

UNSEASONED

What happens when a
dream job is no
longer your dream?

Emerald LaFortune

America Outdoors 2023

Phoenix, AZ



The Unseasoned Interview Series

What shifts when you leave seasonal outdoor work for a 9-5, or more year-round focused work?

Why do highly qualified seasonal staff leave?

What might entice them to stay?



9 Interviews /
12 Months

Outdoor Seasonal



The 9-5

RIVER
GUIDE

PARK RANGER

OUTDOOR
EDUCATOR

SNOWBOARD
INSTRUCTOR

FISHERIES
TECHNICIAN

TOUR
GUIDE

TV WRITER

DIRECTOR

GRAPHIC
DESIGNER

SCIENCE
COMMUNICATOR

ACCOUNTANT

HOMEMAKER

PROJECT MANAGER

CONSERVATION
DIRECTOR

About Emerald

- A decade as a **daily and multiday whitewater and fly fishing guide** in Idaho.
- 3 years as **Executive Director of the Redside Foundation**, a 501c3 that supports the health and strength of Idaho guides.
- **Trainer and Project Manager** for Recreation Law Group.
- **Outdoor writer** and general curious and nosy person.



Opening Exercise



Why Care?

Experienced Staff:

- Help train and set expectations for incoming staff.
- Are more skilled risk managers and decision-makers.
- Are expensive to replace.



1/2 to 2x

The cost of replacing an individual employee can range from one-half to two times the employee's annual salary.

The Big Picture

Experienced staff are looking ahead to...

- Student debt
- Increased housing costs
- Increased childcare costs
- Inflation
- ... a sense of unease about global stability and whole lot of unpredictability in general.



\$533,725

The median cost of a home in Missoula, Montana in 2023, up from \$312,000 in 2019.

LESSON #1

**Staff Are Ready to
Leave: Do You
Help or Hinder?**

BEN SHORTLEDGE



I think for me, I was in an obvious transition point and ready to move out of guiding. Maybe if they were going to pay me a lot more money and the benefits were way better, maybe it would've been a harder decision to make as I was comparing other options. But for me, I think I was ready to move on.

JAMIE DAWSON



I was just generally kind of frustrated. I feel like part of being a federal employee is that when you're interacting with the public, you are paid to not have an opinion about the actions of the federal government. You're not really supposed to be talking about politics. I was also not necessarily willing to go back that way.



Sometimes the fear loses its power over you, and you think, "What do I have to lose?" If you can make it through, it builds up an absurd amount of confidence. Not an egotistical confidence, I would say, just a very healthy confidence where you're like, "This might hurt but I'm going to do it, going to go for it."

TREVOR FULTON



You have to help your staff and say, 'What's next? What do we need to do to get you there? What skills, what experiences, what opportunities, what reflection do you need to do to get you to that next step?' I just think it's amazing what relationships can be built and in turn, either help somebody stay or sets them up to do great things when they leave.

LESSON #2

**Create
More Stability or
More Challenge
(or both)**



Your schedule in these jobs is reliable and predictable. I could just see friends after work most nights.

Overall, I think I just had more mental space for friendship because I wasn't so burnt out all the time.

SHEREE DENETSOSIE



Another big reason that scared me away from getting too deep into guiding was wondering, "How do I make money? How do I make a long-term life for myself and how do I even approach retirement? What does that look like? Can I actually afford to put away funds for retirement?" I just had so many questions I didn't know.

LANDON MOORES



My favorite part of non-seasonal work is knowing that I can do this job for as long as I need to and I don't have to worry about my body giving out on me. Knowing that I have benefits in a retirement plan, knowing that my likability won't affect my paycheck.

MARGO STONEY



Having more security with consistent hours and good health benefits was definitely a bonus.

I was also lucky enough to have opportunities for professional development, promotions and raises. I felt those were more available to me as a year round full-time employee than as a seasonal person where you just get treated differently.



“Location was a really tough factor too. And that's something that you maybe can't change. But also to better the workplace environment, you have to better your communities, so people can be safe in these locations.”

