



## Do Diligence Sounding Board Report

To: Interested Parties

From: Eric Eckl, Water Words That Work, LLC

Re: Review of a Fundraising Email from the North Florida Land Trust

Date: 2/11/2010

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Water Words That Work, LLC is preparing to launch a new market research service -- tentatively titled the "Do Diligence Sounding Board" -- for nature protection and pollution control organizations to use to evaluate marketing materials and messages.

The purpose of this forthcoming service is to allow you to **quickly** and **affordably** pre-test materials *before* they are final -- giving you an opportunity to improve your piece before you release it into the wild. Once the service launches, Water Words That Work, LLC will provide DDSB feedback to our clients in complete confidence.

As part of our field trials for this service, we tested 8 fundraising webpages and emails from nonprofit organizations seeking financial support for water-related work.

This report summarizes what two dozen "everyday citizens have to say about a fundraising email from the North Florida Land Trust.

<http://docs.google.com/fileview?id=0BxjtnOJhd9TUNzQyNDhmYzQtMzNkMy00Y2M2LWJhOTctZjFjZGVkNDhkYWJk&hl=en>

The Do Diligence Sounding Board provides feedback that you can use to sharpen your fundraising message -- finding your way to the words and pictures that successfully evoke a charitable response. However, favorable feedback does not guarantee fundraising success, and negative feedback does not guarantee failure, for the following reasons:

- This report provides insight into the *first impression* that your fundraising message makes. Those who already have an impression of your organization already may react differently.
- You are *competing* for donors' generosity against other good causes, as well as the events that occur in their lives and in the world.
- A powerful message is only one part of a fundraising effort. Successful fundraising also requires regular effort, enough suitable prospects, regular effort, a good reputation, regular effort, and a good system for delivering your message and processing the gifts.

## By the Numbers

Of the eight pieces tested in this bath, this fundraising email received the second lowest marks overall. It scored below the group average on every criteria, earning its lowest marks for connecting its work to the well-being of children.

Statement	1-Strongly Disagree	2-Somewhat Disagree	3-Somewhat Agree	4-Strongly Agree	Average for this Piece	Average for similar pieces
This group is trying to solve a problem that is important to society	0	3	17	7	3.15	3.45
This group is is trying to solve a problem that has affected me or someone I care about	9	5	10	3	2.26	2.46
This organization will use donations to help end the suffering of people or animals	4	8	14	1	2.44	3.03
This organization will use donations to correct some kind of injustice	6	7	13	1	2.33	2.63
This organization will use donations to help children	7	9	10	1	2.19	2.34
The group has a clear goal that it is raising money to achieve	2	6	7	12	3.07	3.32

I understand how the organization will use the donations it receives	8	3	8	8	2.59	2.83
I am confident that this group can make a difference if it reaches its goal	3	7	10	7	2.78	2.95
I am confident that others are supporting the group's work	0	9	13	5	2.85	3.06
If the group doesn't reach its goal soon, it may be too late	6	6	10	5	2.52	2.59
Overall					2.43	2.86

## Key Findings

Question	Yes	No
Does the work of this organization fit your own personal definition of a "good cause?"	22	2

**Question:** "Please elaborate on your answer to the previous question:"

### They answered like this:

- "I believe strongly in conservation".
- "I support similar conservation efforts with financial donations and have volunteered to support similar organizations locally".
- "Florida has some of the most beautiful areas in the United States, and preserving it for the future is an important cause".
- "Land preservation is always important. It's for future generations and goes overlooked so often now".
- "Wildlife and wetland conservation is important to the community because without the wetlands, much of the natural habitat for Florida's animals and birds will vanish. This in turn will change the whole ecosystem. As animal species vanish, it affects the people in the area as well".

