

## You First Podcast Episode 25: Eco Ableism

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**Narrator:** Welcome to "You First," the Disability Rights Florida podcast.

**Keith Casebonne:** I'm Keith Casebonne. Thank you for listening to You First. You can find this and other episodes at [disabilityrightsflorida.org/podcast](https://disabilityrightsflorida.org/podcast), or you can find us where you generally find other podcasts to browse, listen, and subscribe.

Let's talk today about saving the planet. Let's fight climate change by eliminating all single-use plastics, walking to get where you need to go. That'll save us all.

Will that really save us all, or does that disregard a group of people who have been largely left out of the movement? People with disabilities often need plastic straws, rely on their vehicles because they cannot traverse complex terrain or cannot access public transportation, or need uninterrupted power for lifesaving equipment.

Those in charge are making decisions that adversely affect people with disabilities by not considering their unique needs, and that is eco-ableism. If we're going to save the planet, let's not just save it for some of us. Let's save it for all of us.

My first guest is Elizabeth Wright, a writer, activist, keynote and TEDx speaker, and an Australian Paralympic medalist. She is also the Founder and Editor of "Conscious Being," a publication for disabled women by disabled women, and the Editor of "Disability Review Magazine."

Liz gives us the global perspective on disability and climate change and explains why people with disabilities need a seat at the table to help us think more creatively when planning how to combat it. Hi, Liz. Thank you so much for being our guest today on "You First."

You wrote an often-cited article about a year ago, just before the pandemic, in fact, called "Climate Change, Disability, and Eco-Ableism -- Why We Need To Be Inclusive To Save The Planet." I'll link to it in the show notes.

In the article, you said you wanted to change how people with disabilities are included in the climate change movement and that you feel excluded from something you would love to contribute more to. How does modern day environmental activism exclude people with disabilities?

**Elizabeth Wright:** Hi, Keith. Thank you so much for having me on the podcast. You're absolutely right. It's been over a year now since I've written that article, and I certainly feel I have to write a follow-up. For me, it's someone who's always been interested in sustainability since my teenage years, and I don't know how much of that is from me growing up in Australia or anything like that.

The environment has always been something that I've been really interested in, but there's certainly an element of feeling excluded from a movement that is very big now. Each year, it's growing and growing. As more people realize the potential impact of what this climate change is going to have on every single one of us, more and more people are joining this movement.

I certainly feel that there is certain elements that need to be addressed within the movement to make it more inclusive. The two main elements, especially in light of my own experiences and my own readings and my own awareness of other disability activists out there, is it all really comes down to two things, and it's access.

When I say access, I mean access to protests, access to conferences, some of the big UN conferences and climate change conferences, as well as then onto the flip side of the problem-solving side of climate change. What are we doing as a global community to cut down to zero emissions?

What a lot of those solutions involved are not very helpful or inclusive of disabled people and disabled experiences. For me, it comes down to those two particular points, the access and problem-solving solutions.

For me, it's disappointing that disabled people aren't more involved with it because certainly as a disability community, many of us, and I do say many of us because I think there are some disabled people that are not aware of the potential impact of climate change that is going to have on their lives.

I'll probably talk about an instance of this in a moment where this has happened recently to me. In my opinion, most disabled people are aware that we're going to be disproportionate, and we are actually right now being disproportionately affected by climate change.

It's imperative that we are a part of this activism movement for the environment and to make the changes that we need to make in regards to climate change.

It's something that we do have to address, speak up, and challenge more. We basically need a seat at the table. It's this thing of when disabled people do speak up in this space, is that they often get ignored or knocked back.

The best example I can think of, in recent years, probably one of the biggest examples is the plastic straw situation.

**Keith:** Yes.

**Elizabeth:** For absolute transparency, I jumped on the bandwagon about plastic straws. I got challenged by a disabled friend of mine who needs to use plastic straws. With their disability, they can't pick up mugs, cups, or anything like that.

They tried the whole paper straw thing. Especially with hot drinks, they just go soggy. It makes it impossible to drink and all that.

**Keith:** Some people with disabilities can even aspirate if the straw was to fall apart in their mouth [inaudible 6:39] .

