

**TALKING CONSERVATION:
WHAT WE SAY/WHAT THE PUBLIC HEARS
COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH
FOCUS GROUP REPORT**

Prepared for:
National Association of Conservation Districts
Social Sciences Institute, Natural Resources Conservation Service
National Association of State Conservation Agencies

by

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BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Purpose:

- To gain insight from consumers regarding conservation issues of importance, and to ascertain the best ways by which to communicate and induce involvement in conserving the environment.
- Specific topical issues addressed by the research included:
 - ◇ Discussion of issues and terminology associated with conservation.
 - ◇ Assessment of five conservation organization mission statements.
 - ◇ Measurement of preferences regarding conservation movement leaders, services, and individual involvement.
- Evaluation of test ads and NACD brochure.

Methodology:

- In order to meet the objectives of this study, four focus groups were held with suburban and urban residents during July 1997 at the following locations:
 - ◇ Boston, Massachusetts—July 14, 1997
 - ◇ Atlanta, Georgia—July 15, 1997
 - ◇ St. Louis, Missouri—July 16, 1997
 - ◇ Burbank, California—July 28, 1997.
- Earl Wims, Chairman of Marketing Horizons, served as moderator for the meetings.
- Participants were screened to ensure a cross-section of the population, including:
 - ◇ A mix of males and females distributed by age.
 - ◇ Representation of ethnic/racial backgrounds (Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American).

SUMMARY FINDINGS

The following findings are based on the results of the four focus, and while they should not be taken as conclusive, they do represent the general feelings of a diverse group of individuals from various parts of the U.S.

- It cannot be assumed that the general public has an adequate understanding of terminology related to conservation to understand and be influenced by messages directed to them.
- The public understanding of conservation issues is largely based on popular/headline opinion of the day.
- Consumers generally do not think in terms of private land conservation and do not connect with associated benefits.
- There was a consistent feeling throughout the research that the major focus should be on education and information, especially with the youth.
- People are interested in learning what they can do for the environment in their own backyards.
- The primary focus was recommended to be on local government involvement, with state and federal support.
- There is a general mistrust of politicians and business.
- There is a broad-based willingness to volunteer on their own terms.
- Messages must be few and briefly stated in to improve public awareness.
- Nature-oriented messages and graphics have strong public appeal.
- There is a public concern about the negative impact conservation efforts may have on jobs and business success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Messages must be expressed in terms the public understands, as it was apparent that most of the terminology tested would not convey the intended message. Terminology must be used that is not technical in nature, understood only by those professionals in the field.
- Most words need supplemental explanation, with specific examples, in order to be understood.
- Fewer words and messages must be used in public communication tools if the messages are to gain the attention and interest of the audience.
- In order to ensure that messages will be effective, they should be tested with the targeted public audience (local and national level).
- Design and test graphics and messages with personal (relevant) appeal.
- Identify partnership entities who have an interest/ability to communicate.
- Emphasize “water quality,” a well understood and important issue.
- Use the phrase “natural resources” freely.
- Use “conservation,” but give some explanation to ensure the interpretation is consistent with the goals of the Conservation Partnership. This explanation must include the emphasis on private lands because consumers today generally limit their interpretation to that of preservation related to public lands.
- Focus on the locally-led conservation concept, but take care to explain what it means to the public.
- Work the volunteer element into public outreach efforts.
- Don’t make the public choose between conservation and business success.
- Reinforce benefits of private land conservation to the public (provide specific examples).
- GOAL=UNIFIED APPROACH to public communications.

AWARENESS OF CONSERVATION ISSUES

- When respondents were asked what topics came to mind when they heard the term conservation, mentions included:
 - ◊ Forest preservation
 - ◊ Endangered species
 - ◊ Waste management
 - ◊ Alternative energy sources
 - ◊ Preservation of natural resources
 - ◊ Recycling
 - ◊ Fuel and electric efficiency
 - ◊ National/state/community parks
 - ◊ Clean air
 - ◊ Water conservation.

- In addition, when asked to name the key problems or issues associated with conservation today, responses included:
 - ◊ Air pollution
 - ◊ Global warming
 - ◊ Endangered species
 - ◊ Water conservation
 - ◊ Reduction of the rain forest
 - ◊ Lack of international cooperation
 - ◊ Educating people on how to conserve
 - ◊ Balancing the needs of business/corporations versus land preservation
 - ◊ Government laws/regulations regarding conservation.

“Something that bothers me is the air pollution.”

“Global warming is an issue now, too, with conservationists because of the emissions from the steam-fired coal plants . . . “

“I always think of the spotted owl versus the lumbering business in the far northwest.”

“Endangered species versus humans.”

“I keep coming back to the water usage in Atlanta. I mean, for example, you’ve got a fairly small river providing water for a rather large city.”

“The reduction of the rain forest. That seems to be an issue, too.”

“The lack of international cooperation.”

“Getting back to conserving and not throwing stuff away is the whole issue of landfills. The amount of space it takes, where we throw everything away, the stuff we are throwing away that doesn’t need to be thrown away. Stuff that will be there for thousands of years.”

