

University of Maryland

# Project Management Symposium

*NEXT SESSION*

## The Paradox of Rewilding Projects: Exploring rewilding as projects, programs or portfolios

Gavin Jones

Senior Lecturer in Project Management & Program Leader for the Online Project Management degree, Institute of Business, Industry and Leadership, University of Cumbria



PROJECT MANAGEMENT  
CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE

A.J. CLARK SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING  
Civil & Environmental Engineering Department

This session will be recorded.

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# The Paradox of Rewilding Projects

Gavin Jones *and* David F Murphy  
University of Cumbria



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# Introduction

- **Gavin Jones** – Senior Lecturer in Project Management
- **David F Murphy** – Associate Professor of Sustainability & Collaborative Leadership
- **University of Cumbria**



# What is Rewilding?

- Perspectives:
  - Aesthetics?
  - Ecology?
  - Wilderness?
  - Community?



# What is Rewilding?

- At minimum rewilding is a human decision to abandon a place to **“nature knows best”**  
(Rewilding Europe, 2024)



# What is Rewilding?

- “...**rebuilding**... a natural ecosystem by **restoring** natural processes & the... food web at all trophic levels as a **self-sustaining & resilient ecosystem**... that would have been present had the disturbance not occurred”

(Carver *et al.*, 2021, p. 1888)



# What is Rewilding?

- “Chris Packham says Glencoe is ‘sad’ to drive through”
  - “barren moorland”
  - “could be fixed by rewilding”



(Robertson, 2023)

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# What is a Project?

- “A **temporary** endeavour undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result” (PMI, 2021, p. 245)







# What is a Program? ...a Portfolio?

- Program
  - “Related projects, subsidiary programs, and program activities that are managed in a coordinated manner to obtain benefits not available from managing them individually” (PMI, 2021, p. 245)
- Portfolio
  - “Projects, programs, subsidiary portfolios, and operations managed as a group to achieve strategic objectives” (PMI, 2021, p. 244)



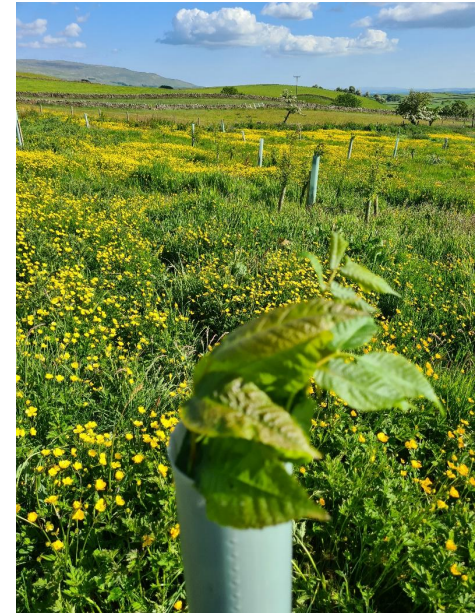
# Rewilding – What is Success?

- What will it look like in 10 years?
  - “We don’t know. It’s going to look like whatever it looks like”  
(Root-Bernstein *et al.*, 2018)



# Rewilding is Collaboration

- “Collaboration is a necessary response to entanglement of matter and meaning” (Barad, 2007, p. x)





# Rewilding is Uncertainty / Adaptability

- “Speculative wild experiments” (Peeren, 2019)
  - Natural processes are unpredictable
  - Adaptable vision required
  - Suited to Agile project management methods



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# Rewilding has Complexity

- “**Strong visionary leadership**” is needed to reconcile diverse stakeholder values & views... (Lynch, 2022, p. 17)
- ...and to communicate the vision in **simple accessible language** (Jiménez and Basurto, 2022)



