

pollution secrecy
forests
Sierra Club
global warming Communications
wells and clean water Manual
human rights and the environment
endangered species trade population

Most Americans (76 percent) consider themselves to be "environmentalists" or "pro-environment."
(Charlton Research Company, July 1996)

Americans are proud of the progress we have made as a nation cleaning up our environment. Progress on the environment is one of the few examples of government effectiveness Americans volunteer and one of the best reasons they offer for believing that individual action can make a difference and collective action can be an answer.

Americans believe they have personally contributed to the progress America has made — by recycling, buying a fuel-efficient car or voting for a pro-environment candidate. Acknowledging their contribution in our communications is important. (Lake, Sosin, Snell; March 1997)

They are emphatic about the need to continue protecting our air, water and land. More than three-quarters (78 percent) of respondents in a Times-Mirror survey (April 1995) say "this country should do whatever it takes to protect the environment."

Their concerns about the environment are personal. They want their children's health and inheritance protected. Americans understand that the quality of their health and their children's health is linked inextricably to the environment. Most voters, 80 percent, say the environment is important to their health and the health of their families. (Charlton Research Company, July 1996)

NOTICE: THIS MATERIAL MAY BE
PROTECTED BY COPYRIGHT LAW
(TITLE 17, U.S. CODE).

Dillard

Environmental Progress

Specific examples of environmental progress tap into national pride and convince people that action can be effective.

Our air is cleaner. Over the past 25 years, major air pollutants have decreased nationally by almost a third; the amount of lead has decreased by 98 percent.

Our water is cleaner. As a nation, since 1970, we have reduced by 2.2 million pounds a day the amount of pollutants released into our waters. Two-thirds of the nation's rivers are clean enough now to meet federal standards.

We have made progress protecting our natural heritage. Over 100 million acres of wilderness have been set aside for conservation since 1964 and the bald eagle and brown pelican have been brought back from the brink of extinction.

Seventy-one percent give their "responsibility to future generations" as one of their two top reasons for caring about the environment. (Belden & Russonello, May 1996)

Voters are nearly unanimous, with 93 percent agreeing that "federal environmental standards should be set at levels strong enough to protect children's health." (Lake Research and the Tarrance Group, July 1995)

They worry most about their own "backyard" — about the effects of pollution, overdevelopment and degradation on their own families, neighborhoods and communities. Americans generally are more optimistic about local than national progress on the environment. According to a July 1996 Charlton Research Company report, there is a generational split on the assessment of how much progress has been made locally. Older people tend to agree their local environment has improved over the years; younger people, who have not experienced as dramatic improvement, do not.

They believe individuals have a personal responsibility to act as citizens and voters on behalf of the environment. A July 1996 Charlton Research Company survey concluded: "The most important value the public links to the environment is *individual responsibility*. Actions such as littering, smoking or failing to car pool and recycle are seen as having an effect on the environment."

Given individual actions to choose from, Americans are increasingly choosing to act positively on the environment as consumers, not just as voters. In a July 1996 Mellman Group survey focused on the problems of the oceans, participants said they were most likely to take personal action — to recycle used motor oil and pick up litter at the beach. They were least likely to act politically — to lobby or write a letter or to attend council or state legislative meetings on ocean issues.

The majority of Americans want corporations held accountable for the damage they do to the environment. They believe just as individuals should be responsible for their own

The public's number one environmental concern is pollution. Their concerns over pollution have increased dramatically, by 77 percent, in the past five years. (Wirthlin Quorum survey, September 1996) They are most concerned about water and air pollution and toxic and hazardous waste.

In an April 1996 analysis of their biological diversity survey findings, Belden & Russonello found the following two messages to be the most compelling:

Toxic chemicals have caused birth defects in bird and fish species, and scientists are concerned that recent declines in human sperm counts and increases in birth defects may be caused by a buildup of chemicals in food and water we consume.

Marshes, forests, rivers and streams are nature's tools for cleaning the air and water we rely on. By destroying these habitats, humans are endangering the services that nature performs for us.

Suburban sprawl is the fastest emerging threat to the environment. Americans equate overdevelopment with increased traffic, longer commutes, more air and water pollution, loss of forests, wetlands and green space, and destruction of habitat. It is *the* local environmental issue. They are reminded of it daily. It couldn't be closer.

People believe developers, big business and industry are the bad guys — responsible for pollution and for suburban sprawl. A large majority of voters (65 percent) do not trust business to limit the amount of pollution as much as possible. Most voters (59 percent) blame large factories for pollution in the past. (Charlton Research Company, July 1996)

Americans generally believe existing laws should be more rigorously enforced before new laws or regulations are imposed.

