

Rewilding Lecture at Washington College

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Peter Michael Bauer (AKA Urban Scout) gives a presentation and a Q&A on Rewilding at the Washington College Locavore Literature Festival in March of 2012.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mzIo5AdEEI>

Lecture

I'm Peter. I have a blog about rewilding, which to me means to return to a hunter-gatherer lifestyle and all of the aspects that includes.

A lot of people don't really know what that, how hunter-gatherers actually lived.

There's a lot of mythology that's sort of been spread.

for hundreds of years about hunter-gatherers or Stone Age peoples and part of the process for me of learning to be a hunter-gatherer is learning to navigate through that mythology about hunter-gatherers and our ancestors.

So that's what I write about on my blog and I saw that I was listed as the more radical author this weekend.

So I thought I would write a little intro speech sort of thing to open up a discussion that was more radical than I probably normally write.

Just give me a little push and I'll do that.

So if wild foods, the idea of eating wild foods was radical to any of you 10 minutes ago, what I'm about to say will probably be a lot crazier than that, I'm guessing.

So this year's theme is the other local, finding wild foods.

This is a very clever way of slipping a dangerous concept into your subconscious mind.

I'm going to do something that I probably shouldn't.

I'm going to explain what this simple title actually means and hopefully incite a revolution along the way.

So let's go through the first part, the other local.

In order to understand what the other local is, We have to establish what the normal local is.

You can't have an other without a normal.

So let's define that first.

What do we mean by local foods? Common sense tells me this simply means food that comes from the local environment.

However, the term local is a general term and open to interpretation.

For example, the moon is local to the earth when comparing the distance from the earth to the sun.

importing bananas from South America is more local than importing them from the terraformed biodomes on the planet Mars.

By the way, if that ever happens, please shoot me in the face.

So how close or far do we mean when we say local? Well, there's no defined locale when we say local foods.

We clearly know It's a common sense term meant to describe food that we can acquire that is closer to us than bananas from South America, unless, of course, we live in South America.

Most people interpret local foods to mean getting their food from local farmers' markets.

This greatly impacts the distance, defining the locale by small-scale farmers who can only readily transport their food to a more localized market and while local can be interpreted differently based on distance, sorry, I skipped ahead there.

Generally, these farmers' markets are defined by the region in which the farmers farm.

While local can be interpreted differently based on distance, the term region is not based on an individual's interpretation of distance, but rather a defined area.

The term region has a more clear specificity than the term local.

While local means nearby, regions are places with specific identities and borders.

Since we're talking about regional food systems, and since our food comes from the land itself, It makes sense to identify our food systems based on our bioregions, a place, locale, or area that constitutes a natural ecological community.

Biological communities shape vast regions.

These biological communities are defined by their identity, the kinds of plants and animals that live there, and the geographical limitations to where these communities can spread.

What I think people are striving for when they say local is actually bioregional.

Local food more specifically means bioregional food.

I like to eat bananas.

I don't think I'm alone there.

But there are values that I have that come before my taste buds.

I'm sure I would love the taste of antifreeze, but I don't eat bananas for the same reason I'm not going to shotgun a liter of antifreeze.

I care about the health of my body and recognizing that my health depends greatly on the land, I make choices like buying local or bioregional food because I know those decisions help keep the land healthy.

Healthy land, healthy food, healthy body.

It's pretty simple.

Local food, the local food movement is based on these same values, sustainability and bioregional resilience.

Yet we don't always take this thread to its inevitable conclusion.

While our food distribution system is destructive, Our food production system is vastly much more so.

In other words, while getting your food from a shorter distance is less destructive, it's not necessarily a less destructive way of growing your food.

Just because you eat more localized doesn't mean your soil won't erode away.

Local food, bioregional food, is less destructive than globalization and factory farms, but it is far from sustainable.

If we really strive for sustainability, then we must be very clear about what that actually means.

It's not just the distance our food travels that is important.

It must be a sustainable food production system that creates the food in the 1st place.

This is where we get into the second-half of this year's theme, wild foods.

I've been fascinated with the word wild for a long time.

The concept of wildness can only exist with its opposing concept, domestication.

Humans are the only animals to create this dichotomous paradigm between wild versus domesticated.

In fact, agricultural humans are the only animals to create this dichotomy.

Our hunter-gatherer ancestors did not have a concept of wild.

For 3 million years, what we now think of as wild wasn't just the normal way of being, it was the only way of being.

There was no such thing as wild.

When we say wild food, we mean edible plants, animals, and fungi growing without the aid of human manipulation and control.

This means that the normal, local, non-wild food, the economic food system of domesticated edible plants, animals, and fungi.

If the other local is what we call wild and free food, then the normal local is the controlled, the domesticated, and here's the clincher, the taxed.

What if we think of What we think of now as normal food is quite abnormal if we look at the vast majority of human history.

The proper, biological, ergonomic way our bodies are designed to poop is in the squatting position.

Toilets have plagued the human ***** with terrible hemorrhoids and colon disease ever since the first #2 was flushed down the aqueduct.

Yet we continue to build bathrooms, that do not match our ideal biological defecation posture.

We are not educated in our ancestral defecation posture.

From birth, we are potty trained to worship the porcelain god, never stopping to rethink it.

We no longer know there was any other way of pooping.

Toilets hurt our bodies, but we're completely unaware for the most part and this might be because we have a lot of pride.

What is this nonsense you say? Toilets can't hurt you.

They've been around forever.

We would have figured that out by now.

Tell that to my hemorrhoids.

Maybe it's because of peer pressure.

I'm pretty sure no one is going to want to go to the bathroom in my house if I installed one of those squatting troughs from China.

But in order for us to make serious change about aspects of our culture that we've taken for granted for generations, there has to be a critical mass of, and here comes the punchline, people who give a ****.

This is much like the way we practice agriculture.

We take it for granted that this way of life may not be the end-all, be-all of humanity.

If it didn't work, we would have stopped doing it a long time ago.

But this is sadly not the case and now I'm going to read a little bit from the unreleased second edition of my book, *Rewild or Die*, about the subject of agriculture.

This chapter is called *Agriculture, Unsafe with Any Seed*.

That's a play on a Ralph Nader book.

Anyway, around 10,000 years ago, a group of humans living in what we ironically still call the Fertile Crescent began to practice a subsistence method that led to an increase in complexity of culture.

Let me translate that for you.

It led to the creation of slavery, population growth, disease, industrialization, weapons of mass destruction, nuclear technology, and the diesel engine, all of which have been part of and helped to further a human-inspired mass extinction event.

What we gained in social complexity, we lost in the more foundational environmental complexity.

We exchanged old-growth cedar trees for Apple's iPod Touch.

Jared Diamond, the author of the book *Collapse*, has called this method of subsistence the worst mistake in the history of the human race.

We call this method of subsistence agriculture, and refer to this shift in cultural history as the agricultural revolution.

Agriculture lies at the heart of all modern social inequalities and this human-inspired mass extinction that scientists are now referring to as the Anthropocene.

Defining agriculture is complicated.