- "A good cause is something that helps to solve a problem that does not have a current solution. A good cause involves giving for the sake of giving rather than expecting something in return".
- "Wetlands are the "nursery" for a great number of species".
- "more important to me to help people or animals in need than to use the money to preserve land"
- "My definition of a good cause is a self less deed, something that you stand no personal gain from it as in a kick back or money, just the joy of helping. which is what the company does".
- "I think a "good cause" means anything that tries to make a better world"
- "They are helping to preserve valuable Wildlands".
- "Wetlands are an important part of our ecosystem."
- "There is not enough information in the brochure. Where is the land located at and what animals reside there?"
- "Its environmental so its a good cause, but the issue doesn't seem particularly pressing and they've not made it clear just exactly what they plan on doing".
- "I personally believe in the preservation of wildlife habitats and open spaces".
- "Think of it as making the world more beautiful. Your simply preserving your own back yard".
- "Maintaining adequate natural spaces is important for biodiversity and to protect developed areas against extreme weather events".
- "I believe that some preservation of land is necessary for wildlife and not all be destroyed by overbuilding. It also ensures that some wildlife will not be endangered".
- "Preserving land from development is a worthy cause".
- "It is a good cause because conserving land helps the environment's balance and also helps society still have space to connect with nature".
- "This group seems to have a good cause as they are trying to protect as they state 'your own backyard' from being used and ruining the aesthetic beauty of the state of Florida".
- "It helps to keep some lands wild for preservation of native animal and plant species".
- "Considering the damage we have done to the environment and considering that everyone today is concerned about the protecting the environment and the world as whole. The organization is working for the same cause and therefore I believe it is a good cause".
- "I think conservation and preservation of wetlands is important for the ecosystem, for the species of animals that depend on them for their habitat and their survival".
- "Preserving wildlife and natural land is something we all need to do to protect nature for our children".
- "It's good because it works to protect animal habitats and wetlands".

## **Their Initial Reaction**

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**Question:** "Pick one word that summarizes the feeling this piece evokes in you:"

**They answered:**

- "Sadness"
- "protective"
- "future"

- "agreement"
- "urgency"
- "curiosity"
- "pithy"
- "green"
- "Happy"
- "kindness"
- "respect"
- "confusing"
- "Lacking"
- "dismissal"
- "protective"
- "peaceful"
- "Uninterested"
- "nature"
- "Environment"
- "conservation"
- "Nostalgia "
- "wild"
- "Preserve the wetlands and estuaries".
- "important"
- "soft"
- "Beauty"

## **Your Message in Their Words, Part I**

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**Question:** "In your own words, please describe the work of this organization:"

**They answered like this:**

- "They're a conservation group that wants to protect land in northern Florida".
- "Environmental conservation, protecting wetlands and estuaries in Northern Florida".
- "North Florida Land Trust. Seem to be interested in land conservation".
- "North Florida Land Trust. Land preservation of wetlands and estuaries".
- "They are working to save the wetlands of North Florida by purchasing easements".
- "This organization preserves Florida wetlands by increasing conservation easements".
- "This organization works to preserve wetlands in Florida".
- "conserving north Florida's wetlands and estuaries"
- "protecting wetlands and other lands".
- "I feel that they are trying to save the environment so that we as a race will have a better future"
- "They are working to conserve the wildland in North Florida".
- "protecting wetlands"
- "The group is trying to save the natural habitat in Florida".
- "They take donations and use them to 'protect' wetlands and estuaries in northern Florida. Its not made clear from the context of the ad just what exactly they do to protect the wetlands".
- "The organization works to preserve wetlands in Florida".

- "This organization is designed to conserve and protect our wetlands and estuaries in North Florida."
- "North Florida Land Trust purchases wetlands and estuaries in this geographic area to preserve them from development".
- "They are a non-profit organization that is trying to save wetlands and wildlife preservation areas".
- "Land preservation in Florida"
- "Saves lands and creates conservation easements"
- "This organization tries to preserve land by purchasing it and conserving it rather than having it go to commercial or residential use".
- "Purchase lands in the North Florida region to set aside for conservation".
- "The organization is working to preserve wetlands and estuaries".
- "They are trying to raise funds so that they can continue their conservation efforts in helping protect the wetlands and estuaries in northern Florida".
- "Land conservation in northern Florida"
- "They are working to protect and preserve lands that are wetlands and habitats for animals. They are trying to support and get conservation programs strengthened and new programs enacted".

