REWIND: Billionaire Wilderness

https://www.climateone.org/audio/rewind-billionaire-wilderness
Recorded on April 16, 2021

Greg Dalton: This is Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton.

The wide open spaces of the American West loom large in our country's mythology. But that romantic narrative has always left something out.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker: …the virgin wilderness, a place that was unpeopled, this place is where only animals roamed…But the reality of that is that native people have always inhabited these spaces.

Greg Dalton: One percenters have contributed generously to preserve America's wilderness, going back to the founding of our National Parks system. But leveraging wealth and privilege for access to nature glosses over the human cost.

Justin Farrell: The idea of …giving your time and philanthropy to protect nature is through this elite sort of white lens that can be based on, you know, this romanticized view of nature. And a nature that for example for Yellowstone had to remove certain people to create that Eden.

Greg Dalton: Climate One's empowering conversations feature all aspects of the climate emergency: the individual and the systemic, the exciting and the scary, people who are in power and people who are disempowered.

Greg Dalton: Today: Revisiting [the idea of] " Billionaire wilderness." That's up next on Climate One.

Greg Dalton: How much is access to so-called wilderness tied to wealth?

For many of us, the story of the American wilderness begins when Europeans arrived on these shores, and began conquering it. What often gets written out, is the history and culture of those native societies who were here to begin with - and whose relationship to this land is very different.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker: Because when you see the natural world and all the things in it as relations, as relatives, you are then responsible to them.

Greg Dalton: Dina Gilio-Whitaker [DEE-nah JIH-lee-oh WIH-tah-kur] is a lecturer of American Indian Studies at California State University San Marcos.

Land that once belonged to Indigenous peoples has been carved up and parceled out, some of it in preserves like national parks. For some people, being at one with nature could now mean flying there in a private jet.

In Justin Farrell's book, "Billionaire Wilderness," the Yale professor describes wealthy landowners in expensive cowboy boots, swaggering through the saloons of Jackson Hole, Wyoming and congratulating each other on their environmental stewardship and philanthropy.

Justin Farrell: And the money…most of it is going to environmental and arts organizations who

have tens of millions of dollars in the coffers. Meanwhile the people who work for the wealthy who are there to enjoy this idea of nature are struggling working two to three jobs. [:16]

Greg Dalton: For some, access to the outdoors is becoming a luxury, not a right.

Diane Regas: A hundred million people in this country, and that's 28 million kids, do not have a park close to home. Do not have a green space close to home that they can access. We're actually about closing that gap. [:12]

Greg Dalton: That's Diane Regas [REE-gahs], president and CEO of The Trust for Public Land. On today's program, we'll talk about the history of the American outdoors, the intersection between public and private land interests, and how to make experiencing nature more sustainable and inclusive for all.

We start by exploring the myths and realities of the American west. As Dina Gilio-Whitaker points out, there's more to the story than most of us have heard, or care to remember.

PROGRAM PART 1

Dina Gilio-Whitaker: We often hear this phrase that the National Parks are America's greatest idea or something to that effect. And it always begins this narrative begins with this sort of common sense understanding about the wilderness as, you know, the virgin wilderness, a place that was unpeopled, this place is where only animals roamed and you know, maybe there were Indians there at one time but they were like the animals and they're roaming around on the land aimlessly. But the reality of that is that native people have always inhabited these spaces everywhere every square inch of this of the land on this continent was indigenous territory. They were spaces and lands that native people used for a variety of purposes.

They were, most tribal people were actually farmers so, you know, to debunk the myth of the wandering nomadic native. This is largely something that's very not really true. There were people, however, that did that were you could say migratory and they traveled between homelands between places in what we sometimes call the seasonal round. So there were much like people today have you know, winter homes and summer homes. Native people had the same kind of land-use patterns where they would travel from their winter homes to their summer homes and back, depending on food sources and ceremonial cycles and things like that.

So and this is what happens with some of the state are these National Parks like Yellowstone like Yosemite and Glacier National Monument which are the first three that become National Parks. And the actual history of them is that they were not empty spaces that needed to be preserved, but they were empty spaces that needed to first be created as Mark David Spence notes in his decision from his book, Dispossessing the Wilderness. And so this is, you know, part of a larger history of American genocide, land theft and indigenous dispossession that most people don't really connect with when they think of National Parks.

