



NORTHERN VIRGINIA CONSERVATION TRUST

NVCT CLIMATE COMMS PLAN 2020-2021

Executive summary:

The current NVCT supporter has already expressed appreciation for the organization and mission, they see the value in the work being accomplished, and they want to see the organization go deeper on communicating their impact on the growing climate crisis locally and globally. NVCT has the right staff, supportive leadership of board members, educated and engaged donors and supporters, that make now the right time to infuse a climate-forward communications strategy into your branding, outreach and materials.

Value statement: Communicating *consistently and effectively* about climate change and climate impact will achieve a goal to grow support for NVCT's mission with new audiences and make the mission of the organization more accessible to the communities served in the six-county region.

Goals

- Connect and communicate your mission to climate change issues impacting your service region
- Engage new audiences not historically connected with NVCT through a climate-impact lens

Objectives:

- Communicate how small, urban land conservation can have a large-scale impact on adapting to our changing climate
- Incorporate climate action into policy efforts
- Provide opportunities for constituents to understand the connection between supporting NVCT and being an advocate on climate issues

Audience recommendations: for the purpose of this report, we're recommending climate messaging to be segmented by current and future audiences.

In reviewing your communications and materials, the staff concluded that NVCT's supporter list currently represents a small and homogenous population of Northern Virginia and is not representative of the entire population in the coverage area that NVCT serves. Adopting a strategic approach to climate change messaging provides a significant opportunity to grow your supporter list, and ultimately convert supporters to donors and advocates, by broadening the appeal of community-based land conservation to audiences outside of your normal reach.

Current Audiences:

- a. Donors (predominately white, 55 and older, moderate to liberal, politically engaged, financially well-off)
- b. Current Landowners already connected to the organization

Actions for current audiences:

1. Inviting to events either in-person or online
2. Highlighting personal stories of donors and landowners
3. Making the case that NVCT's conservation action mitigates the challenges brought by climate change

New Audience Recommendations:

- a. Younger Generation X + Older Millennials: Ages 30-40 in 2020
- b. People of color: Black and Latinx
- c. Legislative policy champions

Actions for new audiences:

1. Cultivating legislative advocates for key policy issues
2. Recruiting social media ambassadors to support content creation
3. Making the case that supporting NVCT's conservation action is the best way to channel their interest in climate issues

COMMUNICATION METHODS

TACTIC	AUDIENCE	FREQUENCY	INTENT	OUTCOME
Website page	All website visitors: Current + New Constituents, Legislators, Donors, event attendees and volunteers.	1x – updated as needed	Establish NVCT's climate role and goal	Education
Blog Stories	All website visitors: Current Audiences	2x per quarter		Education, Action, Donation
Email Newsletter	Current Email Subscribers	Bi-monthly (or monthly if content allows)	Dedicate one story to overt or subliminal climate story based on other content	Education, Action, Policy/Advocacy
Email drip campaign	New Email Subscribers	3-email flight	Frame how NVCT conservation supports climate resilience	Education, Donation
Social Media	Current + New Constituents	1x per week on each channel	Repost web landing page + blog content, publicize	Education, Action, Donation, Policy/Advocacy

			action opportunities, raise funds for future climate work	
Traditional Media	Current + New Constituents, Legislative Representatives	1x per quarter	Plan op-eds, LTEs, or a feature story on timely climate/land conservation stories	Education, Action, Policy/Advocacy
Events	Current + New Constituents, Donors, Volunteers	As needed	Inclusion of climate messages in ED and Board remarks	Education, Action, Donation
Legislative Policy Agenda	Legislators + Advocates and Volunteers	Annual	Add climate goals to annual policy agenda	Education, Action, Policy/Advocacy
Print Materials	New Constituents, Donors	Annual	1. Create climate-specific one-pager 2. Identify if climate messaging is relevant to add to existing fact sheets when reprinted	Education, Donation

IN DEPTH:

WEBSITE: create a dedicated landing page on your website for climate initiatives + add specific climate messaging on existing acquisition and stewardship pages.

BLOG STORIES: establish a content calendar of climate-related stories on a quarterly basis. Work with program staff and reference the messaging guidance document for story inspiration.

EMAIL: One climate story in every monthly or bi-monthly e-newsletter + email drip campaign for new subscribers (if technology allows).

SOCIAL: Content calendar for social that includes education about, promotion of, and reposting climate related content.

*1-3 climate messaging posts per month on Facebook

- *1 climate post for per month on Instagram
- *Repost news articles from other reputable sources
- *Share NVCT climate content shared on the website and e-newsletter
- *Build relationships with volunteers who could create content about or for climate on social
- *Photo content
 - *how are those images being used beyond the contest?
 - *how are those individuals being engaged?

EVENTS: Identify 1-2 key events per year where Alan can have climate-forward messaging in his remarks to attendees.

MEDIA RELATIONS: Plan twice annual climate content story pitches to local and regional media either as editorial, op-ed, LTE or earned media.

ONE-PAGERS AND FACT SHEETS: Create one fact sheet related to NVCT's climate goals and climate impact work + review existing fact sheets to identify where climate messaging could be incorporated into revisions and reprints.

POLICY AGENDA: Review annual policy agenda and identify where climate goals and standards could be incorporated.

- *clean energy and carbon reduction
- *building and zoning to reduce non-climate positive development
- *funding for future land acquisition based on climate resilience standards
- *train volunteers and citizen lobbyists to communicate climate messaging to lawmakers and local representatives in line with NVCT's goals and priorities

NEW OUTREACH EXPERIMENTS TO TEST

Climate Champion profiles: Interview and feature donors, supporters, legislative champions on why they're climate change champions and what they're doing to forward the goals of the organization or to mitigate the impacts of climate change in their local community

- *good for blog, e-newsletter, social, policy agenda, media relations
- *Existing videos and landowner profiles: start with the existing content already created and not shared widely. Seek approval from champions to have new climate messaging added to the stories either on the webpage, in social posts, or email promotion

**Good outreach for current audience grouping*

Email acquisition campaign: targeted toward Millennials ages 30-40

- *good for e-newsletter, social, events, fundraising
- *Good outreach for new audience grouping*

Ask the expert webinar series: identify climate science or climate resilience experts to feature in Zoom calls in a lunch & learn or another digital event format.

- *good for blog, e-newsletter, social, video
- *Good outreach for both current and new audience grouping*

Heron Rookery Success Story: discuss the positive climate impacts of the Rookery

- *good for blog, e-newsletter, social, video, events, policy agenda, media relations, one-pager
- *Good outreach for both current and new audience grouping*

Data collection and updates: circulate an annual survey to constituents on climate messaging and other aspects of the organization where you want to either take a pulse check or collect new data from your audience.

*Data collection with Google Forms or Survey Monkey

*good for blog, e-newsletter, social

**Good outreach for both current and new audience grouping*

CLIMATE MESSAGING THROUGH CURRENT CHANNELS

Messaging overview: because the population of your coverage area reaches the communities surrounding D.C., your current and potential audiences are highly educated, middle to high wealth households, and may already have a basic understanding of conservation and conservation science. However, messaging should still strive to be clear, concise, and accessible without relying heavily on jargon and scientific data.

Based on feedback from your current audience, recommended themes to infuse climate change action into NVCT's content channels include building a link between local action and global impact; focusing on traditional conservation impact including habitat, storms, and storm water; preserving land for carbon sequestration; and protecting open space while balancing the need for urban and natural spaces. An emerging focus for land trusts will also be to address issues related to environmental justice and public health impacts of our changing climate.

Characteristics of an Effective Message:

- Single-minded and focused: Conveying just one idea at a time.
 - Meaningful: Connect with your audience.
 - Important: Useful and significant.
 - Direct: Be straightforward.
 - Clear: Written in simple, non-technical language. Where possible pre-test language.
 - Brief: None of these four sections should be m
- Keep it simple – not heavily science driven
 - Take a values-driven approach – what are your organizational values?
 - Make the case for *local* conservation success – Focus on your impact on wildlife habitat as a starting point to get your team comfortable with this new approach

CURRENT AUDIENCE MESSAGING: *Quantitative survey results of your current audience showed that your audience meets the motivations of traditional land trust and conservation advocates who are motivated by messages related to clean water, clean air, healthy forests, and wildlife habitat. They also specifically want to understand how local actions add up to global impact.*

Local action to global impact:

- Addressing the impacts of climate change begins with nature nearby – in our backyards and communities.
- As our region experiences rapid growth, local land trust efforts are vital to preserving undeveloped land for parks, open spaces, tree cover, natural habitats, and farms.
- Every acre we conserve seeks to keep land natural and undeveloped for the health of our waterways, parks and open spaces, and farmland.
- By conserving land today, we can keep our communities clean, beautiful and sustainable, for the health of Northern Virginia's people now and for future generations.
- There is a substantial amount of work to be done to protect our environment, but by conserving land in our local region, we can have an impact on a national scale by contributing to an interconnected network of conserved lands.

Land, Water and Habitat Resilience:

- Northern Virginia is home to diverse flora and fauna. Preserving land means preserving habitats for our native wildlife and their ecosystems.
- By conserving natural and open spaces, NVCT's conservation efforts will safeguard clean water, protect important wildlife habitat, keep local farms and agriculture in operation for local food production, and build communities that are more resilient to change.

- Storm water connects us all whether it's playing in storm puddles or responding to the aftermath of a flood. As storms and hurricanes become stronger and more frequent, it's important to understand how we mitigate water run-off that ultimately impacts our local waterways, rivers, and streams.
- Storm water run-off directly impacts the quality of our drinking water. Conserving land can reduce the negative impact of storm water run-off that threatens the quality of drinking water in communities.
- We must be conscious of habitat loss as our state continues to develop and carve out protected spaces for all that share this land.
- We are already working to preserve wildlife important to local ecosystems. Last year, NVCT and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation partnered to protect one of the largest great blue heron nesting sites in the Chesapeake region. It is imperative to both organizations that we combine resources to protect this biologically diverse site.
- This partnership works to maintain the ecological integrity of the wetland for future generations as well as protecting vital habitat for one of Virginia's favorite bird species.
- Every year, we are fortunate to see these large, beautiful birds up-close as they breed, nest and catch fish. As our state's largest wetland bird and North America's largest heron, these creatures are a priority to protect, which means protecting surrounding wetlands.

Carbon sequestration

- Approximately 3.3 billion tons of greenhouse gases are released in the atmosphere annually. Carbon sequestration attained by keeping natural lands undeveloped can reduce this trend while providing a host of benefits related to keeping our communities healthy, our drinking water clean, and our food systems operating effectively.
- Preserving the connectivity of our forest lands and limiting tree removal, we can help sequester carbon from our atmosphere and create spaces for wildlife and other biodiversity to thrive.
- Conservation delivers substantial environmental and health benefits. By preserving natural and open spaces that remain free from development, we can have a positive impact on the air and water quality for all members of our communities.
- By removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and putting it into our soil, it will not only boost agricultural output and help build healthy farms, but it will reduce emissions leading to global warming and climate change.
- Carbon has a slew of benefits on soil health: helps soil retain moisture, improves soil structure, moderates pH and temperature, and reduces erosion.
- Conserving land for carbon sequestration could have massive benefits to healthy soils and robust agriculture operations.

NEW AUDIENCE MESSAGING: *Although the message themes below will also resonate well with NVCT's current audience, we recommended utilizing these themes specifically when recruiting new audiences to your network.*

Recreation and natural spaces

- Parks and public greenspaces serve an essential role in preserving natural resources and wildlife habitats. By creating public parks and recreational spaces on protected lands, we can support the conservation and stewardship of the land, water, and natural resources.
- For many Virginians, natural spaces are a key part of community health. We turn to nature, parks, greenways and blue-ways for wellness and happiness in uncertain times.
- Natural land provides spaces for both mental and physical wellbeing to people. Preserving natural spaces is key for personal well-being as well as the natural and environmental benefits it provides.

- As the Northern Virginia region becomes more developed and populations of people increase each year, it is imperative that we balance the need for land conservation alongside community development in order to provide natural places for people to connect with nature.
- Everyone deserves to have a park, trail, or green space nearby. Natural areas provide important public health solutions as our communities become more urbanized. We all need spaces that provide an opportunity for wellness and connection with nature.
- Virginia is home to a beautiful array of landscapes and wildlife. As our climate changes, it will be more important than ever to find solutions that preserve our region's parks and natural areas for future generations to enjoy.

Natural versus urban solutions to the climate challenge

- To meet growing challenges of climate change, NVCT and the conservation sector must establish new approaches to conserving our natural spaces using a mixture of natural and urban solutions.
- Expensive technology is not always necessary to combat climate change.
- Natural climate solutions play a key role in reducing harmful emissions and improving the resilience of communities across the state
- Natural solutions to mitigate our individual greenhouse gas emissions does not need to be difficult. A few natural solutions include composting, planting trees in our backyards and reducing plastic usage. We all can play a part in reducing the impacts of climate change from the actions we take in our homes and communities.
- Reforestation, habitat restoration, improved land management and land conservation are solutions that can help keep our state resilient for future change as climate change worsens.
- Focusing on clean electricity and limiting transportation emissions are important steps towards a more resilient state.
- Conservation efforts to protect wetlands, farms and grasslands have a huge impact on reducing emissions, storing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and improving resilience of ecosystems.
- Renewable energy and innovations to transform energy systems and infrastructure to be more sustainable are necessary for combating the changing climate.

Environmental Justice and Climate Action

- Economically-challenged communities at the coast feel a greater negative impact from climate change with worsening hurricane and storms.
- Areas of lower socioeconomic status and communities of color are likely to suffer the worst consequences of climate change.
- More than 260,000 Virginians live in areas at an [elevated risk of inland flooding](#). Heavy precipitation is likely to worsen flooding both in coastal and inland regions.
- Leaving tracts of land natural and undeveloped will alleviate the damage from flooding by capturing more of the water.
- Vulnerable populations are less likely to have the means to evacuate during storms and hurricanes, and they will be hardest hit by natural disasters and devastation.
- Outdated and/or undersized storm drainage infrastructure harms inland communities