

March 2020

Advocating Public Land Conservation During An International Pandemic

Reflections and recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a global anxiety, crashed the economy and overwhelmed the news media. How can conservationists and public lands advocates continue communicating about their work in this troubled, confusing time? In short, carefully. Resource Media offers the following suggestions.

- **Meet people where they are.** In this case, it's crucial to recognize that people are worried. They are afraid for their own health, the lives of loved ones, and for their own ability to make mortgage payments and pay the bills. When reaching out to your members and constituency, acknowledge that up front. We are all in this together.
- **The time is WRONG for discussing more troubles.** There will be a time to discuss problems like extinction, habitat destruction, and the loss of favorite wild lands. But this is not that time. People's appetite for worry is overwhelmed. Any attempts to connect our organizational issues to the pandemic will be rejected as cynical. At best, such messages will sound tone-deaf. At worst, those messages will be hurtful.
- **Connect public lands to values of family and health.** The good news is, public lands like national forests and national parks ARE healthy places to go during a pandemic. Of course, ALWAYS following public health guidelines. Properly executed, outdoor activities such as fishing, birdwatching and hiking fit well within the parameters of social distancing. It's fine to encourage your people to take part in these activities – where appropriate and following the rules.
- **Use images of public land, water and wildlife to share feelings of calm, beauty and serenity.** We all enjoy nature for its soothing impact on troubled souls. This is more pertinent than ever. Fill your social media with images of laughing kids at play, tumbling streams and beautiful wildlife. It's reassuring to remember that, as all seems so chaotic, the natural world is carrying on its everyday miracles.
- **Provide "news folks can use" about public lands.** While many folks continue to enjoy the outdoors, the fact is there are changes afoot because of the pandemic. Visitor centers, ski resorts, some urban beaches and facilities are closed. Your followers will appreciate accurate, timely and up-to-date information on these changes.

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- **Offer thanks.** Now is a great time to offer gratitude to the workers, service providers and “helpers” who are doing so much for others, at no small risk to themselves. In the big picture, it’s timely to remind folks of the value of science, experts, and institutions that knit society together. It’s also timely to remind folks of the importance of being good neighbors, even global citizens. After all, we are all in this together.

In short, it’s no time to be quiet. It is time to be thoughtful, careful and encouraging. Let’s set aside the doom-and-gloom and show a path to a better, healthier future.

If you’ve any communication challenges – regarding Covid 19 or otherwise – remember that Resource Media is here to help. Please reach out any time.

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