

Capturing Stories from the Field:

DIY Video and Content Production

Rachel Rhodes, Social Media Manager, Natural Lands

Natural Lands

September 6, 2025



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objectives

1. Learn how to confidently plan for and produce video content on-site.

2. Learn how to repurpose one video multiple ways.

3. Learn which tools and resources can really help punch up your video content.









agenda

- intro
- pre-production
- production
- post-production
- questions & answers

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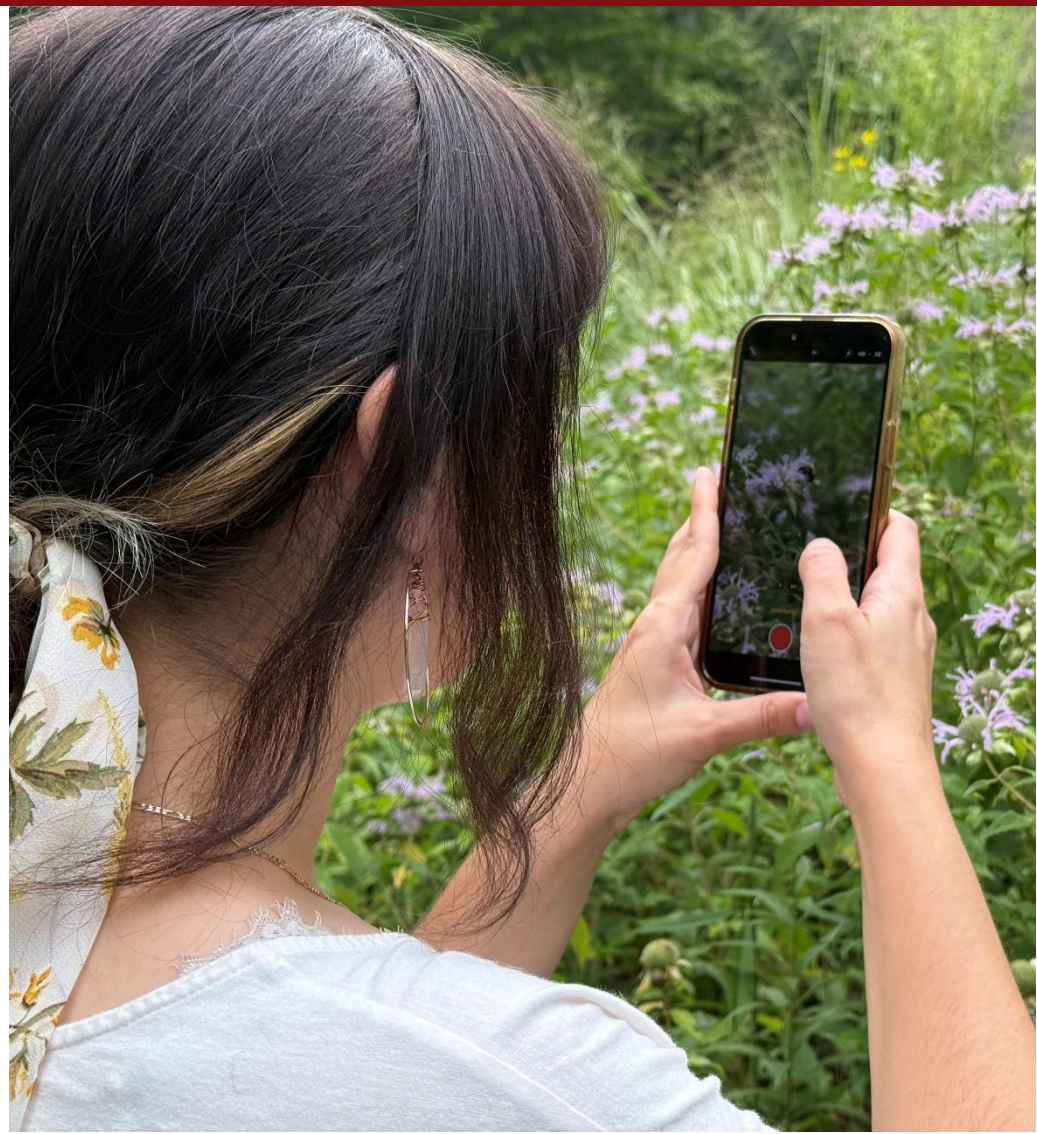
intro



