

COASTAL COMMUNICATORS

A newsletter for the nation's coastal management and research reserve programs.

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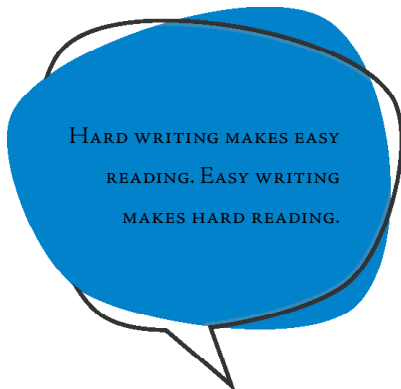
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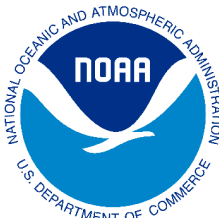
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– William Zinsser

May 2022, Issue 42



COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

THE BIG MYTH: THE ANNUAL OUTREACH PLAN

Do you believe in unicorns, Big Foot, or agency outreach plans? I've heard about all three, but I've yet to see even one. Does that mean they aren't real? Or are they just really scarce, which would account for my lack of contact? Or are these myths that just keep hanging on?

Have you seen one? I've received numerous calls over the years from research reserves and coastal zone management programs— from people looking for sample outreach plans, something that will provide guidance for their efforts. So here at NOAA we ask around, and guess what: nada. No replies. (Wait—we did get one a year or so ago, but they asked us not to share it.)

Why is this? I have my theories, which I will use this column to share. And if you disagree with me, please get in touch—the more information we can get on this topic, the better.

The problem. The first problem, I believe, has to do with unrealistic expectations, or perhaps a misunderstanding about what an outreach plan is. Admittedly, it's pure conjecture on my part, but when I hear management say, "we need an outreach plan," what I hear is, "if we were more organized, and had a snappy slogan, I'm sure more people would love us, fund us, and most of our problems would be solved."

So I usually ask a few follow-up questions to clarify the request: what do you want the outreach plan to do? Who is your audience? What is the message you are trying to relay? What are the outcomes you hope to accomplish?

This is no lie, and no exaggeration: after asking those questions, I usually hear nothing for a really long time, until I get an email, maybe six months to a year later, that states, "We really need an outreach plan." And the process starts again. It drives me bonkers.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

The solution. Let's reach a common understanding about what an outreach or communications plan is. In my career, I have seen some fat outreach plans (contrary to my opening statement), usually written by a consultant. These plans contain a lot of words that aren't needed, but the basic two components are the same, and represent something most of us can do if we have a staff person with time, ability, and reasonable direction from management. These components are 1) foundational information, and 2) outreach strategies.

Foundational information represents the nuts and bolts of your communication efforts—logos, operating principles, how you handle media inquiries, and basic messaging. It could also include “outreachy” events that happen every year, such as a social media campaign for National Estuary Week or organizing a beach sweep. Foundational documentation is a good thing to have; I'll write an article about this topic in the near future.

The second part, the outreach component, is where you develop specific campaigns that include goals, target audiences, implementation timelines, and more. We wrote about this in the December 2018 issue (“[Developing an Outreach Plan: A Ridiculously Simple Approach](#)”). (Reminder: to find all past issues of the newsletter, visit our website, coast.noaa.gov, and look under the “About” section.)

But let's get real. I've provided this information hundreds of times, and I am clueless about who takes it to heart and acts on it. I know it is hard—you need the right staff, and time to strategize organizational goals and approaches, as great outreach usually happens when it supports specific organizational goals. The outreach plan is the support that allows the rubber to meet the implementation road. But I digress.

For most managers, when they say “we need an outreach plan,” maybe what they are really saying, at least at first, is “I want people to appreciate the work we do.” They want to raise the profile of their organization.

Sounds simple, but this is a tall order, mainly because raising one's profile is a broad, mostly unmeasurable goal. But the heart wants what the heart wants, and raising your profile, in general, and with the right people, is never a bad thing. So what should you do?

Perhaps have staff work on basic foundational information (I promise an article is coming about that), for it is from this that all messaging and reputation-building flows. This will help keep everyone on the same page. Then you can prioritize an audience or two for your profile-raising effort. Talk about why you want this audience to know more about you, and how that knowledge—and their appreciation—will benefit your operation. Then think about what it is about your organization that this audience cares about and will find interesting. Finally, list the many opportunities you have to bring this message to said audience, and act!

Most important to know. Regardless of your approach, the most important sentence in this article is this: if you don't articulate your goal, and articulate it well, good outreach will not happen.

Thank you for your time, and if you see this situation differently, please let me know. I would love to have your input.

