

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE

Institutional Positioning Document

August 22, 2014



University of Maryland
CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE



Connecting Nonprofit Organizations
to Policymakers and the Media

CONTENTS

SITUATION ANALYSIS 1
METHODOLOGY..... 2
TARGET AUDIENCES..... 3
MESSAGING GOALS 3
POSITIONING STATEMENT 4
ELEVATOR SPEECH 4
MISSION STATEMENT 5
TAGLINE 6
CORE MESSAGES..... 7
INSTIUTIONAL POSITIONING RECOMMENDATIONS..... 7

APPENDICES

SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER AND FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH10
EVALUATION OF COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITIES13
EXAMPLES OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS RECOMMENDATIONS.....15
PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH.....16

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Over the course of its history, the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES) has built a well-deserved, excellent reputation among several target audiences, including natural resource managers, scientists, non-government organizations and funders. Words like “credible,” “honest broker,” “cutting-edge” and “innovation” are used to describe UMCES. Many also describe the institution as a “hidden gem,” and we agree. Because while audiences who are aware of UMCES have a very positive perception of the institution, few are fully aware of *all* aspects of what UMCES does.

For example, some of these external audiences are familiar with UMCES’ research, but know nothing about its graduate program. Some know of its graduate program but remain unaware of its public policy work. Others are familiar with UMCES’ efforts in the Chesapeake Bay region but know little about its work around the world.

During our evaluation of UMCES’ positioning and how others see the organization and its core benefits, we were reminded of the old Indian fable about the blind men and the elephant; each one describing a different part of the beast but none able to provide the entire picture.

The strength of UMCES comes from its diversity in research and academic resources—its four regional labs, Maryland Sea Grant, the Integrated Application Network and specialists recognized as leaders in the field of environmental science. Likewise, UMCES research ranges from the Appalachian mountains to the Arctic, from fisheries to climate change. However, this strength is also one of UMCES’ greatest identity challenges: how to make sure UMCES is seen as a connected institution and not just separate moving parts.

Both UMCES staff and its external supporters find it difficult to describe the institution. When we asked various stakeholders, “what is UMCES?” answers often began with the phrase: “We are not...” For example, “We are not College Park,” “We are not a state agency,” “We do not do undergraduate education,” “We don’t just work in the Chesapeake Bay.” Many also started their answer with “It’s complicated...”

While the network of separate labs is significantly more unified now than in UMCES’ past, and, for example, uses consistent stationery, the UMCES logo and email signatures, the disconnect between the labs and UMCES remains a major challenge. For example, some labs have their own websites and social media accounts that do not necessarily always reflect UMCES branding. The independent, autonomous nature of UMCES’ regional laboratories is an essential part of its identity. However, we firmly believe that UMCES will be a stronger institution when its regional facilities are perceived as integral, collaborative parts of a whole; in turn, a stronger, more united institution will make each individual lab stronger, particularly when it comes to competing for funding and research dollars, recruiting graduate students and communicating with the public.

Another identity issue that is both a strength and potential weakness is the strong association of UMCES with its highly regarded president. President Don Boesch has an enviable reputation, shared

by many of UMCES' high-visibility staff. But, in fact, the institution has a long history of renowned leaders among the world of Chesapeake Bay and ecosystem science, and Dr. Boesch is just of the latest of these.

UMCES must demonstrate that the organization is strong, not just because of its individual leaders, but because *its leaders reflect the strength and unique benefits of the institution itself*. After all, part of UMCES' mission is to bring up the next generation of leaders—this is true for UMCES in total, not just its graduate program. UMCES must remind key audiences about its nearly 90-year history of leadership in the scientific community—a legacy that will continue during transitions.

Throughout our review, we were repeatedly struck by how many things UMCES is already doing well. UMCES has a clear and compelling five-year strategic plan, many of its communications outreach activities (such as the annual report, e-newsletter, IAN fact sheets and *Chesapeake Quarterly*) are strong and persuasive (see Appendices for more details). Clearly, UMCES is seen as a credible source for Maryland media, but media outreach could be expanded to the wider Chesapeake Bay region.

UMCES must be able to more clearly articulate its primary mission and what makes the institution so uniquely valuable to continue to receive support from the state, in order to compete for funding for research, attract outstanding faculty and increase graduate enrollment. With a well-crafted positioning statement and agreed-upon core messages, as well as key steps outlined in the specific recommendations that follow, we believe you can achieve these goals.

Note: In addition to this institutional positioning work, The Hatcher Group has developed a separate but complementary strategic marketing program for the UMCES graduate program. While graduate students are a core audience in this positioning work; we do not detail how to reach them specifically here—detailed recommendations will be included in the marketing plan.

METHODOLOGY

For this work, we conducted three facilitated discussions in a focus group format with internal UMCES stakeholders (executive council, steering committee and board of visitors), followed by one-on-one telephone interviews with four additional internal stakeholders. We conducted individual in-person or phone interviews with 12 external stakeholders representing funders, Maryland state agencies, environmental science leaders outside of Maryland and alumni in leadership positions. Through these facilitated discussions and interviews, we probed questions about the center's identity, its unique values, target audiences and their perceptions of UMCES as well as the role of UMCES within the environmental science field today. We also conducted a focus group and an online survey with current UMCES graduate students. In addition, we conducted a site visit to the Chesapeake Biological Lab's Visitor's Center.

In addition, we reviewed UMCES' strategic plans, messaging and branding documents, as well as communications activities such as annual reports, newsletters, website and social media outreach. To round out our work, we researched recent public opinion surveys about Marylanders and the environment. More details on our research and review can be found in the appendices.

TARGET AUDIENCES

In all of its work, UMCES needs to prioritize who its target audiences are in order to use resources wisely. For example, whether considering message placement in publications or deciding which conferences to send staff, these key audiences matter most. Based on our discussions and research, we believe UMCES should focus its outreach efforts primarily on these distinct groups:

- Natural resource managers, decision-makers and elected officials (local, state and federal)
- Environmental scientists
- Internal UMCES stakeholders, including faculty
- Graduate students (former, current and future)
- Environmental non-governmental organizations
- Current and potential donors
- Interested public

MESSAGING GOALS

Messaging opportunities for a large institution are practically infinite, so defining overarching goals to shape UMCES' messaging and communications work will help UMCES focus on the most important outcomes. The organization should concentrate its efforts on achieving the goals that will do the most to help identify what UMCES is and to best position the institution in the marketplace (in other words, to demonstrate why UMCES is different from its competition and how).

In evaluating all the potential communications priorities that could be recommended for UMCES, these are the goals that seemed most important at this time. These goals represent the communications needs that should most immediately be addressed. All of the recommendations in this document are intended to help you meet these goals.

We urge you to adopt these overarching messaging goals and consider them as you work on all communications and public outreach efforts. When you are attempting to reach external or internal audiences, ask how many of these goals are being met? If a project does not further one or more of these goals, its value and importance should be re-evaluated.

1. Clearly define what UMCES is and what its unique values are
2. Train staff and board on messaging—get everyone on the same page
3. Educate key audiences about all aspects of UMCES: research, education, resource management advice and public outreach/communication
4. Demonstrate the human connection to UMCES' work

POSITIONING STATEMENT

A positioning statement is an internal statement that defines an organization and how it distinguishes itself from the competition. It succinctly defines a product's target audience and marketplace, its unique benefits and reasons to believe in a particular brand.

The positioning statement is the foundation from which other UMCES messaging is built. As we developed this positioning statement, we felt we needed to address UMCES' two distinct audience groups, so we created two internal positioning statements, one appropriate for each. UMCES internal staff should be comfortable with both.

Use the positioning statements to remain focused when creating marketing and other public-facing documents and communications. Use it to help you talk about UMCES with potential graduate students, faculty or non-governmental organizations. Challenge whether existing initiatives, materials and talking points fit and deliver on the intended positioning.

Research and Education

- **For faculty and graduate students**, UMCES conducts cutting-edge research and applies practical science to solve today's environmental problems, in the Chesapeake Bay and around the globe, through an immersive educational experience. Unlike other environmental science institutions, UMCES works across disciplines and in diverse settings to actively investigate pressing issues and discover solutions that improve people's lives and our natural world.

Resource Management Advice and Public Outreach/Communication

- **For professionals working to understand and manage our natural resources**, UMCES conducts unbiased, cutting-edge research to solve today's problems, in the Chesapeake Bay and around the globe. Unlike other environmental organizations, UMCES has expert staff—from its president to its faculty and graduate students—who are credible advisors with the skills and authority to connect environmental science to policy solutions and public outreach. At home, UMCES is the "scientific conscience" of the Chesapeake Bay restoration effort.

"ELEVATOR SPEECH"

An elevator speech is an external statement meant to explain how the organization accomplishes its mission. As the name suggests, this statement should be used to inform an audience about the organization as thoroughly as possible in a very short period of time, and it should be used consistently and comfortably by all.

The elevator speech should easily roll off the tongue of every faculty and staff member. It's the answer when someone asks, "What do you do?" or "UMCES, what's that?" If it doesn't roll off the

tongue, tweak it until it feels right in natural conversation. Your chief “ambassadors,” such as Board Members and top-level executive staff should feel comfortable giving this speech.

The University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES) is the premier research and educational institute working to understand and manage our world’s natural resources.

UMCES’ collaborative network of four regional laboratories and Maryland Sea Grant College investigate and respond to today’s most pressing environmental concerns, using cutting-edge science to discover solutions to challenges in the Chesapeake Bay and around the world.

Our top-notch faculty educates the next generation of science leaders through a unique, interdisciplinary and immersive learning experience, awarding degrees jointly with the University of Maryland, College Park. UMCES also provides unbiased research to advise and inform public policy, and we help Marylanders understand their connection to our extraordinary ecosystem.

MISSION STATEMENT

UMCES is in need of a consistent mission statement— a short, written description about what you do and why. A mission statement should describe how you are achieving your vision for the future. What does UMCES want world to look like—and how are you working to make that world a reality?

In our communications review, we found that UMCES has used a variety of mission-like statements. The mission statement used in the past two annual reports focuses on its Maryland charter mission, whereas on the website a five-page document includes a three-paragraph mission statement.