LESSON #3

Outdoor Seasonal Work is a Launchpad

LANDON MOORES



Guiding really teaches you to talk to people. And I would say there are many guides who cannot understand what it would be like to have a fear of public speaking. There's not a river guide that's going to be afraid to give a toast at a wedding. We don't even look at that as a skill. We don't even think about it, but it's kind of huge.



Being okay with uncertainty and change is so valuable in a role like mine or any sort of leadership role where you just roll with it and you just figure out what your today is going to look like based on what's in front of you or what gets thrown at you.

It's amazing to me how good outdoor educators and guides are at that.

SHEREE DENETSOSIE



I think guiding is a really good background to have because it teaches you so much about how to understand people and how to keep people safe, and how to help people understand their fears and get past them.



“
Now as a homemaker,
dealing with people,
dealing with kids,
supporting people,
understanding emotions...
in every way I would say
that guiding was helpful in
what I do now.”



Having these seasonal jobs teaching snowboarding and working in ski towns gave me a ton of great experience and helped me get to know the industry and understand my audience. It helped me better develop my skills for the type of people that I wanted to do design work for.

LESSON #4

The Dream Job is Dead



My dream job now is a job that lets me live my life separate from my job, rather than live my life through my job.

TREVOR FULTON



There's no such thing as a dream job. For me, my focus has shifted towards, "I want to work for me, I want to work for my family. I want to work towards a passion." And that's what a dream job is. It's not necessarily a single role. It's more of a huge combination of things.

SHEREE DENETSOSIE



It's never a finish line,
what a dream job is.

I think the dream job is
always the next thing.



My dreams have changed. Now I'm more interested in having freedom with my schedule, having flexible hours, and taking on the types of projects that allow me to work with nature and outdoors and sustainability.

I also want to collaborate with people who are fun to work with and where there's mutual respect.

