

Communications in Conservation



Wildlife Management Institute

MSCG Project Intent

- Not to replicate or create conservation social scientists in state agencies
- Provide basic information to increase awareness of and about the acquisition and application of conservation social science in agency decision making
- For the purposes of these modules, we'll use the more modern and broader terminology of conservation social science rather than human dimensions of wildlife management
- Our use of the term wildlife includes mammals, fish, birds, insects, reptiles, etc.
- WMI deeply appreciates the contributions of Dr. Daniel J. Decker and Dr. Lou Cornicelli to this project

Communication

- Conveys information through the exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, as by speech, visuals, signals, writing, or behavior
- Essential process in wildlife management
- Increases transparency and demonstrates inclusion of diverse constituent perspectives in decision making
- Increases understanding of complexity of wildlife management
- Increases understanding of issue among stakeholders

Communication

- Communicating effectively to the public and target audiences is a common challenge in most conservation agencies
- Occurs within a complex and multi-layered array of intersecting groups of people with different needs, interests and concerns
- Requires planning, skill and use of multiple approaches
- Fear of misspeaking or communicating about contentious issues is common
- Technical competence doesn't always result in effective communication

Communication

- Nothing happens without communication
- Can be a very powerful tool
- Ineffective management is often result of poor communication
- Basis for maintaining good relationships
- Listening is just as important as delivering content
- Communication is especially important when not all agree
- Communicate to all, not just current stakeholders
- Scientists are rarely trained to communicate scientific information to the public

Education and Outreach

Education and Outreach require communication skills but may have different intended outcomes

- Education – improves knowledge, skills and abilities through instruction, training or mentoring, often 1-way
- Outreach – increases awareness of services to people who might not otherwise have access to those services; encompasses research, planning, and engagement of stakeholders

Laswell's Communication Model (1948)

- Who?
- Says what?
- To whom?
- Through what channels?
- With what effect?

Source → Message → Channel → Receiver → Evaluation

Who Communicates?

- Everyone in agency
 - Commissioner(s)
 - Director
 - Communications Office staff
 - All staff

Everything sends a message – even what is not communicated

Messages

- Identify key take-aways (what do you want them to know/do?)
- Know your audience
- Test and refine message
- Be clear and concise
- Make it memorable (tie to past experiences, emotion, tradition)
- Tell the “why”, “what”, “when” and “how” all at once
- Identify the positive and negative impacts
- Stick to agency branding

Methods of Communication - Formal

- Press conference/press release
- Research/management report
- Commission meeting remarks
- Website
- Social media
- Remarks to elected officials

Communication - Informal

- Method or channel of communication (e.g., delivery.gov, selected audience, TV, radio, social media)
- Type of communication (e.g., survey, public meeting, focus group, informative, call to action)
- Who is communicating (e.g., status, title)
- Timing and location
- Appearance, skill and demeanor of communicator, tone
- Visuals (e.g., photos, graphics, text, language)

Working With the Media

- Understand the request
- Select the most appropriate communicator, no technical jargon
- Stay in your lane – have key talking points
- Represent agency perspective, not your own
- Understand their time constraints/deadlines
- 5-10 second sound bites
 - Why the issue is important/why should people care?
 - What the agency is doing to achieve desired outcome?
- Be camera ready

“News”

- Now 24/7
- Everyone has a camera and microphone in their pocket and can post in almost real time and without review
- Print news is old news
- News often has a “wow” factor or conflict
- Reporters are increasingly storytellers
- Have and follow a communications plan for routine *and* emergency communications
 - Develop a policy for responding to misinformation and disinformation

“News”

- Develop relationships with environmental reporters
- Provide positive stories for slow news days (facts, photos, B-roll)
- Don't play favorites with the media
- Provide key points in case they don't ask the “right” questions
- If you don't know the answer, say so and get back to them later
- Never say “no comment”
- Nothing is off the record

When to Communicate

- Early and often
- To inform operational and strategic decision making
- When people may be impacted by agency actions or wildlife
- Announcements of new programs or services
- When a call to action is needed
- When information you have informs other decision-making processes
- Help others understand current or emerging issue
- To maintain partnerships or agency image