**Elizabeth:** Exactly. I was like, "OK, I need to listen more to my own community about the environment, access, inclusion, and what that looks like." What might work for me might not work for someone else. For me, it's building that awareness in the wider community.

I don't want people to feel excluded from the environmental movement because they're going to, it's that whole eco-ableism thing of, that you're going to get told off because you use a plastic straw, or you're going to get told off because you have to use a car, because of the nature of your disability.

Case in point, this is me. I use a car to get everywhere because I have above-knee prosthetic leg. I can't run. I physically can't run. I struggle on trucks on public transport. I can't ride a bike. Where I live particularly at the moment, it's just to the north of the city that I live in. Public transport isn't great.

For my access needs, I need to be able to use a car. I try to minimize how much I use it, but I have to use a car to have access. For me, being part of the environmental movement, and why it's so important that the wider movement needs to understand about us in terms of inclusion and building that access for us is that it is going to impact us more disproportionately.

We need to have a voice. We need to be able to stand up and say, "Well, I need to use a car. I need to use a plastic straw. Hey, let's work together to maybe come up with a more sustainable solution for every single person."

**Keith:** If someone else chooses not to use a car or not to use a plastic straw, that's great. That's wonderful. Don't make a decision for an entire community of people who you don't really know what their needs are.

**Elizabeth:** Exactly. You hope that activists, in whatever space they're in, are going to be people that want to be allies and are willing to learn about different protected characteristic groups, and willing to accommodate them.

I find with the environmental movement and eco-ableism that sometimes, or a lot of the times, actually, that's not the case. As I'm sure you know, Keith, in the disability community, we have that saying... [laughs] I'm going to totally mix it up here.

**Keith:** [laughs]

**Elizabeth:** Nothing with us without us, or is it the other way around? Oh, my God. You could tell it's a Monday. [laughs]

**Keith:** I'm blanking out too now.

**Elizabeth:** [laughs]

**Keith:** I think you got it right the first time. Nothing without us.

**Elizabeth:** I think that's right. In a situation where we're going to be so disproportionately affected by something, we need to have a voice at the table. We need to be there, basically. That's summing up everything that I've just said. [laughs]

**Keith:** Absolutely. Related to that, you also mentioned in the article that able-bodied people lack the imagination to think inclusively. We need to challenge ourselves to be more creative about sustainability solutions. How are people with disabilities leading the way in climate and environmental justice? What can everyone learn from that movement?

**Elizabeth:** That's a very Liz thing to do, to completely [laughs] say that non-disabled people are very unimaginative [laughs], but I think it's true.

**Keith:** Well, but I think it's true. No, I do too.

**Elizabeth:** I think it's true. My disability is congenital, and for me, my whole life, I've always had to think creatively and outside of the box to access space, to be able to do things that my friends were doing, and so on and so forth, and that's a real skill.

That even if it's about access or not, in terms of the environmental movement, it's a skill that people should be tapping into with the disability community for sure. In terms of disabled climate activists and environmental activists leading the way, case in point, basically, our biggest leader and role model, Greta Thunberg, identifies as being autistic.

She's shown that her autistic traits have been beneficial to the environment movement because she's able to be very focused and able to take what she is passionate about and articulate it in a simple straightforward way that people can understand.

It's a skill that is absolutely brilliant when she's taking the science of it and explaining it in such a way that anyone should be able to understand the issues that are happening. I think it's brilliant that she is kind of the leader, or really the leader of this movement. Of course, we're so aware that she's been attacked because of her autism.

She's been infantilized because of her autism. She's been told that derogatory things about who she is as a person based on her disability, and we have to work hard at flipping that narrative. It makes me wonder so much, as the critics are saying, how much within the actual movement maybe people are believing that too?

I'm not labeling that to anyone or generalizing that claim at all, but it does make me wonder to a certain degree, with ableism, how much that that's held back other disabled activists from stepping up and being an active part of the movement.

Certainly, here in the UK in recent years, especially before the pandemic, [laughs] which is what we'll be talking about a little bit later on, but there's been two Paralympians here who are quite passionate about the climate change movement.

One of them, Hannah Dines, I hope I'm pronouncing her last name correctly. She wrote a fantastic article in 2019 on "The Guardian" about very similar stuff to what we're talking about now, that she comes from a family who's very passionate about the environment.

