important. And so this position came up in winter of 2022.

Patrick Shults ([07:31](#)):

Awesome. And I like what you said about the intersection of forest health or I guess forest resilience a broader term and environmental justice. To me, I think there are really significant opportunities there and mutually beneficial opportunities. I think sometimes it's really easy to get caught in the trap of, and I think we've touched on this in previous episodes for listeners, but of when we think about forest resilience or forest restoration in particular, imagining a time when the forests were pretty much untouched and pristine, and we know that that didn't really ever exist and humans have always been a part of it. Exactly. And here we have an opportunity to engage humans in forest resilience and in particular engage, as you said, vulnerable communities, communities that have been, I guess disparaged or separated from environmental resources in various ways, which we'll get into. So I like the way you put that and the intersection being really important.

Ashley Blazina ([08:47](#)):

Yeah, it is a space. I feel like that, and thank you for saying that. I feel like it is a space that really important to think about where are those overlapping, but also it's really a space that is, I think we're getting a better and better purview of how wide it really is that intersection of all the different ways and relationships that people have with the forests. So

Patrick Shults ([09:17](#)):

It's a

Ashley Blazina ([09:17](#)):

Very cool space to work.

Patrick Shults ([09:19](#)):

Yeah, it must be really rewarding. I bet. So I know some of, and you'll have to fill me in on the timeline because I'm aware of the environmental justice implementation plan that came out of the DNR and was that something that, well, I know obviously your role is, as you said, a result of the Heal Act, but how did the plan fit into that? Was the plan before your role, did it help put up this position to be opened? And can you tell us more about what the plans function is?

Ashley Blazina ([09:59](#)):

Sure, yeah. So the implementation plan is actually part of the Heal Act as well. And so one of the things that the Heal Act asks seven different state agencies, one of those being the Department of Natural Resources, was to really develop a more formal plan of how environmental justice is going to be part of agency work. And so our agency made a strategic plan and agency-wide implementation plan. And our division's implementation plan is really looking at how do we fit into that overarching plan and what are the specific actions that we are committing to for our agency and our work around environmental justice. And so this is something that I started to work on pretty quickly after coming into the role in February. And the implementation plan was launched in June of 2023, so it's a little over a half a year old at this point, so still pretty young, but was a result of a lot of different time just spending, listening to different folks throughout the state, learning about what are some of the different challenges, what are some of the different inequities that are still very present in our state, and what are the ways are the different roles, I guess that our division, the Forest Resilience Division, can really work to help move the dial on some of these and reduce some of those burdens and really create more accessible inclusive forests and forest management kind of processes as well.

([12:02](#)):

So yeah, this plan, we basically split it up into three different sections, and I'll provide a link to everyone in the notes for this episode. But the first one was really defining that intersection in a lot more detail of where environmental justice and forest resilience meets and how we're thinking about that for our state and how we're really defining forest resilience. The second one is the second section of the plan outlines our process because going through it, we really found that it's a lot of equity and environmental justice work is looking at what are the actual processes, the journey of how you get to certain decisions that really paint a picture and show how well a process was in terms of being inclusive or adaptive or open to all the parties that it needed. And so documenting that felt like a really important first step and one that we could utilize in the future to say, Hey, even how we did our implementation plan could have improved, and here's the areas that were really documenting where those improvements could occur.

([13:28](#)):

And knowing that this is going to be an iterative process, and this document itself is very much a living breathing document. And so the second section was kind of our first attempt to start to really document these efforts in a more concrete way. The third section is our actual goals for our division, and we have it split up into five different specific goals, and we have 58 associated actions. So each goal has between nine and I think 15 different actions tied to it. And each of those also includes some examples of how we're really working on each of those goals in ways now, but also really provides a framework for the ways that we want to grow, the ways that we know that we need to grow in our division and in our work to make it more inclusive and environmentally just. So yeah, I could go a little bit more into some of the different goals and what those are, or I dunno if that's a good place to stop in terms of an overview.