Because it is outside the scope of this work, and is something that leadership should be wholly involved in, we do not attempt to re-write the mission statement here. However, we recommend that UMCES senior staff undergo a deliberate process to re-evaluate your current mission statement and work together to describe your common vision for the future. From this work, you should develop a concise and compelling mission statement that is ideally no more than three sentences long.

Here are some examples of strong mission statements (with examples from both within UMCES’ field and outside of it):

- Blue Water Baltimore’s mission is to restore the quality of Baltimore’s rivers, streams and harbor to foster a healthy environment, a strong economy and thriving communities.
- The Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution is dedicated to research and education to advance understanding of the ocean and its interaction with the Earth system, and to communicating this understanding for the benefit of society.

- (Scripps Institution of Oceanography) The Scripps mission is to seek, teach, and communicate scientific understanding of the oceans, atmosphere, Earth, and other planets for the benefit of society and the environment.
- (National Public Radio) To work in partnership with member stations to create a more informed public – one challenged and invigorated by a deeper understanding and appreciation of events, ideas and cultures.
- The W.K. Kellogg Foundation supports children, families and communities as they strengthen and create conditions that propel vulnerable children to achieve success as individuals and as contributors to the larger community and society.

TAGLINE

An organization's tagline can be an important component of its identity and branding. Some organizations incorporate a tagline as part of their logo treatment and some use it case-by-case when space allows. A good tagline should work together with and add clarity to the organization's name, to elaborate what the organization does.

We have seen several different UMCES taglines in use. A tagline is only effective if it is used consistently to help brand the organization. To firmly establish its identity, UMCES needs to choose and use one consistent tagline. While many of these taglines are compelling, we don't believe any single one of them does enough to explain *what* UMCES does.

UMCES taglines and where they are being used:

- Knowledge is our best natural resource (UMCES website)
- Globally eminent, locally relevant (strategic plan)
- Science for the Bay and Beyond (2013 annual appeal)
- Guiding our state, nation, and the world toward a more sustainable future (Maryland Public Television; Chesapeake Biological Lab donation envelope)
- Science for Solutions (media interview series)

Here are some recommended taglines for your consideration:

- Discovering, teaching and applying practical solutions to benefit our natural world
- Advancing solutions through science, learning and public understanding
- Educating and innovating to improve our natural resources
- Discovering, teaching and applying practical solutions for Chesapeake Bay and beyond

In addition to the options listed above, the UMCES' 90th anniversary provides you with an opportunity to adopt a new tagline, at least for one year that recognizes this achievement. Here are some options to consider:

- Celebrating a legacy of innovation and a focus on the future of our natural resources
- Celebrating 90 years of leadership to understand and improve our natural resources

- Celebrating 90 years of innovation, while envisioning the future for our natural world

CORE MESSAGES

The following are core messages about UMCES that we have attempted to capture in the positioning statement and elevator speech but are expanded upon here.

The core messages should be incorporated into your communications and outreach work. The ideas or actual language may be used as in promotional materials, publications, commentaries, on the website and in conversation. These messages allow all UMCES staff and partners to convey the key messaging goals to target audiences in a consistent way. Whether the President of UMCES or a first-year graduate student, anyone can and should use these messages when speaking or writing about UMCES.

- UMCES solves problems facing our natural environment, at home and around the world.
- UMCES' top-notch staff, faculty and students stand out amongst their peers, developing solutions for ecosystems from the Chesapeake Bay to the Arctic using cutting-edge research.
- UMCES' network of labs and research facilities across Maryland and around the world are intensely collaborative.
- UMCES offers interdisciplinary, immersive education for the next generation of environmental researchers.
- UMCES supports its home state—it is a major resource and asset for Maryland.
- UMCES is a highly responsive, nimble organization.
- UMCES is an independent, trusted advisor for environmental science investigations and policy recommendations.
- UMCES places a high value on communicating environmental science challenges and solutions to the public.
- UMCES' scientific research provides the backbone of key Bay restoration milestones.

INSTITUTIONAL POSITIONING RECOMMENDATIONS

Invest in Tools and Resources

- UMCES is very large institution, and it requires time and diligence to maintain communications with both the public and internal audiences. Be sure your communications work has appropriate resources (particularly staff) and planning lead time.
- Consider more formal internal communications policies and outreach to keep the regional labs and research facilities connected and “on the same page.” This could include dedicating at least half of one staff person’s time to internal communications. We include specific examples of internal communications strategies in the Appendices.
- Overhaul your existing communications activities based on new positioning materials to make sure messaging is implemented uniformly across all activities. This would include a website language audit, a brochure that could be used by the board of visitors, a press packet and blurb for the bottom of press releases and for inclusion in publications.

- Work to educate and engage the board of visitors so they can serve as public spokespeople for UMCES. They are eager to be equipped with communications tools to act as ambassadors for the organization.
- Create a flow chart or infographic for UMCES that clearly shows how the research facilities, IAN, Sea Grant, MEES and the University System of Maryland all work together. This should also show UMCES' role on the Bay Cabinet, in BayStat, etc. This visual tool will go a long way to helping to explain what UMCES is and how all of the revolving parts interact.
- To demonstrate the many accomplishments of UMCES over its history, create what some have called a “greatest hits” or “top 10” achievements list for use on the web and in print. This could be depicted using a timeline format. Based on our interviews with internal and external stakeholders, this list could include work on nutrient pollution, submerged aquatic vegetation, *pfiesteria*, dredging, oysters, etc.

Establish Your Identity

- There have been discussions about changing UMCES' name, and we advise that leadership continues that discussion. While this would be a major undertaking, many stakeholders remarked that, with regional research facilities as well as work around the world, and no single, physical central location, “center” is not an accurate word. Possible other terms could include: institute, network or collaborative. Also, given the confusion with the University of Maryland, College Park, you may not want to begin your name with the phrase “University of Maryland.”
- Next year's 90th anniversary will provide many opportunities to shine a light on UMCES, its history and identity. This would be an ideal time to release a timeline or “greatest hits” list or unveil a new name or begin to consistently use a new tagline.
- Some stakeholders recommended that the institution make more of an effort to “share the wealth” when it comes to exposing other UMCES staff to opportunities for public policy engagement. This would also broaden UMCES' identity and provide a more robust interaction with policymakers.
- Throughout this document, we use the UMCES acronym. We have seen UMCES referred to as “the Center” in some documents, and we attempted to use this abbreviation in stakeholder interviews, but we found that using “the Center” caused confusion. Stakeholders familiar with the organization are comfortable with UMCES. For communications and marketing materials, as much as possible, we recommend spelling out the full name: University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science. When pressed for space, use UMCES.

Make Connections

- Many internal and external stakeholders talked about the need for UMCES to delve more deeply into social sciences and/or to talk about the human connections to the work that is being done. IAN is involved with work in this arena. Be sure to include this element whenever possible. For example, UMCES' work is connected to improving local economies, fisheries and agriculture. Bring this connection home to the public.
- Forge stronger ties to the communities surrounding regional labs and facilities to increase local awareness of UMCES. Many stakeholders that felt local residents and even regional

media outlets did not know what UMCES was or what type of work was occurring at its facilities. This could involve reaching out more frequently to local media, offering more frequent public tours and “open houses,” participating in speakers’ bureaus and more.

- When fundraising, stress that funding is for projects, as well as for future leaders. Some stakeholders said they would not be interested in specifically funding graduate students. Indicate how the money will be used, what the research entails and the ultimate solutions that donors can help to make happen.
- A strong message for potential donors who want to contribute to the Chesapeake Bay
- Restoration effort, but who may be reluctant to support advocacy organizations, is to demonstrate how UMCES’ science and research is intrinsically connected to the restoration work, and that by funding UMCES they support this work in a fundamental way—but the institution remains unbiased and objective.

APPENDICES

SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER AND FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH

For this work, we conducted four focus-group type facilitated discussions with internal UMCES stakeholders (executive council, steering committee and board of visitors) followed by one-on-one telephone interviews with four additional internal stakeholders. The participants included:

UMCES Executive Council

- Don Boesch
- Bill Dennison
- Liz Freeland
- Russell Hill
- Ed Houde
- Tom Miller
- Ray Morgan
- Fredrika Moser
- Dave Nemazie
- Mike Roman

UMCES Steering Committee

- Melissa Andreychek
- Jeff Brainerd
- Sarah Brzezinski
- Lee Cooper
- Andrew Elmore
- Matt Fitzpatrick
- Anne Gauzens
- Lara Lapham
- Jamie Pierson
- Eric Schott
- Guy Stevens

UMCES Board of Visitors

- Paul Allen
- Tom Buckmaster
- Paul Fischer
- Tom Lignan
- Charlie Monk
- Kathy Quattrone
- Eileen Straughan

- David Wallace

Current UMCES Students

- Jeanette Davis
- Emily Flowers
- Brian Gallagher
- Dave Kazyak
- Jenna Leuk
- Robert Sabo
- Danielle Zaveta

We also conducted individual in-person or phone interviews with 12 external stakeholders representing funders, Maryland state agencies, environmental science leaders outside of Maryland and alumni in leadership positions. Participants included:

- Dr. Holly Bamford, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- Rich Batuik, EPA Chesapeake Bay Program
- Dr. Craig Carlson, University of California Santa Barbara
- Kim Coble, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
- Verna Harrison, Keith Campbell Foundation
- Tom O'Connell, Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources
- Joe Gill, Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources
- John Griffin, Governor O'Malley's Office
- Dr. Denise Reed, The Water Institute of the Gulf
- Dr. Don Scavia, Graham Environmental Sustainability Institute
- Dr. Bob Summers, Maryland Dept. of the Environment
- Dr. John Wells, Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences

These facilitated discussions and interviews informed much of our recommendations regarding UMCES' identity and messaging. Many of the comments about UMCES, which we work to address in the institutional positioning document, fell into areas relating to:

Identity

In all focus groups and one-on-one interviews, stakeholders agreed that it was difficult to describe UMCES, particularly due to the diversity in geography and areas of work (research, education, resource management advice and public outreach/communication). Many commented that the name itself was a problem.

