

FY26 NMCB Coffee Hours-10.16.2025 GRIP Youth Interns TRANSCRIPT

0:02

I'm Allison Siwik Executive Director of Gila Resources Information Project, based in Silver City.

0:09

And with me here in the office is Mariah Runnels

0:14

Yep, I'm our tree stewardship coordinator at GRIP, and I also help supervise our youth interns.

0:20

And we also have hailing from Cliff, NM along the Gila River, Alesia Hallmark.

0:30

So Alesia is our pick it up toss no Mas coordinator.

0:35

So yeah.

0:37

And thanks Chantal for doing our slides.

0:41

So let's let's go to slide number one.

0:47

We're we're really excited to talk to you all today about how we're engaging youth in our Big Ditch Park revitalization project.

0:58

And this is a nice fall picture of Big Ditch Park.

1:03

For those of you who have been to Silver City, you know the story of the Big Ditch.

1:09

So Chantal, next slide.

1:13

About 100 years ago, this is what the Big Ditch look like.

1:17

So when folks came to Silver City back in the mid 1800s, this area was a Cienega.

1:29

So Cienega in Spanish means marshland, so cottonwoods, very wet Meadow, riparian wetland here through the center of Silver City.

1:44

But success when when settlement came, basically the town was laid out along drainage pathways and then obviously for, for for heating and cooking and building.

2:02

All the surrounding hills and uplands in what is now the Gila National Forest was all deforested essentially.

2:10

And so with precipitation and rainfall, we had basically no way to hold back the water, the rainfall, it didn't soak in.

2:20

And So what did it do?

2:21

It's just sort of ran down the drainages, you know, big floodwaters coming into Silver City that essentially eroded down through, I think it was three major floods over a period of probably 30 or so years that basically eroded down South Vicente Creek to bedrock.

2:44

So now in places, it's about 40 to 50 feet deep.

2:49

So we have.

2:52

And so actually, Chantal, go back to the yeah, starting in the 90s.

2:59

Well, actually before that, the town leaders had to build walls to sort of hold back the slopes.

3:06

So basically the town of Silver City has been fighting erosion in these slopes, basically caving into the Creek for 100 years.

3:15

They started out with these walls that they built to to buttress the the sides of the drainage.

3:23

And then in the 90s, they built this park on the east side of the park.

3:27

It's really gorgeous, but we're still fighting erosion.

3:31

So go to the Yeah, there you go.

3:36

Also, we're also fighting climate change here.

3:41

So we're getting hotter and drier.

3:44

We're having more frequent extreme precipitation events with flooding and then increased fire risk.

3:51

And all of these conditions are affecting our parks and our trails, our riparian areas.

3:57

So this actually I, this is a, I'm not sure this is going to work Chantal, because you could try it, but this is a video just to show folks kind of what it looks like when this area floods in Silver City.

4:12

And this is in Big Ditch Park.

4:15

And this is the Creek running through the park.

4:17

So you can see that's a heck of a lot of water running down the Creek and then also coming off slopes into so there you see a big sort of culvert dumping into the Creek.

4:30

OK, next slide.

4:34

OK.

4:34

And other challenges that we're dealing with in Big Ditch Park, littering, graffiti.

4:40

I know a lot of our communities around the state are dealing with the unhoused and Big Ditch Park is a really gorgeous area to be hanging out, but that you know, that has its own challenges.

4:55

Next slide.

4:58

So we started back in 2021, actually the pandemic, a local organization, the 30 something grant program, came to us and asked us if we could take the lead working with the town to start revitalizing Big Ditch Park and addressing some of these issues.

5:19

And so we cobbled together funding from a number of sources, including New Mexico Clean and Beautiful, and started to come up with a plan for all the things we needed to fix and improve in the park.

5:34

And incorporating youth was a big part of that.

5:38

And so sort of our goal all through this Big Ditch Park internship program has been to provide local youth with job experience, training and education on real world problems here in Silver City.

5:53

And Big Ditch Park really provides in one spot 1 project a lot of opportunity for us to be addressing a number of issues like erosion control and how to build green storm water infrastructure.

