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[00:02 - 00:33] Podcast 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 wellbeing. This podcast is brought to you by the Centre 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.[pause][music]

[00:38 - 00:44] Podcast Speaker 2: Episode 6, Regenerative Tourism, with Crista Valentino.[music]

[00:47 - 01:26] Erin Hicks: Hi, my name is Erin Hicks and I'm the Assistant Director for the Center for Protected Area Management at Colorado State University. I'm so glad to be your host today for our Protecting Hope podcast.[pause] Welcome, everyone. Today I'm with Crista Valentino, who currently is Interim Executive Director of the Jacksonville Travel and Tourism Board in the state of Wyoming in the US. Thanks, Crista, for joining me for a Protecting Hope podcast where we interview people from around the world to dive deeper into sustainable tourism. Um, to first, to start off with a little bit about what you're currently doing and some of your previous experiences in sustainable tourism.

[01:28 - 02:30] Crista Valentino: Sure. Yeah. Thank you. And thanks for having me on here, talking with you today. Um, so I was appointed to the Jacksonville Travel and Tourism Board five and a half years ago, as you mentioned. And quite honestly, it was really my first introduction to the tourism world. Um, I come from an environmental and sustainability background, and my interests have really always laid in people and how we, as humans, affect or are affected by the world around us. So, as I've gotten more involved in the travel and tourism space, I found myself really intrigued by discovering how we can use the inherent curiosity of people and our natural desire to explore and adventure and move across the land, which we've really done as humans since the beginning of time. And in modern day we call it travel and tourism, but really how we can use that to benefit communities and culture and even in ways be regenerative in its outcome.[pause][music]

[02:34 - 02:51] Erin Hicks: Involving people in sustainable tourism, destination management, you worked on the sustainable tourism destination management plan um, with Jackson Hole. Can you provide us more of a overview of why Jackson Hole decided to pursue this planning process?

[02:52 - 05:09] Crista Valentino: Absolutely. So as a destination, um, Teton County, which includes Jackson, like the town of Jackson, which many people refer to as Jackson Hole, but also Teton County includes Grand Teton National Park, Bridger Teton National Forest, the surrounding communities of Kelly, Wilson, Teton Village, Moose. Um, we really reached a point where we are seeing such an increase in visitors and a strain on our community and our infrastructure that we needed to more strategically consider visitor management as a part of our operating system to ensure that our community, our wild spaces, our environment, our culture, were remaining healthy while also not impacting our economy or negatively affecting our businesses. So, um, to put in perspective, Teton County is 97% protected land, which means that we have state and federal land management agencies to consider. We have Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, we have an airport and it's the only airport in the middle of a national park in the country. Um, we have a really robust small local business community. We have over 250 nonprofits and a very passionate and engaged community. So, it's all really a complex system of many, many stakeholders. So, our decision to pursue the planning process was really, for the first time, to engage all those voices in a conversation that created a collective vision for the future of the Valley, and also a clear roadmap on how to get there. So, the plan took in all about 16 months and was really highly focused on community engagement and feedback, and using community workshops and focus groups to validate the findings and recommendations at each step of the plan. So, it was a process. It really began with a lot of, um, research and desktop reviews from the start, because we wanted to start from a place of data and then use that data to build on top of it, some clear, um, like a vision, values, uh, goals, implementation actions, beyond it.

[05:09 - 06:31] Crista Valentino: And so, we to do this all, we hired a contracted team from George Washington University's Department of Tourism and Confluence Sustainability, and the Travel and Tourism Board also hired a contractor Sustainability Coordinator, um, through the River Wayne Foundation to manage this whole process. So for the duration, what that looked like was having 8 focus groups with over 150 tourism leaders, a part of them, 12 working sessions with over 50 community stakeholders, um, a resident sentiment survey that went out to the community that saw 4,777 responses, which, to put in perspective, was almost the same amount of respondents as the number of voters who came out in our last election. Um, and this is the largest residence survey in Teton County history. Um, our community is made up of about, uh, typically about 16,000 to 20,000 people who live here. And the outcome of all of this was a, comprehensive strategic analysis that outlined the future of tourism in the Tetons, and it was publicly revealed and officially adopted by the Jackson Travel and Tourism Board on January 26th.

[06:31 - 06:59] Erin Hicks: Wow. And I've looked at the Sustainable Tourism Destination Management Plan, and you guys have it very detailed, the whole process. And so, I really encourage people to look this up on the internet and download it for inspiration for other colleagues and listeners who are working at sustainable tourism management in their own sites. Um, are there any key takeaways that you have from your involvement in this process that you think are worth sharing with our listeners and colleagues from around the world?

