

Transcript for Conversations @ KAFM CMUnow: July 14, 2020

**Katlin Birdsall:** Remarkable accomplishments are happening every day on the Colorado Mesa University and Western Colorado Community College campuses. From faculty instruction and research, to student projects and community involvement. CMUnow is a monthly segment of the KAFM Community Affairs hour, where we interview faculty, athletic coaches, and students to keep you up to date on all things CMU and WCCC. I'm Katlin Birdsall, along with my co-host David Ludlam, and we'll have two guests on the show today. And our first guest is Instructor, and Director of the new Outdoor Recreation Industry Studies Program, Sarah Shrader. So welcome to the show, Sarah!

**Sarah Schrader:** Thank you! Thanks for having me!

**Katlin Birdsall:** Of course! Thanks for taking the time out of your busy schedule to come down and chat with David and I and the KAFM listeners!

**Sarah Schrader:** Happy to be here!

**Katlin Birdsall:** Great! Well, why don't we jump right in. So, you've been instrumental in helping to launch the new Outdoor Recreation Industry Studies Program here at CMU, and I think you are up for the job because of your extensive background working and owning an outdoor recreation industry business. So for those listeners who maybe don't know you, or haven't met you, or haven't heard your story, can you give us a little more information on your background?

**Sarah Schrader:** Yeah! Thanks for asking. So, I own and operate a company called Bonsai Design. We're an outdoor recreation manufacturer. We design and build ziplines, and aerial adventure courses all over the world, and I've been in that business 15 years. And during that time, I've really watched the outdoor industry grow. In fact, a few years ago, they measured it as a percentage of the GDP in the federal government, and it's over 2% of the GDP, which is pretty remarkable. And so, I think part of the reason why it was so exciting to think about CMU starting a new program, was really because of the workforce demand. These companies really need talented and skilled employees that have a robust understanding of what it takes to be in an outdoor industry business, whether that's a manufacturer like ours, or a service provider, or an entrepreneur. And so, it's been really neat to build the program as a real multi-disciplinary understanding of, you know, how the industry works, and what the industry needs from the next generation. Which is, graduates of CMU.

**Katlin Birdsall:** Which I love! Love, and we're lucky to have you on board, and I'm really excited for this new program, especially for our students.

**Sarah Schrader:** Thank you!

**David Ludlam:** For sure, and, Sarah, you know, sometimes you look out on the political landscape, and it's, you know, impossible to get anything done, let alone on a bipartisan fashion. But I know last week was a pretty big week for the outdoor recreation industry from a legislative standpoint. Congress passed some legislation, and I was wondering if it will be beneficial to the program? You know, will we use it in the classroom? And maybe also, no matter what the bill itself does, does it symbolically send a message that Congress cares about, you know, what you do; outdoor recreation and what you're teaching?

**Sarah Schrader:** Yeah, it's really interesting! So, for those of you who don't know, Congress just passed the Great American Outdoors Act, which gives the Land and Wildlife Conservation Fund permanent funding. So, the LWCF is really the governing body that gives funding to maintain trails – national parks, national forest infrastructure – for visitors. So it's a huge, important thing, and it has been two decades in the making, and one of our senators here in Colorado spearheaded the bill and brought it to the finish line. Which was really miraculous, like you said, David, it's really hard to ...

**David Ludlam:** You don't see that every day.

**Sarah Schrader:** No, you don't, and really, it's a huge win for the industry because... I try to, people are like, "Well what does it really mean?" I try to equate it, like, um, so right now, one of the most important parts of a rural community like Grand Junction or the Grand Valley is our access to trails, and our national parks, right? This is what makes it such a great place to live here is that we can hunt, fish, ride our mountain bikes, ski, um... hike, run, all of it, right? From our front door... paddle the rivers... and that's why people want to live here. Well, the infrastructure, the trails that we so enjoy, all of us, doing all sorts of things... the way they're funded are by volunteers. And that, really, is not a great way to fund one of our most important infrastructures that make people want to live here. I mean, the trails are why people want to live here, and so, it's a huge win because we're actually taking funds and putting them towards rebuilding trails, maintaining trails, maintaining national parks. So it's a huge, it's a really big deal, I think a bigger deal than a lot of people imagine it to be. So yes, we are very happy, and the industry is very happy.

**David Ludlam:** But you'll still take volunteers where you can get them?

**Sarah Schrader:** Of course! Of course! And we still need that, that's a great community builder as well.

**David Ludlam:** Yeah.

**Sarah Schrader:** I think what we see from the outdoor industry is not only how important it is for our physical health, but for our community health. And for what it does to bring pride, and hope, and people together, and we see that here in Grand Junction all the time, and those Monday trail workdays are really fun.

