



In collaboration with

EMILY ZUCCHINO,

Director of Community Engagement at Dogwood Alliance

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Interviewer(s): Amanda Ostuni

**00:41 Emily
Zucchini**

Alright so a little bit about me and the work that I do. I am the director of Community Engagement at Dogwood Alliance. I have been with the organization about 8 years now, and I started out as a community organizer. That was my role when I first started with Dogwood Alliance. And essentially, that is still how I consider my role at Dogwood, is doing community organizing. In my current role as Director of Community Engagement, I work primarily in North Carolina, Dogwood Alliance does work all across the South, the Southern U.S. And our focus is forest protection—working to oppose the impacts of industrial logging and advocate for environmental justice solutions in the communities that are impacted by industrial logging, by climate change. And so, in my role in North Carolina, I work closely with the Impacted Communities Against Wood Pellets Coalition, and we are working to stop the expansion of the wood pellet industry in North Carolina, to advocate for stronger pollution controls on wood pellet production facilities in North Carolina, and to work for policies that both protect our forests and also limit the impacts of dirty industry on communities, primarily lower income communities of color.

A little bit about the wood pellet industry, and I can probably get more into that later, but North Carolina exports more wood pellets than any other state in the nation. The wood pellet industry is cutting down our North Carolina forests—one of our best resources against climate change, against weather events, and chipping those up into wood pellets, putting them on ships, sending them overseas to Europe, and increasingly to Asia, where they are burned alongside coal, oftentimes,

in incinerators to produce energy and electricity for residents in other countries. And so, North Carolina is sacrificing our forests, cutting down our forests, sending them to countries where they are being burned, and putting more coal into the atmosphere—more carbon into the atmosphere than coal. And also, we're reducing our ability to absorb carbon here in North Carolina, and to be resilient from weather events like hurricanes, floods, droughts. And so that's primarily the work I do in Carolina is, is working to oppose that industry and working primarily with the community members who are most directly impacted by the industry because they live near a facility, or they're impacted by the logging, and by the flooding.

03:35 Amanda Ostuni **Okay, alright that's a good overview, and we'll definitely get into some more specifics around that. But we do like to have a section on background. So, we'll sort of build up to that now. Okay, so for your personal back story, where do you consider home?**

03:58 Emily Zucchini I absolutely consider home to be the mountains of North Carolina. I did not grow up here, but I have lived here longer than I've lived anywhere else. And my family's from Eastern North Carolina, so I spent a lot of time visiting grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles in Eastern North Carolina, growing up, and when I finally came out to the mountains of North Carolina, it just—it felt like home immediately. And so, this is where I've chosen to call home, I've lived here for about 20 years now, and it is just the place that every time I leave, travel, go other places in the world that are beautiful, I come back home, and I think 'wow, I just live in one of the most beautiful places on Earth.' You know, the lushness here, the greenness, the amount of public green space that we have access to—it's just something that honestly, I wish more communities had, in terms of taking advantage of the assets of the green space and the natural spaces in the community, and I feel so lucky to have that in my hometown, in my home community.

05:14 Amanda Ostuni **Okay. So then, where *did* you grow up?**

05:17 Emily Zucchini I grew up outside of Philadelphia. So, long way from North Carolina, but spent a lot of time coming down here—[audio cut out] Philadelphia, where there is, you know, a lot of the same issues in Pennsylvania that we see here in North Carolina—a lot of mirror issues in terms of extractive industries, in terms of industries being placed in rural, lower income, often communities of color. So, a lot of the issues that I saw growing up in Pennsylvania are unfortunately the same here in North Carolina.

05:59 Amanda Ostuni **And in Philadelphia, who was part of your community—did you have siblings, extended family nearby, neighbors you were close with?**

06:12 Emily Zucchini I grew up with a tight-knit family, and we were not from the Philadelphia area, so. As I mentioned, my parents are from—my mom grew up in Carolina Beach, my dad grew up in Fayetteville, North Carolina. And then my dad is a journalist, and so was working at the Philadelphia Inquirer. And so, we moved up to Philly after living abroad the first 4 years of my life. I grew up in Africa—in South Africa and Kenya, and then moved to Philadelphia.

