

# Towards Resilient Land Protection Programs:

**A model based on conservation values.**

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It was never easy to get voters to approve conservation funding at the ballot box...

But now, there's not a lot of good news out there...



SPECIAL REPORT TODAY, TOMORROW and NEXT SUNDAY

# Newsday

LONG ISLAND

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## THE LOAN CRISIS



# Your home is no longer a cash machine

THE SQUEEZE ON YOUR WALLET, YOUR LIFE AND THE LI ECONOMY A4-7

And there are those who would take advantage of the current situation....



**LONG ISLAND GOVERNMENT LAND ACQUISITION:**

**CAN LONG ISLAND TAXPAYERS AND  
THE REGIONAL ECONOMY STILL AFFORD IT?**

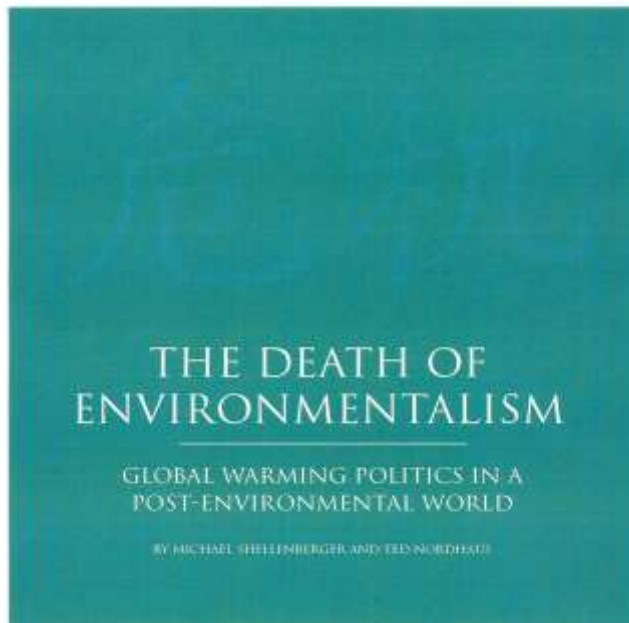
## **How should we be communicating with our voters?**

What do the voters really want?

What do they really care about?

How can we tell?

What questions should we be asking?



The Chinese ideogram on the cover of the paper is “crisis” – composed of the ideograms for “danger” and “opportunity”



# About the Paper

- Released at 2004 Environmental Grant Makers Association meeting
- Authors are reputable members of environmental community
- Distilled Interviews with 28 leading environmentalists in US as preparation
- Received with CONTROVERSY by leading environmentalists
- Reluctant consensus on key “findings”

# What the Paper Says

- Our efforts fail to motivate public concerns
- Politicians have learned they can safely ignore us





# What the Paper Says

Environmentalists have failed to make a compelling positive economic argument to underpin their calls for policy changes.

HOW  
MUCH

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WILL THIS  
COST ME?

## TALKING TO CONSTITUENTS

### US

Environmentalists push ISSUES and technical “fixes”

Our messages lack linkages to the VALUES of our constituents

Environmentalists propose “solutions” to environmental problems as though politics didn’t matter

### THEM

The conservative right leads with clear shared VALUES

They push ISSUES clearly linked to their VALUES by compelling messages

The conservative right successfully brands us as “special interests”

## LESSONS FROM “Death of Environmentalism”

1. Environmentalists and scientists like us are not representative of the attitudes and perceptions of the typical ballot measure electorate.
2. Environmental issues are a second tier concern for most voters, after war/defense/terrorism, social security, the economy, education, health care, personal income...
3. Voters respond most strongly to affirmative conservation messages: “I have a dream”; versus negative messages, “I have a nightmare”. “We’re in big trouble and it’s going to cost a lot of money to get out of this one...”

Having a values-based persuasion message means understanding the basic values of the audience.

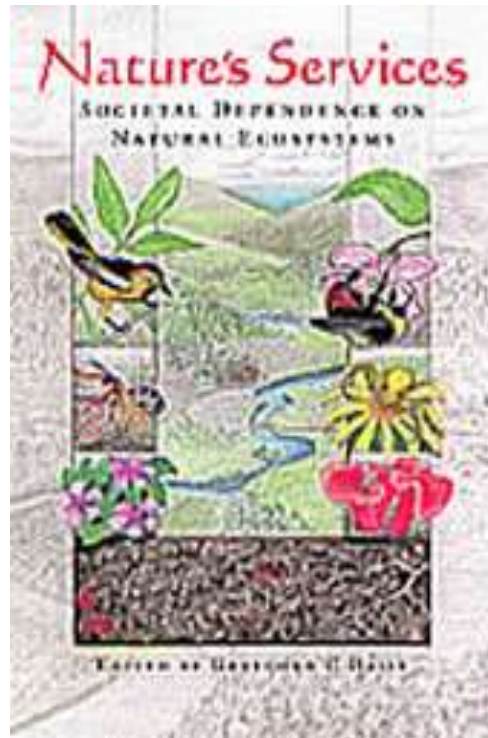
Campaign messages should demonstrate to the voter how a proposal reflects those values

Any conservation ballot measure poll should have at the center of its methodology two outcomes:

1. Gain greater understanding of how to present a message that reflects general conservation **values or goals**.
2. Develop a clear connection between specific proposals and those general conservation values or goals.

