

ADDRESSING DIVERGENT AUDIENCES IN CONSERVATION
COMMUNICATION: AN EXAMINATION OF LAND TRUST WEBSITES IN
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

By

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ABSTRACT

ADDRESSING DIVERGENT AUDIENCES IN CONSERVATION COMMUNICATION: AN EXAMINATION OF LAND TRUST WEBSITES IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

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In a world rich with a diversity of stories and values, successful conservation must not rely on everyone thinking and feeling the same way. Values are the foundation of the cognitive hierarchy of human behavior and are relatively fixed and unlikely to change. As a result, environmental communication that is reliant on a particular set of values may cause polarization around conservation issues. The reasoned action approach offers a way to explore communication techniques that address the cognitive hierarchy of human behavior at its most malleable point, behavioral intentions. Because land trusts work with historically divergent audiences who are often polarized by conservation issues, they are in a unique position to provide insight on how to bridge this divide. This project examines the websites of sixteen land trusts operating in Northern California through the lens of the reasoned action approach. The result offers land trusts and others engaged in the broader environmental communications insight into the current website communication practices of land trusts and to how website narratives and structures can work towards building of community through the well-balanced treatment of these diverse audiences.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	5
Reasoned Action Approach	5
Attitudes	6
Social Norms.....	8
Perceived Behavioral Control	12
Values and the Cognitive Hierarchy of Human Behavior	13
Discourses and Conflict Over Conservation.....	15
Consumptive and Productive Value Orientations.....	16
METHODS	21
RESULTS	30
DISCUSSION	39
Attitudes & Audience	39
Social Norms: Building Community through Representation, Integration of Divergent Audiences, and Telling a New Story	46
Perceived Behavioral Control: Addressing Concerns & Creating Opportunities for Direct Communication.....	52

CONCLUSION	56
REFERENCES	58

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Comparison of Consumptive and Productive Value Orientations.....	18
Table 2. Values Framed with Community, Individual, and Land Benefits	24
Table 3. Strategies Used to Address Social Norms	27
Table 4. Resources and Strategies to Address Perceived Behavioral Control.....	29

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The Theory of Planned Behavior	6
Figure 2. The Cognitive Hierarchy of Human Behavior	14
Figure 3. Values Framed with a Community Emphasis	31
Figure 4. Values Framed with a Individual Emphasis.....	32
Figure 5. Values Framed with a Land Purpose.....	33
Figure 6. Resources to Address Perceived Behavioral Control.....	36
Figure 7. Resources to Address Social Norms.....	37
Figure 8. Homepage with Consumptive (Recreational) Focus	41
Figure 9. Homepage with Organizational Focus	43
Figure 10. Homepage with Effective Emotional Appeal to a Diverse Audience	44
Figure 11. Homepage with Well-Balanced Information for Different Audiences	45
Figure 12. Homepage with a Link to a Page for Landowners	48
Figure 13. Homepage with a Community Building Narrative & Balanced Audience	49
Figure 14. Interactive Map.....	51

INTRODUCTION

As humans we rely upon symbols and stories to understand the world we live in, to tell us what is right and what is wrong, and to tell us how things should be. Of course, we live in a world rich with cultural diversity that creates many different realities and truths. There is no singular human story or one perception of reality on which everyone agrees; thus, we create and live in a world of social (and ecological) contradictions and conflicts that grow from our own unique and collaborative sets of stories.

Woven into this web of stories, the threads of conservation are also tangled in conflict and contradiction. While our global society is facing the impacts of biodiversity loss, climate change, and widespread pollution, there is no universal social consensus about what the problems are or how to solve them. As a result, there is no one story that helps us understand how to communicate about issues of conservation. Nor is there likely to be such a consensus. Diversity is a crucial part of resilient social and ecological life. Likewise, environmental communication and its impacts reflects the complexity of the social and ecological systems it strives to discuss.

In conflict, we often endeavor to influence the “other” or the “opposition” through rationale that relies on our own unique understanding of the world and our own values with very little impact (Feinberg & Willer, 2013; Haidt, 2012). This is due to the human tendency to hold steadfast relationships with our largely unchangeable values, at least in the short-term (Lakoff, 2004). In the long-term, those able to frame political conversations with their own language do have an advantage. When their frames are

picked up as common language, they are likely to sway the opinions of biconceptuals (people whose opinions swing conservative on some issues and liberal on others), and thus, influence cultural values at a large scale (Lakoff, 2004).

Meanwhile, issues such as biodiversity loss and climate change require immediate action. They require solutions that begin now while keeping long-term goals and objectives in mind. Diversity in values and views of the world are a constant; thus, successful conservation must not rely on everyone thinking and feeling the same way or holding the same values.

This project examines sixteen land trust websites through the lens of the reasoned action approach (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010) as a way to explore how these organizations address their diverse audiences while working towards private land conservation. This examination is focused solely on how the organizations currently communicate with their audiences. It does not ask why these organizations communicate the way they do nor does it ask about landowners' first point of contact with an organization. I chose to examine websites because I am interested in communication strategies that reach a large and potentially diverse audience, particularly in the area of land conservation. This exploration is merely a starting point for a much larger conversation. My examination of environmental communication literature did not uncover existing research on these subjects, so I set out to do a preliminary examination that others might build upon. I also feel that land trust websites are important because they present the official face of the

organization to these audiences. As a result, I wanted to know how land trusts were communicating with their audiences through their websites.

The reasoned action approach gets around the rigidity and polarizing nature of values by accessing the cognitive hierarchy of human behavior in the more malleable realm of behavioral intentions (Fulton et al, 1996; Vaske & Donnelly, 1999) which includes attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010; Fulton et al., 1996; Vaske, J. & Donnelly, M., 1999). I selected land trusts as a subject because they work with private landowners to conserve land by protecting it from development through conservation easements. Additionally, land trusts work with two distinct audiences that often hold divergent values. The first group consists of environmentalist supporters of the organization, such as donors and volunteers, and the second consists of private landowners who often make a living off of working lands by ranching, farming, or logging. These groups may have very different values, perceptions of land conservation strategies, and a historically contentious relationship with one another (Walker & Fortmann, 2003; Watt, 2017). This can create conflict. Land trusts are ideal to study for this purpose because they are already trying to bridge the historically conflict laden gap between their two dominant audiences.

The project began with a desire to ease conflict around private land conservation and asks three questions to begin looking at communication strategies of land trusts from the perspective of social psychology. What attitudes are represented by land trusts? How

do lands trusts address, or not address, social norms for landowners? How do land trusts address landowners' perceived behavioral control?

I begin the paper with a discussion of reasoned action approach, its components, and its relationship to values. Then I discuss the role of discourses and common value-orientations in creating conflict around conservation measures, particularly when it involves private land conservation. I conclude the paper with insights about creating a balanced representation of divergent audiences and by addressing referent power and landowner fears and concerns.

Through this project I contribute to a better understanding about how land trusts communicate with working landscape owners through their websites in a way that moves communication beyond polarizing discourses and supports the successful implementation of conservation projects on private lands. It is my hope that this project can be applied both to the work of private land conservation by communication practitioners as well as academics, and more broadly to the field of environmental communication and land conservation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reasoned Action Approach

The reasoned action approach was first proposed in 1975 by communication expert, Dr. Martin Fishbein, and social psychologist, Icek Ajzen (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). The approach states that people's willingness to engage in a behavior, or their behavioral intention, is determined by several factors: attitude, social norms, perceived behavioral control (See Figure 1) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). In other words, attitudes + social norms + perceived behavioral controls = behavioral intentions. As Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) and many others have shown, behavioral intentions are the best predictor of someone's actual behavior. By influencing the causes of a person's behavioral intentions, you influence their behavior (2010).

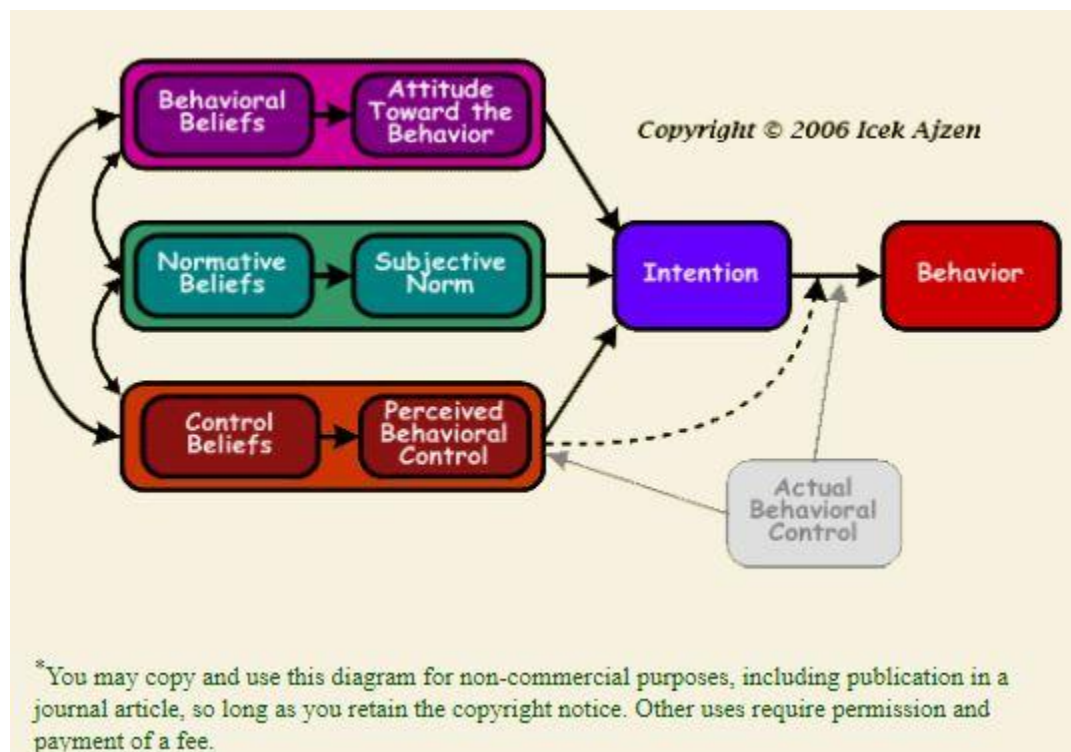


Figure 1. Theory of Planned Behavior. Reprinted from the website of University of Massachusetts, Ajzen. By I. Ajzen. (2006). Retrieved from:
<http://people.umass.edu/aizen/tpb.diag.html#null-link>

Attitudes

Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) define attitudes as a positive or negative feeling about an object or behavior. The reasoned action approach is concerned with how attitudes influence an individual's willingness to perform a behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Attitudes are "evaluative in nature" (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010, p. 76) which makes them difficult to represent directly in website communication strategies. Unless there is a direct statement regarding a positive or negative feeling about a behavior or an object, attitudes

must be inferred by what is and is not included in website content and how both behaviors and ideas are represented.