## **Your Message in Their Words, Part II**

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**Question:** "In your own words, please describe the people or animals this group is trying to help?"

### **They answered like this:**

- "They're trying to help the animals of northern florida".
- "By protecting wetland, should benefit the animals that depend on them to survive".
- "Floridians to an extent, future generations, and anyone who enjoys nature."
- "All people who love nature and all the animals who live on the land that would be preserved".
- "Florida's native fowl and animal population".
- "The Florida wetlands"
- "Large numbers of fish, birds and insects use wetlands as their nurseries. The existence of many species is affected negatively when wetlands are lost. We need to preserve wildlife for future generations for both sustenance and enjoyment".
- "this group is trying to save land for people and their children to enjoy"
- "None its protecting land".
- "Any animals in america and all humans in the future"
- "The wild animals that inhabit the wildlands of North Florida".
- "I can only imagine they are attempting to protect native wetland species".
- "Maybe they are trying to help the land and animals in that part of Florida. I really don't know because they lacked the pictures or facts".
- "It looks like they're trying to protect areas of Northern Florida that have been threatened by sprawl. I assume that the protection is region wide because they say 'north' with Florida. Not really clear whether its pristine waterways in the Everglades or little patches of land that run between suburban masses. Not that the one is more or less important than the other, it just seems a little vague".
- "The organization is trying to preserve this land so that it will still be around for future generations to enjoy. The piece mentions that it will preserve wetlands and

estuaries, but fails to give any details about what plants and animals live in these areas, and how these species might benefit".

- "Everyone of any age. Especially our children and grandchildren that will miss out on enjoying the beauty of our trees. All animals that are living within this area or come there in search of food will be affected".
- "Communities in north Florida benefit from access to natural spaces -- via tourism, via environmental protection against extreme weather events, and via the connection of such spaces to healthy biodiversity. Since funding in the event of emergencies (on the negative side) and sustainable growth through environmental preservation (on the positive side) can affect government coffers in Tallahassee and Washington, everyone has an interest in local environmental causes like this one".
- "They are trying to help people that enjoy the beauty of nature. They are also helping wildlife with their natural habitat. Also wildlife that may soon become endangered".
- "None"
- "It is trying to help people by protecting the area that they will need in a future and is also helping the animals that live in the areas that would otherwise be destroyed".
- "This group is trying to help the land areas they are able to purchase, but also 'our children's children' by preserving the beauty and landscapes we grew up with for the future".
- "It is trying to help the wild animals and plants in North Florida, and thereby helping people to experience them".
- "The Organization is trying to protect the wetlands and estuaries. These lands are ecosystems which support a lot of different animals and in directly the organization is trying to protect those animals".
- "By helping to protect the wetlands, they're helping to protect the habitat of certain animals who live there, and they're helping to protect the area by their conservation efforts so that people can enjoy it now and in the future too".
- "Protecting natural habitats for wildlife and natural settings for our children".
- "They are trying to protect animals whose habitats are being threatened by development and the destruction of wetlands and scenic areas. The animals this would protect would mostly be mostly animals that make their home in wetlands".

## **Shop Talk vs. Plain English**

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**Question:** "Imagine that your friends, coworkers, or family member are looking at the piece themselves. If there are any words or phrases that might be difficult for them, please share them below:"

### **They answered like this:**

- "easements"
- "estuary"
- "conservation easements"
- "I am not sure they would know what an estuary is. I'm not clear what a conservation easement is"
- "The brochure is difficult to understand who or what they are going to help".
- "Easements' sounds technical. If its trying to preserve in suburban areas around people that own property, maybe the word wouldn't be so off putting. I'm left with the strong impression that they want to beautify the suburbs, more than anything

else. Maybe its the bolded text 'In your own backyard' but really I think its more than that. The whole tone seems aimed at wealthier landowners. 'Easements' sounds like the kind of word that they use at community board meetings, so maybe if that's who they're targeting, its a good choice. I don't think that people who aren't deeply involved with those kinds of formal, governmental organizatiosn would be moved by this ad".