Humans have been manipulating their environments in order to manage their food supply for a long time.

Agriculture refers to a very specific way of managing the land.

It is a combination of two words, *agri*, which means field, and *culture*, which comes from the word *cultivate*, which originally meant tillage of the soil.

The word agriculture means a food production system which people till the soil in order to produce a field.

When we picture a farm in our minds, we generally see fields and no other kind of habitat.

We also have phrases like a farmer's fields and not a farmer's forest.

In order to understand the destructive nature of agriculture, you have to 1st understand the phases of ecological succession.

Ecological succession refers to the phases of growth of a forest, starting from barren rock and ending with a climax forest.

The loss of biodiversity that starts this cycle of growth over again generally occurs through a natural disturbance such as a fire, flood, volcanic eruption, meteor, and earthquake, among others.

Primary succession is the first phase of ecological succession, characterized by the growth of annual pioneer plants.

that grow quickly and live for only a year, such as grasses and annual wildflowers.

These plants love sun, barren rock, and or disturbed soil, and serve to create quality, life-giving soil for secondary succession to grow in.

Secondary succession refers to the later phases of ecological succession, marked by the growth of larger perennials.

Perennial plants are woody plants who live longer than one year, such as shrubs and trees.

These plants need established soil to grow in, the very soil created by primary succession.

These phases of succession work towards creating the final stage of succession, a stable ecosystem referred to as a climax forest.

Agriculture refers to a process of cultivation that uses clear cutting and the tilling of soil to simulate a natural catastrophe such as a fire or a flood, et cetera.

in order to inspire the growth of annual pioneer plants.

Specifically, grasses with calorie-rich grains like corn, wheat, and rice.

Agriculture is a strategy that comes from an area that naturally has a reoccurring disaster, such as a floodplain along a river.

Every year, the river floods and returns nutrients to the soil.

In this kind of situation, agriculture works quite well.

Humans do not have to work against nature because nature creates the regular catastrophe as part of the natural system of the river.

The problem is when we take agriculture and try to transpose it over time and space.

Forest succession will continue unless otherwise halted.

Fields quickly turn into woodlands and forests.

In order to cultivate a perpetual grain-producing meadow, we require continuous deforestation, fighting the natural flow of forest succession, destroying climax forests, or preventing their growth.

Agriculturalists use tilling as the main method for fighting succession. Tilling means agitating the soil through digging, stirring, or overturning. We use a tool called the plow to do this.

Tilling the soil to create continuous primary succession exposes the soil to wind and rain until the soil erodes away entirely.

So much so that in order to grow crops, most of our fields now require the importation of mineral resources we refer to as fertilizer.

These minerals also end up washing out of the soil and into the ocean.

The minerals shoot out of major rivers and create the perfect food for algae, creating what we call algal blooms, which cover large portions of the surface of the ocean.

Algal blooms block sunlight and absorb all the oxygen, making it impossible for life to live in them.

For this reason, we call these areas in the ocean dead zones.

To maximize the yield of a desired species, agriculturalists generally plant only one particular species.

This is what we call a monocrop.

Monocropping creates the perfect environment for insects who love to eat that particular plant.

Increasing an insect's food supply in a dense area will also increase the insect's population in a dense area.

We create the perfect environment for their populations to explode, and then we call these insects pests.

This further complicates things, as we now require the routine use of pesticides, poisonous chemicals we spray on our food to kill the insect populations that our monocultures created.

Agricultural subsistence sets up the perfect conditions for famine.

Deforestation, monocropping, and the destruction of fertile soils leads to an overall loss in biodiversity.

As a way of life, this creates an extreme vulnerability to crop failure from large insect infestations, disease, and climate change.

If you put all your eggs in the agricultural basket, you are going to end up starving.

In order to combat this, In order to combat this built-in crisis, agriculturalists invented food storage, AKA the granary.

They work even harder to produce a little extra food to get themselves through inevitable monocrop failure and a resulting food shortage.

Initially, this seems great.

A little more work on their part, but in the end, they don't starve when famine strikes.

Unfortunately for us, having a food surplus inspires population growth.

Any animal that has a surplus of food has a surplus of food, grows to match the surplus, humans included.

A population cannot grow without an increase in food availability, usually through an increase in efficiency of food production.

Therefore, a population explosion implies more food production.

Full-time agriculturalists with a grain surplus create a positive feedback loop of growing more grain to feed an ever-expanding population.

Eventually, the soil beneath them degrades and washes away, and they cease practicing agriculture.

We've seen this with many civilizations, particularly in the New World.

All civilizations, in fact, except ours.

In our case, we didn't stop farming.

We expanded into our neighbor's territory, murdered or assimilated them through force and coercion, and kept on growing.

Towards the end of the film, *The Matrix*, The villain, Agent Smith, a pinned that every animal on this planet instinctively develops a natural equilibrium with the surrounding environment, but you humans do not.

You move to an area and you multiply until every natural resource is consumed.

The only way you can survive is to spread to another area.

There's another organism on this planet that follows the same pattern.

Do you know what it is? A virus.

Human beings are a disease, a cancer of this planet.

end quote.

I might have agreed with Agent Smith if I didn't already know that humans have lived here on this planet sustainably for 99.9% of the time we've lived on the planet.

We're awesome.

This ideology of his reflects the larger view of people in our culture who write these scripts and refers only to humans who got swept up with the agriculture several thousands of years ago.

Humanity does not act like a cancer and does not have an inherent drive to destroy itself.

Agricultural civilization, on the other hand, does.

Now, for a talk about wild foods, I'm taking up an awful lot of time to talk about domesticated food.

I wish I could just talk about wild food.

I wish it was that simple.

I wish I could just happily tell you what plants you could eat and when was the proper time to harvest them and send you on your way.

But if I did that, I would be glossing over the underlying implications of wild food and if we were to gloss over that, there may never be a revolution and if we are to save what is left of the planet, or rather, if we are to increase the chances of the human race surviving through the next century, we need nothing less than a global revolution.

This revolution has already begun, and it has a name.

It's called rewilding.

The process of undoing domestication and returning to the hunter-gathered lifestyle of which all of our ancestors once lived, happily for 3 million years.

Many people think that hunter-gatherers lived in a perpetual state of hunger, aimlessly wandering the land in search of food.

This is not true.

Hunter-gatherers live on seasonal circuits, managing the same places year after year and encouraging their abundance.

Their methods were invisible to agriculturalists because agriculturalists do not understand any other food production system than ones that fight forest succession.

There are many accounts of explorers and settlers describing the abundance of wildlife where indigenous hunter-gatherers have been managing the land for thousands of years.

These people were confused as to why these people had not begun to deforest the region and plant crops.

What they didn't realize is that the abundance they were seeing was the hunter-gatherer's crop.

They just didn't need to cut everything down.

They knew the wild, kept the wild, and spread the wild.

In order for us to cease the destructive inherent, the destruction inherent in our agricultural systems, we must embrace this kind of forest gardening, as some have called it.

We must take the lands that we have domesticated, and we must rewild them.

We could talk about sustainability and sustainable land management practices until we're blue in the face.

