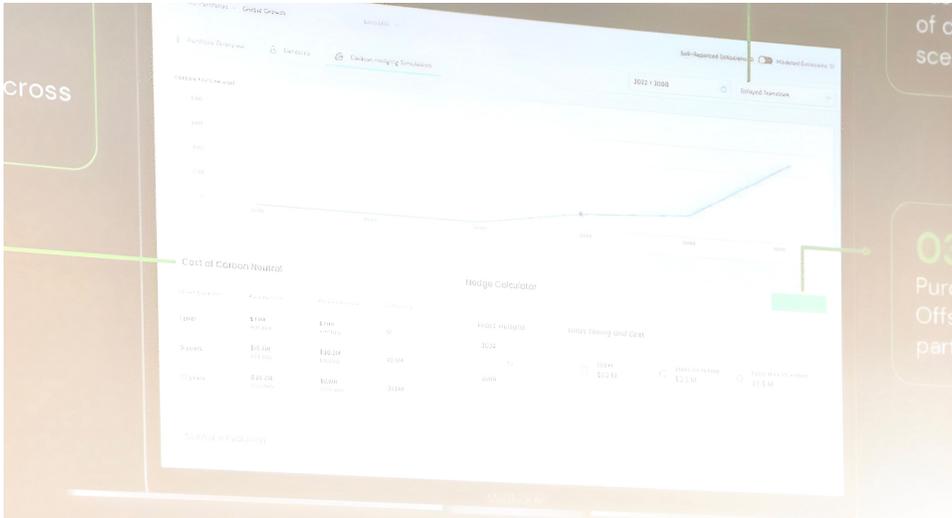


Jeff Reece's Vision for a Sustainable Future

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Jeff Reece on stage

When Jeff Reece returned to Utah State University to speak with students, his journey from investment banking to international conservation took center stage. A 2004 graduate with a degree in economics, Reece built a career that spans two seemingly opposite worlds: One focused on financial growth and resource extraction, the other on ecological preservation and social equity. His mission now? To rethink economic systems by integrating sustainability into capitalism.

Like many economics graduates, Reece began his career in consulting and investment banking. He worked as an analyst at Oliver Wyman, moved into private equity, and spent over a decade navigating high finance. He encouraged students interested in consulting and banking to take a practical approach like join networking clubs, practice case interviews, and develop strong Excel skills.

While financially rewarding, Reece said this path left him questioning something deeper. As an avid outdoorsman, he spent much of his free time in nature and began noticing a disconnect. He started to wonder if something was missing from the traditional economic model.

Reece's curiosity led him to conservation, where he co-founded MarVivo, an organization focused on blue carbon, mangrove, and marine conservation. The goal? To create economic incentives for ecological protection.

One of his early projects in Indonesia's Borneo rainforest illustrates how this works. His team purchased land to prevent deforestation and developed a model where they were paid for the carbon emissions they prevented. "That's the entire genesis of the carbon markets," he explained. "Go to a place that has a deep concentration of carbon, has an imminent threat for being deforested, and then prove that it's a permanent... protection of that biosphere." The project generates about \$50 million annually while protecting 600 species, providing healthcare, and improving access to clean water and solar power for local communities.

Similarly, in Baja Mexico, his team acquired 60,000 acres of mangrove forests—critical to marine biodiversity—to protect them from commercial shrimp farming. However, in economic terms, he noted that this essential ecosystem is valued at only \$15 million per year, highlighting the gap between financial markets and ecological importance.

While these projects have made a difference, Reece acknowledged that economic models must go even further. He pointed out that traditional economics prioritizes power and wealth, but "the results to life on this planet are quite negative."

His latest endeavor, Odyssey, takes conservation to the seas—literally. His team has acquired a 115-foot sailing yacht to explore and protect the world's most biodiverse places. They engage local communities, conduct scientific research, and document their findings for a Netflix docu-series.

Reece also introduced an innovative financial model to address global debt. His team is working with nations like Tonga, which face significant debt to larger economies. Rather than requiring full cash payments on debt interest, his model proposes splitting payments half in cash and half in biodiversity and carbon credits. This approach could generate billions for conservation while alleviating financial burdens on developing nations.

As he wrapped up, Reece challenged students to think critically about the future of economics and sustainability. He emphasized that "we will live in balance with nature—it's just a question of whether we get there by design or by disaster."

For students considering their own careers, he encouraged them to embrace curiosity, even if their path isn't linear. He noted that most people will have multiple careers in their lifetime and that interests can evolve over time. Rather than stressing over a first job, he advised students to pay attention to what truly fascinates them.

By integrating sustainability into economic systems, Reece believes the world can transition toward a model that benefits both people and the planet. The challenge now, he said, is for the next generation to push those ideas forward.