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*Keeping Conservation Visible in
the Interconnected Age*



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Foreword

Driven by growth of the Internet and expanding access to it, a communication revolution is underway. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service must embrace this revolution as a vital part of our conservation work.

Developed collaboratively by External Affairs program staff in all regions, this document is intended to foster a conversation among leaders, employees and stakeholders about how the agency should join the revolution and adapt the way we communicate.

The greatest conservationists have also been the greatest communicators—Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Ding Darling, just to name a few. They used the power of the pen to create a conservation movement. Now, the Service is poised to use the power of the keyboard to further our conservation legacy and build future constituencies to conserve our nation's fish and wildlife.

We invite Service leaders, employees and partners to join in a conversation about leveraging new media technologies for conservation action, meeting long-term communication demands and developing a FY2012 budget proposal that builds a 21st Century communication capacity.

"Like the resource it seeks to protect, wildlife conservation must be dynamic, changing as conditions change, seeking always to become more effective." Rachel Carson, Silent Spring

Introduction

A massive global communication network (the Internet) has proliferated around us. At best, we have dipped our toes into this ocean of collaborative, collective opportunity. Communication technology and culture has changed dramatically in the past decade. Though the fundamentals of communication have not changed, the new mechanisms and styles of public engagement are nothing short of revolutionary.

The Service has struggled to be a leader (or really even a player) in the Web-based communication revolution. The agency has shining stars and bright spots — innovative individuals and programs who have embraced social and collaborative media opportunities. Many other conservation organizations like The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society, Children and Nature Network and government agencies like the National Park Service have expanded their online efforts and mobilized people for real conservation action.

The revolution is all around. We must adapt or become obsolete.

If we do not actively pursue strategic and tactical changes in our communication, we risk becoming “invisible” to the interconnected communities of people who support what we do. And that has huge implications for our conservation work and to those who will follow us.

We have left the “information age”—a time when sending news releases and posting documents online was considered effective communication. We are now in the midst of the “interconnected age”—an age that demands new levels of engagement and collaboration between a government and its people.

It is an age defined by *collective conversations*. From the White House to state houses to school houses, the American people expect us to engage.

Fresh communication approaches require new tools, techniques, skills, knowledge and an openness to innovation — and changes in management and communication culture.

Our agency needs the communication capacity to engage in this new world—this new *conversation*. External Affairs and the professionals who fill its ranks strive to facilitate the needed change conversation within the Service at all levels and with our demanding publics and stakeholders.

Our nation has been at the forefront of change throughout the history of conservation, and today our collective response to climate change and other challenges of the 21st century resolves to be even stronger. To meet these challenges, we must engage those who are already talking, in the places where they are talking.

Join us in the conversation for change.

Forces of change

The World Wide Web emerged 20 years ago.* This global communication network has dramatically altered, among other things, the way we share and process information, shop, socialize, learn and mobilize people. And new technologies are being invented at blinding speed.

Aldo Leopold wrote, “The outstanding scientific discovery of the twentieth century is not television, or radio, but rather the complexity of the land organism.” Humanity’s discovery of ecosystem complexity was hallmark indeed. As well, the advent of the Internet is revolutionizing how people conceptualize the landscape and move toward conservation action.

With online mapping technologies, we can “fly” over the landscape where we live, work, hunt, hike and birdwatch. We can layer habitat and demographic data to better understand how people impact the landscape. We can monitor the landscape’s rapid degradation from the comfort of our desks while we lament society’s divorce from the natural world in favor of a virtual one.

Or, perhaps, we now have the power to use this global communication network for revolutionary conservation action through online data sharing, collaboration, community action and citizen participation—and a renewed conservation movement. We must apply the same science to our communication that we systematically use to conserve America’s fish and wildlife.

The fundamentals of communication have not changed. Indeed, the best way to foster conservation messages is through one-on-one conversation and encouraging direct contact by people with their natural world. However, audiences—especially younger ones—are demanding new ways to engage with and share information about their experiences, opinions and concerns.