[06:00 - 09:08] Crista Valentino: A lot of them, but what really comes to mind is, um, a phrase that came up early in our SDMP process. SDMP stands for Sustainable Destination Management Plan, which in and in of itself is a mouthful, and the document is also a mouthful, so they go hand in hand. But, um, that phrase that we continue to use and to really fall back on is all lands, all hands. And it's the recognition that we have to involve everyone in this process. All voices, all perspectives, all experiences. As I mentioned earlier, you know, our community is made up of land management agencies, resorts, business leaders, non-profits and etc. and so for the plan to actually take effect, we need all deck for its implementation. Um, it's really in that engagement, deep engagement and ownership from start to finish. And if you look at the final SDMP, we have

8 clear goals to help us drive forward towards this vision of being a sustainable destination for our community, for our economy, for our environment, and some of those goals may seem a bit outside the scope of work of a travel and tourism board or tourism focused entity. For example, one of the goals is focus on housing, another on mobility and transportation or climate action. However, if you take out any one of those topics, it's as though you're removing an entire chapter of a community story. And so, I think it's really important that these conversations are happening at all levels, between all sectors, in order to provide a forum for collaboration. In order to see this as a way to enhance efforts and maybe find gaps in work that's already being done. And I guess I really can't stress enough that the importance of casting a wide net when it comes to the community engagement and when it comes to who's at the table and who's a part of these conversations.

[09:09 - 09:25] Erin Hicks: Thank you so much. Um, I know this is just a short dive into a big project and really look forward to following how the implementation goes for the plan. When is the implementation sent to happen?

[09:25 - 10:47] Crista Valentino: So, we've actually already begun the first stages of its implementation, one of the priorities, I guess you could call it low hanging fruit that came out of the plan, was the development of something called the Destination Stewardship Council. Um, the idea is that while it's really important for us to develop a governance, an operating governance system that supports destination management and marketing, um, many times these are called DMO's or DMMO's, which Teton County or the destination of Jackson Hole doesn't have yet. In the interim, it was recommended that we develop this Destination Stewardship Council that helps bring tourism stakeholders to the table to have the discussions of developing what a DMO looks like that's really relevant to our community. Um, and also to help drive forward the progress in the implementation of the SDMP. Um, as I said, that all lands, all hands. So, bring in all the different, um, important people to really satisfy all or focus on all of those goals. And so, we're starting that process. We actually had our first meeting of the core team this morning. Um, and we'll be continuing to build that out and, um, continue the momentum here starting almost immediately.

[10:47 - 11:02] Erin Hicks: And that probably really speaks to what sustainable tourism is, that it really is focused on benefiting all involved, including, um, considering the environment. Um, would you like to share what sustainable tourism means to you?

[11:03 - 11:52] Crista Valentino: I actually prefer to go beyond the word sustainable because at its root and its definition, sustainable means to be maintained at a certain level. Right. And as I think we often find with the impact that us as humans and us as humans moving around the Earth have on this planet. The current state we often find ourselves in isn't necessarily something we want to maintain, right? A lot of times when we like effort to do these, these things like sustainable destination management plans or what have you, and it's to try to make things better. And so, um, in order to think about it, of how do we create the conditions that leave a place better than we found it? This is more of the idea of regeneration or regenerative tourism.

[11:54 - 12:13] Erin Hicks: That's great. Well, there'll be a lot of opportunities for us all to learn from Jackson holes. Uh, example. Um, as we close, I wonder if you would be willing to share with us about, um, what about sustainable tourism gives you hope for the future. Or regenerative tourism? What about it? Gives you hope for the future.

[12:14 - 14:12] Crista Valentino: I've been recently a part of a lot of conversations with similar communities to mine here in Jackson, similar mountain towns and such as Aspen, Park City, Taos, and have researched and learned a lot from even more similar communities like Vail, Tahoe, many places across Europe, and um. One thing that felt quite validating was that many of these communities are dealing with the exact same issues, that we are the same challenges, but

also see the same opportunities to make better decisions, to have a better strategy and mitigating the negative effects of tourism and also enhancing the opportunities that tourism brings us, is a topic that many of those destinations and more are having right now. And this includes, you know, educating visitors on how to be good stewards when they arrive, supporting residents and making better decisions about how they involve or engage with their community or being ambassadors. Setting standards for how to visit and how to manage a destination, encouraging good business practices that prioritize quality of life for residents. So really, what gives me hope is that these conversations are happening and that the messaging is actually quite consistent between us all, even without conversations taking place, but that also these conversations are starting to take place between destinations. And so, we're putting out that consistent messaging. We're saying the same things, and I think it's really going to shift the way that people visit to these incredible places. Um, those that makes that the quality of their visit better. It makes, um, the positive impacts of their visits on the community, uh, more parent. And I guess I'm really excited to see how tourism shifts over the next five years and how communities and ecosystems are better served by it.

[14:13 - 14:55] Erin Hicks: Thank you. And and it's great to know that the conversations are happening, um, throughout the world. And also here on our podcast, we hope to continue to have these conversations. We're grateful for having this conversation with look forward to having conversations with other leaders and folks working in sustainable tourism management in and around protected and conserved areas. Thanks so much for your time today, Crista, it's been a real pleasure and wish you the best of luck to you and the community of Jackson Hole and the implementation of the Sustainable Tourism Destination Management Plan. Uh, to our listeners, thanks for being a part of this podcast and for participating in our sustainable tourism community of learning and practice.[pause]

[15:06 - 15:16] Podcast 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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