

Resilience in Recreation: Stories of a Changing Climate

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Introduction

As the impacts of climate change become increasingly prevalent, the outdoor activities that bond us to our local communities and environments are under threat. In Missoula, MT, prolonged drought, rising temperatures, increasing wildfire smoke, and other climate impacts change what it means to fish, ski, run, and recreate in our town. Through a podcast mini-series, *Resilience in Recreation: Stories of a Changing Climate*, I create a platform to share stories of climate impacts and adaptation strategies through the lens of local recreators and climate activists. Audio storytelling is an intimate and widely utilized practice that can be easily shared through environmental nonprofits and outdoor interest groups across Missoula. Capturing these voices invites us to consider our relationship with the outdoors on both an individual and communal scale, to find unity in shared

experiences of a changing environment, and to spread messages of hope and collective action.

For this podcast, I reached out to local recreators who have been in Missoula long-term (15+ years) and can speak to their anecdotal experiences of environmental changes through the lens of their sport. I met recreators in the field to join them for their activity, recorded an informal Q+A, and took pictures. I then put together a collection of cohesive 10–20 minute episodes that tell the story of the interview. Each episode focuses on a specific recreation type. There are a total of 6 episodes, including the following recreations: fly fishing, paragliding, cycling, running, and skiing. The last episode is a conversation with a local climate therapist on climate grief and mindfulness within the outdoor community.

I formulated this project alongside Shanti Devins of Climate Smart Missoula. Climate Smart is a local non-profit that does a wide range of work within sustainable community development and climate action. My project builds on Climate Smart's library of local environmental stories. I workshopped this project with Shanti as a way to voice the impact of climate change on a community that is so strongly rooted in various types of outdoor recreation. With the support of Climate Smart and other environmental groups, I shared the podcasts across a variety of social media platforms as well as community events. I tabled alongside Climate Smart at a February kickoff event for Running Up For Air (RUFA), a sports activism endurance event on Mount Sentinel that raises money for clean air initiatives.

Capturing first-hand, anecdotal accounts of changing climate on a local scale demonstrates the values of storytelling, community and culture, and place-based

connection. Doing so through the lens of recreation captures how our interaction with the environment through play uniquely shapes the way we value it. These are all topics prevalent within environmental philosophy, from the emotional and ethical power of place-based storytelling explored by Henry Bugbee, to the aesthetics of outdoor play illustrated by C. Thi Nguyen. The foundations of my project are rooted in these philosophical underpinnings, which I explore in depth in this paper. All of these threads trace back to the notion that when we care for and value our environment, we seek to interact with it in a sustainable way. When we take time to tell stories of what we love in the spaces we share, we strengthen our care for not only each other but for the areas we all call home.

Background Context and Plan

Localized climate storytelling takes a variety of forms in communities across the world. From a casual anecdote that family members share at the dinner table, to news articles and interviews, voicing the changes in climate that impact everyday life is a scalable discussion growing louder and louder. In Missoula, a variety of groups share these stories in many different formats. The two that I have become the most familiar with through this project are the Montana Climate Stories organized by Families for a Livable Climate, as well as the limited podcast series *Grounding: Conversations on Mental Health and Mother Earth* hosted by Sarah Aronson.

The Montana Climate Stories is a project where citizens share stories about how climate has impacted their lives and what actions they're taking to create a livable future. These stories are available online in a variety of formats, including written narrative, poems, artwork, photography, visual and audio recording, and more. Anyone in Montana can

submit their story. They also host live storytelling events that organizers hold across the state, including here in Missoula. I shared my mini-series with the organizers of this project.

The podcast *Grounding* is an NPR series from Montana Public Radio exploring the intersection of psychology and the climate crisis. Sarah Aronson is a local climate-aware psychotherapist who speaks to the impacts that climate has on our mental and emotional health. I had a recorded conversation with Sarah about her lens on climate grief and anxiety. I included this conversation as my final episode.

These existing efforts are complimentary to my project. By exploring these issues through the lens of recreation, I'm able to build off of the existing climate conversation happening in Missoula. I think that narrowing the focus of the narratives to outdoor recreation has a unique pull for Missoula's large community of folks who love to play outside. When I first approached the project I was thinking of focusing on runners specifically, but I realized that I had interest in bridging together several recreation types. There are many people in Missoula that do all different types of sports, but there are also plenty who stick within one lane. In this way, the outdoor communities can become independent of one another and lose connection across groups. This project creates the opportunity for people across a multitude of groups to have simultaneous conversation about some of their greatest joys in life, alongside the sadness and grief that comes with watching these landscapes change. It's bittersweet discourse that strikes multiple emotional chords at once, and I think this method of storytelling can be most impactful.

The term 'solastalgia' refers to the profound emotional or existential distress caused by negative environmental changes to one's home landscape. As Missoulian's witness

changing climate conditions in the area they've long called home, such as milder winters and hotter, drier summers, they experience solastalgia in a variety of ways. As Henry Bugbee demonstrates in his work, place-based storytelling allows us to relate to one another on an emotional and ethical level that is uniquely localized. Just as our experiences are deeply personal and specific to our surroundings, so are our emotional ties and ethical frameworks. Sharing local stories of climate distress allows for expression of the intimate feelings of solastalgia that are rooted in the particular experiences and observations of one's home community.

For my engagement work I began by reaching out to individuals of different recreation types one by one. Shanti with Climate Smart was an incredible facilitator for connecting me with locals. When possible, I sought out recreators who are affiliated with local groups and organizations surrounding their sport. This allowed me to gather a better sense of their particular community and impacts they may be witnessing as a whole. Once I obtained the contact, I reached out by either phone or email and gauge their interest in participating in my project. For the field interviews, I utilized school library audio resources and checked out portable mics. I conducted the field interviews during the activity or just after it, depending on logistics such as background noise and equipment handling. With a loosely prepared set of questions in hand, these interviews were casual and lasted anywhere from 20 to 60 minutes.