Greg Dalton: Thank you. Justin Farrell, as a native of Wyoming you note in your book that you gain access as a white man from the Ivy League that a person from another background wouldn't have. So how did race and class offer you access into the ultra-wealthy in Jackson Hole you write about the real upper percent there.

Justin Farrell: Yeah, so historically there hasn't been a lot of work within the academy on the ultra-wealthy on economic elites at least from the ground level from their perspective, through interviews and observation. And so in terms of this project I really played up kind of both aspects of my

identity. And I do talk about in the introduction of my book, how I am a white man I was able to navigate these spaces in almost in an unquestioned way through these private clubs. If I were even walking through the lobby, you know, of the Yellowstone club or some other elite private clubs no one was gonna stop me and ask me what I was doing there or ask me why I was there. And so I had that an aspect of my identity that allowed me to gain access into these spaces.

But also being, you know, born in Wyoming I also have this gravitas that the folks I interviewed often admired and tried to emulate. So I had this kind of dual identity of this, you know, Yale elite gravitas and then the Wyoming Western gravitas that ties into this myths of authenticity and masculinity and was able to kind of pair those together to get the interviews and to get into these spaces.

Greg Dalton: Diane Regas, for generations the Astoria Hot Springs in Jackson were a community gathering area. In the 1990s they were closed to the public and the developer has plans to convert it to a private spa. What happened next?

Diane Regas: Well, what happened was the community didn't like that plan. And in fact, a couple of those developers went bankrupt. And The Trust for Public Land believes that everybody needs access to the outdoors, at every economic level. Every race, native people, everybody. We can live longer, healthier and happier lives if we have access. So Astoria Hot Springs which is about halfway between Jackson Hole and Alpine, a city where a lot of people who work in Jackson live. We figured out who owned it and tracked him down and began to engage the community and what would they like to see at Astoria Hot Springs. And what people wanted was a restoration of a place that they had access to as kids. And people who'd immigrated to the area a lot of the Hispanics who live around there live in Alpine really wanted a place that they could go and recreate with their families. So we had thousands of people involved in designing what Astoria Hot Springs could look like going forward. It's one of the only Hot Springs in the country that is now run by a nonprofit and we're hoping to reopen it. It will be ready physically this year with provisions to make sure that everybody can have access. So I'm really excited about it. I'm really excited to get to go see it.

Greg Dalton: And Justin that really runs against kind of the theme of what you've written about which these private enclaves gated communities large mass of lands sort of preserved for people who own them or their friends. So where's the wealth coming from and how is it reshaping the American West?

Justin Farrell: Yeah, it's coming from the shift within the United States and even globally with the increase of wealth among a select few. And so for example, we've seen globally a 13% increase just over one year in the number of ultra-wealthy people. In the United States there are more than 100,000 ultra-wealthy people now and that's commonly known in terms of just the wealth concentration and the income inequality that has resulted.

Greg Dalton: Right. And you write about the how the wealthy relate to the environment. And also, there is also talk about somewhat about the people who live there who are very, you know, making $20,000 a year and these wealthy people like to pride themselves that they can sit at the cowboy bar and people don't know that they're a billionaire and they mingle with regular folk. What's their approach to the environment and the intersection of race?

Justin Farrell: Yeah, so I talked about how they use the environment to solve these dilemmas that they face. And there's these economic dilemmas; you've made all this money how should you enjoy it, how should you give it away. But then there's also the social dilemma which you're kind of touching on here in terms of how do they wrestle with and respond to the social stigma of being rich of feeling like perhaps they're not authentic people or perhaps for some feeling guilty about having all that wealth. Not all, just some. And that plays into their attraction to these areas and to the idea

that again kind of going back to Dina's point that this is a preserved Eden, you know, that they can enjoy they can relax and they deserve to relax in because they work so hard to get their wealth.

And so what's really interesting is the way it plays out again across these race and class lines. The sense that, you know, when you move to a place like that I write in the book how they're trying to become more authentic people and they're trying to resolve these existential dilemmas they face as wealthy as folks who are sometimes targeted in the media and the like. And so they try to form relationships with "normal people" and often times those relationships are based on economic exchange. So I did interviews with the working poor, mostly immigrants from Mexico and asked them are these really your friends? Do they really care for you? What is your sense of how their environmental ethic and how they enjoy the environment. And so all this is wrapped up again in race and class and impacts how they see the natural environment and then it ultimately impacts their philanthropy and which organizations they give money to and the impact that has on the community and the ecosystem.

