

# Communicating Environmentally

Prepared for River Alliance's 2007 Northern Workshops by  
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1. Approach your audience by connecting with their values.
  - a. Research their values (don't assume you know - you might be wrong)
  - b. Methods for research:
    - a. National opinion polls (for general audiences)
    - b. Focus groups and interviews (for specialized audiences)
    - c. Study their literature.
2. Who are you talking to?
  - a. Communication is a tool, not a goal. What is your goal?
  - b. Who must do what for you to succeed? (This is your target audience.)
  - c. Who or what will influence them? What is important to them? Can you reach them directly or must you reach them indirectly?
3. Develop your message (a paragraph from which you develop slogans and sound bites).
  - a. Appeal to values
  - b. Describe a threat and who is responsible
  - c. Provide a solution with appropriate action to take
4. Use words that work.
  - a. Use everyday words that everyday people use.
  - b. Make the consequences real and relevant to your audience:
    - i. Health and Safety
    - ii. Children's health and safety
    - iii. Children's future quality of life
    - iv. Money in their pockets (total cost, pay me now or later)

## American Values

### Primary Values:

- Responsibility to care for one's family;
- Responsibility to care for oneself;
- Personal Liberty;
- Work;
- Spirituality/Belief in God;
- Honesty/integrity;
- Fairness/ equality.

### Secondary Values include:

- Responsibility to care for others;
- Personal fulfillment;
- Respect for authority;
- Love of country or culture.

### Environmental Values:

- Responsibility to future generations;
- Nature is God's creation;
- A desire for one's family to enjoy a healthy environment.

Source: *Human Values and Nature's Future: Americans Attitudes on Biological Diversity* by Belden Russonello & Stewart

## Useful Words and Phrases

| What are we talking about?                    | Not:   |
|---|--|
| Nature, ecosystem, fish, wildlife             | <del>biodiversity, endangered species</del>              |
| Pollution, dirty water, not enough water      | <del>run-off, non-point pollution, waste, effluent</del> |
| Water, lakes, streams, rivers, drinking water | <del>riparian zones, aquatic resources, watersheds</del> |
| protection, standards, keep safe              | <del>laws, regulations,-</del>                           |
| natural areas, working farms, habitat         | <del>open space, sprawl, undeveloped land</del>          |

| What do we want?                       | Not:  |
|--|---|
| responsibly planned growth             | <del>no growth</del>  |
| enough drinking water, fish to catch   | <del>habitat protection-</del>                                    |
| hiking, biking and walking trails      | <del>trails, new parks, green space, natural landscapes</del>     |
| voluntary land preservation agreements | <del>conservation easements, purchase of development rights</del> |

| Why do we want these?   | Not:  |
|---|---|
| to protect clean water, clean air                                       | <del>to clean up our water</del>                                    |
| to protect our health   | <del>to protect biodiversity</del>                                  |
| so our children can enjoy what we have, can learn about the environment | <del>for the tourists, for business, for economic development</del> |

| How can we get these?  | Not:  |
|--|---|
| responsible action from accountable communities                  | <del>regulations, federal solutions</del>                     |
| investments (in health, future)                                  | <del>taxes, funding,-</del>                                   |
| strong enforcement (against polluters, corporations, industry)   | <del>unfair solutions</del>                                   |
| making developers pay to cover costs they cause – it's only fair | <del>sock-it-to-em</del>                                      |
| freedom of choice, balance                                       | <del>(mass transit) only, preservation over development</del> |

### 5. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.

- a. Deliver your message early and often.
- b. Use a variety of channels and a variety of (appropriate) messengers.
- c. Stick to the same message (but leap on lucky breaks).
- d. Rely on visuals - they say more.

6. Support your audience with:
  - a. Specific things they can do
  - b. Encouragement and empowerment
  - c. Models, mentors,
  - d. Success stories, stories about people, more stories

## Resources

“Strategic Communications Primer for Great Lakes Habitat Advocates” (2005) - A 35 page guide downloadable from [www.greatlakestownhall.org](http://www.greatlakestownhall.org). Go to “Tools” then “Great Lakes Communication Toolbox”

“Americans and Biodiversity: New Perspectives in 2002 – A summary of a national research poll by Belden Russonello & Stewart for the Biodiversity Project. This and other public opinion polls can be found at [www.biodiversityproject.org](http://www.biodiversityproject.org)

*Fostering Sustainable Behavior: An Introduction to Community Based Social Marketing* By Doug McKenzie-Mohr, Ph.D. A book-length, how-to guide for getting communities to actually change their behavior. Completely downloadable from [www.cbsm.com](http://www.cbsm.com) or in paperback from New Society Publishers, \$14.95

Water words that work – a user-friendly web site with useful words, and the research that backs them up [www.waterwordsthatwork.com](http://www.waterwordsthatwork.com)

“The Language of Conservation” (2004) - A 7-page memo from professional communication advisors, based on nationwide survey and focus group research, suggests words and approaches for The Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land. [http://www.fws.gov/northeast/stateplans/Other%20Resources\\_files/The%20Language%20of%20Conservation.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/northeast/stateplans/Other%20Resources_files/The%20Language%20of%20Conservation.pdf)

“The Power of Effective Communications” (2007) - A 3 page article in the Land Trust Alliance’s newsletter for member land trusts. [http://www.ltanet.org/attached-files/0/64/6447/EXC\\_26\\_03\\_10.pdf](http://www.ltanet.org/attached-files/0/64/6447/EXC_26_03_10.pdf)

*River Talk – Communicating a Watershed Message* – A 75 page “how to” guide for environmental advocates available for \$15 from River Network [www.rivernetnetwork.org](http://www.rivernetnetwork.org)