After I completed the interview process, I moved on to first steps of forming the podcast episodes. This was the conceptual period. During this preliminary process I communicated with Shanti about different ideas for the structure of the podcast, as well as

best journalism practices. This is also when I established a title for the podcast and mapped out the narrative I was planning to tell. Setting a direction for the intended tone, episode lengths, and target audience were all crucial to producing a cohesive product.

Next, I moved on to editing. I approached editing on an episode-by-episode basis, utilizing the programs GarageBand and Descript for clipping. I spent extensive time in the podcast studio at the school library to record my narrative voiceover. Finally, I worked with my musical friend JM to create intros, outros, and transition music for the episodes. Once I pieced the episodes together, I sent first drafts to my advisors Shanti Devins and Dr. Christopher Preston. I made final edits, and then I moved onto the next!

Once all of the episodes were complete, I uploaded them to the CEP website and shared them with Climate Smart, Families for a Livable Climate, and all of the contacts I made (including interviewees and many more) during the production process. I also shared them with public radio stations and my connections in the Environmental Journalism Department at UM.

The last component of my project was tabling alongside Climate Smart at the February kickoff event for Running Up For Air (RUFA), a sports activism endurance event on Mount Sentinel that raises money for clean air initiatives. At this event, I had an opportunity for runners to share a short, recorded clip of why they were participating in RUFA, as well as a signup sheet so I could notify individuals when I released the podcast. I completed and released all of my podcasts at the end of April 2026.

Theoretical Applications

In this section I demonstrate the philosophical underpinnings of my project through key ideas learned in three of the graduate seminars I attended throughout this program. I will discuss main takeaways from PHL 524 Environmental Aesthetics, PHL 522 Environmental Philosophy, and PHL 515 Issues in the Anthropocene.

I. Environmental Aesthetics

In this course, we looked at the overlap between aesthetics- how we judge beauty and taste based on something's sensory, emotional, and intellectual qualities- and environmental philosophy. Environmental aesthetics examines how our appreciation and valuation of nature is impacted by its perceived positive or negative aesthetics. The feeling we get when we look at a polluted factory plot is likely different than what we feel when we look at a lush, untouched mountainside. These perceptions shape the way we value these lands, in turn affecting how we interact with them. Philosophers in this field have differing theories of the basis for how we judge the beauty, or lack thereof, of the environment we're surrounded by. In this class we explored a number of different views on this, including Allen Carlson's 'natural environmental model', C. Thi Nguyen's art of play, and Nick Riggle's aesthetics in relation to community.

Allen Carlson's natural environmental model is considered one of the most important theories in the current debate on environmental aesthetics. It is argued to be a driving force in the understanding of the aesthetics of nature as a crucial element in the formation of ecological awareness and environmental ethics. The model is grounded on scientific cognitivism, which considers scientific knowledge as the basis for the correct

aesthetic appreciation of nature. According to this view, science gives us more opportunities to know the world and therefore to discover new objects and environments which deserve aesthetic appreciation. In other words, the more I know about the biodiversity and ecosystem dynamics of the hill outside of my apartment, the more likely I am to appreciate it for what it is and how it is valuable to the greater system.

Carlson also bases his model on an analogy to our aesthetic appreciation of art. We are better able to form a strong evaluation of a piece of artwork that we are viewing when we know about its context, category, and history. For example, many pieces of modern art, which may look like meaningless shapes and lines at first glance, often have value in the context of the artistic norms they are breaking, the artist's abstracted expression of their inspirations, and/or the aesthetic impact the pieces have on the larger gallery or space that they occupy. Many of us have experienced feeling completely lost in looking at a piece of art, and then reading the small wall label next to it and receiving insight into its deeper meaning. Looking at it again with new information often changes the way we visually and emotionally process it.

In the same way that our ability to appreciate and evaluate art grows as we learn more about it, so does our ability to appreciate the environment. Carlson argues that "our knowledge of the nature of a particular environment yields the appropriate boundaries of appreciation, the particular foci of aesthetic significance, and the relevant act or acts of aspection" (Carlson, 2004, p. 73). The appropriate aesthetic appreciation of natural objects and environments demands the support of a sufficient knowledge of their properties and circumstances, just as the correct appreciation of art requires a knowledge of its

contextual and historical background (Carlson, 2000). In the same way that the hill outside my window may be dismissed as just another grassy hill at first glance, the more time I spend learning about its contextual and historical background, such as how it was formed, where it is situated in the greater Missoula valley, and the flora and fauna it is home to, the better I can understand its unique positionality and value. As we learn more about natural environments, we will be better able to understand the importance of their processes and recognize the value within these systems, which will influence the way we aesthetically appreciate and act on them.

In relating Carlson's theory to my podcast series, it highlights how a deeper understanding of environmental dynamics that are gained through one's sport can inform a more developed appreciation of the environments they are interacting with. For example, a paraglider I interviewed spoke about the complex wind patterns and atmospheric conditions associated with each area he flies. Through increased observed scientific knowledge through research of and exposure to these conditions, he has a more developed aesthetic appreciation for the environments in which he flies. This means that the paraglider is able find appreciation for a particular windy day or mountain slope in a way that others may overlook, because he is aware of and finds value in the functions that these environmental factors have on his sport. The same goes for bikers and runners on trails, skiers on snow, and more.

Many of us who are not engaged in a particular hobby, outdoor or otherwise, have been left confused and entertained by a friend that is inexplicably enthralled with something that is associated with an activity they love. Skiers who drool over fresh powder

and runners who express their love for a certain hill gradient can look pretty silly, or at least fail to be met with the same excitement, when they're talking to friends who don't partake in the activity. These are examples of recreationists having a unique aesthetic appreciation and reaction to the environment as it pertains to their sport. The more we learn about our environments, and the more experience we have interacting with them in different ways, the more tools we have to aesthetically evaluate them.