“We don’t know what the Web is for, but we’ve adopted it faster than any technology since fire.”

*David Weinberger,
The Cluetrain Manifesto*

* MARCH 13, 1989 | Computer scientist, Tim Berners-Lee, at the European Organisation for Nuclear Research, presented a paper containing methods by which scientists could easily find and share documents. At that time, the use of Internet was limited to defense and academics domains only. Communication was text-based in newsgroup, chat and send message format (much like email).

New Administration / New Media

The Obama administration has provided clear direction for federal agencies on use of Internet communication tools. On January 21, 2009, his first full day in office, President Obama issued a *Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government*, calling for the Federal government to be more transparent, participatory and collaborative. The memo directs agencies to “harness new technologies to put information about their operations and decisions online and readily available to the public.” A concurrent memo regarding the presidential Freedom of Information Act instructs agencies to “use modern technology to inform citizens about what is known and done by their Government.”

“Innovation in social technology has created unprecedented opportunity to connect you to your government in order to obtain information and services and to participate in policymaking. If you are on Facebook or MySpace, government should be accessible there, too. This is the core of what we call ‘context-driven government.’”

*The White House Blog,
New Technologies and Participation*

Beyond merely aggregating information online with newly-developed sites like *Data.gov* and *Recovery.gov*, the Administration has led by example with online participation and seeking public involvement and comments through campaigns like the *Virtual Town Hall*, *National Discussion on Health Care Reform* and other Web sites that encourage the contribution of ideas—then sharing those contributions online in the form of text and video.



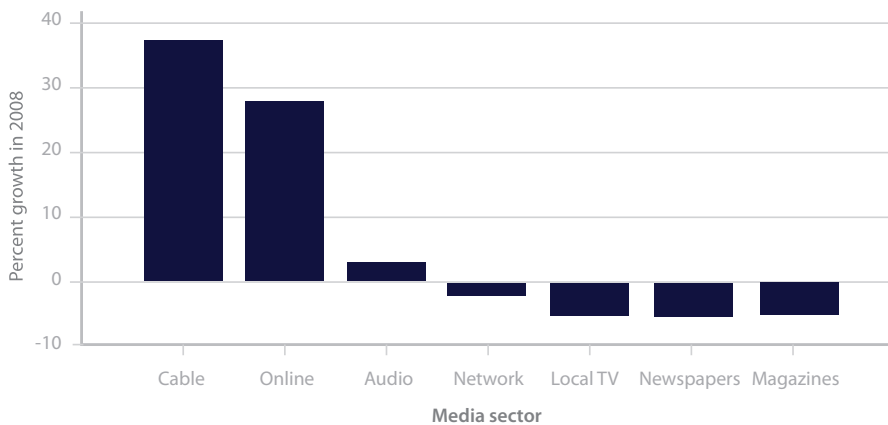
The front page of WhiteHouse.gov on July 1, 2009 demonstrates a new participatory and collaborative communication approach. The site featured video clips submitted by Americans commenting on health care reform and offered opportunities to watch and/or engage online.

Print Declines—Web Expands

According to the Project for Excellence in Journalism's (PEJ) *State of the News Media 2009 Report*, newspaper ad revenues have fallen 23 percent in the last two years. This has imperiled some of the nation's most prominent newspapers, with a few, such as the *Rocky Mountain News*, forced to close. PEJ estimates that nearly one out of every five journalists working for newspapers in 2001 is now gone.

Audiences Turn to Cable and Web

Percentage Change in Audience, 2007 to 2008, Across Media



Source: Arbitron, Audit Bureau of Circulations, comScore Media Metrix, Nielsen Media Research; as presented in *State of the News Media, 2009*.