6:11

Or maybe folks have heard about natural infrastructure.

6:14

So using rock or, or natural materials, wood, logs, things like that to build infrastructure to say, capture rainwater or help slow down storm water and, and facilitate recharge, things like that.

6:36

Tree care and landscaping, litter cleanup, graffiti removal.

6:41

And this year, thanks to Clean and Beautiful funding, we are going to be painting a mural in Big Ditch Park on one of the walls that actually you saw in the previous slide that gets consistently tagged.

6:56

But we're finding that if we do a mural and a community based mural that that really prevents tagging and a lot of graffiti.

7:06

So that's that's what some of the interns are going to do this year.

7:12

Next, next slide, please.

7:14

OK, So just to give you a sense of where we've been since 2021, here is a steep slope in the park.

7:22

You can see on the in the left slide with successive rain events, all that soil is just running off the slope and collecting at the bottom.

7:32

You kind of see it sort of mounded up a bit.

7:35

The town kept trying, you know, year after year to plant on that slope, but really just planting plants didn't do any good because we didn't have a way to capture the rainwater and hold back the erosion.

7:50

And so we worked with JB Bjornstadt and, and he and along with his trail crew at YCC at Aldo Leopold Charter School, as well as our, our interns and JB came up with this really ingenious design to use pinon and juniper posts and staves that came from a rest forest restoration project and reuse that material to build these rain gardens.

8:24

So you can kind of see the kind of in the middle, the messy middle, as they say, of construction.

8:31

So next slide.

8:34

And here you can see them finished and really, really beautiful sort of what we're calling rain gardens, capturing not only the soil and holding it back, but also capturing the precipitation, the storm water flow, the runoff that comes off that slope.

8:55

Next slide, here's another slope that we worked on last year and this year.

9:03

So you can see way to the left before sort of a nasty looking slope and you can see the middle and the right kind of these successive stages of putting in rock and creating rock basins for trees and and plantings.

9:22

And Mariah is going to talk a little bit about that in a in a minute.

9:25

And then the bottom is kind of when it's all done, when it was all done.

9:30

OK, next slide, understory planting.

9:35

So the kids have learned a lot about, you know, drought tolerant pollinator friendly understory plantings.

9:43

That's been super important.

9:45

One of the things that happened over the years is the irrigation system broke in big ditch Park and it's taken the town a number of years to actually get it back up and running.

9:57

So we've and, and also originally the park was planted with not very drought tolerant plants, eastern species that really didn't survive when the irrigation broke.

10:11

So the town's been in the process of fixing the irrigation, but in the meantime we've had to be watering.

10:17

We've also selected species that you know are going to be able to deal with the heat, are going to be able to be more drought tolerant and not only for now, but in the future because we know we're getting hotter and drier.

10:30

So we've also been planting species like silk tassel that we know is, which is a more of a shrub that that we know is going to survive in hotter, drier climates.

10:45

Kids learned how to do sheet mulching to retain moisture.

10:48

And then obviously the rock basins and Mariah's going to talk a little bit more about that just to retain water on steep slopes.

10:56

Next slide.

10:59

All right, I'm going to hand it over to Mariah.

11:01

So tree care.

11:01

So through the Southwest New Mexico Community Forestry Network, I was able to help supervise these children in learning how to plant a tree, how to prune a tree, how to identify trees, and how to properly water trees.

11:16

So just the basics for what you need to know with trees.

11:22

So the first project I did, we planted 4 trees on top of the large rock slope that you saw.

11:30

I had the kids dig basins so that when we water the tree, the basins fill up allowing the tree to root zone to get proper amount of moisture and it's spread out.

11:40

We heavily mulch that.

11:41

So what creating a weed barrier and retaining moisture in the soil and in the first foot of soil that is the tree's root zone.

11:50

And then and through that, I taught them how to properly plant a tree, how to properly dig a basin that's the right size, how to keep their root crown level with the ground so you're not planting trees too deep.

12:04

And then for pruning, I taught them how to properly sterilize your tools in between trees so you're not passing on diseases and how to make proper cuts and how to prune up young trees and older trees.