“On a more personal level, the lack of education of the people on how to conserve.”

“What about getting people to change habits? On a personal level, it’s easier to just keep doing things the way that we are doing. But, [we need to] educate them to the point where they feel motivated to change their habits, and do it on their own.”

“I think the conflict of trying to preserve what we have within free enterprise. Companies that want to use the resources kind of trying to find the balance between that.”

“Government laws mandate how we can and can’t conserve. Tied in with businesses trying to make money out of conserving, and at the same time making it difficult for persons to actually do the recycling. For instance, the trash company that we use charges us to pick up our recyclables. So, why would anybody want to have an extra bill?”

“I’m not really sure how to phrase it, but say, between a corporation who wants to come in and do a development and people that want to preserve that particular kind of land . . . where do you find the proper mix there?”

“I think another part of the conflict issue is the waste, and let me explain that. In certain parts of the country [like] western states [such as] Montana, Idaho, Utah, miles and miles of that land is public free range. The ranchers in that part of the country would like to use that range to fatten beef cattle and so on and so forth. But, the government has a stipulation on its usage. So, it can’t be used. So, you have a rancher that needs to use it so he can take a product to market, fatten up cattle, whatever. But, the government says he can’t use it. So, he watches his cattle basically wither away and starve. He’s not able to do that so he can’t understand the regulation that the government has pertaining to public land. There is a huge conflict.”

“Also, related to the recreation, is the use of the state parks where people like to camp and go out to the parks where people might want to hunt. So, there is a conflict of the recreation related to non-lethal activities and then hunting.”

FAMILIARITY WITH CONSERVATION TERMINOLOGY

Focus group attendees were asked to provide their level of understanding of a list of terms used in communications associated with conservation based on the following categories:

Never heard of the term—don't understand

Heard of the term—don't understand

Some idea of the meaning of the term

Understand term—could explain to others

The terms below are coded as follows to show the general understanding that respondents feel they have of the term:

- * Virtually all think they understand
- ** About one-third say they don't understand
- *** One-half or more say they don't understand

A sample of quotes from participants who thought they understood the term are also presented.

* Conservation—Respondents were confident they understood this term. However, their understanding was basically in the context of the preservation of resources.

“Preservation of all resources.”

“Preservation of natural resources for future generations.”

“Not to be wasteful.”

“I would say to just protect and preserve.”

“The maintaining of our natural environment and resources.”

* Natural Resources—Participants also thought they were knowledgeable regarding this expression, and for the most part, they were correct.

“Things produced by nature, such as minerals or water that have limited quantities.”

“Non-man made.”

“Water, air, land, trees, food.”

“Things that come from the earth.”

“Things occurring in nature that can be used for man's benefit.”

* Water Quality—Easily understood, and felt to be very important, by respondents.

“Swimmable [water would be good quality water].”

“Drinkable [water would be good quality water].”

“What I thought about that was how pure or unpure the water was.”

“The ratio of pollutants and chemicals to just clean water. “

“Turbidity, and if you’re not familiar with the word, that’s just a number of particulates in the water. And, even if that’s natural, organic, that turbidity has a lot to do with water quality.”

“Poor water quality would be where . . . animal and plant life couldn’t even live anymore.”

“You have natural spring water or you have water somebody dumps their toxics into.

That is kind of like the two ends of the extreme. Water quality—is it clean, are the fish dying left and right? Are they going in and coming out with their skin falling off?”

** Technical Assistance—Respondents had an idea of the general concept but were generally unable to accurately connect this term in its application to conservation.

“Calling somebody who has some expertise in the area you’re concerned about.”

“Help of a technical nature by experts in the field.”

“An expert who helps a novice with a question or problem. I guess tying that in agriculture, it may be the guy down at the seed farm, or it may be the local farm bureau, or it may be the soil conservationist in Jefferson City.”

“Aiding people in technical areas, or providing solutions or help. Like [if] they don’t know how to conserve, maybe providing ways to help them to conserve.”

“In relation to best management practices or something like that, it’s like if you expect technical assistance you’re looking to people who have studied and might have some clue as to what’s going on to help conservation in one way or another.”

“What technology and biochemistry can offer in conservation efforts.”

“The research and development that supports the process or product. Especially in corn-growing states, you have a lot of hybrid seeds that you use and a lot of things go into that. It’s technical support for that.”

** Wetlands—Consumers usually associated this term with areas such as, swamps, marshes, the Everglades, areas that collect water when it rains, and man-made bodies of water resulting from dams.

“Tidal marshes.”

“Swamp lands.”

“Everglades.”

“Swamps and marshes that support a variety of life.”

“Any area designated to have plant or animal life which survive in certain wet types of soil. That’s a wetland.”

“Water fall close to river drainage systems that are usually frequented by ducks and geese.”

“A navigable waterway in this country, as designated by the Corps of Engineers, can be a dry ditch. It fills up with water when it rains. That’s considered a wetland.”