Greg Dalton: Diane Regas, The Trust for Public Land works with community groups and acquires lands and hands them over to local control. Do you think that, you know, Native Americans other people of color traditionally have been left out of a lot of those conversations, what is Trust for Public Land try to be inclusive with the people who are around the land now and as Dina mentioned earlier may have been related to it or occupied it earlier.

Diane Regas: Well it takes time and care to make sure that we engage the communities. And so we put equity at the center because equity in the outdoors is absolutely essential. It's not easy to achieve I think for some of the reasons that Justin has pointed to. So we look is the organization invited into the community. Have we looked at the data and are informed about who's in the community, how to engage them and are we involving them. And it's really exciting to me to see how when we invite in a genuine way the opportunities for communities to engage with us with partners for what they want to see in their community for the outdoors, it's truly transformational it changes the community it strengthens the community in addition to providing wonderful opportunities for people to get outdoors.

Greg Dalton: Dina Gilio-Whitaker. I realized preparing for this program how ignorant I am of Native American history and I went to some pretty good schools and I don't know if I blocked it out of my mind because I didn't want to -- it was hard to confront those things. So address the educational inadequacies and also what terms we should be using.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker: Your experience is unfortunately just common, so, I mean it doesn't matter. You could have, you know, an advanced degree and still not know the actual history and political structure of this country is relative to American-Indians because it's not taught. And, you know, studies actually show that across the board in all 50 states in the K-12 level, the teaching of American-Indians stops at about 1900. So what that does in effect is render native people as people of the past, people that no longer exist. And so it's no wonder that if we do show up in popular culture or in, you know, demographic studies, and things like that, most of the time we're not there, especially. But when we are, we are painted with these broad brush strokes of being, you know, not modern people, and you know, relegated into this frozen past.

So, but the important thing to know is that as people we are not ethnic minorities, right, that's probably the biggest misnomer that we deal with. We are not ethnic minorities. It is not correct to think of us in terms of people of color, as you know, people part of the large brown mass, like we are nations, we are people with political relationships to the state because of the treaty relationships. There are over 300 treaties that are still extent that are still in force because they don't expire they are made in perpetuity. And that constructs our relationship to the United States which is usually a

thorn in the side of the state. Because for them, for the American government we have always been a problem, the Indian problem is something to be solved. Which they tried to do by usually by trying to get rid of us in one way or another.

Greg Dalton: You're listening to a Climate One conversation about the American wilderness. Coming up, we discuss how the appointment of Deb Haaland to lead the Department of the Interior could affect public land policy:

Dina Gilio-Whitaker: There's a lot of coalescing of these issues coming together and that create this opening, and part of that is the recognition that indigenous land management practices are key to climate adaptation and restoring the health of lands everywhere. (0:22)

Greg Dalton: That's up next, when Climate One continues.

Greg Dalton: This is Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton, and we're talking about wealth and wilderness in America.

PROGRAM PART 2

Greg Dalton: We discussed this idea of Indigenous erasure, with Dina Gilio-Whitaker last summer. She's a lecturer of American Indian Studies and author of "As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock."

Greg Dalton: After Joe Biden was elected President, he tapped New Mexico Congresswoman Deb Haaland as the first Indigenous Secretary of the Department of the Interior. She's also the first Indigenous cabinet secretary of any department.

We invited Dina Gilio-Whitaker back onto the show to discuss Haaland's appointment, and what that could mean for our public lands.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker: It's certainly it's very significant that we have a presidential administration that is going above and beyond any other administration, from what it looks like to me to incorporate or to prioritize Native issues and land protection and things like environmental justice. They really are embedding the ethics and values of environmental justice at every level of government. From what I've seen, and I think Deb Haaland understands all of that, I think she brings that to the office, and so I think she's an amazing choice for the Biden Harris administration to lead the Department of the Interior.

Greg Dalton: What about Deb Haaland in particular will change the relationship between the US government and tribal governments when it comes to oil drilling, coal mining and other extractive acts?