I have 2 siblings—one older, one younger. And I remember growing up feeling, in Philadelphia, like I was a little different than everyone else, and I grew up with a South African accent, and everyone would ask me, ‘where are you from?’ And I’d go, ‘How do they know? How do they know I’m not from here?’ So that was—I did have a really, really good community there, and a lot of friends that I’m still really close with now. And had my siblings who I spent a lot of time with, but then all of our relatives were *not* in Philadelphia. They were in other places—in North Carolina and South Carolina. And so, this is always the place where I saw my parents feel—look like they felt the most at home, look like they felt the most comfortable, look like they fit in the most. So, when I went to college, my parents really encouraged me to look at schools in North Carolina, and so that's ultimately how I ended up here in Asheville.

07:51 Amanda Ostuni **Wow, interesting. Okay. I wanna come back to the different places that you’ve lived. But I I’ll continue with the standard line for a**

minute. How would you describe yourself as a kid in terms of just your personality?

08:11 Emily Zucchini

I was very outgoing at home with my family. I was always kind of like the bold, courageous one, but then was a little bit shy in school and in public places. I really love to read, I loved to write—I still do.

Growing up, we had this little nature preserve down the street, which I remember thinking was so big, and I'm sure if I went back and visited now, it would be tiny, but we spent a lot of time there—me and my younger sibling, collecting, you know, looking for kind of turtles and frogs in the water, and trying to bring them home, and my mom would tell us ‘that's not gonna survive in that shoe box, you need to go, go put that back.’ Getting lost in the woods, which again I'm sure were very small, but... I was very social. I always really wanted to spend time with my friends, more than anyone else in my family. I didn't really like to spend a lot of time alone. That's changed somewhat, but as a kid, I was very much the kid who needed to be entertained, who needed to be around friends a lot, who always wanted my siblings to play with me, my mom to entertain me.

09:28 Amanda Ostuni

What career did you want to do as a kid?

09:32 Emily Zucchini

I never really knew as a kid. I was always very interested in other cultures and people, but I don't think that anyone ever sat me down and told me about the type of career that I have now. I think the careers I saw were the ones in my immediate life—teacher, doctor, my dad was a journalist so I thought, you know, maybe I could do something like that. Going into college, I thought ‘oh, maybe I could be a psychologist.’ And it was really after I started studying, in college, sociology and political science, that I thought ‘I want to do something with people.’ And that's ultimately what led me to environmental work was a focus on people and the impacts of policies. And so, I don't know that I was ever able to clearly define that as a kid, because I didn't, I didn't really know anybody in this type of career. But as a kid, I was very interested in learning about people—about what harmed people, what helped people, how I might support people. I was very, very interested in other cultures. I wanted to—I knew, even as a kid,

and I did travel as a kid, but I knew I wanted to continue to travel, to learn about other cultures, learn other languages. And that's really the extent of what I knew as a kid. I don't think I was able to clearly put into words, 'this is'—I don't think I knew it was possible to honestly do the type of work that I'm doing.

11:11 Amanda Ostuni **What do you think made you at least have that interest in cultures? Was it the traveling and moving around, or what—are you able to pinpoint like why that felt right?**

11:25 Emily Zucchini I think so, because you know, from a very young age, before I can even remember, I was traveling, because of my dad's job. We lived abroad—and, as I mentioned, I was very interested in reading, so I was very aware that there was this whole world out there of people who did things different than me, who had different cultures than me, different food than me, different daily routines than me, and so, I was very interested in that.

And I was also, I think, from a very young age, very aware of that there was a lot of pain and suffering, and I was always very, very sensitive to that, and very, in a way curious, you know, curious like 'what is causing this?' It's not something I saw so much in my own community. I did see it, but it's not something that in my family, I was seeing, as much as I understood that it was happening in other places—that, you know, resources were not as available to other people as they were to me. So, I was very curious about that, and curious why that was the case, and very sensitive to that as a child.