Patrick Shults ([14:43](#)):

Well, no, I think that's awesome. And I wonder if you could give us just a little slice because I'm wondering, in the process of writing a plan like that, and I'll use this opportunity to call out our forest owners that write stewardship plans for their forests and stuff like that. Maybe this is applicable example, but in the process of planning and doing anything, you discover a lot and I think you discover a lot about the landscape that you're working with, but you also discover a lot about how you are set up in the case of the DNR, like you said, how is our approach going to function at tackling this thing? And I wonder if anything came out during the writing of the plan that really called to specific priorities. I know that's a really big question, but if there was anything that shot out as a really good example of, oh, this is something we really need to work on.

Ashley Blazina ([15:46](#)):

Yeah. Oh man, that's hard to call them all. I feel like they're all really important. I think one of the big ones that I feel like our fifth goal was really focused internally on just acknowledging that we really needed to dedicate time and resources to thinking about our own work practices, policies and requirements, and thinking about how homogenous forestry has been as a field and really thinking about how can we start to really learn and listen and honestly, I mean kind of work ourselves out of our comfort zones to be better about learning and listening and understanding the different needs and wants from Washingtonians. So yeah, I think that is a huge one. But I think another really big goal is that goal four is really looking at the fact that a lot of local communities have this deep localized knowledge. And I think a lot of times in rural spaces, one of the big EJ issues that we've heard is that this management and planning of forested areas is done outside and without a lot of input from these communities. And so how are there ways to support more local and community led efforts around these forest resilience projects and plans?

([17:45](#)):

But yeah, I mean there's so many a huge need for access of different materials in terms of what are some of the different opportunities for different programs and services that different forest landowners and just different communities can utilize. And so knowing that there's 150 different languages, for example in Washington that are spoken, and I think it's 27 counties have at least 5% of their population speaks a language other than English at home. And so the need to just translate a lot of these materials is so big and thinking about how are we making different trainings, education opportunities, workshops more tangible, more inclusive for folks? But the first goal was really the biggest intersection that we saw was really working more and acknowledging tribal history of land management and really uplifting and thinking about how are we helping to support indigenous led efforts to bring up opportunities for things like co stewardship and co-management of different forested and forest spaces. That seemed like the biggest intersection that really came to the forefront of our goals. And so I think that is something that just requires a lot of listening and learning since there are 29 different sovereign nations in the state, and so there's still so much to listen and learn.

Patrick Shults ([19:49](#)):

Yeah, no, I think that that makes sense. And starting from a place of listening I think is a really natural place to start when you consider a long history of not listening. So I'm really excited to see where this goes. And you brought up tribes, and I think that's obviously probably a really good example of an environmental justice issue and how many of the tribes have been sort of disenfranchised from the lands that they previously managed. And that's obviously a big hairy thing, and we're not going to solve it here today, obviously. But I wonder too, because I was reading through the report, it was really interesting and it said that both Seattle and Portland, these areas rank among the top metropolitan areas for urban indigenous populations. It occurred to me, well, environmental justice looks really different in rural versus urban environments, and that's not just for tribes, that's for all kinds of communities. And so from your perspective in this position, how does that function with the plan and what you plan to do?

Ashley Blazina (21:23):

Yeah, so I guess thinking about it from a broader perspective, I think urban access is probably the biggest one is just that lack of urban green spaces. That's one of the historic tenants I guess of thinking about or examples I would say of environmental justice is that certain communities and usually based on race or socioeconomic status have less access to green or healthy spaces in their communities and are more likely to be spaces where large industrial pollutants are more concentrated typically. And so in terms of some of the additional kind of challenges around that, I mean there's a lot of health effects.

(22:26):

There's just lower value for properties if folks do own their properties in those areas. There's heat islands. I mean, in terms of some of the specifics, there's often just fewer opportunities to really play outside or even be outside in a safe and healthy way. And so I guess some of the ways that I've seen that really be taken back into the hands of communities, I think there's been a lot of, well, I wouldn't say a lot, but I've seen a growing amount of folks kind of flip the power dynamic and give communities the driver's seat in terms of where are these different green spaces that they really want to prioritize? So having community meetings that say, these are the green spaces that we've identified as a city as potential areas for restoration, which are the ones that are actually being used by you or which ones are the ones that you find to be ones that you go to? And what are the features that are really important to restore or to even start to include in some of these areas?