Because land trusts have at least two primary audiences or stakeholder groups, supporters (grant makers/donors/volunteers) and landowners, they must contend with diverse and divergent audiences. The nature of their work requires them to find a balance between the two. The predominant ways land trusts express attitudes through their website content and discourses is based on these audiences through 1) expression of land trust attitudes, 2) addressing landowner attitudes, and 3) addressing supporter attitudes.

Land trusts may express their attitudes through promotion of certain activities in website content such as photos, video, maps, and text. For example, a land trust is not likely to say, “we have a positive attitude about hiking!”; however, a positive attitude about hiking might be represented indirectly through interactive maps that allow the public to find trails to hike and images of people hiking across aesthetically pleasing open space.

Landowners may not have a positive attitude about hiking, especially when it comes to allowing trails on privately conserved land (Bastian, 2017). For example, a landowner with a fear that allowing a conservation easement public access to their land would interfere with operations of their ranch would be less inclined to allow an easement that provides public access. According to the reasoned action approach, attitudes are best predicted by people’s beliefs about the consequences of enacting a behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). As a result, the fear of interference in management

operations would likely result in a more negative attitude about allowing a conservation easement, and thus, a reduced willingness to engage in the behavior. Such perceived consequences may be negative or positive, and they also may or may not be founded in fact. Either way, understanding landowner concerns and addressing these concerns are an important consideration for land trust website communication strategies when applying this approach.

Social Norms

The reasoned action approach defines social norms as “social pressure to perform (or not to perform) a given behavior” (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010, p. 130). The more pressure there is within a social group to perform a behavior, the stronger the behavioral intention (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Fishbein and Ajzen’s approach recognizes that social pressure can be an effective tool to influence behavioral intentions even when there is not a reward or a punishment associated with the behavior (2010).

French and Raven (1959) identified five forms of power, or social pressure: reward, coercive, legitimate, expert and referent that can be examined in this context. Reward pressure is the proverbial carrot. This type of pressure is created by offering something favorable that comes as the result of the behavior (French & Raven, 1959). Coercive pressure is the “stick” and offers punishment as the result of enacting a behavior (French & Raven, 1959). Legitimate pressure in the specific context it is being used here refers to the power of governments to enforce or restrict behavior with legal consequences (positive or negative) (French & Raven, 1959). Expert pressure refers to the power held by scientists, academics, and others with legitimately recognized expertise

to have their voices elevated above others. Finally, referent pressure comes from the power of community, belonging, and a desire to be a part of a group (French & Raven, 1959).

These distinctions are important to communication practices geared at conservation easements for several reasons. While research has shown that working land owners respond favorably to the possibility of reward, or reward pressure, such as financial compensation (Bastian, 2017), they typically do not respond positively to the possibility of government regulation and oversight (Bastian, 2017; Cook & Ma, 2014; P. Walker & Fortmann, 2003). This suggests that communications emphasizing coercive pressure associated with government regulation may be damaging to the potential for conservation, particularly on private lands. Conservation easements are voluntary and negotiated to meet the unique needs of each landowner provides an opportunity for land trusts to address landowner concerns over the use of coercive power.

On the other hand, both Corner and Randall (2011) and Lakoff (Lakoff, 2004, 2010) demonstrate that using reward-based incentives, such as financial benefits, may actually be detrimental to long-term pro-environmental goals. This does not mean eliminating the use of reward pressure when it comes to conservation entirely. Instead it suggests that there is value in employing additional forms of social norms as communication tools

While employing reward pressure is not necessarily effective for long-term pro-environmental goals, coercive pressure may also be problematic as it is not held in high

regard by land owners (Bastian, 2017; Cook & Ma, 2014). Additionally, coercive pressure is often tied to government regulation which is a form of legitimate power, or pressure. This form of social pressure over property may not be seen as legitimate by some landowners who see regulation as a threat to individual liberty and as an infringement on what they perceive to be absolute property rights (Freyfogle, 2007).

Expert pressure that comes from an unknown or outside authority also holds the potential to be perceived negatively by those who make a living directly from the landscape. This is because, to varying degrees, the legitimacy of both local and indigenous knowledge, practices, and needs have been historically overlooked in favor of outside “expert” opinions in the creation of conservation policy and implementation of conservation projects around the world (Robbins, 2012; St. Martin, 2001; Watt, 2017).

Discourses that emphasize technocratic solutions often combine legitimate, coercive, and expert pressure as a means to resilience and the greater good (Dryzek, 2013). This trifecta is likely to be perceived as having grave consequences to individual liberty and freedom by those who value it the most (Freyfogle, 2007; Lakoff, 2004). This group includes working lands owners who also value the notion of absolute individual liberty and freedom and are inspired by its discourse (Freyfogle, 2007; Lakoff, 2004). As a result, these three forms of social pressure appear more likely to have a negative influence on attitudes about conservation measures among landowners, and thus behavioral intentions, as they raise fears about negative consequences of a behavior.

Reward, coercive, legitimate, and expert power have all been demonstrated to be potentially problematic to the goal of conservation for a variety of reasons. This leaves referent pressure as a way to address landowner participation in conservation projects. Fishbein and Ajzen (2010, p. 130) define referent power as “compliance with perceived social pressure [that] derive[s] from a sense of identification with the social agent”. Referent power is based on a “feeling of membership” (French & Raven, 1959). This feeling of community inspires the “member” to desire to be like those in this group (or to be like the powerholder) (French & Raven, 1959). This type of pressure is inspired by positive associations with the power holder rather than negative associations such as fear (as would be the case in coercive pressure) (French & Raven, 1959). For land trusts, this most often means building personal relationships with landowners.

In terms of website content, engaging referent power means inclusion and representation of participating landowners on the land trust website while using discourses that are inclusive rather than exclusive of landowner values and attitudes. Creating a sense of common ground and community may reduce the potential that landowners will perceive land trusts through the lens of coercive power and view them instead as a source of referent power, or at least as an important and respectable part of their community. In other words, create a discourse in which land trusts may be seen as an ally operating from within the community rather than as an “other” that threatens individual liberty and freedom. This may be accomplished, in part, through the

representation of other landowners (or landowners “like me”) successfully participating in conservation projects without suffering negative consequences.

Perceived Behavioral Control

Fishbein and Ajzen (2010, p. 64) define perceived behavioral control as “people’s perceptions of the degree to which they are capable of, or have control over, performing a given behavior”. For example, a landowner might believe they would not qualify for an easement, or they might believe an easement is not financially plausible. These perceptions may or may not be accurate which is why these are identified as perceived behavioral controls as opposed to volitional controls, or actual factors outside of their control.

Because conservation easements are voluntary, the volitional controls on placing an easement on private land are primarily the willingness and ability of a land trust and the landowner to do so. This ability may also be reliant on external factors such as receiving funding from an outside source, such as a grant, a desired timeline, or a combination of these things. These may or may not be the controls perceived by the landowner.

As the title suggests, perceived behavioral controls are a matter of perception and may have little to do with actual external controls on behavior; thus, fears and concerns over the consequences of enacting a conservation easement on their land may be more pertinent than actual behavioral controls. For this reason, there may be some overlap between perceived behavioral control and attitudes because, in terms of behavior,

attitudes are measured most accurately when they are based on the perceived negative consequences of that behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010).

Values and the Cognitive Hierarchy of Human Behavior

Conflicting values lie at the heart of much conflict over conservation measures (Freyfogle, 2007; Lakoff, 2004; Walker & Fortmann, 2003). The cognitive hierarchy model of human behavior (See Figure 2) (Vaske & Donnelly, 1999) demonstrates the role of values in behavior and behavioral intentions and helps explain why communication strategies may benefit from the application of the reasoned action approach.

For this project, I define values as “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence” (Rokeach, 1973, p. 5). Values lie at the foundation of the cognitive hierarchy (See Figure 1). The base is much narrower than the top of the hierarchy because values are fewer in number (Vaske & Donnelly, 1999). Values are also more difficult to change and tend to be consistent from one situation to another (Vaske & Donnelly, 1999). The higher one rises in the cognitive hierarchy the

more numerous and flexible the components become (Vaske & Donnelly, 1999).

