# Training, Educating and Activating U.S. Hunters and Anglers And Other Constituencies on Climate Change

December 10, 2010

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Description:

In this paper we describe the lessons learned by the National Wildlife Federation's (NWF) climate change education and training program as we trained some 5,000 influential leaders, between 2007 and 2010 in selected communities of interest. Our goal was to engage these leaders as voices for both personal and civic actions on climate and for broader policy reforms at the local, state and national levels. The selected constituent groups for these trainings included: environmental and civic activists, hunters and anglers, master gardeners, conservative faith-based organizations, watershed conservationists, land trust leaders, birders, college and university campus groups, coastal wetlands conservation organizations, and business leaders. More specifically, our goals were to: a) educate key members of each of the targeted constituent groups on the basic science of climate change, b) familiarize them with solutions in both greenhouse gas reduction and natural resource adaptation, and c) win their support for addressing climate change actions and policy reforms. While NWF initially focused on environmentally-minded civic and organizational leaders, we went on to target leaders among less likely allies such as hunters and anglers, conservative church organizations, and private company employees. This paper goes into depth on the specific aspects of how educating and enlivening hunters and anglers on climate change was carried out, the results it produced and the lessons we learned for reaching and working with what might be considered naturally skeptical constituencies.

## Educating and Enlivening Influential Leaders

The NWF climate change training program kicked into gear in early 2007 after its Education Department was asked by former Vice President, Al Gore, to work with his Climate Project organization to design and deliver a short training course to complement the documentary film, An Inconvenient Truth (AIT). The aim was to train a cadre of more than 1,000 individual leaders from widely varied backgrounds to go forth into the public and effectively present a shorter version of the slide presentation used in the film. The aim was for these presenters to personally reach out to thousands of community-based audiences. The training consisted of a short course on the complex science of and solutions to global climate change and a workshop on honing their skills as public presenters. The presenters were then asked to make ten presentations each, within the first year of being trained, and were supplied with a version of

the AIT digital slide presentation, and an accompanying curriculum and handbook on climate change. The curriculum was specifically designed to match each slide with a mini-tutorial that provided the presenter, (mostly non-scientists) with core background science on what a particular slide was depicting. We did not assume people independently understood the underlying science, economic or social issues addressed in each slide. Having these tutorials and background information added significantly to presenter knowledge and confidence and to their ability to address audiences of strangers which oftentimes contained vocal climate skeptics.

In phase one of the AIT training project, some 1,300 people, including 300 in the UK and Australia were trained and deployed. Some of them were civic leaders and others were students. There were also elected officials, corporate employees, small business owners, public agency employees, entertainers, Wall Street and Silicon Valley executives and tribal leaders among others. Americans of every stripe participated. Once through the training, these trainees were much more prepared to discuss complex climate change issues and solutions with a range of audiences and have since made more than 70,000 presentations to civic organizations, campus groups, church and school organizations, corporate employees, and planning boards among many other entities. In all, some 7.3 million people have come to see these presentations and participated in discussions about the implications of climate change.

In addition to the raw numbers of people reached through this train-the-presenter approach, we saw another important implication of this format for national education and change. This relates to the 25-year findings of the survey research firm of Roper ASW (later made part of NOP World) that the people most likely to attend such presentation are, themselves, community leaders or what Roper labels as "influentials." Over two decades Roper has verified that virtually every local community has a cohort of particularly active influentials comprising roughly 10% of all of its adults. These people are energetic early adopters who are five times more likely than the average person to attend a civic-oriented public gathering. They are likewise seven times more likely to be an officer of a club or organization, six times more likely to attend a political rally and eight times more likely to have written a letter to the editor. (Keller and Berry, 2003) Importantly, these community influentials are keenly interested in learning, are curious about environmental subjects and, we hypothesized, are much more likely to be interested in attending an orientation to the subject of climate change and its solutions.

In 2008, after assessing the efficacy of this short-course training format in motivating and activating leaders to become voices for addressing climate change and solutions, NWF expanded its climate change training efforts to other communities of interest including: hunters and anglers, watershed conservation leaders, church groups (including members of the Christian Coalition), land conservancy or land trust leaders, master gardeners, birding clubs, and private company employees such as Sprint, Capital One and Wal-Mart. The hunter and angler training experience was particularly instructive for effective program design.