“Swampy locales that have delicate interdependent plant and animal relationships.”

** Stewardship—Respondents generally understood the meaning of stewardship in terms such as, protection, management, leadership, or giving or sharing.

“Knowing your responsibility for protecting something.”

“I think it is sort of protection of a project, or leadership involved in a specific area. Like maybe a congressman may have stewardship over national parks.”

“Benevolent and conscientious management.”

“I say it [stewardship] is taking care of the resources that you have.”

“Stewardship is managing the land, or the process of the future. We are stewards of this earth, so to speak, and if we do good, then there will be something out there for our children.”

“For me, because we have had this in our church, it means sharing your time and talents with others for the better of other people.”

“I’ve never heard of it in terms of conservation. But, you know, stewardship—it’s yours, don’t screw it up.”

“I would think if you’re really trying to communicate what you want people to understand about stewardship, then you don’t have to define stewardship. You just use the other words.”

*** Biodiversity—Some attendees interpreted the term based on the makeup of the word, “biology” and “diverse.” More than one-half said they were not familiar with the word.

“The plant make-up of an overall landscape. So, it’s the different plants that make up a natural landscape.”

“Maintaining a variety of life in an ecosystem.”

“The amount of plants and animals. The diversity of plants and animals.”

“I thought of the rain forest. How everything is dependent on everything else there and when one thing is disrupted, like when one animal dies out, a lot of things are affected by it.”

*** Locally Led Conservation—Most did not think they knew what this meant and those who thought they did expressed it a variety of ways, including city and state, grassroots, and local rather than federal.

“Conservation problems dealt with by the city and state.”

“I guess more of a grass roots kind of movement to make things better where you live.”

“More thought of on a local level rather than coming down from the federal government or something.”

*** Best Management Practices—Understanding was relatively low as applied to conservation.

“Most cost-effective.”

“Most efficient means.”

“It’s the process that is most suited to the product or process. For example, you would manage wetlands differently than you would prairie lands, and so on and so forth.”

“Best management practice might be to harvest the timber in such a way that you maintain the way the area looks over a long period of time and you replace the timber, either for natural reasons or so that you’ve got some more to harvest later on.”

“Researching the way the other people do it [in order to] find out what those practices are and see how they work and try to make them work for your particular situation.”

*** Sustainable Agriculture—Although many participants felt they understood the meaning of this term, actual comprehension was very low.

“Not a clue.”

“Is that where you grow what you need to sustain yourself, and then you trade with other people?”

“I guessed. Just that it was crops that can easily be grown year after year, they sustain themselves.”

“Sustainable implies that you’re thinking long-term.”

“I’m pretty sure I know what it means. I would think it is a way that agriculture is easily sustained, like in a greenhouse, they used to have this chemical way of growing plants and foods. Hydroponics. You can sustain that, it doesn’t really depend on the weather or whatever else because it is controlled within a certain environment. I don’t know if that is accurate, but it is my thinking.”

“Crops that you grow that regenerate or contribute to the soil. For example, crop rotation, you rotate the crop because you don’t want to completely deplete that area, so it’s those crops that contribute back to the soil. They need nutrients.”

“Sustainable agriculture, I would think, is when you take the waste from your agriculture and make compost heaps and then supply it. Just trying to sustain your growth so that you don’t have to . . . go to other sources to grow your things.”

“I thought of profitable farming.”

*** Watershed—While some Consumers thought they understood the word, there was very limited actual understanding.

“Watershed is a drainage system, a draining system for a river, a lake, or a stream. Everything that drains into that river, lake, or stream is part of the watershed.”

“The area which gathers rainfall and then deposits the run-off to a common area.”

“My perception of it has always been an area to protect. The watershed would be where things might be stored or kept.”

“I think of it as an area of land and how water gets there, how it is used.”

“To me it means conservation. When we have fires, we lose our watershed. I guess the greenery isn’t there.”

“It could be anything. It could be all sorts of things. It doesn’t have to be natural [water]. It’s like an accumulation of water, of water for an ecosystem. So, anything that can be accessible to living things around it. Watersheds can be underground, they can be above ground. Every location has to have a watershed.”

“I thought of a watershed more as a defined area, like every area has its watershed. They talk about . . . Boston being under such and such watershed and then there are different . . . you can look at a map and it will show you different points of Massachusetts and what-not, that this is where the watershed is that controls this region. That’s pretty much all I know about it.”

*** Nutrient Management—Most participants claimed to not understand the concept of nutrient management. Even those who thought they understood the term actually did not.

“Making sure a ground stays fertile through the rotating crops or whatever.”

“Probably making sure what’s good for one thing will [not] harm another part of conservation. Whether it be the bugs, the worms, or whatever it might be, make sure everything is considered and not just one aspect of it.”

“The management of the fertilizer applications.”

“I would think it means something in the water to feed the plants.”

*** Nonpoint Source Pollution—This was the least well known term of all those tested.

“A point source would be like a company, I mean a factory, that dumps all its waste products into the Chattahoochee River. So, a nonpoint source would be something that really couldn’t be traced back to a single source of origin, I guess.”

