

Thurston-Mason Counties E3 Leadership Summit June 1, 2007

Results of Session 3: Lay of the Land Media and Communications

The Media/Communications participants offered the following responses when asked to comment on statements assessing the current status of environmental education in Washington. This summary reflects both comments generated by participants as a group and comments submitted in writing by individual participants.

Lay of the Land

- The participants in general accepted the view that the Puget Sound ecosystem is not healthy, and that Washington, like the rest of the globe, is experiencing climate change.
- Concerning Puget Sound recovery legislation, comments emphasized the importance of including all stakeholders in the process of meeting, planning, talking, and gathering feedback. Stressing the need for “public participation at all levels,” rather than reliance on a “top down” approach, they seemed concerned that the legislation did not draw on the participation of a broad enough base.
- Participants identified hands-on education as a means of addressing the high percentage of people in the state who are unaware that Puget Sound is unhealthy.
- Participants suggested that signs of poor health in Puget Sound and of climate change across the state need to be specifically noted and communicated, presumably as part of the process of better educating the people of Washington.

Challenges

- The participants accepted the statement that nearly three-quarters of the population of Washington believe Puget Sound is in “excellent or pretty good” condition.
- Additional challenges were noted, including:
 - Increasing population.
 - Lack of affordable housing.
 - Transportation issues, including rising fuel costs.
 - Food security issues resulting from rising fuel costs.
 - Overall difficulty communicating effectively with the public.

Difficulty establishing good communication between the media and action groups.

Lack of engagement among the public, and especially youth.

Difficulty inspiring those who do not live on Puget Sound to recognize issues and take action.

- Participants offered general suggestions for addressing these challenges, including:

Make climate change and its effects more visible.

Communicate issues and impacts at the local level; show how they affect individuals, particular communities, and the economy.

Attract and organize local groups to lead others.

Avoid “fear-based sensationalism” when reporting; avoid focusing solely on “big polluters” and allowing individual members of the public to define themselves as victims by contrast.

Focus on the positive benefits of action.

Find a way to get people out on Puget Sound for first-hand experience.

At the neighborhood level, show new residents how to live sustainably.

Use e-mail or a newsletter to inform people.

Opportunities to Build Upon

- Overall, the participants accepted the statement that the public (children and adults) receives most of its environmental information from the media, although they specifically noted the increasing role of the Internet.
- There was some concern that the media is not supplying good environmental reporting, either because journalists face obstacles or because the current focus of the news media is on entertainment.
- Regarding the role of the media, participants noted the need to ensure that the media has current/timely information about environmental issues and events.

- Participants suggested that the way the media tends to report on environmental issues often fails to call attention to the larger issues behind a particular effect or event. They suggested the need for a “paradigm shift” in the way environmental news is reported. One particular suggestion was to implement a “nightly environment watch” as part of news reporting programs.
- In response to the budget of the Puget Sound Partnership, the participants were skeptical that \$2 million would be sufficient to produce a meaningful impact. It was noted that this was not enough “even to run an effective add campaign.”
- Concerning climate change, some of the participants suggested that, while the effects of transportation and automobile emissions were emphasized, the impact of construction was not stressed enough. They wanted to draw more attention to the importance of “green building.”

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