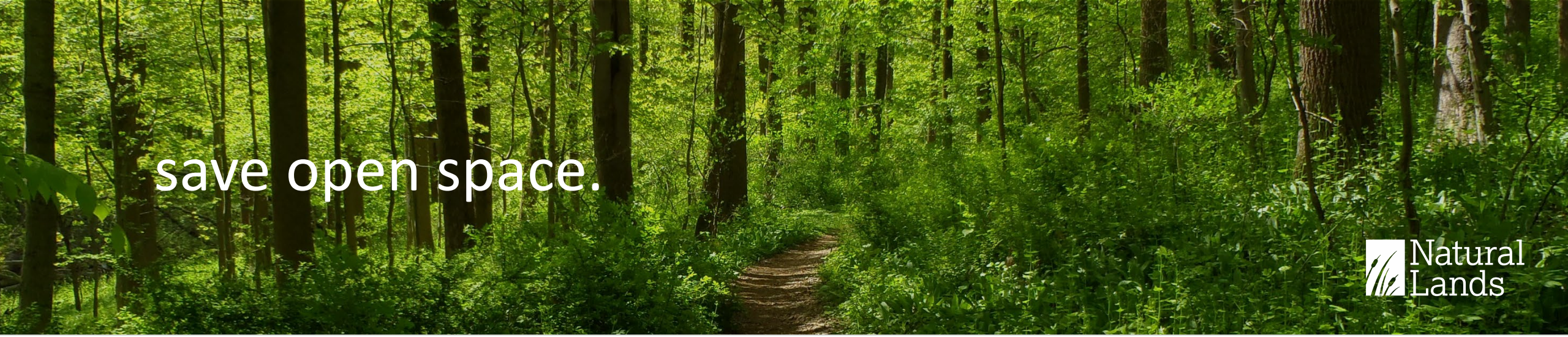
intro.

what this session is all about.

- DIY video!
- How to plan for success.
- How to capture the stories you want to tell.
- How to turn raw footage into engaging, high-value digital content.




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land for life. nature for all.



- We keep it and care for it (40+ nature preserves and one public garden totaling 23,600 acres).
- We buy it to give away (100,000+ acres).
- We ease it (494 conservation restrictions totaling 28,000 acres).
- We help townships save it through planning & zoning (150 townships).



care for nature.

- We restore habitats on our preserves.
  - managing invasive plants
  - planting trees
  - creating bird and pollinator habitat
  - removing ponds to restore wetlands
  - manage wildlife populations
- We help others manage and improve their lands.
- We offer written resources for landowners.



- We open our preserves to everyone, free of charge.
- We host events on our preserves and beyond (300+ annually).
- We train and engage volunteers (350+ organized volunteer opportunities annually).
- We work with communities on park planning and restoration.

intro.

about me.

- Hi! I'm Rachel
  - Social Media Manager, Natural Lands
- Education
  - BA Advertising, Copywriting
  - Honorary degree from YouTube University (jest)
- Experience
  - Studied abroad and started a YouTube channel
  - Continued to grow as a micro-influencer
    - Only 15,000 total followers, but...
    - Worked with a handful of brands
    - Built a close-knit network (and friend group)
    - Was recognized three times in public by followers
  - Okay…why is that relevant to me?



intro.

about me.

- Because video—especially on social media—is about one thing and one thing alone...
- Community!
- Video content is not about sales.
- Video content is not just a stop on the marketing funnel.
- Video content is a journey and a destination in its own right.



intro.

about me.

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- After nearly 10 years in the field, I have worked both in-house and in agency settings.
- I am new to the non-profit sector...
- ...and LOVING IT.
- Because you're all about what?
- YOU'RE ALL ABOUT COMMUNITY!



intro.

why video?

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- Relatively low investment.
  - You have a smart phone? You can film.
  - You have internet access? You can edit.
  - You have a website, mailing list, or social media profile(s)? You have an audience.
- Easy to reduce, reuse, recycle.
  - One five-minute recording can be cut and mixed and matched and recut countless ways.
- Video is KING!
  - Video innovations shape the digital landscape.
  - YouTube second largest search engine behind Google.
  - Video watch time up 36% on LinkedIn (source).



intro.

why video?

- Secret bonus reason...
  - Donors and board members love them!



intro.

strategizing for value.

- Education & Entertainment
  - If it isn't educational or entertaining, folks keep scrolling.
  - People learn more when they're having fun!

- Content Pillars
  - Defined themes to organize and filter content through..
  - Should have at least two (education, entertainment)
  - Don't overdo it, either! Keep it simple. If you've hit 10 you've gone too far.
  - Natural Lands uses five content pillars:
    - Education
    - Entertainment
    - Events
    - Industry Leadership
    - Culture
  - If something doesn't fit, it doesn't add value.



intro.

strategizing for value.

- Diving deeper: assign attributes
  - Attributes can help you track which sub-categories of each content pillar resonate with your audience the best.
  - Examples:
    - Education: land stewardship, easements, birds, habitats, insects, etc.
    - Entertainment: trends, scripted, humor, etc.
    - Events: live music, hike, kids, arts, vlog, etc.
    - Industry Leadership: news, press releases, awards, etc.
    - Culture: volunteer highlights, new hire announcements, etc.
  - Attributes can be mixed across pillars
    - A scripted humor video that also sprinkles in fun facts about birds (pillar: entertainment)
    - A volunteer highlight about bird banding and nest box monitoring (pillar: culture)
    - A vlog from a kids birding event (pillar: events)



intro.

recap.