“To me, a point source pollution would be a factory. So, nonpoint pollution would be cars.”

“Just from the nonpoint source, it sounds like a reference to like not coming from one large, particular source.”

“You know what’s causing it. Various hydrocarbon pollutants. But, you don’t know whether it’s coming from automobiles or power generation . . . “

“I just figured it was a point source or something like you could see sledge coming out of a pipe. So, a nonpoint source would be coming from a wide range of areas, not just one source you can pinpoint.”

REACTION TO CONSERVATION ORGANIZATION MISSION STATEMENTS

- Respondents were asked to rank several statements based on what they felt the priority should be for America's Conservation Districts. The relative appeal is summarized as follows with statements presented in descending order of priority :
 - ◇ "Helping citizens become better stewards of natural resources in their own backyards."—This slogan was very well received by participants. Specifically, stewardship of land was perceived as very important, as was the emphasis on "beginning things at home."

"I liked the idea about stewards. I think we should all be stewards. I think when you say, 'Your own backyards,' people tend to be effected more by what affects them." [Ranked high]

"I think as a country we are a little bit dependent on the federal government, or other people fixing things. I think we are more effective if it is something that directly involves us. If that is just our backyard, or our community, then we are probably going to be more effective at changing things. You can talk about somebody in Wyoming should be doing this, or somebody in Florida should be doing this, but really the only thing that you can do is in your own community. If that is what they are trying to do, trying to get people involved, then I think they have to start right in your own yard." [Ranked high]

"I think that one's very important. Because when you show a person how to take care of their own backyard, and actually show a lot of people, then people are aware of it, not only when they're in their backyard but when they're outside their backyard. People are less likely to pollute if everyone else around them is not doing it. [Ranked high]

"It's my number one. I've always been a great believer in beginning things at home." [Ranked high]

"Well, you have a larger group of individuals when you've got the citizens. I mean, much larger than any group of politicians or volunteers or educators. I mean, I'm sure the education is real high, but if you've got the citizens participating, that's who you want to get to. That's really who you want to get." [Ranked high]

"That's where it starts. It starts with the individual. Conservation starts with the individual. Recycling starts with the individual. It all starts with the individual." [Ranked high]

- ◇ "Conserving natural resources for our children and future generations."—Several respondents picked this statement as the best, largely because it was perceived as summing up the purpose and goals of all the other statements combined. One consumer did mention, however, that while agreeing with the concept itself, in reality little progress has been made towards actually achieving that goal.

"[I picked this one as best] because of the way things are happening, like the volcanoes, and taking away everything, different things happening to the earth, that if we don't start conserving it and taking care of it, it's not going to be here." [Ranked high]

“[I like this one] mostly because everything else basically just seems to fall under that category. You have to conserve everything for our future generations and everything else just kind of falls under that. It is more of a general topic, out of everything else that was written.” [Ranked high]

“Well, not just for my own daughter, but I think the trend has always been, and it seems to be getting worse, don’t worry about the future, there will be some magic thing that occurs that will solve everything. It has become more and more obvious, that’s not going to happen. We have to start cutting back a little bit if we expect some people to continue on.” [Ranked high]

“It had such a Mom’s-apple-pie ring to it. How can you not want to conserve things for future generations? To me, I don’t care how I achieve it, as long as we achieve it.” [Ranked high]

“I picked that one, looking at all five of them. That one is probably closest to what’s most important to me. And, as most parents do, they want their kids’ futures to be as good, or better, than theirs. If the people who are in charge of things use everything up, and there is nothing left for our children, it doesn’t matter how pretty everything looks.” [Ranked high]

“I see it more as a threat. You know, it’s like you will do this.” [Ranked low]

“You can definitely see it as putting off the solutions. In the future generations they’ll come up with new solutions. We don’t have to worry about these problems now. They’ll take care of it in the future. So, I mean I definitely see it in a threatening way. I don’t think of it as extinction versus recycling. But, I definitely would say that it’s more important that we conserve natural resources for this generation.” [Ranked low]

“I agree with the concept, but I’ve been seeing it on TV and hearing it on the radio since I could walk. But, they’ve still got problems, and the problems have gotten worse. It’s a statement, but that’s it.” [Ranked low]

“Helping land users conserve natural resources that give us food and a beautiful environment.”—Consumers had a very positive reaction to this statement. Food production and environmental beautification were two important issues among focus group attendees. However, a few participants did note that you could not help land users/companies conserve resources if they didn’t have the inclination to do so themselves. It was also indicated that land owners might have a conflict of interest and a lack of willingness to sacrifice, if needed.