(24:04):

I think it's really working with communities on what are some of the different types of trees that they want to see there, and not necessarily just doing tree a tree planting, but thinking about how are you really incorporating the community's voices from the get go? And that just giving communities more of that ownership and a larger ability and more of a voice in this space since it is their space that on the whole just feels like it's the most effective. I feel like there's a lot more efforts around things like food forest too, and so making outdoor spaces tangible and something and connecting them to something that is familiar as well. So something like food is a really great way to connect populations who maybe don't have a large connection to green spaces doing something like food or other features that are important. It could be for urban indigenous populations, spaces that are historic salmon runs, really focusing restoration efforts on salmon or looking at what are some of the first foods that are important, and it might not be ones that are necessarily native to here, but it might be ones that they still want to see.

(25:45):

And so it's thinking about where are those opportunities and what are the different limitations of the landscape or what works the landscape? And finding where those really collide and work well together I feel like are kind of the ways that I've seen it be more effective in urban populations. For urban indigenous populations. I feel like there's just a lot of challenges, especially with funding and because so often different grants and opportunities are for federally recognized sovereign nations. And so when indigenous individuals and communities aren't necessarily part of a recognized, a federally recognized

tribal nation, then a lot of times they don't qualify for those funds. And so it can be really difficult to compete to garner and to really create a community that is working around some of these challenges. But I think there are some really amazing efforts there are underway. So the Elib Telecom Land Trust is one particular example of urban indigenous efforts, and they're really focused on building land acquisitions for urban indigenous populations and looking at how these properties can be collectively managed and stewarded and what are some of the different opportunities there in terms of restoration, but then also thinking about they also want to build additional partnerships with different land managers thinking about access and really having the ability to practice and be part of some of different cultural activities that they might not have had access to their entire lives or for decades.

(28:07):

And just thinking about how to create some of those opportunities off land that is outside of their ownership. So yeah, there's a lot, it's ripe for opportunity, but I think at the end of the day it's all about just voice and time and giving the opportunity to really have that ownership and a prime seat at the table.

Patrick Shults (28:44):

Yeah, I think that was really well put and appreciate the examples. I couldn't agree more, and not that I'm really myself in a position to be giving advice on this, I'm here to learn, but I think that's absolutely right. The role is maybe more about empowering than the traditional sort of top down, like you said, let's go in and plant some trees. Well, what if that community doesn't want those trees or doesn't want trees in that particular area?

(29:20):

And there's a lot of really good hearted, good efforts out there that have made those mistakes in the past. And it was really interesting. I remember hearing a talk from someone from Michigan State University, my alma mater on urban tree, and what happens to them, those trees after you plant them if you don't do this sort of bottom up approach. And a lot of times they fail and sometimes they get ripped out because you plant a tree in someone's yard. And one of the reasons they ask communities is Why don't you want these trees is, well, they cost a lot to maintain sometimes. And just little things like that you have to be really aware of. And like you said, just taking that listening approach and that empowerment approach seems to me, I think it seems like a very effective way of going at it. There's also an example you mentioned before of at a policy scale sort of supporting indigenous land management and Pierce County. Yes. I wonder if you could tell us a little bit more about that.

Ashley Blazina (30:37):

Yeah, I think this is, and it's actually the city of Tacoma, I think I might've misquoted when I spoke to you about it last time, but the city of Tacoma, I think it's the first city in the nation that put this policy in place. So I feel like we should all be proud of our state for this, which is pretty great. But the city of Tacoma formally changed their surplus land policy and now they give the Puyallup tribe of Indians, which is a traditional land managers of where the city of Tacoma currently is the first right of refusal for these lands. And so that basically means that any surplus property that the city has is offered first to the Puyallup tribe before it's opened up to any other potential buyers. And this is kind of huge in terms of its symbology because as some folks might be aware that a lot of the reservation land when it was being split up for different family allotments, the remaining tribal lands were then considered surplus by the US government.