But if we do not simultaneously talk about the power systems in place that prevent us from making sustainable changes, nothing will ever change.

The food distribution system is flawed.

The food production system is flawed.

The power structure that controls the production and distribution systems are flawed.

Taxation is the method that those in power use to maintain their power and continue the destructive system of food production and distribution.

Growing your own food for foraging, or foraging for local food, is an act of resistance against taxation.

Therefore, eating wild is a revolutionary act in that it inherently goes against the systems of power.

Everything in nature used to be free.

Indigenous people don't have to pay for food.

They go out and pick it.

That doesn't mean they don't have to work for it.

They must perform the labor of going out and getting food and building containers to store the food and building shelters to protect themselves from the elements, etc.

This doesn't mean that they did not have taboos in place that prevented them from taking anything and everything they wanted.

They did, and they still do today.

What it means is that there was no bureaucracy skimming off the top.

There was no one getting fat off the fruits of the labor of others.

unless everyone was getting fat together.

This is not some egalitarian idealization of the noble savage.

This is how successful bands of hunter-gatherers sustained themselves for over 3 million years.

There may have been captive slaves here and there, but it was not an entire slave class holding up a privileged elite.

Our current economic food system wasn't just built on slavery.

It is sustained by slavery.

We didn't abolish slavery in America.

We exported it to the Third World, where we didn't have to look at it anymore.

The financial wealth and privilege of America is kept up by a world of slaves.

If we had actually abolished slavery, we would have abolished the wealthy at the same time, because you can't have one without the other.

So along came agriculture, and with it the power structure we call empire.

It's not exactly our fault that we're too afraid to challenge Empire.

After all, they'll kill us if we actually make an impact, right? So next I'm going to read a little excerpt from the 2nd edition of my book, *Rewild or Die*, which is called *Empire, An Offer You Can't Refuse*.

Imagine this scene.

Joey, the head of a budding family, opens a restaurant in New York City.

The night before the grand opening, Joey stands, sweeping the floor and preparing for the next day.

A man in an expensive suit comes in and sits down at a table with a red and white checkered tablecloth.

By the look of recognition on Joey's face, you can tell he knows this man.

He swallows, sets the broom against the wall, and cautiously joins the suited man at a table.

The man looks him cold in the eyes and says, I want to make you an offer you can't refuse.

He offers Joey his protection for a small fee.

Everyone knows really that this paid protection means pay us or we're going to ****
** your restaurant.

We can all recognize this scam when it has a cliché Italian mobster pushing it.

We don't recognize that we all live as victims to it right now, only we call it taxes.

Agriculture requires A tremendous amount of hard physical labor.

Ecological succession shows us that plant growth naturally progresses to climax forests.

Agriculture works against this natural progression rather than working with it. Mimicking the power of a natural disturbance requires a lot of physical labor and energy.

Creating and distributing pesticides decrease insect populations when you've provided them the perfect habitat requires a lot of work.

Making and importing your own fertilizer that you would not have needed had you followed the flow of rich soil building succession requires a lot of work.

Continuously pulling weeds to prevent ecological succession requires a lot of work.

Harvesting and processing all that grain requires a lot of work.

Not only does this form of subsistence destroy the environment, it requires a massive amount of labor.

This labor always, always comes in the form of a slave class.

No one can prove why, many theories exist, but for some reason, when humans live sedentary lives with a dense population, a social hierarchy forms.

Agriculture requires A sedentary lifestyle, you can't exactly wander with fields, and simultaneously creates a positive feedback of population growth.

This leads to the ideal conditions in which hierarchy forms.

Agriculture and hierarchy go together like a Big Mac and high cholesterol.

Empire most likely started like this.

A small group of agriculturalists grow a bunch of food and funnel wealth to themselves.

They use this wealth to pay a military to tax or more accurately steal more wealth for them from their neighbors.

After a long enough time, a whole cultural system emerges.

A large slave class that performs the majority of physical labor tilling and working the fields a military or police class to keep the slaves in line, and a ruling class that makes all the decisions for the whole.

Fast forward 5,000 years and we have wage taxes, property taxes, sales taxes, rent, food bills, water bills, health insurance bills, electricity bills, gas bills, student loans, mortgages, etc., all of which everyone pays for without question.

Well, of course you have to pay taxes.

How else would we pay for Rd.

maintenance? forgetting, of course, that they use our taxes to pay for a military to continue forcing us to pay taxes.

No one in their right mind would choose this lifestyle.

We actually haven't chosen it.

Like all slaves, we must live this way or the military or police or culture will come and kill, imprison, or exile us.

Today, this hierarchy invisibly drives wealth to the rich and steals it from the poor.

We no longer see the slavery in America.

The violence hides in plain sight.

It lies outside of most people's perception because we grow up in it, never knowing anything different, never seeing it articulated, but understanding it down to our bones.

It feels as natural to us as turning on the tap and having water pour out.

We have a hard time imagining a different social order could even exist, even though deep in our bones, this one doesn't feel right.

This power structure keeps us as slaves, forced to continue working in the fields with Monsanto seeds and pesticides, or sowing tennis shoes at a gunpoint for a large multinational shoe company, or a more privileged version, as in my own case, slinging coffee at a hipster coffee shop in Portland, Oregon, making just enough to pay rent and buy alcohol to drown out the feeling of our meaningless lives.

We've been led to believe that we are free, But really, this freedom simply translates to the freedom to choose between Coke and Pepsi, HBO or Showtime, or the lesser of two evils.

We are not free.

We are highly privileged slaves.

Once a system like this gets going, it becomes very hard to stop.

If you say no to it, they have the power to kill you and steal your land.

With an ever-growing population from grain-based agriculture, they will quickly fill your land with their ever-growing population of farmer-slaves.

If you say yes, you will get assimilated and enslaved.

If you run, you will have conflict with your neighbor's territory that you run into and if the expansion of empire continues, it will eventually reach you anyway.

Resistance is futile.

Or is it? The system is heavily dependent on non-renewable resources.

Peak oil is upon us, cheap energy is over.

We've reached the apex of empire, and we are now at the beginnings of what is called a catabolic collapse.

This is a meaningful moment in the history of our slave-based agricultural civilization.

It's the beginning of the end of slavery.

Empire no longer has the resources to maintain their control over the planet.

It's like we're at the top of a roller coaster.

We've begun our descent, and even though things are still seemingly going slow, we will continue to build more and more momentum.

This momentum is directly related to our ability to build a new culture outside of empire and taxation.

When you destroy a worldview, you must offer another one.

Wild food is the foundation of the rewilding worldview.

The faster our descent, the easier it becomes to create a culture of rewilding.

This culture will be built on wild foods.

The other local will eventually become the one and only local once again.

So what does the other local finding wild foods really mean? It actually means bioregional food systems, rediscovering and managing the food that sits outside of the control of the people with guns.

When you rediscover wild foods, you rediscover the wild within yourself.

By living from wild and free food, we remind ourselves of a time when all humans were wild and free.

This is scary to those in power.

They want to squish the wild.

