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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

Background

- ▶ Summary of three different audience research efforts
 - “Exploration of Barriers and Motivators to Adopting Recommend Practices for Septic and Livestock Management in the Oakland Bay Watershed.” January 2009
 - “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

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

Research Highlights

- ▶ 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.

Research Highlights

- ▶ 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.

Research Highlights

- ▶ 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)

Research Highlights

- ▶ 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
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Shoreline Audience Highlights

- ▶ 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.”

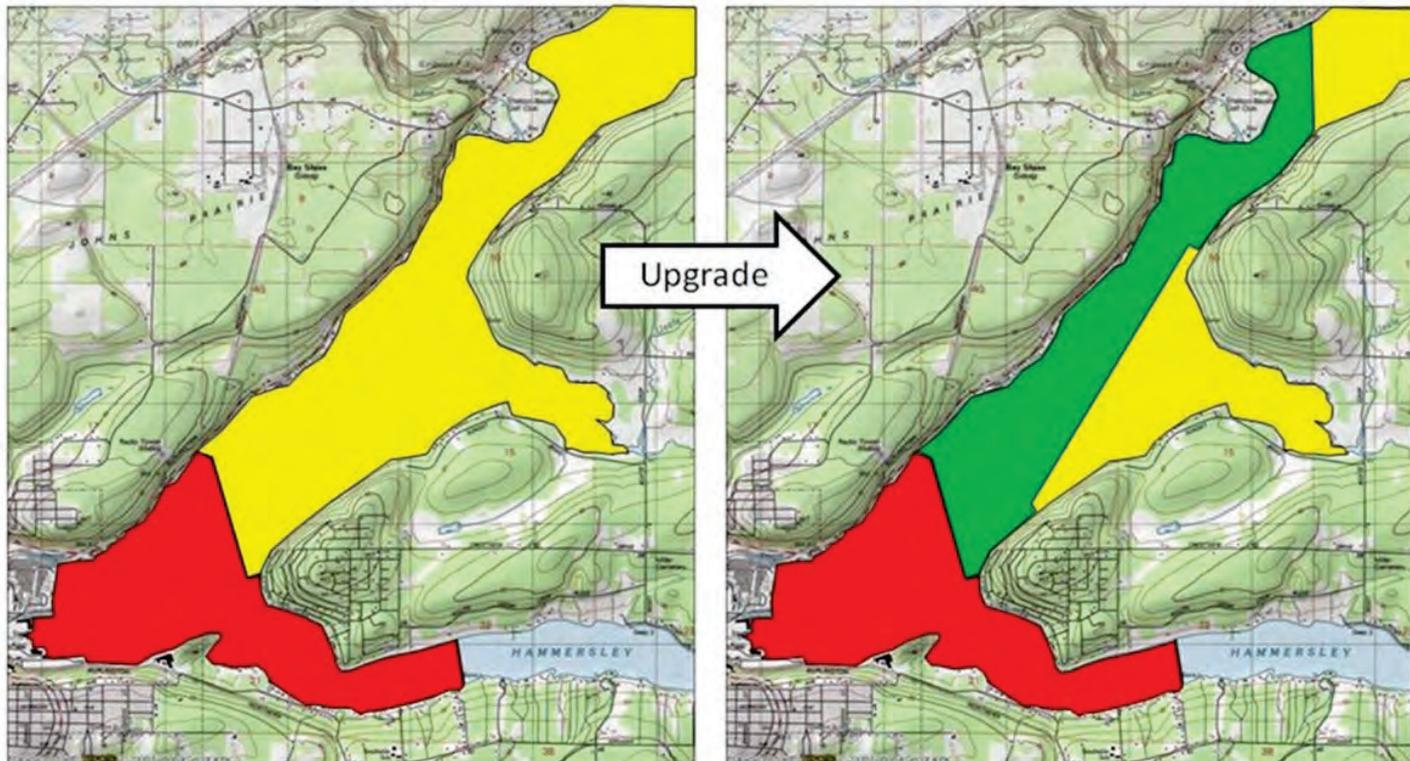
Program response – Oakland Bay

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



Approved

Conditionally Approved

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
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