

# **Nature's Value: Measuring Nature's Benefits When Communicating About Nature**

## **Introduction:**

Nature's Benefits. Nature's Value. Ecosystem Services. By whatever name you call it, the concept is one that has incredible power. The idea that we can focus on the measurable benefits nature provides, in dollar terms or by other measurements, has the potential to catch on as a message frame for advocating conservation. Yes, nature has value and should be protected in and of itself. But the idea that we should count and protect measurable benefits is one that shows important possibility.

And recent research shows that voters are listening. A nationwide study completed by The Nature Conservancy and other partners and stakeholders shows how responsive voters can be when the message is framed in this way.

This memo won't repeat the findings of the research, but aims to interpret the results mentioned above, with an eye towards using it to communicate to your audience. Attached at the end will be some sample message tools – a sample press release, a sample speech, and a draft op-ed, that you can use as models for some of your own work using this messaging.

Many communicators reach first for talking points, a series of important sequential points. As a format, talking points are limited to circumstances where one has time to enunciate each point in succession. But there's a simpler tool many people use to stay focused on the strategic goal, called the Message Triangle.

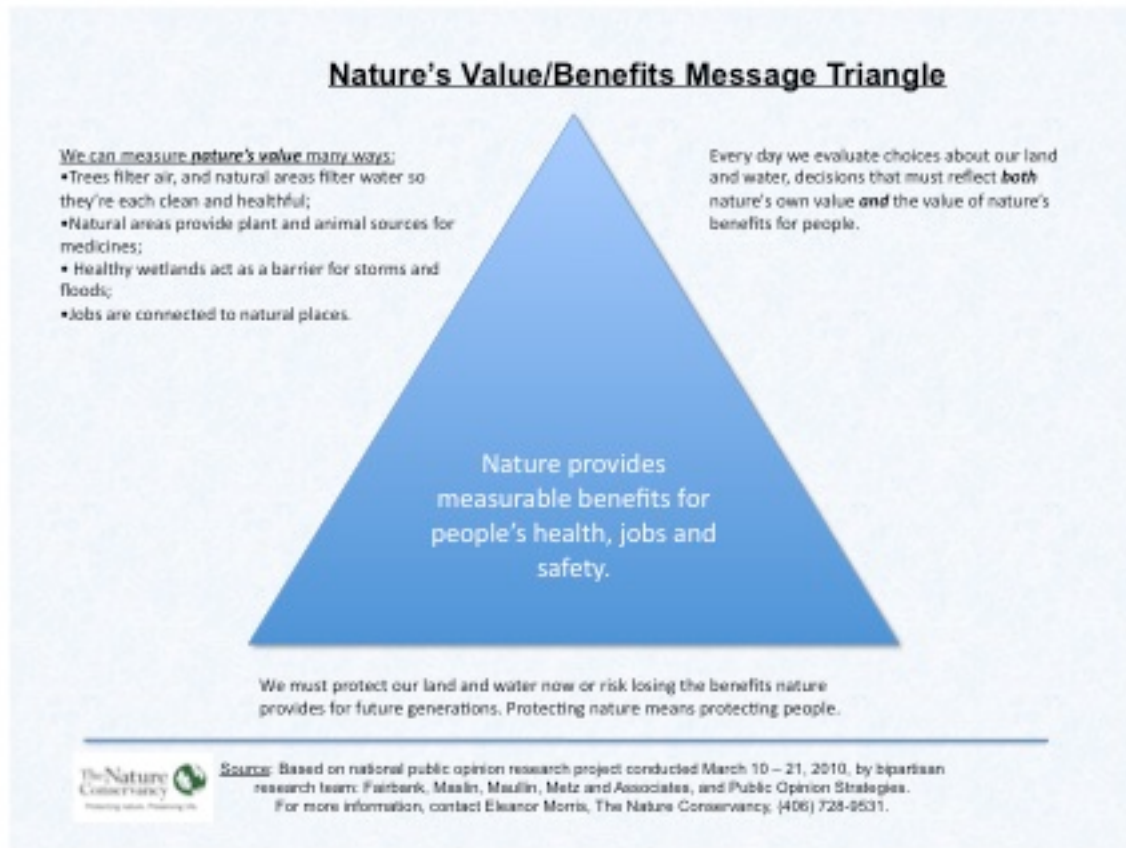
## **Message Triangle**

By creating a simple diagram to annotate your message making, you do two things primarily: First, you give yourself a simple "cheat sheet" to help keep you on your message, and second, you help yourself to focus your communications so a few important points, as opposed to layering on argument after argument. The Message Triangle is a tool to help you stick to what's persuasive to voters, what's important to them, and helps you repeat it so it will be heard.