- Why video?
  - Low investment and easy to iterate on.
  - Video is king and driving digital innovations.
  - Donors, board members, and our biggest fans just love it.
- Education vs. Entertainment
  - Think before planning any video content: Is this idea educational? Is this idea entertaining? Can it be both?
- Content Pillars
  - The planning before the planning: identify and define the themes you want to make content for.
  - Assign attributes.
  - Begin tracking which pillar and attribute combos connect best with your audience.



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pre-production



pre-production.

ground rules.

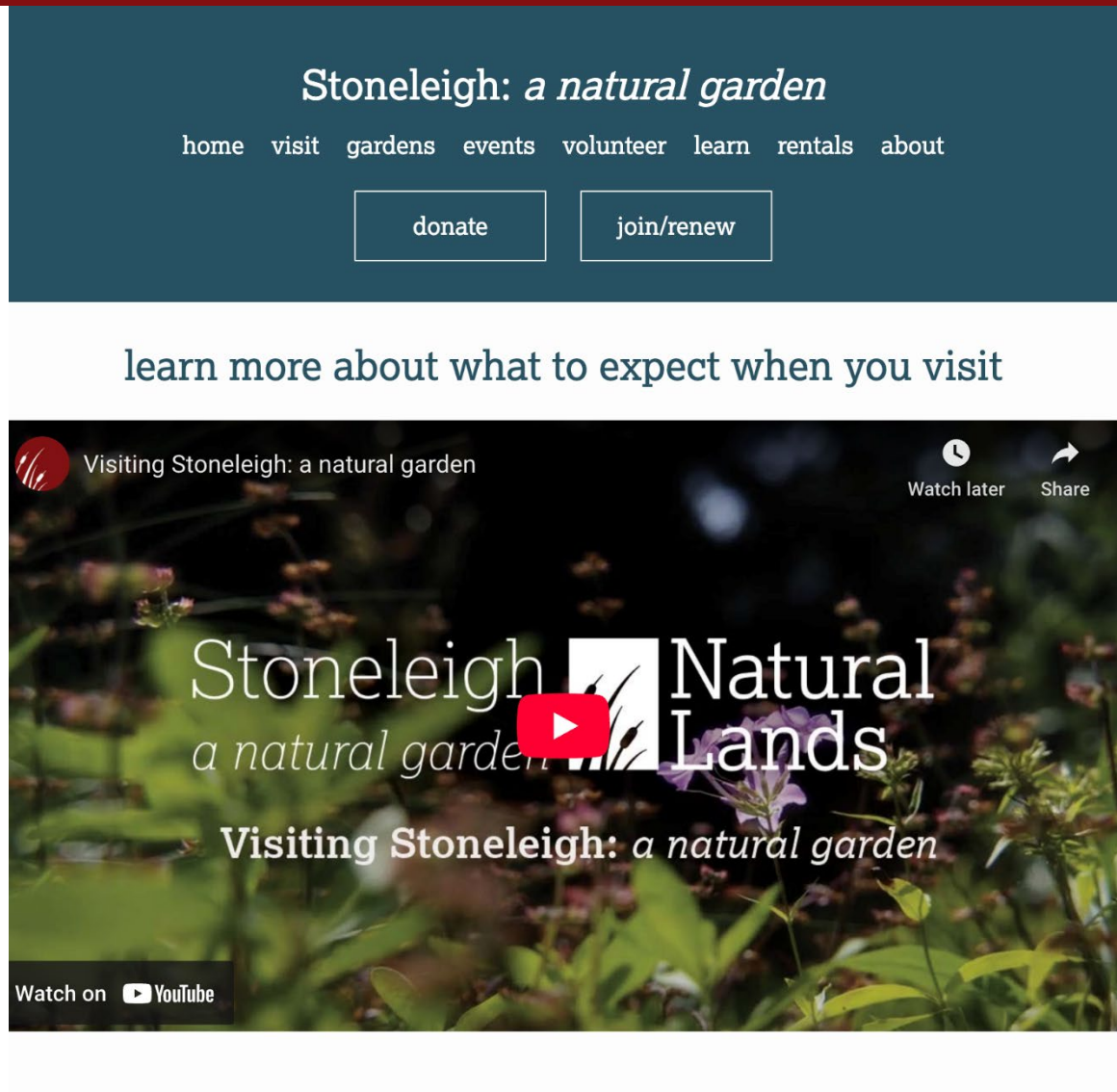
- Rule #1: EVERYTHING is content.
  - Ask a coworker to repeat that insightful thing they just said.
  - Go film that monarch caterpillar on the milkweed outside.
  - Keep a library of random clips. You never know when they'll come in handy.
- Rule #2: A failure to plan is a plan to fail.
  - Thanks, mom. ✨
  - Don't just hope for something cool to happen.
  - Be proactive. Be the spark that makes the cool thing happen. Or at least plan to be there when other people make the cool thing happen.
- Rule #3: Get comfortable being "that guy."



pre-production.

ideation.