We heard things such as: "We have 70 faculty – sometimes feels like there are 70 other business units," "Our name is somewhat torturous," "We are an odd institution," "It's a research institute—the word Center is misleading and confusing," "There are regional labs, but is UMCES more than the sum of their parts?" and "When introducing a foundation to UMCES, it can take three or four meetings to explain what UMCES does."

Another common theme was that not enough people know what UMCES does, or they are unaware of all aspects of UMCES. For example: “Not enough people know what they do,” “They are the best kept secret in Maryland environmental work,” and “They are not just fish and crab guys.”

Integrity

Overwhelmingly, external interviewees had a very positive perception of the independent, unbiased role that UMCES plays providing resource management advice.

Participants said: “Other states have interest and envy that Maryland has this scientific arm,” “UMCES is seen as an honest broker,” “Their willingness to engage the problem and come up with practical solutions is unique—their research won’t take five years,” and “They are unbiased... credible.”

Leadership

Over and over, external interviewees said the people at UMCES were its greatest strength. Many interviewees singled out President Boesch and felt the institution’s identity was strongly linked with him. Other highly visible leaders, such as Dave Nemazie and Bill Dennison, were mentioned repeatedly.

For example: “What is UMCES? I see Don as the identity,” “Their biggest strength is they have very strong researchers—but they manage to work together. They seem to have gotten beyond the ‘prima donna’ thing at other institutions,” and “Their strength is the group of scientists, but they need to share the wealth and knowledge. It can’t just be the Don and Bill show.”

Unique Graduate Experience

Various audiences described the unique, interdisciplinary and immersive experience of UMCES graduate students as being one of UMCES’ strengths. Faculty described themselves as “mentors” to students rather than just advisors.

Comments included: “UMCES is not traditional teaching, not traditional research,” “All staff are theoretically field workers,” “We don’t have graduate students, we mentor students—they are more like colleagues,” and “You don’t need to make an appointment for a week from now with your college advisor—you can pop in anytime... here you are sitting in the lab with your mentors every day.”

Bay Restoration Role

UMCES is seen as key leader in the Chesapeake Bay restoration effort, providing the science that resource managers and nongovernmental organizations need to fulfill their missions. Several stakeholders described UMCES as always being responsive to requests, but said they wished UMCES would do even more to help the effort.

For example: “Restoration efforts have to be based on scientific explanation. UMCES has been front and center on so many important issues affecting the Bay,” “They are our strongest collaborator on the Chesapeake Bay,” “They are the ‘scientific conscience’ of Bay restoration work,” “If we lost them, it would hurt,” and “We wished they weighed in on things more, because we value what they do.”

EVALUTION OF COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITIES

For this work, we reviewed various UMCES communications activities. While the scope of work does not include a complete communications audit and plan, here we share some general observations and recommendations for your consideration.

Publications

UMCES' print publications, such as the annual report, strategic plan, IAN public outreach materials and *Chesapeake Quarterly* are very professional, easy-to-read and effectively geared toward target audiences. Many external stakeholders praised these materials and said they use them and, in particular, appreciate IAN's work to communicate complex scientific issues with the public.

Media Relations

In Maryland, UMCES certainly seems to be a valued resource for the media, and press releases are professional, well-written and timely. If the communications staff resources allowed, UMCES would only be better served by doing more proactive work to engage the media. Local media outlets surrounding the regional laboratories could be one target. Outside of Maryland, UMCES could do more to reach reporters writing in the Chesapeake Bay watershed region (Delaware, Virginia and Pennsylvania in particular) as well as national media covering ecosystem, clean water and climate change news.

Regular opinion pieces from UMCES leadership, as well as business profiles of President Boesch, could help the institution reach broader audiences and strengthen its identity. Additionally, the 90th anniversary provides opportunities for feature stories about the history of the institution.

E-Newsletter

Environmental Insights, UMCES' email newsletter, is visually attractive and effective and follows many best practices (doesn't arrive too frequently, features some—but not too many—photos, good selection of articles, is not likely to be flagged as spam, etc.) It also highlights a good variety work from the regional facilities.

Website

The UMCES website serves a variety of purposes for different sets of audiences (scientists, faculty and staff, students, policymakers, etc.). But it is not functioning as efficiently as it could. UMCES' website is often the first place someone goes to learn about the institution, and that first impression is critical. The following recommendations are designed to help reorganize the website so that visitors can locate the most relevant information while highlighting UMCES' outstanding work.

- Improve search functions. Develop the ability to search for research based on issue, geographic area or lab as well as to locate faculty members and their area of expertise.

- Refine the “About” section to better explain UMCES’ role as an educational institution as well as an environmental research institution.
- Highlight news and research relevant to policymakers and potential funders.
- Separate UMCES websites (Horn Point Oyster Hatchery, Integration Application Network) should use the same design and templates as the main UMCES website, so they appear seamlessly integrated. The blue UMCES logo should be used and the general aesthetic of all microsities should be consistent with UMCES branding.

Social Media (Facebook and Twitter)

UMCES has a large fan base on Facebook and has been posting a lot of content regularly. However, it is not seeing the amount of engagement that could be expected with so many fans. Many posts went untouched or received little interaction. While UMCES’ Twitter account has a decent amount of followers, what is more important is that it is reaching the most influential followers and engaging in an active conversation with users in the twittersphere.

The following recommendations will help make UMCES’ Facebook and Twitter content more appealing to its fans, encouraging interaction and boosting the page’s reach to more users’ networks. As more fans interact, their friends will learn about the page, helping to boost UMCES’ overall audience and impact.

- Post more images. Research shows visual content works best on Facebook. We suggest creating photo, graphic or video content when possible.
- Preface links and photos with a bit of text to give context. Tell your audience why they should be interested in the article or photo you’re posting.
- Interact more. Develop a list of other organization pages to Like as a page, and then follow their content and share it to the UMCES page. Liking and commenting on other pages’ content will get your name out there, and engaging with other pages will increase your connections.
- Horn Point Laboratory Oyster Hatchery has its own Facebook page with 606 Likes and a very interactive following. The Institute of Marine and Environmental Technology has 109 likes and is updated once or twice a month. In order to maximize UMCES’ social media efforts, we recommend combining these two accounts with the main UMCES Facebook page. UMCES’ Facebook page should contain posts that are of interest to all of its labs and should display the range of work its students and researchers are producing to share with the diverse audiences that will visit the page. Having one centralized Facebook page will also allow labs to feel more connected to UMCES as well as with one another. Although the labs are already separated geographically, their interaction and connection to each other does not need to be so separate on social media. With that said, we recommend approaching this integration with sensitivity, especially with Horn Point. Because Horn Point has such a strong Facebook following—with regular updates and consistent interaction with its fans—any integration needs to be done in phases, with clear communication to fans that their community is not going away; just that it’s moving to a different platform.

- For both Facebook and Twitter, build a dashboard to track metrics on a monthly basis. This can be a simple spreadsheet recording subscriber and interaction totals each month. This tool will help identify what worked particularly well the previous month to help continuously improve engagement over time. The Hatcher Group could help set this up and populate it if necessary.
- Retweet other users' content more frequently. We recommend an average of eight tweets per day spread out throughout the day – four original tweets and four retweets. Retweeting and interacting shows others that you are interested in what they have to say and will encourage them to engage with your content more often.
- Use stronger hashtags to get in front of wider audiences. Use a tool like hashtagify.me to identify popular hashtags related to your topics. Many of your tweets do not contain any hashtags and face the risk of disappearing in the overwhelming amount of buzz on Twitter.
- Consider hosting your own Twitter chat. This could be centered around one specific event or could be a weekly or monthly occurrence. Twitter chats are a great way to boost reach by filling your followers' feeds and catching their attention for retweets.

EXAMPLES OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that UMCES consider instituting more formal internal communications systems and processes in order to increase collaboration and consistency, particularly when it comes to institutional identity and messaging, among the regional facilities. Here are just a few examples of recommendations that we have made when preparing internal communications plans for other nonprofit organizations. While they are not tailored to UMCES specifically, we think they could be a starting place for consideration.

- Identify Clear Goals: A strong internal communications system should streamline information and methods of conveying information, connect employees to leaders, co-workers and the organization's story and mission and set measurable goals and ways to measure progress.
- Assign Staff: Designate one full-time staffer to managing internal communications, or at least one staff person who can spend half of their time focusing on this responsibility.
- Seek Feedback through a Survey: Start by conducting a survey of all staff to ask questions such as: How well do staff members understand the organization's mission and their roles in achieving it? How well does the organization communicate with staff members? What channels exist for cross-team communications? Which existing tools work well, and which need to be improved? What new tools or products would be useful?
- Implement an Effective Intranet: An easy-to-use, frequently updated intranet site is a key source for employee information. A website content coordinator should update the site, manage and oversee all site updates and track usage to identify further areas for improvement. Some intranet websites include social media and/or direct message "chat" style functions that allow staff to communicate online without using email.

- Establish Clear Email Procedures: Establish and follow best practices for all-staff email communications. These could cover such topics as subject lines, the number of all-staff emails, or identifying prime times for disseminating all-staff emails.
- Provide Regular Updates from Leadership: Create and send regularly internal, HTML-designed newsletters and notes from CEO, President and/or other leaders.
- Consider Town Halls: Hold staff town-hall style meetings to impart important information and solicit feedback from employees, while also putting employees in the same room as the CEO, which is important for ground-level engagement.
- Build a Learning/Sharing Culture: Create more work-related learning sessions for staff, i.e. peer-led brown bag lunches, professional development series, small-group staff discussions or luncheons with the CEOs for new hires and at different geographic locations or departmental units. This would strengthen relationships and coordination between different departments and locations while encouraging professional development.

PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

To further inform our work, we researched recent polling and public opinion surveys about the Chesapeake Bay and general environmental issues. We were particularly interested in Maryland polling data, but did expand our research beyond the state. Below are some key findings that we thought were relevant to UMCES work. Hyperlinks to the full polling information is included below where available or attached at the end of this document.