12:49 Amanda Ostuni **Do you feel like there was any kind of activism that you did as a kid—maybe without even realizing it? Or is there a certain first activist type thing that you did growing up?**

13:09 Emily Zucchini I was very kind of a, I guess a go-getter, in some ways, in terms of like seeing issues and wanting to figure out how to fix them. So, you know the very basic things that were available to me: I wanted to collect money for UNICEF. I wanted to say, 'okay, let's go around'—and I was not shy—to talk to the neighbors, to see what we could collect, to see what you know we could build to send to other places. I was involved in my unitarian church youth group in identifying what are

some of the issues that we can be a part of. And I think, as I got older, I was very much—I was much more aware of kind of how I could use my own agency for that. So probably it was like in high school when I got a lot more involved with different groups in high school. I was involved with a group of students with disabilities, and so I spent a lot of time working with them, spent a lot of time working with children. And so, I don't know if I'd call it activism. But I did work within the systems that I had available to me to kind of do what I could.

14:41 Amanda Ostuni

That's definitely along the same lines. I'm going to connect that to your current work. But I want to know in terms of growing up, your experience with the environment, you said you had this nature preserve. What about like climate? Did you experience any extreme climate situations in any of the places that you lived, or?

15:18 Emily Zucchini

I don't think that I was aware of. I don't think I was making those connections at the time. And so growing up outside of Philadelphia, to me, the weather was the weather. I remember feeling very like insulated from natural disasters that I would hear about elsewhere. 'Cause I remember my grandmother, my Nana, lived at Carolina Beach, and so I remember her having to, at times leave the beach because of hurricanes, and I remember listening to my mom talk on the phone with my Nana, you know, 'Are you going to stay? Are you going to leave?' My Nana was very stubborn. She did not like to leave, and so she said she stayed home a lot. And I remember hearing my mom talk with her and be concerned about her, and I remember feeling very insulated from that, you know, almost like this is something that happens to people I know and people I love, but it doesn't happen to me in my home. So I do remember being aware of natural disasters, being aware of climate and feeling like that was a little bit removed from me.

16:37 Amanda Ostuni

Okay. But did you live—you said South Africa, and then Pennsylvania, and then North Carolina. Are they all pretty moderate, or do any of them have very distinct climate characteristics?

**16:58 Emily
Zucchini**

I'm sure they are. You know we left—I lived in Kenya and then South Africa, and we left when I was almost 5, and we were there—My dad was doing a series on Apartheid, and so I was again much more aware of the human impact. And I don't think, really considering the environmental impact, and it wasn't until I was older, that I really connected the human impact, which has always been my main interest, with the policies that are impacting climate which are ultimately impacting people. And so, you know, I had this very strong sense of justice growing up. And so I, you know, remember being in South Africa and thinking—and knowing, just knowing it wasn't fair, it wasn't right, you know the little bit that I could comprehend at 4, 5 years old, just knowing that these are not the ways that we should treat people.

Growing up in Philadelphia, I remember it was cold. I remember people talking about the cold a lot but that wasn't, to me, an abnormal climate impact. So yeah, it was very much about people as I was growing up. And really in my first job outside of college, or my first job in the nonprofit sector, was working with people in Latin America, and that's where I met a man, Omnibal Perez, who was talking about the impacts on his community in Columbia from Drummond Coal, which is a U.S.-based coal company. And that's when it really hit home to me because he was talking about how his entire community had just been desiccated by this mining corporation to the point of having to leave their homes. And that really drove home for me 'this is the human impact of these policies that are driving people from their homes, that are making it so that people can't grow food anymore.'

And then the more I started looking around, the more I really saw it—you know, here in North Carolina, which is where I was living, here, where my parents had grown up. I think things that I drove by all the time as a kid, and really sadly just thought that's part of the North Carolina landscape. We see tree plantations, and we see clear cuts, that's just North Carolina, and it really wasn't until I got a little bit older that I started to realize: these are human impacts. These policies that are disrupting our environment are having human impacts. You know, when I was little in the 80s, it was all about the dolphins and the whales, and save the orcas.