She wants to be active in making a change, but that there are certainly a lot of issues around ableism within the movement, and that she doesn't feel encouraged necessarily to be taking part. Case in point for her, it's about the protesting with Extinction Rebellion.

When I've spoken to a lot of disabled activists who are very intersectional, they might have other points whether it's pride or something like that where they're wanting to parade with the environment protest and stuff, a lot of the time, any access needs are not given any thought to. It's an issue across the whole board of public activism and what that looks like.

The other Paralympian, James Brown, who's a member of Extinction Rebellion, he got noticed for his protesting when he glued himself to the top of a plane at London [laughs] City Airport. [laughs]

**Keith:** Wow.

**Elizabeth:** He made it onto TV, but again, because of his disability, a lot of people ended up, and I think because of the lack of representation of disability, disability isn't normalized within the movement, he got a lot of attention about the fact that he is disabled.

People weren't talking necessarily about climate change because of what he did, but we're literally just, "Well, how did he even get up on the plane? How did he do that?"

**Keith:** Oh, Gosh.

**Elizabeth:** They were focusing on the disability as opposed to the message that he was trying to get out, but the remedy to that is certainly increasing and building the profile and inclusion of disabled people within a movement such as this. We are definitely heading on to a right track.

Very recently, just a few weeks ago, I came across an organization called Sustained Ability, and they're attempting to fill that gap about disability representation within the environment movement. This is where I refer to my notes.

[laughter]

**Elizabeth:** Otherwise, I'll forget their goals and their aims, but everyone should go check them out anyway. They're working to create a network that disabled activists need to connect and work together to ensure that all of our voices are being heard, specifically, in terms of climate negotiations.

When you've got countries involved in discussing how they're going to get to zero net emissions and all of this stuff, the disabled community's voice has to be heard within that. The Sustained Ability are working towards making that happen. Their goal is also to create a disabled constituency in the United Nations Convention on Climate Change.

They're working hard to get that disability voice within the actual movement, but at that global level so that we can make sure that we do have a seat at the table. In the likes of Hannah and James, it's also got to be about getting that grassroots participation and inclusion happening.

It's hard to encourage disabled people to be involved, especially when they think that the access might not be there for them to be involved however that may look, but also in light of a conversation that I had the other day on Twitter where I tweeted...I can't remember the exact tweet I'd said about climate change. It was in connection to COVID.

I think I was saying something along the lines of this. "COVID is an opportunity to look at the access needs of disabled people and the environment, and lowering emissions and making sure that we're doing everything we can to limit the impact of climate change." I had some pushback from someone on Twitter...

**Keith:** Interesting.

**Elizabeth:** Who has a daughter who's disabled. They live rurally, she was basically like, "I don't think we can have a green recovery. I don't think that it's possible. We just have to live with it because we don't have public transport," we don't have this, we don't have that. It very much almost like that fatalistic view, which, I think, can be an issue for disabled people as well.

This is where I do wonder. Are we talking about the impact that this is going to have on disabled people enough? I feel sick to my stomach when I think about the potential outcomes of climate change in the coming decades.

I eventually want to move back to Australia, but I see Australia as almost the canary-down-the-mine kind of situation. It scares me. All of my family are in Australia. I would love to move back there one day, but it absolutely petrifies me as to what is the climate going to be like just for myself. Am I going to be able to cope within that environment, let alone other people with different types of impairments and conditions?

[laughs] I think we need to look at the Gretas, we need to look at the Hannahs, and the James's, and sustainability, and educate ourselves, and start looking at how we can work together to make sure that we have a seat at the table, and we're making a change to protect ourselves and other people.

**Keith:** Definitely. Well, [inaudible 19:11] has come up. The article was written before the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout this last year, it suddenly became fine to dispose of certain single-use items such as masks.

Well, of course, this is classic ableism, but I'd like to hear your perspective on how COVID-19, either has or maybe has not, changed things related to climate and people with disabilities. Of course, you touched on this a little bit, but I'd like to probe a little further.

**Elizabeth:** Absolutely. It's certainly complicated. It's a complicated situation that we're in. As we know, there's been an increase in plastics that have been discarded between masks and gloves and all of that stuff. That's happening, but it's needed to protect our health and our well-being.