Opinion Works – Chesapeake Bay Trust: Marylanders’ Attitudes about Environmental Stewardship Interviews with 1,005 randomly-selected adult residents of Maryland by telephone December 20-28, 2010, yielding a margin of sampling error of no more than $\pm 3.1\%$. (see attachment)

- Marylanders have a high interest in the Bay and say they think about Bay restoration often, and 49 percent say they are more interested in hearing about the Chesapeake Bay today than a few years ago.
- Marylanders place a high priority on protection of the natural environment. Fifty-five percent of Marylanders place their concern for the natural environment “above average” or “at the top” of their priorities.
- Nearly three-quarters of Marylanders (71 percent) believe that government regulation is necessary to deal with the problem. Only 22 percent think the problem can be fixed with incentives and voluntary actions alone.

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates – The Nature Conservancy: The Language of Conservation 2013: Updated Recommendations on How to Communicate Effectively to Build Support for Conservation (see attachment)

Based on three major national surveys over the last decade. The most recent was completed in June 2012 with 800 registered voters throughout the United States conducted on both traditional land--lines and cell phones. The margin of error associated with a sample of this type is + 3.8%. Previous surveys were conducted in 2009 and 2004. The 2009 survey was preceded

by eight focus groups conducted among a variety of audiences, including voters of color, in Kansas City, MO; Denver, CO; Charlotte, NC; and Tampa, FL.

- Voters respond to a future generations message, phrases that imply ownership or inclusion, such as “our” and “we,” and they recognize the benefit of federal government in managing lands and waters.
- DO NOT use the term “ecosystem services.” The term “ecosystem services” does not adequately convey the concept to less knowledgeable audiences. Few voters spend time visiting “ecosystems” – they visit forests, wetlands, rivers, deserts and mountains.
- DO position ecosystem services as a way of acknowledging the long-term impacts of resource decisions. Voters regularly express frustration that decisions about land use and resource management are too often made with short-term convenience and profitability in mind, rather than a long-term evaluation of a community’s needs. The “nature’s benefits” framework can be positioned as a way of helping decision makers understand – and take into account – the longer-term impacts that decisions about resource use can have on a community’s health and safety.

<i>Bad Words to Avoid</i>	<i>Good Words to Use</i>
<i>Environment</i>	<i>Land, air and water</i>
<i>Ecosystems</i>	<i>Natural areas</i>
<i>Biodiversity / endangered species</i>	<i>Fish and wildlife</i>
<i>Regulations</i>	<i>Safeguards/protections</i>
<i>Riparian</i>	<i>Land along lakes, rivers and streams</i>
<i>Aquifer</i>	<i>Groundwater</i>
<i>Watershed</i>	<i>Land around rivers, lakes and streams</i>
<i>Environmental groups</i>	<i>Conservation groups / organizations protecting land, air, and water</i>
<i>Agricultural land</i>	<i>Working farms and ranches</i>
<i>Urban sprawl</i>	<i>Poorly planned growth/ development</i>
<i>Green jobs</i>	<i>Clean energy jobs/jobs protecting water quality/etc.</i>

Maryland Schaefer Center Annual Policy Choices Survey [\(link\)](#)

Comprised of 815 telephone interviews with Maryland residents from across the state who were at least 21 years of age. Interviews were conducted between September 23, 2009 and October 22, 2009. The margin of error is +3.43% for all analyses, unless otherwise noted.

When read a list of possible threats to the Chesapeake Bay (presented in a random order) and asked to classify the potential impact of each on the Chesapeake Bay, respondents identified industrial

discharge (80 percent) sewage treatment plants (69 percent) and farm runoff (60 percent) as the top three most serious threats to the health of the Bay.

- Concerns about stormwater runoff from urban areas saw the highest jump in perceived impact as 56 percent of respondents felt it had a major impact on the health of the Chesapeake Bay, up from 44 percent the previous year. The percentage of respondents who thought automobile emissions were a major problem decreased from 46 percent last year to 35 percent this year.

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates and Public Opinion Strategies - Chesapeake Bay Foundation – Virginia Voter Support for Policies to Protect the Chesapeake Bay ([link](#))

From July 21-24, 2013, 601 telephone interviews – on landlines and on cell phones – with voters in Virginia likely to cast ballots in November 2013. The margin of sampling error at the 95% confidence interval is +/- 4.0%; margins of error for subgroups within the sample will be higher.

- 96 percent believe the state government plays an important role in ensuring clean water.
- 86 percent consider the bay "a priority" for the state, while 83 percent agree conditions are "improving but still need help."
- 72 percent say the state can protect water quality without sacrificing a strong economy, while 23 percent say the two goals are in conflict.

To: Allen Hance, Executive Director
Chesapeake Bay Trust

From: Steve Raabe, OpinionWorks

Date: February 7, 2011

Subject: Marylanders' Attitudes about Environmental Stewardship:
Results from Our Statewide Survey

Background

This memorandum summarizes the findings of our statewide survey recently conducted for the Chesapeake Bay Trust. The survey explored attitudes and behaviors related to protecting the Bay and its tributaries. Respondents were *not* told that the survey was sponsored by the Chesapeake Bay Trust or that it concerned environmental issues, so as not to bias their responses.

OpinionWorks interviewed 1,005 randomly-selected adult residents of Maryland by telephone December 20-28, 2010, yielding a margin of sampling error of no more than $\pm 3.1\%$ at the 95% confidence level. This means that, if every adult citizen of Maryland had been interviewed, the true results would fall within that range at least 95% of the time.

Strict sampling quotas were established for nine major jurisdictions and regions of the state, and the final sample was weighted to accurately reflect the distribution of Maryland's adult population for key indicators including race/ethnicity, age, and gender, according to the latest population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Findings

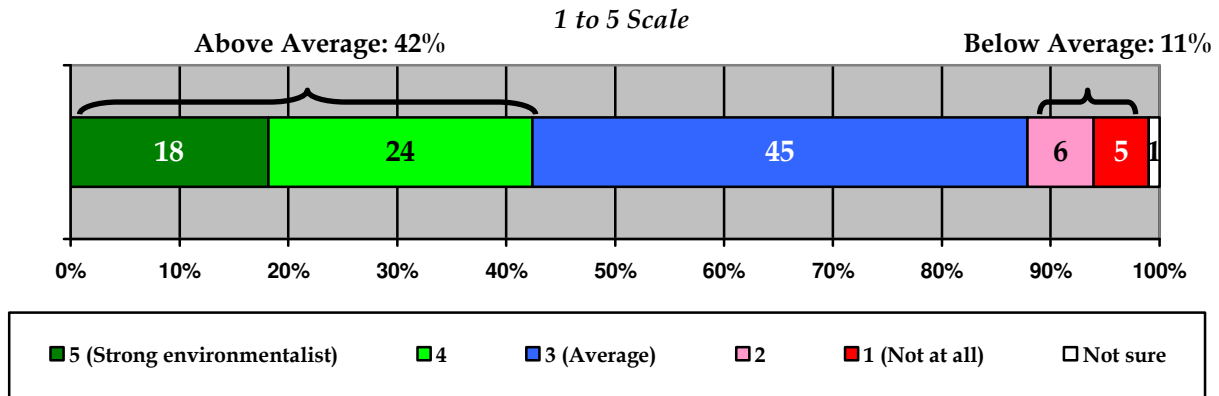
An Environmentally-Minded State

On a 1 to 5 scale of environmentalism, nearly one in five Marylanders (18%) place themselves at a "5," or a "strong environmentalist." Another one-quarter of the public (24%) places itself at a "4" on that scale, totaling 42% of the public who consider themselves above average on an environmental scale.

Only one-fourth as many (11%) place themselves below average at a "1" or a "2" on the scale. Forty-five percent of Marylanders consider themselves average environmentalists ("3").

(See chart, next page.)

A Self-Assessment of Environmentalism



“On a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 is a strong environmentalist, 3 is average, and 1 is not an environmentalist at all, where would you put yourself?”

As a basic measure of how tuned in Marylanders are to broader environmental issues, nearly two-thirds (63%) say they know what a “carbon footprint” is. Nine in ten Marylanders (91%) can picture the closest stream, creek, or body of water to their home, and nearly one-half of Marylanders (44%) can name a watershed in which they live.

Water Pollution the Top Environmental Concern of Marylanders

We tested eight broad environmental concerns to determine how Marylanders perceive them, from global warming to hazardous waste sites to loss of natural habitat. Topping this list, and rated as a problem by nine out of ten Marylanders, is “water pollution in rivers, streams, and the Chesapeake Bay.”

Environmental Concerns of Marylanders

	Very Serious Problem	Somewhat Serious	Total
Water pollution in rivers, streams and the Chesapeake Bay	64%	27%	91%
Loss of natural habitat, such as wetlands and forests	52%	30%	82%
Air pollution	38%	39%	77%
Sprawl or poorly planned growth and development	30%	43%	73%
Contaminants in your drinking water or food	45%	24%	69%
Global warming or climate change	37%	28%	65%
Landfills, incinerators, or hazardous waste sites in or near your neighborhood	28%	23%	51%
Lead paint or other toxins in your home	29%	11%	40%

“Do you consider each of the following to be a very serious problem, somewhat serious problem, not much of a problem, or not a problem at all?”

Two-thirds of Marylanders (64%) believe that water pollution is “a very serious problem.” Another 27% call the problem of water pollution “somewhat serious,” for a total of 91%

Next on the list is “loss of natural habitat such as wetlands and forests” at 82%, with a majority of Marylanders (52%) calling that a very serious problem.

“Air pollution” (77%) and “sprawl or poorly planned growth and development” (73%) are next, followed by “contaminants in your drinking water or food” (69%) and “global warming or climate change” (65%). The issue of contaminants in food and water is distinguished by the fact that it rates the third highest number of people calling it a “very serious problem” at 45%.