- Identify your goals
  - Do you want to be more engaging on social media?
  - Do you want more video on the website?
  - Do you want fresh material for newsletters?
  - Do you want to reach new audiences?
- Break your goals down into phases
  - Tackle one phase at a time.
  - Example 1, Social Media:
    - Phase 1: Facebook and Instagram
    - Phase 2: LinkedIn
    - Phase 3: YouTube
  - Example 2, Broader Marketing:
    - Phase 1: Website
    - Phase 2: Facebook and Instagram
    - Phase 3: Email marketing



pre-production.

ideation.

- Make a list
  - Upcoming events
  - Projects to document
  - Shots you can get *now* for Before and After's *later*
  - Which trails/plants/properties will look especially good in the upcoming season?
  - Landowners who would be happy to share their conservation story or testimony
  - Members of staff who would be good on camera (or, at the very least, are willing)

- Brainstorm some formats
  - Interviews
  - Skits
  - Vlogs (video blogs)
  - Walking tours
  - Some combo of the above!



pre-production.

mise en place.

- Planning your shoot
  - Single item vs. "Production Day"
  - Communication
    - Have conversations with people in-the-know
    - Prep the person in front of the camera
  - Written materials
    - Scripts
    - Important talking points
    - Conversation starters
  - Shot list
    - Location highlights
    - Subjects (bench, nest box, volunteer, etc.)
    - Other b-roll (light in trees, various meadow shots, etc.)
      - B-roll is used over A-roll, or the main footage, to establish setting, smooth transitions, and provide additional elements of context or atmosphere



pre-production.

mise en place.

- Prepping your gear
  - Phone
  - Mics + wind muff ($-$$$) 1
  - Tripod ($) 2
  - Spare batteries or chargers ($) 3
  - Drone ($$-$$$) 4
  - Water
  - A snack :)

- Other considerations
  - Lighting
  - Weather
  - Setting
  - Event attendees and language in waivers

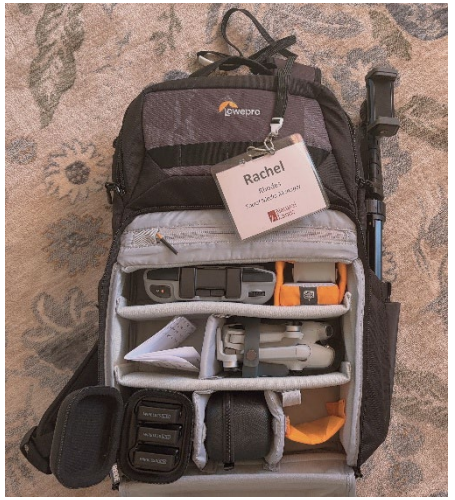


pre-production.

recap.







- Know your ground rules
  - Everything is content
  - Be proactive
  - Get comfortable behind the camera
- Organize your ideas
  - Draft a basic plan for phases
  - Make a list of stories to tell
  - Decide which formats to try
- Gather your ingredients
  - Communicate with your team
  - Draft a shot list
  - Write out any scripts or talking points
  - Gather your equipment


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production

production.

pre-flight check.

- Communication
  - Check in with the people you're working with.
  - Remind them that everything will be edited and they can review any drafts before they go live.

- Run through a checklist before heading out
  - Double-check all gear is accounted for.
    - Things that need to be charged are charged.
  - Collect anything that needs to be printed.
  - Clear some storage space on your phone.



production.

framing the shot.