Another notable author that we discussed in this course is C. Thi Nguyen, who writes on the aesthetics of games and the art of agency. Nguyen argues that games are like yoga for one's agency, allowing players to create a multitude of agencies in which we practice taking on different types characters with varying levels of control over our in-game situations. In this context, agency means the control we have as individual actors in our environment. The rules and goals of games are not arbitrary as they may seem at face value, but rather a way of specifying particular modes of agency for players to adopt and experiment with. For example, a board game like Monopoly has us step into the role of a capitalist business owner interested in increasing their wealth through a set selection of potential business actions. A game like Uno puts our agency within the direct bounds of the card rules and the ultimate goal of being the first with an empty hand. Nguyen argues that this distinctive gaming experience is accessible to players only if they give themselves to the goals of the game and immerse themselves in the alternative in-game agencies. This submersion makes games both a unique art form and "a valuable tool for human self-development". (Nguyen, 2020, p 426).

Nguyen applies this view to outdoor recreation in his article “The Aesthetics of Rock Climbing”, in which he explores rock climbing as a game of solving puzzles with your body and mind (Nguyen, 2017). Achieving the perfect flow up a rockface with the right sequences of holds, moves, and rests is an aesthetic experience in which the climber is the agent of a harmonious dance. This puzzle-and-solution oriented practice invests players in an aesthetic experience that would not exist without the rules and parameters set out for their engagement. This experience, in turn, allows climbers to have a unique aesthetic interaction with their environment that they would not without this mode of play.

In the same way that rock climbers aesthetically value the rock faces where their puzzles of crevices and holds reside, other recreationists have unique appreciation for the aspects of outdoor landscapes in which their sport is intertwined. The hill gradient of a particular trail can be appreciated by a runner in the same way the fish population of a given river can be appreciated by an angler. The engagements of one’s sport, or ‘game’, influences their valuation of a given landscape.

This view is particularly interesting to keep in mind for my project because it highlights both positive and negative implications of this form of environmental valuation. On one hand, it demonstrates how outdoor recreationists can find more positive and diverse aesthetic value in areas based on the games they play throughout them. A skier can find unique enjoyment of a particular snowpack, a climber can judge a rockface on its available holds, and a runner can take specific notice of the root composition of a certain trail. These observations are made by players who pay particular attention to factors that compose their games. These observations affect the beauty they may find an area to have,

often distinguishing their aesthetic appreciation of an area from those uninvolved in the same game. On the other hand, it demonstrates how areas that are not as conducive to this play, whether it be a really root-packed, rocky trail or a mountain slope that can't hold snow, can in turn go undervalued by recreationists if we aren't careful to value the environment for more than it can offer us for a particular use. In this way, it's important to keep in mind a multitude of values when we're practicing aesthetic valuation of the environment.

While increasing forms of interaction with the environment may be one way to achieve this, another way is to listen to the experiences of others. I'm not an avid climber myself, but I strive to appreciate the environmental nuances that climbers are able to share with me through their experiences. Sharing stories of experience and varying aesthetic appreciations can be a great way to go about expanding one's perspective. It's also important to consider aesthetic appreciation of a landscape beyond what it offers us as recreators or users in any form, which is to recognize the worth of the environment in and of itself- beyond human utility. I'll be exploring this distinction between instrumental and inherent value of the environment in my second theoretical application.

A third philosopher discussed in this course with particular relevance to my project is Nick Riggle. Riggle's piece "Individuality, Freedom, Community" comments on how our aesthetic valuing practices allow us to cultivate and express our individuality (2022). How we feel, how we value, and how we talk about feeling and valuing in our aesthetic lives all resonate with the kind of community formed between individuals. Aesthetic life is a matter

of having an aesthetic valuing practice in which we exercise a special kind of expressive freedom, cultivate our individuality, and create and access special forms of community.

This can be seen in practice in the endless social groups we become immersed in and the ways they shape our aesthetic choices, from the clothes we wear, to the entertainment we enjoy consuming, to the environments we find most desirable to be in. Those who are in the art community may find particular enjoyment of the fabrics and designs of unique clothing styles that demonstrate their creative expression. Business-oriented individuals in New York may aesthetically appreciate the lighting and presentation choices of a post-work cocktail lounge. The artist and businessperson, if switched, would likely recognize much less of the aesthetic nuances of the other's enjoyment. We see beauty and derive value from the experiences and environments that our identities and communities are most tied to.

In applying this view to my podcast series, we can think about how different types of outdoor recreation have their own communities that adopt their own 'aesthetic profiles'. Runners may be caught getting excited about a certain brand of running shoes and checking their Strava profiles. Skiers will discuss the best powder conditions and their favorite skis. But what all recreation groups have in common is that they have a community-oriented appreciation for their sport and the environment in which it takes place. Most every outdoor group will list community as one of, if not the, top factors in their love of what they do. With communities formed around a collective enjoyment of a place-based activity, the place itself gains aesthetic value. One's appreciation for the beauty of Mount Sentinel is likely to grow when based in a larger community love of and appreciation

for a shared mountain. Recognizing how the communities we form influence how we look at and aesthetically value the world around us demonstrates the importance of practicing intentionality in the groups we associate ourselves with.

What we know about the areas we occupy, the games we play within them, and the communities we form around them shape the pockets of beauty we find in our everyday environments. Through a diverse array of experiences, hobbies, and communities we each have a unique set of criteria that we use for valuing our environments. Philosophers like Carlson, Nguyen, and Riggle help us to consider how our varying criteria impacts the way we view and act toward our surroundings. Understanding what influences our aesthetic perceptions of the natural environment allows us to consider how we can best position ourselves toward an environmental ethic and movement that we desire. This involves celebrating the unique lens that our identities give us to appreciate different types of environmental beauty, while also recognizing the limitations and blind spots we face through our limited scope of experience. Listening and connecting to the way that others find aesthetic value in the outdoors is one way to expand our scope of understanding, and I'm hopeful that my podcast provides a platform in which to do so.