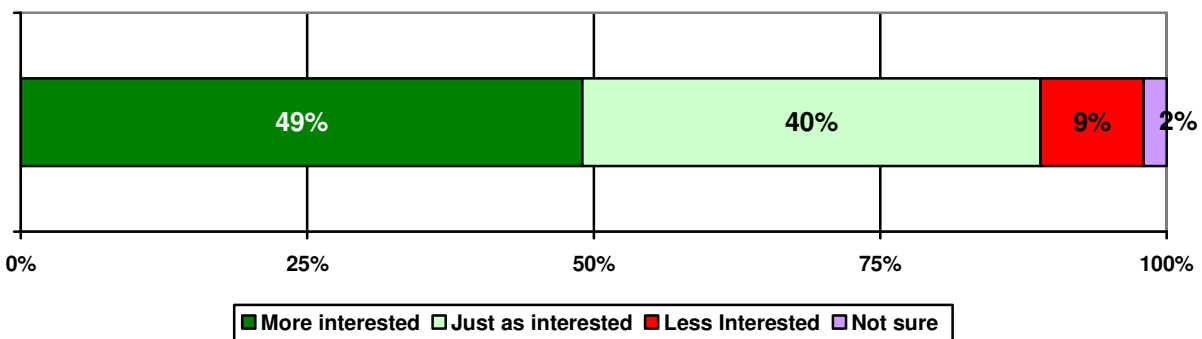
Somewhat lower are “landfills, incinerators, or hazardous waste sites in or near your neighborhood” (51%) and “lead paint or other toxins in your home” (40%).

Continued High Interest in the Bay

Not only do Marylanders rank restoration of the Bay and local rivers and streams extremely high on their list of environmental priorities, but they think about these issues frequently and want to hear more about them.

- Two-thirds of the public think “often” (25%) or “sometimes” (40%) about “the health of our local waters.”
- Half of all Marylanders (49%) say they are “more interested...in hearing about the health of the Chesapeake Bay” today compared to a few years ago. That is five times as many as say they are less interested (9%). Forty percent remain just as interested in the Bay as they always have been, for a total of nine Marylanders in ten who want to hear as much or more about the health of the Bay compared to a few years ago.

Interest in Hearing about the Health of the Bay
Today Compared to a Few Years Ago



“Compared to a few years ago, would you say you are (rotate): [more interested, less interested, (or) just as interested] today in hearing about the health of the Chesapeake Bay?”

Only one quarter of Marylanders think the health of the Chesapeake Bay is getting better (24%), while 28% think it is getting worse and 40% see no change. Even fewer Marylanders are likely to think the health of local streams, creeks, and rivers is getting better (13%), with 26% seeing them as getting worse and 53% seeing no change.

Health of Local Waters

	Getting Better	Getting Worse	Staying about the Same
The Chesapeake Bay	24%	28%	40%
Local streams, creeks, or rivers in your area	13%	26%	53%

"Do you think the health of the Chesapeake Bay is generally (randomize): [getting better, getting worse, (or) staying about the same]?"
"What about local streams, creeks, or rivers in your area? Do you think their health is generally (randomize): [getting better, getting worse, (or) staying about the same]?"

Marylanders' Contact with the Natural Environment

The way most Marylanders come in contact with the State's natural waters is by eating fish or crabs that come from the Bay or local rivers. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of Marylanders eat seafood from local waters either frequently or occasionally.

As reflected in the table below, active contact with the water in other ways is somewhat less frequent:

- One-third of Marylanders catch fish or crabs frequently (14%) or occasionally (20%). That 34% total has increased 6 percentage points since our last CBT survey of Marylanders in November 2008, while most other measures on this list have stayed relatively the same.
- One-quarter swim in natural waters besides the ocean frequently (8%) or occasionally (19%).
- A similar number canoe, kayak, sail, or power boat frequently (10%) or occasionally (15%).

Taken together, half of the Maryland public (52%) is in direct contact with the water through one of these three means (excluding eating seafood) at least occasionally. One in five (21%) are in contact with the water *frequently*.

Marylanders' Contact with the Natural Environment

	Frequently	Occasionally	Total
Picnic or walk in a public park or neighborhood	42%	37%	79%
Eat fish or seafood out of the Bay or local rivers	29%	34%	63%
Garden at home or in a community garden	33%	24%	57%
Bird watch	17%	20%	37%
Fish or crab	14%	20%	34%
Hike or camp in an undeveloped area	11%	18%	29%
Swim in any natural waters besides the ocean	8%	19%	27%
Canoe, kayak, sail, or power boat	10%	15%	25%
Hunt	5%	4%	9%
"Frequently" in contact with the water through fishing or crabbing, swimming, or boating			21%
"Frequently" or "occasionally" in contact with the water through fishing or crabbing, swimming, or boating			52%

"Please tell me how often you do any of these things using the scale frequently, occasionally, rarely, or never."

Four out of five Marylanders (79%) are picnicking or walking in a public park or neighborhood at least occasionally, while 29% are hiking or camping in undeveloped areas. More than half of Marylanders (57%) are gardening, 37% are bird watching, and 9% are hunting.

Individual Environmental Stewardship

We measured individual stewardship behaviors by the public on an assortment of actions from recycling to purchasing green products to participating in community clean-ups. For each action, we asked people to place themselves on a scale ranging from never thinking about the action, all the way to actually doing it and encouraging others to do it as well.

It is no surprise that recycling emerges as the leading environmental stewardship activity practiced by 89% of Marylanders, with nearly two-thirds of the public (63%) not only recycling themselves but encouraging others to do so.

Reducing energy usage ranks very high on the list at 89%, with 42% feeling so strongly they encourage others to save energy, too. Similar numbers say they pick up litter (87%), and 39% are bothered enough that talk to others about littering.

Two emerging issues, eating locally grown food and purchasing green products, rank next on the list with four out of five Marylanders saying they do them, and a quarter or more saying they encourage others in those activities, as illustrated in the table below.

Individual Environmental Stewardship by Marylanders

	Do It and Encourage Others too	Do It Myself	Total	Think but Don't Do It	Don't Think about It
Recycling	63%	26%	89%	4%	6%
Reducing the amount of energy you use	42%	47%	89%	4%	6%
Picking up litter	39%	48%	87%	5%	8%
Eating locally grown	29%	51%	80%	6%	12%
Purchasing green products ¹	23%	55%	78%	7%	14%
Reducing fertilizers and pesticides ²	20%	27%	47%	11%	34%
Participating in community clean-up ³	13%	33%	46%	22%	29%
Joining with others in your community ⁴	10%	27%	37%	25%	34%

¹Purchasing green or environmentally friendly products

²Reducing use of lawn fertilizers and pesticides

³Participating in community clean-up projects

⁴Joining with others in your community to oppose environmentally damaging projects or actions

"I am going to ask about your experience with several other activities. There are no right or wrong answers, so just tell me what is true for you. The first one is... (randomize from list.) Please tell me about that using this scale: I don't think much about it, I think about it but don't do it, I do it when I can, I do it and encourage others to do it too."

Just under half the public are reducing the use of lawn fertilizers and pesticides. One-third to one-half are joining with others in organized community clean-ups and to solve environmental problems.

An Engaged Public

Marylanders are engaged in the life of their communities in various ways.

- More than three-quarters (78%) say they give money to a cause they believe in, not counting religious giving, and 38% say they have done so frequently over the past year or so.
- Three-quarters (72%) attend religious worship, and 50% do so frequently.
- Two-thirds (63%) have volunteered for a charitable organization in the local community.
- Nearly as many (58%) say they have “worked with others to solve a problem in your local community or make it a better place to live.”
- Four in ten (41%) have attended a meeting of a neighborhood association at least occasionally over the past year, and a similar number say they have contacted a public official on an issue that is important to them, with 10% of the public doing so frequently.

Civic Engagement by Marylanders

	Frequently	Occasionally	Total
Given money for a cause you believe in, outside of church or religious giving	38%	40%	78%
Attended religious worship	50%	22%	72%
Volunteered your time for a charitable organization in your community	28%	35%	63%
Worked with others to solve a problem in your local community or make it a better place to live	22%	36%	58%
Attended a meeting of a neighborhood association	16%	25%	41%
Called, visited, or written to a public official on an issue that is important to you	10%	28%	38%

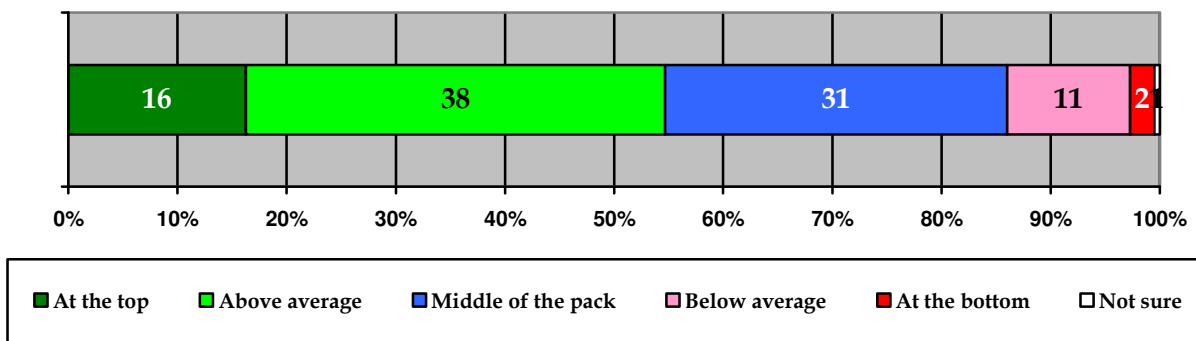
“Over the past year or so, have you done any of these things? And if so, was it frequently, occasionally, or only rarely?”

Implications for Public Policymaking

When it comes to public policymaking, Marylanders place a high priority on protection of the natural environment. Four times as many Marylanders place their concern for the natural environment “above average” or “at the top” of their priority list (55%) compared to those who place their concern “below average” or “at the bottom” (14%).

(See chart, next page.)

**Priority Placed on the Natural Environment
 Compared to All the Challenges Facing Maryland**

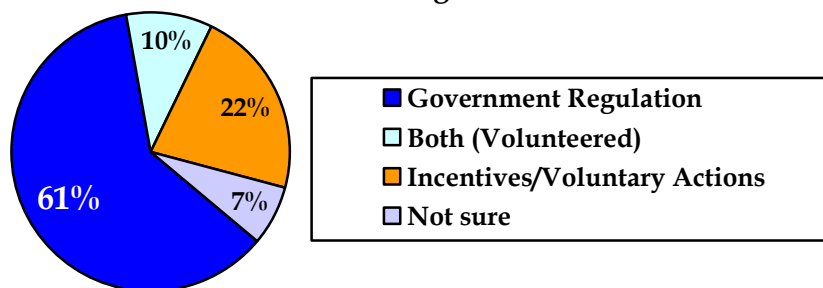


"If you were to consider all the issues and challenges facing Maryland today, where would protection of the natural environment rank on that priority list for you?"