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## Message Triangle



The above illustration is the message triangle we've created for "Nature's Benefits/Nature's Value" messaging.

### **Term "Nature's Value" vs. "Nature's Benefits" vs. "Ecosystem Services"**

The polling memo makes clear the evidence that terminology is important, and that certain terms are more persuasive to voters than others. "Ecosystem Services," as a nomenclature, is not our most effective tool as a term for persuading voters about the importance of this frame. But it's a term that's widely used in the field. It's in job titles and department names, and book titles. It's almost a proper noun. So it would be foolish to try to eliminate it from use.

That said, when communicating to the general public, or to even specific audiences in a persuasion context, there are much better terms to use to describe this way of thinking. “Nature’s Value” and “Nature’s Benefit” are both very persuasive terms. A close reading of the poll will show you that they’re not interchangeable, that there are nuanced differences, but what’s more important is they’re both more persuasive than the current nomenclature. Use language that fits the context of the audience you’re speaking to.

It’s beyond dispute that, when communicating publicly, to general audiences, the new terminology is recommended. One question communicators may wish to address, or even to pose to themselves, is whether the existing nomenclature is worth maintaining, even when speaking to scientific, conservation, or other elite, inside audiences. A concern is that it becomes difficult to segregate language and terminology. If a language is used in one elite forum or audience, it can leach out into the public in unintended ways. What we do know is that “Ecosystem Services” and a nomenclature is not persuasive or effective or even understandable to the public, and we want to avoid branding these powerful ideas with that term in the future.

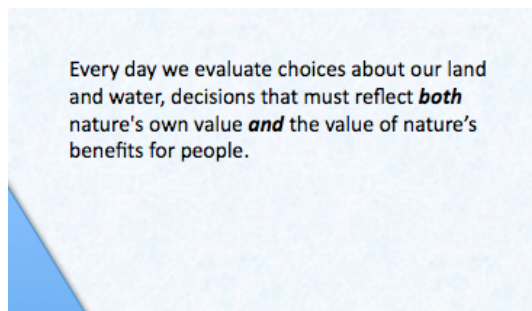
### Pieces of the Message Triangle

A little elaboration about the central message and three sides of the triangle:



The central statement illustrates the basic framing, that benefits to people have measurable value. There are some implications as well: That nature has value of its own and should be protected, and that, while nature may not necessarily exist purely for the service of humankind, that it’s useful to quantify the benefits that nature provides to people.

The statement in the upper right takes that framing and applies it to the policy realm – that we are, every day, making *choices* about conservation and nature, and that these choices have stakes. The stakes are the inherent value of nature, but also the values, which can be measured, of the benefits to people.

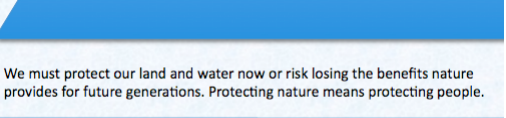


We can measure *nature's value* many ways:

- Trees filter air, and natural areas filter water so they're each clean and healthful;
- Natural areas provide plant and animal sources for medicines;
- Healthy wetlands act as a barrier for storms and floods;
- Jobs are connected to natural places.

The statement in the upper left gives *examples* of how Nature's Benefits affect our lives. It's worth expanding on these. Recall that several of these individual examples were tested in our polling, and were among the highest testing support positions for our overall framing.