“[I liked it because] it included agriculture and horticulture. I thought, none of the others mentioned agriculture specifically, so that is why.” [Ranked high]

“Well, I feel it’s very important. Everybody has to eat, obviously. You wouldn’t want to drive down the street and see plastic flowers lining the streets. Like I said, you hear so much about the contaminates in the food, and all this stuff, already. It gets to be where we are almost afraid to eat anything.” [Ranked high]

“I like the beautiful environment. It made me think of the urban areas and the food made me think of more rural areas. I thought this one can incorporate more people.” [Ranked high]

“I think it’s natural to want to preserve it and make it a beautiful environment and give us good food. So, to me it’s more on a localized level dealing with the user. So I like that. It has more to it. [Ranked high]

“If you’re talking about companies or farms, certain federal regulations are things that these people have to go by. But, just as a volunteer group, or just as you or me going in and trying to help these people manage or do what might be best with their land, I don’t see it as a possibility.” [Ranked low]

“It was just the way the wording was to me. It was a little soft. But, I mean when you sit down and break it down word for word and say that you’re targeting the population to have a certain outcome as a result of their efforts, then maybe thinking of it that way, maybe it seems a higher priority.” [Ranked low]

“My thoughts were that you’ll have as many people that are not interested in it as you will that are interested, if not more. And, you can’t make folks want to [conserve natural resources], in fact, some of them will destroy what’s already there.” [Ranked low]

◇ “Local leaders helping the community work together for a healthy environment.” --

While some thought local leaders were preferable, there was a concern with many that local leaders are not to be trusted and that they have not done a good job in the past.

It was not entirely clear, however, who constituted local leadership.

“I agree that instead of having all of these mandates from the federal government that maybe aren’t appropriate for where you live, it would be better to have local leaders and local people setting those mandates and deciding what needs to be done.” [Ranked high]

“That’s my lowest one . . . because I think that’s the way our system works. I mean, it’s the leaders who are responsible for doing this stuff. So, you’re saying the people that are already doing stuff are going to be the ones who keep doing it. We just need to change their focus a little bit.” [Ranked low]

“It was my lowest one, too . . . there’s not enough being done. I think it’s the worst way, of the five, to go about it because you can already say it’s kind of proven itself.” [Ranked low]

“It sounds too much like a political promise.” [Ranked low]

“Local leaders have vested interests and you never know what they are.” [Ranked low]

“I don’t think much of local leaders. I’m leery of them.” [Ranked low]

“Whether they’re political leaders or just neighborhood leaders, they have truly special interests in a lot of cases.” [Ranked low]

“All I could think of, was Riverport and the wetlands they destroyed there, and the new casino right next to it. There was a law where it had to be on water, so they tore down trees and it’s just [an] environmental nightmare, and that is thanks to our local leaders.” [Ranked low]

“Local volunteers providing natural resources conservation assistance, and education.”— Many did not know what was involved in this approach. Even though it was felt that the volunteers have a genuine interest in the subject, they may not have the perseverance to get the job done. Also, it was thought that they must have an organization with strong leadership to be effective.

“I think that is positive because, first of all, when you get people that volunteer, volunteers have an interest in whatever the subject or topic is. So, when they volunteer, they have a genuine interest in it. Then, they are providing the assistance and education. I think the

education is a big part of that, to make people understand and get people involved.”
[Ranked high]

“We have a wonderful community around here, people who are concerned about these issues. If you have ever been to an Earth Day locally, there are all of these groups. I have worked with them on some different things. That is a very positive thing, getting the volunteer agencies involved.” [Ranked high]

“That has a way of people getting all enthused and then, a week or two later they forgot about it.” [Ranked low]

“I favor the spirit of local volunteers and everything. I just think that there’s not continuity in the programs or something. My thinking is they tend to be visionaries and not volunteers. They’re going to have to do something else for a living.” [Ranked low]

“I felt it was quite important, but I felt like the volunteers are already heavily laden with duties and what have you. So I just didn’t feel realistically that they could do this.
[Ranked low]

“But who’s going to do it? I mean we’ve already said we’re cynical about our local leadership doing it, and now we’re saying we don’t think local volunteers either have the political strength or the stick-to-itiveness, or the resources, or whatever. So, who’s going to do it? I mean, you know, that’s the question that comes up to me.” [Ranked low]

PREFERENCES REGARDING CONSERVATION MISSION LEADERSHIP

Focus group attendees reported varied preferences regarding who should lead the conservation effort. These preferences included:

Local Government

Local government—Viewed as more sensitive to the needs of individual communities and people need to solve the problems in their own communities. There was some question, however, if they would have sufficient funds.

“I think they would address the problems locally. I am not as familiar with the problems in Michigan. But, I am more familiar with the problems in California.”

“If you go all the way to the top, to the federal government, it is just too big and they don’t care.”

“Somebody is going to have to get a consensus and make a decision, and with a local government, they would have the ability to make a law, based on the consensus, and they have the money to back it up.”

“I had said the local government agencies . . . you have to get people in there that you trust . . . I agree with the coalition with the business getting the money and stuff. But, based on what’s happening right there, and what the laws are, they need to be patched to try to get the people to solve problems in their own community. And if that happened across the boards, it might straighten things out.”

State Government

States were thought to have unique problems and needs and, therefore, leadership should be centered at this level.