**David Ludlam:** Right.

**Katlin Birdsall:** Great! Well, you are listening to CMU now on KAFM Community Affairs and our first guest today is Director of the new Outdoor Recreation Industry Studies Program, Sarah Schrader. So, let's dig into this new program a little bit more. You know, because as we've had conversations, I've found it really interesting just, the depth of this program, and maybe what you would initially think it's going to be like, and then when we start talking, you find out how multi-faceted the degree is going to be, and what graduates with this degree are going to be able to do. So, can you, you know, tune us in to a little more of what students can expect from the program, and then what they're going to be able to do with it afterwards?

**Sarah Schrader:** Yeah, um, great question! It's interesting, when this was brought to my attention like, "Hey, is this something you're interested in spearheading?" I did a bunch of research on all of the outdoor rec industry degrees all over the country. And there are several of them. A lot of them are really focused on parks, recreation, and tourism, or adventure education, or outdoor education, and what we were seeing, um, we're seeing not only locally but from a statewide and nationwide demand is really this workforce demand for graduates to understand not only all of the technical field skills that are so important in the outdoor recreation industry, but also, a lot of business and communication skills. So, what I did was, in sort of doing this research, I assembled an advisory council of CEOs and VPs in the outdoor recreation industry. So we had, you know, a Vice President of Aspen Ski Co, we had the Director of the Outdoor Industry Office in the state of Colorado, we had the CEOs and VPs in outdoor manufacturing companies like Black Diamond, and Icelantic. And we had, um, all of these different, you know, the head of Colorado Outward Bound School, all of these different providers, as well as local folks, you know, the head of Boneshaker Adventures, the head of MRP, they came to us and said, "These are the things we really want in graduates." And that's how we built the program. So, really more from a workforce perspective. Like, what... You know, because we want these students to get jobs, when they're done...

**Katlin Birdsall:** That's the end goal.

**Sarah Schrader:** Right! That's the end goal. And in the industry that they really love. And so, yeah, I looked at the catalogue, and started building the program that way with courses that we already had. And then, we added 8 new OREC courses. And so, those will be a combination of, like, outdoor industry business, community health, but also, some technical field skills courses like swift water techniques and rescue, and, you know, rock-climbing and rope rescue. And so, and those will teach the students risk management, and how to think on your feet, and how to work under pressure, and how to communicate really effectively, because you have to do that when you're working in the outdoor industry, and you're leading a group of people. But also, those can be translated to the workplace. I think one of the most interesting things was about the advisory council. I did have a really prominent international mountain guide, who runs his own mountaineering company. Extremely talented fellow who lives here, and he said, you know, "One of the things I need most from my guides when I hire them... I can teach them a lot of the technical field skills, but I really need them to be able to communicate well, and to be able to build a budget, read a financial statement, and understand a balance sheet." And that was really interesting, because I think those are real, important life skills to know. So, anyway, we'll be working with the Business Department, and the Biology Department, and the Environmental Science Department, and the Political Science Department, so there's, it's a really interesting, multi-faceted degree that we're really excited about.

**Katlin Birdsall:** Yeah, I was going to say, and that's what I always love about CMU too, you know, you're just talking about all of the partners, whether they're on a local or state level, that get involved, to really launch a program that's going to get our graduates careers and jobs after they're out of here. I think that's, you know, something really unique to CMU, that that is always a focus, and I love hearing that with this new program, that that's a continued focus.

**David Ludlam:** For sure. Well, you can't have a podcast here without talking about COVID-19, so I want to ask you something about that. When you imagine yourself living, say, in downtown Denver, you're in a flat, you know, depending on traffic, you're an hour and a half from the great outdoors, high density, things like that... Has our access to the great outdoors, here in Western Colorado, I mean, has it potentially even been a tool, an asset for our community, but also for people dealing with the pandemic, from a mental health standpoint, and maybe even after the pandemic, is there a connection between mental health and the great outdoors, and will you be teaching that?