There's the cons [laughs] of COVID, and all of that, that's been happening, but then, in terms of the environment, but then, the flip side obviously is that global net emissions are going to be lower. They were lower last year, and they may potentially be lower this year because we had to stop.

Of course, there was still emissions. It wasn't a complete rid of fossil fuel and stuff like that, but there was lower emissions which, of course, going to be beneficial for the environment.

As well, the impact, I know myself, certainly in the area that I live, the impact of nature coming back because you're not out and about as much. We've all read the stories of animals that have

come in from the countryside and have been roaming down city [laughs] streets and stuff like that.

For me, that shows how insignificant we human beings actually are. If we cease to exist, nature will just take back over again. I hope that people take that as a humbling point of view that [laughs] it's our job to protect nature. That is what we should be doing.

Then, on the flip side, in terms of disabled people, there's been, again, a lot of pros and cons about the impact of COVID. For me, one of the biggest good things with COVID, or the pandemic, is that it's shown that our businesses are very capable of doing flexible working. Flexible working may include people working from home permanently.

As we go into the future, I don't think we can go back to the idea of normal, what was beforehand, because the pandemic is going to be around for quite a number of years until, with the vaccination, that we know how the vaccine works, and that globally, there is equity in terms of the vaccine.

As we know, there are richer countries that...UK, for example, where I live, we're nearly halfway through our vaccination program of the population.

There's all those things, but when we do go back to a certain degree of normal in terms of work, we could have situations where, yes, people can work from home or people can work part-time in the office and part-time at home, whatever's going to work for an individual and for disabled people.

That is what they've been calling out for decades, [laughs] literally, is that, "Please, give us flexible working. Please, meet our access needs and accommodations." That's definitely something that has come out of the pandemic that will hopefully be really good for disabled people going into the future.

It's almost like for me, it's that laying across these two things, the environment and the impact that COVID has had, and disabled people and the impact that COVID has had.

It's looking at how they can connect or work together. Case in point, across the road from where I live, we've had a bike path put in literally just before the pandemic. I don't know. It's like they somehow knew [laughs] that we would be needing this bike path. Not that I ride a bike, because I physically cannot ride a bike.

In terms of the environment, that's good. In terms of the pandemic, that was good. I've seen so many people out there riding their bikes, people walking it, using it as a walking track, and so on and so forth. It's been good.

It comes back to the access needs of disabled people being met in light of these changes that COVID have wrought in terms of the environment. It's about lining them up. Coming back to that idea of creativity and ensuring that disabled people have a seat at the table.

What's the perspective of the disability community of these two layers? One that both impacts them. How can we make those creative solutions work across the board? Personally, I would never wish a pandemic on anyone. The death count has been horrendous. It's horrific.

There are plenty of countries out there that haven't dealt with it well at all. I'm not going to point any fingers. [laughs] To be fair, the UK hasn't dealt with it that well, either. I'll be fair. It's happened. I've got to be pragmatic about it and think that the pandemic has happened.

I've got to look at it and encourage people to look at it as, "This is a real opportunity for us to look at the

[25:13] issues with the environment and disabled people, and how we can actually come up with a new normal that works for both."

**Keith:** Not long ago, here in the States, we saw the power grid in Texas completely shut down for millions of people. Like other climate-related disasters, it affected people with disabilities and other marginalized groups disproportionately. Of course, this is even more dangerous during a pandemic.

What steps can people with disabilities take to advocate for themselves during crises such as this? Maybe also speak on how access to disaster preparedness only goes so far to protect people with disabilities.

**Elizabeth:** I said earlier that Australia was a bit of a canary down the mine thing. The States are too, to be fair. We're starting to see more and more extreme climate issues popping up in these two particular countries.

Of course, as you mentioned, there was the power outage within Texas most recently. As well in California, wasn't there a year or two ago or something. There was an issue around power grids.

**Keith:** There was a plant power outage. Unfortunately, an individual with a disability died because they didn't give enough advanced notice. He relied on equipment that he didn't have a way to power alternatively.

**Elizabeth:** I think, though, that even in itself is telling that we need a better system in place. That was a planned outage in that case, and we still had a death. If it's unexpected, a bit like Texas, there's that worry that, of course, you can't even plan for that. Certainly in Australia.

