

Rehabilitation of Land Podcast Transcript

Hello and welcome to the Prairie City podcast. My name is Addison Fisher (A) and I'm joined with Clint (C), Senior Environmental Scientist for Twin Cities District.

(A) How are you doing today?

(C) I am doing good, thanks.

(A) So why don't we start off by you telling us what exactly you do for Prairie City and what qualifications you have for this job?

(C) Like is said, I am the Senior Environmental Scientist, I'm in charge of the regulatory programs for the park. My qualifications, I have a bachelors [degree] in environmental studies, I also have a masters in environmental studies as well. In school, I studied conservation biology, GIS systems, endangered species, and conservation. I have been working for state parks since 2000. I have been working in the OHV division since 2008. Had a lot of experience with water quality regulations, which is a big part of my job.

(A) We are going to delve into part of your job, that's land rehabilitation. My first question is why do we rehabilitate land?

(C) There are several reasons. Part of our mission is to protect natural and cultural resources. Some of the land we have has experienced accelerated soil lose. So, typically the reason we do it is for erosion control purposes. But there can be other reasons. Habitat monitoring could be a reason. Or habitat preservation/restoration could be a reason. Also, recreational opportunity and experience could be a reason. Sometimes trails get to a condition where you can no longer recreate on them. So, they need to be rehabilitated, in that sense. But to get more the whys of it...it is our mission...we also have public resource codes that are designed to protect habitat and also conserve soil. There are water quality laws in place that apply to all lands within the state and within the United State. As well as air quality regulations.

(A) Rehabilitation, how exactly how is it done? What are the processes that go into rehabilitation the land?

(C) As part of our soil standard program, we have a monitoring component where we look at every trail and give it a trail evaluation. A rating based on a number of factors. Most of them tie back to soil loss. Identifying those areas, targeting those areas that have experienced soil losses is a start of it. Typically, it involves bringing soil in, bringing the trail back to grade, then applying a hydro mulch or some sort of covering to get vegetation to grow again. It can be done in a lot of different ways. It can either be done, the area could be closed, soil brought in, and then allow vegetation to come back, then open the area again. It can be done without closing an area. The area can be closed, if it is deemed not sustainable, the area can stay closed. Typically, heavy equipment is involved, manual labor, some fencing, that kind of thing.

(A) So, you said that erosion plays a big process in land rehabilitation. So, if someone didn't care about the erosion or what the land looked like. What would you say to them to make them understand why we are rehabilitating?

(C) Well, habitat fragmentation or trails can have negative effects on wildlife. It can have negative effects on water quality. These systems, at this park in particular, are connected to the delta, which have listed species, fish species, like the delta smelt and salmon species. For someone one who doesn't necessarily care about erosion, this species that live here, the air that moves through here, the water that moves through here, isn't really the parks resources. It's the people of the state of California resource. So, there are laws in place that protect those resources. If you violate those laws and regulations, typically lawsuits can happen, and or closures can happen of OHV land. So, even though you don't think you care about erosion, it can lead to less recreational opportunities. Which we are seeing quite a bit of that through the state.

(A) Then you mentioned that sometimes lands have to be closed and sometimes they don't. Why would some of the areas have to be closed for the habilitation?

(C) Mainly the areas are closed while rehabilitation is taking place. This is due to safety concerns. There is a lot of heavy equipment moving in and out of the area. Obviously, OHV's fast moving vehicles within that area can lead to injury, safety concerns.

(A) So you mentioned soil lose is one of the main concerns for choosing an area that has to be rehabilitated. Are there any other things you are looking at in specifics?

(C) Yeah, sometimes it is based on habitat. There is critical habitat that is a concern. That you want to rehabilitate. You kind of have to look at what is going on with the species regionally and if it is under pressure. Is it like a very specific habitat and you may have several trails going through that habitat, you may decide, sometimes we decide we just need to rehabilitate some of those trails, just to increase habitat for that species. But, typically, it is driven by soil concerns, erosion.

(A) During the actual process of rehabilitation, what type of different materials are used?

(C) The soils in these two parks, we have a series of sediment basins that's part of our water quality strategies. What look like ponds, but are basins and they slow water down, and sediment settles out of the water. Then each year typically we recover those soils and stock pile them and reuse them within the park. So, materials in the sense of soil, we have not imported soil yet, for rehabilitation project. Other material that are used are like straw waddles or weed free hay, hydro mulch, native seed, those types of things.

(A) Alright. What's the time scale on a rehabilitation project? How long does it take, beginning to end?

(C) Typically, we like to have a season or a year to let the land rehabilitate. You need to get the cycle in, vegetation to grow on. But it does depend on what type of habitat you are working in. If it is habitat, like a scrub habitat, it may take longer. Cause those species take a little longer to recover. It also depends on the strategy for the area. You could rehabilitate an area and while its recovering you can have it open. As long as you could ensure that folks stay on the trail that is intended and don't go off the trail. Sometimes it helps the user, when they are going into a rehabilitated area, to have vegetation there to just discern what is a trail and what is not a trail. Sometimes it is just kind of a communication thing. Not necessarily always,

there may be other ways to communicate how to stay on the trail while the habitat is recovering.

(A) The land you are rehabilitating is land that the riders are riding on and recreating on. What measures are taken to ensure that the riders can still experience that certain future, like a hill climb, while that land is being rehabilitated.

(C) Good question. One of the parks in our district, it is a sister park of Prairie City, we have done a lot of large scale restoration, rehabilitation projects in those areas. We have used or leaned on the public to have input on the trails. So, kind of erase the canvas, kind of hit a reset in a area, then we bring them in to design the trails. Our main concern is the number of trails, not necessarily the orientation of the trails. We know that the land can handle some vertical paths, just when I look at a hill, I look at it and sometimes there is maybe twelve paths going to the same point. We work with the public to decide, instead of having twelve can we do four. Here at Prairie City we have initiated, through our Prairie City Improvement Group, we kind of branched out, we started the Prairie City trails advisory team. Started collecting names for that.

(A) How exactly does rehabilitation of the park effect our visitors at the park?

(C) Short term, if we do close an area during a rehabilitation process, which is typical. They will have a loss of riding area. But it's with long term goals in mind to keep the park open. So, it impacts them temporarily and negatively if you just want a pure number of trails to ride, pure mileage. But in the long term, it will ensure that the park stays here and stays open.

(A) Is there anything else you think we should know about the rehabilitation process? Something that maybe we haven't covered that you wanted to let us know?

(C) I think we covered most of it. If folks want to get involved, we really encourage them to get involved and reach out us. Make sure if there are certain types of trails they like, or certain things they want to see in the park, let us know. In the planning phase, we will definitely be reaching out to the public during these planning efforts to get the public involved.

(A) So one last question. What does Prairie City mean to you?

(C) What does Prairie City mean to me? It means... (A) take your time. (C) laughter...when I am here at Prairie City I see a place where families come out to enjoy the outdoors. There are not a lot of OHV recreational areas, especially this close to an urban environment. So, I think Prairie City is, on a personal note, the more I see kids away from screens and more outdoors, that's a positive thing. Just like any other type of recreation, it all has to be managed. Trails alter the land, which alter the water, that leads to erosion. That's the same for hiking trails, as it is for equestrian or mountain biking, it all needs to be managed. But these places are very important to the community and the social fabric. So, that's what I see at Prairie City.

(A) Very cool. Well thank you for joining us. My name is Addison, my name is Clint, thanks for having me. (A) This was the Prairie City podcast.