This is because the wild cannot be managed.

It cannot be put into a cubicle.

It will not, cannot take orders.

There is a wild in all of us, and it is that constant battle with the controlled environments of which we now live.

Although we've been domesticated like the foods we eat, we can still rewild ourselves.

Finding wild foods is a revolutionary act and I ask you to become a revolutionary and rewild with me.

Thank you.

Audience Questions

Audience member #1: So, I'm a little confused what you really mean by going and getting wild foods.

If this revolution were to really to the poll.

We'd have people streaming out of the cities into the woods, picking berries off every tree.

Wouldn't we encounter the same depletion issues and perhaps malnourishment issues? And are we not also going to face the byproducts of the current toxification of our environments anyway? I mean, I'm just that's.

Peter: So yes, a couple of things.

One of the most common first questions is, aren't we going to deplete the world if we start eating wild food? So the idea isn't to run away to the wilderness and that's what most people think rewilding implies.

It implies turning around the process of domestication.

So if we were to just throw our hands up of everything we've done over the last 10,000 years and walk into the wilderness and we'd kill all the deer in a day, right? We have factory farms, we have farms, we have tons of ranches with cattle.

Rewilding is turning that process backward.

So we have the mechanisms in place right now.

It's just a matter of switching it back.

So it wouldn't necessarily mean walking into the woods and starting to hunt deer.

It might mean no longer It means trying to take the animals that we've already domesticated and rewild them with us, if that makes sense.

So more like free-ranging, less like factory farm type things.

It's sort of like turning back the clock from where we're at now, not jumping back to where we were 10,000 years ago, because our population 10,000 years ago was a fraction, obviously, of what it is today and it would be nearly impossible to feed the population of the planet as it is today with that kind of diet, which is another thing.

It is unsustainable to feed the number of people that there are alive today with sustainable land management practices and that's something that everybody, I think, just needs to recognize as a harsh reality of living in an unsustainable way for 10,000 years.

So part of the collapse will be a die-off of people and that's not something to look forward to.

But there have been die-offs for as long as humans have been alive.

Diseases have killed people all over the planet.

The Black Plague is an example of something that hit us before that humanity survived through.

That was also a product of agriculture and living in dense populations and domesticated animals are one of the biggest causes of diseases because of living in their own filth and dense areas.

So, we've already been through diseases, I'm sure, in the last 3 million years.

That's just something that is a natural part of the life cycle of humans and human culture.

So does that answer, there were a couple of other things you mentioned that I think.

Audience member #1: Cool, and then the other question I have is, how does the rewilding of say, a Holstein cow farm differ from, I don't know, like illegally, it sounds like there's something, you're implying a certain degree of serious radical revolution, like action, like breaking down fences and having cattle.

Peter: Well, it can be as radical as right now, raw milk is illegal.

right? We were just having this conversation last night.

Raw milk is illegal.

So if raw milk is illegal, I have a friend who lives in Colorado, and she was saying that it's now, I don't know if this is 100% true, I didn't fact check it myself.

It was either that this has happened, or they were trying to pass it, where you're no longer allowed to collect rain in rain barrels in your house.

because that rain belongs to the state and then therefore the state can sell it to corporations.

So you cannot, you do not own water.

Water is becoming the next thing and then maybe air.

You know it's funny in that movie, Spaceballs, they have like the canned air and I saw that recently again, and I was like, wow, that's like what water has become.

I bet, you know, 100 years ago, that would have been a joke to people for people drinking clean water in a bottle and having it be sold to them, right? It's a very good commentary on that.

Audience member #2: I always say we do actually pay for air because they pollute the air to the extent that a lot of us can't breathe without medication.

Peter: That's true, yeah.

Audience member #2: So it's roundabout, but I pay to be able.

Peter: To pay on a daily basis.

Totally.

Yeah, I just, some college Cornell, I think, did a massive study, and the headline was, 40% of deaths in the US linked to pollution.

So if you look at it that way, too, it's like, you know, I don't know if that's just air pollution or water quality or whatever.

Oh, and that links to the other thing you said, which was, you know, we are now living in a toxified environment.

If I wanted to start eating a lot of wild foods that I know of.

For example, one of the staples in the region where I live was a plant called the Wapato, or Indian potato and the whole region, actually Lewis and Clark named Wapato Valley because of how much was growing there and what they didn't know, of course, was that it was actually managed by the native populations there, the Chinook Indians and within about 10 to 15 years of In the 1830s, there was a massive die-off of the Chinook, and everybody, actually, the whole West Coast, had a malaria swept through and killed about 90% of the native populations that were actually left there.

Now, interesting thing that they're realizing now is that the estimates of Lewis and Clark's populations in these different villages are what they think of now as maybe 20% of what they were before any settlers got there.

Because by the time Lewis and Clark arrived in the Northwest, a wave of smallpox had already gone through and now what they're saying is estimated 80% of those populations were gone by the time Lewis and Clark arrived and there's loads, they have all these accounts of native people who had scars all over their face that were really old from like a smallpox epidemic that had hit 50 60 years before they even got there and also just vacant villages.

There were tons of sites of Northwest Coast tribes that were just abandoned.

So you have another disease wiped through in the, comes through in the 30s, kills 90% of the 20% that was left over.

Within 10 years of the absence of those native people, the Wapato was almost gone. because people harvested it in a way that wasn't sustainable, that were coming to that region, and there wasn't this traditional ecological knowledge there anymore.

Well, it was there, it just wasn't, you know, it was put on a reservation at that point.

So it wasn't respected.

The Wapato that it exists now, the fields of it that I found in the Wapato Valley are sitting right next to a Superfund site.

It's an aquatic plant, so I'm sure that It's, full of all kinds of awful chemicals.

The Willamette River is a good example.

I live right on the Willamette River, so near the Willamette River.

They did a study and found 36 pollutants in the river, one of which was Prozac, which I thought was an interesting thing to find in water, aside from dioxin, which is found everywhere now.

But So even if you boil water to kill Giardia and the other things, you're still having this problem of chemicals and again, I sort of equate urban rewilding with sort of, we have the raccoon totem, which is the idea that there's this wild animal that lives in the city that's super abundant there and is eating garbage, is super toxic, but they're continuing their life cycle and at some point, the toxins will be redistributed throughout the planet.

Hopefully it won't, we won't all die in that process.

But it's like, Fukushima and Chernobyl and all that stuff, all that stuff is in the atmosphere now and there's going to be more of that.

There's just no way to stop that kind of thing from happening.

So If you look at the site of Chernobyl when left alone, yeah, the birth rates are still low.

The animals that are being born are deformed, but there is still an abundance that's there.

It's more abundant now than it was when the town of Chernobyl was there, which says a lot about civilization as a culture.

It's more abundant without humans living in large settlements than it is with nuclear radiation everywhere.

It's more abundant with nuclear radiation than with a city, which I find fascinating.

So that's definitely just something that's going to be here.

There's really nothing we can do about it, and that's sort of the process of evolution, I guess.

Audience member #3: So I agree that there are a lot of large-scale, unsustainable agricultural practices out there.