# Rewilding has Ambition

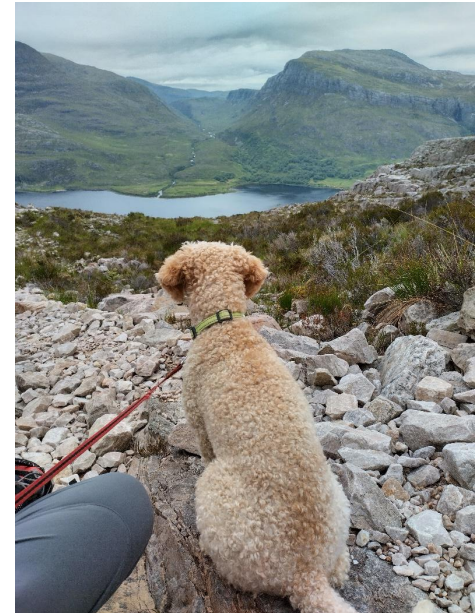
- “An 18,500-acre estate in Perthshire is set to be the home of a **100-year rewilding project** managed by Durrell”

(Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, 2023)



# Rewilding has Scale

- **250-year** Trees for Life's Dundreggan rewilding project in Glen Affric in the Scottish Highlands (Couling, 2017)
- One of "...several of our **ongoing projects...**" (Trees for Life, 2023)



# Rewilding has Partners

- Crosses boundaries
- Not constrained by targets and deadlines?
- **500-year Wild**  
Ennerdale rewilding  
**project** in English Lake  
District

(Root-Bernstein, *et al.*, 2018, p. 296)





# Rewilding...

- 100+ year projects...
- ...landscape scale...
- ...with intervention...
- ...then leaving nature to it...
- ...seeing what happens...
- ...adapting the vision...
- ...modifying the intervention...



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# Funding

- Challenge 1: Vision driven or funding driven?
- Challenge 2: “Typically it takes 10–15 years for a change in the landscape to demonstrate results. When you think about it, that could be two to three parliaments and four to five environment ministers”  
(Root-Bernstein *et al.*, 2018, p.298)

# Rewilding – Is the word Project “plastic”?

- Adaptable (Agile PM?)
- Different stakeholder perspectives?
- Cross-disciplinary gaps:
  - A lack of PM expertise?
  - A lack of recognition of the need for PM?
  - A lack of monitoring and evaluation?





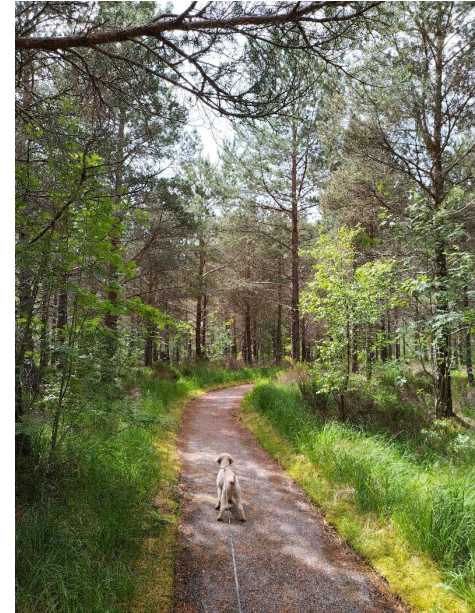
# Rewilding – Transformation Program?

- Rewilding takes an environment from one state to another...
- *...using multiple projects to do so?*



# Rewilding – Portfolio of Projects?

- Trees for Life
  - Dundreggan – Rewilding Project
    - Nursery (Project and Operations)
    - Rewilding Centre / Experiences (Operations?)
    - Trails (Project and then Operations?)
    - Accommodation / Café (Operations?)





# Benefits of Portfolio Management

- Dezhkam et al 2019 suggest
  - Higher collective value
  - Better decision-making / resource allocation
  - Greater strategic alignment



# Conclusions

- Adaptable
  - Landscape level
  - Collaborative
- that are*
- Strategic
  - Transformative
  - Multi-project



# Reflection

- Contested value
- Interdisciplinary
  - Socio-economic-ecological environment
  - Complex adaptive network
  - Natural world collaborations







# Questions?

Primary Contact: Gavin Jones

[gavin.jones@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:gavin.jones@cumbria.ac.uk)

Contact: David F. Murphy

[david.murphy@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:david.murphy@cumbria.ac.uk)



# Evaluate Session



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