The way in which the public consumes news is changing. More and more Americans are getting their news via blogs, social networking sites like Facebook, and video sites like YouTube. This trend, while still in its infancy, is changing the way news is reported—with profound implications, as the PEJ report notes:

“Mobile viewing, the sharing of stories on social networks and video sites, and posts on a multitude of microblogs became more widespread in 2008 while earlier tools like e-mail and RSS remained popular. By compiling, sharing and customizing the news they consume, people in a sense are becoming not only their own editors, but also critical agents in the trajectory of a news story.”

As a result, we face a rapidly changing and fragmented media environment, one that demands rapid response, constant attention and multi-channel information distribution. Effective communication in this world demands more content that is updated more frequently—a development that is overwhelming the Service's existing communication resources and quickly pushing us toward obsolescence.

ORGANIZING AROUND CONSERVATION ISSUES TODAY: GRAY WOLF CASE EXAMPLE

The Service's proposal to remove the gray wolf from the federal list of threatened and endangered species in 2008 generated raging controversy. In response, conservation groups and the ranching community took to the Internet and began launching campaigns to support their case.

Defenders of Wildlife, which adopted the wolf as its iconic symbol, has made organizing around wolf issues a priority online. Defenders maintains a MySpace page with nearly 20,000 friends and an active message board. Defenders' Facebook presence comprises 29,750 fans and a group with nearly 2,000 members. On YouTube, a Defenders “Save Northern Rockies Wolves” video was viewed 241,832 times and had 3,782 comments. “Wolf Slaughter,” a film illustrating aerial wolf hunting in Alaska, was viewed 600,188 times and had an astounding 7,483 comments.



Supporters of the delisting are also connecting with one another through online forums and message boards, and are using social media platforms to argue the vitality of game herd conservation and pest control. Anti-wolf Coalition posted a Youtube video, “Misinformation,” that drew 2,519 viewers and 89 comments.

Organizing Without Traditional Institutions

Institutions have traditionally been the vehicle for organizing people based on shared values or purpose; however, as people increasingly find each other and communicate through technology, the role of traditional institutions has become less important—sometimes even irrelevant.

New technology enables new types of group formation because it removes the transaction costs associated with forming relationships. The costs of all kinds of group activity—sharing, cooperation and collective action—have fallen so far that serious, complex work can be taken on with little institutional direction.

An emerging trend, enabled by Internet technology, is a transition toward networking as a means of organization. Because localized groupings have only the capacity of their immediate resources, many are finding they can have a larger impact through use of shared resources. Networked groups have begun pooling their efforts for bigger impact.

Landscape-level cooperative agreements at various levels of governments and civil society depend on these same networking concepts. As the technology matches the spirit of large-scale and diverse partnering in the conservation community, this phenomenon will only become more profound.

CONNECTION & COLLABORATION



As a mechanism for sharing information and tracking implementation of State Wildlife Action

Plans, the Service and dozens of partners collaborated to build The Conservation Registry (www.ConservationRegistry.org).

Service project report data is aggregated and presented alongside projects of other habitat conservation partners—federal agencies, non-profit organizations, tribes and foundations. Initial release of the database was focused on the Pacific Northwest, but it is now expanding across the continent. The communication effort helps identify areas where landowners and organizations can generate the greatest strategic benefits for fish and wildlife.

“A RECORD TURNOUT IS EXPECTED”

That simple message was a key piece of guidelines and a sample script Mike Moffo, the field director for President Obama’s campaign, shared with *Get Out the Vote* operatives across the country two weeks before the election.

In a *TIME* magazine article this spring, psychologist and author Richard Cialdini told Michael Grunwald, “People want to do what they think others will do.” The President’s campaign was taking advantage of what Grunwald called a dream team

of behavioral scientists and psychologists. The disciplined use of language linked to human behavior can be a powerful nudge for people.

It can be powerful for the Service.

The use of language is critical to achieving goals and priorities. The language of conservation must change—particularly the way the Service understands and uses language to communicate its priorities. Whether the topic is accelerating climate change, landscape conservation or

connecting people with nature, the way we use language can have a dramatic impact on the success we realize.

