

EP. 6: ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP 101

TRANSCRIPT

Kaitlyn Dirr 0:19

Hey there, my name is Kaitlyn Dirr and welcome to the NERR or Far podcast. Today's episode is all about environmental stewardship.

So what does it mean to be an environmental steward? Here to tell us more about stewardship and how the National Estuarine Research Reserves play a role as stewards in the southeast is Erik Smith, manager of the North Inlet-Winyah Bay Reserve in South Carolina.

Erik Smith 0:52

I think stewardship is probably the most important thing we do and it embodies every aspect of what the reserve does. There are a lot of different definitions of stewardship. I think the one that I like that sort embodies this notion of careful and responsible management of something that has been entrusted in your care. The coastal zone has been entrusted to us and we need to responsibly care for and manage it because it is so very important to us.

Kaitlyn Dirr 1:35

The coastal zone is important to us. You don't need to work at a reserve to be a steward of the coastal zone. We can all be caretakers of our environment. Keith Laakkonen, Director of the Rookery Bay Reserve in Florida is here with some ways to be good environmental stewards at the reserves and also in our own communities.

Keith Laakkonen 1:55

Yeah, so you definitely don't have to go to college or work at a research reserve to be a, to be a steward, as you said. There's a lot of stuff that you can do in your house and everyday life. You know, it's a small thing but native plants in your yard is very important for pollinators, for migratory birds, for wildlife moving through the area and your landscape, you know, make sure that you're putting down the proper and appropriate amount of fertilizer at the right time. Fertilizer is great for your yard, but if it washes off, it can be very harmful for the estuary by putting too many nutrients out there. When you're fishing, make sure you understand that if you're going to catch these fish that you understand how to exercise proper catch and release, that you're really protecting these fish because you just have an opportunity to engage with this animal for a short time and we certainly don't want to harm it after we release them. And also really respecting the space of wildlife. You know, we've talked about these nesting areas that are really important: when those birds are nesting or sitting on a beach, they're conserving their

energy, and if people are disturbing them or impacting them, it's really going to impact their health and their fitness. So I really think that anyone just coexisting with wildlife in the environment is probably the best thing you can do to help protect these areas and be a good steward.

Kaitlyn Dirr 3:16

There are many small ways to have a big positive impact on our environment. The same thing holds true at the ACE Basin Reserve in South Carolina. Here's reserve manager Julie Binz to tell us more.

Julie Binz 3:30

Ways that people can help protect the reserve? If you do come visit, we definitely want you to come visit, we definitely want you to share your experience with others and let everyone else know what you thought about the place, but then also, please remember to try to minimize your impact on the environment. We're trying to balance people being there and enjoying it but also allowing a safe space for wildlife and nice healthy habitat. So if there are signs or rules, please make sure you're following them. Don't go past the shorebird signs. When the shorebirds aren't nesting, don't bring dogs if it says no dogs, all of those things. All the rules are easily displayed easy to find on the website and we just ask that people minimize their impact and "leave no trace" when you're enjoying these places.

Kaitlyn Dirr 4:23

What does it mean to "leave no trace" at the reserves? Here to answer that question is Anita Grove, the Coastal Training Program Coordinator for the Apalachicola Reserve in Florida.

Anita Grove 4:35

Just have that mindset that you're going to take all the- try to leave only footprints as they say and take trash with you, put out fires that you start if you're camping, don't- you know we have a lot of artifacts that wash up on the beach from earlier peoples and you're not supposed to take that, and just you know, try to leave only your footprints and observe nature and observe what you're seeing and you will you'll do fine.

Kaitlyn Dirr 5:06

Leave only your footprints whenever you're out in nature. Taking responsibility and being aware of the impacts that your actions can have on the environment is important to the health and future of these systems. The Apalachicola Reserve's Coastal Training Program offers a course called the "Stewardship Series", an ecosystem studies program for residents and visitors to the reserve. Let's learn more!

Anita Grove 5:30

Well, we decided to offer some programs to residents, especially- we get a lot of new residents here and they might be from a, you know, the interior part of the country and not know about how to live on a coast. So we offer courses: oyster ecology, what is an estuary, the Apalachicola River and floodplain, the whole ecosystem of the river and the floodplain and how they work together. We also offer living shorelines to help people to understand the need to not put in a concrete seawall but to have a connection between the shoreline, the shoreline and the land. We also offer a course on bay-friendly landscaping because people who move here, it's an entirely different world. We don't have soil here, we have sand, so these courses are to help people understand the environment they come to because it's very different. Generally everywhere surrounded by water they have sandy soil, so it's to help give them an understanding of what they've come into and the value of it essentially and then they hopefully will become better stewards because they're able to understand that something they may not initially. For the bay friendly one... we have a lot of people who come and they want to put in grass and grasses from Asia. It's it's difficult to grow, especially on sand and it takes a lot of water. So it's sort of a losing proposition that I personally learned. And I want to share that with other people and people thank me a lot, but some people don't think me for 10 years after they've struggled with it for a long time. And we used to have what the local people call kind of a natural lawn and it's, it's a mix of dollar weed and weeds and... but it's natural, and now we have a lot of people moving here from suburbs where they have manicured lawns and they spray to keep the lawns, they spray and fertilize, which can impact the bay. And so we're trying to discourage some of that and as many parts of Florida are trying to discourage that so that it's more of a natural environment, especially when we have species landing here, looking for sources of food and those types of things.

Kaitlyn Dirr 7:55

Another way to get involved and make a difference no matter where you are is by participating in citizen science projects. If you're near a reserve, you can help out with projects like the oyster monitoring and butterfly monitoring network at the GTM Reserve in Florida, the new saltwater adopt-a-stream program at the North Inlet-Winyah Bay Reserve in South Carolina, or volunteer or intern any of these reserves sites in the southeast. More information on the different site opportunities can be found on the NERR or Far podcast web page or the websites of any of these reserves. Here with more information on some programs that allow you to be a part of citizen science no matter where you are, is Keith Laakkonen.

Keith Laakkonen 8:36

There's a ton of other citizen science programs out there. Literal programs such as things you can get on your phone. As a birder, of course, eBird is something that is really important to me, but it also gives scientists an understanding of how birds are using these habitats and how that may be changing over time. There's also things such as iNaturalist where people can not only record birds but they can record things such as reptiles, amphibians, plants, and so all these go into larger databases, which are going to give all scientists better understanding of what the landscape truly looks like. And citizens being involved in this is very important. It's not just scientists who can do this work. Anybody can participate.

Kaitlyn Dirr 9:17

Apps like iNaturalist and eBird are great because they really build this huge database that then becomes very powerful in understanding the distributions and the timing of different species at broad scales. This data is super useful for scientists not only at the NERRs, but also scientists across the country. In addition to being active collecting data that will help us better understand plant and wildlife distributions, you are also becoming more familiar with identifying species, which personally I think is super fun. The NERRs of the southeast are incredible stewards of the coastal zone. You too can be an environmental steward at the reserves and in your communities by getting involved in conservation outreach, as well as by remembering to "leave no trace" when you're out in nature. In our next episode, we'll explore what creatures live in the estuary, as well as introduce the practice of birding. Until next time, I'm Kaitlyn and this is NERR or Far: The Reserves Are Where You Are.