

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

## Quarterly Update: Fall 2010

### Research Updates:

- Oil Spill Impacts Public Opinion
- Spotlight on Recent ZAM Visitors

### Initiative Updates:

- Initiative Extended Through 2013
- Partner Q&A Now Online

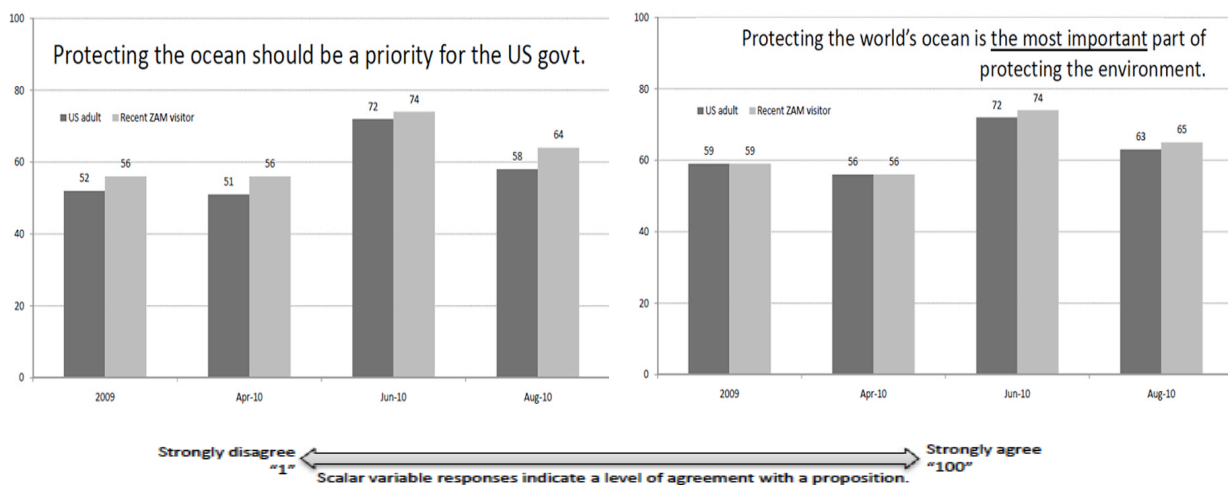
This update covers the latest round of public opinion research, completed in three phases between March and August of 2010. The initial phase of data collection took place in March and April, with a 5,220 person representative sample of adults in America while the second and third phases were in May/June and August, with 2,118 and 1,206 person samples, respectively.

The research focused on two main elements. First, the phasing included an analysis of the impact the April 20 BP Deepwater Horizon disaster had on public opinion. And second, the results were also analyzed to compare responses from those who had visited a zoo, aquarium, or museum (ZAM) within the last year to those of the public as a whole. These two highlights are summarized below.

### Oil Spill Impacts Public Opinion

The impact of the oil spill on public opinion was direct and immediate. Responses to statements as diverse as the extent to which the ocean is in danger, the relative importance of protecting the ocean as compared to other environmental priorities (e.g. climate change, as it is still seen as a separate issue), and the responsibility the federal government has in protecting the ocean, all showed a clearly correlated spike following the disaster. Yet as the media coverage waned, so did the oil spill's apparent impact, as much of the increase in interest had already disappeared by August. (See representative graphs on next page.)