But a lot of, at least in our farmer's market here, a lot of those farms are using sustainable practices like compost for fertilizer, really good soil and erosion control techniques, rotating crops through soapsan and monoculture.

So while I agree that there are a lot of benefits to a wild landscape, it seems like There's no way to get the nutrient density in the wild landscape that there is in a cultivated landscape.

So I'm not clear why we should skip that sustainable agriculture part, which may, you know, I could be convinced that that wouldn't sustain the same population we have now.

But why would we need to skip that stage and go all the way back to a wild landscape? So.

Peter: The civilizations, the Mayan civilizations, they were using sustainable agriculture.

Solar, the people in the Fertile Crescent that's now a desert wasteland.

There's only so much it took the Fertile Crescent several thousand years to become a desert, but they were using practices that we today call sustainable agriculture.

Obviously, they didn't have pesticides back then.

Everything was organic.

They were doing crop rotations.

Their populations didn't have, you know, they didn't have Monsanto, they didn't have giant factory farms.

It took several thousands of years of agriculture to completely decimate the soil there.

Even with fallowing fields, even with that, If you're doing it in a riverbed, it's fine because this river is constantly flooding, right? But as soon as you take it anywhere outside of that, even if you're composting, even if you're, you know, it's just a matter of time before it will completely erode.

The other aspect of that is not so much agriculture as the enemy, but agriculture as the one way we get our food.

So If the only way you're getting your food is by deforesting a region and planting a field, even if you have, even if you're fallowing fields and not going back for a few years, you're still never allowing a climax forest to be part of your food subsistence strategy.

So that's sort of part of the problem is like domestication and of animals.

It's not just agriculture.

Obviously, the animal component is huge within that because instead of having a climax forest where you hunt elk, you have a field, again, where you graze cattle.

So it's like you've got a field for cattle, there's deforestation happening there, and you've got a field for your wheat.

So there's deforestation happening there and that's the only way that you get your food.

Then you're still requiring deforestation, especially because of the link to population growth and it's not just, I mean, in here it was a little oversimplified in a lot of ways.

It's not just a food surplus that encourages population growth.

Obviously, mythology and cultural beliefs are a huge part of human existence.

So you can't eliminate the fact that in our cultural mythology, it says be fruitful and multiply, which is a huge mistake and I don't know where that came from.

That's not definitely, if you ever hear any indigenous mythology, there's never anything like that.

We're the only culture that's ever had that as part of our belief system.

So the idea of expanding is like built into our belief.

So it's not just that we have a surplus of food to prevent famine during agriculture. It's, I mean, then that's the other part of just doing agricultural subsistence is very susceptible to disease and things like that, which is why the food surplus was created, which then requires more deforestation for agriculture.

So it's not just, it's mostly, I mean, there are sustainable agricultural practices.

It's not that agriculture's unsustainable from the core.

What makes it unsustainable is transposing it from a riverbed and doing the natural catastrophe yourself and doing it as a full-time farmer.

So it's not as cut and dry as like agriculture bad wild good.

There's a continuum there where agriculture is a sustainable practice when used in a particular way.

But when combined with all these other things, it makes it more destructive in a sense.

But the other thing I wanted to say was that grain calories increase fertility among people.

It triggers a response in your body that makes you more fertile.

So you've got a culture that has a food surplus, believes that they should expand be fruitful and multiply, and then you've got this grain that's making everybody super ***** basically, and really fertile, because it's this calorie-rich thing that says, oh, you have plenty of calories to start reproducing.

Audience member #3: So could you support then a landscape where you had a rotation, say, you know, we have a large-scale forest where it's managed and you harvest a certain stand now and that goes back and then next year you're harvested from the stand.

So could you imagine a landscape where when that stand is harvested, you cultivate that land for a few years before it grows in the forest?

Peter: Oh, definitely.

I mean, and that's what I'm talking about here with succession land management practices.

So you're working with, you clear an area, And then you work with the succession, there's things to eat in all phases of succession.

So it's about creating the mosaic and letting nature do the work for you and hunter-gatherers, they didn't till the soil, but they burned things.

That was their method of creating a disturbance, was regular burning.

So they were keeping grasslands as grasslands.

They were creating mosaics, but the point is that they weren't full-time agriculturalists.

They had, they practiced agriculture to an extent, but they also practiced what's now called horticulture, which is like, horta means garden.

Although oftentimes people use horticulture for like growing fruit trees or something.

But it's now sort of used to describe indigenous hunter-gatherer land management practices that were more with all of the phases of succession.

So like permaculture is basically the the new buzzword that's trying to figure out what this older concept was and that's exactly it.

But I don't think that you can live to the scale that we live today by doing that.

I mean, it's very, it's quite possible that, but I don't, I highly doubt it.

Mostly because humans didn't, our population wasn't where it is today when we were living that way on a global scale.

So.

Audience member #1: Do you have an estimate of how many people you think the plant can actually support in the long term?

Peter: I have no idea.

I mean, I would place my bets at where our population was before the agricultural revolution, which was 10,000 years ago and I don't remember.

I think it was maybe...

Definitely not billions, no.

I think, well, it's grown exponentially.

So if we're at 7 billion now, it took like 30 years to get to 7 billion.

Do the math backwards.

I can't do math.

I went to art school.

So yeah, I don't know.

But I would place bets on where we were before the agricultural revolution.

just because evolutionarily that seems to be a baseline.

Although human fabulation was growing before the agricultural revolution, but that's because we were moving across the planet as well.

But yeah.

Audience member #4: I wanted to ask about culture.

I was going to ask if there's a link between culture and agriculture and I think and then you slipped it in a list.

I don't remember the exact list, but it seemed to be one of the problems that you had in mind.

So I guess I'm wondering if you see, and to sort of define maybe the kind of culture I'm thinking about, I'm thinking what we do here, philosophy and art, I mean, stuff that, you know, can be viewed as very useless and accessible in the wild.

Peter: Yeah, so that's a great question.

So here's an interesting thing.

Most people conflate the word culture with civilization.

So oftentimes when I critique civilization, people like, well, hunter-gatherers had civilization too and I say, no, they had culture and society, but they didn't have what we call civilization and civilization is, there's a bunch of definitions going around.

My current definition of civilization is a natural disaster.

caused when humans practice full-time agriculture that spirals into a continuous growth, deforestation, and overall loss of biological diversity that leads to a collapse of ecosystems and culture.

Interesting thing about the word culture is that it originally meant to till the soil, which kind of, to me, sort of exemplifies how our culture thinks of itself as human.

Like if you're a hunter-gatherer, you're not a culture, because you don't cultivate, you don't till the soil.

So it's also sort of this way of almost, I think, of debasing hunter-gatherer societies or cultures as inhuman, which is something that's been done for generations.

I mean, that's always sort of the excuse up until recently, and even still today in a lot of places.

So I think that civilization doesn't have a monopoly on culture, definitely not on art and storytelling and philosophy, which are all intrinsic aspects of hunter-gatherer culture.