“It seems to me that this state is concerned about our state, and that is where we are living. They are doing the best they can and they probably would be concerned.”

“I put the state because I figured every state would be run differently, so they should have control.”

Concerned individuals

Citizens might tend to be more proactive regarding conservation problems or issues affecting their own communities, but they don’t have the necessary financing.

“I just said concerned individuals at that level.”

“I see a coalition of concerned individuals. Because conservation throughout the United States is going to be a regional area, so the things that people in Florida would want to conserve like the Everglades would be different than what the people in California might want to conserve. The government has a tendency to establish policies that are broad-based. And so, they may not have specific applications, so I think the focal point should be the concerned citizens that are specifically affected.”

Federal Government

People were generally very positive or very negative on this source of leadership. While they have the financial clout and would provide uniformity of laws to overcome self-centered activities at the local level, they were thought to be too big and non-caring.

“I said federal because I figured uniformity of laws and so forth. Also clout, in terms of clout, that the federal government has.”

“I had federal, but I envision that it is a trickle down. Federal to state to the local . . . but, I think it needs federal to get it started because of the clout.”

“I agree that a local interest is very important, but I put the federal government because a certain state government may think that the logging industry would be more important than the conservation of species. And so, you need federal laws and mandates to save certain things that a local entity might overlook, because it will save jobs. Although it can be broad-based, I still think you need the federal mandates.”

Businesses

Due to their potential to pollute the environment, it was felt that businesses should have an inherent leadership role in conserving natural resources. However, even though they should be part of the solution, they have a potential conflict of interest.

“I think businesses should be the [leaders in conservation] already. Because if you look at it, they are the ones that are contributing more to the pollution problem. They should be the ones that are most concerned about it. With the federal government coming in second, you stand on a really big stick. That would trickle down to the state, and then your local governments.”

Other groups mentioned in regards to possibly leading the conservation effort included:

- ◇ Schools
- ◇ Church groups
- ◇ Boy Scouts
- ◇ The scientific community.

CONSERVATION DISTRICT SERVICES PERCEIVED TO BE MOST BENEFICIAL

Respondents were asked to rate a list of services that could be provided by the conservation districts that would be most beneficial. The following represents their assessment of these services presented in order of perceived benefit.

- Educating children about the need for conservation -- There was a general consensus among focus group attendees that educating children about the need for conservation would be a very beneficial service to be provided by conservation districts. Specifically, participants felt teaching children to properly care for the environment now would reap rewards for future generations. This will also provide an indirect benefit as they will influence their parents.

“I started with children. Because children are our future generation, and when they grow up, if they care about the environment and animals now, they are going to care about them when they are adults.”

“I had that one too, educating the children. I really think that is important. The teachers should be paid more money. These kids really need education real bad today. Pay the teachers good money so the teachers will want to teach them.”

“If the children aren’t there, then their parents aren’t going to be there. Children will talk to parents and tell them, ‘Daddy you threw that in the trash can, you’re putting it in the wrong place.’ They are the ones that are going to be in charge twenty years from now. They are old enough to save the earth.”

“I put educate the children. I think if anything is going to be done we have to start with them.”

“I think they do a pretty good job educating the kids right now on recycling and conserving energy.”

- Informing the public about natural resource conservation needs -- This was also felt to be important, particularly as related to educating children. A general awareness is first needed in order to generate interest and action.

“I put it number one, informing the public about natural resource conservation needs. You have got to get the word out.”

“I put down informing the public. I was sort of leaning between that and the children. But I think one reason that kids can be such effective motivators of adults is that when we try to inform kids, they go to these concentrated programs and they are told exactly why it’s important. You sit them down, and show them all of these films, and things like that. Whereas, most of the time, the public is just familiar with the slogans. They don’t get the concentrated

education or information that you give to a child. The child will go to the film or have a class meeting.”

- Bringing local interests together to solve natural resource problems -- There was a felt need to have local orientation but it was also felt to be necessary to provide coordination for the local effort.

“Bringing local interests together to solve natural resource problems. To me, that’s the first step.”

- Obtaining federal and state money to solve local resource problems -- This would also be beneficial, as implementing solutions to current problems and enacting preventative conservation techniques requires funding not available to many of the other parties.

“I kind of changed it a little bit. I put the federal and state money first, because you have to have money to educate the children. Then the children, because you have to educate them. You need money to pay teachers to educate the children, or whoever. How are they going to get the education if there is no money there?”

“My number one was obtaining federal and state money, because everybody agrees that there is a problem, but their biggest gripe is they don’t have any money to solve the problem.”

“I think we need money to solve the local resource problems before we try to educate somebody else. Because there are enough people working on it right now, we need to solve the problems. We can’t wait another thirty years for the children to grow up and start working on them. We need to start solving them right now.”

- Technical assistance to help farmers and ranchers save soil and keep clean water -- This was thought to be too targeted and not broad enough to have a major impact.
- Urban conservation planning -- This concept was just not understood by the vast majority of people as it was unclear what was involved. One person supported the issue.