Audio break for technical issues; new recording started

20:00 **Amanda Ostuni** **All right. So yeah, so you had said, like how you got from Witness for Peace to interested in environmental [issues], but how did you first get into the Witness for Peace job? What drew you to that?**

20:14 **Emily Zucchini** It was that international and people focus. I was in grad school. I had graduated from UNC-A with a degree in sociology and political science, and then lived in South Korea for 2 years—well, one year on a Fulbright scholarship, so teaching English in South Korea, and then stayed there for an additional year just getting to know the culture, getting to know the people, I lived with a homestay family. And so, when I came back to North Carolina, and I did a Masters in International Studies at NC State, I was really thinking about ‘okay, how can I, how can I do a job that is kind of true to my values?’

Working with the Fulbright program, I had thought for a little bit, maybe there's a job I want with the U.S. Government, and just became very disillusioned with the impacts of U.S. policy overseas and just knew that I couldn't do that. I couldn't—I could not be an ambassador for the U.S. for policies that I did not believe in. And so, I learned about Witness for Peace when I was living in Raleigh, and it was an organization that worked with communities in Latin America to learn about the impacts of U.S. Policy, and then to advocate for changes in the U.S. And to me, that really spoke to my core values, my theory of change, in terms of ‘you've kinda gotta start at home, you've gotta look around and see what are the—where are the areas I have influence? What are the things that maybe I can't control, but that I can advocate for to create the change I want to see.’ And that's how I got connected with Witness for Peace, and it's really a model that's kind of driven my organizing work, is, you know, look, look around at the communities near you, and at the people you have access to and influence to, and work within that community for the change in the values that you want to see.

And so, as I said earlier, it was through that job that I started learning more about the environmental impacts on people. Because when I first started Witness for Peace, I was very interested in things like migration—how did NAFTA, the North American Free Trade

Agreement and the closing of factory jobs contribute to migration, and you know, how are the policies that are being passed in the U.S. having impacts on other peoples' lives, and the more I learned about the environmental implications of a lot of the policies and started like really opening my eyes more to what was happening in my home state, that kind of led me to where I am now.

But initially with Witness for Peace, it was about the people who was wanting to like build those connections in Latin America, to visit with—directly with communities and kind of learn, learn from them how they live, what's important to them, what's their culture, what's their food, what's their family structure? Yeah, I was just very, very interested in kind of making those connections and sharing *my* culture, sharing things from—that I love about the U.S., which isn't everything, but there is a lot, you know, that I love about where I live, and my culture and my food that I wanted to share, as well. And really just this idea that I've seen is prevalent a lot in Latin America that people understand: you are not your government, you are not the embodiment of the policies that your government are passing, and I think, I think it's the same here in the U.S., you know, working, working in North Carolina for environmental justice, we are not our government, we are not their policies.

24:45 **Amanda Ostuni** **So, tell me how exactly you moved from Witness for Peace into specifically Dogwood Alliance.**

24:56 **Emily Zucchini** I mean some of it's just practical. Witness for Peace was a part-time job while I was finishing my master's program, and when I graduated, I needed—I needed full time work. *And* I was very interested in moving more into climate work. At that time, I was starting to become more concerned about climate change and really wanting to work on solutions, and so wanting to work for an organization that had a proven history of success in advocating for solutions. And a lot of it was just wanting to be back home, you know, what I consider home. I wanted to be back in the mountains, and that led me directly to Dogwood. It was the first job I applied for after college, after my master's program, and I've been here ever since.

26:03 **Amanda Ostuni** **So you talked a little bit about this in the beginning with the overview, but if you want to kinda go back into any more details about the work that you started doing for [Dogwood], how it's kind of evolved over time, either in terms of the roles you've had, or approaches that Dogwood has taken?**

26:25 **Emily Zucchini** So, I started Dogwood—I work—my first role at Dogwood was campaign organizer. And this, in a lot of ways, was very similar to the work I was doing at Witness for Peace, which was really just, you know, connecting with people who are also concerned about the issues and helping them identify ways that they could be a part of the movement. That's how I've always seen organizing, is really kind of identifying how disparate people who are concerned about the same issue, be it you know, social justice, climate justice, how can we work together for the greater good? How can we, as different entities, influence the whole?