I mean, I think the earliest ceremonial burial that we've found is maybe 40,000 years old and that's marked by what we think of was a ceremonial burial because the person was covered in a layer of red ochre, which is like a red powder and their whole body was sort of, it's been traditionally used for ceremony for thousands of years.

So it's believed that was sort of the first marker, at least archaeologically, that we know of, like a ceremonial burial, which includes philosophy and religion and all kinds of things like that.

So it's definitely not a recent thing.

Audience member #4: Would you make the connection that, for instance, the college, that a lot of our culture is sedentary and that would have to change? What would that be? I mean, how would you imagine some of the things that we associate?

Peter: So there's, I don't, I guess I maybe describe a little bit more.

Audience member #4: If there is a link, if what has grown up as culture, what has emerged for us as culture, which is tied to being, is tied to agriculture in the kind of...

So like sedentarianism, for example.

Peter: Okay, yeah.

I mean, I definitely think that most of our culture is intrinsically sedentary at this point and that's why I call us domesticated, because we've grown up in this agricultural civilization for thousands of years now, and we have lots of tendencies that prevent us from even seeing what the world would look like through the eyes of a hunter-gatherer and a great example is the verb to be, which is now in every sentence, basically, that I have ever said, almost, is, am, are, was, were, be, and been, is a fundamental aspect of our culture and what it implies is something that most people don't look at, I think, which is that something is in a fixed state at all times.

So it's almost like a word of the gods, which is sort of, a friend of mine has this theory that it was like a religious word at first.

I don't know what word it is, but there's a word in Hebrew that he knows that he's told me is like very similar and it made him kind of think about it in this way, because you can say like, And specifically, I'm talking about the is of identity, which Aristotle wrote down, put into stone and the premise of that is that the world is in fixed states.

So if I go to a movie like Star Wars Episode I with my friend, and we leave, and I go, God, that movie, Star Wars sucks.

Or I say, Star Wars is a terrible movie, And he says, no, it is not.

in to be English, there can only be one reality.

One has to be true and one cannot be true and these scientists, there's this whole underground movement that's probably even smaller than the rewilding movement of scientists who use this different version of English called E-prime, which is English without the verb to be and the way they created it was they were looking at a electron, I think it was and with one instrument, it appeared as a wave, and with another instrument, it appeared as a particle.

But you can't, it can't be both in that science.

So the language didn't allow them to accurately represent the scientific reality that they were observing and that's when they realized that is a fake word.

It creates a fake idea of reality.

So you have And that's why I say it's sort of a religious word, because only the gods can say what something is and isn't, right? We don't have that ability.

So it doesn't allow us to have a shared, observed reality.

Now, if I said to my friend, I hated Star Wars, that is me taking it and making it subjective experience that I had and so it's a more accurate representation of reality than if I were to say, Star Wars is a bad movie.

So, I mean, aspects of our culture like that are so deeply rooted now that it will take a renaissance of rewilding, which I actually think of rewilding as a renaissance that requires A revolution.

Not necessarily an intrinsic revolution that's happening, but more of a renaissance that will require a dismantling of power in order to become possible.

Audience member #5: Your idea of rewilding.

consider this, and the website is described as radical, and actually prior to coming here, I thought it was a lot different than what it was.

So I was thinking more radical and based on modern society, especially in the United States, with less radical things like Obamacare and such, are being criticized as being too radical.

Do you think this will ever catch on? And if it does, how many people will it take to make a significant difference?

Peter: Okay, awesome question.

One time I had a friend ask, or One time I had a friend called me radical, and I just got so furious.

Because I don't see myself as radical, because to me it's like, I'm running from a burning building.

Does it look, is it radical to run from a burning building? No.

But it is if the other people are going like this, and they don't know that the building is burning, right? No, I like it because, I don't mind the term now because I was on a panel a few years ago at Portland State University and it was called radical environmentalism and I was kind of like, radical and the guy who put it together was like, so this is called radical sustainability and radical actually means, it comes from the root word, the root word root, radical as in radish.

So it's like attacking the root problems and I was like, okay, I can see it.

Okay, that makes me feel a little bit better.

Because I equate radical with crazy, right? Because that's what people...

So now I don't mind it, because if it really means going for the root of the problem, then I'm definitely a radical.

So, which goes into the next part.

Do I ever think that this movement will catch on? There's only...

In the 3 to 4 million years of human history, there's been one prevailing lifestyle that has allowed us to succeed evolutionary for that entire time and that was as hunter-gatherer scavengers.

Whether people acknowledge they're part of a new movement or whether they have no idea what rewilding is, in 1000 years, 2000 years, if humans are alive, they will be living in the same way.

So whether or not it catches on as a movement in that regard, I think doesn't really matter.

I think it's more just like, this is sort of, the way things are going to fall apart or lay out or play out.

As far as a movement goes, the more our economy continues to go down the drain and slide, the more energy gets expensive, the more all these things happen, people have to find resources that are closer to them.

Local food is like getting huge, right? It's like becoming this thing.

That's a symptom of collapse.

That's one of the first signs that we no longer have the resources necessarily to go that far.

It's both people who care and people who can't afford to, you know, as things get more expensive to ship, we end up getting more and more localized environments.

So as collapse intensifies, you're going to see a shrinking of these kinds of the global economy.

It's going to close in on itself back around resources, and that means local resources.

So the local food movement is almost like a first wave of that sort of a thing.

So as things intensify, it's like people are going to have to get things on their own.

They're going to have to rediscover these skills because there won't be anything else.

The main problem is going to be food riots and the urban centers will probably be not ideal, but that's another, it's kind of this weird thing.

It's like, It's, to me, a reason to celebrate because it's the end of this culture that's been destroying the planet and enslaving people for 10,000 years, but also it's not going to be like an easy thing.

Because those, not because of people, but because those in power are going to do everything they can to keep the status quo as long as they can.

It's like in New Orleans.

The main problems that happened after the hurricane were caused by the military, the police, and the mercenaries that the government hired to go in.

There were amazing grassroots organizations happening there where people were redistributing wealth.

All this kind of stuff was going on and the people that messed it all up were the ones in power that were trying to keep the control over it and I think that will be a major component of what happens.

So the movement will grow, whether it's called this or that and it will be in conflict with those in power who don't want that to happen because they want to maintain control.

They want taxes, right? They want to be rich.

But again, it's also a time to celebrate because I think about, for a long time, I was really afraid of the collapse, and it was always sort of stressing me out until one of my influences, Martin Frechtel, He's like a Native American, half Native American, half Swiss guy.

He's written a lot of books about, he lived with the Mayans for like a bunch of years and has written a lot about their culture and stuff and one of the interesting things he said was every year they would dismantle their village house by house and what that did was that made, everybody had to rebuild their house.

So the whole community came together and rebuilt all these different houses and it forced the community to have to work together.

In a similar fashion, the Lakota are an example of a nomadic culture who constantly broke down their village and had to set it back up again, right? Because nomadic people's worked circuits.

They're constantly moving.

They're constantly breaking down their village, rebuilding it and that requires companionship and an interesting thing, of course, when the government came in, they're like, oh, these people are living in shacks that are falling apart every year.