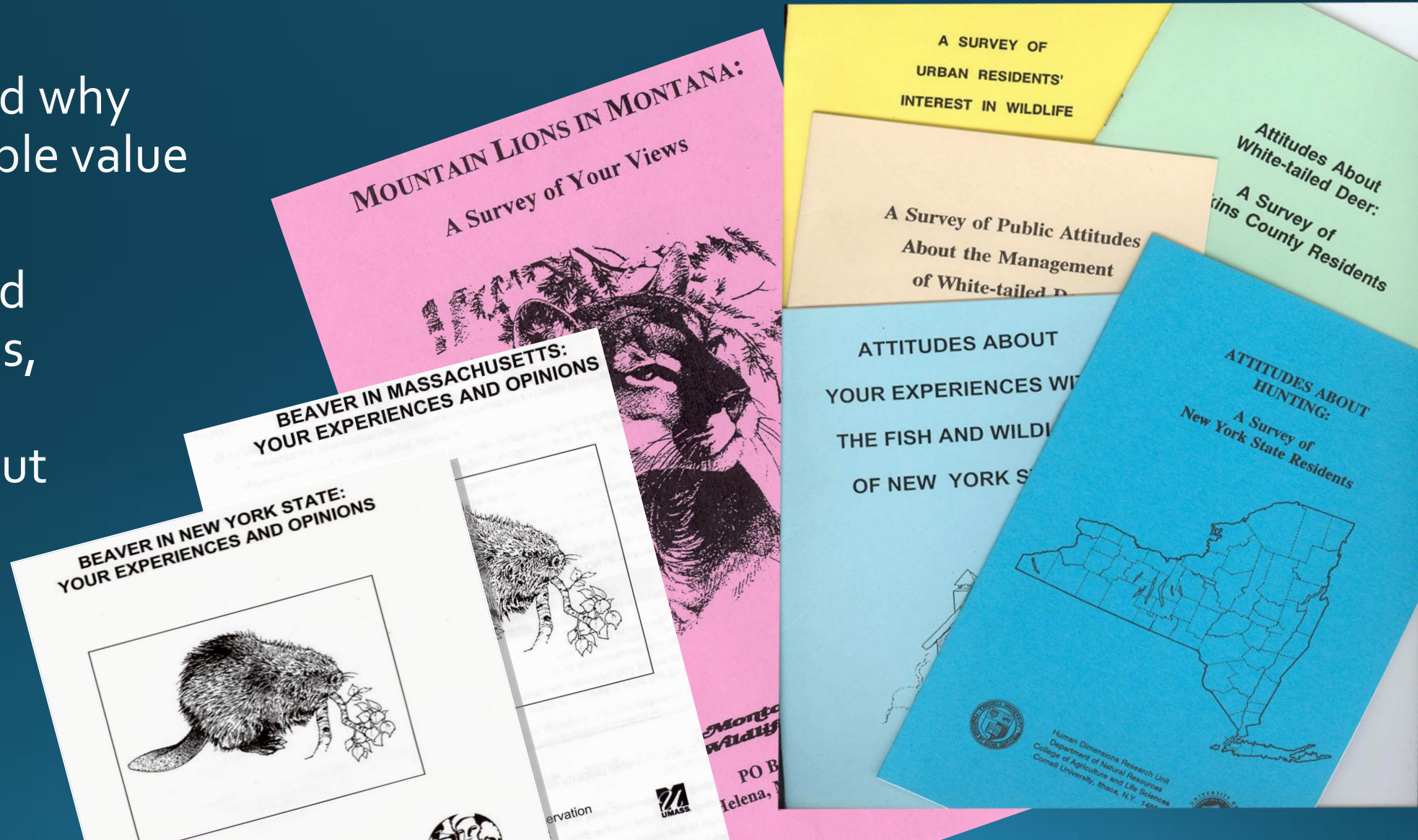
Persuasive

- Intent is to change attitude or behavior
- Difficult to achieve; long-term
- Repetitive and consistent messaging



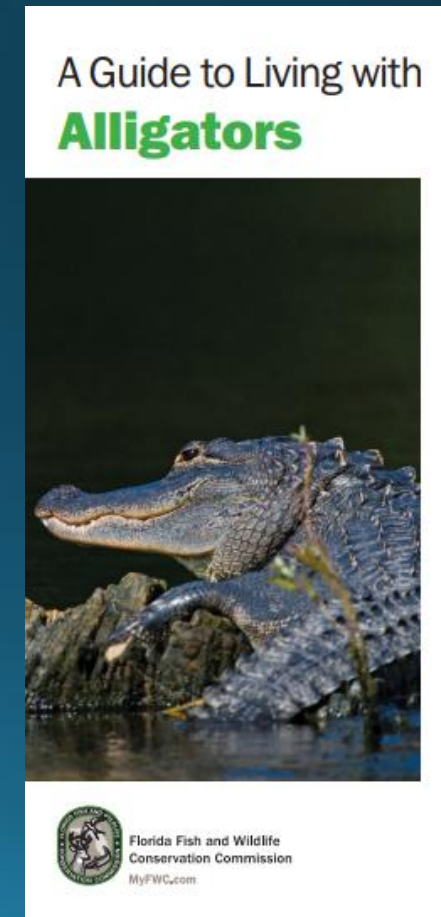
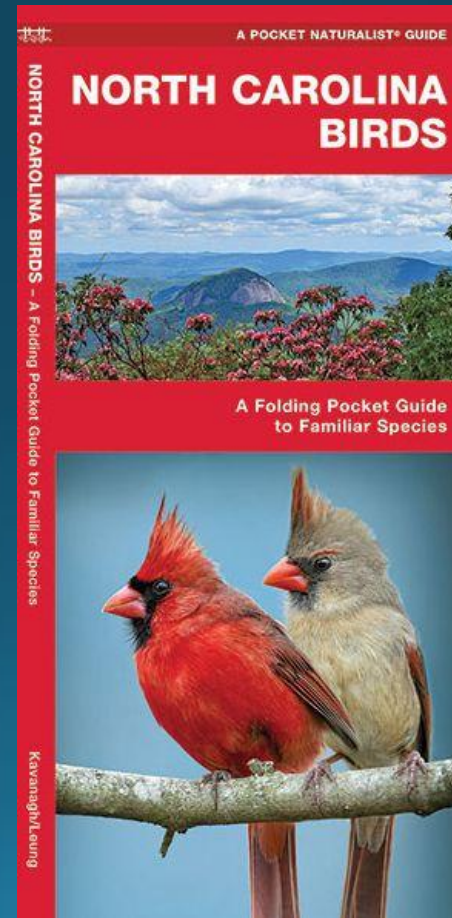
Inquisitive Communication