And so that's the mindset I came into Dogwood Alliance with and at that time I was organizing across the whole U.S. South region and doing a lot of education. The wood pellet industry, which is the main campaign I work on, was just taking off at that point, had just started really expanding a few years before I joined Dogwood Alliance, and so the issue was really new to a lot of people. I think a lot of people had been seeing more clear cuts, more logging, and were maybe starting to wonder, is there—what is the new player on the scene? Because, unfortunately, logging is not new at all in the U.S., people are very familiar with logging. But I think, seeing the increase, learning about what the products were being used for—this isn't going to lumber to build homes; this is being sent abroad to be burned for energy and being subsidized for a clean energy alternative, when there are much better, much cleaner alternatives that we could and should be subsidizing. That first piece was education, more broadly—just starting to make people more aware of the issue and then starting to identify ways that people can plug in. Initially, our campaign was really focused in the European Union, and so we were organizing people to send messages, send post cards, support groups in Europe trying to influence the policy.

And then, as that work evolved—as my work at Dogwood evolved, again it was this like, looking around and saying, we’ve got a big problem right here, where our policies in North Carolina, and across the South, but for me, with my work being primarily in North Carolina, the policies and regulations here are really set up to allow and to favor industry cutting down forests, not incentivizing people leaving those habitats standing, and there's really no regulations against this, and there's no alternatives, there's no alternatives for people who own land. And the people who are being impacted the most are the people who have nothing to gain from the industry, are the people who are living near these polluting facilities, who are living in areas that are being clear cut, and then dealing with flooding or sedimentation from those clear cuts. And so that was my evolution at Dogwood, was starting to organize around this campaign focused policies in the European Union, and then really shifting and saying ‘okay, we've got to come together and organize for our own policy change here in North Carolina.’

And I think the other kind of evolution of my work is to become much more focused on the impacted rural communities. We still do broad-based education, but my work is primarily focused on, and primarily led by, the people who are most directly impacted and kind of getting a sense of what are the improvements you want to see? What are the changes you want to see? What are your recommendations for implementing those changes? What's our best strategy moving forward?

30:37 **Amanda Ostuni** **So what is the heart of what you are, I guess, pitching to policymakers—are you just going with: ‘this is how many people want you to change, and this is why,’ or is there an alternative that you're suggesting to them; How do you make that case?**

31:02 **Emily Zucchini** Kind of the realization that I've come to is, we’re—this is a long game here, we're playing a long game. Because there's really not a lot of understanding or awareness about industrial logging, I would say. And so even a lot of our policymakers who are environmental champions are not necessarily informed on the big picture of the state of industrial logging in the South. And so, there is a logging industry lobby that has a lot of influence. And there are narratives out there that ‘well, because

trees grow back, this industry isn't as detrimental to the environment—you know, as long as you replant, it's okay.' And so, I think step one for us has really been a lot of education, both on the fact that these industries are very harmful to the communities where they locate—both the paper industry, the wood pellet industry, these industries create a lot of toxins, a lot of pollution that are really harmful to the people living there. And then, environmentally, I think it's building this understanding that the picture that is being painted by the forest industry is a very simple one, and it's not kind of explaining the nuances of forest health. And so, what we have right now in the South is a situation where our forests are really young. We don't have a lot of the old forest that we used to have that are not only holding carbon, but continuing to sequester carbon and contributing to forest diversity. So, we have a lot of very young forest, and we have a lot of crops—pine plantations. And so that's been what's been happening to our forests in North Carolina and across the South is we're cutting down forests. Sure, maybe they're being replanted, but what's being replanted isn't going to grow back the same way a native biodiverse forest does.

And so that's kind of been the first step for us with policymakers, is a lot of this education that this is a problem, this is a problem for biodiversity, for climate change; pine plantations don't sequester nearly the amount of carbon that a native forest does, and they're about 95% less biodiverse than a native forest. Clear cuts don't protect communities from hurricanes and floods the way standing forests do—when you have trees that are using their roots to suck up water, that's lowering the amount of flood water during extreme weather events; that's not happening in clear cuts. So that's been a lot of where we are right now, is just kind of laying out these facts.