- Filtering clean water and air – This proposition has been tested many times in many places, and particularly the water element has strong resonance with voters. Voters want both clean water in terms of lakes, rivers, and streams, but also understand that clean water means clean drinking water. Clean air is also compelling, but not quite as compelling as water. Again, in this research and in multiple research projects, the benefit nature provides by filtering air is important.
- Sources of medicines – Voters understand and validate that important medicines have natural sources. Using real life examples can be beneficial. Examples include:
  - Aspirin – Pain relief and heart disease
  - Morphine – Pain relief
  - Paclitaxel -- Element of Cancer Chemotherapy
  - Quinine -- Antimalarial medicine, anti-inflammatory medicines. Comes from the bark of the cinchona tree.
  - Galanthamine -- Used to treat Alzheimer's disease.
  - Camptothecin -- Also used in anti-cancer drugs. From the bark of a tree.
  - Diosgenin -- Used in hormone treatments like progesterone and cortisone. Also in early oral contraceptive pills.
- Barrier for storms and floods – Voters also understand this message well, and perhaps even more so after the Katrina catastrophe and all the messaging about diminishing coastal wetlands. But the concern seems to be viable even in circumstances that are not “once-in-a-lifetime” events, such as seasonal flooding. People seem to get that there are barrier areas that protect us from nature's extreme moments.
- Jobs connected to natural places – In some ways, these are some of the most obvious benefits of nature. It is interesting that among these examples, they are not at the very top of the list in persuasion, even though they may be easy to enumerate.



We must protect our land and water now or risk losing the benefits nature provides for future generations. Protecting nature means protecting people.

Source: Based on national public opinion research project conducted March 10 – 21, 2010, b

The statement at the bottom is an advocacy statement, but one that puts this in a context of urgency. It's important, but it's particularly important that we do this *now*.

## Proof Points

In each case, the message on the side of the triangle is meant to be a jumping off point. You should add proof points to the proposition to bolster your messaging. In the upper left hand section, some proof points are provided for you. You can use those or you can use your own. But the research shows localized proof points work best. So, for instance, augment the upper right proposition with a proof point about the benefits provided by some natural place. The Chamber of Commerce speech, at the end of this document, makes that example clear.

## Using the Message Triangle

It bears repeating that this is a tool, meant to simplify your task, and help you select, out of the large number of messages we tested and statements arising out of the poll, some simple elements to repeat and focus your comments. But think of the triangle as the tip of an iceberg. There's more for you to draw on if you feel it's appropriate. This shows you what works best, on average. Communicators need to "make it their own" and absorb what works best for them.

## What's next?

It's best to use these tools in a variety of circumstances to see that they work. Writing documents communicating your position, talking to people in meetings, or more informal circumstances, working your way up to speeches and op-eds, all of these are ways to "field test" and "own" this messaging.

In the next section, take a look at three sample communications tools, and imagine yourself creating similar communications documents yourself.

## **Examples Using Messaging: A Scenario:**

The Nature Conservancy of New Washegonia is launching a major campaign to support protection of the Upper Monongylvania River and surrounding natural areas. The entire Upper Monongylvania Wildlands includes river, wetland, forest, and a rare grove of Chinchona trees, the biggest source of domestic quinine in North America.

The message documents below are each in support of that campaign.

The speech, is given by the head of the New Washegonia chapter of The Nature Conservancy, Jane Smith, who is speaking to a group of businesspeople at the New Washegonia Chamber of Commerce monthly meeting. As it happens, next month the NW Chamber is heading up to the state Capitol, Washegonia City, to lobby members of their unicameral legislature on a variety of topics of interest to business.

The press release and Op-Ed are each also in support of conserving the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands.

## Op-ed

### Protecting the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands

Imagine, if you can, you're a raindrop. You form high up in the sky above New Washegonia. As you get bigger, you start to fall towards earth. As you do, you pass through a little bit of pollution in the air. A stream of sulfur dioxide. Some mercury. Maybe even a little arsenic from the power plant in the next state. A little bit of all these chemicals rubs off on you, the raindrop. Then you fall into our reservoir. You take those heavy metals, Sulfur, Mercury, and Arsenic, into the drinking water with you. And if we're lucky, the water treatment plant filters that bad stuff out before you become a child's glass of drinking water.

Now, imagine that drop of water falls in the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands. The heavy metals get filtered out of the water by the soil and plants in nature. The water runs into the river, which runs into the reservoir, clean and pure. By the time it hits our drinking glasses, chances are it's cleaner. Even without treatment. That's a serious benefit to our health, provided by nature.

Natural places like the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands provide benefits to people far beyond what we usually think of when we think about the benefits of nature. Sure, the woods are a nice place for a walk or a picnic. But they're a place where our drinking water gets filtered, where we save money by letting nature clean our water – and our air, by the way – before we have to. Keeping natural places natural means we keep the health, safety, and other benefits that nature provides.