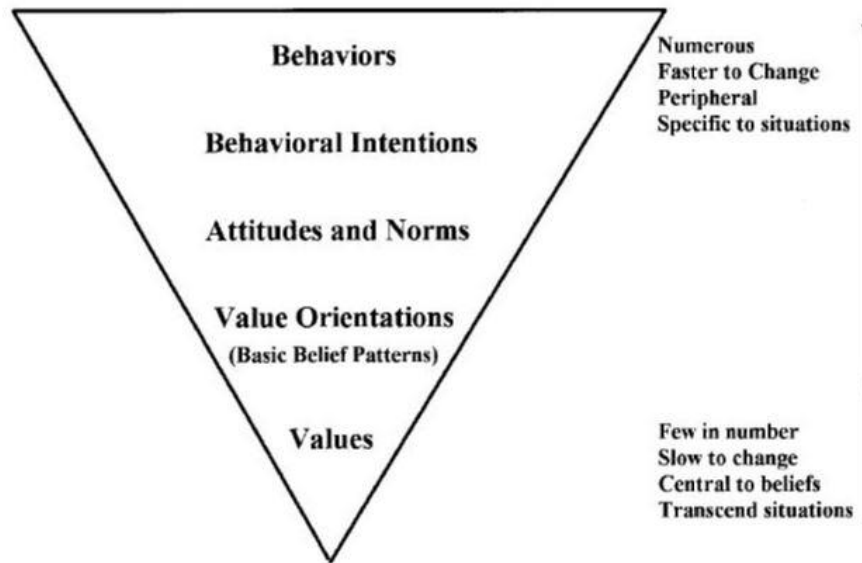


Figure 2. The cognitive hierarchy model of human behavior. Reprinted from Vaske & Donnelly. (1999).

Just above values are value orientations. Value orientations are basic patterns of belief that are directly informed by values (Fulton et al, 1996; Vaske & Donnelly, 1999). Researchers separate value orientations from values, because values are often static and widely shared among members of a culture, and thus, there is little opportunity to differentiate or change behaviors based on values or value-orientations (Fulton et al., 1996; Vaske & Donnelly, 1999). Attitudes are closer to the top of the chart and are defined as a positive or negative feeling about a behavior. They are more fluid and more numerous than either values or value orientations (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010).

Rising further up the cognitive hierarchy reveals that while behavioral intentions are influenced by values, value-orientations, and attitudes they are more flexible than the

previous three (Vaske & Donnelly, 1999). Additionally, behavioral intentions are the final cognitive component in the cognitive hierarchy before actually enacting a behavior (Vaske & Donnelly, 1999). There are still external factors that may block the enactment of a particular behavior, but positive behavioral intentions indicate that the individual now has the willingness to engage in the behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Behavioral intentions represent the closest point to the enactment of a behavior that can be influenced by communication strategies which makes them an ideal place to encourage behaviors such as collaboration in conservation projects behaviors.

Discourses and Conflict Over Conservation

Applying reasoned action approach to land trust communication is a tool to examine and, potentially, create new discourses that help bring communities together around issues of conservation. Discourses are key to communication. Without them we could not communicate the complex ideas of conservation, work towards solutions to socio-ecological problems, or understand the social conflict that surrounds them. In Dryzek's (2013, p. 9) work on environmental discourses he defines a discourse as:

“...a shared way of apprehending the world. Embedded in language, it enables those who subscribe to it to interpret bits of information and put them together into coherent stories or accounts. Discourses construct meanings and relationships, helping define common sense and legitimate knowledge. Each discourse rests on assumptions, judgments, and contentions that provide the basic

terms for analysis, debates, agreements, and disagreements. If such shared terms did not exist, it would be hard to imagine problem-solving ... at all.”

A natural discourse refers to constructed meanings and relationships about the natural world that make it possible for people to construct, conceptualize, and communicate about issues such as conservation. The discourse someone subscribes to is influenced by their values and value-orientations. Some discourses will appeal to people with certain values, while they will deter others. Discourses influence how people talk about and understand conservation measures.

Consumptive and Productive Value Orientations

There are two dominant value orientations that influence discourses of nature and property which are at the root of much conflict over conservation in the west: 1) consumptive and 2) productive value orientations (Stern & Dietz, 1994; Vaske, & Donnelly, 1999; Walker & Fortmann, 2003).

The first of the two is consumptive value orientations. These value orientations prioritize aesthetics and recreational activities like hiking, kayaking, or bird watching. Consumptive discourses focus on aesthetics such as viewsheds (P. Walker & Fortmann, 2003). These discourses are much more likely to use metaphors such as wilderness (i.e. natural areas free from human influence) than their productive counter-parts due to a tendency for consumptive discourse to describe and view human influence on the natural world as a negative force (Dryzek, 2013; P. Walker & Fortmann, 2003)

The second value orientation is the productive value orientation. People with productive value orientations envision humans as a positive force that improve the environment through utilitarian land use such as logging, mining, farming, ranching, and real-estate development (Stern & Dietz, 1994; Vaske, & Donnelly, 1999; Walker & Fortmann, 2003). Metaphors commonly associated with discourse include liberty and freedom as a right for the individual (Freyfogle, 2007; P. Walker & Fortmann, 2003).

There is not a correct or incorrect value-orientation. Both consumptive and productive value-orientations can impact resilience in a variety of ways (see Table 1). Due to the rigid nature of values and value-orientations, communications strategies that attempt to sway listeners with strong values to a different position are largely ineffective and likely to simply increase polarization between strongly divergent groups (Feinberg & Willer, 2013; Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Lakoff, 2004).

Table 1. A comparison of consumptive and productive value orientations.

Consumptive Value Orientations	Productive Value Orientations
Aesthetic discourses (Walker and Fortmann, 2003)	Utilitarian discourses (Walker and Fortmann, 2003)
Prioritizes viewsheds, recreation, and human free landscapes.	Prioritizes logging, ranching, mining, farming, and real estate development
Views nature as an aesthetic, economic spiritual & recreational resource	Views nature as an economic resource
May pose a challenge to resilience because <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tends to remove functional role of humans in ecosystems which may degrade both social and ecological resilience. (Cronon, 1996; B. Walker & Salt, 2006; Watt, 2017) 	My pose a challenge to resilience because <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plot based management practices for one or two resources (Walker and Fortmann, 2003) which degrades habitat, reduces biodiversity and thus resilience (Walker & Salt, 2006) • Plot based management causes habitat fragmentation (Walker & Fortmann, 2003) and thus reduces resilience (Walker & Salt, 2006) • Resources extraction may cause environmental degradation at and far from the site of extraction
May be beneficial to resilience because <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incidentally fosters landscape scale management practices that in are more conducive to creation, restoration, or the maintenance of resilience. 	May be beneficial to resilience because <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certain land management such a grazing may prevent an ecosystem from shifting to a new less desirable regime • May slow or prevent fragmentation • May foster a land ethic that works in favor of resilience

My examination of work on individual versus community property rights by Freyfogle (2007), Lakoff's (2004) work on conservative and liberal values in communication, and arguments used by landowners in the Walker and Fortmann study (2003), led me to wonder if the production-based value-orientations also prioritizes the protection of individual rights, particularly around property rights. In brief, Freyfogle's (2007) work on community versus individual property rights recognizes that ideas of liberty and freedom are currently viewed by many as individual rights. This aligns this group with Lakoff's (2004) conservatives who see self-interest as the path to both community and individual well-being. Finally, the arguments made by long-term utilitarian minded locals the community studied by Walker and Fortmann (2003), suggested that these individualistic and conservative values might be linked to productive value-orientations. Subsequently, I began to wonder if consumptive value-orientations might be connected to Lakoff's (2004) liberal community-based values and Freyfogle's (2007) community property rights. This curiosity influenced my organization of the data I collected.

In terms of historical conflict, those with productive and consumptive value-orientations experienced conflict over the role of humans in nature, the impact of human activities on the landscape, and individual versus community rights. In their case study on the conflict that arose between ex-urban migrants and long-time rural residents of Nevada City over the Natural Heritage 2020 proposal, Walker and Fortmann (2003, p. 469) found that the question of "who owns the landscape or decides how it should look" played an prominent role in the conflict. The NH 2020 project was implemented by the ex-urban

migrants to create a community landscape management plan. The discourse they used to support this plan was one of aesthetics to protect regional viewsheds from what they regarded as unsightly human activity such ranching, mining, and logging—activities that made up the livelihoods of long-term residents (Walker & Fortmann, 2003). The result was a decades long fight that polarized and divided the community (Walker & Fortmann, 2003).

Walker and Fortmann (2003) state that the NH2020 conflict is a representative of many similar conflicts across the country where those who make a living from the landscape are pitted against those who would preserve its “wild” aesthetic characteristics. Both sides desire the well-being that comes from a resilient world (Lakoff, 2004), but they disagree about how to create it. The conflict over this common goal demonstrates that there is a need to change the way we communicate about these issues that builds community among diverse and divergent groups rather than pulling them apart. Our world and our communities depend upon it.

Land trusts are in a unique position to teach us something about how to create this new story. This study examines how they address the issues between groups with divergent value-orientations. Owners of working landscapes tend toward the productive value-orientations while supporters tend toward the consumptive value-orientations, and land trusts must walk a careful line between the two.

METHODS

In this project I examined sixteen websites of land trusts operating in Northern California through the lens of the reasoned action approach (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). I analyzed and coded content for attitudes, social norms in terms of landowner representation, and perceived behavioral control in terms of resources offered directly to landowners to address questions or concerns they might have about participating in land trust programs. Because of the potential overlap perceived consequences of a behavior may have on both attitudes and perceived behavioral control, I made a deliberate choice to categorized fears and concerns under perceived behavioral control rather than attitudes to avoid confusion. I chose to examine attitudes as a positive or negative representation of a benefit or activity that is the consequence of successful land trust projects.

I selected land trusts from the interactive map of land trusts on the California Council of Land Trust website. The site contains a map of sixty-six land trusts operating in California which is searchable by county. I used the following criteria to narrow website selection: 1) the organizations operate in counties north of San Francisco 2) the organization's operations are confined to California. National and international organizations were excluded. 3) the organization's websites must show evidence that they are actively maintained 4) the organizations are listed on the California Council of Land Trusts website.

Due to the tendency of websites to change frequently, my analysis took place over a 3-month window after which I did not collect any additional information from the site. I

conducted initial analysis on the homepage, the landowner page (if present), and through “landowner” search results when available. When landowner searches were available, I limited myself to the first five search results. It came to my attention later that a Google function could perform the same task. Only 5 websites had search functions built into the site, and when searched these almost all led to the pages I had already searched for using other methods. As a result, I do not think this impacted my data. In some cases, information for landowners that addressed social norms and perceived behavioral control were distributed throughout the website based on program, or other categorization, rather than through a page created for landowners. In these cases, I conducted a more extensive search of the site to locate this information. This initial analysis provided the basis for the codes related to attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral controls.