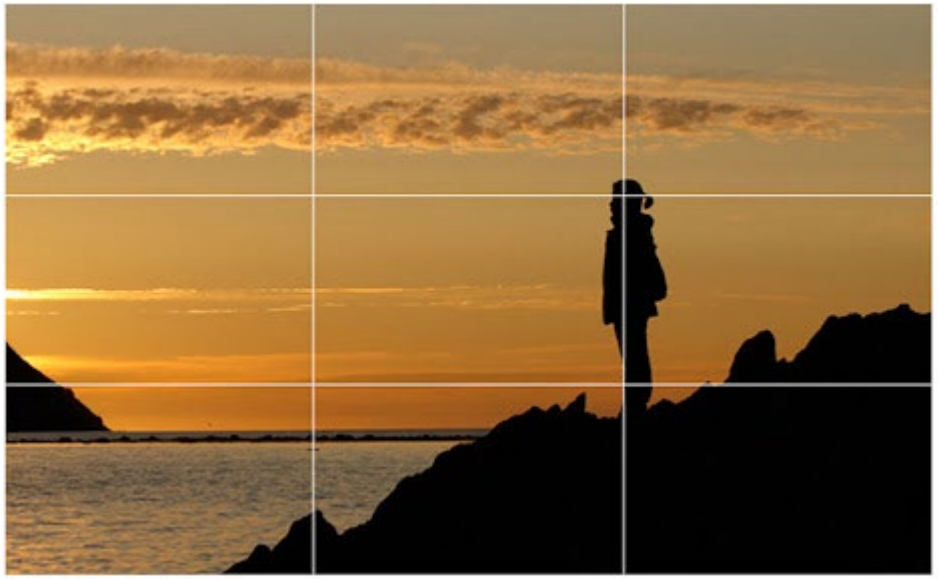
- Lighting
  - Outdoors is usually best
    - Direct light = harsh highlights and shadows
    - Shade = even and diffused light
  - Indoors can be challenging
    - Try to seek out natural light from a window
    - Sometimes we just need to make do! It's always better to just hit record and see what you can get.
  - Lighting gear
    - Ring lights (standing or clipped to phone)
    - Soft boxes (mimic outdoor lighting)
    - Any number of hacks depending on indoor vs. outdoor



production.

framing the shot.

- Background or setting
  - What's behind the speaker or subject?
  - Be mindful of negative space and cropping potential
  - Rule of thirds
  - Be cognizant of where you position yourself in a group





production.

hitting record.

- Phone settings
  - Extremely personal to your own phone's make, model, and even software update
  - YouTube (and TikTok, and Instagram) university is your friend — so many short, easy tips and tutorials!

- Basic tips
  - More is more
  - Learn when to prioritize audio over video
  - Horizontal vs. Vertical orientation
  - Shoot in 4k if you're planning to crop a short vertical clip from a longer horizontal video
    - 4k takes up a lot more storage (1080 x 4)
  - 4s or 8s clips make great b-roll fodder



production.

recap.



- Pre-flight check
  - Communication
  - Double-check all gear
  - Make sure you have storage space!



- Framing the shot
  - Lighting
  - Background
  - Crop potential



- Hitting record
  - Research your specific phone for setting ideas
  - More is more
  - Audio vs. video


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post-production

post-production.

editing.

- iMovie
  - Pros
    - Free, already built-in to Apple devices
    - Very basic and user-friendly
    - Drag-and-drop style timeline editing
    - Runs just as well on old and new laptops
    - Can be used on desktop, tablet, and mobile
  - Cons
    - Exclusive to Apple
    - Color correcting and other additional functions very limited
- CapCut
  - Pros
    - Both free and paid versions
    - Free version has some built-in effects and transitions
    - Easy if you're focusing on vertical-only (social) videos
    - Can be used on desktop, tablet, and mobile
  - Cons
    - Many of the best effects, transitions behind a paywall
    - Browser version not as good as app



post-production.

editing.

- Davinci Resolve
  - Pros
    - Free version so robust, you may never need paid
    - The most in-depth functionality of any other free tool
    - Can edit audio in ways iMovie and CapCut cannot
    - Has a built-in version of After Effects (animations, etc.)
  - Cons
    - Much steeper learning curve
    - Needs a faster computer to run efficiently

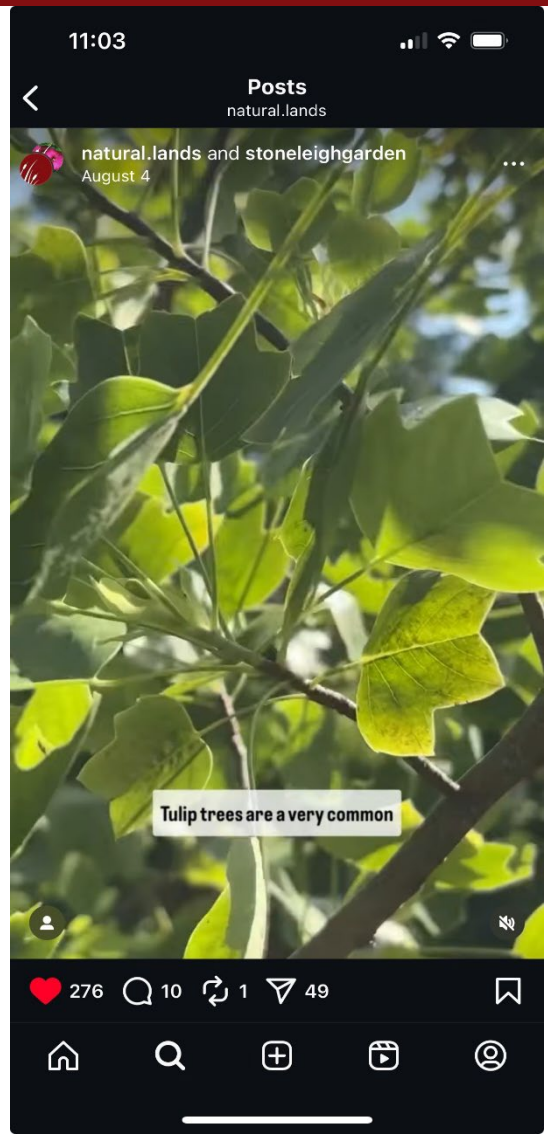
- Adobe Premiere Pro
  - Pros
    - May already be accessible if you're paying for the Creative Cloud
    - Beginner-friendly
    - Scales with you and your learning curves
  - Cons
    - No free version