(31:50):

So then to be flipping this back and saying, no, this land, this surplus land, this is going first two back to the native population, this is where it needs to go, is symbolic. I also think though, that this is just the first step. There could be other land policies beyond just surplus land policies that include this, but it is just really encouraging and great that this is definitely a step in the right direction of how we're really formally

acknowledging land management, land stewardship, and really prioritizing that driver's seat for our indigenous populations in Washington. I have heard that the Pierce County Health Department is also thinking about adding this to their surplus land policy, and so hopefully this is a step in the right direction for other agencies, for other jurisdictions to make similar policies. I think it's a really great step and we should be proud of it for our state.

Patrick Shults ([33:09](#)):

Yeah, I agree. And I was just going to ask if, I know it's early, but if anyone was sort of following suit, so it's great to hear that the health department may be considering it and maybe, yeah, other cities, other municipalities will consider it counties, things like that. And there is a lot of surplus land out there,

Ashley Blazina ([33:31](#)):

So

Patrick Shults ([33:31](#)):

It's a really interesting model. I wonder because closing it on almost time, not quite, but there is something else, another topic I really wanted to touch on, which is workforce development.

([33:49](#)):

And I know that this is important to environmental justice as a whole, but also it's important to you. When we spoke before, and you mentioned earlier how forestry is a homogenous workforce, and you're absolutely right. I mean foresters, most of them look like me, maybe a little older usually, but I'll get there. White male, I mean, it's very much dominated by white men in particular. And I'm curious what kind of efforts are there to diversify the workforce development? I think it's a really important thing to be doing, and I'm familiar with some efforts, but I'm just curious how it fits into the plan.

Ashley Blazina ([34:40](#)):

So in terms of workforce development, I was relooking up before we spoke, just a few facts that I learned after our agency did a little review of basically who makes up DNR right now. And out of 40 of the state agencies, we were 35th for veterans, 36th out of 40 for folks with disabilities, 39th for L-G-B-T-Q, and we were dead last for racial diversity. And so that's just to give a brief picture of how modernist DNR really is and thinking about what are some of the bottlenecks. I've talked with a few different folks about this, and I think one of the things is that the forest still has some very negative connotations for a lot of groups. One example is that the woods were where a lot of really bad things happened to a lot of African-American people. If we think about the practice of lynching that is only a few decades old, and that is still tied to trees and forests and so many groups still don't necessarily feel safe in the woods.

([36:04](#)):

And so it isn't a space that feels inclusive yet. And so working in that field can feel scary. I've heard from, well, I'll just share one very poignant example of I heard from one tribal member who told me that natural resources a very hard field for indigenous individuals to work in. And I think the fact that indigenous knowledge has just been pushed to the side in terms of forest management decisions, forest stewardship for the past few centuries can make a lot of indigenous individuals just feel disempowered and not respected in the field. And so that can prompt them to choose a different career path for sure. And so I think one of the biggest things that I think can really help is just making spaces more inclusive, making outdoor spaces more inclusive. And so one example is having interpretive signs that acknowledge things like indigenous names of places and different plants and features. And so really, really acknowledging different histories of spaces, both the good and the bad, not necessarily redacting historic facts, but then also really including some of the cultural touchstones of those spaces.

[\(37:47\)](#):

What are the past human presences and current human presences of these landscapes? Kind of breaking apart that pristine landscape idea of a lot of our forests, but including signs in other languages. So including them in Spanish. I don't know if you visited the Lighthouse for the Blind in Seattle, but they have this amazing sensory garden that includes signage in braille, and then it also includes a forest walk that has things like these plants that have great textures and amazing fragrances or that even have edible pieces to them. And so thinking about are there different ways that folks can start to interact? And I guess going back to of a food forest, are there ways to make these spaces more familiar or tie them to things that are more familiar and make them feel more welcoming? And I think that's one of the biggest things I is really thinking about.