II. Environmental Philosophy

In this course we closely examined the main topics that composed the first fifty years of professional environmental philosophy. These include intrinsic value debates, ecological feminism, environmental virtue ethics, environmental justice, indigenous perspectives, and wilderness debates. We looked at how views such as Aldo Leopold's land ethic in *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), Rachel Carson's environmental health

warnings in *Silent Spring* (1962), and Arne Naess's deep ecology movement in "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements: A Summary" (1973) drew attention to the need for a new environmental ethic focused on our interconnectedness with the natural environment. Following this movement in the mid 1900s, our class chronologically traced the biggest developments and transformations that have occurred within the field through the early 2000s. Among many voices and viewpoints, the topics I find most intertwined with my project include Holmes Rolston's contribution to the intrinsic value debate and Henry Bugbee's argument for place-based environmental ethics.

Holmes Rolston III was a leading voice in the argument for the intrinsic value of nature. Intrinsic value of nature refers to the inherent worth of ecosystems, species, and natural entities independent of their utility, economic value, or usefulness to humans. Much environmental thinking and action prior to Rolston had been focused on the protection of nature for the sake of its value to humans, such as its natural resources or offerings of solitude. This is known as instrumental value. Instead, Rolston argued that nature has value in and of itself: "Nature is not barren of value; it is rather the bearer of value" (Rolston 1982, p 151). This claim of intrinsic value posits that nature has a right to exist and flourish for its own sake, rather than solely as a resource for human consumption.

Under this view, living beings and ecological systems deserve respect and protection regardless of human perception or use. Rolston argued that when we attribute inherent value to natural environments, we are more likely to protect them and treat them in ways that consider their best interests rather than our own. This, in turn, will be a more prosperous worldview for humanity too. Rolston asks, "What if living well is not merely a

getting of what I value, but a negotiating of my values in a neighborhood of worth?” and he claims that “to devalue nature and inflate human worth is to do business in a false currency... We are misfits because we have misread our life support system” (1982, p 150).

One way that Rolston makes this argument for intrinsic value is through his appreciation for the deep time and history behind the formation of Earth’s systems. In his famous piece “Hewn and Cleft from this Rock”, Rolston narrates his hiking encounter with a Precambrian geological boundary in East Tennessee. He reflects on the evolution of human life from rock to complex organisms, exploring how humanity itself is hewn and cleft from the rock. The rock he’s surrounded by is the womb of Mother Earth, and he is “the sentient offspring” (Rolston 1971, p 79). Through this reflection of geological history, he illuminates the power of deep time and its immensity in birthing us. He asks readers to join him as he admires the processes from which we originate, as “knowledge begins in wonder... reveling in awe, I am who I am” (Rolston 1971, p 83). His exploration of the geologic origins of the Earth leading to life in modern day comments on the interconnectedness of humanity with the rest of the natural world. It also serves as an argument for the respect and value that natural systems hold outside of human desires and agendas.

The argument Rolston makes for intrinsic value of nature has become something that most of today’s society is familiar with. Though still relevant as a debate, many are on board with the idea that even when humans are removed from the equation altogether, ecosystem functions and nonhuman lives still have their own value. In the U.S., a 2014 study of adult residents found that 81% believe in nature’s intrinsic value (Bruskotter et al

2015). So how does this philosophical view play into recreation in the outdoors? It's important to consider here that recreational use of the environment is actually a type of instrumental value. When we use a trail to mountain bike or a river to fish from, it's serving a function to humans that creates a source of value or worth. So, it isn't given that outdoor recreation will lead one to recognize the intrinsic worth of the ecosystems they interact with.

In "Hewn and Cleft from this Rock", Rolston describes coming across a sheriff on his hike who is there in search of moonshiners. The sheriff has no regard for the ancient geological presence of the area. He is instead there solely to track down criminals and enforce human law. Rolston remarks on this disconnect of the sheriff from the natural environment, exclaiming "It was as though he pursued his moral quest independently of his origins... as though his sermon and authority were derived elsewhere than from the dust of which he is composed" (1971, p. 82). While an outdoor recreationist may be more likely to immerse themselves in their natural surroundings in a way that the sheriff fails to, it isn't impossible for outdoor users to fall into the same lack of regard that Rolston warns against.

Valuing a wilderness area for the rock faces you can climb doesn't mean you will attribute them as having value in their own right if you could never access them again. Appreciating the awesome holds these rocks offer for your sport doesn't necessarily mean you're joining Rolston in his reverence for the deep geologic history of this rock in which, according to him, has led to your creation. Enjoying a trail that provides miles to run doesn't ensure that when you pass through an area of old growth trees you'll pause to soak in their magnitude.

I think that this illuminates an interesting point in considering the narrative tool of the podcast. Utilizing instrumental value as a motivator for environmental protection, such as protection of natural resources or backpacking trails, can be an incredibly useful way to encourage sustainable use initiatives. But without there being an appreciation for the worth an area has independent of its connection to humans; is there potentially something missing from our ethical approach? It's important to consider how this could lead us to skew our efforts toward caring only or mostly for the areas that serve us best, while overlooking natural systems that don't have the same instrumental value for us. Analyzing how intrinsic versus instrumental values impact the way we shape our environmental ethics and agendas is relevant to consider within the theme of my podcast.

Another author we discussed along this timeline of environmental philosophy is Henry Bugbee and his emphasis on place-based storytelling. Bugbee supported the view that having a deep, experiential, and emotional connection to the wilderness through specific, local environments is most powerful for shaping a strong environmental ethic. He argued that forming ethical foundations based on lived narratives is how we shape our ideals around environmental thinking and action. "Experience is our undergoing, our involvement in the world, our lending or withholding of ourselves, keyed to our responsiveness, our sensibility, our alertness or our deadness" (1958, p 41). For Bugbee, philosophy was rooted in the granular details of life as it is lived, and the process of decision-making that shapes it. In his book "The Inward Morning", Bugbee proposes that philosophy is a mediation of the place. It must be built standing on one's own ground. He asks readers to find wonder in the particulars, from each bend in a stream to each brand of

a willow. Our fundamental attunement to our surroundings is what brings us before reality and frees us from being lost among things.