- "easements"
- "the section about the best opportunity for land acquisition are available could be elaborated on".
- "Easements," "estuaries," and "wetlands" are all at once common terms and terms with slightly technical meanings that could perhaps be fleshed out a bit".
- "understand what easements are"
- "conservation easements"
- "none noted"
- "I believe my friends and family would want to know how exactly is the organization going to use the money. Also they would want to know how will their donations affect the world at large."
- "This was all very simple to understand".
- "Mentions "easements" several times and while they explained what that was, they should use an easier to understand word".
- "Maybe just thinking about animal habitats being harmed would be difficult".

## **Strengths of the Piece**

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**Question:** " In your opinion, what is the strongest or most compelling thing about this piece?"

### **They answered like this:**

- "Where they stress that this is happening IN YOUR BACK YARD".
- "concise call to action"
- "That Florida is beautiful and should be maintained".
- "That this is for the future, completely".
- "It is well organized. The piece states the problem, the way the group is trying to solve it, and it gives the reader a sense of urgency".
- "Describing what they have already done with the money they have been given. It lets me know that they have already taken action and succeeded".
- "They state up front what their success has been".
- "That this organization set records last year"
- "That it's trying to conserve the land for our future sons and daughters may enjoy".
- "The fact that they've already saved so many acres of land is what i find most compelling".
- "It appeals to the fact that it is the residents' "backyard"
- "There were records set in conservation efforts this year".
- "They organization has no information backing them as a legit charity".
- "The design is really nice.The logo and the image work well together, with the soft colors. The red box w/ the drop shadow emphasizes that they're trying to get donations, so its clear what they want from you. The slim column of text is easy to extract information from".

- "In the third paragraph, the piece specifically mentions the current economic difficulties and how other conservation programs are disappearing while there are good opportunities to acquire and preserve land".
- "preserving your own back yard" & the beginning tells how much progress has been reached already".
- "The clear mission of this group and its particular desire to act now (presumably because of cheaper land prices in the recession) come through clearly in the piece".
- "Saving nature so that our children can enjoy it".
- "The appeal to protect land for our children".
- "when they refer to the spaces that the children can play in, it makes you think about the future and the quality of life that we are giving to others".
- "This piece gets personal with phrases such as 'your back yard' and 'our children'. Another strong accent piece is the boxes at the bottom left which show landscapes that have been saved with donations, and then a box with 'your donation' listed on it".
- "It is a clearly written and straightforward piece, that is easy to understand, and the goals are clearly defined".
- "The strongest point is stating that due to economic situation now is the best time to donate."
- "I think the overall positive tone and attitude, along with the statistics, made this very convincing, asking to just dig a little deeper, not being pushy but being positive really helps sell this".
- "The biggest problem with this piece is that it is NOT compelling. There is no sense of urgency at all".
- "The part about preserving wetlands and animal habitats was the most compelling".

## **Weaknesses of the Piece**

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**Question:** " In your opinion, what is the weakest thing about this piece?"

**They answered like this:**

- "The picture doesn't really do anything besides take up space".
- "Not specific about current efforts"
- "No weaknesses".
- "Nothing terribly weak really".
- "There's not a strong enough connection between what might happen if Florida's wetlands go dry and what will happen to the human population. The reader will understand that this is a bad thing for the animals, but the piece needs to show that the loss of the wetlands and animals will also negatively affect the people".
- "It is not specific enough about what it is going to do with my money".
- "I am not clear what exactly they are doing with their money: "conservation easement" vs. "land acquisition." Are they changing laws on use, zoning, etc. or out right buying up land?"