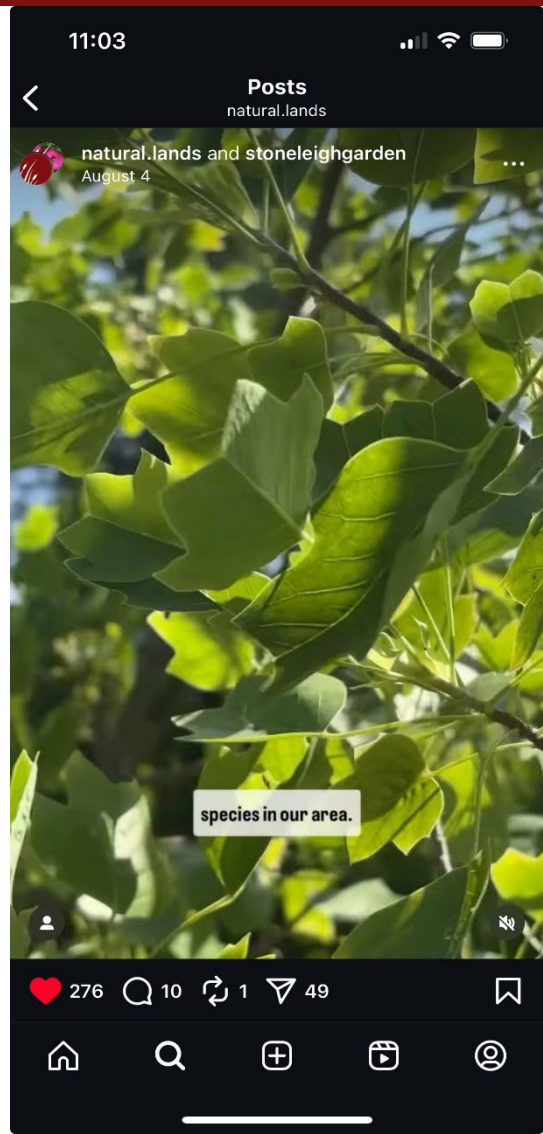


post-production.

best practices.

- Captions
  - ADA accessibility
  - Algorithms like it
  - Folks in public oftentimes watch video with sound off, so captions help them stay engaged.
- Music/Audio
  - Trending audio
  - Copyright vs. Paid vs. Free
- If posting to social media...
  - Algorithms change often—try to check semi-regularly.
  - Engagement (and hence, reach) is a two-way street—do NOT post and ghost!