**Sarah Schrader:** Yeah, that's a great question. I don't know about everybody in this room, but I have felt really grateful to live here. Um, for the last three months, I mean, I'm always grateful to live here, but this has been an exceptional time to live in Western Colorado because, with

74% public lands, we can go outside, and we have great weather here. And so there's... that's a pretty crucial thing to, not only mental health, but community health. And I know the pandemic has been a really tough time for a lot of people, and so we have had, you know, a really interesting approach in this community, to talk about how we can be outside in order to make sure that we're healthy, not only from a physical perspective, but also from a mental health perspective. The other thing I would say is, as far as community health, as soon as this program went public, which was probably in January or February when they started talking about this program and how we were going to unroll it, immediately the Mesa County Health Department, Mesa County Public Health, approached me and said, "We want to teach a class, because we see this as so crucial, the outdoor recreation, and outdoor industry is so crucial to public health, in all of our communities." From Palisade, to Clifton, to Orchard Mesa, to Grand Junction, all the way to Fruita. This is an extremely important part of how we have hope and pride in our community, and we also spend time with our friends and family outdoors. And there are scientific, there's so many scientific studies about how being outside, even just standing outside, you don't even have to do anything outside, but just even being outside for a few minutes changes the way your brain is firing, and for the better, so.

**David Ludlam:** We were kind of laughing as you said that because it seems so obvious, you know, that that's true. But, you know, from an evolutionary and biology standpoint, there's got to be something scientific behind staring into the flame of a campfire, standing outside on a trail... Is that going to be part of it? Because I don't think it is commonplace. I don't think everybody, especially those that are from an urban environment, maybe understand that there is a scientific, evolutionary connection there that's worth thinking about, learning about, maybe in your program.

**Sarah Schrader:** Yeah, so, OREC 350 is the Community Health class, and they're going to be talking a lot about, you know, that exact thing. And, that, from all the way to Wilderness Therapy, because, you know, people with mental health problems, they actually have therapy programs where they put them in the wilderness with guides and their brain changes. I mean, it's pretty remarkable. But that will also be, I mean, that's talked about extensively in a couple of the environmental science classes, so it is something that everyone is collaborating with, and getting on board with, and it's exciting to think that that will be one of the things that we really highlight in the program.

**David Ludlam:** That's great.

**Katlin Birdsall:** Great! Well, you are listening to CMU now on KAFM Community Affairs and our first guest today is CMU's Director of the Outdoor Recreation Industry Studies Program, Sarah Shrader. So Sarah, we're already at the end of our time together, this always goes by so quickly, but I think before we let you go today, I was hoping that if anybody's listening, and they're

thinking about maybe coming back to school, or coming to school, or they've got a son, or daughter, or neighbor, or friend, and this has been piquing their interest, the Outdoor Rec Studies Program, what would you say to them about why they should come and enroll in this program?

**Sarah Schrader:** Well, I do think, I'm a big pro-education person; I grew up in a family where education was probably the most important part of my entire childhood. But I will say that, so not only will you be getting this really great multi-disciplinary education program, but you will have the opportunity to pursue your own outdoor passion. And, if you love the outdoors, and you're passionate about the outdoors and outdoor adventure, it is really a great place to be, because you'll not only be learning all of these extremely beneficial, business skills, policy, understanding of policy, understanding of challenges that the outdoor rec industry has, but also all of the benefits, and all of the most important parts of, you know, really why we are connected as humans. And so, and I mean, I'm personally super passionate about the outdoors, and so it's really easy for me to think, this is a great place to pursue your own passion, and also get a fantastic education.

**Katlin Birdsall:** Great! Well, I can't think of a better way to end today's segment, so thank you so much again Sarah for taking the time out, and coming and talking to David and I, and the KAFM listeners.

**David Ludlam:** Thank you!

**Sarah Schrader:** Yep! Thank you so much for having me!

**Katlin Birdsall:** Alright, well don't go anywhere, because after a short break, we'll be back with right back with Western Colorado Community College Technical Instructor of Veterinary Technology, Catherine Whitney.

#### SEGMENT BREAK

**Katlin Birdsall:** Welcome back to CMUnow, a monthly show where we talk about the remarkable work that's happening at Colorado Mesa University and Western Colorado Community College. We'd like to welcome our second guest today, Western Colorado Community College Instructor of Veterinary Technology, Catherine Whitney. Welcome to the show!

**Catherine Whitney:** Thank you Katlin!

**Katlin Birdsall:** Yeah! Thank you for joining David and I, we really appreciate you taking the time out of your schedule, and to come down in the heat, and chat with us and talk to our KAFM listeners.

**David Ludlam:** Yeah, thank you!

**Catherine Whitney:** It's a pleasure!

**Katlin Birdsall:** Um, so I'd have to assume that with working at WCCC's Veterinary Technology Program, that you'd have to have a love of animals. So, I'm assuming this, so I wanted to ask if this is true for you, and if so, how did you develop this love for animals and turn it into a career?