Dina Gilio-Whitaker: Well, I think that remains to be seen. I think she is really coming from the right place, she's an indigenous woman, she is not somebody like we had before, Tara Sweeney, who was an indigenous woman from Alaska, but who is deeply beholden to the oil and gas industry. So Deb Haaland is not Tara Sweeney, Just because Native person can be in an office doesn't mean their values line up with indigenous values, and we can see that in people like Tom Cole and Markwayne Mullin, who were the congressional reps from Oklahoma, who were both Republicans who were both deeply in the pockets of oil and gas, so just being indigenous does not mean that somebody has

abides by those world views and those values.

Greg Dalton: Those are Indigenous legislators you just mentioned.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker: Yes, yes, yes. Tom Cole and Markwayne Mullin, both members of the Cherokee Nation, and they are Oklahoma, but they're very conservative and they often work against native interests.

Greg Dalton: Yeah. Well, no group is a monolith. Right. How might having a Native American as Secretary of the Interior change access to public land is particular for things like gathering materials, religious and cultural ceremonies?

Dina Gilio-Whitaker: Again, I think that remains to be seen. But it bodes well. I think that she understands the protection of sacred sites, she takes it really seriously.

Greg Dalton: What hope do you have that having a native American at the head of interior will change the public perception of whose lands, not just the national parks, but really the whole country we are actually on?

Dina Gilio-Whitaker: So I think Deb Haaland's appointment comes at a time. There's a moment, there's sort of an opening right now, this is... We don't know how long it will be, but the Dems have the mic right now. Of the national narrative. So she's the Secretary of the Interior, but at the same time, there's this larger land back movement that's happening, and even a water back movement, so I think that's something that we're gonna be hearing more about because as these activists say, You can't have land back without water back. So these things are tied together. But the land back movement has been building for some time. And there's a lot of ways that we can talk about what that means. But in its most fundamental sense, it means that doing justice, environmental justice for native people and justice in general, how it is that we think about what that means, cannot have off the table giving land back, and that's something that's actually happened. Even under the Trump Administration, the Trump administration gave it returned, to my knowledge, at least 40000 acres of public lands to tribes. but the train is sort of left the station, and I think there's more more willingness and acceptance to think about what it means to return public lands to native people, to trust status of native peoples and in other different ways that ensures indigenous jurisdiction and land management practices.

So I think this whole idea, there's a lot of coalescing of these issues coming together and that creates this opening, and part of that is the recognition that indigenous land management practices are key to climate adaptation and restoring the health of lands everywhere.

Greg Dalton: Dina Gilio-Whitaker is an American Indian Studies expert and author of as long as grass grows the indigenous fight for environmental justice from colonization to Standing Rock. And I just wanna ask you, how did you feel when you heard Jennifer Lopez singing “This Land Is Your Land” at the Biden Harris inauguration?

Dina Gilio-Whitaker: I didn't hear it because I can't listen to that song. I hate that song. Every American Indian, personally, I know hates that song, that song is a slap in the face to native people, even though Woody Guthrie, who wrote the song was coming from a place of... He was a progressive, he was a lefty, he was very conscious of racial and social justice, but there was a blind spot, he had his blind spot in that blind spot, he really didn't think it through, like when he said, this land is our land, this land is my land, he did not. And he knew native people, he understood land theft by the federal government, so it's kind of... I don't get why he would write a song and not be reflective about that. So any time I hear that song, I can't hear it, I tune it out, I turn it off. And in

fact, I have written about that in this new book that I'm working on, about why it's such a problem for native people.

Greg Dalton: That was Dina Gilio-Whitaker. We'll hear more from her later in the show.

Today we're discussing questions of access and privilege when it comes to America's public lands and natural spaces.

When Jessica Newton tried inviting her daughter's friends on family hikes, many of their moms said -- no way. She realized that not all black women were as comfortable out in nature as she was. She started an organization called Black Girls Hike that later became Vibe Tribe Adventures. They go hiking, zip lining, river rafting and more. They're based in Denver with chapters around the U.S. and a few overseas.

[Start Playback] (2:21)

Jessica Newton: I've always been an outdoorsy girl black women were already very communal anyways. And so being able to say, hey black girls let's go out and hike. Well, number one it attracted women who were already outdoorsy. And then I started seeing other women who had never been outdoors and it was like, hey I saw you guys you've made a post on Facebook and I just want to try it. There are tons of black women across the globe who want to get outdoors, but they may not have the education on how to be outdoors. They may not have the resources to get outdoors and there's a fear of wilderness.