We need to build them permanent houses.

So they built these permanent houses with tin roofs, and nobody had to rebuild their house, so their community collapsed and if you look at what happened on 9-11 when the towers collapsed, all of a sudden, for several months, New York City was like, everybody was like their brothers and sisters, except for the gas station that put \$10 per gas or whatever, right? But as a family, I thought, you think of New York as this place where everybody's like honking at each other and flipping each other off and then all of a sudden you have all these people on a bridge.

They're like, don't mess with us.

Like we're, you know, so there's this idea of when crisis happens, it builds community.

So in that regard, it's inspiring to think what will happen when everything starts crumbling.

Because in America, we're so alienated.

We don't even live with our families.

Anywhere else you go in the world, you live with your family your whole life.

But here we're like, God, I can't wait to get out of my parents' house.

I hate them.

Nowhere else.

Nowhere else.

We are alienated and alone in this country and I feel like the more things collapse, it's a return to community.

It's a return to companionship.

I hope, anyway.

That's my hope.

Audience member #3: Have you or the movement been officially criticized by the powers of the in any way in press or?

Peter: Good question.

So there's a few things.

So I have a friend who's a rewilder.

She's sort of on the extreme end of things.

She is a transgender woman who learned how to harvest roots sustainably and land management practices from Native Americans in the desert of like Eastern Oregon when she was a child and kind of lived as sort of a neo-traveler for most of her life and now lives on what she calls the hoop, which is like a nomadic figure eight pattern in the desert that spans over 3 states and she lives off root vegetables that she harvests from places that are going to be developed and then she'll replant them in national forests and she'll find sort of sparse roots, and she'll dig them up and create these colonies to sort of enforce their reproduction so that they'll be there in the future.

So she's doing all these practices, and she's sort of got this eclectic group of queers that started following her and now it's like this queer gang of a countless number of people who are doing this in the desert.

Now it's splintered into several groups and they're doing it all over the place.

But she was arrested for replanting roots in the national forest, not for taking them to eat.

She was arrested for planting them or moving them or something by park rangers and that's just a very interesting, she was in jail for, I think, 20 days for doing that and she's obscure.

I mean, no one knows about her unless you're in this sort of thing, There's another woman who has a wilderness immersion program where you go live as a hunter-gatherer, like full-on Stone Age technology.

Links Vilden.

She Interesting thing, she had a class that was like a week-long class on her property, and the Forest Service put a plant in her class, an undercover agent, who with a GPS, and they did a camping trip one night where they went and camped in the National Forest for a night, and then came back.

Well, on their way for the last night, on their way back, this guy just disappears and they're like, that was weird.

I wonder He just went ahead on the trail and they never saw him again.

Two weeks later, she gets fined and banned from national forests for a year for running a class in the national forest without a proper permit.

So you have this kind of interchange happening where raw milk is illegal.

It's illegal to pick roots in the forest.

In this sense, wild food or more wild foods are super illegal or highly regulated.

You have to It's interesting because poaching originally meant killing a deer in the king's forest, right? Well, you have to be rich in this country to hunt.

You have to have wealth to an extent, because you have to buy a permit, right? You have to get tags.

You have to have the weaponry that's legal.

You can't hunt with primitive tools.

You can't trap with primitive tools.

So there's this whole thing, you know, and then how do, in Oregon, for example, even if I was a hunter, I can only get one deer tag a year.

Well, if I have a family to feed, one deer isn't going to last us a year.

So there's this other aspect.

I mean, also, again, we can't just run to the woods and start slaughtering all of the deer, but there's this aspect of it that's definitely taxed and if we started living in a way that was untaxed without paying for permits, without going through the proper authorities, then we would be met, we would be imprisoned or fined or whatever else is worse than that.

So there's definitely backlash coming down from government for doing things like rewilding.

There's also, I don't want to call it infighting or horizontal hostility, which is like another group pitting themselves against another group and rewilding could be considered very much in line with anarchism, because it's sort of, you know, we don't want, the state is what's taxing us, so why would you want a state if you could regulate things autonomously without a state government, which is what, again, hunter-gatherers have done for a long time.

Not that they didn't have laws or authority, but there was no state that taxed people.

So it can kind of go in hand with anarchy a lot of the time, and you'd think that we would be working together for the same purposes, but I've been personally attacked by anarchists dozens of times.

When I was on a book tour last summer, and my car was, the windshield was smashed, the tires were slashed.

So there's like this interesting infighting happening.

However, a lot of my friends that are activists have suggested that it's not actually those groups of people, but that it's possibly like agent provocateurs, because those tactics are classic for Cointelpro, for example, of pitting groups who theoretically should be working together, for example, like Black Panthers and AIM in the 70s or something along those lines, or even like, Black Panthers against Black Panthers, pitting those groups against each other as a way of breaking them down.

So now when that stuff happens to me, regardless of who I think it was, I just assume that they're working for the government regardless of whether they are or not.

because it's easier, because that's the right thing to do, because that's what you should do.

You shouldn't ever attack another group, because then you're going to set the barrier in stone.

But if I get attacked by somebody and I'm like, even if they're like, we're vegans and we hate you, I'm going to be like, those are people who hate me, because I'm friends with plenty of vegans who aren't going to slash my tires, or vegan anarchists who aren't going to slash my tires.

So I don't want to condemn a whole subculture that's on the same side more or less as me if that thing happens to me.

Because then I'll just do what the government wanted me to do if it was an agent provocateur or just a bunch of stupid kids with a lot of time on their hands.

So in that regard, there's definitely been some stuff like that.

But that's sort of minor compared to, I mean, the Green Scare is a huge example of that.

I don't know if you're familiar with the Green Scare, but it was called Operation Backfire a few years back.

The FBI arrested like 20-something people who were charged with being members of the ELF and the whole idea, it's called the Green Scare now because it's sort of created this fear for any kind of direct environmental activism.

which part of rewilding would involve direct environmental activism because the state is continuously destroying the planet and probably won't just decide to give up its power.

So there's this constant struggle between saving habitat and species like salmon that you would be dependent on if the whole bile region of Cascadia, for example, was to was to go wild or start to try to manage that, we would have to immediately remove all of the dams on the Columbia River.

I mean, that would just, that's the first thing that needs to happen.

Of course, that's not going to happen because there are interests that keep that from happening, financial interests, and they are paying the military to stop anybody from doing that.

Now, again, in terms of like, if the movement catches momentum, now we're talking it becomes more valuable for the masses.

Salmon become more valuable to the masses of the bi-region of Cascadia than electricity or than the things that the dams do because we need more local food.

Then we're going to start seeing the powers that be have to do it.

They'll have to do it.

So there's this interplay there between like radical activism and taking out dams, whether you have permission or not, and then actual litigation playing the system as things collapse and as we need more food.

However, it's hard to imagine that kind of, it's hard to imagine the system changing to the point where we could do that without direct conflict.

Audience member #2: What a rewilding lifestyle could look like. Or how would we live it?

Peter: So it's, to me, it's a mosaic and it's a process.