**Catherine Whitney:** Um, excellent question. So, I've always loved animals, um, in my younger years it was characterized by pure, dumb joy. And by dumb, I mean just speechless. You don't have to analyze it, you don't have to think about it, you know, if there's 15 things in the room, it's the animal that holds your attention. I see that in our students, and so, we're brought to it by the joy that we get from animals. You know, over the years, and it's been more two decades for me too, in terms of working with a wide diversity of species. You know, I've come to realize that it's really some of our first, you know, cross-cultural communication. So, when I teach animal behavior, you know, there's a language barrier. And so, the thing that we love, slow down, paying attention, so it becomes for me, it becomes richer as I've gotten older, and worked with a wide diversity of animals, and I wish that for the students as well.

**David Ludlam:** You mentioned that it kind of bridges cultural divides; I noticed in your bio that you have worked all over the place. I mean, you've worked in Colorado, and Alaska, and Washington, and even more interestingly, in East Africa, and, I suppose for most people who've never been to that continent, the cultures couldn't be more different. But did you find that the way that people interact with animals in Africa, there's some common ground between our relationship with animals here, and does that help you with your teaching in the program?

**Catherine Whitney:** Absolutely! And, I've had an adventurous life, but the human-animal bond is alive and well in all corners of the globe. There are cat ladies overseas, too! [laughing] You can become the village cat lady, um, so, it's always lack of resources or unmet needs that

infringe upon good animal care. But yeah, it's, my first trip was in 2005 and that was really transformative. It was helping some enterprise development with some ladies in the village who were breeding swine. And, you know, what's good for the animal is good for the producer, and you know, we could say that here even on the Western Slope. But, but also just being immersed in a culture that can find joy on its own, independent of things and job titles and stuff. That was very, very enriching.

**David Ludlam:** That's really interesting to think about the cat lady motif being a global thing.

**Katlin Birdsall:** I love that!

**David Ludlam:** But, speaking of cats, I recently had an opportunity to join the students at one of our local clinics. And they were doing wellness checks on chickens, and goats, and horses, and, I think people think of pets usually as just being dogs and cats, but in this program I think students get exposure to large animals, exotic animals, traditional dogs and cats, and um, you know, is that useful for the program being in kind of an area that does sort of have a lot of agriculture? And is it important for students to get that exposure to a wide variety for, not just the cat, but all this wide range of animals?

**Catherine Whitney:** Absolutely! And the community support here on the Western Slope is profound. But this is a lesser known degree, and probably 60-70% of us go into clinical practice after we get the degree. And that's, again, working for the veterinarian on the corner. You know, another 30% or more, you know, goes to work in government operations, um, other forms of research and healthcare. I'm told here in Colorado the 7% of us that have already done it all end up in education. But, yeah, so, it's, in two years we're trying to give them the Swiss Army Knife of a degree. So, you know, everything from aquaculture, to working with wildlife, reptiles and amphibians. And they each have a particular interest, so, you know, reaching out to community partners to augment that part of the curriculum is part of what I'm after.

**Katlin Birdsall:** I love that. I love, you know, any time we can talk about our programs and how diverse they are, and how we really try to prepare our students for a wide range of careers after they've graduated from the degree program. That's always interesting to hear.

**Catherine Whitney:** I was thinking recently about that adage "roots and wings". So, again, with the community support, you know, some strong roots here in, you know, Grand Junction, but the sky is the limit with this type of degree.

**Katlin Birdsall:** I love that! Well, you are listening to CMU now on KAFM Community Affairs and our second guest today is Technical Instructor of Veterinary Technology, Catherine Whitney. So it's interesting that you've kind of mentioned twice now that community support, you know, organizations that help out, because that's one thing that I love about CMU and WCCC, is I feel like we are really integrated into the community. That we talk a lot with our businesses and organizations to find out workforce needs, and then integrate them into the programs to give our students, you know, these hands-on experiences. And I know there's been quite a few partners with the new Veterinary Technology Program at WCCC, including the Mesa County Sheriff's Posse, Amigo Animal Clinic, so I was hoping you could just talk a little bit more about these partnerships, and how they're going to really benefit our students in the program?

**Catherine Whitney:** You know, well first, the students can feel, they can feel the love. They know that they are filling an important niche, and, you know, we need them to go forth and do their thing. But, Amigo Animal Clinic, the generosity of the team there, the collaborative spirit, the willingness to allow us to use their facilities or to host our students in the first clinicals, you know, that's quite remarkable. I'm looking forward to working more with the Mesa County Sheriff's Posse. This spring, during this crazy interim in history, we were able to go out to farms on some excursions. And students could work a cattle chute, and ultrasound some goats, and so we met a lot of those large animal needs just out in the field, because we have a nice, small group of students. But in the future, when we're at full capacity with 20 or 30 students, using that arena and facility, uh, the Sheriff's Posse is going to be enormously important. We have a number of students who are coming to us, they ride rodeo, you know, or they're involved. They're third generation cattle ranchers and they definitely are ready for that large animal, or farm animal, learning experience.