The campaign might mean more if they talked about the impact of wetland loss on one or two recognizable species to make the problem more "real."

- "doesn't tell me how it will actually benefit animals or people"
- "why they are protecting the land wasn't stated, whether its to protect an animals eco system or what".
- "That they aren't very specific on what kind of land they want to save"

- "It is not very specific about what it is doing."
- "Extremely vague. Does not mention specific goals, does not explain what they are using the money for and while it says they set records, they did not mention what those records involved. If they did nothing last year, and this year they did something small, that would qualify as a record setting year, but how is the reader supposed to know if it's an impressive record".
- "There is no information on where this protected land is located in Florida".
- "Again, I think this ad takes credibility from more of a word of mouth campaign, like your neighbor comes over and tells you about it. The ad inspires confidence but not very much interest. Maybe its because I don't find the issue to be as pressing. If this ad is primarily targeting wealthier suburban parents and trying to get them to contribute to their own communities, I guess it's designed well enough"
- "The tone of the piece is not terribly persuasive. I don't know how much money they are looking for, what they use it for, what the benefits are, who administers the money, and in which areas they work. There are far too many questions left unanswered for anyone to feel comfortable with donating money. Also, instead of a painting, it would be far more effective to include a photograph of the type of land they are attempting to preserve".
- "It didn't go into alot of detail about how the progress so far had been met. For instance: where exactly the money went. However i feel it could have had maybe pictures of before & after affects if something is not done soon enough".
- "The weakest thing about the piece is the lack of context for its claim that conservation programs are "needed most" right now -- why? Were they needed less eighteen months ago, and will they be needed less a year from now? Similarly, vague references are made to budget cuts, but no figures are provided. Generally, the piece is so short and abrupt, so devoid of context, that it's hard to feel motivated beyond a certain point. Finally, a letter format would be warmer and more personal than the impersonal statement followed by a Donate Now button, as was actually used. This writing format, along with the minimal information provided, treats the reader more as an ATM machine than as a citizen".
- "Could have explained more what damage has been done by not trying to save these lands".
- "Not clear how the group has used money in the past".
- "the enfasis on preserving my own backyard makes it sound too exagerated"
- "Once this group receives the money they do not say how they are going to use it, or what specific areas they are trying to protect or acquire".
- "Only people with an interest in North Florida might be compelled to contribute".
- "That it is focusing on North Florida too much, that might drive away some of the donors who are not connected to North Florida. Even though its trying to protect North Florida lands but they should not mention that repetitively".
- "Maybe they could mention some of the wildlife their efforts are helping to protect, that would offer more examples of the good that their work is doing".
- "As stated above, there is no sense of urgency to spend money on this cause versus any other"
- "The weakest part of this piece is it really didn't give any details about how they protect these lands or what they will do in the upcoming period with the money".

## **About the Do Diligence Sounding Board**

Just whose opinions are these, anyway? The "Do Diligence Sounding Board" is a standing body of U.S. residents who provide feedback on marketing materials and perform related tasks in return for payment.

A major corporation recruits the board members, maintains the system for securing their feedback, and handles the financial transactions. Water Words That Work, LLC pays to access to this service, as do other marketing firms.

The feedback that you receive from the sounding board is different from feedback you receive from your peers, for three reasons:

- The sounding board members who review your materials approach them like actual everyday citizen "in the wild." They are not professionals in the field and have not participated in the drafting of the materials.
- The sounding board members have never met you, and will provide their feedback anonymously. Their feedback will not be influenced by their personal relationship with you.
- The sounding board more closely approximates the demographic makeup (especially race and education) of the U.S. "public" than the staff and board of most nature protection and pollution control organizations.

Demographic Trait	Environmental Professionals	Do Diligence Sounding Board	Traditional Telephone Poll, U.S. Sample	Actual U.S. (Census)
4 Year College Degree	95% or higher	~50%	~40%	24%
White/Caucasian	95% or higher	~80%	~80%	79%

All sounding board answers are verbatim -- including spelling and typographic errors.

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