Bugbee argues that observations of our local environments, such as a river we often pass by, are what can guide our ethics: “I could wish for no more than to do justice to the instruction I have received from moving water” (1958, p 83). Noticing these particulars in our individual experiences is essential to not becoming overconsumed and disconnected through the exciting fullness of reality. He goes on to use the example of fishing. There can sometimes be so many fish that it is difficult to concentrate one’s attention on any particular fish. This danger of loss of focus calls for a moment of recollection, so that one can “fish in one place, for one fish at a time” (1958, p 86). This loss of connection to place and overwhelming presence of reality is a feeling many can relate to, especially in current day with the growing influence of travel and technology. Endless worlds at our fingertips through screens allow us to disconnect from our current surroundings in a millisecond. With countless distractions, or fish, always in front of us, we become unable to focus and find investment in the issues and matters right in front of us. This message can be applied to many aspects of everyday life. In terms of the natural world, Bugbee is pointing to the importance of appreciating and addressing the environment right in front of us.

Bugbee’s writing and messages strike several chords with the aim of the podcast project. The most prominent of these to me is the emphasis on place-based connection and how it guides our ethical approach to all aspects of life. The communities we’re surrounded by, the mountains and valleys we live within, and the unique narratives we experience are what inform our views on the world.

As Bugbee argues, the experiences and details we find in our direct surroundings, rather than universal generalizations, are what truly guide the way we approach the world. He writes, “I think of immersion as a mode of living in the present with complete absorption. The present in question seems to expand itself extensively into temporal and spatial distances... There is a continuing passage from thing to thing in which a kind of sameness or continuity of meaning deepens, - ever confirmed and ever relevant” (1958, p 52). In this way, sharing and hearing stories about individual or community-based relations to lands can have some of the most impactful influence in shaping our outlooks. Listening to community members we know speak about areas we share allows us to relate our individual narratives through a common basis. It creates connection, stirs emotion, and inspires us to action.

This is a main pillar on which my local storytelling project rests. Passing local stories of recreationists who have first-hand experience of shared land highlights how climate impacts are observable on an individual basis. It captures an issue of massive scale and magnitude on a localized, experienced level. Just as Bugbee emphasizes striving to learn from the water flows he observes, we can all strive to learn from our community’s witnessing of a changing climate. And in the same way that it's important to focus on catching one fish at a time, considering how to recognize and address climate impacts on a local level can pull us from the hypnotic, overwhelming sea of fish in front of us. It can encourage us to act not only on a broad scale, but also through contributions that are noticeably impactful to our communities.

Both of these authors, who have contributed to significant movements in environmental philosophy over the last fifty years, provide me with insights that deepen the mission and intention of my project. Considering Rolston's views of how we attribute value to the natural environment reminds us to expand our appreciation for it beyond the recreational opportunities it provides. Reflecting on Bugbee's argument for the strength of place and experience-based narratives in shaping our worldview prompts us to recognize the importance of particulars in the surroundings and experiences of our everyday lives. These insights help us to prosper through a more informed, attuned approach to our environmental ethics and actions.

III. Issues in the Anthropocene

Humanity's globally extensive impact is leading to mass extinctions, changes in atmospheric chemistry, and altered terrestrial features. Over two decades ago, the term 'Anthropocene' was proposed to denote our current interval of time- one dominated by human activity (Zalasiewicz et al 2010). The term serves to capture the reality that we're living in an age in which humans have impacted the Earth to such an immense degree that we must consider humanity's presence in every capacity of our world. The challenges of the Anthropocene include consequences that stretch far beyond geology, impacting the decisions we make on social, political, and ethical levels. In this class, we explored how this human-dominated time period shapes key concepts in environmental thinking. We questioned what it means to think of the Earth as having entered a 'post-natural' epoch, and what implications this may have for the way we approach practices such as land use, policy formulation, and new climate technologies.

Accepting that we have entered a time period in which human activity has fundamentally altered the planet raises important questions for what 'nature' truly means- and whether it still exists. One of the first writers to argue that human activity has fundamentally altered the planet, ending nature as a force independent of humanity, is Bill McKibben in his 1989 book *The End of Nature*. McKibben writes on the colonial settlement across North America as an example of how 'nature' and 'wilderness' has come to an end. Early explorers came across lands that had seen little to no trace of people or human development. He recounts the experiences of explorers such as Bob Marshall, who set off to explore Alaska's Brooks Range and wrote "I cannot convey in words my feeling in finding this broad valley lying there, just as fresh and untrammelled as the dawn of geological eras hundreds of millions of years ago" (McKibben 1989, p 53).

In the modern day, McKibben argues that "we are rarely reminded anymore of the continent's newness" (p 53). But despite this, we are still passionate about designating certain wilderness areas to be free of humanity's presence. We have been able to preserve this idea of wild nature in our minds, and this idea has managed to survive much of our destruction of nature over time. He states that "wilderness can survive in our minds once the land has been discovered and mapped and even chewed up" (p 58). By changing the climate, we've impacted every spot on Earth in some capacity. McKibben argues that the conceptions we have of nature and wilderness no longer exist.

Many people, including myself, have quite a hard time accepting this notion. McKibben describes this idea of nature as a type of faith. The awe-inspiring experiences of imagining and spending time in areas completely independent of human influence is

considered equivalent to a religious, existential, or soul-moving experience for many. In interviewing outdoor recreationists who pass so many of their days in the largely undeveloped areas surrounding Missoula, this passion for wild areas shines through. At first glance, asking these individuals to let go of the idea of nature as Bill McKibben suggests may feel like pulling the wind from their sails. But outdoor enthusiasts may actually be some of the best-equipped to do so. Most who have spent extensive time in wilderness areas can provide first-hand accounts of how human influence is not escaped in these seemingly untouched spaces. From planes flying overhead, to nuclear plant lights in the far distance, to changing weather patterns, to trails stretching far and wide- humanity's footprint is ever present.

These testimonies come through in the interviews in my podcast. Highlighting this reality supports McKibben's argument that nature as we conceive it has come to an end. How can it serve us to view nature and wild spaces as no longer existing, when this faith is often what brings hope and inspiration in the midst of so much destruction? Perhaps it can be found by taking a step past McKibben's suggestion and dissolving the human nature dualism altogether. Steve Vogel argues that mourning the death of nature is a mistaken path, as 'nature' never existed to begin with.