Currently the legislature is debating whether to set aside funds to provide for conservation of the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands and other natural places here in New Washegonia. There's the inevitable debate over funding levels, which are important. But what the debate's missing is a measurement of some really important benefits – the clean water filtration that we derive from the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands, and what it would cost us to clean the water that falls there if those lands aren't protected. Nature has value beyond its inherent value – it has measurable value that includes important benefits for people.

Clean water is really important, but that's not the only tangible benefit to keeping the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands protected. The forest in the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands filters pollution from our air, so all the smokestack smog from states to our west doesn't make it into our lungs. And the wetlands in the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands act like nature's levee system, absorbing water in times of heavy precipitation and snowmelt, and meteing it out during times of drought. Those wetlands are the natural equivalent of dams and levees we don't have to raise taxes to build.

These valuations of benefits provided by natural places aren't just academic. They're important to consider right now. The Upper Monongylvania Wildlands is under pressure by developers who want to build a mega mall and parking for over 80,000 cars. Paving over those natural places isn't just an affront to nature, it's denying the people of New Washegonia important benefits, and passing the bill along to them for technological fixes they'll have to pay for, to replace those benefits in the future.

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## **Speech**

Draft 2 4/27/2010

### **Scenario:**

*The Nature Conservancy of New Washegonia is launching a major campaign to support protection of the Upper Monongylvania River and surrounding natural areas. The entire Upper Monongylvania Wildlands includes river, wetland, forest, and a rare grove of Chinchona trees, the biggest source of domestic quinine in North America.*

*The speech, is given by the head of the New Washegonia chapter of The Nature Conservancy, Jane Smith, who is speaking to a group of businesspeople at the New Washegonia Chamber of Commerce monthly meeting. As it happens, next month the NW Chamber is heading up to the state Capitol, Washegonia City, to lobby members of their unicameral legislature on a variety of topics of interest to business.*

## **Speech**

Thank you so much for inviting me to speak to the New Washegonia Chamber of Commerce.

I know that sometimes we are made out to be natural enemies, the business and environmental communities. But we at the Nature Conservancy don't buy into that false dichotomy. It's not just that we see everyone as part of one community with a common interest in our common welfare. It's also that, on a more practical level, we operate just like most of you do. We are in the business of protecting our assets for the future, and making sure they continue to pay dividends.

I came here today to talk with you in a little more depth about just what those dividends are — to explain how nature benefits everyone's bottom line, why conservation is smart investment for your community as well as mine, and what you can do to maximize your natural returns.

We're not necessarily used to thinking about the environment in those terms. Most conservation campaigns are about protecting beauty or fighting pollution or saving wildlife. Those are all worthy goals, and all good reasons in their own right. But we are selling ourselves short — quite literally — by stopping there. Thanks to advances in science, and our evolving understanding of nature's value, we can now measure just how much our environment does to make us safer, healthier, and even live longer lives.

Here's a perfect example of what I'm talking about. Did you know that installed all over this area is an incredibly affordable, abundant, and efficient technology that is uniquely designed to filter pollutants out of air and improve the quality of air that you and your kids breathe? They're called trees. By conserving them, we are creating a tangible benefit for public health for a relative song – in this case, most likely a bluejay's, We're reducing the risk of asthma. We're cutting greenhouse gases. You add up those dividends, in saved costs and saved lives, and it's not as hard to see why it's easier being green.

But that's only the beginning of the benefits nature provides. And to see what I mean, just take a look in our own backyard at the diverse resources of the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands , It has a river, wetlands, beautiful forests, and even an unusual feature – the largest stand of Chinchona trees in North America.

What are Chinchona trees? Well they're not some kind of leafy, bark-covered version of a snail darter or great spotted whosewhatsis. It's a tree whose bark is a great natural source of quinine. You might be surprised to know that Quinine, while essential to a fine Gin and Tonic, is also a naturally occurring medicine that is used to control fever and fight malaria. So when those trees fall in the forest, you may not be there to hear it, but a lot of us will surely feel it.