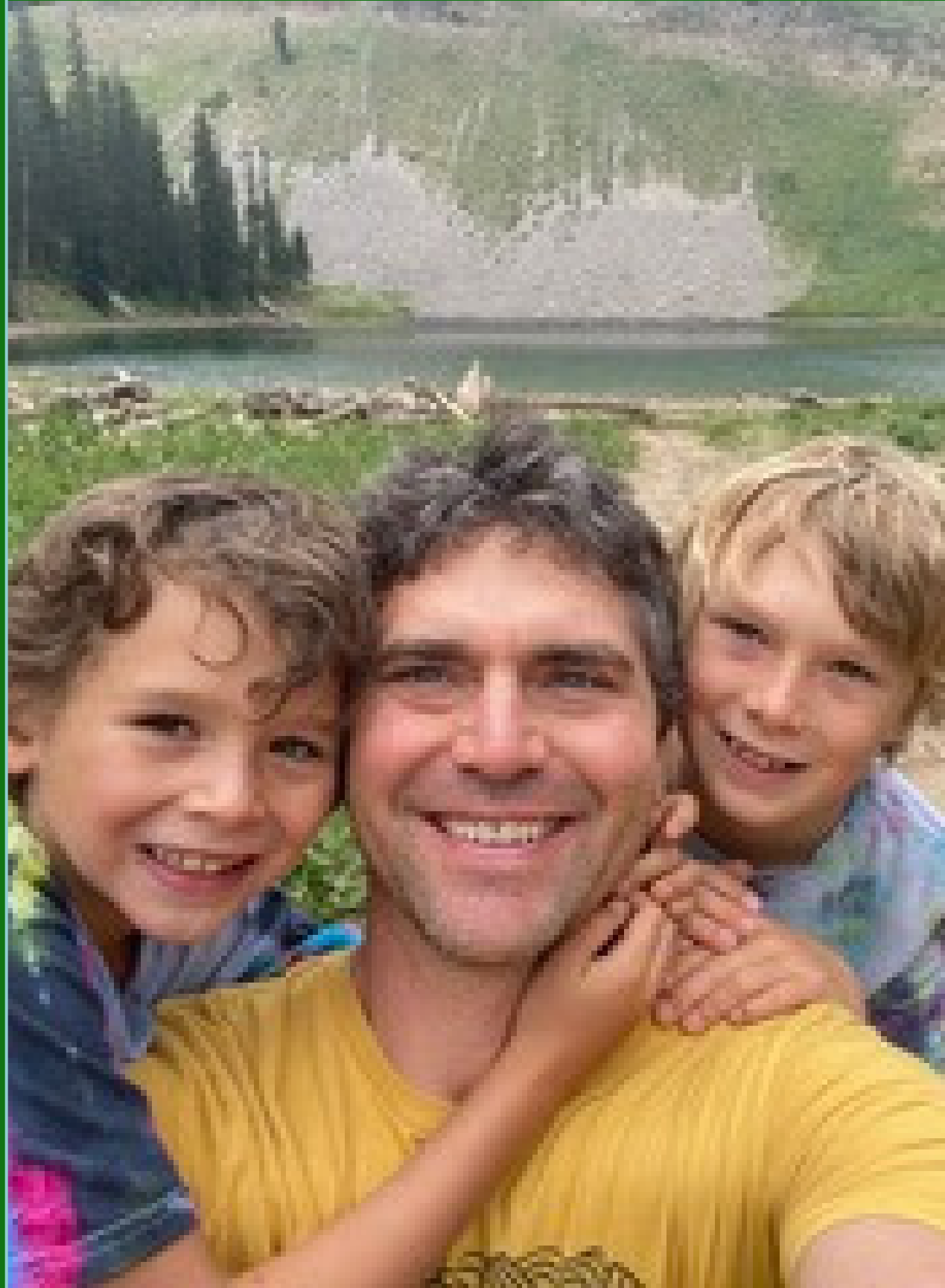
LESSON #5

The Fear Is Real



I think I'm definitely much less restless now, but there's always the fear of becoming boring or becoming complacent, getting too settled, and being less fun.

BEN SHORTLEDGE



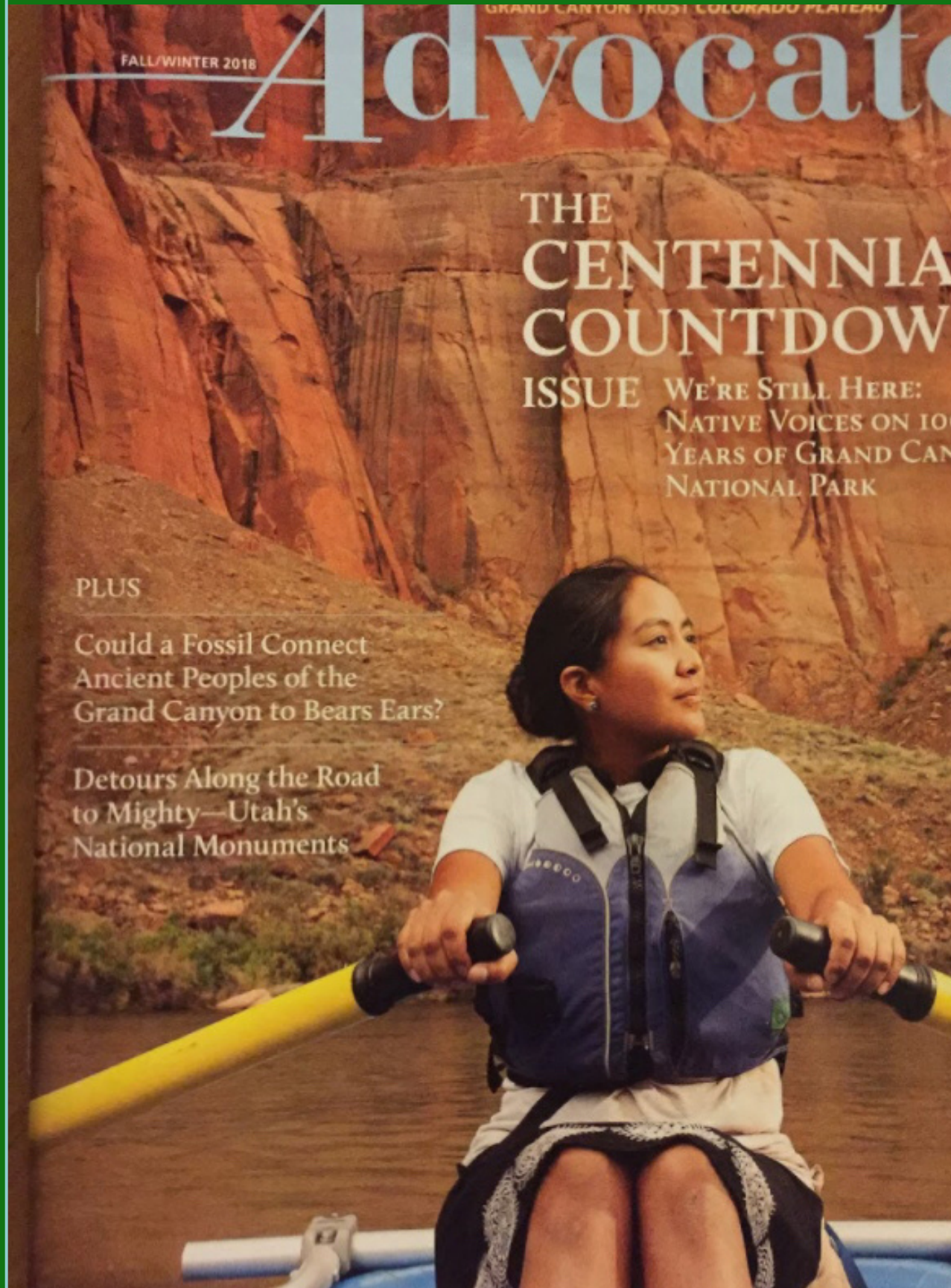
I was most worried about how I defined myself to myself.

