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 Pallavi Pokharel, Idaho State University's newest sustainability manager. Joining the ISU team this past September, Pokharel uses her position to work with academic, research, operations, and student groups to develop initiatives related to environmental stewardship and sustainability. She holds a bachelor's degree in Environmental Science from Kathmandu University in Nepal, and a master's degree in Environment, Natural Resources, and Society from the University of Wyoming. Pokharel has worked in the sustainability, environment, and climate change sphere for over six years, and with prestigious organizations like NASA and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

So, what drew you to the sustainability field in the first place?

Pallavi Pokharel: I come from a small place called Nepal. It's a developing country in South Asia. We've always grown up seeing scarcity, especially around water. Seeing periodic floods, people not being able to voice and understand what's happening or why is it so challenging, pretty much drew me to it. I started to work more with slum communities in my undergraduate to really understand the disparities. And wow, there's so much socioeconomic inequity going on with water distribution. And I think that was a striking point where I was like, no, I have to work in the environment. There's so many problems and we have to do something. I believe that whatever my work does has to be of service and of impact. If I go home today, I need to feel proud that I'm working towards something rather than just signing off checks or doing research. That's my driving force.

ML: In your experience in the college setting, what does sustainability mean to you in the context of higher education?

PP: In the context of higher education, sustainability can be a very vague word for a lot of people. They might think of recycling or efficient buildings. These are all true. But for me, I think sustainability, especially in higher education, which is pretty much like a small town itself, it's bringing a more systemic level of change. I feel like that's the main place where students grow as professionals, as individuals. For example, if you go to classes, can you bike there? Can we make it easier for you to bike there? Can we have more green spaces allowed for students to work outside? If there's recycling education happening, do students know about recycling? Are they recycling? What are we doing after that's recycled?

ML: According to their strategic plan mission statement, ISU aims to "engage students through learning and research opportunities that improve the intellectual vigor, cultural vitality, and health of our communities." The key goals are one, increase student access, opportunity, retention, and success. Two, strengthen programmatic excellence. Three, cultivate external partnerships. Four, expand research, clinical, and creative activities. And five, energize the Bengal community through more engagement. How do you plan to ensure the alignment of ISU's broader mission and strategic plan with your sustainability goals?

PP: I've given it a lot of thought. I've had a lot of meetings with professionals, faculty, staff, and students on campus. And one thing that has resonated is everybody wants to collaborate with me and that's very fortunate. So I want to put sustainability as not an addition to projects and more so a piece that works through every project. I feel like sustainability should be thought through whenever you're planning or making any decision about academics, about engagement, student involvement, anything.

ML: Earlier this year, ISU received a bronze STARS rating from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education for their sustainability achievements. STARS stands for Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating Systems. How do you plan on advancing campus sustainability further?

PP: So, the STARS report gives us an idea where we stand in terms of every single aspect. Operations or transportation, waste footprint, carbon footprint, energy efficiency footprint, or even how much engagement is happening on campus, what's being done for academics. I have been working on building a goal for sustainability. The sustainability action plan document is a living document that I pretty much worship every day, and I've tried to make it into more measurable bite-sized goals for yearly, monthly, quarterly breakdown.

One of the major projects that we're working on is a campus thrift store and that has come into a lot of conversation about waste minimization, student engagement in thrift stores, making thrift a cultural piece, and also communicating better in terms of departments and housing on campus. Another thing is uniform recycling bins across all the departments on campus.

ML: Would you say that those are some of your top priorities for your first year as a sustainability manager?

PP: Those two are definitely. I've been working every day on thrift store. Believe me when I say every day, we have had so much progress and momentum going. And because the momentum is going, I want to make sure people feel that energy from me. Because if my energy dies, they're going to lag. Another thing that I'm working on currently is Earth Day on April 22nd. I recently made a concept document about having Earth Week-ish events where we bring different clubs, students, faculty, and staff and have different workshops or even keynote speakers, panel discussions. Because I realized there's so much miscommunication about sustainability and what can be done, what has been done. There is no way to see some background things that are happening, and we've not been able to show it.

ML: While these projects are still in-the-works, how can students get involved with ISU sustainability initiatives?

PP: I've been wanting to reach out to students however I can in my capacity. This first month I worked straight into getting the Sustainability Club formed, a student-facing organization which

will allow more opportunities for student engagement. Another thing that we do have is the Student Sustainability Grant, which is a $5,000 fund.

ML: The grant Pokharel is referring to is a university fund to any number of students who present a clear sustainability project to benefit or improve campus sustainability in terms of energy optimization, resource conservation, consumption and generation reduction, and the promotion of education, community engagement, and behavioral change.

Are there ways students can get their voices heard?

PP: We have a newsletter. We started from September and we're getting very good feedback. If you sign up to our newsletter, we have so many opportunities. The Instagram page updates daily, I would say, or at least twice or thrice a week. We also have been talking a lot about the Thrift Store. I would at one point be reaching out to students to either volunteer or give some inputs. And if they want to give suggestions or have some ideas, but they don't have capacity or time to invest, we do have the sustainability student survey form that's on our website.

My office is in the Physical Sciences Building. You can totally reach out to me, directly come to my office. I love when students come. I love when they hold me accountable. It makes me more passionate about my work.

ML: Idaho State University's sustainability website, at isu.edu/sustainabilty, reads that sustainability managers and personnel are "dedicated to developing a culture that prioritizes sustainability while fostering innovation, progress, and collaboration within the Bengal community." Pokharel is actively working to reduce waste on campus through more recycling initiatives, spark interest with a potential campus thrift store, and educate college students. You can find more information about ways to get involved on our website kisu.edu/sustainableidaho. Thank you to Pallavi Pokharel, ISU's new sustainability manager, for joining us today, and thank you for tuning in to Sustainable Idaho.

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