This environmentally-sensitive public remains optimistic about the problem of pollution in local waters, with **85%** saying "the (water pollution) problem can be fixed." Only 12% of the public thinks the problem is "too difficult" to fix.

Nearly three-quarters of Marylanders (71%) believe government regulation will be needed to address the water pollution problem. Only 22% think that incentives and voluntary actions alone will do the job.

Pollution in Local Waters: Need for Regulation vs. Incentives



(Rotate): "[Is it the kind of problem that can be fixed with incentives and voluntary actions, (or) is the water pollution problem so big that it will require some government regulation]?"

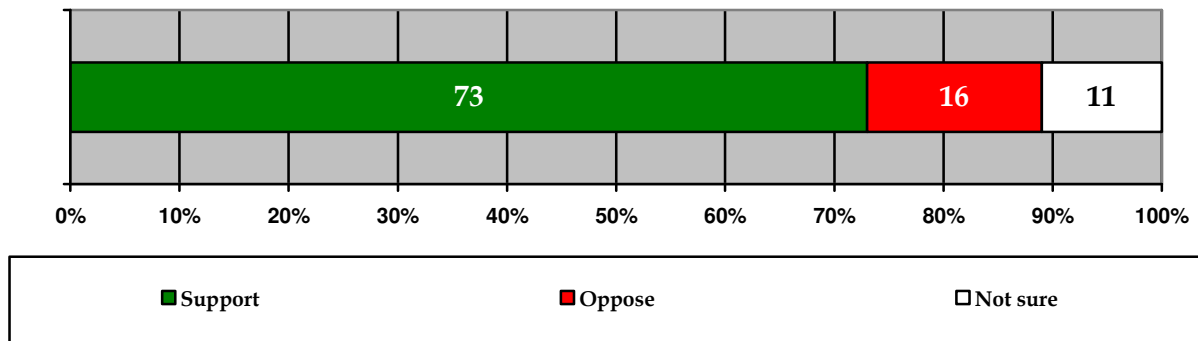
Chesapeake Bay Pollution Diet

The survey attempted to gauge public support for the new, regulatory plan for Bay restoration announced by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) at the end of last year (officially known as the "Total Maximum Daily Load" or TMDL, but described popularly as the "Bay pollution diet").

Marylanders strongly support the concept of a pollution diet "that will require local governments in Maryland and other Bay states to reduce pollutants coming from homes,

businesses, and farms within their jurisdictions." Three-quarters of the public (73%) support this concept, while only 16% oppose it.

Support for the Concept of a Pollution Diet
Knowing it will Require Local Governments to Reduce Pollutants



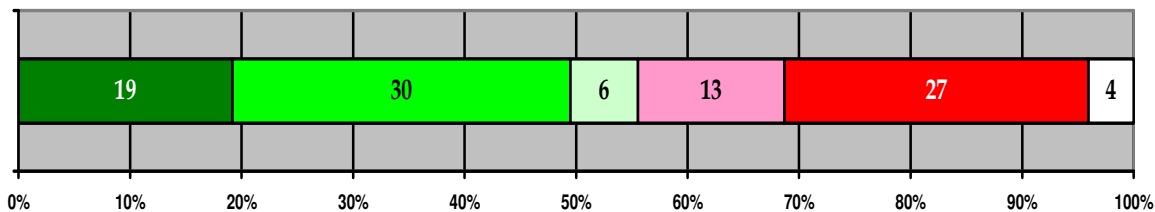
"Because water cleanup goals have been missed in the past and local water quality problems differ from place to place, the pollution diet is a new effort that will require local governments in Maryland and other Bay states to reduce pollutants coming from homes, businesses, and farms within their jurisdictions. Do you support or oppose this effort?"

Stormwater Policies

A plurality of Marylanders are willing to pay a "reasonable" fee to help "solve the problem of polluted runoff into our local waters." Forty-nine percent (49%) of Marylanders would support such a fee "if leaders in the State said more money would be needed," while 40% would oppose it.

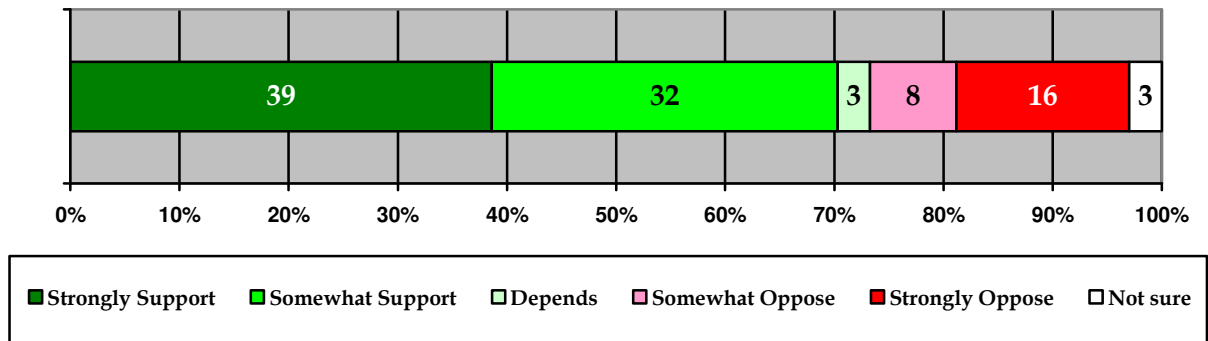
Support for a stormwater fee grows significantly - from 49% to 71% - if Marylanders know that the fee will be enacted by jurisdictions all across the state at once, return revenue to their own communities, and create jobs.

Support for a Stormwater Fee
If State Leaders Said the Money was Needed



"If leaders in the State said more money would be needed to solve the problem of polluted runoff into our local waters, and they proposed a monthly fee that was reasonable, would you be likely to support or oppose that?" (If support/oppose): "Is that strongly or just somewhat {support/oppose}?"

Knowing the Fee is Statewide, Locally-Directed, and Creates Jobs



"If you knew that counties all across the state were enacting this new fee at the same time, that the money you pay would be put to work right in your own community, and that it would create jobs in engineering and construction, would you be likely to support or oppose it?" (If support/oppose): "Is that strongly or just somewhat {support/oppose}?"

From past focus group work we know that residents view polluted stormwater runoff as a regional, not an isolated local problem that respects political boundaries. Most people want the solution to be broadly-shared, and not confined to their own jurisdiction. Maryland residents also have a strong desire to see tangible progress on Bay restoration within their own community, so that they know public money is being put to good use. And naturally as the economy continues to drag, the prospect of creating new jobs through restoration work is important for Marylanders today.

In another example, an overwhelming 80% would support "strengthened regulations on the formulation and application of lawn and garden fertilizers in order to prevent polluted runoff from reaching local waters and the Chesapeake Bay." Only 15% would oppose that.

Finally, when asked whether they would "participate in a 'Bay Friendly' home and yard maintenance program that provided tax credits or other financial assistance to reduce stormwater runoff," more than half of those polled (54%) said they would likely or very likely and only one third (34%) said they would not. The remaining people were unsure (7%) or didn't have a yard (6%).

Brief Background on OpinionWorks

OpinionWorks conducts frequent opinion studies in Maryland and the surrounding states. We are the polling organization for *The Baltimore Sun*, having accurately forecast the 14-point gubernatorial margin in 2010, and have polled for numerous other media throughout the region. We work for state and local agencies throughout the Mid-Atlantic, and for a variety of non-profit and for-profit entities within the region and nationally.

The Nature
Conservancy



Protecting nature. Preserving life.™



PUBLIC OPINION
STRATEGIES

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates - FM3

Public Opinion Research & Strategy

SANTA MONICA • OAKLAND • MADISON • MEXICO CITY

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: David Metz
Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates

Lori Weigel
Public Opinion Strategies

CONTACT: **Andy Tuck**
atuck@tnc.org

RE: The Language of Conservation 2013: Updated Recommendations on How to Communicate Effectively to Build Support for Conservation

DATE: April 15, 2013

The following recommendations for communicating effectively to build support for conservation are based on a representative national survey of American voters commissioned by The Nature Conservancy in 2012 and conducted by a bi-partisan research team: Democratic polling firm Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates and Republican polling firm Public Opinion Strategies. In some cases, we have also drawn from regional and state research conducted over the last few years on behalf of TNC and its partner organizations to further illuminate the data.

This memo seeks to provide language and messaging recommendations in a list of easy-to-follow, broad “rules” for communication. Some of these rules reinforce long-standing communication guidelines we have tracked over time, while others were tested to reflect today’s changed political and economic context. We found few exceptions to the guidelines presented, although we note that it is always prudent to test language and messages to ensure their effectiveness in a specific state or local area prior to investing in public communication.

Talking About Safety and Health First...

Voters' hierarchy of needs starts with health and safety, and connecting conservation to those issues helps ensure conservation shifts from a "nice to have" to a "need to have."

- *DO talk about water FIRST and foremost.* Voters consistently tell us that nothing is more important than having clean water to drink. Ensuring reliable supplies of clean water cannot be stressed enough as a primary rationale for conservation. Pollution of rivers, lakes and streams rates as one of the most serious conservation problems tested in the most recent national survey, and has consistently been at the top of voters' priorities. Moreover, when we have asked voters to rate the importance of a variety of conservation goals in previous state and local surveys, water has always risen to the top of the list. The act of referencing water as a rationale for conserving land is more important than the specific language used; however, protecting "drinking water" implies a connection to public health which resonates on a deeper level with voters than any other formulation.

Moreover, we have seen in other research that voters believe that land conservation positively impacts their own drinking water. We find widespread agreement that "protecting land around rivers, lakes, and streams, will keep pollution from flowing into these waters and prevent it from eventually contaminating our drinking water."