[\(38:53\)](#):

How are people, what are some of the preconceived feelings, emotions that people are bringing into a forest? And then how can those potentially be removed or replaced with feelings of safe feeling safe or welcomed and included. I think another really big thing is that our workforce, I feel like has largely kind of focused on certain steps of how to acquire skill sets. So it's like you get your forestry degree and then you start working in the woods after that, or it seems like there's a few different kind of solidified pathways of how to get into natural resources. And so I think it's also thinking about how are we really acknowledging different skill sets, maybe more formally figuring out ways to certify how people can have ways to showcase their skill sets and the different ways that they can come about these different skills. And also really tying that to outreach and talking about how different skill sets can really be transferable or what are different ways that skills could be utilized in natural resources. And so creating or thinking about what are those different opportunities, ways to tie folks, again, making those connections. But I think another really big one is just that outreach and engagement at a younger age with a way wider diversity of students making those connections and really creating those opportunities to connect with our forests and with our green spaces and thinking about what are the different ways people can connect with those green spaces.

[\(41:07\)](#):

I guess I'll just do a quick plug. Our youth education and outreach program manager just created our new strategic plan for that. And a lot of the efforts around that are thinking about how are we working with different educators who are serving a diversity of different students to think about what are different ways that we can incorporate natural resources, different topics around natural resources into classrooms, what are some different ways that would really resonate with their students when we talk about natural resources and different opportunities in our field? But then really thinking about what are the different experiential learning opportunities? For example, students who have socioeconomic challenges or don't have as much access to different things like outdoor equipment. I talked to a rural community member who said that they wanted to take a lot of students out for a hike for a field day in the woods, and a lot of their students didn't even have shoes that didn't have holes in them.

[\(42:34\)](#):

And so thinking about are there ways that we could have almost a gear garage for students to be both more comfortable and also feel prepared to be in the woods and feel like this is a space that they have the right tools to approach it with too. And so I think it's just thinking about some of those pieces of what are the things that maybe are being overlooked or missed, but what are the little things that are going to make students, but also just everyone in Washington a little bit more comfortable, feel more at home in these spaces? And then I think that's really where more robust conversations and discussions about stewardship and management and what that really looks like for everybody being included fully in these conversations is really going to start to happen on a full scale.

Patrick Shults [\(43:41\)](#):

I have to say hearing your response to that, I am very certain you're the right person for this job, and you just described such a multifaceted approach to the issue. And I think that's what it requires. I mean, there's four or five different very actionable items in there that could help solve a problem. And I think it is a big problem that the forestry workforce isn't diverse. If I can be super cringey for a second, I'll give a cheesy example, but forests are more resilient when they're diverse, and we should be absolutely taking that lesson. And especially like you said, what, yeah, we need more indigenous perspective in the forestry workforce. We need more Latinx, African American. We need all of these perspectives in land management. But you're right though, it's really important. I think you touched on something that not a lot of people would be aware of. It's very easy for some of us who grew up escaping into the woods, that was our safe place.

(44:57):

It's not the case for everybody. And it requires a very systematic and thoughtful approach to make them welcome spaces. And I think some of the stuff you've described is really excellent and can do a lot to make progress on that. And I wonder too, just kind of putting my extension hat on, is there a space there forest us donors to support that? Because like you said, it could be something as simple as a shed full of boots that people can use when they need to and other tools. And I am sure if you put the call out, there'd be a number of forest owners that would say, Hey, come use my property. We've got extra boots, we've got extra stuff. And just something to think about. Not to put you on the spot because you'll probably get an inbox full of requests if we opened you up to that, but it'd be interesting to think about a role for forest owners in there.

Ashley Blazina (46:02):

And I just wanted to go back. I don't think that was cringey at all, Patrick. I think that's a great analogy and a perfect, yeah, we need diversity for resiliency in our forests in our communities too. That's the only way to grow.

Patrick Shults (46:17):

Appreciate that.