You will probably be even more surprised to learn that most drugs actually come from a source in nature. In fact nine of the top ten medicines have their sources in nature. So protecting nature means protecting a medicine cabinet full of cures. And that's just the ones we know about. As research progresses and we come to understand the causes of disease even more deeply, nature will surely produce a host of new cures for people.

But beyond the Chinchona trees, the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands contains 5000 acres of wetlands. And these wetlands offer an important benefit to people all over New Washegonia. Because when the winter ends, and the spring rains come, the Upper Monongylvania River naturally swells. River levels rise. If it was a particularly harsh winter, there's lots of snow in the mountains, and as that melts, that water needs a place to go. The wetlands in the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands absorb a lot of that moisture, and that reduces the chance that the Upper Monongylvania River will flood over its banks.

You see, the wetlands act as a ready-made barrier, to protect our homes from floods. Maybe every year isn't a big flood year. But enough of them are that the Army Corps of Engineers did a study, to determine what flood control measures they might need to take to protect our homes. The study forecast a series of dams and levees, costing billions. But if we protect those wetlands, and other wetlands like them, we can save that money. That's nature benefiting the bottom line.

There's another way the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands serves our needs here in New Washegonia, and it's right in front of you, right at this luncheon. Look down at your place

setting, right above the knife. There it is. It's your glass of drinking water. Because that drinking water comes from a reservoir that's fed by the Upper Monongylvania River. And the land on either side of the river catches the rainwater that runs into the river, that basically, ends up right in those glasses on your tables. The land on either side of the river acts like a water purification filter. Any pollution a raindrop picks up on it's way through our skies – and it picks up a few , like mercury, sulfur, even arsenic – those pollutants get filtered out by the natural plants and soil and sediment those raindrops travel across on their way to your glass.

Now, we have a lot of technology we can use to get those pollutants out of the water. We could pave over the banks for the river, park a million cars along there, and those raindrops would still flow into the river, and eventually into your glasses there. But we'd have to spend millions upon million to get the arsenic out. Keeping the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands wild means we save that money. That's a real benefit you can bank on.

Those are a few of the important benefits nature, and the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands in particular, provide to the people of New Washegonia. They're measurable, and more importantly, they're reliable. There's all kinds of science to back it up. But if we're going to realize those benefits, for all of nature's shareholders, we're going to need people to back them up — specifically to advocate for their protection.

That's where we can really use your help. You all have clout in your communities. You're visible. You contribute to the local economies. You might even pay a little in taxes now and then. And perhaps most importantly, you have credibility with policymakers when it comes to weighing costs and benefits and making smart investments.

So when you're headed up to Washegonia City for your lobby day, I hope you will share this message with them about nature's true value and support our campaign to protect the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands . I hope you'll even consider joining and supporting The Nature Conservancy. I'm sure you'll come to see that there are incredible benefits to doing that too, but that's a topic for another speech.

Thank you.

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## Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Contact: Eleanor Morris  
The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy announced a major effort to save the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands, at a press conference today in New Washegonia. The Upper Monogylvania Wildlands are a rich source of benefits to the people of New Washegonia, benefits like clean water, clean air, and a source of important medicines, which needs to be protected.

Nature Conservancy spokesperson Eleanor Morris made the announcement. "Protecting this natural place means protecting incredible benefits for the people of this community. The Wildlands filter pollutants out of rain, so our drinking water is safe to drink. The forest cleans smog out of our air. That saves New Washegonia the cost and trouble of cleaning our water and air other ways," Morris said.

The Nature Conservancy has started a public education campaign, kicking off with a recent speech before the New Washegonia Chamber of Commerce, by Jane Smith, a Nature Conservancy leader. The speech highlighted, among other things, a unique feature of the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands.

Said Smith, "If you've ever been through the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands , you knowit has an unusual feature – the largest stand of Chinchona trees in North America. What's a Chinchona trees? It's a tree whose bark is a great natural source of quinine, a naturally occurring medicine, which is used to control fever, and is an anti-malarial," Smith said.

Quinine is just one medicine that comes from a source in nature. In fact nine of the top ten medicines have their sources in nature. Protecting nature means protecting a medicine cabinet full of cures. As science progresses and we come to understand the causes of disease even more deeply, nature will surely be a source of medicines for new cures for people.

"Protecting the Upper Monongylvania Wildlands, really means protecting incredibly valuable benefits for our people," Morris concluded.

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