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[00:02 - 00:33] Speaker 1: Welcome to Protecting Hope- stories of successful sustainable tourism. Join us as we travel the globe listening to impactful stories about how sustainable tourism to protected areas contributes to environmental conservation, local economies and human well-being. This podcast is brought to you by the Center for Protected Area Management at Colorado State University, in partnership with the US Forest Service International Programs Office, and is supported by funding from the US Agency for International Development.

[00:40 - 00:49] Speaker 2: Episode three- The Unseen Benefits of Nature, with Doctor Kathleen Wolf. A special episode celebrating the International Day of Forests.

[00:52 - 01:34] Ryan Finchum: Hello everyone, my name is Ryan Finchum. I'm the director of our Center for Protected Area Management at Colorado State University, and I'm going to be one of your hosts of this podcast, Protecting Hope. We are launching this episode to coincide with the United Nations International Day of Forests. The theme this year is "Forests and Health". So, in this episode, we are reaching out beyond our network of past graduates of our sustainable tourism community of learning and practice to learn more about the human health and wellbeing benefits of spending time in nature. Today I'm with Kathleen Wolf, who is a research social scientist with the University of Washington on the West Coast of the United States. Thanks, Kathleen, for joining us.

[01:35 - 01:42] Kathleen Wolf: Ryan, thanks. Such a pleasure to be here. And I have to say, Protecting Hope, such a wonderful name for this.

[01:42 - 01:00] Ryan Finchum: Well, we really are appreciative of you being here. We know you've been off traveling around and have, uh, you know, have a lot of work to do. And, and so we appreciate you taking the time to be with us. Um, why don't we start off, uh, just with that brief kind of overview, provide us with a... With an idea of kind of who you are and what your research focuses on.

[01:00 - 02:27] Kathleen Wolf: Yes. Uh, my... My career has been a kind of a scientific meander. I started out as a biologist, actually, then, uh, thought I would become a landscape architect, but, uh, did graduate work in environmental psychology. So I bring the skills and theories of, of social science to my work. And over the last decade or so, I've focused more on health response in addition to other responses, particularly in, in urbanized areas.

[02:27 - 02:42] Ryan Finchum: The focus of UN International Day of Forest this year is on forests and health. And so I wonder if you could provide us with a brief overview of the types of human health and well-being benefits that are associated with spending time outdoors.

[02:42 - 03:38] Kathleen Wolf: Oh, where do we start? My goodness. Um, and I'll speak not only from my own research, but from the research being done by people all over the world, in nations, um, everywhere. And what we see is, first, mental health. And that's really prominent right now, there's a lot of concern about mental health. So time outdoors, even, even a few minutes, um, can help us to improve feelings of depression, anxiety, reduce stress, and so on. Then there's physical activity. So outdoors is the place where we can go out, not necessarily exercise, but just movement. Movement outdoors is really valuable for a wide array of benefits such as cardiovascular health, mental health as well. Um, and then there's social health. So, we are seeing in many nations quite a concern about loneliness. And that's important because loneliness can affect our physiological and mental health as well. So, being outdoors with others is really important.

[03:39 - 04:19] Ryan Finchum: A lot of your research, um, takes place in urban environments and other types of environments. Um, I, you know, I find myself thinking about, um, the lands that are managed by our primary partner on this podcast, the US Forest Service. You know, they have 193 million acres of national forest lands and around 160 million, uh, recreation and tourism visits each year. And I, you know, I find myself thinking about, well, what are what are, what are some of those specific kinds of health benefits that are likely accruing in these visitors, whether they... Whether they realize it or not? And, um, might we kind of, um, unpack a little bit more, um, the, the... These kinds of benefits that, that they're receiving?

[04:19 - 05:41] Kathleen Wolf: Well, I think we, what we see, let's think about a landscape gradient and the US national Forest and other public lands actually do cross a landscape gradient from being right in the middle of cities, down into cities, adjacent to cities, and then more out into the wildlands. So, across this entire continuum, being outdoors, spending time outdoors, be it just outside your home, or be it traveling a little distance to go to a more remote, conserved or preserved area; um, we see similar benefits from time outdoors. And what is really interesting about the research is, people are not always conscious of these benefits, um, in the moment. But often, as they return home to, they return to their schedules and busyness, they feel this sense of ease, the sense of restoration that happens from being outdoors. So, um, one finds different types of activities across this landscape gradient and different public areas, but overall, being outdoors generally is quite valuable. As long as the outdoor space you feel secure, you feel safe, it offers compatibility with the types of activities you like to do or want to do. So, it's about how people respond, but it's also how you manage the space to encourage and promote those benefits.

[05:42 - 06:05] Ryan Finchum: Uh-huh. So, we don't necessarily have to get, you know, really far away from the city in some remote area to be able to obtain benefits from nature. Um, it sounds like even just small, um, urban parks or green spaces right around where we live can provide some of those same benefits we might have previously attributed to only spending time in large scale, landscape scale forests.