I examined each of the websites for attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral controls that may impact the behavioral intentions of landowners to participate in land trust programs such as conservation easements. As common themes emerged, I recorded them and then used them as the basis to code the content in subsequent analysis.

The initial search for attitudes included both homepages and landowner pages. I began with an attempt to categorize attitudes about the benefits of conservation easements such as aesthetics, recreation, and maintaining working landscapes; however, I soon found that this was complicated by the audience and the way in which the benefit was framed. Attitudes were not going to fit neatly into these categories. The intended audience and implied benefactor of conservation measures was key. My initial analysis revealed three frequently used frames for attitudes about benefits of land trust activities.

As a result, I examined and categorized attitudes in terms of audience and benefactor: 1) community benefit, 2) individual benefit, and 3) land purpose (See Table 2). Many of benefit benefits overlap and can be found within each of the three frames. They are distinguished by the implied benefactor such as community, individual, or the perceived land purpose.

Table 2. Attitudes Framed in Terms of the Benefits Provided to the Community, the Individual, or the Land (or its perceived purpose) from both homepages and landowner pages.

Community Benefits	Individual Benefits	Land Purpose
Aesthetic		Aesthetic
Cultural	Cultural	
Economic	Economic/Financial	
Food		
	Heritage	
Intergenerational	Intergenerational	
	Legacy	
Quality of Life		
Recreational	Recreational	Recreational
Regional		Regional Character
Identity/Character		
Spiritual		Spiritual
		Working Land
Other: Wildlife Habitat, Open Space, Sustainable Land Use		Other: Natural Values, Conservation, Open Space, Diversity

Possessive pronouns such as “our” or “your” revealed the first two categories as they are indicative of collective and individual benefit. In addition to indicating the recipient of the benefits, this categorization also provided insight into who is included and excluded from community as does the placement of the information for this group on the website.

I also determined positive attitudes about community benefits through frames that emphasized direct or implied community benefits of conservation such as conserving the land for “future generations” or to conserve the “regional character” of the community. I determined positive attitudes and representation of individual benefits by the presence of a direct address such as “protect your legacy” or implied often by activities offered on conserved land such as recreation. These attitudes were framed in the language of self-interest and demonstrated a positive attitude toward these benefits and activities.

The third category, land purpose, identifies statements about land purpose, or benefits of conservation, without a direct benefactor named or implied. These statements reveal the attitudes of land trusts about the purpose of the land and desirable benefits that come from conservation. Benefits to the land reflect attitudes about the “purpose” of the land such as working lands, wildlife habitat, or aesthetics.

Often this category can be found in general statement or claim made by the land trust. For example, the Redwood Coast Land Conservancy states that “The Redwood Coast of southern Mendocino County and northern Sonoma County is a place of exquisite beauty and natural solitude” thus it is implied that this is a benefit of

conservation in general. The statement demonstrates a positive attitude about the aesthetic characteristics of the region and reveals a positive attitude towards solitude.

On the surface, statements about aesthetics may seem neutral, but as the NH 2020 conflict (Walker & Fortmann, 2003) demonstrates that is not. Such general statements indicate of land trust attitudes about these characteristics which is inclusive of those who share this attitude and holds the potential to exclude (or be perceived to exclude) those who do not.

This initial analysis of attitudes revealed themes to code for in during data collection. I conducted the final attitudes analysis on homepages only. I also examined each homepage for the primary and, if applicable, the secondary audience through content analysis.

I evaluated the category of social norms through their presence on the homepage, the presence and content of a landowner page(s), the results of a landowner word search, and a search of each website for landowner representation. Initial analysis revealed landowner representation in the form of interactive maps that included visual locations of properties whose owners were participating in conservation easements, images, quotes, stories, videos, and the presence of a landowner page (See Table 3). The presence of these tools on each site were tallied and examined for their engagement with social norms.

Table 3. Strategies Used to Address Social Norms

Tools to Address Social Norms
Interactive Maps
Images
Quotes
Stories
Videos
Landowner Page
Intended Audience: Direct address of implied direct address to landowners

To determine the presence of a landowner page, I used the title of the tab or the consistent use of direct address to landowners within the text. For example, a landowner page may be determined by its title “Information for Landowners”, or a direct call to action “Sell or Donate Land”. The latter contains no subject but includes an implied “you”. A landowner page may also be distinguished by the use of a direct address in the title “Conserve Your Land”. Additionally, I determined that a “landowner” page qualified as such if it had a title such “Conservation Easement” but the intended audience for the page is clearly landowners as a result of the consistent use of a direct address throughout the text.

During the analysis I noted the presence of interactive maps and examined the descriptions of the properties linked to these maps. A few of the descriptions included content on landowners, but the majority of sites did not use this feature to address social

norms for landowners. Images, quotes, and videos were much more easily identified as tools to address social norms for landowners. I determined most of these through direct representation of landowners through images and language. One site used generalized, rather than specific, storytelling through a historical and romanticized mythos of the American West to represent social norms for ranchers.

My search of each website revealed an extensive list of resources for landowners that addressed various perceived behavioral controls and the consequence-based motivator for attitudes (See Table 4). During the initial analysis, I compiled a list of each method or resource used to address a perceived behavioral control by an organization on a spreadsheet and then created a category or code for data collection. During a second analysis of each site, I tallied the methods used by each website in order to make comparison between the sites.

Table 4. Resources and Strategies to Address Perceived Behavioral Controls

Tools to Address Perceived Behavioral Controls
Frequently Asked Questions
Examples of a Standard Conservation Agreement
Benefits for the Landowner: Individual Frame
Benefits for the Landowner: Community Frame
Description of Financial Process
Description of Management Process
Description of Process Enactment
Workshops for Landowners
Supplemental Materials: External Brochures
Supplemental Materials: Internal Brochures
Call to Action for More Information
Contact Information for the Land Trust or a Staff Member
Definitions of a Conservation Easement
Definitions of a Specific Type of Conservation Easement
Definitions of Other Types of Land Trust Activities

RESULTS

Initial analysis of attitudes about benefits of land trust projects found on the homepage, landowner page, and landowner search of three websites revealed three different ways in which attitudes were framed 1) community benefits 2) individual benefits 3) perceived land purpose that provided the basic codes/categories for subsequent analysis. The most important role these categories played in this project has been to reveal how land trust address these audiences through inclusion and exclusion of community in terms of referent power and provide insight into audience through consumptive and productive value orientation. Community benefits include intergenerational benefits (e.g. “future generations”) cultural values, spiritual benefits, economic benefits, recreational benefits, aesthetic values, nutritional benefits (food), regional identity, quality of life, and other. Individual benefits were intergenerational, legacy, economic/financial, cultural, recreational, and heritage (intergenerational). Land purpose included working land, aesthetic, recreational, spiritual, conservation/natural value/open space/diversity, and character. I conducted analysis on the homepage of each website for the presence of these benefits. (See Figure 3).

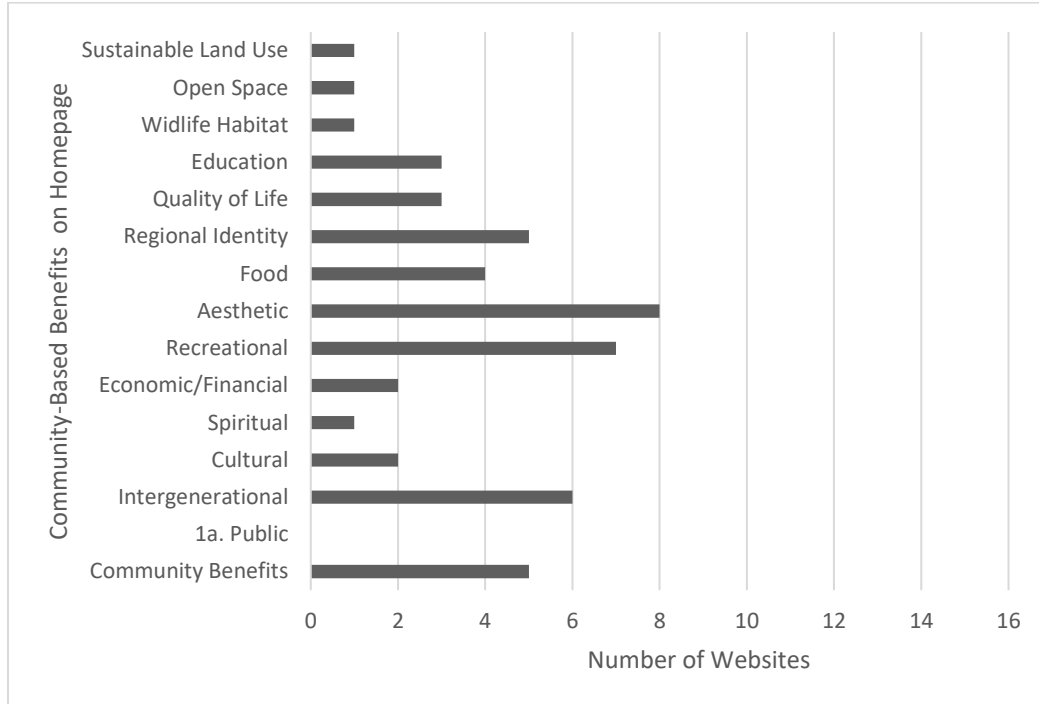


Figure 3. Attitudes Framed with A Community Emphasis on Website Homepage

The most frequently used community-based value was aesthetics. This was employed by half of the websites. The next most frequently used community-based value was recreation which was used by seven out of sixteen organizations. Recreation was followed by intergenerational benefit (i.e. “for future generations”), and then came regional identity. Spiritual values, sustainable land use, open space, and wildlife habitat were the most infrequently utilized values each appearing on just one website.