In his book *Thinking Like a Mall*, Steve Vogel argues that the distinction between humans and nature is a false dualism that has perpetuated the environmental crisis we now find ourselves in. The environmental movement has traditionally been concerned with this concept of 'nature', focused on protecting nature against the harms generated by human action. In his opening pages, Vogel writes:

“The “environment” it wishes to defend is not the built environment of cities, or the technological infrastructure that modernity seems to require- although many of us live in urban environments, and the technologies of modernity might be said in a deeper sense to “environ” us all.” (2015, p1)

Vogel argues that this focus on natural environments causes disregard, or even disdain, for the human built environment. He argues that the concept of nature is one that we *ought* to give up. When we separate ourselves and what we create from the rest of the world, treating nature as something that needs to be protected because of its independence from human beings, we fail to take responsibility for our role in shaping the world.

Vogel utilizes a “Thinking Like a Mall” parody of Aldo Leopold’s famous “Thinking Like a Mountain” to drive home the idea that nature doesn’t have special intrinsic worth just by being “nature”. He sets up the parody by pretending to argue for the moral worth of a mall. He draws parallels between the mall and the mountain, arguing that the mall is not fundamentally distinct from the mountain in any way. Like the mountain, the mall is an independent being that has become incorporated into the larger ecosystem. It too is acted upon by unpredictable forces outside of human control. And it too deserves to be mourned when it is destroyed. Vogel asks readers, “Why does the destruction of a natural entity such as a mountainside raise moral questions while the demolition of a building does not?” (p 138).

He ultimately uses this parody to argue that the only thing fundamentally separating the mountain from the mall is the factor of human creation. And this alone is not a valid distinction for attributing a mountain moral worth that a mall simultaneously lacks. He

drives home his real point that while there can be many great things to value in nonhuman entities, assigning them their own moral worth distinct from humanmade artifacts is as absurd as attributing that worth to a mall. He uses his mall argument as a reductio about mountains. Instead of valuing natural entities for the sake of being “natural”, we ought to identify specific qualities about them that make them valuable- just as we should recognize the qualities of human artifacts that give them value.

Vogel argues that when we dissolve this distinction we’re able to focus on taking real action toward a better future. Recognizing that we are surrounded by that which we physically build and socially construct requires us to look at the unsustainable, harmful processes we’ve adopted. According to Vogel, “it is a social question, and requires a social solution” (p 199). The message received from Vogel’s view is not a story of tragedy as one may read from McKibben. Rather than mourning something we’ve destroyed, we need to reshape our world view to recognize ourselves as an inseparable, influential, and responsible force in our environment. We need to imagine and work together to build things we’re proud of. To construct cities we enjoy inhabiting. And to build an environment that sustainably supports lives we all want to live.

Another advocate of letting go of the concept of untouched nature is Jedediah Purdy, who argues that the term has culturally been used inconsistently and harmfully throughout history. Today it proves to be obviously hollow, as “the natural and the artificial have merged at every scale” (Purdy 2015, p 15). Purdy makes a case for the “post-natural” world we now live in by describing modernity in a way that makes artificial influence impossible to ignore. He describes our “every function extended by engines, screens, and

data streams; we are cyborgs in artificial worlds” (p 16). Yet, Purdy’s point is not to suggest that the Anthropocene reality is inevitably a dystopian one. He instead argues that accepting this reality involves taking responsibility for the parts of society often deemed most artificial- with politics falling high on the list. He writes, “collective, binding decisions are how people can give the world a shape that we intend” (p 19). Like Vogel, Purdy sees the solution to our environmental crisis as a social one. It’s a problem that is ours to solve.

Changing our narrative to take pride in the environments we create, including the cities we build and the buildings we occupy, may seem like an overwhelming pursuit. The idea that we live in heavily polluted, ugly cities with poor waste management and overconsumption runs strongly in the views of much of society. But thinkers such as Vogel and Purdy encourage us to take a new look at our surroundings and think about how we can find value in these spaces.

Emma Marris is another proponent of positively reshaping how we view humanity’s presence within the environment. In her book *Rambunctious Garden*, Marris argues that we make a mistake when we think of nature as something “out there”, far away. Pristine and untouched by humanity. She states, “This dream of pristine wilderness haunts us. It blinds us” (p 1). Just as nature can be found in wilderness areas and national parks, it can also be found in the birds in our own backyards; the carefully designed garden; the dandelions at the park. Like Vogel, she argues that we must let go of this idea of untouched wilderness. Instead, we should look to a “more nuanced notion of a global, half-wild rambunctious garden, tended by us” (p 2). This means marveling at the diversity of life in unfamiliar places and in new capacities. She argues that our ideas of nature cannot be stagnant, as

“ecosystems are in a constant dance, as their components compete, react, evolve...” (p 4). Rather than viewing human change to nature as degradation, we should be building environments that support the ‘wild’ entities we wish to see flourish.

On a similar page to Vogel and Purdy, Marris asks us to take responsibility for the built environment and to let go of this idea of pristine nature. She asks us to see ourselves as part of the equation, and to instead put our energy toward building an environment we want to see. While one may find bliss in driving to a quiet mountainside trail to run, there can also be beauty and enjoyment found in running at a local park or along the river through town. Outdoor recreationists can be intentional about finding and shaping spaces within urban areas that allow them access to the components of nature that Marris suggests we can build into our environments. This includes building parks, establishing urban trails, grooming ski areas, and creating river access points. Outdoor recreators can have a positive and vital influence in shaping cities and towns to incorporate the aspects of ‘wild’ that we love to exist among.

Accepting humanity’s impact on the Earth may mean letting go of the conceptions of ‘nature’ and ‘wilderness’ that have long shaped the heart of environmentalism. For those who advocate for the value of the natural environment the most, including outdoor recreationists, this may feel like an incredibly difficult narrative to accept. McKibben’s writings on the end of nature force us to look at the universal impact on the world, including a changing climate that is shaping the most remote areas on Earth. Vogel prompts us to consider how it was a mistake to ever consider ourselves as separate from the rest of the natural world in the first place. Instead, we have to accept our role as builders of our

environment and work to create a world we're proud of. Purdy echoes this sentiment, commenting on the centrality of our politics in finding a true solution. Marris suggests that we must find the 'wild' that we love about natural spaces in our own urban areas. Letting go of a faith grounded in untouched nature will not come without its challenges, but it can prompt us to shift our focus toward building a world we're proud of.