“I put urban conservation planning, as my number one, basically, because you have to have mission statement to tell people what you’re going to do, and then really, the next five are, what, where, when, how and who, you’re going to get it done by.”

WILLINGNESS TO PROVIDE LOCAL SUPPORT

When presented with the following alternatives to get involved in the conservation efforts, focus group attendees were mixed regarding their preferences for assuming an active role. There was a great deal of interest to get involved in some manner with the preferences indicated by the following order of activities:

Volunteer some time as an earth team volunteer (office or field)

Purchase conservation-oriented products from the local conservation district (such as trees and shrubs, fish, bat or bird houses, and conservation books)

Attend a local meeting about conservation issues facing your community

Talk to a neighbor or a friend about a needed conservation action in your community

Pay to become an individual member of the National Association Of Conservation Districts or local districts

Subscribe to a natural resource conservation magazine

“I checked everything except paying. In subscribing to a conservation magazine, chances are, I wouldn’t read it. It is just a waste.”

“I checked them all except for talk to your neighbor. I am not a good talk to your neighbor kind of person. All of the others I checked.”

“I checked all of them, and added one. I would like to do things that I have already done. When I was in high school, my girlfriend and I, we went to a stream and pulled all of the garbage out. We pulled out all the broken glass. I mean, I am willing to do anything. I do subscribe to a Natural Resource Conservation magazine. I am a member of little groups. I would, and do, purchase conservation oriented products. I haven’t attended any meetings, because I haven’t heard of any. I definitely talk to my neighbors.”

“I checked them all, except the subscribe to a magazine or purchase conservation oriented products because I don’t normally purchase trees, shrubs, or fish. My cats wouldn’t like it. I also put down recycle, which is something I do. I volunteer to clean up the beaches, on the day that they do that kind of thing.”

“I checked the volunteering some time, if I had some time to spare. I would definitely purchase conservation oriented products, and talk to my neighbors.”

“I said attend a local meeting on conservation issues, particularly those affecting my local area.”

“Clean streets, recycle garbage found on streets that you just cleaned, and clean a stream. Those are the things that I have done, or would do, if it was organized for me. I would definitely volunteer time, and I think they ought to do that for people who get in trouble. Like those people who clean the freeways. Make the community services whoever they are, when they get in trouble, make them do it.”

“I would volunteer. I have volunteered. I have volunteered without anyone asking me to volunteer, I did it all by myself. That is why I checked every single one of these, because I am an animal lover.”

“I liked the one about attending the local meetings, about conservation issues. Because I think a lot of times, we don’t really know what kind of issues are even out there. A lot of things are decided without us really knowing, not through the fault of anybody.”

“I put down volunteering some time. I am one of those hands-on type of guys to see what actually goes on. You know, what I can do to do my part.”

“One thing that interested me was the purchase of conservation oriented products, trees, shrubs, bird houses, and so on, and so forth. I don’t know if anybody has ever done it, but if you take a kid out, and you plant a shrub, or some type of tree in the yard, you would be surprised how much possessiveness that individual has with that tree. That is his tree. He is not going to let you mess with it [or] touch it. When you get kids involved, I think that’s a plus. When you put bird houses and things in your yard, it attracts wildlife, you can sit on your patio and watch it.”

EVALUATION OF TEST ADS

- In regards to the magazine test ads, “It isn’t easy being a working mother” was by far the most popular ad of the trio presented. Participants especially liked the use of humor in the ad.

“That’s cute.”

“That was better.”

“That was excellent.”

“That’s the best one.”

“It’s clever.”

“Humor works real well.”

“I like that, except they’ve got one paragraph in there that I don’t like where it talks about it’s easy to do. And see, it’s not easy. I mean if I were making a campaign for this I’d say, ‘We’re all in this together.’ And you get the idea from that, that not only are we in it as people, but we’re in it with animals and all that kind of stuff. That picture really does a good job of pulling this thing together.”

“I think if they had pretty colors it would draw you right in.”

“The thing about the bills I found annoying, because birds don’t pay bills.”

- The ad “Who says you can’t have your cake and eat it too?” received lukewarm enthusiasm at best among focus group attendees. Drawbacks associated with the ad included:
 - ◇ Picture of a child with cake on his face was not perceived as related to the conservation of natural resources.
 - ◇ One participant did not like the use of children in advertising.
 - ◇ Many felt unclear regarding the message the ad was trying to communicate.

“I’m turned off by it, because I think children are used too much to pull at the heart-strings of people in advertising of all kinds.”

“I don’t get much out of it.”

“When you read it to us—well, that’s kind of a fun little picture. But I think if I were trying to appeal to me to get that message across that that group does both provide food

and protect the land, that we know of, a landscape would probably be more effective than that picture would be.”

“I just don’t get the significance of the cake all over the face.”

“The picture doesn’t strike you as being related to nature.”

- The advertisement entitled, “We’re proud to help feed her. But the diapers are up to you.” was also not well received by consumers. The lack of a clear, concise, straight forward message was a major drawback associated with the ad.