[06:06 - 06:53] Kathleen Wolf: Uh, totally agree, and the term that I use is near by nature. So, that's been the focus of my research, is near by nature, what you see, experience, walk through, um, really close to your home. But this does extend, these benefits do extend to greater distances and greater, and... And larger areas. And as an example, forest bathing, forest therapy, a practice that originated in Japan, Shinrin Yoku. I participated in forest bathing with guides in remote, large forest areas, but I've also participated in it with a guide from Singapore with a single tree on an urban campus. So, with that as an example, you see the array of situations where one can experience health benefit.

[06:53 - 07:27] Ryan Finchum: Well, in reading some of your research as well, uh, in some of the, the information from other researchers you're sharing on some of your website, I've also seen that, um... Even proxies for nature can sometimes bring health related benefits. Um, this idea of, of bringing nature into your office, whether that's through plants or pictures of plants. I think there's some really important lessons learned for those of us that are, unfortunately, spending more and more time in an office setting, that that... We can also bring benefits to ourselves by, by... By bringing nature into the office.

[07:27 - 08:23] Kathleen Wolf: Oh, yes. Uh, not only that, but bringing plants and nature into hospitals. Um, think about situations where either people are unable to go outdoors or are immobile. And yes, uh, virtual nature, remote nature, views of nature out a window are valuable, we see that across the studies. As an example, I once was on tour in a hospital looking at various therapy gardens, and one was in a burn ward, and people were not able to go outdoors because of issues with infection, skin infection. But they all had views, it was designed in the facility. They all had views into a small, high, highly... High quality designed space. So, what we see across the research is this human response to nature. A biophilic response, if you will, transcends not only the situation, but what one sees, what encounters are exposures to it. And we're still learning more about that.

[08:23 - 08:39] Ryan Finchum: Do we need to be spending lots and lots of time in nature for these, like, for these benefits to start to accrue to the point where we start to see substantial improvements in our health? Is there, you know, what is the literature telling us about how much time we should be spending in nature to receive some of these benefits?

[08:39 - 09:39] Kathleen Wolf: So, you're alluding to one of the most- uh, to my knowledge, recent- uh, pursuits of this research, is dosage. How much? How often? Who? So, what we see generally; there's not entire, uh, consensus, complete consensus; but what we see is about twenty to thirty minutes is really great for being out. Now, there's some studies that show as little as five or ten minutes value. But in terms of sustaining the, um, uh... The health benefit and the sense of benefit, twenty to thirty minutes. Then, just like a doctor's prescription, you don't take one pill and, you know, things are done. You need an ongoing dosage, if you will. So, what's recommended is about 120 minutes a week. And that's, again, very general guidelines. But what that does is with twenty to thirty minutes a week, it also includes probably a certain level of activity, which again, is really valuable for general health in so many ways.

[09:39 - 09:50] Ryan Finchum: Yeah. So, the green space, um, serves as the staging ground for these kinds of physical behaviors that, um, also add to our health benefits. Yeah.

[09:50 - 10:09] Kathleen Wolf: Yes. It's really a stack system of benefits. There's the... There's the actual encounter with the nature and physiological response to that. And then, if you're out and moving about, which may be more likely in a large public land, conservation land, then there are those activity level benefits.

[10:09 - 10:41] Ryan Finchum: You know, a part of our work with the US Forest Service International programs is focused on creating capacity, sharing opportunities on a number of different fronts. Um, and most of the people listening in on this podcast are involved in sustainable tourism in some way, usually to national forests, national parks or other protected and conserved areas, either here in the US or around the globe and, um, what do you think are some of the key lessons that, that you're finding through this research that, that apply more broadly to the development of sustainable tourism opportunities around the world?

[10:41 - 12:09] Kathleen Wolf: Let me just say, what are the sort of, um, extension ideas from what I have learned about nature and health research? The first is how... Enable people to be able to get to these spaces. So, do you offer transit opportunities, carpooling, ride sharing; enabling

people to get to places which, um, that has been a limitation for a number of urban populations, to actually reach these spaces. The second is programming. So, thinking about what are the ways that you can develop programs that welcome people, because the research suggests that there are some people who don't realize this nature is accessible for personal use. They don't know how to get there, they don't know who to talk to or how to engage with it. So, offering programming. The third is, um, thinking about economic development. So, that may involve different partnerships. So for instance, maybe there's a nearby health care system, a rural health care system, or a larger system. Can you work with the medical community, say parks prescription or walk with a dog? These are national level programs in the US and are now starting to extend to other nations as well. But because of the nature and health research, we're looking at different opportunities for partnership to engage more people in connecting with, um nature, be it near or far for, for health benefit.

[12:09 - 13:02] Ryan Finchum: And I really appreciate the really specific translation of the research to, to really applied, you know, um, um, um... Kind of tactics or strategies that different public land management agencies, municipal parks and things like that can take in order to help, you know, provide that access. Um... And, and actually access is one of the things that I think many of our people are thinking about, um, that are, that are working across this spectrum of recreation and tourism opportunities and thinking about diversity, equity and inclusion, and thinking about who has access to green space and who doesn't have access to green space. And I just was curious if you are all, are finding anything in the in the literature and the research about, um, the, the importance of providing access to, to all people to these forested spaces and, and, and, and whether or not there has been a sense of kind of restriction to these spaces by, by some populations.