I think the vision that we want to bring is this multi-faceted, and I think it intersects with a lot of the other issues that environmental groups work on in the state. I think we want to talk about cumulative impacts—I'm sure that's come up in some of your other interviews, and I think that's an overarching theme that really touches on all of the issues, all of the environmental justice issues in North Carolina, is we're not looking at the cumulative overall impact of all of these polluting industries located in the same areas. And so, when we—

when the state holds a public hearing on an air quality permit for an Enviva wood pellet facility, and they're saying, 'okay, this facility is just under the legal limit, and therefore, it can be permitted,' we're not taking into account all of the other polluting industries in that community that are having a cumulative effect.

So that's one thing that we would really like to see policymakers do, is we need to get real about cumulative impacts. The North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality needs to be more willing to push what they are able to do under cumulative impacts. And so, we need to push back on the problem. But, like you said, we do also need to be building out solutions. And so that's where I say that's our long game here. That's where we need to be building the understanding, building the relationships and looking at creative alternatives. Are we able to incentivize land owners to keep their forests standing? Right now, if you're a landowner, there's not a lot of options. Your most lucrative option, and what the industry is going to push you towards doing, is clear cut, because that's the way to get the most money the fastest; it's the easiest for the industry, instead of going in and selectively cutting, which would have a lighter impact on the environment—just go in and cut the whole thing down and then replant it in rows of pine plantations. And so how can we build alternatives to that? 'Okay, you're a landowner. This is an asset that you have... are there policies and incentives that can be offered to you to keep your forest standing as a public good to the communities that surround you?'—as carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat, absorbing floodwater, these are all benefits that standing forests can provide. Are there ways that we can promote green spaces, like I talked about here in Asheville, where we are surrounded by public land that has really benefited the economy here in Asheville, in terms of tourism, in terms of outdoor recreation outfitters that have located here.

Eastern North Carolina is some of the most beautiful forest that I've ever seen. We have cypress trees that are over a 1,000 years old, in Eastern North Carolina. I mean, these are just amazing habitats, and you don't know they're there, driving down the highway. You get a little bit off the highway, and you're in one of the most beautiful wetland swamps. And these are assets that we should be considering with our policymakers. How do we create more access to green spaces

and build outdoor recreation? How do we build environmental education centers for youth? How do we promote forest restoration, as a job—that we should be investing in restoring our forests, for all the benefits they provide; building trails, building kayak centers. So that's a lot of the vision that we want to be building with elected officials, and with communities, frankly.

38:03 **Amanda Ostuni** **Oh, you're giving me like 'leaving North Carolina' angst, because now I want to check off all the things I haven't gone to.**

38:13 **Emily Zucchini** Oh, you should!

38:16 **Amanda Ostuni** **So, you brought up a lot of challenges in that, I think, in a way. Is there one thing that you would say is the biggest challenge to the work itself? Is it the expansiveness? Is it resources or opposition. Is there one thing that you think is gonna be the biggest hurdle to what you're talking about?**

38:42 **Emily Zucchini** Yeah, it's just the power and influence of these industries. And I do think it's the lack of resources in rural communities, and that this type of industry kind of breeds itself, in a sense. Because when you have in the—in Eastern North Carolina, it's been the timber industry for many years. I think it looked very different 100 years ago, when there was more selective cutting, and there weren't these rampant, clear-cut practices, but it has been the landscape for decades now, and when you have companies like International Paper warehouse, you know these big paper companies that come in and really devastate the landscape, that limits the type of other investment that will be coming to these communities, that really sets up kind of a type of industry in the community. And it also creates a lot of dependency, so then, you see these companies closing down and being shuttered, and the community is so reliant on them that it really devastates the community. And so, it kind of sets up this this cycle of dependency. And it's created this narrative that this is the only type of industry that will provide jobs and income in these communities, and so, then it leaves a very desperate tax base, where counties are more attracted to this type of industry because of the tax base, and because there is not a lot of other industry

that is looking to invest in this kind of devastated landscape that's really been created for one purpose.

