

Linda Engle Introduction: Sustainable Idaho is brought to you by the Portneuf Resource Council.

Madison Long: Welcome to Sustainable Idaho. I'm your host Madison Long and today I talked with Amanda Reed, the Idaho Chapter Organizer at the Sierra Club to share more about the organization and their efforts to involve youth in the area.

Amanda Reed: Sierra Club, nationally, we're the country's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. And grassroots is really a key word to the work that we do. We effect change alongside everyday people like you and me. We get people to show up to public hearings, write comments to their decision makers, get press attention on issues and ultimately influence our decision makers to make change for people and for the planet.

The areas we tend to focus on the most are equitable, clean energy advocacy, trying to get more solar in Idaho that is accessible to everyday people not just wealthy homeowners, wildlife and public lands advocacy, trying to save Idaho's salmon, grizzly, wolves, bison, reintroducing public lands.

ML: With more than 2 million members and supporters, Sierra Club has helped pass the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act. What started in 1892 California has grown into 64 nonprofit volunteer chapters across the U.S.

How does the Sierra Club interact with various advocacy topics and encourage the youth to participate?

AR: Specifically with youth, we have our youth-led Climate Justice League, which is a team of youth activists that propels forward a lot of our clean energy work in particular. It's a group of high school students for the most part, some college students, and their mission is to advocate for our planet, for clean energy solutions, but specifically ones that prioritize social justice. The Climate Justice League really focuses on that intersection of justice and climate to work toward a future that's good for people and also good for the planet.

ML: With no extra requirements for being in the Climate Justice League, students can join at any point, adding to their advocacy and public speaking portfolio. What are some more recent events or activities that the Sierra Club and the Climate Justice League have done to engage the community and youth in the Boise area?

AR: The most recent example in collaboration with our youth team, has been in our campaign to get Boise's and Idaho's first community solar project in a large =utility area. We have been working on this campaign for a little over two years now, and the youth team has been at the forefront of it, really propelling that change forward. In the last couple months, notably, the team did a lit drop and a doorknock effort.

There's an affordable housing complex in Boise that is the potential site. The city surveyed all their buildings and found that this affordable housing complex has a great potential for solar

energy to pass the benefits on to the low-income residents that live there. We've already gotten all the panels donated, the city just needs to allocate a little bit of money in their annual budget to get it over the finish line. And our youth team thought that it'd be really pertinent to engage the residents of that building because they're the key stakeholders here. They did a lit drop where they put educational materials on every single person's doorstep that lives there, inviting them to a neighborhood meeting a month later and then a few days before that meeting, they actually went around and knocked on every single person's door to invite them to this meeting and share a little bit more about the project.

We got quite a few engaged residents from those conversations and then held that meeting to get people's feedback on the project. That was just with the youth to get some experience in door knocking, canvassing.

ML: In 2025, the Climate Justice League students used the help of muralists Lawson Shultz and Jay Smith to create a mural of the foothills of Boise, native Idaho flowers, and several activists holding signs advocating for community solar projects.

How do campaigns with the Climate Justice League work, and how are short-term or smaller projects like painting this mural included?

AR: Typically our Climate Justice League have one big campaign at a time. Several years back, the group focused on getting the city of Boise to commit to 100% clean electricity and they were successful in that. Now our campaign is community solar, so we have a goal in mind, then we make a campaign plan of how can we get to that point, who's the decision maker here, and then how do we make relationships with people and collect public support in a way that can achieve our goal. We make a timeline with a bunch of tactics, and that's really where the mural came in as a tactic for community education. Everyone that drives along Park Center Boulevard now, they'll see our huge 90 foot long mural that says community solar for all, and there's a link in the corner where people can look up, "what does community solar mean." And we've held lots of community events at the mural and use it as a catalyst for community engagement. But it's just one tactic, short term but it's also all in the long term plan.

ML: What skills or experiences do you think participants gain through their involvement with the Sierra Club?

AR: I think in general just like bread and butter grassroots organizing skills, which is great to have as a young person. I wish I would have developed some of these skills myself earlier in my life. Things like how to tell your story, how you got to where you are, how to testify in front of a room of people at the State House or at the Public Utilities Commission, how to write a letter to the editor, or do a press interview, creativity and especially brainstorming different forms of nonviolent protests to propel change in their communities. I feel like they get to exercise those creative muscles a lot and hone in on different ways they can engage with people and their students. It sets them up for success for being a really great community member.

ML: Are there any barriers that youth and communities in Idaho face when trying to engage in these climate activism topics?

AR: There's a lot of turnover in the group, young people moving off to college, schedules change. So just that lack of consistency can be challenging but you just kinda have to roll with it and even a small group can accomplish a lot. Another thing in the last year especially that's been on our mind more is safety. Being a very progressive organization there's a lot more fear of retaliation nowadays or even ICE coming to events and wanting to protect some of our students that are part of immigrant communities.

Before our big events, we do more safety planning, having more safety volunteers, to help make people feel more safe and have open dialogue with the students about if they're nervous about anything. Fortunately we haven't had any big issues. It's just an abundance of caution, wanting everyone to have a really positive experience in the group.

ML: What are some of your goals for the Climate Justice League in the next few years?

AR: One thing we've started talking about recently is we'd love to connect with more college aged youth. There's a lot of potential to branch out and historically, college students have been at the forefront of grassroots movements everywhere. I would love to connect with student groups and people that are interested in climate justice activism.

I'm really excited in the next couple years to see this community solar project to its completion. We're expecting if everything goes well that we could see Idaho's first community solar project, by 2027 before the tax credits expire. In the meantime, we are starting to look at advocating against natural gas plants and Idaho Power's plans to build a couple new gas plants in Idaho by 2030.

I'd just say, Climate Justice League in general really equips you with the tools, no matter what you're doing after high school, to be really engaged and to help create a better future that we all want.

ML Outro: Thank you to Amanda Reed from the Idaho Sierra Club for sharing a little more about what they do and their youth Climate Justice League. If you are interested in checking out what the Sierra Club is campaigning or what events are next, visit sierraclub.org/Idaho.

L Outro: Funding for our Sustainable Idaho Student Hosts is provided in part by this radio station, the ISU Center for Ecological Research and Education, through the ISU Career Path Internship Program. Direction, funding, and additional support is provided by the Portneuf Resource Council.