**Katlin Birdsall:** That's amazing to hear! I love getting to hear about those local partnerships. Well, you are listening to CMU now on KAFM Community Affairs and our second guest today is WCCC Instructor of Veterinary Technology, Catherine Whitney.

**David Ludlam:** Catherine, you know, you've really given me something to think about. There's been times where I've wondered if people could love animals, because I wondered if they are capable of the reciprocity that you need for, you know, love as you might typically define it. But you've really, the way you've described it has made me rethink that, and I hope that for the listeners too, they can hear the love that you have for animals. I'm wondering, how do you, you kind of touched on this earlier, but how do you pass along that love to your students? And is there something in the course work, um, a specific class, maybe a specific activity, or a part of the discipline that you teach in the classroom that helps do that? Transfer that love that you have to the students? [laughing] Love that you have for animals, to the students? And maybe to the students themselves? [laughing]

**Catherine Whitney:** Well thank you, I'm glad what I said was meaningful. You know, slowing down and attention to detail... we're going through that right now, too, where we've put them in clinics so they can have a more rounded concept of what's going on. I mean, book learning and isolation doesn't, doesn't help. You need to see how the pieces and parts fit together. But, you know, even when you get to practice a clinical skill, and you're doing a write-up for that clinical day, you know, your patient has a name. And that vaccine you gave, you know, if it's in your hand, you're responsible for knowing exactly what it is. So, yeah, I guess it, you know, just time on task, and a deep breath, and also, know your normals. Like, one of the best things veterinary professionals can do, you know, is study their own cats and dogs, horses, sheep, when they're healthy. Because knowing what is not normal is more important than anything, in terms of, getting them the care they need.

**David Ludlam:** Could you expand on, you said, every patient has a name. And when you said that, you mean the animal?

**Catherine Whitney:** Correct, yes.

**David Ludlam:** And that's important, that might distinguish a good vet from a bad vet, perhaps, because that imparts the value you place on that patient as an animal? Is that what that means, that phrase?

**Catherine Whitney:** Yeah, that animal is a story, you know, and sometimes it's, you know, the last part they have, you know, the connection with your father, or... And then when we get our clients talking, again these animal owners, when you get them talking, that's when the animal bond really glows. And, it's a teamwork that I always loved in clinical practice.

**Katlin Birdsall:** Yeah, I mean, I know, and for me personally, I've got a little one-and-a-half-year-old yellow lab, Tucker, who's our baby right now. And, you know, we really care for our pets, and I think that's most anybody, whether it's your goats, or your chickens, or your dog, or your cat, that, you know, you're entrusting the well-being of, you know, one of your family members when you take them in to see a veterinarian technology person. So, I think it's important to hear that from your side, that you're not only teaching the technical skills, but that emotional, compassionate side of the practice, too.

**Catherine Whitney:** Thank you. It's important to me that, you know, that you have a sustainable, fulfilling career. It's given much to me, and I hope they experience the same.

**David Ludlam:** You know, Katlin, sometimes, in the office, I get ganged up on by the dog people, because I'm a goat person, and I've always advocated that goats, you know, are not that much different than dogs in terms of their loyalty and personalities and stuff, so I think I might have found an ally here. That will help me advocate for goats.

**Katlin Birdsall:** [laughing] That's true!

**Catherine Whitney:** The differences, between individuals, is greater than the differences between species, from what I've seen, in terms of, yeah, like, the older I get, the more, uh... especially between mammals. You know, we're all mammals, and, the depth, the bond is... you know, each to its own kind, they display it in their own way.

**Katlin Birdsall:** Perfect! Well I think that's a great way to end our show today! So Catherine, thank you so much for coming on today, and talking to the KAFM listeners and David and I, about the new WCCC Veterinary Technology Program. Thank you so much!

**Catherine Whitney:** Thank you!

**Katlin Birdsall:** Great! Well this segment airs on the second Tuesday of each month on KAFM Community Radio. You can also listen to a podcast of today's show at [KAFMRadio.org](http://KAFMRadio.org). I'm your host Katlin Birdsall, along with my co-host David Ludlam, and we will be back next month for another edition of CMUnow on the Community Affairs Hour.

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