Training Leaders in the U.S. Hunting and Angling Community on Climate Change

There are some 35 million people in the U.S. who regularly hunt and fish. This group of Americans has socio-political characteristics that make them challenging to win over as supporters and advocates for addressing global climate change. Many members of the hunting and angling community live in rural areas, are of moderate means, and are fairly conservative in their political views. They are also more inclined than the general public to be skeptical about the existence and human causes of global warming. As indicators of their natural positions on climate change, some 80% of them voted on the Republican side of the ticket in the last two presidential elections and many are or have been members of the National Rifle Association. (Responsive Management, 2008)

Our goal was to identify groups of respected and influential hunting and angling leaders in each of some 35 states to take part in a tailored short course on climate change science and solutions that would address their skepticism and improve their capacity to discuss the subject with other club and organization leaders in their respective areas. Even though we had significant experience through the Climate Project and AIT trainings, it became clear we needed a separately designed course design and approach for U.S. hunters and anglers.

We accomplished this by testing out different content and visual presentations directly with a set of selected leaders of state and national hunting and angling-based organizations. After having been exposed to pilots of the course presentation, these individuals commented that: a) we should use local, rather than international or even nationwide examples of global warming's effects, b) we should stay sharply focused on habitat and wildlife when educating about problems and solutions, and c) we should have a format that allowed ample time for participants to describe their own observations and experiences. Based on these reactions we decided to provide a briefer and more rudimentary "climate science 101" part to the presentation and to include a significant amount of wildlife and ecosystem course content that was customized for each of the 35 target states. Fortunately, as we began gathering state-by-state information, we found there was a fairly rich base of research and study information on the effects of weather, climate and climate change on fisheries, birds, mammals and other creatures in most states. It also helped that many of these studies had been done by state fish and wildlife agencies, which have longstanding and trust-filled relationships with leaders in the hunting and angling community.

We also quickly learned that the train-the-presenter approach would have a different meaning for the hunting and angling community. Once we began to conduct actual pilot training programs (in Arkansas, Michigan and Pennsylvania) we found that the average hunter or angler was much less likely to want to go out and give a digital slide presentation than were, for example, the Inconvenient Truth trainees. The leaders tended to be a little older and many fewer of them owned portable computers. They were instead more inclined to rely on a tradition of talking things over at meetings with their organization or club members then to actually make formal presentations. We discovered that, for this group, the degree of trust felt for the climate change messenger seemed to matter as much or more than the

details of the science. This is not unusual among different cohorts but it seemed to be a particularly strong consideration for hunters and anglers. So, even though we supplied them with pre-packaged Digital slide presentations and accompanying slide-by-slide guides, we received feedback that these were not used all that much in the field or, if they were, it was a highly abbreviated version.

Early in the hunter and angler training program pilot stage NWF added a more intentional participant discussion session to the training and placed it very early in the agenda. During this participants' session, which came in the first hour of the six-hour training, we asked the trainees to reflect on what changes to the natural environment and wildlife patterns they had personally observed in recent years. This turned out to be highly effective due to the how observant hunters and anglers are of their surroundings and the many years a number of them have been making these observations. While the skepticism was often thick in the air as the training sessions started off with reviews of information and graphics on core climate change science and the greenhouse effect, once we got to the place in the agenda where the trainees began to describe their own observations and experiences, their mood shifted to be more positive and even enthusiastic.

The participants, who were keen observers of the natural world, had many vivid and compelling stories to tell:

- They consistently described the weeks-earlier arrival of spring and the corresponding late arrival of autumn in many states.

- Many had observed, first hand, how waterfowl species were stopping short along their southern migration routes rather than continuing farther south to traditional wintering places such as the Gulf of Mexico.

- Some talked about the disappearance of brook trout from entire streams during their lifetimes and how they had seen bobwhite quail drop over dead from record summer heat.

- Others had seen the sustained rise of water temperatures on major rivers cause large-scale fish kills and disease outbreaks, even in large eastern warm-water fisheries.

- They noticed differences in the timing and prevalence of insect species and larval hatches that affected fishing or were just evident in woodlands they traversed.

- Stimulated by agency and university studies that described the actual numbers and statistics of climate-related changes, that related their own personal descriptions of how they had witnessed such events as the decline of moose populations in Minnesota and mule deer populations in the West and were often highly emotional in their reports.

- A Pennsylvania organizational leader described his recent experience of seeing a snow hare in the northern part of the State. He recalled his own childhood when he and his father regularly hunted the hares and how the decline in winter snow cover over a 35 year period had caused their territory to shrink and their numbers in the state to decline. As he described his recent sighting as possibly his last, he became choked up and was unable to finish the description.