If our audience isn’t moved, what we do will matter less.

We must apply the same science to our communication that we take for granted when it comes to the science and biology needed to conserve America’s fish and wildlife. It’s no longer enough to think we know what language will transform our goals into reality—we must know.

Visits to FWS.gov last year: 19.5 million

Average time on site: 6 minutes

We are not just about delivering content; we are helping people discover us and engage with us. Our Web content is voluminous and our Web audience is large. Our Web site is important, but what is more valuable is our Web presence. Right now, our presence is limited.

Conservation uses of this social phenomenon are fledgling, yet exciting. Platforms like my.nature.org (Nature Conservancy) and NatureFind.com help conservation enthusiasts organize around environmental topics, particularly in the context of outdoor hobbies and social groups that never had a means of forming before the Internet.

Vision for the future

Communication in the “interconnected age” requires new approaches and changes in our communication culture.

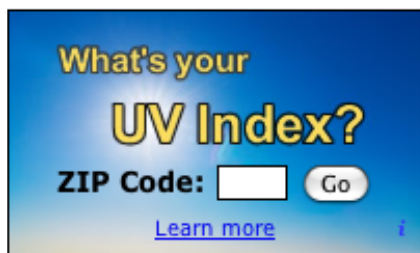
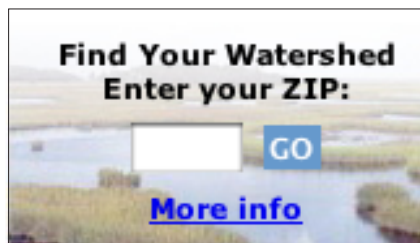
We envision a future for the Service where daily public information sharing is transparent, encouraged and decentralized — allowing for rapid production and deployment of information by talented employees throughout the agency. Communication efforts will be aligned, guided and supported by External Affairs practitioners and the agency’s leadership, but executed by our scientists, field biologists and experts. Natural resource priorities will drive priority communication as we systematically engage Congress, partners, media and other stakeholders and specific user audiences to support conservation efforts and actions.

Internet-based communication technologies do far more than offer new channels for information delivery. Making information available online is a good step, but the mere presence of information online does not “communicate.” To truly communicate effectively as an agency, we will put our most talented individuals out front, and enable them to listen and converse with our stakeholders in a human voice (rather than the bureaucratic-speak of the traditional news release). We need to enable processes, tools and a communication culture that cultivates openness, transparency and individual accountability for engaging individuals and interest-based communities.

We envision extensive use of online social media, user-contributed-content tools (think Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, Facebook, etc.) to bolster the online presence of the Service. We will strive to move at the pace of innovation.

We recognize, given the blistering pace of new media development, that today’s online destinations and tools will change and evolve rapidly. Fundamentally, we need to be where our audience is located — and our audiences are changing and moving fast. They are moving away from desktops to mobile devices. They are hanging out in new online, interest-based communities.

We need to move with them. We need to be a community member.



A widget is a small piece of Web code that makes something interesting appear on Web sites. Widgets allow Web sites to feature dynamic content from another site or data service. Like these EPA widgets, the Service could offer information that could be embedded on partner Web sites, expanding our audience and increasing our Web presence.

To move deftly in the communication world, we must liberate and entrust our staff to access information appropriately and communicate responsibly. With the same accountability as other professional communication functions (phone, email, public presentations, etc.), staff will be encouraged to engage in online conversations and networked communities.

Using the tremendous wealth of data, research, observations and experience at our disposal, we will offer our stakeholders tools for querying and aggregating information about our activities. We recognize that the Internet has, by some measures, become a massive database. We will strive to present open, transparent information in the form of data that can be shared, searched and queried and reported in the form of feeds, mashups, widgets and other open-sharing methods. We will strive to make data available so that our public and our employees can consume these services on their terms.