- To understand why and how people value wildlife
- To understand peoples needs, interests and concerns about wildlife



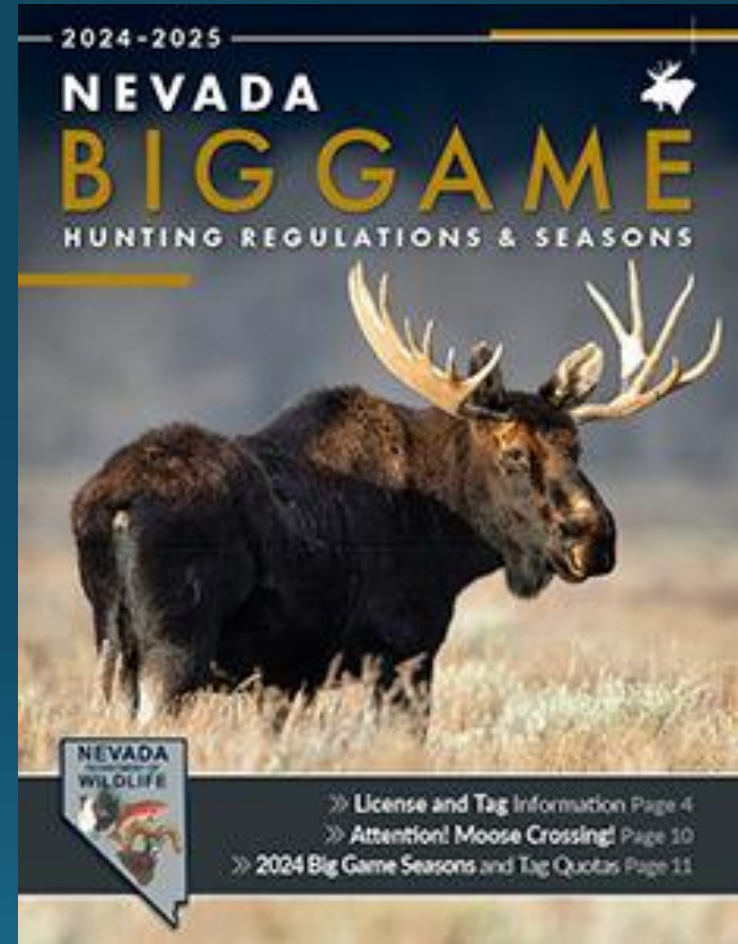
Educational

- Informs people about wildlife or actions of conservation agencies
- Usually one-way



Informational

- Convey facts (e.g., hunting regulations)
- Use best available information
- Not as effective for
 - Controversial issues
 - Issues with high uncertainty



Performative

- Demonstrate a particular trait (e.g., staff expertise)
- “doing business with words”
- Ex: proposes, assesses, selects, offers



Communication Channel Considerations

- Purpose of message
- Content of message
- Longevity of message
- Characteristics of audience
- Available channels to reach desired audience
- Skills to use channel effectively
- Consider multiple channels
- Cost relative to its effectiveness
- Time constraints

Social Media

- Have a social media strategy that identifies purpose, persona, language and tone
- Use is increasing
- Needs to be timely and accurate, closely monitored
- Have strategy for responding to misinformation or disinformation
- Helps determine how people are interacting with your content

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Resources

- [What is Social Media Engagement? – Qualtrics](#)
- [Five Components Of A Successful Strategic Communications Plan \(forbes.com\)](#)
- [COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TOOL \(epa.gov\)](#)
- Human Dimensions of Wildlife Management. ed. D.J. Decker, S.J. Riley, W.F. Siemer 2nd ed. 2012. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD