

EcoA Tips

Notes & news from
EcoAnalytics Research



Welcome to EcoA Tips #12, your key *massage* before the communications marathons of the climate and biodiversity COPs ahead.

Three tips based on new research:

Tip 1: Fill the nature knowledge gap

Tip 2: Use empathy to close the distance to personal risk

Tip 3: Stress immediate affordability of clean electricity

Other resources

- Use scale to communicate the magnitude of loss and damage
- Share personal stories to amplify impacts
- Promote pillow talk
- Call out clear mandate for conservation

EcoA News and calendar



Building block: This [video](#) about the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone National

Park illustrates succinctly how biodiversity can be described using a "building blocks" concept, helping fill a common knowledge gap; but it fails to take the next step: showing how biodiversity may be personally relevant to viewers, answering the "so what? question." *Photo: Doug Smith/NPS*

Three tips on knowledge gaps, empathy and affordable clean electricity

Tip 1: Fill the nature knowledge gap

Recent research reveals big gaps in knowledge among Canadians about biodiversity loss and collapse, and conservation targets. These can be filled with misperceptions, so we need to address these in simple, personal and, ideally, local terms.

What the data say

EcoAnalytics' [Summer 2022 Policy and Efficacy qualitative research](#) looked closely at Canadians' understanding of the 30% by 2030 land and water conservation targets set by the federal government. Qualitative research, engaging 54 individuals in detailed online discussions revealed that many do not understand the threat of biodiversity collapse as well as they understand the threat of climate change. Nor do they understand why biodiversity loss and targets are important or how protection works. Most were generally supportive of the conservation targets, but some were uncertain about how land would be chosen for protection, whether private property would be expropriated and who would decide.

How to use this

Stress the basics and the relevance of biodiversity loss and collapse to us, personally. Help people visualize what happens when species disappear at the current rate. Emphasize that this is not just about a world with fewer butterflies and polar bears, but the removal of the ecological building blocks we need to survive. Use tangible, familiar examples of what is at risk and how this will affect one's personal health, lifestyle and pocket book: food security, more pandemics, infestations, disappearance of vital medicine, clean water, clean air, etc.

Then help them visualize the process for averting this. With housing shortages a growing issue, be prepared to show that individuals will not be losing their homes or livelihoods in exchange for the protection of land and water.

Concept brief for IG post, TikTok video, or infographic

Concept: Connect the dots between sea otters and you

Communication objective: Illustrate how the loss of sea-otters (and

other species) could hurt your audience, by revealing the connections between this charismatic keystone species, its ecosystem and related services.

Key message: Everything is connected...to you: when one species fails, the knock-on effect can be significant.

Scenario: A major spill from an oil tanker off the Pacific coast hurts a population of sea otters in B.C.

Story summary: Decline of affected sea otters has a domino effect on people, products and issues your audience may care about (more than it cares about otters):

- Fewer sea otters leads to more sea urchins eating too much kelp.
- Less kelp, means less habitat for juvenile salmon.
- Fewer salmon support fewer bears and eagles, who in turn bring in fewer ocean nutrients to feed forests.
- Without vital nutrients, forests are more vulnerable to disease, infestations, fire and invasive species.
- And as forests die, human livelihoods are undermined, along with the economy, tourism, forestry, fishing, air and water quality, soil stability, flood mitigation, food/medicine availability, cultural/spiritual knowledge, etc.

Call to action: Protect the Pacific's Great Bear Sea, home to sea otters, and ensure the survival of our web of life.

Tip 2: Use empathy to raise sense of personal risk

Canadians' sense of the personal risk posed by climate change remains stubbornly low, and as we don't have time to wait for everyone to experience personal harm, communicators need to use other methods to heighten people's sense of urgency. One effective tool is the use of powerful images and video to build empathy. This was a theme of two recent EcoA *Opinionation* webinars, which looked closely at perceptions of personal risk and how to strengthen communication about this aspect of public engagement.

What the data say

Dr. Anthony Leizerowitz, Yale Climate Communications, shared [data](#) contrasting relatively low levels of perceived personal risk in affluent countries of the northern hemisphere with much higher levels of perceived risk in lower-income countries of the global south. This disparity was found despite higher levels of (self-reported) climate change knowledge in the northern countries than in the global south. The data, gathered through a partnership with Meta (formerly Facebook) showed that most residents of the

United States still feel that the risk is distant, except in areas already affected by fires and floods, where personal risk awareness and climate concern is slowly growing. (EcoA's [Climate of Change Survey 2021](#) also found growing concern in areas most affected by extreme weather: e.g. BC, after extreme flooding and heat events in 2021.

How to use this

One way is to challenge people to rethink the risk associated with climate change, and feel greater empathy for people affected by extreme weather, by showing them images that allow them to think about hypothetical impacts in familiar places, including their own neighbourhoods and cities. These were key points of a September [EcoA Opinionation webinar](#) presented by Dr. Erick Lachapelle, EcoA Research Advisor and Université de Montréal political scientist, and Toby Smith, the Climate Visuals Programme Lead at Climate Outreach (UK).

Lachapelle's work, using images generated by a [computer simulation tool](#) in conjunction with Google Street View, shows that images of severe impacts of climate change on the viewer's locality can reduce the distance people feel when thinking about the personal risk posed by climate change. Smith argued that [excellent photos](#) showing the impacts of climate change on oceans (and people in ocean communities) are another powerful tool for creating a sense of place and connection and triggering empathy. He recommends highlighting new, diverse and varied people and projects connected to oceans; focusing on stories of urgency that evoke feelings; focusing on the scale of systemic problems rather than individual actions (e.g., a large industrial fishing trawler vs. an individual eating fish) and scalable solutions that convey the potential to overcome problems and fear.

Both presenters, however, warn against images that are inauthentic, such as generic scenery and overused subject matter (e.g., polar bears on melting ice.)

Mock social media post: Women restore mangroves

The below example of a possible post on Facebook (Meta) reflects the following advice of Climate Outreach's [Climate Visuals](#) programme: Show real people not staged photo-ops; tell new stories; show local (but serious) climate impacts; use images of climate impacts that are emotionally powerful; understand your audience; stress that sustainability must be everyone's objective; and overcome present-day fears with a vision for the future. Use the caption to develop a sense of responsibility and stewardship by highlighting the wonders of the ocean combined with a relevant story.



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These Indian women are protecting their village from flooding and cyclones by replanting mangrove forests in the Sundarbans area, near the Bay of Bengal. The mangroves that once protected their homes and environs from severe weather are being destroyed by increased salinity, from rising sea levels, and illegal fisheries. With accelerating climate change, tidal floods and severe cyclones are now frequent events, leaving their homes, roads and power installations exposed. Photo: Avijit Ghosh / Climate Visuals



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Tip 3: Stress immediate affordability of clean electricity

While an energy transition seems ever more inevitable to most people and the right thing to do, beliefs about the cost of this continue to undermine support. But using local, tangible examples can help folks understand that a clean electricity grid will actually save them money, even in the short term.

What the data say

EcoA's [Summer 2022 Policy and Efficacy qualitative research](#) revealed that affordability is a significant barrier to building greater support for a clean electricity grid. This is not surprising, as the oil and gas industry has been

amplifying affordability concerns, despite contrary evidence.

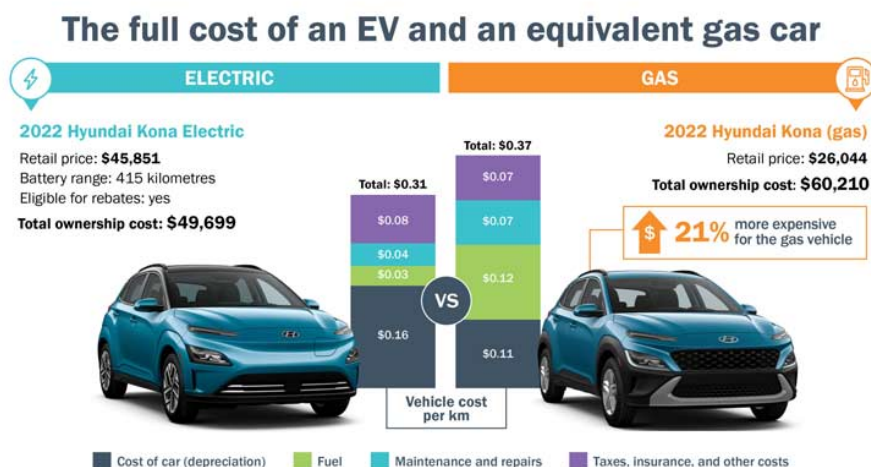
EcoA's [Quantitative Research](#) last year also indicated that many folks don't understand how Canada would transition to renewables, or what this would mean for them personally. Recent [polling in Ontario](#) by Clean Energy Canada and Abacus show that while most understand the many benefits of electrification (to their health, the environment, and economy), few recognize the benefits to their own pocketbook. Worse, most felt that climate action would actually cost them more and the benefits would only be felt by the future generations.

How to use this

With the cost of living a top concern, use this moment to stress the affordability of transitioning to renewable energy now. Clean Energy Canada highlights the importance of local and tangible evidence in bridging the gap between energy transition perceptions and evidence. Rather than quoting high-level statistics about the declining cost of solar, focus your audiences' minds on immediate household savings. Compare the actual costs of fossil-fuels with the savings households will see in their monthly heating, gas and power bills. And talk about rebates and cash incentives: on heat pumps, better insulated walls and windows and electric vehicles.