Finding this wealth of experience, observation and connection and the underlying recognition that a warming climate was bringing about many of these changes and that further warming would make them more pronounced had its effects on the trainees. As these trained cadres of leaders began to talk to others in their respective states, we began to see shifts in hunter and angler group support for climate change policy reforms. Eventually, we saw hunter and angler organizations that were previously reluctant to support climate change legislation or even admit the problem was real, start to become advocates. The training program was not the only reason for this shift but we noticed that on various advocacy efforts involving bringing hunters and anglers in to Washington D.C. to talk to Congressional leaders, of 100 participants more than 90 came from contacts and relationships formed as a result of the trainings. We also noticed that while previous years of effort had been unable to rally the hunter and angler community to support climate change legislation, the training program and the relationships it fostered contributed to some 670 national state and regional hunting and fishing groups signing on to a letter to Congress urging passage of the American Clean Energy Act. (National Wildlife Federation, 2008)

In keeping with the need to focus on wildlife effects, the state-by-state training packages for hunters and angler also had to contain considerable emphasis on solutions that focused on habitat improvement rather than just greenhouse gas reductions. Hunters and anglers consistently show a high interest in volunteering their time to work on site-specific habitat improvement projects. Besides just concentrating on ways to cut greenhouse gases, the hunters and anglers were also interested in learning about approaches and methods for habitat improvement and management that could make wildlife areas more resilient to adverse effects from warming. The trainings focused, for example, on the value of maintaining stream flows and restoring stream side riparian areas. They also discussed regional opportunities such as the restoration of longleaf pine communities in the southeastern U.S. or sage steppe restoration in the West.

In all, we conducted some 60 hunter/angler training courses in 35 states across the nation. Each state has its own customized presentation and curriculum. About 1,000 influential members of the U.S. hunter and angler community were trained including organizational leaders, state fish and wildlife agency personnel, outdoor writers and outfitters. We reaffirmed, through the hunter angler training program, the wisdom of effectively tailoring each training approach, visual package, course content and geographic scope to the audience being addressed. This sensitivity to tailoring proved highly useful as we developed other climate change programs between 2008 and 2010.

Framing for other Key Audiences of U.S. Leaders

The early experiences of the AIT and hunter and angler training programs helped NWF to identify other natural constituencies that might be made more knowledgeable and active on behalf of climate change reforms and other solutions. As noted above, we also reached out to and developed programs for master gardeners, conservative faith-based organizations, watershed conservationists, land trust leaders, birders, campus groups, coastal wetlands conservation organizations, and business leaders.

Assessing and addressing the varying interests, culture and sensitivities of each of these audiences helped us to be more effective in designing climate change training courses that fit their conceptual frames, informational needs and inspired them to be more supportive of actions and reforms. Examples include:

- For conservative church organizations we used survey research that suggested that framing the training sessions around the value of climate change education and action to energy independence, self-determination and caring for God's creation was a key to being effective and gaining support. NWF and the Christian Coalition were eventually able to join forces in support of climate legislation. (Ethics Daily, 2009)

- We found through test courses that the attention birders and birding clubs pay to the movement patterns of various species each season made them particularly open to and interested in government bird atlas information predicting how migration patterns and resident species locations would change as a result of global warming. (Matthews, 2007)

- We found that leaders in the gardening community have the same observation acumen as hunters and anglers but are clearly more aware of differences in today's timing of when to plant or irrigate and that they have personally observed shifts in growing seasons as reflected in more recent plant hardiness maps. (Arbor Day, 2006)

- We also discovered that some longstanding conservation advocacy organizations benefited from learning more about how their long-term efforts would be affected by global warming. It was surprising, even as late as 2007 and 2008, to discover some land trusts, watershed conservation groups, and coastal protection groups had yet to fully factor climate change considerations into their long-range planning.

Conclusions:

Carefully crafted short courses aimed at selected leadership constituencies and groupings can have the effect of giving nonscientist leaders the ability to become confident climate change information sources and more effective voices for change in their zones of influence. The training courses themselves can have the effect of convincing people who are naturally skeptical of the reality and causes of climate

change to be less skeptical and even to become advocates for reforms. This is particularly true when the process allows for a trainee's personal experience and observations to be discussed. Each indentified constituency has its own perspective, values, underlying world views and cultures that need to be factored in to course design and delivery. This is best done through reviews of background research such as attitude and value surveys and to test or pilot courses where opportunities to discuss trainee reactions are abundant and their advice on course format and content is actively sought and incorporated. It is vital that the subject matter and examples used in the course presentations are tailored to be highly relevant to the selected audience. We also observed that many of the target audiences who were directly involved with natural resources felt that learning about adaptation solutions, such as riparian restoration, were as or more interesting and useful than learning about ways to reduce greenhouse gases. Making an effort to customize climate change-related course content to a particular group can make all the difference in the success of the training, and, we believe, in its translation into action.

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