



*America, the Ocean, and Climate Change:
New Research Insights for Conservation, Awareness, and Action*

key findings



June 2009

Ten years ago The Ocean Project conducted landmark research to improve the effectiveness of aquariums, zoos, and museums as conservation leaders. The resulting report, *Communicating About Oceans: Results of a National Survey*, revealed the extent to which Americans know about, care about, and value the ocean – critical information for aquariums, zoos, museums, and other conservation-oriented organizations and agencies as they develop their conservation communications strategies.

During the third and fourth quarters of 2008, with research conducted by IMPACTS Research & Development, and working collaboratively with the Monterey Bay Aquarium and the National Aquarium in Baltimore, The Ocean Project updated and significantly expanded upon the 1999 survey. Funding was provided by an Environmental Literacy Grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The current report – *America, the Ocean, and Climate Change: New Research Insights for Conservation, Awareness, and Action* – provides the results from this survey.



For those of us who are driven by our missions to inform and inspire the public about conservation, the report offers new ideas on how we can be more effective and impactful.



below are several

key findings

1. Public awareness

- Similar to 10 years ago, Americans' awareness related to the ocean remains low, and concern about environmental issues affecting the ocean is low compared to concern about issues such as the economy and national security. (It is important to note, however, that the survey was conducted during a period of acute economic upheaval that dominated the news.)
- Despite their low levels of ocean literacy and lack of a sense of urgency, when asked, Americans say they support protecting the health of the ocean and the environment.

Implication

» Aquariums, zoos, and museums, as well as other conservation-oriented organizations and agencies, can be more efficient and effective by targeting communications to key audiences who are most likely to take or influence action. One example is to increase individual and collective lobbying and advocacy efforts with policymakers.

2. Climate change

- Climate change is the environmental issue of most concern to the public.
- However, the public does not associate climate change and carbon pollution with ocean health.

Implication

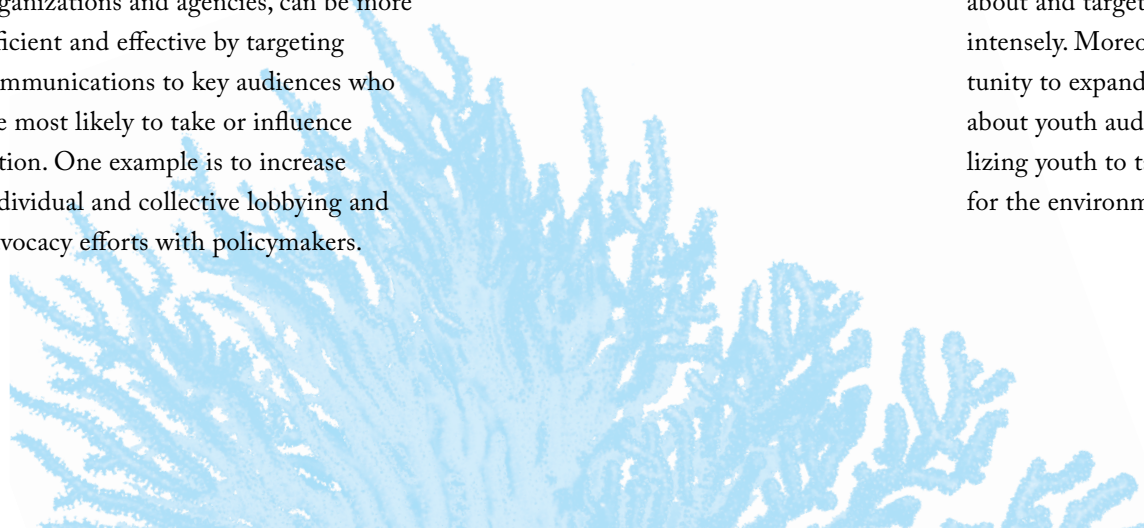
» Climate change is the most critical environmental issue we face. Ocean health affects climate change, and climate change affects ocean health, both of which affect people everywhere. Our institutions must make explicit the connection between climate change and ocean health, and do so in ways that resonate with our audiences.

3. Youth and minorities

- Young people (aged 12-17) know and care more about ocean and other environmental issues, and they are more willing to act than adults; furthermore, they influence the opinions of adults, who tend to view their children as better informed on conservation issues.
- Americans in households where English is not the primary language express significantly higher levels of concern about ocean issues and are more willing to modify their behavior than Americans in households where English is the primary language.

Implication

» Youth and members of households where English is not the primary language are key audiences to learn more about and target more specifically and intensely. Moreover, we have the opportunity to expand our traditional thinking about youth audiences to include mobilizing youth to take meaningful action for the environment.





and their implications

4. Individual actions

- In a shift from views expressed in the 1999 survey, Americans now believe that their individual actions can have a positive effect on protecting the environment and improving the health of the ocean. They are ready to act but are not sure what to do.
- The public expects and trusts aquariums, zoos, and museums to communicate about solutions to environmental and ocean issues, and to advance ocean conservation; however, the public feels that our organizations are not meeting these expectations.

Implication

» Communications need to galvanize action by offering specific ideas for solutions. We have a window of opportunity to meet public expectations by providing more conservation action messaging, without fear of harming attendance-driven financial models. The evidence indicates that being more action-oriented will improve our standing rather than erode it, and when we don't address this public need, others – who may not be as conservation-minded – fill the gaps.

5. Seafood choices

- The public agrees that individual choices people make about what seafood to eat impact the health of the ocean.
- Americans are willing to change their seafood eating habits to conserve the ocean and protect endangered species. They are also willing to pay more in restaurants or markets for seafood that has been certified as healthy and sustainable.

Implication

» Providing the public with sustainable seafood recommendations is a viable way to engage them in positive actions. Moreover, the idea of certification appeals to the public. We should explore the public's perception of "certification" and invest more time and effort in meeting this expectation.

6. Internet communication

- The for-profit corporate world is out-communicating conservation-oriented organizations about ocean and environmental issues by a wide margin, and most of this communication is occurring on the Internet.
- The public, especially younger generations, prefers to get information about environmental issues from the Internet.

Implication

» Aquariums, zoos, and museums, as well as other conservation-oriented organizations and agencies, must better leverage the Internet to communicate about conservation and mobilize the public to take action.

Survey data was based on 22,000 responses from adults in the United States between August and November of 2008. The survey was conducted online, and respondents were paid, screened, and certified. The sample accurately reflected the U.S. population, and the overall confidence level is 95%. This survey will be updated periodically. Updates and the full research report are available on The Ocean Project's website at www.TheOceanProject.org.





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