We did have an incident where we went hiking and the state patrol Park Rangers and the Border Directors were called in us for hiking. What they tried to say is that we didn't have a permit because there were so many of us but we had no idea that there was gonna be this many out. And so the fear manifested itself I saw people who are trying to explore outdoors and they already have a fear of wildlife. Now we have to worry about other human beings who don't necessarily think this is a place for us or a place to be diversified. Denver is not, you know, our percent for being African-American is about 2% to 5%. So typically, our guides will go scout a trail to see how it feels out there if we get the you know the look like hey what are you doing here it's like, nah, this is not a good city we're gonna go to the next one. I do know that Colorado Parks and Wildlife is definitely, definitely trying. Taishya Adams she's actually the first African-American Commissioner for the Colorado Parks and Wildlife. You just look at the history on the wall you just walk down the hall and you see poster a picture after picture after portrait after portrait. And there's no Native Americans, no Asians like it's crazy. I'm like wow this is what parks and recs is made of. And so for me it's a joy to see someone like her step into a position of action to say here is where we change our policies our legislative efforts. How do we work on getting the brown community the black community outdoors and just really integrate into the outdoor atmosphere?

[End Playback]

Greg Dalton: That was Jessica Newton, founder of Vibe Tribe Adventures, an outdoor group for black women. You're listening to Climate One, I'm Greg Dalton. Today my guests are Dina Gilio-Whitaker of California State University San Marcos, Diane Regas of The Trust for Public Land, and Justin Farrell of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies

Greg Dalton: Diane Regas, your great great grandmother I believe came and homesteaded in what is now Denver where you grew up. Your reflections on how that group based in Denver and how certain people just don't feel welcome in the outdoors.

Diane Regas: First of all, it's unfortunately all too common that people experience these kinds of incidents. And I love Jessica's leadership at bringing people together and getting outdoors. I think it demonstrates a couple of really important things. One is that it's not enough to just have the land and trails there; people have to feel welcome. And that requires everything from community leadership to leadership at the governmental level to work from groups like us frankly, because the conservation movement needs to change to address these issues of people who need to feel welcome outdoors. And so I love that work it's absolutely fantastic, but I think to me the core of it is that community creating that she's doing. And what we find is that centering around community, whether it's in a Black neighborhood a Hispanic neighborhood whether it's working with a tribe. The centering around community is where you create that power and create that welcoming atmosphere and people really begin to sense that they own these public lands. They have a right to be there.

Greg Dalton: Dina, white people often look at land as something to be developed or improved something to own. And parks are a little bit different they're held in common. Tell us about how, you know, Native Americans view land obviously very differently, something to be shared and stored it when you hear about seventh generation. Tell us about that conceptual difference and connection to the land.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker: We have this word, I'm gonna throw out a jargony word here. And the word is called "epistemology" and it's an academic term. And it just simply means how we come to know what we know. So it's like knowledge. And we talk about indigenous epistemologies as - or worldviews we could say worldviews -- is very different than the Eurocentric worldviews that we are raised within. That views land as anthropocentric, right, where that is human centered that is in service to humans that is ultimately commodified. And so thus we have, you know, capitalism mediates these extractive industries that we know of, you know, like with the oil and gas industry with mining and the ways that we use the land to create wealth.

But from an indigenous perspective, the land is a relation and all the things on the land are relatives. We talk about our nonhuman relatives. So this is a worldview that is relational that decenters humans and it also decenters a discourse or a narrative of rights. And that's another thing about the Eurocentric worldview in individualist democracy, "democracy" like we have in the U.S. that is what we call a rights-based society. And native societies, they are responsibility based societies because when you see the natural world and all the things in it as relations as relatives you are then responsible to them. So that sets up an entirely different kind of way that you engage with the land.

Greg Dalton: Diane Regas. Trust for Public Land puts people at the center which is different than some environmental organizations which are some of them are focused on saving cute furry creatures or whole ecosystems. Is Trust for Public Land anthropocentric is it human centered and are the humans above more important than other members of an ecosystem?