Individual values collected throughout the websites were intergenerational, legacy, heritage, economic/financial, cultural, and recreational (See Figure 4). The most commonly employed individual benefit on the homepage was recreation. Recreational value for individual benefit did not include a reference to enjoyment for the community or future generations, but provided resources, such as maps, for individuals to recreate for

their own enjoyment. This benefit was used by five out of sixteen sites; however, recreation was not mentioned as a landowner benefit, but rather as individual benefit for recreationalists. Two other values each appeared once on the homepages of the websites. These values were heritage and economic/financial.

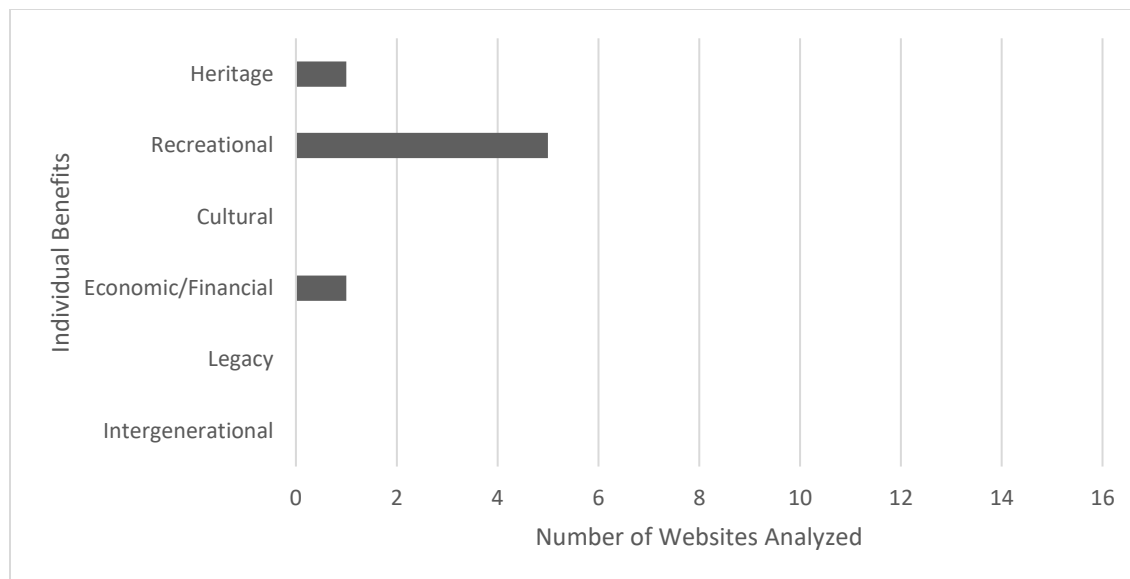


Figure 4. Frames that emphasizes individual benefit on website homepages.

The perceived purpose of the land, that appeared on the homepage were working lands, aesthetics, recreation, spiritual, conservation/natural values/open space/diversity, and character. Statements about land purpose are claims made about the purpose of the land bolstered by conservation efforts without a clearly stated benefactor or audience. statements made directly by the organization. In this way they help reveal the attitudes of land the land trust. The most frequently used land benefit was aesthetics. More than half the land trusts used this as a purpose of land. Conservation and closely associated benefits were used by nine out of sixteen organizations, and working lands were

mentioned as a land purpose by seven out of sixteen sites. The most infrequently used land benefit was spiritual. (See Figure 5).

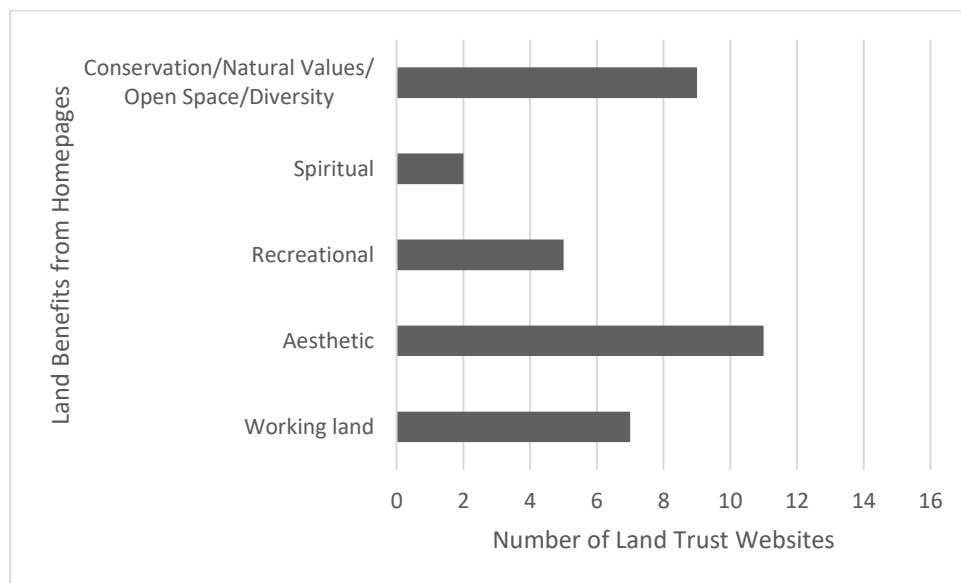


Figure 5. Frames that emphasize benefits for the land or perceived purpose of the land on homepages.

The primary audience for more than half of the land trusts homepages was supporters of the land trust. I was only looking at how land trusts addressed their audience, not why; there may be widely different reasons for this tactic among the different trusts. I determined audience through text and images on the homepage such as direct (or implied) address, calls to action, and the types of information provided. For example, a website homepage might include a prominent “donate now” button or banner across the top of the home page. This call to action might be supplemented with statistics demonstrated the organizations long-term success to bolster donor confidence.

Additionally, there might be events and activities featured on the homepage such as the organization's annual gala or upcoming donor appreciation event. Essentially, a primary audience is the focal point of the majority of the language, frames, images, and content offered on the homepage. While there might be link to information for landowners or recreationalists on the homepage, this information is not the focus of the page.

I discovered that the most common secondary audience was recreationalists. I determined this by the secondary nature of the information. The information would be in a less prominent position and occur with less frequency than the language, frames, images and information provided for the primary audience. A site whose primary audience was recreationists might feature all the open space the organization has made accessible to recreationalists such as hikers, bikers, or equestrians and focus on the ideas and activities that are positively regarded by the outdoor recreation community. It may also feature a map of the accessible lands and images of hikers or other recreationalists. However, a site whose secondary audience was recreationalists would not feature recreation as prominently in language, images, or content. Instead most of the content would be focused on the primary audience such as supporters.

Interestingly, working landowners were the primary audience on the homepage of just two sites. Those organizations that included working landowners as the primary homepage audience were focused on conserving a specific type of land use such as ranching or farmland. These organizations also included the activity or type of land use in the land trust's name, such as the California Farmland Trust which is the most obvious and important signifier of who the trust is there to serve.

Resources for land owners that addressed perceived behavioral controls found throughout each site included a general definition of conservation easements, definitions of specific kinds of easements, definitions of other land trust services or actions, a call to action to get more information with either a contact form or an email address and/or phone number, internally created brochures, external brochures, applications or assessment forms, workshops on easements and processes, information on the process of easement enactment, the process of easement management, and enactment timelines, information on community and landowner benefits from easements, examples of standard easement agreements, and frequently asked questions or a page/brochure that preemptively answers land owner questions and concerns. Figure 6 describes the frequency of use for each resource to address perceived behavioral control.

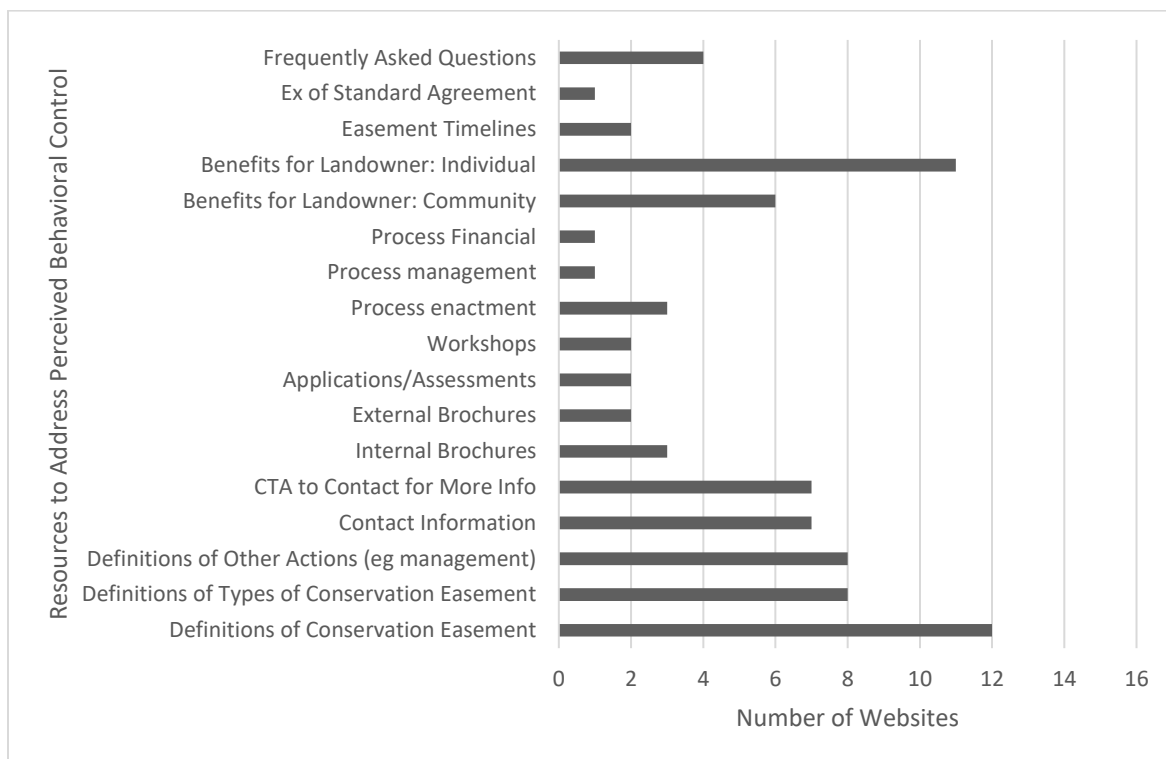


Figure 6. Resources and strategies used to address perceived behavioral controls.