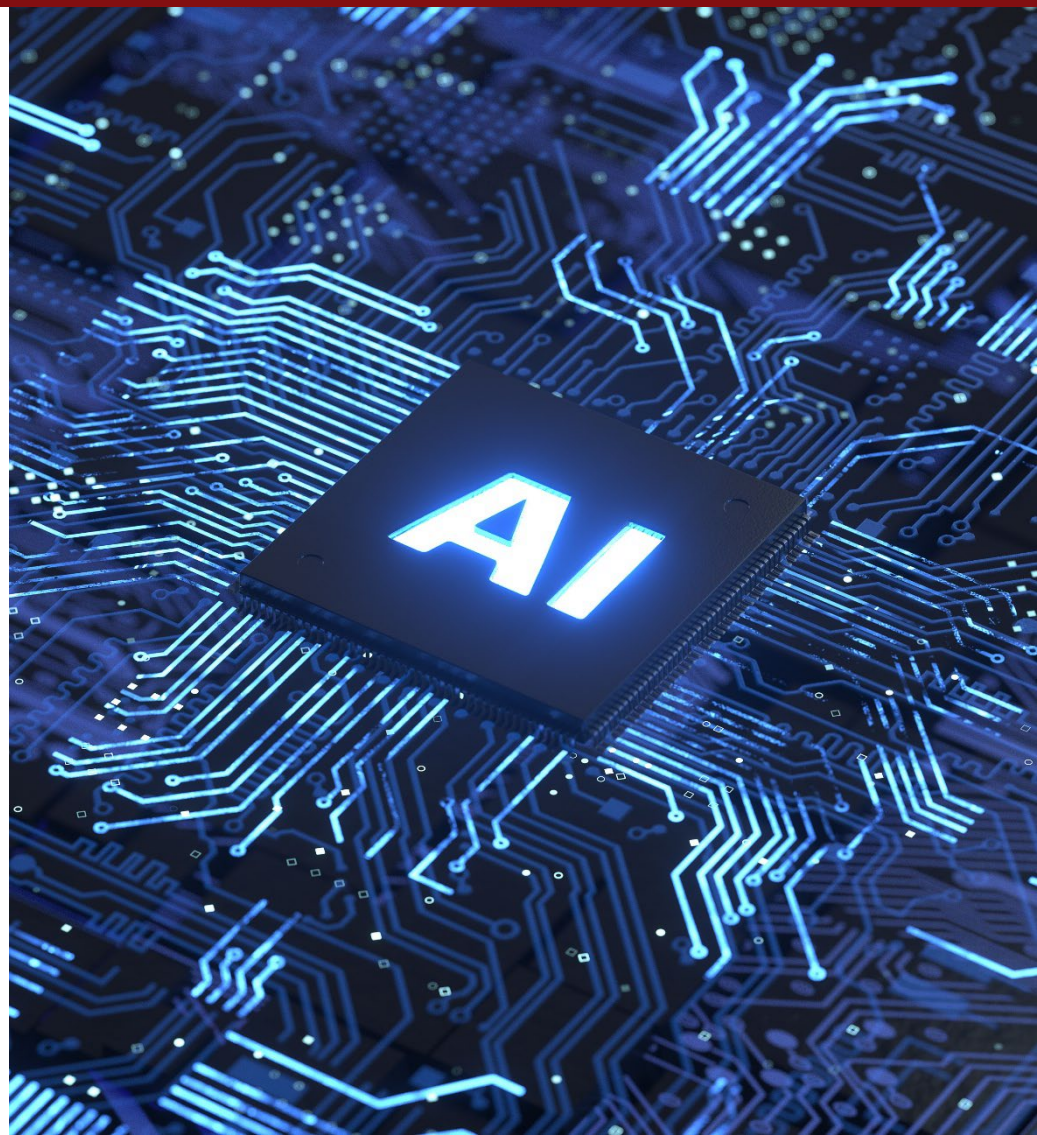




post-production.

best practices.

- AI
  - Good for tedious tasks
    - Transcribing video for captions/subtitles
    - Pushing through writer's block
    - Instant tech support
  - Bad for anything "creative" that folks will see or hear
    - Very polarizing (bad for the environment, steals from real artists, still feels unnatural, etc.)
    - Some trends get the pass, but using generative AI for "original" content will hurt your brand trust with many audiences
  - Work with your team on drafting an AI policy



post-production.

best practices.

- Remember, it's all about COMMUNITY!
  - Create a cinematic universe of characters and stories (cast your coworkers)
  - Relate through humor, hope, and shared experiences (not despair and demands)
  - Have fun!
    - Again...people learn when they're having fun :)