12:17

So through that, I think we planted a total of 8 trees down at the Ditch so far, some Texas redbuds, some Chinese pistache, and some desert Willow, all predicted to do really good in our future climate.

12:31

Through that, I talked to them about why it's important to pick species of trees that are native to our area.

12:37

Talked about the importance of planting native plants and the habitat that trees create in the Big Ditch Park.

12:45

Great.

12:46

Thanks, Mariah.

12:47

Yeah.

12:47

So kids are getting a lot of good practical experience like for landscaping that you know could lead to other opportunities.

12:59

So as well as contributing to our community and to our and to our park.

13:05

And we'll come back to that point.

13:07

So next slide and we're going to hand it over to Alicia.

13:14

So a large part of my job is the other face of our New Mexico Clean and Beautiful grant, which is coordinating monthly pickups in our community.

13:26

Our program is called Silver City Pick It Up, Toss No Moss.

13:31

And recently I was able to have a pickup with the Clean and Beautiful interns and we just went around the park, which is a place that is regularly cleaned by city staff.

13:46

I was able to clean up with interns and it was pretty surprising how much stuff we found.

13:53

So I think part of our heap, heap of bags is showing there in the foreground.

14:02

So we were able to clean up the park, but then also have a discussion about just what kind of litter are we finding?

14:08

Where do we think it came from?

14:12

There were, you know, the usual things like one time use cups from local chain restaurants, but then there were children's toys that had been left behind.

14:28

There were a lot of cigarette butts from people maybe using parts of the Big Ditch as their regular smoking spot and food containers from other places that we kind of didn't expect.

14:43

Like we found a lot of tiny little spoons from maybe samples from a local ice cream shop.

14:50

And it was just kind of surprising to see all that stuff.

14:52

And I could see that the interns, it really made them think about like what kind of items they use in their life, what kind of things they might be dropping out of their pockets or backpacks.

15:04

And so I find the cleanups with youth interns and other kids in the community really gratifying.

15:11

So they can just see the kinds of things that get left behind, what things might be left accidentally versus what things were maybe littered on purpose.

15:22

And so, yeah, it was great to be out there kind of in their space, in the space that they had been working on and making really beautiful, planting beautiful plants and then doing a further step of maintaining that and keeping it litter free and very beautiful.

15:38

Great.

15:38

Thanks, Alicia.

15:40

Chantal, next slide, please.

15:43

And I should say I didn't put a slide in here, but we do have lots of pictures of the kids doing graffiti removal.

15:51

So I showed you some of the graffiti, which can be pretty bad, but that we have a bunch of picnic tables that the kids basically removed all the graffiti and the tables need to get resealed every year because they're made out of concrete is special concrete.

16:10

And so they did that, removed the graffiti and resealed the tables and stuff.

16:14

But unfortunately, the tables, they're very beautiful, but they're sort of a, a wonderful blank canvas for artwork.

16:26

So, so, yeah.

16:30

So Delena and Chantal asked us to talk about hiring and best and management best practices for youth interns.

16:39

And so we just wanted to go through kind of our list and of some of the things that we've learned from doing this in the last, I guess this is this is our fifth year.

16:52

So, so hiring, we've actually, and we just talked about this last night at our staff meeting, social media posts and working with the schools to get job notices are out.

17:05

Social media has been like, you know, probably the number one way to get to get these announcements out about about the internship program.

17:18

So the other thing we started to do in the last couple years is ask for a short statement of interest as part of the application process.

17:29

So we could kind of see what kids interests are and gauge kind of their commitment, how serious they are about the the program just in terms of if we ended up getting too many kids that we couldn't really handle, that might be one way.

17:46

And we do do an interview process too.

17:49

But but yeah, so anyway, that's been super helpful.

17:54

And also to understand kind of what are the particular things that kids are interested in doing or learning about.

18:01

And we can make sure that we tailor that year's program to some of the things that that kids want to learn about paperwork.

18:11

We have consistently had a problem getting all the paperwork from the kids, especially the youth verification, age verification form, because we have to get that notarized.