Diane Regas: Greg, I think that's a first of all really good question. And I think there's a lot of commonality between the ideas that Dina is describing and what we're aiming for. We believe that communities need to be at the center. And if you think historically in this country about the phases of the environmental and conservation movements we created the national parks that's wonderful and it's work that needs to continue to conserve places. And then we had I would say, I would probably mark it with silent spring where we started to really be worried about the chemicals and we had the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act. A lot of those pollution oriented that was really about trying to control human behavior. And in the 80s we kind of added to that and said corporations also have to take responsibility. But I believe that conservation needs to shift back to more of a focus on the relationship with people. And people at the center of our work means that

we're thinking about the relationship between people and land. People and close to home parks people in faraway parks and what that means for the community. And to me that's the next step for conservations to really be bringing people in those relationships back in and recognize we are not gonna solve climate change. We are not gonna solve widespread species extinctions unless we really take into account people and communities.

Greg Dalton: You're listening to a conversation about accessing nature. This is Climate One. Coming up, climate change, conservation and being a good steward.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker: When you live on the land and for thousands and thousands of years as our ancestors did that is the very definition of sustainability. [:11]

Greg Dalton: That's up next, when Climate One continues.

Greg Dalton: This is Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton. We're talking about preserving and protecting the great outdoors. My guests are Diane Regas of The Trust for Public Land, Justin Farrell, author of "Billionaire Wilderness: The Ultra Wealthy and the Remaking of the American West," and Dina Gilio-Whitaker, author of "As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock."

PROGRAM PART 3

Greg Dalton: In his book, "Billionaire Wilderness," Justin Farrell explores the lives of the ultra-wealthy, living on ranches and in gated communities in Jackson, Wyoming, near the majesty of the Grand Tetons. Like many, they're drawn to that state's pristine beauty and are dedicated to preserving its natural wonders. But there's a deep irony there.

Justin Farrell: Wyoming is the largest producer of coal and substantial oil, natural gas. And that in a lot of ways is made possible this what I call a tax haven in Wyoming and it is very lucrative to move there for at least part of the year. They have very loose restrictions on what counts as being a resident. And so you see over time this rush of wealth to that corner of the state. And for example by 2015 eight out of every $10 made in Teton County and from investment dividends. Just interest rather than a salary from a job. And so the state is able to continue not to have a state income tax a corporate tax and so it's a very lucrative place. When you do connect that to climate change and I would ask them about, you know, maybe they worked in finance or maybe they work for an oil and gas or were CEO of an oil and gas company. And a lot of the conversations that we would have what kind of move away from these issues that I call buzzkill issues or issues that might place one in more choppier political waters because climate change is inherently a political issue and is gonna be resolved at that level. And so, you know, it was really interesting to me to understand and to write about how they kind of navigate all of that in terms of they love the area they love a pristine ecosystem and yet climate change is wreaking havoc on that very ecosystem. So it was just difficult for them to kind of even conceptualize and discuss too.

Greg Dalton: Coming from a contrasting perspective, Dina Gilio-Whitaker explores how indigenous knowledge can help move away from oil and gas extraction.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker: In my view climate change well, and not just climate change, but really the world that we live in that has led to the state of profound environmental degradation is the result of it is a problem of not just science not just capitalism even, well capitalism is a huge problem it's part

of it. But it's a problem of philosophy. So and that worldview in that orientation that we have to the world if we inhabit an orientation to the world that just is it results in this extractive relationship to the earth then that's going to just keep perpetuating these environmental problems that we keep intensifying. But if we change the way that we relate to the world if we understand the land and the eco systems and the fundamental limitations of them and learn to respect those limits and our relations within them. Then it changes the kind of decisions that we make about how we use the land.

So I think that that's really the key use of indigenous knowledge. Because as indigenous peoples, I mean when you live on the land and for thousands and thousands of years as our ancestors did that is the very definition of sustainability, Land tenure and longevity on land without having destroyed your environment means that you fundamentally understand what sustainability is and you live it. So that's why in this country indigenous people need to be listened to, we need to be paid attention to and engaged at all levels of decision-making.

Greg Dalton: Justin Farrell, you write about the charitable industrial complex and kind of the new Rockefeller paradigm. So where is that paradigm is that human centered is that kind of preserving pretty landscapes for a relative few? Explain what the charitable industrial complex is.