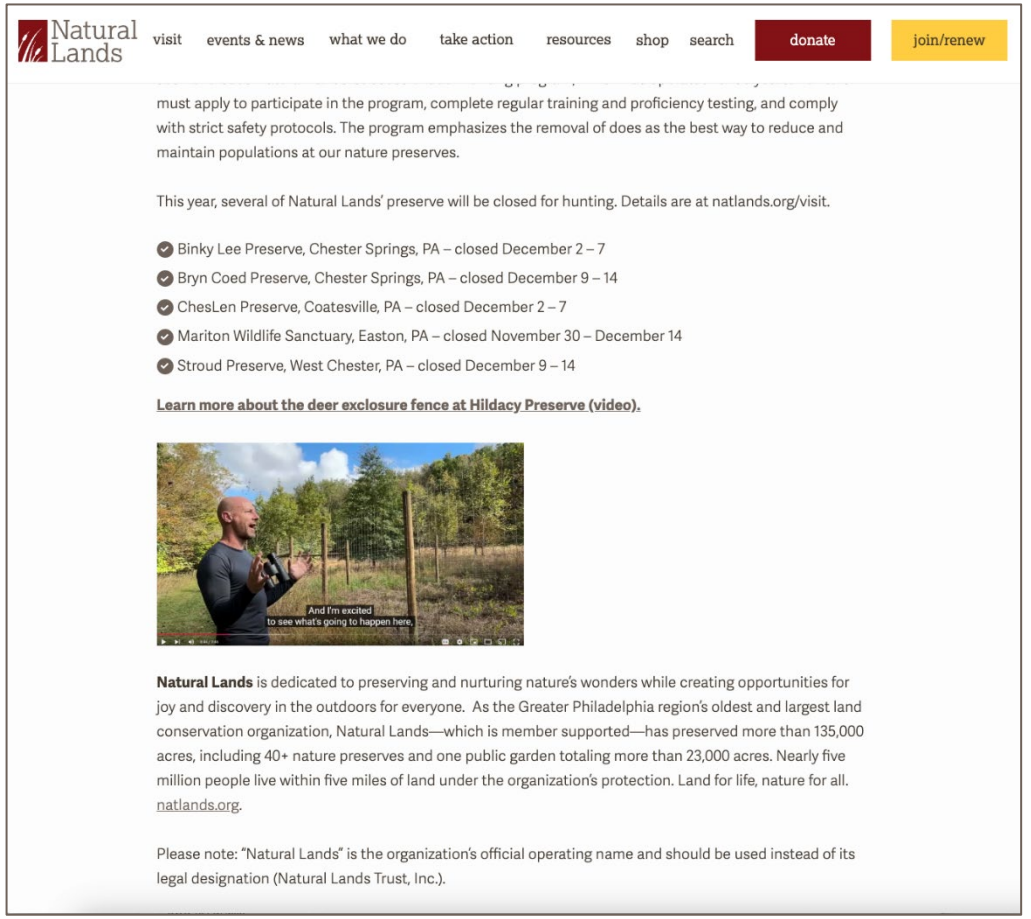


post-production.

posting & repurposing.

- Web
  - Blog posts
  - News, press releases
  - Informational know-before-you pieces

- Stakeholder reports and presentations
  - Partners
  - Clients
  - Donors
  - Granting agencies



post-production.

posting & repurposing.

- Social media
  - Better to do one (or a few) platforms well than try to have it all! Remember: phases.
  - Algorithms. Algorithms. Algorithms.
    - Video posts in-platform > linking out to video elsewhere
    - Reels draw non-followers (drive Reach) on Instagram
  - Every platform has its own ecosystem
    - Lore
    - Trends
    - Audiences
    - Again, algorithms
  - Reduce, reuse, recycle!
    - Re-edit and repost content that performs well
    - Iterate on successful posts; create series
    - Turn one three-minute video into a 90-second version, 60-second version, so on and so forth
  - Do not be afraid to hop on relevant trends!
    - That library of random 4s clips and b-roll can come in handy



production.

case studies.

- The Deer Exclosure Fence
  - Pre-Production
    - Virtually none! This was my first "feature" video, and it was very impromptu
    - I overheard a coworker on her way out to interview a preserve manager for a press release
    - Rule #1: Everything is content!
  - Production
    - Only gear: my phone and a good attitude
    - Gear I wish I had: a tripod and a mic
    - Outdoor lighting and audio were very cooperative
  - Post-Production
    - Edited in Premiere Pro
    - Used drone footage and other b-roll to help smooth some transitions between cuts
    - Posted to YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn
    - Later used in a presentation given to the funders of the project

https://youtu.be/QZd3YV3inAg



production.

case studies.

- Bird People
  - Pre-Production
    - A team member recently got into birding and was enjoying funny bird content on social media — volunteered to write the script and star in the video for me!
    - Rule #2: Make a plan. Scripting the jokes out ahead of time gave us time to fact-check, practice, and film more efficiently
  - Production
    - Only gear: my phone.
    - No mic yet, and wind did ruin some audio.
  - Post-Production
    - Edited a 60-second Reel in Premiere Pro
    - Our first relatively "viral" Instagram Reel
    - Recut and reposted in the spring; outperformed the first post
    - Had other team members talking and sharing with others

www.instagram.com/reel/DLDOO98J3DW/



production.

case studies.

- Walking Tour of the Serpentine Barrens
  - Pre-Production
    - Our team was already meeting another preserve manager for a tour; I reached out to see if he'd be comfortable wearing a mic
    - Assured him before we started the walk that I would be editing and sending him any final cuts for approval
  - Production
    - Rule #3: Be that guy. I tried to stay near the front of the group to ensure I had clear shots.
    - Only gear: my phone and our new mics!
    - The mic made sure I had audio as I used my phone to capture b-roll
  - Post-Production
    - Edited in Premiere Pro; an hour of audio became a 13-minute feature
    - Repurposed into two vertical 90-second Reels
    - Also grabbed a quick quote on the current drought (bonus third short-form video!)
    - Posted to YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook
    - Shared with donors who are interested in special habitats

https://www.instagram.com/reel/DFtGKkHJesN/



post-production.

additional resources.

- ThinkMedia
  - YouTube channel
  - Podcast
  - Endless, well-edited educational content
  - Gear reviews and recommendations, tips, tutorials, editing advice, and more

- Social Media Today
  - Website
  - Newsletter
  - Good for being aware of algorithm and other big platform changes

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Q&A



thank you so much!



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Scan the QR code to be directed to **natlands.org/diyvideo** to reference and review the full presentation.

Please remember to complete a session evaluation!
Scan this QR code directly or complete on the Rally app.

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