

Restoration of Protected Areas Will be Necessary for a Long, Long Time to Come

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THE OPENING SPEAKER to kick off “Restoration: The ‘Long Game’ of Protected Area Conservation” was Steve Buckley. He began with explaining the essential process of seed collecting. The designated months for the process are from August to December and among the few reasons why it’s so imperative are: the pollinator crisis, aiding plants for climate adaptation, assisting migration for plant species, restoration projects, etc. He also mentioned the nectar landscape which includes pollinators like bats, hummingbirds, bees and other insects. I would have enjoyed for him to expand on this a bit more and make a stronger connection to seed collection because I was left assuming that it was linked to the pollinator crisis?

Laura Jones spoke about the Merced River running through Yosemite. Her presentation was rather easy to follow due to the fact that she focused on the pros and cons of development around the river and in Yosemite. She illustrated the skills that are required to balance the community’s suggestions along with what is best for the designated protected area. A practical example of this was the expansion of parking lots in Yosemite. Being such a popular park, Yosemite visitors are requesting more parking sites, yet this brings up the problem of expanding on the park’s valued land. She also commented on bridges that reside in the park; bridges are recognized as a cultural resource as they aid in the exploration of the parks. Yet there is the question of whether it’s more important to protect a cultural resource or the free flow of the river.

Next up was John Burghardt. He gave a detailed presentation on Abandoned Mineral Lands (AML) by including outstanding statistics such as the fact that there are over 37,000 AML features throughout the national parks. In addition, a whopping 85% of them require no action to be taken in order for the area to be deemed safe. AML sites are hazardous to the public since they pose threats such as drowning, vertical drop-offs and bad air quality. Concentrations of carbon monoxide are extremely deadly by the time a person starts feeling nauseous, they’re usually too weak to react.

The last speaker of the day was Evan Wolfe. His presentation was the most elaborate as far as encompassing the various angles of his issue. His main discourse demonstrated soil water plant feedback specifically in wetlands. The star example throughout the session was the identification of a gully in the Halstead Meadow residing in Sequoia National Park; a gully is created by the

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channeling of extreme water flow up or down a meadow. The reason why they're detrimental to the wetland is because they cause sediment to erode removing nutrients for native vegetation such as bull rush, certain grasses and herbaceous dicots. The ultimate goal for restoration was to fill the gully with enough water for it to naturally disperse itself throughout the meadow, creating healthy soil organic matter which acts as a sponge in a normal meadow.

Reflection

While being educated on these topics, I realized that the identification of a problem and solution process is essential to executing goals. I appreciate the attention to detail and admire the many building blocks that are generated in order to attain conservation and preservation in the parks. Any student can take these tasks and lessons to critically think of avenues for concerns or answers in their own major. Additionally, what students can take away from this is the effectiveness of teamwork. Every individual has unique insights and ideas to bring to the table that help create an ultimate goal. Each one of these projects was devised and executed by large and small teams, not just by one person.