Actions Taken

Completing this engagement project occurred through a series of planning and action periods in the fall and spring semester. In this section I will chronologically outline the engagement activities I accomplished, from connecting with Climate Smart to sharing my podcast with the community.

Step 1: Identifying a Partner Organization

My first step in this project was to identify and connect with an organization that does work within the realm I was interested in engaging with. While I had identified a number of different organizations through some internet searches, I ended up coming across Climate Smart at the pre-event for Running Up for Air last February. I was able to introduce myself to Amy Cilimburg, the executive director of Climate Smart, and then follow up with an email to express my interest in partnering with them for my CEP. Amy and Shanti Devins were both excited to work with me, and we quickly began meeting to identify a project that would meet Climate Smart's needs while also suiting my skills and interests. Through a series of meetings over the spring and summer we landed on a storytelling project that highlights the climate issues in Missoula, as well as the solutions Climate Smart is working to provide to the community.

Step 2: Formulating a Project Outline

Once we landed on a storytelling project, I had to narrow in on how I wanted to tell it and from what lens I wanted to approach it. Since I had familiarity with RUFA and knew Climate Smart heavily benefits from the proceeds of that event, I decided that taking a recreation focus for my project would be a fitting approach. With such an outdoor oriented community, Shanti and I agreed that gathering stories on local climate impacts through the voices of Missoula's long-term recreators would be an illuminating and engaging project. I decided to build this project as a podcast mini-series in order to hone my communications and audio capturing skills. Formulating the project happened through a handful of brainstorming sessions with Shanti through the summer and beginning of fall, as well as many of my own hours narrowing down my ideas to one cohesive vision.

Step 3: Sketching out a Timeline and Resource Needs

With a project direction underway, it was time to set up an action timeline and identify resource needs. I worked alongside Shanti and school advisors to come up with a set of deadlines for when I wanted to have each podcast interview and polished episode complete. I also identified the RUFA pre-event as a platform to share the future podcast with the community. During this time, I identified all of the resources I would need for the process, including portable audio mics, the campus library recording studio, and various editing platforms. Identifying these resources included acquiring them, learning more about them from library staff, and familiarizing myself with the new technology.

Step 4: Identifying Interviewees and Conducting Interviews

The next step in my project was to identify interviewees, connect with them about my project, and set up interview times. This happened over the span of October to January, with the majority of them complete by the end of winter break. I identified individuals by first deciding on the five recreation types I wanted to explore. I then began reaching out to Missoula's community organizations affiliated with each group. This, for example, included organizations such as Adventure Cycling, Run Wild Missoula, etc. I emailed them with a summary of my project and asked to connect with any members who may be willing to have a field interview. Through a series of meetings, both in the field and in community spaces around town, I conducted a total of 8 interviews. These are the dates, locations, and participants:

10/23/25- Russell Parks and Zach Scott of Missoula Fly Fishing Outfitters- Boat trip on

the Blackfoot River

11/20/25: Joshua Phillips, Paragliding Instructor- Paragliding flight off Mt Sentinel

11/22/25: Ken Brown of Backcountry Horsemen of Missoula- Missoula Club Restaurant

12/4/25: Jim Sayer, Former Director of Adventure Cycling- Butterfly House

12/5/25: Meg Fisher, Paralympian and Physical Therapist- Missoula Public Library

12/5/25: Sarah Aronson, Climate Grief Therapist- UM Mansfield Library

1/7/25: Teagan Hayes, Missoula Nordic Ski Club- UM Mansfield Library

2/6/26: Various RUFA participants, race directors Mike Foote and Jeff Mogavero, Amy

Cilimburg of Climate Smart Missoula – RUFA 24hr endurance event at Mt Sentinel

Step 5: Podcast Editing

After completing 6 of the 8 interviews I began the editing process. In order to do so, I rented out the podcast studio at the university library for 3-hour periods. I started editing the podcast into a polished episode by listening to the interview and writing out a timeline of content discussed. Then, I created a thru-line and wrote out a voice over script around the sections of audio content I planned to use. Once I had the script written, I recorded the voiceover in segments. I then divided both the interview and voiceover into the desired segments and pieced them together on GarageBand. During this process I utilized Descript to edit unclear language or disruptions out of the interview audio. Last but not least, I added in all of the music and adjusted for volume variations. I worked with my friend JM to mix all of the music for the podcast based on desired tone and message.

Step 6: Sharing with the Community

The final step of this engagement project, alongside the requirements of paper writing and website building, was to share it with the community. In order to strategize this process I met with Shanti, who has an extensive communications background and was able to give me pointers for spreading the word. I started by posting my podcast to both [Spotify](#) and [Apple Podcasts](#). Through Canva I created a main graphic for my podcast as well as graphics for each episode that feature pictures of the interviewees. Once all of the audio, visuals, and descriptions were published on these platforms I began sharing them through text with family and friends. The next step was to create a [Google Drive Folder](#) for all of my content. This provides access to all audio files, graphics, photos, platform links, and episode descriptions. I sent this folder over to Shanti for her to utilize in her posts on

Climate Smart's social media, and I also shared it with all of my direct contacts who may have interest in posting about it on their own socials. The following step in my sharing process was to send out emails to any organizations that were affiliated with or shared a mission with my project in some way. The list includes:

- Runningupforair.org
- Watershed Education Network
- Missoula Nordic Ski Club
- Blackfoot Challenge
- Adventure Cycling
- Trout Unlimited
- UM Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research
- UM Environmental Studies Department
- Families for a Livable Climate

In these emails I included a description of my project and a couple of graphics for my podcast. I also prompted recipients to spread the word in some capacity, whether by social media or word of mouth. After sharing with these organizations, I moved on to draft an official announcement email to all of the professional contacts I acquired throughout the production process. This mainly included advisors and interviewees. This email included graphics, 'listen now' links, big thanks, a request for sharing the podcast, and an invitation to my upcoming project presentation.