Justin Farrell: Yeah, I also wanna connect that with what Dina and Diane are saying too. And I think with this the charitable industrial complex as I described it is built upon some of the myths especially Dina was mentioning in how we see nature and how we use nature. And to Dina's earlier point about indigenous people being locked in time and oftentimes the preservation of nature, especially in the area that I wrote about you know it works differently in different areas which we can talk about that. But out in especially in Wyoming in the West around Yellowstone, Grand Teton National Park. The idea of nature and the idea of giving money and engaging in, you know, giving your time and philanthropy to protect nature is through this elite sort of white lens that can be based on, you know, those romanticized view of nature. And a nature that for example for Yellowstone had to remove certain people to create that Eden and to create that mentality and that romantic idea that is still kind of beneath some of the organizations who work in these areas. But the charitable industrial complex I refer to just as this short-term phrase in this area that describes, you know, how folks give their money who they give their money to and often times it goes to these issues that are serving themselves or serving their view shed or improving in some instances improving their property value. In the community of Jackson in Teton County you have it's the wealthiest county per capita in the nation but also has the largest gap between the rich and the poor there.

And so you do have a lot of social problems. You have some homelessness in the schools and there are a lot of issues that need attention. And the money as I show on one of the chapters of the book is not going to any of those social services organizations who really need it. Most of it is going to environmental and arts organizations who have tens of millions of dollars in the coffers. Meanwhile the people who work for the wealthy who are there to enjoy this idea of nature are struggling working 2 to 3 jobs. And so highlighting that disconnect between caring for the people and to Diane's point what do we want our communities to look like. And ones that are more Democratic or the one that are shaped by a wealthy few. And so that's all kind of part of this makeup in the community and philanthropy plays a huge role in that. And also does a lot of good in the community but I kind of highlight some areas where folks are more concerned about environmental issues that serve themselves or serve their elite experience of nature rather than a more holistic approach.

Diane Regas: Greg, if I could just jump in a second on that. Because I think it's a really complex point and one that's worth giving a lot of thought to. And I would agree that people who've got wealth can and should do more. But I don't wanna lose sight of the reality that access to nature is

actually essential for all humans. And if you look at the data they show absolutely clearly a couple of things. One is having access to nature has a bigger impact on health the lower income people are. So if you're high income and you've got all the other needs of life and a lot of the wants, access to nature actually does help your health. But if you're in the lower income it helps your health more. So we believe that access to nature is essential and don't want to lose sight of that. The other thing is this and I found this statistic quite shocking when I first came to The Trust for Public Land. When I learned that a hundred million people in this country and that's 28 million kids do not have a park close to home. Do not have a green space close to home that they can access. And The Trust for Public Land has been working about closing that gap because we know we all need access to nature. I think it's needed to solve the big problems facing the world, as well as to address the public health and community issues that we see now more than ever.

Greg Dalton: Let's talk a little bit about land-use post-COVID, you know, there's a huge housing shortage a lot of places. Maybe that will change as people move away from urban centers and they can do their job remotely. But affordability crisis and a lot of not just U.S. cities around the world and a lot of that gets to some of that is, you know, conserving land where housing can't be built. So how do you see coming out of COVID with people already moving away from the coast moving away from urban areas that's gonna put some development pressure on less populated areas. How do you see that playing out?

Diane Regas: You know it's interesting, there was already pressure on some of those more small to midsize cities. I think about Bozeman, Montana or Gunnison, Colorado, places that are beautiful, have access to public land and trails. People are able to work remotely and the process have been accelerated under COVID. I think that that commitment to equity that we need the conservation and environmental movement to build deeply build into everything we do brings a new set of challenges. And especially these issues the issues of house in which you need a piece of land to build a house on, you need a piece of land to build an apartment on, you need a piece of land to live on. And I think there are some good examples around the country of how to begin to navigate that and in Gunnison which I mentioned we were able to help with a land swap that created some trails and access for people but also ended up with a big contribution millions of dollars to create hundreds of units of housing in the Gunnison area. Same thing in Bozeman, Montana where someone had evicted low income people from their homes to do a new big development that went bankrupt. We were given the piece of land to build a Central Park for Bozeman which is a wonderful thing to do and engaged lots and lots of hundreds and thousands of people in what that should look like. But there's a responsibility there to think about what about that housing shortage. And so there's interesting new solutions like in that case we've carved off a few acres to create housing in addition having the Central Park.