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COMMUNICATION PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Featured product: Delaware National Estuarine Research Reserve's "Marsh Madness" social media campaign (#DNERRMarshMadness)

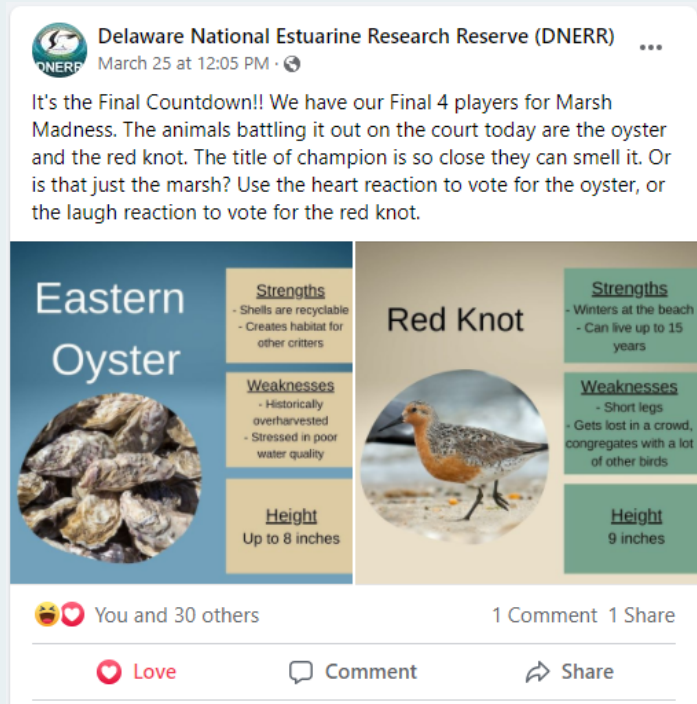
Source: Twitter (@DNERR), Facebook (@DNERR), Instagram (@DelawareNERR)

Contact: Laurel Sullivan, education coordinator for the Delaware National Estuarine Research Reserve, Laurel.Sullivan@delaware.gov

What it is: Throughout the month of March, the Delaware Reserve posted photos and facts about estuarine organisms, all of whom battled it out

for the title, "Champion of the Marsh." Followers of their social media pages filled out brackets and voted using the laugh or heart reactions on Facebook, or the polling feature on Twitter and Instagram. Winners for each bracket were determined by totaling all of the engagement across platforms.

Why we chose it: The #DNERRMarshMadness social media campaign was a resounding success, with increased use and engagement across Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Compared to the previous month, their Facebook account saw a 189.4 percent increase in engagement, Instagram had a 416.7 percent increase in impressions, and Twitter gained 10 followers. The campaign increased awareness of the value of estuarine organisms, and will result in wider audience engagement in the future through new followers.



FROM US TO YOU

OUTREACH TOOL SPOTLIGHT – COASTAL FLOOD EXPOSURE MAPPER

One of the most tried-and-true of the Digital Coast tools, the Coastal Flood Exposure Mapper creates maps that show the people, places, and resources at risk of flooding—an especially effective way to communicate a community’s coastal story. The recent expansion of the tool, which now covers coastal areas along the entirety of the Great Lakes, means all coastal communicators can benefit from the mapper’s myriad features. Access it here: coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/tools/flood-exposure.html.

UPCOMING SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Join us in celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Coastal Zone Management Act all year long. Use #OceanandCoasts50 and get social each week with the following themes:

- May 2 to 6: Vacation coast smart
- May 9 to 13: Contribute ideas to a national marine sanctuary

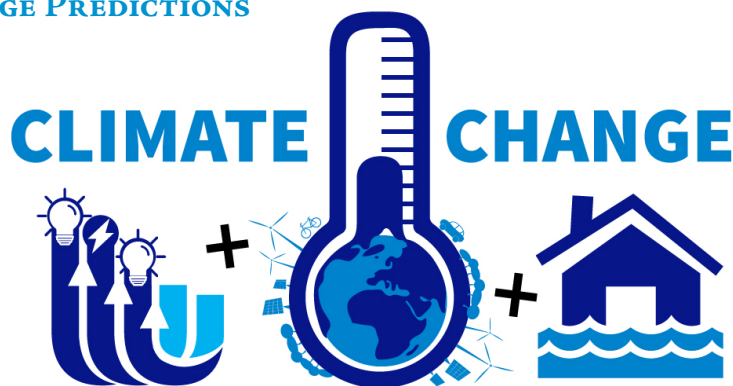
- May 16 to 20: Make your own compost
- May 23 to 27: Use green infrastructure
- May 30 to June 3: River and beach cleanup

NEW ECONOMIC DATA: EMPLOYMENT IN COASTAL INUNDATION ZONES

While tools like the Coastal Flood Exposure Mapper show the who, what, and where of flood risks, economic data tell the numerical story. This first-of-its kind database provides the number of establishments and employees that fall within various flood zone designations, which helps people explore potential business and employment disruptions from storm surge and other flooding conditions. This provides an even more comprehensive picture, offering that much more solid information to communicate to your audience. Find it here: coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/data/coastal-inundation-zones.html.

FAST FACTS – CLIMATE CHANGE PREDICTIONS

This is one of the many graphics and facts available for your use in presentations and handouts. Grab this one at coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/climate-change.html. If you have an idea for a new group of fast facts or illustrations, please let us know.



Temperatures Rise + Property Losses Increase +
Power Costs Rise + Crop Yields Decrease *



**If we continue on this path!*

Coastal Communicators is published by the NOAA Office for Coastal Management.

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Send questions or suggestions to coastal.info@noaa.gov.

View past issues at coast.noaa.gov/gallery/newsletter.html.

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