The most common way organizations addressed perceived behavioral control for landowners was through a general definition of a conservation easement on their websites. Not all of these definitions were directed at landowners. Some were for general public information which was determine by a direct address to landowners. The next most frequently used resource was descriptions of individual benefits for landowners. These benefits were not listed on homepages but found on a variety of pages throughout the websites that addressed landowners. Half of the sites included additional types of services and management offered by the land trust and provided definitions of specific types of conservation easements such as agricultural easements. Seven out of the sixteen sites included a call to action “to get more information” and provided a way to contact the

organization on the page with resources for landowners. One quarter of sites contained a frequently asked questions section, and a total of five sites offered either an internally or externally created brochure with more detailed information on subjects like tax incentives, easement enactment timelines, and conservation easements in general.

The websites addressed social norms to influence the behavioral intentions of landowners through pages specifically for landowners designated by its title, pages specifically for landowners designated by consistent direct address in the text of the page, images of participating land owners and people “like me”, quotes, stories, maps of conserved land, and videos. See Figure 7 for details.

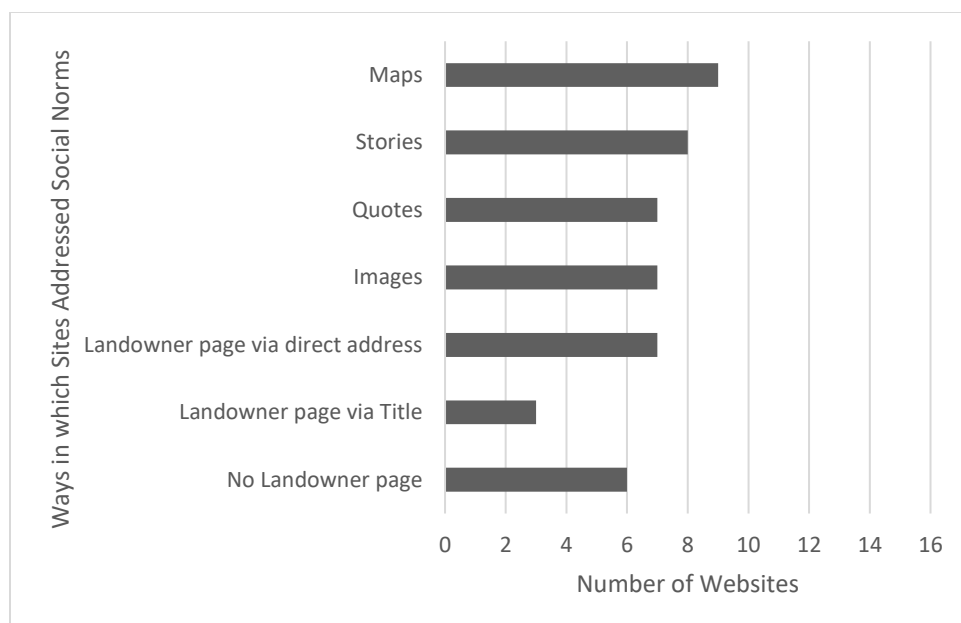


Figure 7. Strategies to address social norms.

The most commonly used tool with the potential to address social norms was a map of conserved spaces. More than half of sites include a map which often linked to images and descriptions of conserved lands. Stories were the next commonly used

resource to provide a sense of social norms that encourage landowner engagement in land trust projects. This was followed by quotes and images of landowners with nearly half of organizations engaging in these representations. Two sites used videos to tell landowner stories and to talk about how and why their partnership with the land trust has been beneficial to them.

Ten of the sixteen organizations had “landowner” pages that treated landowners as the audience. Three of these had titles like “For Farmers” or “Information for Landowners” while seven others used a direct address such as “Protect Your Land” in the title. Six of the sixteen sites did not have pages designated by title or direct address to landowners.

DISCUSSION

Given my results, I believe there are several ways land trusts could expand their use of reasoned action approach as a website communication strategy to help encourage landowner collaboration in conservation projects if they desired to do so. Additionally, I believe that other conservation projects facing issues of conservationist versus landowner polarization might benefit from employing land trust communication techniques.

Attitudes & Audience

In terms of data collection and organization, the frames of community benefit, individual benefit, and land purpose and the categories within each frame helped reveal inclusion and exclusion of audiences. Such inclusion and exclusion may impact the effectiveness of referent power with different audiences of the communication strategy. Overall, the land trust website I examined chose to make supporters with consumptive value-orientations the primary audience for the site. There may be different reasons for this, such as how land trusts chose to approach landowners, how landowners initially learn about and then find more information about land trusts, and what land trusts see as the purpose of their website which may be valuable topics for future research.

While I found that productive and consumptive value-orientations may not be directly linked with beliefs on individual versus community rights, this may be another valuable way to look at communication strategy. Depending on the methods to achieve wellbeing for the community, emphasis on community benefits has the potential to tap

into the values of liberals who believe that community well-being comes from government support (Lakoff, 2004). At the same time, this emphasis may cause people with a conservative value system to bristle as they believe wellbeing comes from a collective of individuals acting in their own best self-interest (Lakoff, 2004). As a result, the trend to emphasize community benefits particularly when combined with a regulatory emphasis may work to alienate conservative leaning landowners. Emphasizing individual choice, explaining how conservation easements impact property rights and management, and creating an understanding about the customization of easement agreements for each landowners' needs may help mitigate some of these concerns.

Conservation easements work on the premise of property as a bundle of rights that create ownership. When a landowner enters an easement, they typically sell only their right to development and sometimes their right of exclusion but retain ownership over the property and the rights that come with it. Most sites explained these concerns in easement definitions. These actions impact attitudes as well as perceived behavioral control, so I feel it is worth mentioning them here.

Frames used to demonstrate the benefits of conservation easements revealed predominantly positive attitudes about consumptive value-orientations which emphasizes an audience that subscribes to those value-orientations, most likely supporters. This was revealed through a heavy emphasis on aesthetic and recreational benefits and resources by many websites. Such a strong focus on consumptive value-orientations is inclusive of many land trust supporters but could potentially result in feelings of exclusion by those holding productive value-orientations; thus, reducing the impact of referent power.

While productive value-orientations showed up on pages dedicated to landowners as individual benefits, they rarely made an appearance on land trust homepages. This surprised me because individual benefits associated with placement of an easement are one of the more apparent motivators for landowners to consider an easement; however, this practice does reflect Lakoff's research that finds consistent messaging using desired values over a long periods of time is likely to sway biconceptuals to that side of the value argument (Lakoff, 2004). Additionally, recreational benefits, a benefit associated with consumptive value-orientations, were the most frequently cited individual benefit frame on homepages. Figure 8 provides an example of a homepage with a strong recreational focus. The lack of representation of landowner interests and an emphasis on benefits such as recreation further underscored the land trusts choice to make supporters of the land trusts the primary audience for the website homepage.

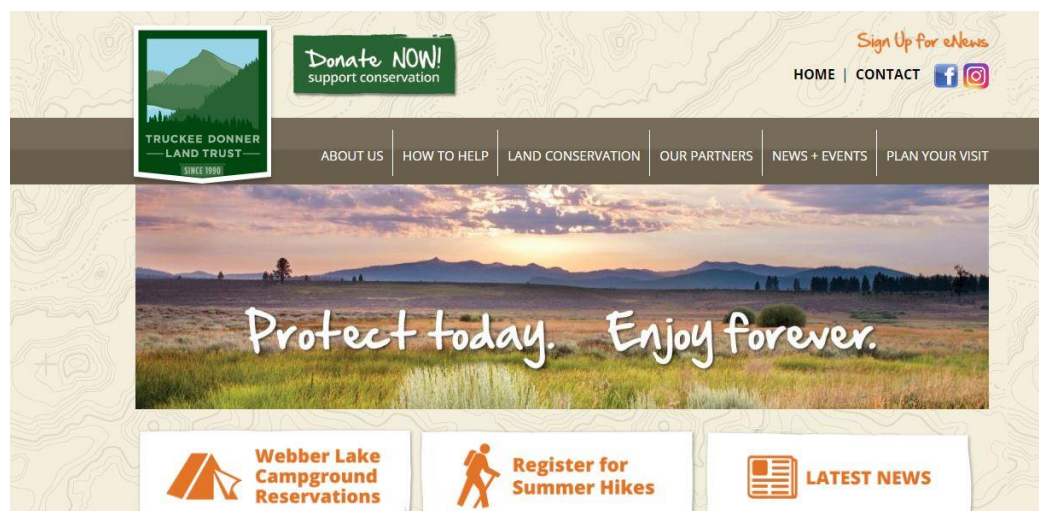


Figure 8. Homepage with a strong consumptive value-orientation and recreational focus.

The homepage is the most prominent location on the website. As the first thing people see, positionally it is the most important and powerful in terms of the hierarchical structure and symbolism. The audience selected for as the primary audience for the homepage page can be read as a symbol of inclusion and exclusion to other groups, particularly if they are a key component to land trust success as landowners are.

It is implied in this placement that the land trust is one of “us” (i.e. is like the community that makes up the supporters) and shares supporter attitudes and values. The land trust is demonstrating likeness and commonality with consumptive value-orientations. This is understandable because land trusts need funders to operate and people will not support an organization if they do not share its values and goals. Unfortunately, as demonstrated in the case of the NH2020 conflict, this may be read by landowners as “you” are not like us. You are the “other”, and thus, we are the “other” to you.