I had guided for long enough and I'd grown up as a guide and I identified as a guide. I was afraid to let go of that. I didn't know what else I was going to identify as.

TREVOR FULTON



For me, the fear was I built my life around that seasonal cycle, and you kind of worry you're going to lose that lifestyle, you're going to lose those outlets, whether it's an outlet mentally or an outlet physically. I think you worry you're going to lose community because of it.



What would I be leaving behind? The work was grounding to me and I had a hard time visualizing what my mental health would be like without long-term access to the outdoors.

When I stopped doing multi-day trips, I was very much a dramatic teenager! And it was like, "Oh, I'm gonna die without going on these trips. It's gonna be the end of the world."

FINAL LESSON

Keep The Door
Open

TREVOR FULTON



You have to make it positive, you have to make it more than a job.

And that's super hard and it takes a lot of time and focused effort from a leadership role, but it has resounding benefits both in office culture, retention of employees, and I just think a little bit of personal and self-worth. Everybody feels better being in an environment like that.

Closing Exercise



At 80 years old... 

"I have hardwood floors and I have some music on. I have people I love in my house permanently. And then I have some people I love that come over to visit, more than people think they should. And we just have rich stories and connections."

- Landon Moores

At 80 years old... >>>

"I hope I am surrounded by love. I'm sure my body will be completely worn out by then. So hopefully my mind is still sharp. And I guess hopefully I'm still spending time outside. If my body is worn down, hopefully, I'm sitting in a fishing boat or something, sitting on a park bench, whatever it is."

- Trevor Fulton

At 80 years old... 

“At that point, I think I would be on my family ranch, having built up my home out there. I’ve built up the land a bit. I’m spending time with my family. Nothing fancy.”

- Sheree Denetsosie

ASK YOURSELF...

**What Is My
Unseasoned Story?**

How can I...

- Stay curious about each new employee I meet?
- Stay curious about how my existing employees want to grow and be challenged or be supported?
- Help my employees understand how outdoor seasonal work is moving them toward their next step?
- Create a workplace that has the texture of a “dream job”, not just the label of one?
- Help employees address their fears of leaving outdoor seasonal work?
- Keep the door open?
- Use my own “Unseasoned” story to help those around me understand theirs?

STAY IN TOUCH

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