Americans generally want more information about the environment than they are getting. A January 1997 poll by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research found that 59 percent of Americans were extremely interested or very interested in news about the environment. A March 1997 Roper survey for *Parade* magazine found that 92 percent of the Americans surveyed said they wanted more environmental news. More people wanted to know about the environment than about sports or political campaigns, according to the poll.

In the Lake, Sosin, Snell focus groups in March 1997, participants volunteered that environmental groups should assume more responsibility for educating Americans.

In summary, Americans believe the environment can be improved if:

- individuals accept their responsibilities
- corporations are held accountable
- action is taken at the local level
- the nation does a better job enforcing existing laws
- more environmental education occurs

"It's everybody, it's everybody sitting at this table here. It's the politicians, it's everybody . . . we have to start somewhere and that's with ourselves." (Grand Junction hunter and angler)

Target Audiences

The audiences identified as being the most receptive and responsive to our call to action on behalf of the environment are women, especially mothers; hunters and anglers; and 18- to 30-year-olds.

This does not mean we should only be talking to these groups. In some localities it may make sense to target outreach to the religious community, low-income groups fighting environmental injustice or some other groups.

The following observations are based on the eight 1997 Sierra Club focus groups, conducted by Lake, Sosin, Snell.

Women, mothers

Women care about the environment because they care about their children and their families. Because of their concern for the future and the environment their children will face, they worry most about overdevelopment, air and pollution.

Women are also more likely than men to be judgmental about companies and want to see them take social responsibility for their actions.

Women also respond more as consumers because they recognize they "consume more than they vote." They see value in using their pocketbook to elicit action.

Women are more likely than men to take action and they see a need for local action and education to advance an environmental agenda. Women are generally more supportive of government involvement in environmental issues.

Suburban sprawl provides a good opportunity for the Sierra Club to connect with suburban women.

Hunters and anglers

Hunters and anglers care about the environment. They witness first-hand the effects of bad environmental management and policy.

They are concerned about overdevelopment because of its effects on air and water quality and the habitat of fish and animals. They believe too many people and too much development are destroying habitats.

The appeal to protect the environment for recreation purposes resonates with hunters and anglers. They also respond well to the message that protecting the environment makes good financial sense. Experience has taught us, however, that they are more receptive to the Sierra Club as a messenger when we are allied with a sporting organization, such as Ducks Unlimited or the Izaak Walton League.

18- to 30-year-olds

They care about the environment; they're cynical about both government and industry; they care about what they will be able to pass on to their children.

They worry about overdevelopment and they associate it with destroying the environment. Public lands are important to them; they use them and want their children to be able to use them.

In addition to the heritage message, messages that center on wasteful and harmful industry subsidies and the need for corporate accountability appeal to these voters.

Who Are the Best Messengers?

The public has formed perceptions of the participants in the environmental debate:

Environmentalists are credible and liked. Though some environmental groups are seen as "extremists," they are much more often regarded as necessary and helpful. According to 1995 research by Peter D. Hart Associates, "The public sees a necessary and continuing role for environmental organizations as guardians of America's natural heritage and as watchdogs on polluters and self-interested big business."

The Sierra Club's "localness" distinguishes us from other groups and earns us respect. It's our local grassroots organization that focus group participants liked most about the Sierra Club — the fact that we have 65 chapters (which they equated to at least one in each state) and more than 400 groups working at the local level.

So stressing your local group or chapter and the ways you are working with local citizens to educate and mobilize the public in your community is the best way to characterize the Club in your communications.

Big business is suspect. Big businesses are widely presumed to care more about their profit margin than their effect on the environment. Hence the need for "watchdog" environmental groups. The public talks about the relationship between business and environmentalists as "a check and balance" system.

Scientists can also be suspect. Science is considered an important, but *not* a deciding factor. In fact, according to Charlton Research, many people rely on personal experience rather than scientific studies to determine whether the environment is affecting people's health. Sixty percent of respondents to this survey said scientific results can be influenced by the organization paying for the research.

Participants in the Sierra Club's 1997 focus groups observed: "For years, the scientists that were funded by the tobacco industry sided with the tobacco industry. Now, all of the sudden, they're on the flip side . . ." "Just follow the money and you can get a pretty good idea whose ox is being gored."

Contact

Kristin Hyde, Communications Director; (202) 675-7903