

## ***Saving Special Places 2017 Conference: Conservation Writing***

### **Outcomes and Audience:**

Before you write that press release or call that reporter, it's smart to take a few minutes to consider *what you're trying to achieve* (outcome) and *whom you're trying to reach* (audience). While this may sound obvious, it's an important step that often gets overlooked. Typically, you'll have more than one outcome or audience in mind, but some will be higher priorities than others.

Here are common examples:

#### **Outcomes**

- Goodwill for a specific project
- Goodwill in a community, or among groups who can be allies in the future
- New donations
- New volunteers
- Acknowledgement of past donors or volunteers (\*be sure you consider any sensitivities regarding publicity)
- Greater public awareness of a new resource – ex. a trail through a community forest
- Landowner interest in future conservation easements – ex. “here’s why this was a great experience for farmer Sue”
- General education – ex. “wildlife corridors are important”

Also consider whether there are any issues related to your story that could generate a negative reaction, and how you may want to avoid that – or be prepared to answer questions:

- Public access – will there be a change in public access? If so, is this likely to be a concern?
- Are public dollars being used? Has there been local opposition to this?
- Is the landowner controversial/is this story part of a bigger story about them?
- Are there likely to be concerns with use of the land under the terms of the easement?
- How do people perceive conservation easements? Has there local resentment about them (if so, what are the concerns?)

#### **Audience**

Think about what audience is the most critical for your desired outcome(s).

- General public and/or members of a particular community
- Past and future donors
- Local elected officials & town/city government
- Land trust members/volunteers
- Landowners who may consider protecting land
- Potential visitors to protected land
- Social media followers
- Special groups relevant to a project

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### **Working with the Press:**

Does your communication plan include working with reporters? Take the time to consider how to make their job easier. Think of your relationship with them beyond this story – will they want to work with you again?

- PR 101: Reporters never have enough time. Don't waste it.
- Know what a given media outlet covers (and doesn't). How does your story relate to *their* audience and objectives?
- Take the time to identify specific reporters who are likely to cover your story: don't expect a general press release or voicemail to go to the right person.
- Short written queries (email) are usually best; avoid calling daily reporters late in the afternoon, when they may be on deadline.
- Think about how to tweak your story to meet their needs. What should you emphasize? Is this a features writer who would be interested in a story about a family's legacy? An outdoor recreation reporter more likely to write a "how to" piece on hiking a new trail?
- Do you have several sources lined up, ready for quotes?
- Can you offer free photographs and/or illustrations, video/audio clips? If for radio or TV, what kind of sounds/images can you promise if they attend an event?
- Is there an opportunity for a reporter to have a hands-on experience that would make a good story? So, for example, a couple hours with a tracker, a trip out with the local elementary school that uses the property?
- Do you know a freelancer who often works for magazine/newspaper? In some cases, it may be better to reach out to them directly to pitch your story, as they have more time and the editor's ear.
- Don't ignore photo desks, letters to the editor, events listings. Many people read these!
- Reporters don't work for you, and there's only so much you can do to influence how they cover a story.

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### **Channels for Your Story:**

You're on the cusp of a great conservation success story, whether it's land being protected, a new trail, a research project or other collaboration. How do you share that success? And how can you devise a strategy that integrates multiple channels that reaffirm a consistent, positive message about your success? What's the strategy that affirms your organization's goals for reputation, donations, enlightening the public and building on success? Here are just a few channels to consider, but also, think about ways to tie a consistent message together.

#### **Internal** (members, trustees, staff):

- **Newsletter** – Different styles, i.e.: donor-centric, journalistic, blend, annual report, etc.
- **E-newsletter** – Regular (monthly, seasonal), special edition

#### **External**

- **Press:** newspapers, magazines, writers, radio, TV, bloggers

#### **Mixed**

- **Website** – Keep it current, vibrant, lively. Think big. Photos. Options for interactivity (quizzes) & donations. Promote traffic here via social media, internal communications and press.
- **Social media** – Keep the love going, not just one post. Milk those assets. Top 10, etc.
- **Video** – for social media, web, internal, events. Expensive. Aim high for production.
- **Photos** – for social media, web, newsletters, etc.
- **Infographics** – Is your project complex? Infographics can explain a lot, quickly.
- **Podcasts** – Some stories land themselves nicely to sound and podcast audiences.

#### **Events**

- **Hikes.** Keep it simple, fun. No death marches. Food helps. Involve partners and local characters.
- **Evening programs.** Keep it short; photos; interactive; recognition, but not overboard.

Remember, how can you make the most of all sorts of channels using a **consistent message** that furthers your goals. Sometimes drafting and using **key messages**, along with an **outline of your strategy**, can help boost the impact of all your hard work.