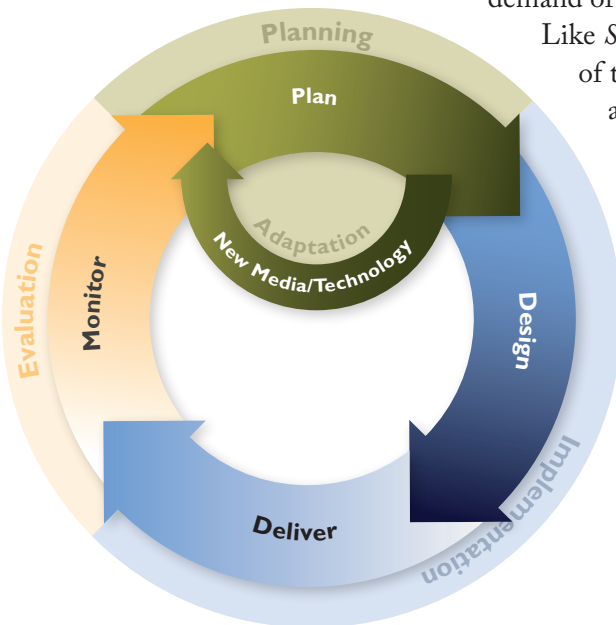
Strategic Conservation Communication

By its very nature, communication at the regional and national level requires a rapid response, triage approach. Internet technologies have only accelerated that pace. We believe that, if we simply follow the topic or demand of the day, we will have talked much, but communicated little.

Like *Strategic Habitat Conservation*, the communication efforts of the Service will be most effective with a decidedly strategic approach (see the *Strategic Approach to Communications*, December 2007).

We will plan, design, deliver, evaluate and adapt communication on three levels:

1. Day-to-day operations — ongoing conversations
2. Long-term, behavioral campaigns
3. Crisis communication



Strategic Conservation Communication

Communication programs follow a similar model to Strategic Habitat Conservation — plan, design, deliver, evaluate and adapt.

Building capacity

The Service has an inherent, remarkable capacity for communication.

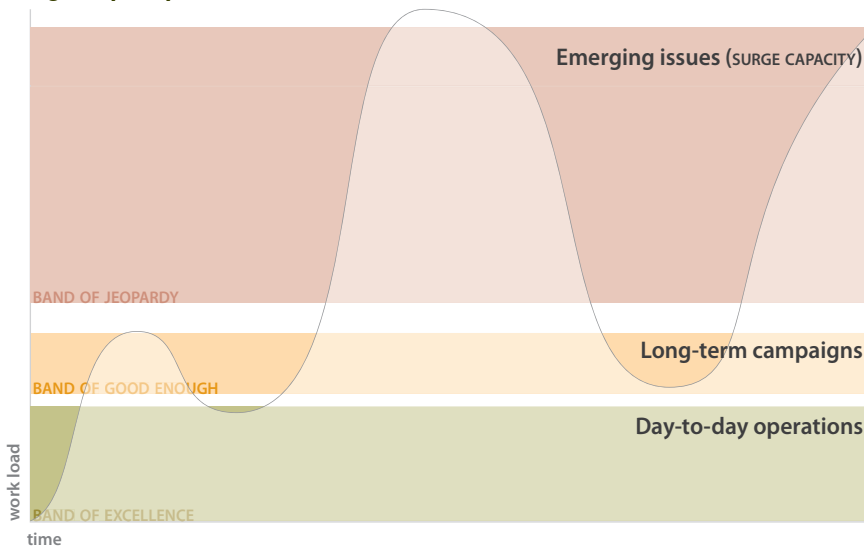
Everyone in the Service is a communicator, and all need to be engaged in communication efforts. Indeed, each Service employee and volunteer plays some internal or external communication role.

