

Correlations between Outdoor Recreation and Environmental Awareness in Participants with  
Various Ages, Cultures, and Abilities

by

Jackie Murphy

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of  
Arts in Education: Natural Science and Environmental Education

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

May 2023

Content Reviewer: Patty Born Selly and Jennifer Carlson  
Primary Advisor: Elizabeth Eby

*How can outdoor recreational organizations boost environmental awareness among various participants using Leave No Trace principles in a way that is accessible to all ages, cultures, and abilities?* This capstone analyzes a variety of different outdoor recreation outlets for the degree to which they effectively communicated Leave No Trace principles. Outlets include a gear company, rafting guide, paddling organization, and scuba instructor turned business owner. With each outlet, the age, background, and gender of ‘typical’ participants are evaluated, and methods to reach non-typical participants are considered. This capstone examines the ways in which companies and organizations educate participants on sustainable practices as they enjoy their leisure activities. An analysis of different outlets and programs indicates that outdoor recreation companies are most successful at inspiring people to adopt sustainable practices when participants are educated on such practices while engaging in outdoor activities that they enjoy.

Through this capstone exploration, my end goal is to create a space for organizations to learn from in order to boost their environmental education outreach within the outdoor recreation, informal, setting. The goal is to create media that take different outdoor recreation outlets and share the principles of Leave No Trace that is accessible to all ages, cultures, and abilities. The fact that many people enjoy spending time outdoors for leisure presents an important opportunity for environmental education outreach.

To address the question, *How can organizations boost their environmental education outreach using LNT that are accessible to all ages, cultures, and abilities?* I have created podcast episodes featuring guests who share how they incorporate environmental education into their outdoor recreational sports programs or companies. The episodes explore different organizations' LNT principles they deem important to share as well as the methods they use. The episodes also

explore different outreach programs that are designed to engage a variety of participants and increase usage of the outdoors. Increased use of outdoor spaces has a greater impact on the environment. Outdoor recreation companies are at the forefront of bridging the gap between new and seasoned outdoor participants. Sharing best practices on distribution methods of LNT principles is key to supporting the growth of outdoor recreation sports and participants.

This project will be a podcast series with five episodes. Each episode will feature a guest from an outdoor recreation company. The guest will introduce the mission of their company and the ways in which they work to increase accessibility to the outdoors. A podcast is a tool for enthusiasts and various outdoor companies to listen and learn from different experts in the field. Guests to be featured on episodes will include an owner of an environmental consulting business, a river guide, a paddling company owner, and a member of an outdoor gear company. There is a prepared series of questions and topics to be covered in each episode, but as the nature of a podcast goes, the more free-flowing and conversation-based, the more enjoyable and engaging for the listener. Episodes will cover topics including, but not limited to, how the guest was introduced to the sport and different LNT informational outreach efforts that are being done in the sport.

## [This Way Out\(Side\) Podcast \(link\)](#)

### **Descriptions:**

#### ***Episode One: Diving Deep into Conservation***

Episode one is called *Diving Deep into Conservation* and features guest star Krista Esplelien, a scuba staff instructor with technical diver ratings, an environmental consulting business owner, and an environmental education professor at Hamline University (**see Appendix 1**). We discuss how she fell in love with being underwater and her experience learning and leading dives in a variety of different places. She introduces me to a woman named Roberta who leads adaptive dives through her company Scuba Shack. Roberta has partnered with LifeWaters, a group that facilitates dives for people with disabilities. They are able to accommodate and adapt the sport for paraplegics, quadriplegics, amputees, and people suffering from PTSD as well as acute brain trauma. Within their facility, Scuba Shack, they offer a course called Scubility to help professional divers, dive buddies, and people with disabilities understand and take part in adaptive diving.

Krista Esplelien shares her journey combining her love of scuba with the environment to create her environmental consulting business, Environs. Through her work with Environs, she travels to different lakes in Minnesota to search for invasive species. She is able to offer specialized scuba dives in lakes to search for early detection of invasive species. She shared how her clients, people who live/own various lake properties on various Minnesota lakes, are already looking to lessen their impact when they reach out to her for help. In this episode, we also talk about an outreach program in Minnesota called Starry Trek. Starry Trek is a statewide event focused on searching for one of Minnesota's newest aquatic invasive species, starry stonewort (Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC)).

## *Episode Two: Making Waves in Outreach*

In episode two, I am joined by Courtney Devours, a rafting guide from Wilderness Inquiry (see **Appendix 1**). We focus our conversation on the mission of Wilderness Inquiry: to give access to local waterways to all people. She talks about her time leading the Canoemobile, a floating classroom. The Canoemobile travels to major cities all over the U.S. to bring students to their local waterways. They travel around the country so that a diverse array of students have the chance to experience an outdoor field trip right in their backyard. These experiences change waterways into places of recreation, learning, and community-building. From San Francisco to the Bronx, Canoemobile serves more than 30,000 youth and adults of all backgrounds and abilities each year (Wilderness Inquiry, 2023).

We discuss how Wilderness Inquiry is taking large strides in creating access to recreational water opportunities. She speaks about an event in San Francisco that was put on by the Environmental Traveling Companion to get a whole paddling company for people with varying abilities on their local waterways. She spoke about all the different adaptive equipment they carry with them to each location as well as the specialized gear that was at that event. She talked about how even at their campgrounds at the Apostle Islands in Minnesota, they still aim to make camping accessible for all. For example, they built boardwalks to help support people in wheelchairs.

Courtney Deavours also shares about the Gateway to Adventure program which is for people with high-need disabilities. The program provides one-to-one support to get people out on the water. It was interesting to hear all the different experiences that Courtney led and to hear how Wilderness Inquiry shares with people how they have access to waterways right in their own backyard.

### ***Episode Three: Trailblazing in Sustainability***

In this episode, I am joined by Theresa McKenney, Director of Sustainability at NEMO Equipment (**see Appendix 1**). We learn about her journey to NEMO and how she became the Director of Sustainability. She shares how NEMO is trying to pave the way in not only innovation but sustainable development. Speaking about how they are launching a handful of new campaigns and products to support their mission.

Theresa shared that on the NEMO website, they have a library of videos of how to use their gear to help spread the word of proper use. The goal of this library is to engage newcomers to the sport to bridge the gap between the newcomers and the seasoned veterans.

### ***Episode Four: Adventure Education in Action***

In episode four, I am joined by Karlie Weavers, a jack of all trades when it comes to leading expeditions in the outdoors (**see Appendix 1**). We focus our conversation on the mission of SOAR, an adventure education boarding school for children with ADHD and other learning disabilities. She talks about her role within SOAR. She was a field guide for groups of eight students over the course of five years.

The SOAR program combined small class sizes with outdoor experiential education experience to support the needs of students with different abilities. She speaks about how the goal of the program is to have students be confident in their skills of planning and running their own expedition once the year is over. Students come to SOAR with a variety of different outdoor experiences, and through the course of the program, the majority of the students changed their minds and impressions of the outdoors to a positive light.

The school also focuses on community engagement when they are not on an expedition. This leads to students practicing LNT principles in the real world. Students are encouraged to

volunteer in the local river and trash clean-ups, work in food pantries, and more. Students are not only learning how to enjoy the outdoors but they are being taught how to play in the outdoors safely while using LNT.

## REFERENCES

- ADHD boarding school: Soar Academy for Learning Differences*. SOAR Inc. (2023, February 9). Retrieved April 25, 2023, from [https://soarnc.org/academy/?gad=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw9J2iBhBPEiwAErwpec-VhweVeEMoG59QorpdX\\_q9iC9wvACzV9kSINedyfpUA3wEQVD16RoCALEQAvD\\_BwE](https://soarnc.org/academy/?gad=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw9J2iBhBPEiwAErwpec-VhweVeEMoG59QorpdX_q9iC9wvACzV9kSINedyfpUA3wEQVD16RoCALEQAvD_BwE)
- Home*. Environs Llc. (n.d.). Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <https://kristaenvirons.wixsite.com/environs>
- Outdoor Adventure Trips*. Wilderness Inquiry. (2023, April 4). Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <https://www.wildernessinquiry.org/>
- Nemo equipment homepage*. NEMO Equipment. (n.d.). Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <https://www.nemoequipment.com/>
- This way out(side) - episodes*. This way out(side). (n.d.). Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <https://sites.google.com/view/thiswayoutside/episodes?authuser=0>