The emphasis on recreation as an individual benefit also challenges the idea that consumptive value-orientations and a preference for community benefit are directly linked. In fact, these characteristics seem to combine themselves in a variety of ways. This raises questions about what consumptive or productive value-orientations actually tell us about underlying values.

While some of the websites made a clear distinction between the audiences and separated them accordingly, other sites which employed an organization-centric focus appeared more neutral in terms of polarizing attitudes and values. This may or may not be the intention of such an approach, but it is the effect. I did not anticipate the

organizational focus, but it was slowly revealed to me throughout my investigation. This focus emphasizes programs and accomplishments from an organizational perspective (See Figure 9). The content refrains from using any direct address to any group and provides statistics about accomplishments and programmatic details. This is information that may be of interest to board members and grant makers but is not likely make an emotional appeal to any individual donors or to landowners (K. Smith-Fagan, personal communication, February 21, 2019). As a result, this approach to avoiding polarization among divergent groups may not be particularly effective in terms of community building and emotional appeals.

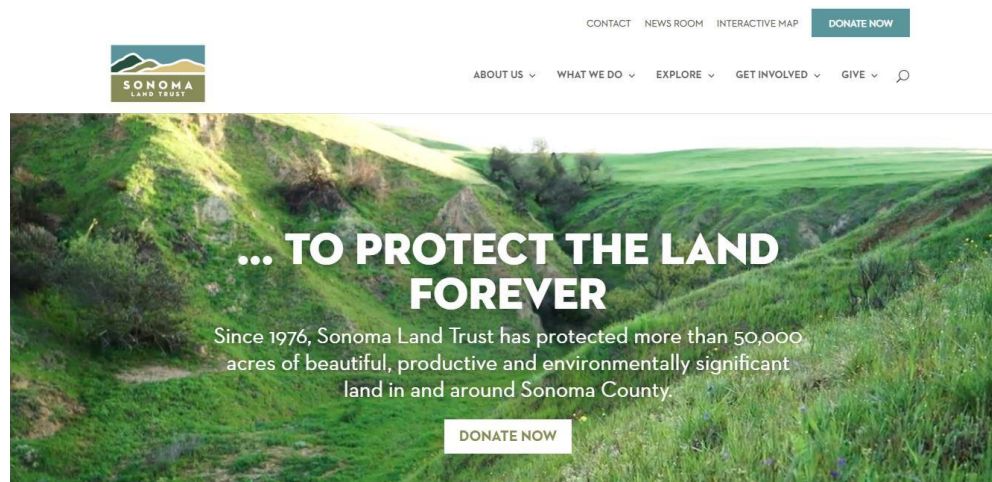


Figure 9. Homepage with organizational focus.

Another organization made a well-balanced emotional appeal on their homepage that builds common ground among their diverse audiences (See Figure 10). This appeal includes environmental health, wildlife, and paints a picture that incorporates way of life important to the ranchers the trust serves. The site also successfully integrated information of interest to landowners, environmentalist supporters, and financial

supporters such as grant makers, on their homepage by including images with a teaser of information for each linked to an appropriate page (See Figure 11). The first teaser, “About Us” introduces the land trust as concerned with ranching families and future generations. The second and third teasers are about land trust accomplishments and impact.



Figure 10. An effective emotional appeal to a diverse audience.



Figure 11. A well-balanced introduction to information of interest to landowners, environmentalist supporters, and financial supporters like grant makers.

Interestingly, several organizations reframed the socially and ecologically problematic wild and human-free notion of aesthetics (Anderson, 2005; Cronon, 1996; B. Walker & Salt, 2006) commonly seen in other conservation discourses. These organizations achieved this by transforming the beauty of a landscape into the “regional character” of an area.

Regional character was never defined by any of the sites. Berry (1964, p. 9) suggests that the “basis of regional character...[is] the repetitive appearance of a common theme or themes throughout the entire set of variables recorded for the places within the region”, and that it is this aggregate of traits that makes that region unique or different from other regions. Such an aggregate may be key to distinguishing the aesthetic values that divide communities from those that bring them together.

Regional character may include positive perceptions of local architecture, working lands such as ranches or farms, and community adjacent open space valued for its freedom from utilitarian purposes such as resource extraction. As a result, character creates a more inclusive term that represents multiple components of beauty. It also allows for the complex realities of resilience often overlooked by older and more common discourses of nature and the environment that oversimplify the human role in the natural world as either entirely positive or negative (Dryzek, 2013; P. Walker & Fortmann, 2003). In terms of social norms, this allows the phrase to integrate working landscapes and the role of working landowners and their employees into the positive aspects of a region's character rather than positioning them as a barrier to environmental health and conservation. Ultimately, this reframing allows for many activities, values, and experiences to be represented at the same time creating room to build community around this story. Reframing aesthetics in terms of regional character helps create an inclusive common ground that land trusts, supporters, and landowners can imagine themselves a part of.

Social Norms: Building Community through Representation, Integration of Divergent Audiences, and Telling a New Story

Referent power is tied to social norms because of its relationship with a feeling of belonging to a group and I have identified it as the type of social pressure with the most potential to create opportunities for collaboration in conservation. If they wish to do so, there are several ways in which land trusts might expand their use of social norms to create a more inclusive sense of community for landowners through the integration of

audiences throughout the website. Currently, most of the websites I examined separate their audiences. One way to incorporate referent power into websites is to create a new discourse that combines the divergent audiences into one rather than separating them.

Beginning writers are instructed to know their audience and write to them.

Donatone et al (2010) writes that “Providing relevance for your target audience fuels your writing. It determines what you write, how you write, and how you design Web content to cue into Web users’ needs.” This could help account for this separation.

Marketing research helps business get feedback on their products and their audience (“Market Research and Competitive Analysis,” n.d.), and is a global industry that reached a value of \$76 billion dollars in 2017 (Global Market Research Industry, 2018). Such a sizable industry suggests that marketers do indeed go to great lengths to understand and gather information on unique audiences in order to target ads very specifically to them. With online tools such as search engine optimization and data analytics and tracking, digital marketing has gotten more and more specific and individualized (Daniels & Einstein, 2019). The most commonly way to segment audiences in marketing is demographics followed by geographic (Li, 2014). Of course these groups may not hold the same values or interests, and thus may also require segmentation by psychographic factors (Li, 2014) Land trusts have a unique challenge in this regard, because they must constantly navigate between traditionally divergent audiences, such as supporters who may prioritize larger scale land management practices and conservation and working lands owners who may tend prioritize individual property rights and more parcel -based use of resources (Freyfogle, 2007; Lakoff, 2004; P. Walker & Fortmann, 2003). Given

the trend of individualization, it is understandable that websites pages are organized with the varied interests and priorities of these groups in mind.

Currently, landowners tend to be relegated to just one page of most land trust websites. At the time of analysis, just three of the websites had dedicated landowner pages designated by title (See Figure 12). Supporters are most often the primary audience and recreationalists are the most common secondary audiences represented on homepages. Landowners typically receive one link to access information for them rather than being represented in a more inclusive way alongside donors and supporters. While dedicated landowner pages are an important aspect of land trust websites, especially for addressing perceived behavioral control, the presentation of landowner interests as an afterthought or addendum on the homepage could be problematic. This has the potential to increase the perception of “us” versus “other” between land trusts and supporters and working lands owners.

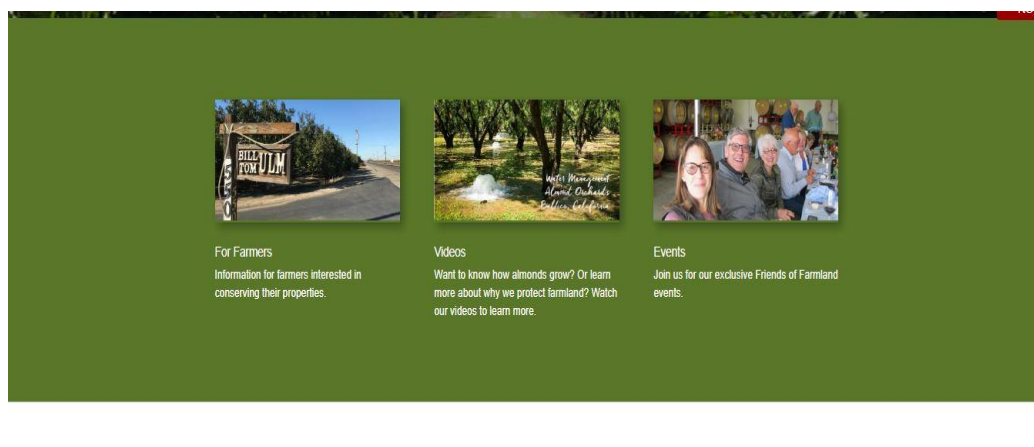


Figure 12. A homepage with a link to information for landowners.

One land trust navigated this in a particularly interesting, and I believe, effective way (See Figure 13). Their homepage included the organization's mission statement, a poetic description of the aesthetic quality of the region, and located the counties served by the land trust. News articles below this description focused on ways the community was collaborating towards the resilient integration of conservation of healthy wildlife and water and working landscapes.



Figure 13. A homepage with a community building message and a well-balanced treatment of a diverse audience.

The frame for all of this content was a regional character that is inclusive of protection of healthy land, air, and water, and economic viability. A visually prominent box at the top right of the homepage within the main field of text featured links for landowners and resource professionals, supporters, and educators. It creates a balanced representation of audience that did not place one above the other, while recognizing the

diversity in interests and information desired by each group. If land trusts desire to expand their target audience to include all people living in their region, undertaking marketing research to determine the elements of regional character that are common to all the areas residents would be beneficial. Once this research is complete and common factors identified an inclusive regional narrative can be crafted to represent the regional community.

