Knowing Your Audience: Lessons for Environmental Behavior Change from Mason County, WA

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Knowing Your Audience: Lessons for Environmental Behavior Change from Mason County, WA

By: Heidi Keller, Cammy Mills and Bob Simmons
Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference
April 30, 2014
Summary of three different audience research efforts

- “Exploration of Shoreline Property Owner Knowledge and Awareness of Shoreline Management and Habitat Issues” August 2012
- “Increasing Beneficial Vegetation on Hood Canal: Homeowner Knowledge, Awareness and Motivation for Planting Along Their Shoreline” February 2014
### Mason County Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics based on 2012 data</th>
<th>Mason County</th>
<th>Washington State</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population density</td>
<td>63.3/square mile</td>
<td>101.2/square mile</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Average Age</td>
<td>44.5 (+/-0.3)</td>
<td>37.2 (+/-0.1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent high school graduate or higher</td>
<td>88.3% (+/-1.1)</td>
<td>90% (+/-0.1)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent bachelor's degree or higher</td>
<td>18.3% (+/-1.6)</td>
<td>31.6% (+/-0.2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median household income, 2008-2012</td>
<td>48878 (+/-2,812)</td>
<td>59374 (+/-263)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent, 2008-2012 estimates</td>
<td>82.8% (+/-0.2)</td>
<td>72.5% (+/-0.1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts
quickfacts.census.gov
Low awareness or belief in the importance of some BMPs. Participants did not feel that their actions (or lack of action) had an impact on local water quality.

- Among septic owners, 51% were not concerned that it was a problem or didn’t think it needed to be inspected.
- Among livestock owners, 61% felt they didn’t have enough manure to pose a problem.
- Shoreline landowners were highly motivated, but unaware of shoreline planting recommendations.
- Belief that Mason County’s waters are cleaner than in other areas.
Discounts and giveaways were a popular motivator

- Discounts for inspection and pumping were most popular among septic owners.
- A free manure cover was the second most popular option among livestock owners
- Shoreline property owners are motivated by offers of free and discounted plants as a possible solution to erosion problems.
DIY attitude – Audiences favored information-based solutions and concrete help

- Do-It-Yourself manual for septic maintenance (second favorite), lists of licensed inspectors, and low interest loans
- Print materials from the Conservation District about manure BMPs (favorite option), equipment loans, and info for haulers and composters

* Exceptions to the DIY attitude among those where physical labor was a barrier (e.g. older shoreline residents who needed help installing plants and livestock owners who needed help with labor)
Variable interest in site-visits
- Visits from County or government employees were not popular among septic and livestock owners.
- Among shoreline property owners, a site visit from a Master Gardner or other native plant expert was welcome.
Motivating messages

- Messaging that focused on specific local problems with concrete solutions
- Statements which included impacts on local economy, jobs and shellfish industry
- Statements about health of self, family and pets were more motivating than statements about the environment in general
Very strong connection to place and strong commitment to stewardship.

Uncomfortable with “blanket” recommendations. Belief that their property is different.

 Desire for others to be included in outreach efforts.

Many older, long time residents means that people have seen changes to local waters over time.

Experience with SMP update process and attention to low dissolved oxygen in Hood Canal has led to some scientific “burnout”.

“I like my green lawn but I’m willing to listen if there is something I can do.”
Program response – Oakland Bay
A multi-agency effort

- Free septic maintenance manuals
- Coupons for discounts on pumping and inspection
- Septic workshops
- Rebates for installing septic risers and effluent filters
- Mailers reminding people to keep up with septic maintenance and advertise septic workshops
- Low interest loans for repair or replacement of OSS
- Conservation plans for farms
- Financial assistance for landowners to implement habitat restoration and agricultural improvement projects
- The start of a manure exchange program connecting livestock farmers with gardeners who need manure,
- The development of the Farmer of the Year Award to provide an incentive for farmers to implement best management practices (BMPs)
- Improvements to Shelton’s wastewater treatment plant
Outcome – Oakland Bay

Oakland Bay Shellfish Growing Area Upgrade
September 2012

Upgrade

- Green: Approved
- Yellow: Conditionally Approved
- Red: Prohibited
Program response – Shoreline vegetation
In planning

- Free and reduced price plant kits
- Customized plant kits with location-specific instructions
- Messaging will focus on tangible benefits of planting shoreline vegetation to the individual (low maintenance and beneficial for erosion).
- Messaging will focus on local water body (Hood Canal) both in terms of issues discussed, and images used.
- Messaging will highlight the regional nature of the effort using our locally popular “Do Some Good for the Hood” logo so that people feel that they are part of a larger effort.
Questions

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- All research reports are available for download on My Puget Sound: www.mypugetsound.net/salishpresi