And so I do think that's a major challenge. We're fighting a lot of history, we're fighting a lot of influence and power—and a lot of money, a lot of wealth that is being generated and leaving the community. You know we talk about Enviva, the wood pellet industry—they might be bringing money to the tax base, but the vast, vast majority of their profits are going to a company that's based in Bethesda, Maryland, and none of that is being seen by the surrounding communities. Look at Northampton County in northeastern North Carolina, where the economic developer came out and said, 'we actually over-incentivized this company, and in doing so had to raise the property tax rates on our residents,' which is now one of the highest in the state—the property tax rate in Northampton County, which is a rural North Carolina community. It's these kind of quick fixes that just don't play out over the long term, and I think it's presenting a huge challenge.

I think the way the systems are set up is another huge challenge. We're in a state with a governor who is passing executive orders on climate change, and yet, the wood pellet industry almost doubled under his administration, and we export more wood pellets than any other state in the nation, under his administration. And that's not all on him, but we do have a system that has a commerce department that is going out and identifying resources and businesses without any vetting, without looking at the environmental impacts, the justice impacts. We have a permitting agency, the Department of Environmental Quality, that's holding public hearings after grants have already been awarded to companies, and holding very, very narrow public hearings, if holding them at all, and then not taking into account any of that public feedback if it doesn't legally apply to the permit. And so, we have this system that we're operating in that doesn't allow a lot of pathways for alternatives. And so, it's a very—it's a great challenge.

43:04 Amanda Ostuni

What about you personally? What is the hardest part that you find about the work—e.g., schedule or principles, or keeping your emotions [in check...]

**43:15 Emily
Zucchini**

For me recently, it's been this just like feeling of despair, honestly. You know, have we done all this work for nothing? And I say that, and the rational part of me says, 'no,'—I can look, and I can see everything that our work and our movement has done, [yet] ultimately, the wood pellet industry has still massively expanded in the state, and it's still destroying our forests, harming people. And so, for me, that's been, that's been really hard, to kind of come to work every day and say, 'Okay, what do we do? Do we keep going down this same path, and just hope that there's a light at the end of the tunnel? Do I need to completely redo my strategy?' That for me has personally been the hardest. [Also] having a governor who says he believes in environmental justice, who has said all the—or some of the right words, but we're not seeing those implemented in practice. So, it feels very defeating a lot, it feels very much like are we up against the wall that we just—sometimes I don't see the way over.

**44:54 Amanda
Ostuni**

Has there been a particular victory moment? Any particular event that you felt especially triumphant over?

**45:05 Emily
Zucchini**

The Environmental Justice Advisory Board held a special session on wood pellets last year and we were so optimistic. I think we were cautiously optimistic, but we were optimistic, and this was during a time when Enviva was applying to massively expand production at one of their facilities. And this was back in November, and I really, again cautiously so, but I really felt like *maybe, maybe* we can have an impact. We might not get everything we want, but maybe we can have an impact. And the Environmental Justice Advisory Board made some really good, strong recommendations to DEQ, and DEQ did not implement any of those.

And so that came out of the beginning of this year, and I think the kind of riding the high of that victory, and then kind of the defeat after that has been a real challenge this year. But...again it's like, in these long campaigns, you have to look at those moments and say, 'okay, well, we're still pushing every little thing we get,' and in this case, it's been some increased pollution controls for the communities living near the plants, and that's a good thing. If it weren't for our campaign, there would be—Enviva's reduced their pollution by 95% because of community activism. And that's a huge—that's a huge victory for

communities. And so for me, it's important to remind myself of that, because it can feel very defeating.

But those are some of the moments that I've been proudest of, and honestly just—I worked a lot in Richmond County, North Carolina, several years ago with Deborah David, who's an organizer there, and just working with her on hosting some community events, those are some of the moments that I look at and think, 'that was a victory.' We had amazing community events where people really came out, learned a lot about the issue, and have—she says she's increased her local group size by four, like that, it's grown four times what it was when she first started, and so those are the kind of victories that I think for me, I have to look at and say, 'we are moving in the right direction.'