Additionally, landowners' interests and concerns are represented in the organization's mission statement which is prominently displayed on the homepage. The statement refers to economic viability and the voluntary nature of conservation agreements alongside goals of land protection. This provides additional representation of landowners as one of several primary audiences on the homepage while also directly addressing one of the factors impacting landowner fears about the loss of managerial control of land (Bastian, 2017; Cook & Ma, 2014). As a result, both attitudes and perceived behavioral control of landowners are addressed in addition to social norms through representation. It is my belief that this presentation holds the potential to build community through representation of several audience's interests and effectively integrates these interests without elevating (or focusing on) one audience above or to the exclusion of others. This homepage content, structure, and frame tells a story that provides momentum toward the creation of a sense of community between land trust audiences rather than separating them.

Another way land trusts might approach increased representation of landowners and integration of audiences is through interactive maps. Many land trusts websites

included an interactive map with a link to photos and a property description of the lands they have conserved (See Figure 14). These maps hold a lot potential for participating landowner representation; however, they rarely did so. This suggests that these maps are designed for an audience people seeking information about the organization's accomplishments such as grant makers and board members. Adding quotes, images, and stories told by landowners describing the benefits landowners received from the conservation easement would be a relatively simple addition to the maps that would make them a source of inclusion and community building with landowners.

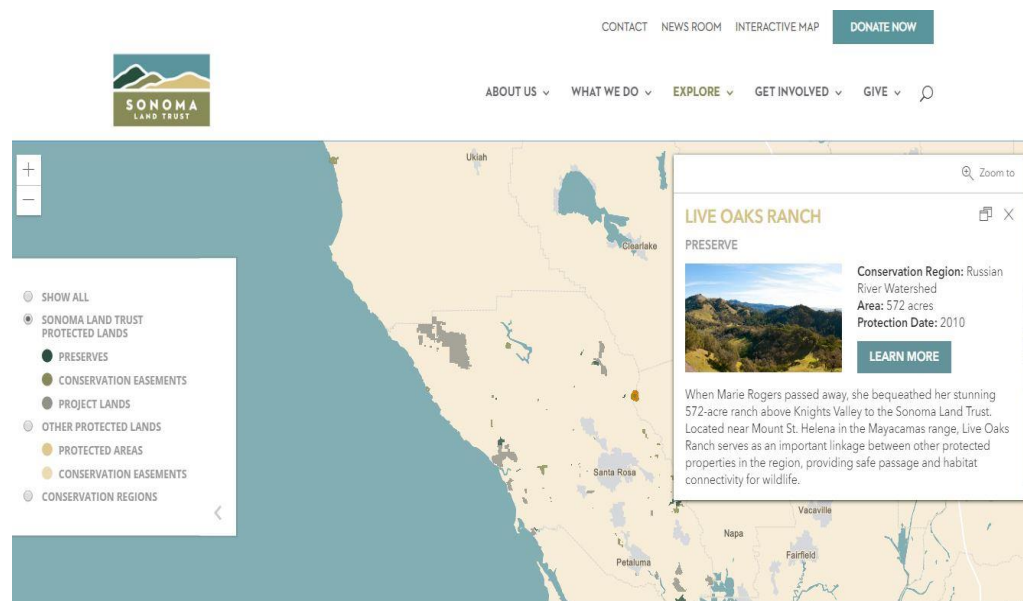


Figure 14. An example an interactive map of protected lands with succinct and powerful information about the landowner and the potential for legacy giving.

Several sites had pages designated to telling landowner stories through images, written narrative, and videos, but these sites were not the norm. Two sites relied heavily on videos to tell landowner stories both directly through storytelling by landowners and

indirectly through the sharing of cultural stories that included romanticized identities common to the landowner group the organization worked with. Stories, images, quotes, and videos are underutilized and important tools to address social norms that in combination with a more integrated audience approach may help increase landowner willingness to engage in a conservation easement.

Perceived Behavioral Control: Addressing Concerns & Creating Opportunities for Direct Communication

Like social norms resources to address the perceived behavioral control of landowners were not extensive; thus, there is room for land trust websites to expand their websites to include this influential component of behavioral intentions. Most website resources for landowners were limited to definitions of easements and other land trust services, and to the benefits that conservation easements can bring to landowners. These definitions and benefits are vital first step to addressing areas of perceived behavioral control for landowners. They work to create a clear understanding of what a conservation easement is and what it means for property rights, property ownership, and restrictions on land use.

Singer (2000) explains that property rights as imagined by legal realists as a bundle of legally recognized and “specific entitlements” (pg. 10). Such a bundle of rights means that ownership constitutes a collection of such entitlements. Conservation easements operate on this premise. A land trust typically purchases only the development rights to a property, and potentially, the right to exclude if public access to the land is part of the agreement. Landowners still maintain ownership of the property; they are selling

only specific entitlements. This distinction is important to make to address perceived behavioral control for landowners.

According to Bastian (2017) and Cook and Ma (2014) maintaining managerial control over land is one of the biggest concerns landowners have about conservation programs and conservation easements. Landowners prefer voluntary agreements over legally mandated regulations (Bastian, 2017; Cook & Ma, 2014). A few techniques employed by the land trusts to address this perceived behavior control included explaining: 1) that easements are voluntary agreements 2) that the terms for each easement is unique and negotiated between the landowner and the land trust, and 3) that the landowner typically just sells their development rights rather than their entire property to the land trust.

Despite this attentiveness to landowner concerns and places for potential misunderstanding about easements, less than half of the websites included a call to action for landowners to “contact” us for more information with a contact email or form. The uniqueness of each easement suggests and the ongoing process that follows the placement of an easement suggests that the development of strong relationships between land trust and landowner are essential. Providing a point of contact and a call-to-action to “contact” for more information is a simple and quick addition to any existing website and seems to be a critical component of engaging landowners in a dialogue about potential collaboration. Missing this step means missing an opportunity to building a relationship and being able to address perceived behavioral control not addressed on the website and potentially unforeseen concerns unique to each landowner. Quick and easy direct

connection through a direct contact person is the first step to building that vital personal relationship between the landowner and the land trust. This is where the real trust is built—in relationship and direct communication. Given the unique negotiated terms of each conservation easement, direct and personal contact with land trust staff is likely to be where the decision to engage in an easement is actually made. Adding personal contact information or a contact us form is a very quick and simple addition to a website. It may also be valuable for each land trust to offer several modes of contact (e.g. phone, email), so landowners can easily choose which one they are most comfortable with as this may vary with demographics.

Another area which was not included across most sites was the frequently asked questions section. Only a quarter of sites contained a section which addressed the questions and concerns the organization has encountered most frequently from landowners. The inclusion of a frequently asked questions section is a simple way to address perceived behavioral control on a website in a more extensive way than a simple description of an easement or the types of easements. This section also allows the organization to utilize their unique expertise and experiences to address the variety concerns that their specific audience has. This is also a good way to attract landowners who are trying to gather as much information easements as possible before seriously considering engaging in one. It provides landowners with more opportunity to consider the pros and cons of an easement and allows them to develop more in-depth questions by the time they speak to a representative from the organization. Finally, like the contact

information and call-to-action, this is a simple addition to an existing website, that would require no extra funding and only a small amount of staff time to implement.

Two sites included brochures from external organizations including information on the Federal Tax Incentive and extensive guidebooks on conservation easements for landowners. In terms of search engine optimization (SEO), external links to well-known organizations and government agencies increases the search engines perception of the site as “trustworthy”, and thus the site has a better chance of appearing sooner on the search engine results. In terms of addressing the concerns of landowners, it may be worthwhile to determine if such documents reduce concerns landowners may have about land trusts. Additionally, three organizations linked to internally created brochures with more detailed information on the easement process, tax benefits, and timelines. These sites are able to address more landowner concerns than those without brochures, and thus, theoretically reduce perceived behavioral control on the part of landowners. These tools also allow the organizations to really focus in on the landowners needs in a way that the general website may not allow.

CONCLUSION

Finding a way to communicate that brings working landowners and those working in land conservation into collaboration is another essential steppingstone toward rebuilding resilience. The reasoned action approach (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010) offers tools that may be used to work around polarization in conservation communication.

It does so by moving the focus off values and up the cognitive hierarchy of human behavior to behavioral intentions (Vaske & Donnelly, 1999). This is beneficial because behavioral intentions are more adaptable than values and they are the last step before enacting the behavior. Additionally, addressing communication at the level of behavioral intentions offers tools outside of the realm of values as a vehicle for building a willingness to participate in conservation projects. By creating a new discourse through a unifying narrative for a diverse audience, and bringing in social norms and perceived behavioral control the reasoned action approach (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010) allows communicators to step outside the polarizing discourse of values and into other less polarizing areas.

This project demonstrated that there is a good deal of room for land trusts to expand their application of social norms and address issues of perceived behavior control on their websites. Some of these are simple. Landowner fears and concerns that may impact perceived behavioral control and attitudes about participating in conservation may be eased by simple actions such as adding a frequently asked questions page or a contact

us buttons. Other approaches such as creating new stories and reframing narratives to be more inclusive may require more practice, experience, and research.

Upon final analysis I propose that unifying narratives and engaging with social norms and their link to referent power may be one of the most powerful tools we have available to create collaboration in conservation. Land trusts can harness the power of social norms to create potential for collaboration by telling new stories through website structure, attention to community building through the integration of audiences, through reframing and replacement of polarizing discourses, and by incorporating more images, stories, and collaborative experiences of participating landowners into their websites as a whole. This practice is a potentially powerful way to circumvent polarizing attitudes and create new more collaborative attitudes on all sides through changes in discourse and representation.

Stories hold a tremendous amount of power. They shape the way we see the world and the way the communicate. Old polarizing stories can get in the way of the collaborative processes necessary to create social and ecological resilience. It is my hope that this project will assist land trusts and the communities they serve in coming together to meet regional goals that bring together working landscapes and conservation in ways that benefit everyone involved. Additionally, it is my hope that other areas of environmental communication may benefit from this analysis as I believe that its potential benefits extend far beyond the practice of private lands conservation.

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