Mock social media post: electrifying facts

Electric vehicles are a good example of an energy solution that is beginning to decrease the gap between evidence and perception of affordability. This mock post, prepared by Clean Energy Canada, outlines the personal savings, step-by-step, helping viewers to understand how affordable clean energy is in the short term. The message factors in upfront costs, those tied to depreciation, maintenance, insurance and energy sources. Note that your messaging needs to account for the local rates your audiences will pay.



Other resources



Crushing evidence: Use scale to help audiences understand the magnitude of the loss and damage caused by climate change. *Photo by [John Middelkoop](#) on Unsplash*

Yale communicates the magnitude of damage

With more extreme weather and climate disasters and more exposure to global news, yet [declining trust](#) in social and other forms of media, it can be difficult to gauge the degree of damage that climate change is already causing. A recent [report](#) from Yale University’s Climate Connections (YCC) helps readers understand the actual scale of damage and loss, including the growing number of “billion dollar climate disasters.” YCC is a nonpartisan, multimedia service providing daily broadcast radio programming and original web-based reporting.

Get personal

Listening, sharing and amplifying the stories of people and communities on the front line of climate change, here and around the world, can trigger the empathy and engagement described in Tip 2, above. Climate Action Network International’s [#worldwewant](#) campaign does this with poignant personal storytelling. [Intersectional Environmentalist](#) uplifts and unpacks stories and perspectives about past and present contributions and experiences within the environmental space by communities of colour and historically excluded communities in North America.

Promote pillow talk

[Social norm research](#) suggests that people often take cues on behaviours and attitudes related to climate action from the people around them. This generally relates to larger, less intimate groups. [Recent research](#) from Yale University,

however, indicates that family and friends may be the biggest influence in terms of adopting norms. Surprisingly, however, [a study of 758 romantic couples](#) found that many had different levels of “concern” than their partners, and were not even aware of this difference, showing the importance of climate conversations for lovers, as well as friends and family.

Call out clear mandate for conservation

CPAWS and Nanos Research have just released a [national survey](#) gauging Canadian opinions about different targets for the protection of land and oceans. A strong majority support or strongly support further commitments to protecting at least 30% of Canada’s land, freshwater and oceans and increasing spending to meet them. Eight out of ten also support or strongly support using Indigenous Protected Conservation Areas (IPCA’s) to achieve targets. Similar support was also shown for speeding up the process of protecting land and oceans.

EcoA News

Searchable site

You may have noticed: EcoA is developing a searchable website, with a fresh design and better navigation. The work of our excellent designer, [Erika Rathje](#), it will be finished later this month, giving you easier access to our library of research and guidance, as well as better explaining who we are, our products and services and how to join. Comments welcome.

Use it all (with care)

Further to a decision at our annual meeting in September, Members and Subscribers are now free to use EcoA research as they see fit, provided they take care not to undermine the interests of other environmental groups. To this end, we ask you to identify any data or guidance that could be used by opponents to undermine environmental efforts.

New approach to research

Members have also agreed to pilot a round of *customized* research, generating data of more value to sub-groups of Members (and Subscribers) or specific campaigns or regional efforts. Expect details early in the new year, a call for proposals in February, and fielding in April or May.

Doubled data

Members and Subscribers can look forward to an abundance of data in the coming months, as EcoA delivers the results of not one but two national surveys. Erick Lachapelle will present the results of his annual climate survey by early December, updating opinion data going back over a decade and answering other questions. Then, in early January, Environics will field its national survey, testing frames and messages for advancing three key federal policies. Expect results later that month.

Reporting experiments

When Environics delivers the results of its next national survey in January, the firm may deliver the data in smaller doses, possibly over a period of a week, and with time to discuss key findings not just with them but with other Members, and your teams. And if you want our Project Manager to meet with your communications team members, or key Partners outside EcoA, Kate McMahon can help in this way. These new approaches are part of an effort to improve the way we share research results, replacing the *fire hose* with more interactive, discursive methods.

Calendar

November

1, week of, Members contribute to Lachapelle's Climate Survey questionnaire

1, week of, EcoA Research Nutshell on Trust is shared

7, week of, EcoA's monthly "Tip" is published *The Energy Mix*

7–14, weeks of, Lachapelle's Climate Survey is in field

28, week of, EcoA launches its fully searchable website

December

5, week of, Erick Lachapelle reports on Climate Survey

5–12, weeks of, Environics finalizes questionnaire for its national survey

12, week of, Social media testing report presented

January

8, week of, Environics fields its national survey

23–30, weeks of, Environics reports on its national survey

February

Mid-month, EcoA issues request for proposals for pilot round of customized research

March

Mid-month, Members select proposal for first round of customized research

Like this newsletter?

If so, what's most useful, or likeable? If not, what's missing or dreadful?

Submit your feedback and suggestions for future issues and EcoA Research

Nutshells through this quick [survey](#).