Yet with all this capacity, we are struggling to meet the growing communication demands and needs of the administration, a demanding public, and a media-savvy Congress. Our ability to unleash the Service's huge potential communication capacity is primarily hindered by these factors:

- Restrictive communication policies and information technology access
- New media skill gaps (Web programming, new media production, etc)
- Uneven distribution of communication expertise agency-wide
- Limited communication support for Service employees
- Limited time and resources

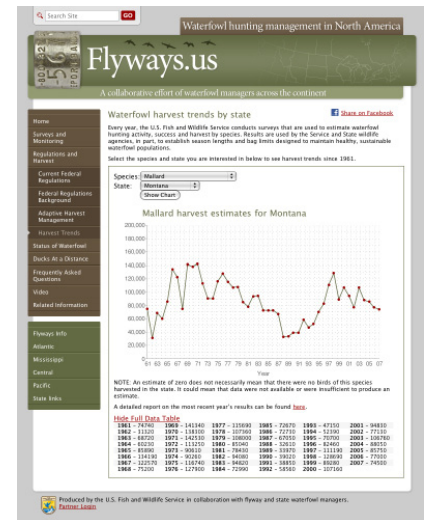
To meet long-term opportunities for employees to prioritize communication work, we must leverage the capacity of our entire workforce. We also must determine where investments in communication make cost-effective sense in achieving conservation goals.

Surge Capacity



Throughout the agency, day-to-day communication demands have increased—most notably in field stations and within regional and national External Affairs and program outreach functions. We have overwhelmed our current capacity, and are currently unable to handle long-term campaigns, the rapid-fire demands of new media and the surge of emerging issues. Many of our communication efforts are typified by scrambling to deliver, with little capacity for planning or evaluation. In addition, we have created expectations for multiple long-term campaigns to change behavior around our priorities (i.e. climate change, Connecting People with Nature and Strategic Habitat Conservation).

COMMUNICATING WITH DATA



We have tremendous data resources at the Service. Data can be used to dynamically communicate about the important work we do. On the site Flyways.us, a collaborative communication effort of the Service, Flyway Councils and states, users can create their own custom waterfowl harvest trend reports.

“The Web is just a vast database of information. Everyday, we interact with it without thinking about that too much. We simply take our best query tool, usually called Google, and fire away.”

Alex Iskold, Yahoo! Pipes and The Web As Database

Moving forward

We are not waiting. We are taking steps to adapt in the interconnected age.

Public affairs professionals throughout the Service are interfacing with some of the best thinkers in our field and staying abreast of communication research through the Public Relations Society of America. Leaders are recasting existing positions to bring new media practitioners on line. Our expectations increasingly focus on strong writing skills. We are moving to a behavioral- and social-science approach to help guide our persuasive communication disciplines. Much is happening. The pace of communication is increasing, and we must catch up, keep up and move forward.

It's not going to be easy.

New communication approaches require far more than just resource allocation decisions. There is no sense in just spending money or drawing new org. charts. There is no innovation in that.

We must take a collective look—agency wide—at how we communicate. We must reinvent. We must be strategic.

We need to take a fresh look at the skills and positions that make up our work force. We need to build communication functions into performance plans and empower employees to make communication a priority. We need to train, retrain and hire staff. We may need to acquire new equipment. Importantly, we need to take a hard look at our communication culture and policies, considering ways to foster open exchange of information and ideas.

The Service's Office of External Affairs strives to facilitate a collective look—this conversation—between staff at all levels and outside stakeholders and experts who can help. We anticipate concerns, strong opinions and emotion in the discussion. We welcome it. Mostly, we expect tremendous interest from Service staff in this communication modernization movement.

External Affairs staff will engage programs, regions and field offices in a collaborative conversation to build a proposal to:

- Leverage new media and communication technologies for conservation action
- Meet long-term communication demands of the Service and our larger mission
- Prioritize communication actions and empower employees to communicate
- Apply social and behavioral research science to our communication planning and evaluation
- Develop a FY2012 budget proposal that begins to build the Service's communication capacity to meet future challenges

Join this movement toward renewed conservation communication by emailing us at Change@FWS.gov.

Let's see where we should be—and could be—where conservation communication need and opportunity meet.

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