Not the Australian summer just gone, but the summer beforehand, I was actually there at the time for Christmas just before the pandemic. Australia, especially on the eastern seaboard, had horrific fires that were all up and down.

Literally people being stranded on beaches. The fires were blocking their exit and they had to get rescued by Navy boats. One of the biggest issues that came out from this was, again, disabled people. Disabled people were the last people thought of. Disabled people were the last people accommodated.

Disabled people were the last ones evacuated. They were worried that evacuating a disabled person on a Navy ship, especially if they're wheelchair users or something like that. I know certainly, for me, if they wanted me to climb up a ladder on a [laughs] navy ship, I'd really struggle.



Again, coming back to this lack of inclusion and understanding about the different types of disabilities that there are and how we afford them access, especially in light of rescue situations that may be happening in the case of, for example, Australia or in Texas, how that has impacted the life and health and well-being of disabled people, but not even rescuing.

There was a woman in Australia with the bushfires who has MS and her mother has dementia, and she evacuated to an evacuation center. The fire wasn't at their property yet, but they'd been told, "You've got to evacuate."

They went to the evacuation center, and she was very flattering of the staff. She was like, "They did the best that they could, but essentially, their access needs could not be met." In the end, they decided to go back to their house and risk it.

In the end, they were safe, but you can't guarantee especially in light of extreme climate and what that means in terms of floods, in terms of fire, in terms of snow. What the resulting impact of that on people's lives. It could have been a worse situation in that sense with that woman.

I think about myself if I do move back to Australia at some point, what I would have to do to self-advocate to make sure that I would be safe in that situation. For me, I'd probably want to live back around Sydney where I grew up and where most of my family are, but in the past few months, Sydney has had extreme flooding.

I was listening to a podcast not long after the flooding had occurred. The scientists were saying that essentially, flooding in Sydney will become the norm over the next couple of decades because of climate change and the extreme storms that will come in off the Pacific.

One of the solutions given was, "We'll have to build all our houses on stilts," and I was like, "Well, how's that [laughs] going to help disabled people if we're going to think about the design elements and the access needs that disabled people will have, that they want to live in Sydney as well."

Again, this idea of, "You have to give disabled people a seat at the table. You have to get their perspective and their point of view." For me, coming back to that self-advocacy, of course, I'm not going to have a house on stilts because stairs are my nemesis.

[laughter]

**Keith:** That's right. Sure.

**Elizabeth:** For me, it's like, "OK, that'd be one of the things I'd have to think about."

I think this will be the same for a lot of disabled people globally as they're more and more impacted by climate change is like, "Well, where am I going to be able to live? Is it going to be a safe place where I live for me in terms of climate change?" Then, even going beyond that to self-advocacy.

I have a cousin who lives in northern New South Wales on a cattle farm, and they have a fire plan in place. "This is what we will do if bushfire comes through," but I literally think disabled

people are going to need that whether you live out in the countryside or whether you live in a city and have it applied to extreme climate situations and what that might look like.

It's about having a plan in place and understanding exactly what you will do in light of flooding, bushfire... [laughs]

**Keith:** Sure.

**Elizabeth:** ...snow, whatever that might look like. It's important to have people on your side and on board.

People who you trust in your community, whether it's a family member or friend or community member who you can share that plan with and ask them if the time comes to come and support or help you however that might look for you in each individual situation.

It's as well about assessing what the risks are, coming back to thinking about where you live, the design of your house, even the design of neighborhoods. All of these things have to be considered because they will all be impacted by climate change to a certain degree.

It's doing a risk assessment essentially for your own life and your own living space and where you live and thinking of the impact that the extreme climate might have on that space and that lived experience.

I think as well, and it's horrible to think about, this is another thing that makes me feel sick, but it's thinking about or contemplating the possible scenarios that you will face, and that does include worst-case scenarios.

In light of, say, in Texas with what happened, they're going down of the power grid. As someone, if you're on a ventilator or something, it's like thinking, "OK, it hasn't happened to me yet, but it could happen. We could have a power outage.

"Worst-case scenario, what do I have to have in place here in my home to support me in getting through a sudden power outage?" [laughs] This conversation, Keith, could go on and on because even then, you think about the financial impact of all of that.