What I'm seeing is more and more partnerships that cross somebody's traditional issue learns like an environmental group or conservation group also cares about housing also cares about equity also cares about public engagement voting. And we can get to that by really thoughtful partnerships with local communities whether it's a rural community whether it's an urban community, whether it's a small city or town. If you've ever gone for a vacation in a small town a lot of times there's nowhere to get outside. And so these issues that we're grappling with whether it's housing whether it's equity, whether it's access beyond doors and they show up differently in every community in our country. And we need to be very flexible and bring in allies to work on them.

Greg Dalton: Diane Regas, you've written about how public spaces and public parks have been used as gathering spaces. You put out a statement about Lafayette Square in front of the White House and noted it's been used as an encampment for soldiers and sites of duels, the longest-running anti-war protest in the U.S. as well as a slave market and a zoo that was new to me. And parks are public forum where we can gather, celebrate, protest and mourn. So talk to us about the

importance of public spaces, especially now.

Diane Regas: Well, if you think about what has happened in our lifetimes and where people go when they're feeling a need to gather when they're responding to challenges facing the country, we go to public spaces. I lived in Washington after 9/11 and I know we all flocked to public spaces to gather and mourn. But that's true with in big historic events. It's also true in communities when you get together for a picnic at a social distance now or the community comes together for a market or a parade or a community meeting to really imagine and create what they want their community to look like, oftentimes it's in parks and public spaces. So public spaces play such enormously important roles they help define culture they help define community and create community. So that's why we put community at the center and we think it's so important to look at the data and make sure that everybody is actually getting access to these spaces.

Greg Dalton: Justin Farrell, you've testified before Congress about dark funding of climate disinformation and the connection with philanthropy. So there's sort of a dark side I'm curious if any of the people you interviewed are funding climate denial organizations while preserving the trout streams in Wyoming but funding climate denialism. Did you get into any of that?

Justin Farrell: Yeah, I would say I'm sure there is overlap within those networks because a lot of it runs within some of these conservative think tanks that do all sorts of work not just climate denial. And actually most of that has went underground in recent years. So during the 90s and early 2000's you had you know, Exxon funding a lot of these groups or even creating imitation environmental groups to disparage the facts on climate change and just spread misinformation. And so that testimony before the Senate committee was about that process and the history of fossil fuel companies and their allies to essentially confuse the American public on climate change. And so, there's some commonalities between my new book and that. But that's the fossil fuel funding of climate denial is much more nefarious much less complex in its motivations and whereas in this this book there are a lot of really interesting ironies and complexities and there's a lot of goodwill even that just kind of falls flat sometimes whereas in climate denial it was they had the mission and they mostly accomplished it.

Greg Dalton: Dina Gilio-Whitaker, you live on the California coast where the term managed retreat is sometimes used. You say that's rich people's territory there's a lot of wealthy coastal property that's at risk. How do you see that playing out?

Dina Gilio-Whitaker: Well, the way I see it playing out is that sea level rise doesn't discriminate. So, you know, with these coastal properties that are by and large owned by wealthy people who will not be able to get flood insurance who still cannot get flood insurance. They are facing you know, massive amounts of stranded assets which means that as we play that game as we talked about before that game of musical chairs somebody eventually is going to -- the music's gonna stop and they're gonna be holding property that is for all intents and purposes is worthless because it's going to be underwater. So the state has taken that approach the state of California considers it as a crisis now and that's how they're dealing with it. And the fights around armoring and manage retreats are heating up. And at the same time it's also you know, raising these questions about access and how do we protect access to public spaces to the coast for public people or people in the public and people who come from disadvantaged communities that don't have easy access to the coast. And so this is the work of the Coastal Commission some of the great recent work of the Coastal Commission that, you know, I applaud and having done this work of creating environmental justice policy and engaging tribes.

Greg Dalton: We've been talking about wealth, privilege and how that relates to American wilderness. My guests today were Justin Farrell, Associate Professor of Sociology at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Diane Regas, President and CEO for The Trust for Public Land, and Dina Gilio-Whitaker, American Indian Studies Lecturer at California State University San Marcos.

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Greg Dalton: Sara-Katherine Coxon and Brad Marshland are our Senior Producers, and our producers are Ariana Brocious and Tyler Reed. Steve Fox is director of advancement. Kelli Pennington directs audience engagement. This episode was edited by Ariana Brocious and Devon Strolovitch and engineered by Arnav Gupta. Dr. Gloria Duffy is CEO of The Commonwealth Club of California, the nonprofit and nonpartisan forum where our program originates. [pause] I'm Greg Dalton.