Accomplishments and Challenges

Taking on this project came with a bundle of successes and challenges. In this section I reflect on my accomplishments as well as the difficulties I encountered along the way.

One of the most rewarding goals I achieved in this process was building the podcast project from the ground up. This meant celebrating countless smaller goals as I went. The first step was narrowing my scope down to which organization I felt my interests and skillsets best served. Identifying Climate Smart's involvement in the outdoor recreation community through the 2025 RUFA event I participated in was a great steppingstone for me to reach out to them. Once I had made the connection and knew they were interested in collaborating with me, it became an entirely new task to formulate a project that would serve us both well. My guidelines were left rather open ended. Shanti and I had agreed I would pursue some type of storytelling mission, and then it was up to me to decide what story I was going to tell and how to do it.

Deciding on my content scope, the media I would use, the final products I would produce, and the timeline for doing it was one of the most challenging but rewarding parts to see through. I would advise anyone else beginning their project to start earlier than they think they'd need, work to set up a timeline so that tasks don't feel overwhelming, and collaborate extensively with their partner organization for support in getting going/check ins along the way. Executing this podcast from conceptualization to production has been my biggest overarching accomplishment!

A close second to this success is the amount of community connection I've made throughout this last year. The goal of the community engagement project really is designed to get students out of the classroom and into Missoula, and I feel that my project was successful in this pursuit. From connecting with Climate Smart early on, to identifying

recreationists across many local events and organizations, my CEP created a strong platform for meeting new faces.

I think that part of what helped me to succeed in this is that I chose to work within a community group that I relate to. Having a love and passion for outdoor play made it easier for me to approach and get ahold of others who love it too. It is also notable that my project is a communications project at its core, so it revolved around the connections I made. I approached finding my interviewees by emailing local recreation groups, gathering mutual contacts from friends and advisors, and attending sports and climate activism events. With an eagerness to learn and put together a story platform that the community could utilize, I was well-received by those I reached out to and was given great support in return.

Inevitably, not everyone got back to me and some connections did not materialize, but that is part of the process. I would encourage anyone hoping to build strong connections in Missoula to design a project that will have a significant component of outreach or communications. And I would also say- don't be afraid to go for it! It's ok to be a stranger at the start. In my experience, Missoulians will quickly make you feel like a friend.

The last major accomplishment I would like to write on is the skill I acquired in learning how to create a podcast. This media format was entirely new to me, so I learned from my advisors and journalism friends along each step. This included components such as: designing the title and structure of each episode, creating interview questions, leading conversations with interviewees, using portable mics, writing thru-scripts, recording in the library podcast studio, editing the audio files, creating graphics, and uploading to streaming platforms. I really had to make my best-informed guess on many aspects, such

as how many interviews were reasonable to take on editing and how much content to cover in each interview.

It was great to learn about the number of media resources available at the UM library, and I highly encourage anyone who needs additional tech for their project to head straight there. The staff are incredibly helpful and will teach you how to use most anything you could think of needing for a media project! When I initially decided on the podcast format I knew it would be a challenge, but I also knew it was more attainable for me than trying to edit a full documentary without any film experience. I would encourage anyone deciding what format they want their project to take to challenge themselves with something new and exciting, but also be realistic about their current skillset. I think the ideal project combines skills you already have with new skills you hope to build so that some tasks feel very easy and natural, while others are a learning experience.

In addition to the accomplishments I listed above, I also encountered a number of bumps along the way. A lot of these were tweaks and adjustments to my original vision, such as allotting for longer episode lengths when the interview content was too important to cut down further. But I would say that the two biggest challenges were time management and interview logistics.

Time management will of course be a main challenge for most projects. And it especially rings true for unfamiliar tasks. Estimating the time it would take to secure contacts, conduct interviews, and go through the editing process was a challenge since I was unaware of how long these processes would take. These tasks were very time consuming and tended to take a bit longer than I had anticipated. Scheduling even more

time for these tasks by having all of the interviews and a significant chunk of the editing finished by winter break would have allowed me less of a time crunch at the end of the semester. This could also be a matter of project scope- taking on one or two less interviews would have made the workload lighter throughout.

The other challenge was interview logistics. Though scheduling and conducting interviews was time consuming, I was lucky to have participants that were easy to coordinate with. One area I did run into issues, however, was the audio quality of interviews. Since I was meeting interviewees out in the field or in off-campus locations, we were using portable mics with variable background noise. In some cases this was to my advantage- such as the sound of the water in the background of the fly-fishing episode. But in other cases, background noise had to be limited, and audio quality was not as strong as studio.

The other issue I ran into was that one of my interviews, the horse packing interview, did not come together as I had hoped it would. The conversation bounced topics a lot and did not have cohesive flow. Due to this, I decided to leave it out of the podcast series. If I had more time, I may have been able to create a primarily narrative episode with small audio clips from the interviewee added in.

Lastly, the goal was to meet recreationists in the field for their interviews. But the weather did not cooperate in every case, so I ended up conducting the cycling and Nordic skiing interviews indoors. In the future I would be more strategic about securing contacts earlier on and planning interviews in accordance with the weather, rather than scheduling them for a given day with less leniency for forecast accommodations.

Overall, this project felt successful and maintained its original vision throughout. If I were to do the project again with the knowledge that I have now, I would adjust my timeline, take on one or two less interviews, and be intentional about having each interview in the field. That being said, I'm grateful for the challenges I faced and the practice it gave me in learning how to redirect when necessary. The podcast was built not only by me but by the community, advisors, and friends that supported each step. It's rewarding to look at the final product and know how much effort and collaboration went into building what it is today. I hope that the episodes can continue to be spread across Missoula and give individuals a glimpse into the environmental changes that others are noticing so intimately through their sport. I hope that years in the future we may be able to look back and reflect on these reports with pride in changes we're collectively making for a better future.

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