There's a charity here in the UK, Scope, who I put out a report, I think it was last year or the year before where, here in the UK...Anyway, I imagine it's similar in the United States. I imagine it's similar in Australia. I imagine it's quite similar globally, but certainly here in the UK, life costs an extra approximately £580 per month for a disabled person.

**Keith:** Wow. Interesting.

**Elizabeth:** That's extra on top of...Non-average, non-disabled person. That's the average of how much more life costs the disabled people...

**Keith:** A person with a disability, globally, generally makes less money.

**Elizabeth:** Exactly. Then, if you're thinking of contingency plans around climate change and extreme climate, how much extra is that going to cost you to put those plans in place to keep you and your family safe and keep you alive essentially?

There's the financial burden of all of this as well that has to be considered, but again, this is why I think it's so important on a global and grassroots level for disabled people to have a say in what is happening.

That has to include the equity of not just safety, but also the financial burden of what climate change will have on the globe and on individuals, whether you're disabled or non-disabled.

**Keith:** Having that seat at the table, as you said.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah.

**Keith:** Well, there's been a lot to think about here. Thank you so much for your time. I appreciate it. It's been a lot of great information.

**Elizabeth:** Thank you, Keith. I hope it's been helpful for everyone. You know what? I've said a couple of times that the whole climate change thing, it makes me feel sick as I see situations get worse and worse. You can almost see this pattern that each year, more and more extreme stuff is starting to happen.

**Keith:** Yeah.

**Elizabeth:** I've always been a bit of an optimist, so I'm trying to hold onto that optimism. It's the disabled community being more open, speaking out more, and being there for each other. Let's be allies to each other and support each other in amplifying each other's voices and lifting each other up to make sure we do have that seat at the table.

**Keith:** Absolutely. We all have to work together to get through all of this, all of us. Yes indeed. Great. Thanks, Liz, so much, appreciate it.

**Elizabeth:** Thanks, Keith.

**Keith:** I also spoke with writer and activist Syren Nagakyrie. They are the founder and director of Disabled Hikers, which advocates for accessibility and inclusion in the outdoors. Syren explains why the outdoors are not always as accessible as you might think and how they are working to change that for people with disabilities.

Hi, Syren. Thanks for being here today. You're the founder of Disabled Hikers. Tell us a little bit about that and how you help people with disabilities to experience the outdoors more fully.

**Syren Nagakyrie:** I started Disabled Hikers three years ago after a lifetime of frustration around my experiences as a disabled person in the outdoors.

I was just inspired out on a trail one day after doing tons of research to try to find a trail that I could hike safely and comfortably, and starting out on this trail and then immediately encountering all kinds of barriers and obstacles that weren't listed anywhere.

I'm out on this trail and just getting increasingly pained and fatigued and frustrated and finally just kind of stopped and said, "Why don't I do something about this?" Disabled Hikers was kind of born in that moment.

Part of our mission is to help provide more of that accessible information for a wide variety of disabled people in the outdoors so that's more readily available to folks.

**Keith:** It's a shame that the outdoors can be so inaccessible. You would think if anything, it's nature. It's the outdoor environment. It's open and available to everybody, but that's just not the case, is it?

**Syren:** No. Not at all, unfortunately.

**Keith:** The outdoors are so good for both your mental and physical health, and it's a shame that people with disabilities are often barred access from the outdoors.

**Syren:** That's a huge topic of conversation. Especially right now, with COVID and outdoors being one of the safer places for people to be is all of those great emotional, physical, and mental benefits of being out in nature. Yet, sick and disabled folks who need those benefits perhaps the most often face the most barriers to access.

**Keith:** What were some of the barriers you were finding when you were hiking and had the idea of starting Disabled Hikers?

**Syren:** For me, I'm primarily ambulatory. I use a wheelchair part-time, but when I'm hiking, I'm generally using a cane or trekking poles or things like that. For me, having really good information around the number of stairs, or how steep the slope is, or how slippery it's going to be, or the elevation change, and things like that, it's really important for me.

How exposed the trail is going to be so I know how much sun exposure I'm going to have and things like that. There is also things like where's the parking in relation to the trail head, and is there other accessible toilets, are there accessible parking spots, and things like that.