In 1997, Gretchen Daily published a collection of papers entitled, “Nature’s Services – Societal Dependence on Natural Ecosystems”

Included in this volume was “Valuing Ecosystem Services with Efficiency, Fairness and Sustainability as Goals” by Robert Costanza and Carl Folke.



We took the reasonable hypothesis of Costanza and Folke and stretched it to fit our altered polling paradigm.

# REACHING VOTERS THROUGH SHARED CONSERVATION VALUES or GOALS

1. Sustainability

2. Fairness

3. Efficiency

Put another way:

Environmental funding and policy must satisfy the average voter on these three dimensions:

1. Provide a sustainable, enduring benefit (future generations, resource management, clean drinking water, clean water in our harbors, bays, lakes, ponds, rivers and streams; quality of life)
2. Is achieved in a fair way (no windfalls, no wipeouts, equal sharing of any burden of implementation)
3. Does not cost too much as compared to the overall benefits it might provide.

**Which of these dimensions is the most important in the mind of the voter?**

**FAIRNESS**

**EFFICIENCY**

**SUSTAINABILITY**



## EFFICIENCY

Yes, it is just as simple as you always thought.

Conservation ballot measure voters vote their pocket books first.

## INSTANT REPLAY

Conservation ballot measure voters vote their pocket books first.

Our Study:

Intuitively we would expect that efficiency concerns would dominate any and all other considerations that voters make on conservation ballot measures.

But how can we know that is true?

And, if it is true, what does that mean for how we poll and market our measures?

Using 2 polls, one from New York's Suffolk County on Long Island, and one from Florida

- 1) Sorted questions into F, E or S piles
- 2) Checked via correlation analysis to see that these groups of questions tested related concepts
- 3) Ran Step-wise Discriminant Analysis procedure on total of nine questions from each poll.

# Discriminant Analysis

- Divided voters into three groups – supporters, opponents and undecided – based on their response in the survey when asked whether they support the conservation funding measure
- Looked across the groups to determine the attitude differences between the three groups, i.e., what attitudes best discriminate one group from another group.
- The procedure then takes the attitude model it creates and calculates if each individual case would be correctly classified as supporters, opponents, or undecided, if all you had was the attitude data. Since you have the actual response of the voters in the original survey data, the accuracy of the model for each group can be determined and the relative robustness of the model verified.

Results from the Discriminant Analysis Model (based on values questions from the poll):

- 1) Model correctly identified supporters of a measure 90% of the time, based on responses to F, E, or S questions.
- 2) Top predictive questions: 2 “cost vs benefit” ones - Efficiency.
- 3) Apparently, the cross pressure of financial concerns can, and mostly does, outweigh respondent’s concerns about the environment.
- 4) The model predicted opponents and undecided voters 69% of the time

## Conclusions and recommendations from this study

1. Efficiency is the most important factor in determining the real level of voter support for an issue.
2. “Saving the environment” probably falls into a socially desirable response pattern – sustainability arguments and messages may help a campaign, but they can’t predict who will vote YES at the polls. Who’s going to tell a pollster that she wants to drink polluted water?
3. Local, local, local – all politics is local. Local references in messages – good.
4. Voters don’t make the connection between overdevelopment and traffic congestion.
5. In NY and Florida, the model was not as accurate in predicting opposition or indecision as it was in predicting support. This suggests that “undecided” voters are not different from opponents; an observation that matches real life experience: in ballot measures the undecided voters break AGAINST you.

## Conclusions and Recommendations from the Study

1. The Conservation community must place less weight on survey research into sustainability issues to avoid the trap of socially desirable responses.
2. Voters use cost/benefit and fairness arguments to build escape hatches from our messaging: “I support conservation but this is unfair, too expensive.”
3. Opposition messages generally avoid the sustainability issues entirely, focusing on efficiency and fairness – our big vulnerabilities
4. Attention to these subtle points is most important when there is active and well-funded opposition to a measure.

## In A Nutshell:

- We want to talk about sustainability
- Voters care most about efficiency
- Our opponents and detractors want to talk about efficiency
- We'd better find the winning efficiency arguments FOR conservation and work them harder.



**What is our affirmative, efficiency-based narrative for environmental conservation?**

# WHAT DO WE DO NEXT?

1. Uncover and Reconnect with the values and “kitchen-table issues” of ordinary folk
2. Narrate a compelling vision for an environmentally sustainable future
3. Work harder, better, smarter with other “progressives”
4. Proclaim the affordability of our vision
5. Expand our membership and engage participation beyond the usual racial and socioeconomic profile