“If I was trying to put an ad in the paper about a productive, managed agricultural conservation theme, I would get straight to the point with a beautiful pastoral scene.”

“They’re just trying to tug at your heart-strings.”

“They give you something that really doesn’t lead you to their message.”

“I would rather be truthfully dealt with.”

“I don’t see the message there. What are they trying to say?”

“I don’t like that.”

“That could be a Gerber commercial.”

NACD BROCHURE EVALUATION

Overall reaction to the NACD brochure was very positive, however, there were some suggestions for improvement:

Brochure is too wordy for many people

Need one brochure for those who have a great deal of interest and one for getting the attention of others

Pictures other than agriculture for broader appeal (city park)

More ethnic mix in pictures

Need a brochure directed to children / students

Add an internet address for more information

Highlight the 800 number by positioning and/or font type

“I think it is wonderful. I like it. I like all of the information. I hate a brochure that doesn’t give you enough information, so I like it. I am a volunteer and I am always looking for things to get me out of the house. So, it is nice to have a lot of information. Maybe a picture that would relate to people who are more urban and less rural would be really good.”

“This would be a great brochure to distribute to students.”

“I like the brochure. I think it needs to be a little more multi-cultural in the pictures.”

“It hits me that they are trying to get everybody on the front page. You open it up, and you see corn growing, and for a person who maybe is not a farmer, they would just think it is related to farmers. That is what hit me. When I opened it up, this is just for farmers. It wouldn’t interest me anymore.”

“They need their Internet address on here. Because if they wanted to use less information they could just put the Internet address: `For more information find us at www.com.”

“Maybe they should have a picture of somebody drinking a sparkling glass of water, or something. Maybe something everybody can relate to.”

“I think something that would reach out to a lot more people, rather than using a corn field, and there is a guy standing here with a kid.”

“I like what it says, but I don’t know if it’s going to motivate me to get involved. This is very nice, it’s informative. Is this going to get us to react?”

“You see the pictures of children, it shows a sign of hope and stuff. With something like this, you don’t need signs of hope, you need to show them what is going on right now. Show pictures of all of the sludge being poured in the oceans.”

“It starts out intriguing on the front, but then you open it up and it’s like I’m going to take a nap now. Too many words.”

“When you handed it to me, the first thing I thought of was it was too wordy.”

“They should probably take one half of it out. There is so much, you look at this thing, and then you start reading, nothing pops out at you. They don’t need to list all of these things necessarily. Provide a little more open space and then have the telephone number—what they want you to do, much more distinctly.”

“Break up the text a little. Visually, it just seems like a lot of reading. If you just picked it up, and you thought, oh well, I will read it later, and shove it in your mail pile, you probably would never pick it up.”

“The other comment I would make is that it would have to take somebody that wanted to read it, to read it through.”

“Two points I would like to make are that if you could possibly have a picture of a park scene, like a city park, maybe somebody sitting on a bench, or somebody maybe roller-skating. Because that is also part of the overall scheme of things. And then another thing, I think the number that you call, the 800-number, should be italicized, maybe bold type or something on that line. Because I think it should stand out. And I agree, that this contacting your district, should probably be on the back, right here. Because I think this type of brochure, we should use available space, and not waste any space. So in doing that, I think it would also send a message that they are conserving.”

“I think there’s a need for two different pamphlets. Number one is kind of a general catch-all to everybody, that would be like he and I were saying. A lot less to read, just give some real high-points. And this would be one for groups that expressed an interest in it.”

- While consumers had many suggestions on how to distribute the brochure, there was noticeable emphasis on using distribution channels (such as schools and libraries) that would get the brochures in the hands of children.

“Give them to kids at school, kids will take them home to their parents.”

“If they put a program on at the schools and then give each kid one to take home and talk to their parents about it.”

“You have to make it appeal to kids somehow, make it teen-oriented. I don’t know how to do that. This is adult-oriented.”

“Every seventh grader in the country [should be given a brochure].”

“Every home [should have a brochure].”

“The library [should distribute the brochure].”

“Extension services [should distribute the brochure].”

“If this is the conservation department, I know like, down at the boat shows that they have once a year, they always have the Missouri Department of Conservation down there, and they have the Illinois Department of Conservation there also. They are always giving stuff out like that.”

“This could also be a regular brochure that they pass out any time you get either a hunting license or fishing license, or just put it on the counter, like at Wal-Mart or Kmart, in the sporting goods department.”

“They can have these at the Welcome Center. Like when you come across 270 when you are coming into the state, they have the maps and they have the different things going on in the state. They might have them there.”

“I think they should go to all of the interest groups, environmental interest groups. They can distribute them, maybe when they are going out on voter drives, or something to that affect. Registration drives, where they are having petitions signed. If you’re having one on the environment, they might also say, here is this brochure also, if you’re concerned about the environment here is something else you can do. So I think interest groups should have these, as well.”

“Advertising. I don’t know if that is feasible, but advertising on the television. Talking about how if you would like our brochure . . .”

“I recommend they do not send it mass mail. It will get tossed away.”