47:53 **Amanda Ostuni**

Okay. And I won't keep you too much longer, just a couple last ones. But you had mentioned cumulative impacts, and sort of the web of environmental issues. Where do you see—how do you see your work in relation to the larger climate/environmental justice movement? What do you see for the future of the environmental justice movement as a whole? Is it a certain—is it going to be these moving parts separately, or what is your vision for that larger picture [how to navigate all the pieces]?

48:43 **Emily Zucchini**

Hope—my vision for the larger picture of the environmental justice movement, I hope, is more coordinated efforts and more frontline leadership. I, because of resources, I think that a lot of the work in North Carolina and across the South is dominated by larger environmental groups that are tied to funding outcomes, that are tied to grant reports, that in some ways, need to move a little quicker on different priorities than what is truly needed at the heart of impacted communities. And so, my hope for the environmental justice movement is more resource-sharing, more resources that go directly to impacted community groups, and more work that's done on a scale to really support that leadership.

I think, with issue-driven work, which is the work that I do—we are focused on the wood pellet issue—and I think there is a lot of benefit in that issue-driven work, in terms of being able to focus solely on an issue, learn the ins and outs of that issue, and I've seen it be a struggle

when working with communities that are dealing with so many issues, and how do you separate this issue from another industry that communities are dealing with. And so, I would like to see the movement broaden in some ways, to be able to focus kind of more concurrently on different issues. And I think a lot of groups do.

And I think, with the, with the leadership and investment in impacted communities, because there's things that I've learned that I never would have learned just from my colleagues at Dogwood, who are very, very smart people. But there's a lot of things that I've learned from impacted community members about the history of industries in this state, about the messaging that works in their community, about the needs in their community, about the solutions they want to see. And honestly, that's where the change needs to happen, that's where these industries are being concentrated, that's where the impacts of climate change are being felt, and so that's, that's where we need to be investing resources.

51:29 Amanda Ostuni

What about you personally? Obviously, activism isn't about the individuals, but there's definitely some motivation for something within yourself. So, what do you hope you'll be able to achieve, or, leave for yourself by the time that you're done with this work or whatnot?

51:50 Emily Zucchini

That's a good question. I really—I've worked on this North Carolina campaign throughout Governor Cooper's whole administration, and up until recently, that was, I think a goal I had set for myself, and I think it still is. I think that we've done a lot of work to educate Governor Cooper and put pressure on him and I really wanted and want to see him take action on the wood pellet industry. I don't know if that's gonna happen. And so, at this point, personally, I want to see if there's other avenues we can explore in terms of how can we build more green space?

I think I would be really excited about like a legacy of joy. Are there—we just had a retreat recently, and I remember one of our members saying 'I want to have fun more. I don't want to have to do this work all the time. I don't want to always have to be testing the river for pollutants because no one else is doing it.' And so, at this point in my

work, where I feel the most excited is what kind of solutions can we build? You know, whether that's green space with trails and just opportunities for people to get out, be in nature, hunt, fish, hike, an educational center. That to me is, I think personally, where I feel the most excitement right now.

53:28	Amanda Ostuni	Very cool. What advice would you give to anyone who wants to jump into environmental activism who maybe just hasn't had any exposure before? How do you kind of start from square one?
53:43	Emily Zucchini	It's all about the relationships. Take the time to really get to know people who are doing this work, to get to know why they're doing this work. And be prepared for a lot of—a lot of hard work. I think, and one of the hardest things for me has been I spend so much time on the computer; I talk about forests all day, and I don't get enough time in the forest, and I think there's different jobs where you can do that, but I also think that a lot of the work is research, is building the case, and ultimately, making the time—pick up the phone when people call. Because we're going to be so much—my work is so much more effective because of the relationships that I've built, and I think that can sometimes get lost in environmental work, because we do, we think it's all about the environment, and we are part of the environment. People are part of the ecosystem, and it's—we're a really important part of it, and can be really destructive part of it, and so it's really important to build and tend to those relationships.
55:11	Amanda Ostuni	Thank you. Is there anything else that you want to add about your background or work and goals, or anything like that?
55:20	Emily Zucchini	I don't think so. It's been pretty comprehensive.
55:26	Amanda Ostuni	I think so. I really appreciate it, I think that's everything then.