So my version of rewilding is going to be completely different than somebody else's.

It's more of the end goal because it's a process, right? It's not all of a sudden, okay, now I'm living wild and I don't have to do anything anymore in regards to it.

It's a cultural movement in that it's impossible to do it by yourself.

So you have, theoretically, part of rewilding could be people who have a cattle ranch deciding, let's do free range grass finished with our ranch and rework it to a more local thing.

So that would be an aspect of rewilding.

That's like feeding into it and you could have people that go with a team of other people and go live in the woods using only Stone Age technology and recreating the land management practices that native peoples and teaming up with native cultures and creating alliances there to re-encourage those things.

It could also be somebody deciding, I'm going to put my foot down, I'm not going to let this country or these corporations continue to kill the salmon, and I'm going to devote my life to ending the dams on the Columbia River or something like that, or ending the Douglas-fir tree farms that we call National Forest in the Pacific Northwest.

It's a process, and it's going to take thousands of years and even then, because it's a process, I actually believe that hunter-gatherers we're constantly rewilding and that's sort of, there's an interesting book called *The Spell of the Sensuous*, and it's about the interplay between a shaman and as a medium between nature and the community, and as a way of keeping people always sort of creating these rituals, creating this, recreating, I should say, or re-envisioning myths all the time that keep people super connected to the land because we have the potential to kind of lose that and if we lose our connection to the land, then we have what we see today.

So I forgot where I was going with that.

But for me personally, I want to, for a long time I did urban rewilding stuff and I think it starts with education.

It starts with foraging yourself and finding local wild food, and creating a system outside of the current system so that we can get more people to start moving over to that system, if that makes sense.

It's kind of like you're on the Titanic, it's sinking, you've got a little while, you're gonna, all the lifeboats are already gone because the rich people paid for them.

They were on the top floor, so they've got their arc that's buried under the ground on their property.

But what we have to do is, this isn't necessarily the best metaphor for it, but build a lifeboat out of the, tear down the boards that are still there and quickly whip together something to get in the water so that when it's under, we'll be able to float to safety.

For me, that looks like a whole, a whole thing, a whole, I am just one piece of like what everybody else is doing.

It's just like any other culture, And for me, that's continuing to learn about what local plants I can eat, continuing to learn about how to manage those in a sustainable way, continuing to create alliances with the native peoples who live there, who did live there sustainably for 10,000 years.

as well as learning more natural skills like fermentation, everything down to bone tools and stone tools and all kinds of technology.

I mean, obviously there's going to be steel around forever.

That's something we can't uninvent.

But just learning to live with less that we have today, but not necessarily less in terms of cultural, the holistic aspect of culture.

Because one of the things I hate is to say to learn, live simply or learn to live with less.

Because if you're living with less things, you have to rely on more people.

So that means you have more social wealth.

So what you lose in ***** toys, you gain in social complexity, you gain in relationships, quality relationships with people.

So there's this play on words there that, and for me, the most important aspect of rewilding is creating more social complexity, which is why I'm here, which is why I write and keep teaching.

Does that answer your question?

Audience member #2: You kind of already answered it in that, but one of the things that I think is critical is the distinction between survival and rewilding.

It's not just about the lifeboat metaphor.

This is limited and that's just like the boat is sinking, I have to get off the boat.

It's not about like, and then I need to do something else after.

Peter: Exactly.

Yeah, that's why I hate, that's why I hate the lifeboat metaphor, because it just doesn't, I don't want a lifeboat.

Lifeboat's this big and you know, I want a lifeboat that can encompass, I don't want a lifeboat, I want another boat that's awesome, you know? And that's why I hate, everybody's like, oh, we got to build a lifeboat.

I'm like, why don't we build a whole other culture? It's a little bit more daunting maybe than piling up canned food in your basement, but I can tell you that one's going to last a lot longer than the other one, right? And that's, so one of the things that I like to make the distinction between is you have survival skills and then you have what they call primitive living skills, or what we now call ancestral living skills.

Oftentimes people think that hunter-gatherers just lived in a constant state of survival, which is just not the case.

They had cultures, they had technology that was there that they didn't have to, you know, when you're in a survival situation, it's like you're being cast into the woods without your culture and without any of the tools that you're familiar with.

Survival was a rite of passage among a lot of indigenous cultures.

When you were a teenager, like there's a great example, the walkabout in Australia, You'd left your whole culture for a year, but it wasn't, they didn't just cast you to nowhere.

Throughout your whole life, you heard this one story told over and over and over and over again about this person who moved through this landscape and they did all these different aspects to stay alive without their culture, right? All these different survival skills that they do.

So these children grow up learning all of this, and then when it comes time for their rite of passage, they go on this journey, and they don't realize, but the whole time they're out there, they're reliving this story that they've been told their whole lives.

So the story is the instruction manual for this whole year of their journey, right? And that's an indigenous culture that's been there for thousands of years.

a child who's grown up living with just with primitive technology or ancestral technology for that entire time, only when they're a teenager and they have this instruction manual and a song line, is what they call it, then they're allowed to go out on this survival trip.

So you have like people like me who are like, grew up in the middle of an urban environment and I go to a week-long survival skills class where they're like, at the end of this class, you're going to be able to survive in the woods with nothing but a knife and I'm like, awesome.

So I run into the woods with a knife after that class and I'm like, turn around and run back to the city with my tail between my legs, right? Because you can't learn how to live in the woods long-term in a week listening to lectures from somebody after being raised in this way, right? It takes decades to reconnect all of this information together and luckily, there's a lot of people out there that are continuing this knowledge and keeping it alive.

Like Links Vilden, the woman I mentioned who does the immersion program.

Her thing is sort of one of the most intense programs that there is available in the United States, at least, and possibly anywhere in the world and again, her rewilding is maybe a more extreme version because it's actually full on 100% hunter-gatherer out in the woods, whereas you might have another rewilder who's starting to free range their cows, right? So there's this spectrum of participation in rewilding and that's why we won't deplete the land, because it's not about running back to this end over here immediately.

Because that'd be kind of rude to like domesticate all these plants and animals and then be like, see you later, you guys are going to die without me. But yeah, have fun.

Because we domesticated them, of course, there's the idea that they domesticated themselves, which I think is interesting, but also not true.

It was a collaborative effort in a sense, but it wouldn't have happened without our input.

So these animals now require our help and that is why I think it's important to remember that we're rewilding a whole culture, not just my, I'm not just rewilding myself, I'm rewilding everything that we've done for the last 10,000 years and that's why, you know, a lot of people are like, if you think you, if you really want to be a rewilder, then how come you live in Portland? You should be living in the middle of the woods and I'm like, well, there's no culture in the middle of the woods, you know? Rewilding is a cultural movement and it's the reversal of domestication.

Cities are like the most domesticated places on the planet.

So it's not that you can't rewild there.

It's just that there's a lot more that needs to happen.

Thank you very much.

The Ted K Archive

Peter Michael Bauer
Rewilding Lecture at Washington College
March of 2012

<www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mzIo5AdEEI>

www.thetedkarchive.com