- *DO connect conservation to public health.* Voters want clean air and clean water, and instinctively view caring for the land as having benefits for air and water. Messaging should continue to stress the many ways that protecting our land, water and wildlife protects our own health. Voters also see other connections between conservation of nature and public health: they recognize that nature is a source of our food; of important medicines; and of critical lands for recreation.
- *DO turn voters' views of a tough Mother Nature to your advantage – by showing how conservation of critical natural defenses keeps communities safe.* Whether wildfire, flooding, or hurricanes, voters tend to think of nature as being a force with which to be reckoned. That "one tough lady" image can pose problems – the concept of "resilience" actually serves to make voters less likely to feel we need to engage in restoration projects in recent focus groups along the Gulf Coast – but can also be an advantage. The idea that "natural defenses" can serve as flood controls or storm barriers is credible and resonates from Louisiana to North Dakota.
- *DO NOT equate nature with infrastructure.* Voters associate the phrase "infrastructure" with concrete and asphalt – with schools, sewer systems, and streets – and balk at connecting it to nature. We have tested a number of phrases that sought to establish nature as just as important as man-made infrastructure: "green infrastructure," "soft infrastructure," and "natural infrastructure." These phrases tend to be confusing at best. For example, many associated "green infrastructure" with wind turbines or clean energy. Moreover, though voters do see some urgency to investing in long-neglected public buildings and facilities, "infrastructure" is not a warm and inviting term. Linking that word to nature only serves to drag down the positive associations respondents have

with nature, rather than lifting them up.

- *DO NOT make global warming/climate change the primary rationale for conservation.* While scientists clearly link global warming to increasingly extreme weather events that affect the safety of people and communities, it is not yet perceived similarly by the public. The most politically polarizing rationales for conservation are those that position climate change as the primary reason for engaging in conservation. Republicans and Independents rated these messages significantly lower than other rationales in support of conservation.

However, referring to climate change in passing as *part* of a broader argument for conservation has generally not had a significant impact – positive or negative – on responses. In the interest of continuing to expand and reinforce public attention to this vital issue, incorporating subtle references to climate change into otherwise strong messages may be advisable. This, however, is an area where location-specific research is likely critical.

What To Say Next...

There are a number of other broad themes that connect broadly and should be kept in mind in communicating about conservation.

- *DO keep people in the picture.* Voters are increasingly telling us that the best reasons to engage in conservation are people-centric. As one can see in the national survey data below, a majority now say that benefits to *people* are the best reason to conserve nature:

53% The best reason to conserve nature is to preserve the benefits people can derive from it - for our economy, our health, and our enjoyment.

OR

39% The best reason to conserve nature is for its own sake - to leave systems of plants and wildlife undisturbed to evolve, change and grow.

- *DO reinforce the compatibility between having a strong economy and preserving land, water and wildlife.* Most voters see no reason why we cannot continue to protect land and water while maintaining the country's economic strength. More than three-quarters of voters (76%) believe we can protect land and water and have a strong economy at the same time, while fewer than one in five believe that those objectives are even "sometimes" in conflict. At every opportunity, voters should be reminded that economic growth and conservation are mutually-reinforcing goals: they intuitively believe it, but given the relentless rhetoric arguing the opposite, voters' beliefs must be reinforced.

The obvious corollary to this "rule" is that conservation efforts must actively resist, reject, and refute claims by opponents that environmental protections will hurt jobs and economic development. While on some level voters realize this is a false choice, their heightened economic

anxieties make them susceptible to this kind of messaging.

- *DO stress the importance of protecting natural areas as a way of helping children spend more time outdoors.* Of 18 conservation-related problems tested in the most recent national survey, “kids not spending enough time outdoors and in nature” rated as the most serious problem. Half of American voters (50%) rate this as a “very serious” problem, and four-in-five (82%) say it is at least a “somewhat serious” problem. This concern extends across all demographic sub-groups, partisan lines, and geographies – a rural Republican is just as likely to view children not spending enough time in nature as a problem as an urban Democrat. We see a similar dynamic in data from a January 2013 survey of voters in six western states in which 83% say that “children not spending enough time in the outdoors” is a serious problem. This issue taps into concerns about children’s use of technology and “screen time,” parenting styles, and childhood obesity.

This concern was successfully evoked in messaging we helped develop for multiple, successful conservation finance measures this past year. While parks, playgrounds and public lands are not seen as a cure-all to this problem, the idea of “preserving places where children can safely run, play and experience nature” is one that resonates today in a way we have not seen in the past.

- *DO continue to use a “future generations” message.* Along these same lines, we continue to see that the concept of protecting land, water and wildlife for our children and grandchildren is one that voters volunteer organically as a reason for supporting conservation; moreover, voters who hear it consistently rate it as compelling. The economic downturn has done nothing to diminish the resonance of this time-honored rationale for conserving nature.
- *DO evoke a sense of “shared responsibility” – or, depending on the audience, a “moral responsibility” – to care for the natural world.* Voters want to be – and want others to be – responsible, whether in regard to their personal finances or how they treat the natural world. The messages below tap into this strong public value.

All Americans have a shared responsibility to protect our natural world: to use only what we need, make smarter choices, and pass on to future generations the beauty, wildlife, water and natural resources we have today. Especially with the threat of climate change, we should invest in conservation to meet this responsibility

Our state's beautiful natural areas are part of God's creation, and we have a moral responsibility to take care of them and protect them.

We would caution that the impact of the latter message is highly dependent on the audience. It can also lack credibility if delivered by a messenger that lacks standing among voters of faith.

- *DO use phrases that imply ownership and inclusion, such as “our” and “we.”* Many of the strongest messages in our surveys incorporate this language. So, we must describe “OUR natural areas” or “WE need to protect OUR beaches, lakes, natural areas and wildlife. . . .”

- *DO speak to voters' pride of place.* Invoking "America" or the name of voters' own state speaks to voters' local pride, and reminds them of the factors that have led them to choose to live where they do. At the state or national level, more often than not, what voters enjoy or appreciate about their location involves something about the land, wildlife or natural setting.
- *DO recognize that this is one issue for which voters intuit a role for the federal government.* Despite continued low ratings for Congress and the federal government, voters recognize the benefit of federal involvement in managing lands and waters. More than four-in-five believe that "*Mountain ranges, wildlife habitat, and rivers cross state borders, so it is important to have the federal government get everyone to work together in conserving our natural resources.*" Similarly, seven-in-ten go so far as to say that "*In dealing with issues like how land and water are used or protected, government plays an essential role.*" And as the 2012 polling indicates, one of the few things which voters think government is doing well is protecting some of these places as public lands: 77% agree that "*One of the things our government does best is to protect and preserve our national history and natural beauty through national parks, forests, and other public lands.*"

How Best to Position Conservation Policy Initiatives...

- *DO highlight the diverse coalitions and collaborations in support of conservation efforts.* Doing so speaks of broad, consensus support. It bypasses partisan divisions. It avoids cynicism that attaches to government or environmental organizations when they are acting alone. Finally, it helps convince voters that foresight and long-range planning are in play.
- *DO provide the public a few key specifics to make policy proposals credible.* Separate national polling our firms have conducted shows that trust in government is declining; and in focus groups testing various conservation proposals over the past year, it has been clear this skepticism affects voters' views of any government policy proposal. The loftier the language, the less believable the proposal is deemed. But by providing a few key facts (such as where land might be conserved, who would administer the effort, and where revenues would originate), voters can be made less likely to regard a proposal as "too good to be true."
- *At the same time, DO NOT get bogged down in the details about how conservation policy initiatives are implemented.* Voters are much more concerned about how they benefit from conservation, rather than the mechanics of how those goals might be achieved. Do not get caught up in providing unnecessary detail about the process of HOW conservation will take place – such as referring to land acquisition, purchase of development rights, etc. Focus on *outcomes*, and on how people will benefit – not on processes.
- *DO address voter skepticism about accountability whenever public funding enters the discussion.* Given continued low confidence in government, conservation efforts MUST ensure that strong fiscal accountability provisions are attached to any government spending proposal. The inclusion of provisions such as regular audits, public disclosure, time limits, and citizen oversight in each and

every funding plan ought to be a primary focus.

- *DO maintain an essentially hopeful, optimistic tone.* Explaining how voters will benefit from a policy beats describing how they will be threatened by its absence every time. There's a place for highlighting the problems that conservation will solve – but only if you also articulate the solution. In other polling we have completed, we have consistently seen that voters who share the positive vision – that a polluted body of water CAN be cleaned up, for example – are significantly more likely to support policy changes or investing in that endeavor.
- *DO talk about conservation as part of a long-term plan for a community's quality of life.* Over the last five years, we have found that there are few stronger words than communicating that there is a "plan" for managing growth, conserving land, and protecting a community's character and quality of life. One of the strongest rationales for conservation has consistently been protecting the good quality of life voters feel they have in their community. Voters want a pro-active approach to preserving it; they want someone looking ahead, past the next 24-hour news cycle and the next election. All too often, on a wide range of issues, they believe that kind of long-range thinking has been absent from government's actions.

And on the flip side, we have seen that voters who are actively alienated by the notion of government planning, or who subscribe to Agenda 21-style anxieties about an active public role in land use, are a tiny portion of the electorate and one that is unlikely to support public land conservation in any context.

- *DO NOT count on public support for conservation unless you work to make it happen.* Conservation is less of a concern today than in the recent past; economic issues have pushed it further down the list of most pressing concerns in voters' minds. While voters value land, water and wildlife and want to conserve them, issues related to conservation simply are not everyday concerns for them. In recent research in six western states, we found that a majority (54%) admitted they had no idea of the positions their Member of Congress has taken on protecting land, air and water.

At the same time, when conservation issues are brought to voters' attention they are every bit as important as they have been in the past. This means the only way to get the public to act on conservation issues is to place the issues before them more forcefully and give them opportunities to get involved.

- *DO NOT focus on "green" jobs as a primary rationale for conservation.* While the economy still tops voters' priorities in our own polling, voters continue to find other more traditional, aspirational rationales for conservation more resonant – like leaving a legacy for future generations and protecting sources of clean air and water. In addition, some of the language used to describe these jobs can be off-putting. Many do not understand the term "sustainable" for instance. Similarly, many voters are tired of the term "green". It is described by voters as being trendy and trite, and a phrase that immediately gives them the feeling they are being marketed to, due to its exploitation by so many consumer products. As one swing voter in a focus group explained his ambivalence to the term, "*I just kind of get numb to the word. Everything is green. Green cars, green buildings,*

green gases. I'm getting numb to it." Notably, jobs are more apt to be intuitively linked to clean energy projects.