**Keith:** An easy trail isn't necessarily an accessible trail.

**Syren:** Not at all, no. Many of the trails that are even labeled as accessible often aren't. [laughs]

**Keith:** Oh, is that right?

**Syren:** Mm-hmm.

**Keith:** Are you seeing any improvements in the accessibility of trails or other outdoor resources in recent years?

**Syren:** Yeah. There is definitely a lot more conversations happening about it. Right now, of course, as we know the ADA was signed 30 years ago. The Architectural Barriers Act, which covers those federal outdoor recreation spaces, is even much older than that.

In the last, I'd say, a year or two, a lot of parks are starting to do their ADA transition planning, which is now leading to them making accessibility improvements. For example, in Oregon State

Parks, they announced that over the next 25 years, they'll be improving accessibility system-wide.

**Keith:** The broader topic of this episode is on environmental ableism or eco-ableism. What does that mean to you, and how have you encountered that in your work, either with Disabled Hikers or in your personal life?

**Syren:** Ableism weaved through many of our experiences. It's an unspoken, unacknowledged thing that's out there in the community, particularly in the outdoors. One of the things that people often say to me is, "Oh, you just want to pay for a little bit of the wilderness so that a few people who use wheelchairs can access it." That's not what we're trying to do at all.

Yes, there are definitely many trails and places that could be made more accessible, but we don't have to play this game of, what's more important -- is it the environment or is it people? -- that sets up this us versus them that is really unnecessary, when really, we could all be working together to accomplish these goals.

**Keith:** How are people with disabilities leading the way in climate and environmental justice? What do we have to learn from your and others' activism?

**Syren:** I think one thing that many groups in the disability communities do really well is that mutual aid, that interconnectedness, that understanding that we have to do all of this together and help one another through this.

For example, I've known of many groups who, whether it was in the wildfires or with COVID have really come together to help make masks more readily available to people and get those shared out with the broader community, making sure that people have access to vaccines and helping them find appointments and things like that.

**Keith:** We've recently seen how climate change and terrible storms can essentially shut down a state's power grid and leave people with disabilities isolated without power for equipment they may require for even weeks at a time. What are some of the ways that people with disabilities can make their voices heard?

**Syren:** I think one way to really be involved in the process, especially now that President Biden is talking about a new infrastructure bill to help some of this, to improve our infrastructure so this doesn't happen so often, so getting involved in that legislative process.

Most counties have some kind of emergency management coordination committee or group or something like that, so finding out about that and getting involved there, and sharing your needs and experiences within the county can help them plan accordingly.

**Keith:** Tell us a little bit more about Disabled Hikers and how it's been growing, getting lots of people involved. I know you're primarily located in the Northwest of Washington, that area?

**Syren:** Yeah, I'm typically based in western Washington, and we have really been covering all of western Washington and western Oregon. As we are growing, we recently incorporated as a Washington State non-profit. We're looking at becoming a 501(c)(3) in the next year. From

there, we'll be expanding, creating training programs, building chapters around the country and things like that.

We're definitely trying to expand this to make it more available to more people, so we welcome people to write park reviews or trail guides or share their own stories and experiences about being in the outdoors as a person with disabilities. We can post those on the website or on social media.

**Keith:** You welcome those from anywhere in the country, really.

**Syren:** Absolutely. Yeah.

**Keith:** Thank you, Syren. I appreciate your time today.

**Syren:** Absolutely. Yeah. Thanks for having me.

**Keith:** Thanks again to both Elizabeth Wright and Syren Nagakyrie for being our guests today. In the show notes are links to some of the resources mentioned in this episode, including Liz's Conscious Being website and Syren's Disabled Hikers website.

Disability Rights Florida has resources about disaster and emergency planning at [disabilityrightsflorida.org/disasterprep](https://disabilityrightsflorida.org/disasterprep). Thank you for listening to the "You First" podcast or reading the transcript online. Please email any feedback, questions, or ideas about the show to [podcast@disabilityrightsflorida.org](mailto:podcast@disabilityrightsflorida.org).

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**Narrator:** The You First podcast is produced by Disability Rights Florida, a not-for-profit corporation working to protect and advance the rights of Floridians with disabilities through advocacy and education. If you or a family member has a disability and feel that your rights have been violated in any way, please contact Disability Rights Florida.

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