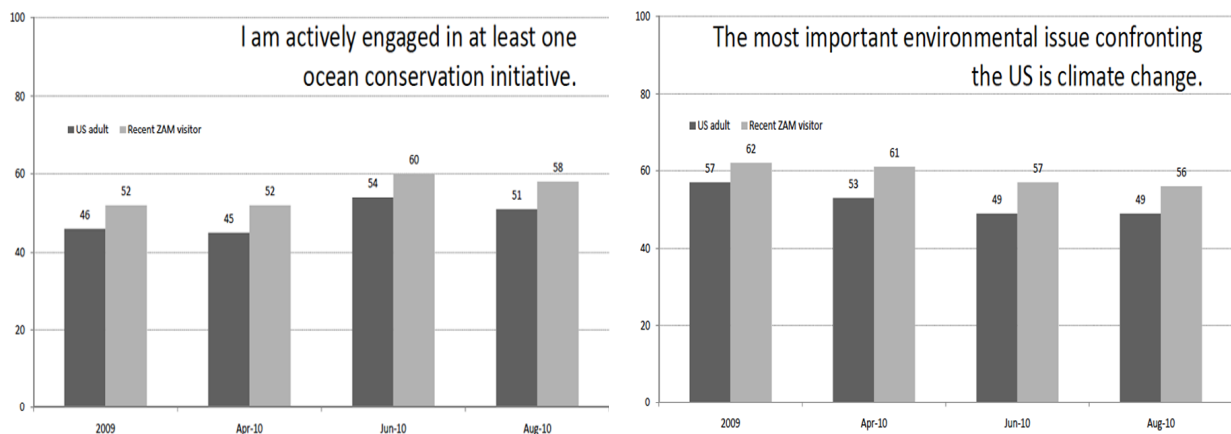
This shift is a striking example of how dramatic events with dramatic coverage can lead to dramatic, though short-term shifts in public opinion. In this case bad news about the ocean led to a good opportunity for outreach, yet one that seems to have been largely missed. The implication for ZAMs and other conservation-oriented organizations and agencies, therefore, seems to center on the short-term nature of these shifts and the need to develop rapid responses in outreach and messaging. As we move forward with this initiative we look forward to providing our partners and others in the conservation community in a more timely fashion, with quarterly tracking survey reports throughout the next three years.



## Spotlight on Recent ZAM Visitors

In regard to the public's attitude on a broad range of environmental issues, there were very minimal differences in opinions between the respondents who had been to ZAM within the last year (shown in gray below), as compared to the public as a whole (shown in black below). With few exceptions, the responses of recent visitors were, for better or worse, largely indistinguishable from those of the broader public. The notable exceptions included a slight difference in the extent to which recent ZAM visitors felt ocean conservation should be a priority for the government (shown above) and a larger difference in self-perception in people's current level of engagement on ocean conservation issues and their concern about climate change (shown below).

It appears in these instances that ZAMs are indeed having an impact on their visitors, though more specific research is needed -- and will be undertaken -- to understand the extent to which visitors came to, as opposed to left, ZAMs with stronger beliefs and increased willingness to take action.



## Initiative Extended Through 2013

The Ocean Project is pleased to announce its receipt of a three-year grant from NOAA. With their support, we will be able to continue and expand the market research; provide additional analysis and recommendations; offer professional development and capacity building opportunities; and help support and shape outreach efforts that connect climate change, the ocean, and individual action, especially as related to reaching youth. Stay tuned!

## Partner Q&A's Now Online

Learn more about how this market research is being applied by reading new Q&A's with Cynthia Vernon of Monterey Bay Aquarium and Peggy Sloan of The North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher, now available at [http://www.theoceanproject.org/resources/partners\\_in\\_action.php](http://www.theoceanproject.org/resources/partners_in_action.php)

### About this Initiative

This update is part of a series of market research reports presented by The Ocean Project and aimed at providing our partners -- zoos, aquariums, museums, and other conservation-oriented organizations -- with the information they need to develop outreach strategies that actively engage their visitors in conservation. This ongoing research is made possible with funding provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Earlier reports, including complete copies of the two landmark studies, *America, the Ocean, and Climate Change: New Research Insights for Conservation, Awareness, and Action (2009)* and *Communicating About Oceans: Results of a National Survey (1999)*, along with more complete results of the tracking surveys can be found at: <http://theoceanproject.org/resources/opinion.php>.

Learn more about The Ocean Project and how you can get involved at: [www.TheOceanProject.org](http://www.TheOceanProject.org).