- *DO highlight efforts to promote renewable energy development and energy efficiency.* We continue to see significant, bipartisan support for clean, renewable energy – support that far outpaces the divisive and partisan reaction voters have to addressing climate change. Voters like the idea of blending conservation with the promotion of renewable energy, and intuitively believe that expanding the use of renewable energy will create jobs. Specific descriptions of jobs in the renewable energy sector can avoid many of the pitfalls associated with more generic descriptions of “green jobs.”

Notably, we see equally strong support for the idea of promoting “energy efficiency.” Though voters are more likely to think of renewable energy when asked about solutions to America’s energy challenges, the idea of improving energy efficiency is one that consumers connect to on a personal level, strikes them as cost effective in the long-term, and therefore yields a strongly positive response.

How to Explain the Specifics of Land Conservation...

While every community is unique, we have seen certain consistent patterns in opinion that help explain the specific benefits that people perceive coming from land conservation – at a national, state or local level.

- *DO remember that retaining a rural way of life often connects in many types of communities.* Conserving “working farms and ranches” continues to be a high priority for conservation. Over the last decade we have continued to see American voters place great value on preserving small, family farms and ranches – notably, this is increasingly in contrast to their views of larger agricultural operations, which are generally not positive. When voters hear references to “farms and ranches,” in isolation, they do NOT assume that they are owned and run by people whose livelihood depends on them – and that distinction matters a great deal. The word “working” evokes those types of lands, and conveys that the land is productive and being used. In addition, we see that discussion of “working farms and ranches” is increasingly resonant due to the important role they play in voters’ concern about local food production.
- *DO highlight the historic value of lands that are conserved if possible.* A segment of the electorate skeptical of the environmental value in protecting natural areas – Tea Party supporters, older men, and more conservative voters – has been shown in other polling to be more likely to consider themselves to be “history buffs.” Emphasizing the historic importance of lands and waters under consideration for conservation may be a way of maximizing support among some of these tougher constituencies.
- *DO highlight the recreational value of land, but be specific – talk about hiking, biking, camping, fishing, hunting, viewing wildlife and enjoying nature.* The more vivid the language, the more likely

voters are to see themselves using these lands and enjoying their benefits. This is particularly true if more passive recreation examples are included in the list, such as viewing wildlife or simply enjoying nature – not limiting recreation to a gear-laden backpacker image. The following language has tested well...

Outdoor recreation is a part of our way of life - from hunters and fishermen to young children who play in parks. Protecting our natural areas will ensure that we still have places to hike, bike, boat, fish, hunt, see wildlife or just enjoy the quiet and peace of nature.

- *DO ensure that opportunities for access to outdoor recreation on conserved lands are made explicit.* Without an explicit nod to continued or increased access for recreation, some sportsmen and highly-engaged voters assume that words like “protect” or “conserve” mean that lands will be “locked up” and unavailable for their use.
- *But DO NOT make access to parks or public lands the centerpiece of appeals for conservation.* Only a very small sliver of the electorate – typically, dedicated outdoor enthusiasts – recognize the need for increased conservation to create connections to other protected lands. Communications with recreationists or sportsmen who care about this issue can focus on access, but the broader public simply does not see a crisis around the issue of access.
- *DO NOT refer to “landscape-scale conservation.”* Voters respond to the idea of preserving large, connected areas like entire forests, mountain ranges, wildlife habitats, or wetlands when described as such, and think conservation should be planned and carried out on a regional, integrated level. However, they do not think of this as “landscape scale” nor can they articulate the rationales behind why “landscape-scale” conservation might be important (“wildlife migration corridors” is another term that is not recognized or understood).
- *In fact, DO NOT use the term “landscape” in connection with lands to be protected.* Overwhelmingly, in the focus groups voters connected the term “landscape” with paintings and/or planned plantings one might have in a backyard (landscaping). Neither concept is one that invokes accessible nature in which people are included. “[It sounds] like you are not supposed to touch it. It’s to look at,” explained one respondent in a past focus group, summing up a general theme we have heard repeatedly over the years. Moreover, “loss of scenic vistas” (at 13% “extremely” or “very serious”) was the single *least* compelling conservation concern we tested in the most recent national survey.=

Explaining “Ecosystem Services”

Our research over the past few years has also explored a complex policy issue much discussed in the conservation community today – that of “ecosystem services.” That research provides some clear guidance on how to convey this concept to the broader public.

- *DO NOT use the term “ecosystem services.”* The term “ecosystem services” - does not adequately

convey the concept to less knowledgeable audiences. Few voters spend time visiting “ecosystems” – they visit forests, wetlands, rivers, deserts and mountains. And some resist the idea that nature provides “services” to people – while they acknowledge that people depend upon and benefit from nature, the idea that nature exists to “serve” them is off-putting to some. Other metaphorical language used in connection with this concept – safety net, life-support, health and safety systems – is greeted with similar indifference.

- *DO talk about the “benefit of nature” or “nature’s benefits.”* The terms “nature’s value” and “nature’s benefits” were rated as highly appealing by clear majorities of voters nationwide. And in focus groups, both terms were seen as intuitive and self-explanatory. Either provides a vastly preferable alternative for general communications to “ecosystem services.” The term “ecosystem” is unfamiliar and unappealing, and even the term “services” causes discomfort for some voters – who bristle at the concept of nature as “serving” people and therefore subordinate to them. For these voters, the idea of nature as existing in a mutually beneficial relationship with mankind is more comfortable.

It should also be noted that the term “value” may prompt people to think about the benefits of nature in economic or dollar terms – which may be advantageous in some circumstances and less so in others.

Voters readily embrace the concept that there is a benefit to the public in nature. Water quality, air quality, production of crops for food, production of medicines, and protection against floods and hurricanes are seen as the most important benefits of nature by voters, although not all were generally intuitive and top-of-mind in focus groups. And though our research has not explored it in this framework, it is likely that voters would view renewable energy – particularly wind and solar – as a key benefit of nature as well.

- *DO remind people of nature’s role in providing materials for medicines.* Relatively few voters name medicines as a top-of-mind benefit that nature has for people. However, when prompted to think about the idea – and particularly when given information like the number of prescription medications that come from natural sources – voters see it as an urgent rationale for protecting nature.
- *DO highlight the benefits of nature for providing food.* Similar to medicines, voters do not instinctively name the production of food as a benefit of nature. However, when prompted more than three-quarters of voters rate benefits such as “pollinating plants and crops to help them grow,” “preventing erosion of fertile soil,” and “keeping soil fertile and productive” as “very important” benefits of nature.
- *DO express the value of conservation in terms other than dollars whenever possible.* Nearly three-quarters of voters nationally (73%) believe that it is at least “somewhat” helpful to calculate the benefits of nature in dollar terms. But even higher numbers favor evaluating the benefits of nature through other metrics, like the number of jobs created (which 84% see as “helpful”), the number of people who benefit (87%), or the additional clean air and water a natural area provides (92%).

- *DO position ecosystem services as a way of acknowledging the long-term impacts of resource decisions.* Voters regularly express frustration that decisions about land use and resource management are too often made with short-term convenience and profitability in mind, rather than a long-term evaluation of a community’s needs. The “nature’s benefits” framework can be positioned as a way of helping decision makers understand – and take into account – the longer-term impacts that decisions about resource use can have on a community’s health and safety.
- *DO NOT position nature as subordinate to people.* Many voters actively resist the idea that nature exists to “serve” people, or merely to provide them resources to be consumed. Communications should be crafted to avoid framing nature in this context.
- *DO NOT forget to invoke the unquantifiable value of nature.* Even the steeliest non-environmentalists in our focus groups acknowledge a value to nature that is difficult to quantify on a balance sheet. Many spoke of its calming, spiritual benefits – simply having the opportunity to be away from a city and from people was seen as enormously valuable. For some, discussions of nature’s benefits that are too practical and utilitarian seem to slight these very real and important ways that nature touches their lives.

<i>Final Notes on Language and Messaging</i>

In summary, the following table provides a short reference – building on prior research and drawing on this year’s work – on the best and worst language that can be used in developing support for conservation.

<i>Bad Words to Avoid</i>	<i>Good Words to Use</i>
<i>Environment</i>	<i>Land, air and water</i>
<i>Ecosystems</i>	<i>Natural areas</i>
<i>Biodiversity / endangered species</i>	<i>Fish and wildlife</i>
<i>Regulations</i>	<i>Safeguards/protections</i>
<i>Riparian</i>	<i>Land along lakes, rivers and streams</i>
<i>Aquifer</i>	<i>Groundwater</i>
<i>Watershed</i>	<i>Land around rivers, lakes and streams</i>
<i>Environmental groups</i>	<i>Conservation groups / organizations protecting land, air, and water</i>
<i>Agricultural land</i>	<i>Working farms and ranches</i>
<i>Urban sprawl</i>	<i>Poorly planned growth/ development</i>
<i>Green jobs</i>	<i>Clean energy jobs/jobs protecting water quality/etc.</i>

Bad Words to Avoid	Good Words to Use
<i>Ecosystem services</i>	<i>Nature's benefits</i>
<i>Landscape-scale conservation</i>	<i>Large, connected natural areas</i>

Research Methodology: Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (D) and Public Opinion Strategies (R) have conducted three major national surveys on behalf of The Nature Conservancy over the last decade. The most recent was completed in June 2012 with 800 registered voters throughout the United States conducted on both traditional land-lines and cell phones. The margin of error associated with a sample of this type is $\pm 3.8\%$. Previous surveys were conducted in 2009 and 2004. The 2009 survey was preceded by eight focus groups conducted among a variety of audiences, including voters of color, in Kansas City, MO; Denver, CO; Charlotte, NC; and Tampa, FL. We have also drawn in corroborating findings from numerous regional, state and local surveys conducted on conservation conducted throughout the country by our two firms, individually or jointly, over the last several years.