[13:03 - 14:30] Kathleen Wolf: Well, first of all, we see, um, there have been a number of studies, big data studies that analyze people of certain socioeconomic situation and where nature is present. And we see nature deprivation. That's a term that's coming around to suggest that underserved communities in urban areas typically- not always, but often- have fewer parks, fewer trees, and so on. So a lot of cities are taking efforts to remedy that. And that's something that's going on all around the world, not simply, not only here in the United States. So, um, but also I would say, and this is because I've worked with the Forest Service and I live in an area with abundant public lands. I'm not sure that the message of management of these spaces has been to welcome urban visitors. Um, and so, uh, rethinking, why are these places of value to the community? And so, Ecosystem Services has driven that outlook in management; water quality, air quality and so on. But now we see this very personal, very personal health response of people being in contact with trees, being in contact with the outdoor environment; and that may change then how we think about management, how we welcome people and again, how we provide the spaces and activities to accommodate their interests and, and just to say, "Hey, you belong here. Welcome. We enjoy having you here."

[14:30 - 14:53] Ryan Finchum: Yeah, I really appreciate that. The, the... For these public lands to truly be public and to, for the for the population as a whole, to feel like they are the co-owners of these spaces. We need to make sure that everyone feels welcome there and that everyone has the opportunity to improve their own, um, their own health outcomes by, by spending time in nature. And I think, so that's just really, really important.

[14:53 - 15:31] Kathleen Wolf: I'll add really quickly to that, um, and, and that involves rethinking perhaps the spatial structure of these spaces. So, as a one time landscape architect, I don't practice anymore. But, um, there are ways baked in to how campgrounds are set up, trail systems are set up, and so on, that, um, it might be time to revisit those with the sense of more welcoming, of a broader array of visitors, not always the ones that want to do the 20-mile hike or

the backpacking trip, but those who may just want to come and do a stroll and enjoy a little forest bathing, perhaps.

[15:31 - 16:41] Ryan Finchum: Yeah, yeah, we, you know, we work with protected area agencies all across the, the globe, and, and... And many of them struggle with, um, um, creating a sense of ownership and a connection to their citizens at large. And, and I think a large part of that is that the citizens haven't always been welcomed, um, into these spaces that have previously been viewed as biodiversity protection spaces and things like that, versus, uh, being spaces that are created for biodiversity and for people to, to share, you know, in these, in these public lands. And so, I think turning that corner is going to be, going to be very critical and, and no doubt that the disconnection from nature, nature deprivation, the, the sense of increasing stress and anxiety are things that we're seeing among people all across the globe, um, as well. So I think many of the things that you've, you've highlighted today will hopefully, um, help some of our colleagues start to think through some of the ways they, they manage these public lands, as well as the kinds of opportunities they can create, uh, for, for, for all of their citizens. As we close, I wondered if you would share with us, um- what is it that gives you hope for the future?

[16:41 - 17:41] Kathleen Wolf: Young people, the young professionals coming into natural resource management, coming into urban forestry, parks management, uh, their keen interest in not only the health of the land, but the health of the people who interact with those lands. And I'm seeing with that a level of creativity, um, you know, breaking the mold, uh, of what they might have learned or what might have been the legacies, say, in natural resource and, and um, uh, conserved lands management. They're looking beyond that and they're looking for solutions because all of this is not easy. I've seen the user demand impacts on some of our public lands in our area, and we still have to figure out how to, um, guide people in responsible use of these spaces even though they are there for their own, perhaps their own benefit and purposes. But young people, the young people coming to all of this, uh, that's my hope.

[17:42 - 18:51] Ryan Finchum: That's wonderful. I love that idea that the next generation of leaders are not just following in step with the way it's always been done; definitely learning from, from the, from the past, but kind of charting their own path forward is going to be so critical to, to make sure that we're successful, you know? And that, and that people can live healthier lives so well. Thank you. Kathleen, I really appreciate your time today. Um, appreciate you joining us. I wish you lots of luck with your future research or your semi-retirement or whatever the case may be, uh, whatever you decide to get involved with. The, the, the, the, um... The research that you've done so far is, is so, so helpful for managers today and thinking about the future. So, uh, we will definitely include some links in, uh, in this podcast, uh, site to, um, sites such as Green Cities, Good Health and others, which are amazing resources and great examples of how research can immediately contribute to decision making and influence policy. Um, to all of our listeners, thanks for being a part of this podcast and participating in our sustainable tourism community of learning and practice. Don't forget to get outdoors and spend some time among the trees, your body and mind will definitely thank you for it. Talk to you all soon!

[18:55 - 19:05] Speaker 1: Thank you for listening to Protecting Hope. To find links and resources from today's episode, visit the Center for Protected Area Management's website or follow us on Instagram and Facebook.

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