Ashley Blazina (46:18):

Yeah,

(46:22):

But I do, I mean, I think it's like, yes, things like gear, if that is something that folks are willing to share, I think that is just a great opportunity. Speaking of Latinx forest workers, I've been talking with a few different representatives of Latinx forest workers, and I think a big need in our state is just space to potentially learn and have trainings and learn about different forestry practices. And so I think if small forest landowners are open to having a small space on their property to do some experimentation or to host a training, I think a lot of groups would be really excited about that. I think it's also things like just learning about some of the different environmental justice issues. I think that's one of the biggest things is just kind of thinking about what are they in our interstate. Easiest thing that I've done, I think, and it provides a lot of good food for thought is I just created a Google alert. So going into Google and making an alert of environmental justice Washington state, and every day you'll get different news on what are some of the different EJ issues that a lot of times do have ties to forests. And in our work.

(48:01):

I think it's also potentially if there are any forest owners who are interested in potentially being a space that is supporting indigenous food forest or first foods, that is also something that I think a lot of different indigenous individuals are interested in. Are there spaces where they would be welcome to potentially

come spaces to potentially harvest or work or just educate tribal youth? I think there is a dire need of those spaces as well. And so there's so many things. I think it could be opening up spaces. It could be thinking about how to incorporate traditional management into spaces. It could be just taking time to listen and learn from different communities that may be neighbor your own and learning about what are some of their concerns or challenges and how might they be approaching forests now. And I guess I'll say that if folks who are listening have any good ideas, I'm all ears and know that I am very much always a learner and always willing to listen. So happy to learn from anyone and take the time to chat with anyone that wants to

Patrick Shults ([49:43](#)):

Another reason you're the right person for the job and we'll put your email up and I'm sure you'll get a flood, especially what you said. I know so many forest owners that would be just elated to support tribal learning or tribal harvesting on their property. I'm sure there would be opportunities for that when the time comes. But I like what you said too about just kind of starting with awareness. I think sometimes something like environmental justice can just be, it feels like such a big, heavy, hairy thing, and it is. It's complex, but if people are just kind of learn about the issues and are aware of what's going on, you might find that you're in a position where you can help throughout your daily life, even sometimes in ways you didn't think. So I think that's a really great way to start. And you kind nailed my final question, which was to say, because we always like to end with an action item of how can people support this? And I think you covered that pretty well, but I wonder if you could finish maybe by telling folks how they can stay up to date on your work and the DNRs work around this. Maybe there's not a list server or anything set up yet, but if there's any way for them to follow it, I'm sure they'd be interested.

Ashley Blazina ([51:13](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. Well, so our plans for our environmental justice implementation plan is that we're hoping to actually include it as part of our State Force action plan. And so that's something that we're planning to do in our next iteration of that plan, so in 2025. So that will include updates of what we, we've made progress on in terms of our different actions and goals. We also have a monthly newsletter. I'll see about if that is something that we could extend to beyond our internal division, but if folks are interested in some of those, I'm happy to share different trainings, workshops, different opportunities there. And that's kind of part of our work in terms of meeting our goal five, which is really that internal learning and listening. So happy to extend that if it makes sense to other forest landowners or just folks who are interested.

Patrick Shults ([52:21](#)):

And I could see how that could be especially relevant to, we have a pretty large professional audience too, of foresters and technical assistance provider, people that work in natural resources and being trained on how to diversify their workforce would probably be helpful too.

Ashley Blazina ([52:41](#)):

Great. Okay.

Patrick Shults ([52:41](#)):

Well, like I said, I'll put your email in the link so you can get all sorts of requests, hopefully. Great. Well, at time, I just wanted to thank you again, Ashley, for joining me. This was a lot of fun. It was great.

Ashley Blazina ([52:58](#)):

Yeah,

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Patrick Shults ([52:59](#)):

And I hope we can have you back again to check in on what's going on in the state, but I'm really excited about some of the stuff you mentioned to see where it goes. All right. Well, with that, I think we're going to close out and we will see you back next month at that point, hopefully, well, inside of spring, things will be blooming and the rain will be gone. You can quote me on that.