18:24

So we work with the town who has a notary and basically on the first day of the internship program, we say you have to be prepared.

18:33

If you want to work, you got to fill out all the paperwork on the first day.

18:38

That worked better this year, but we still had a couple kids who were able to make the first day.

18:44

Yeah, right.

18:45

So stragglers, but, but I think that's kind of more of more something like you got to do the the paperwork.

18:54

So to make sure that, you know, as you know, as you guys know, when we're trying to get everything put together for the grant reporting at the end of the fiscal year, you know, it's better if you got it all up front.

19:08

So the other thing that we started to do because we realized when Chantal asked for photos and then after the internship program was over, trying to get kids to sign a photo release and we couldn't get up with them because it was a summer, we started to put the photo release on our waiver form so they can check the box.

19:34

So again, we get that up front and then we're not after the fact having to, you know, catch up with with kids.

19:44

So that that's something good or those are sort of our best management practices, I guess, for hiring anything.

19:51

Mariah, you want to add to that?

19:53

No, I think the having them write a short statement of why they're interested in doing it has been really helpful in helping us go into our interview process knowing kind of who's more interested in certain areas and then also being able to tailor it to them.

20:12

Right, right, right.

20:13

Yeah.

20:13

And then management.

20:16

I think what we did this year, because we had six kids and we had college kids as well as high school kids, was we just surveyed everybody and said, OK, what days work for you?

20:32

We got everybody's schedules and we just picked what Thursdays at one and said we're just going to be here Thursdays from 1:00 to 5:00.

20:41

And then everybody come whenever you can come during that time period.

20:46

And then we had a couple extra times that we worked as well that the college kids came to, but the but the high school kids couldn't come because they had school.

20:58

So the college kids tend to have more flexible schedules, but I think that works, especially when you have a bunch of interns just pick times and just say, OK, come when you when you can.

21:12

Using a text thread was is really key basically to keep everybody in the loop and then people can tell you if they can't come.

21:20

We did a lot with safety on the job, making sure kids are using sunscreen, hydration.

21:27

I know this sounds very simple, but we had two eighth graders.

21:32

This was the first job they had ever had.

21:34

So we try to make it like a real job.

21:37

So this is what you're going to do and it is a real job, right?

21:41

So, but you know, these kids, they're they, they don't know anything.

21:46

So we're trying to make it so they get experience job training on, you know, filling out a timesheet.

21:55

How do you take care of yourself on the job?

21:58

Drink water, bring your water.

22:00

That's step number one.

22:02

Bring your water bottle, proper tool use.

22:06

When they're working with the with the graffiti removal, they're wearing gloves, they're wearing safety glasses, that kind of thing.

22:14

And then finally, timesheets.

22:15

Obviously they got to be filling out timesheets.

22:18

We do bi weekly timesheets so kids get paid every two weeks, but you know, filling out a timesheet, you know, sometimes that you know, it's not obvious necessarily what how to fill out a timesheet.

22:33

So kids are going to get experience on filling out a timesheet and obviously we need that for tracking.

22:39

So anyway, I think that's do you have anything else on the management?

22:46

Yeah, OK.

22:48

Those are kind of the big hitter items.

22:50

And then I guess our last slide is just a big thank you to New Mexico Clean and Beautiful for their support over the past five years.

23:00

And and we look forward to continuing the program.

23:05

And if anybody has any questions or comments, we're we're here to answer them.

23:13

Thank you.

23:19

Thank you guys so much.

23:20

We truly appreciate your partnership and your presentation.

23:25

So if anybody has any questions, please feel free to ask them now and we will leave it open.

23:32

I'm going to stop sharing my screen as well.

23:36

And thanks, Chantal, for being our presentation support.

23:42

Of course, anytime Allison and Mariah, there are some questions in the chat.

23:51

Looks like, oh, there's chat.

23:53

Sorry, I forget about I'm not a Teams person.

23:58

So OK, so let's see.

24:05

Do you, is it Maxime, do you want to just ask your question?

24:09

It looks like it's kind of a long question.

24:11

It looks.

24:12

Do you want to?

24:13

I think you can unmute, right?