

ENCOURAGING BEACHGOERS TO “KEEP WILDLIFE WILD”: PINNIPED SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

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BACKGROUND

- There has been an increase in harmful human-pinniped interactions (see fig. 1).
- Interactions continue despite policy and guidelines against wildlife harassment.
- A fluid audience with varying beach-use values complicate communicating said guidelines.
- Examining marine mammal science communication practices can lead to more effective behavior change.



Figure 1: A mother harbor seal and pup in WA. A civilian cut the umbilical cord, mis-assessing the situation for an entanglement. Photo credit: Sarah Teman, The SeaDoc Society.

METHODOLOGY

- Internship
I interned with NOAA Fisheries WCR - Share the Shore campaign, supporting communications efforts through a variety of web-content projects (see fig. 2).
- Interviews
I interviewed six experts of various communication mediums focused on the relevant behavior change.
- Literature Review
I researched marine mammal and pinniped public education, and social science informed practices.

How close is too close?



Figure 2: Informational graphic I developed on harbor seal body language and safe proximity, shared to NOAA Fisheries WCR social media. Images are from WDFW, and design assistance is by graphic designer Alix Smith.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the best communication practices to encourage responsible wild pinniped viewing and to reduce human disturbance interactions?

RESULTS

- Transdisciplinary Collaboration
Including various disciplines leads to engaging and creative learning materials with a broad scope of scientifically accurate information.
- Experiential & Accessible Learning
Experience improves knowledge retention but needs to be balanced by additional materials that care for diverse audiences and needs.
- Intentional Messaging Design & Delivery
Messages should be actionable, achievable, relevant, repeatable, and delivered through credible sources.
- Community Discussion & Inclusion
It is important to understand the needs, knowledge bases, and cultural frameworks that shape coastal communities’ perception of pinnipeds (See fig. 3).

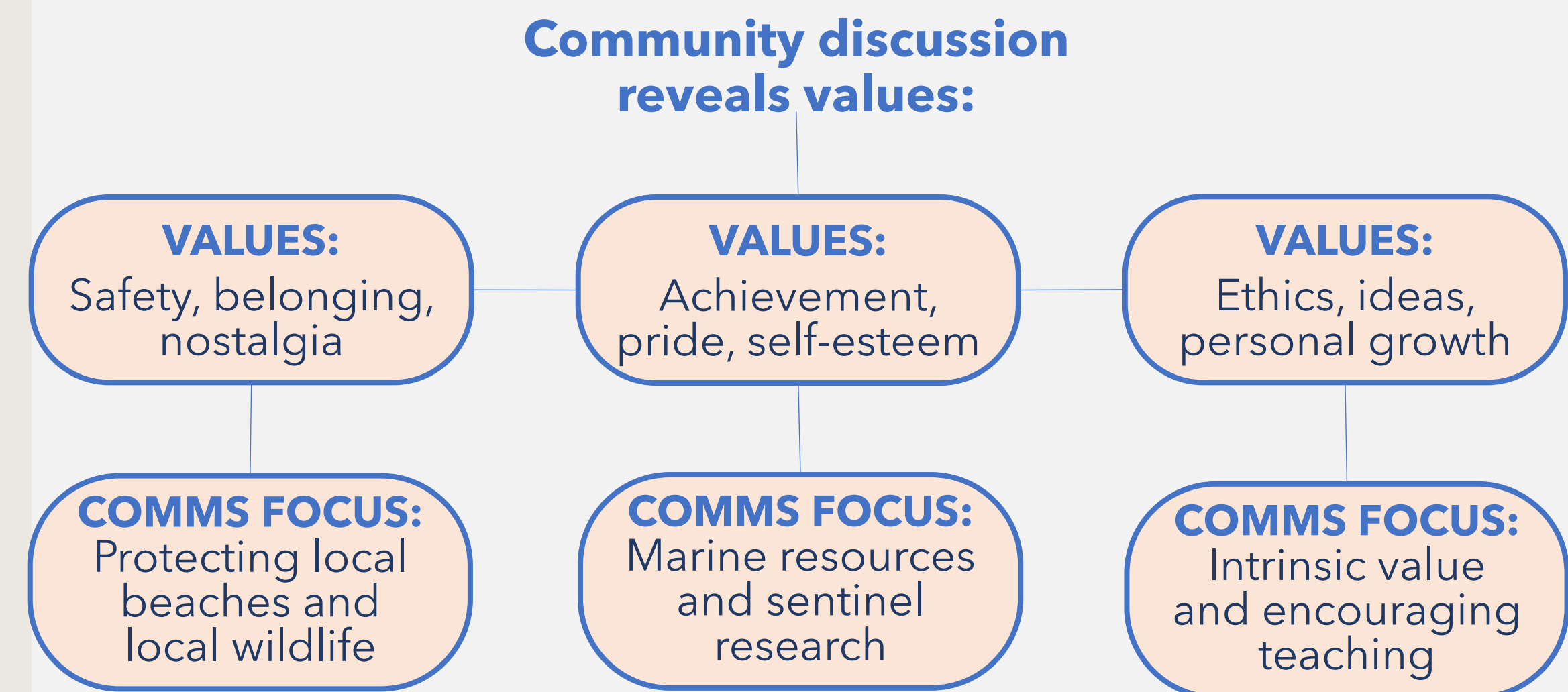
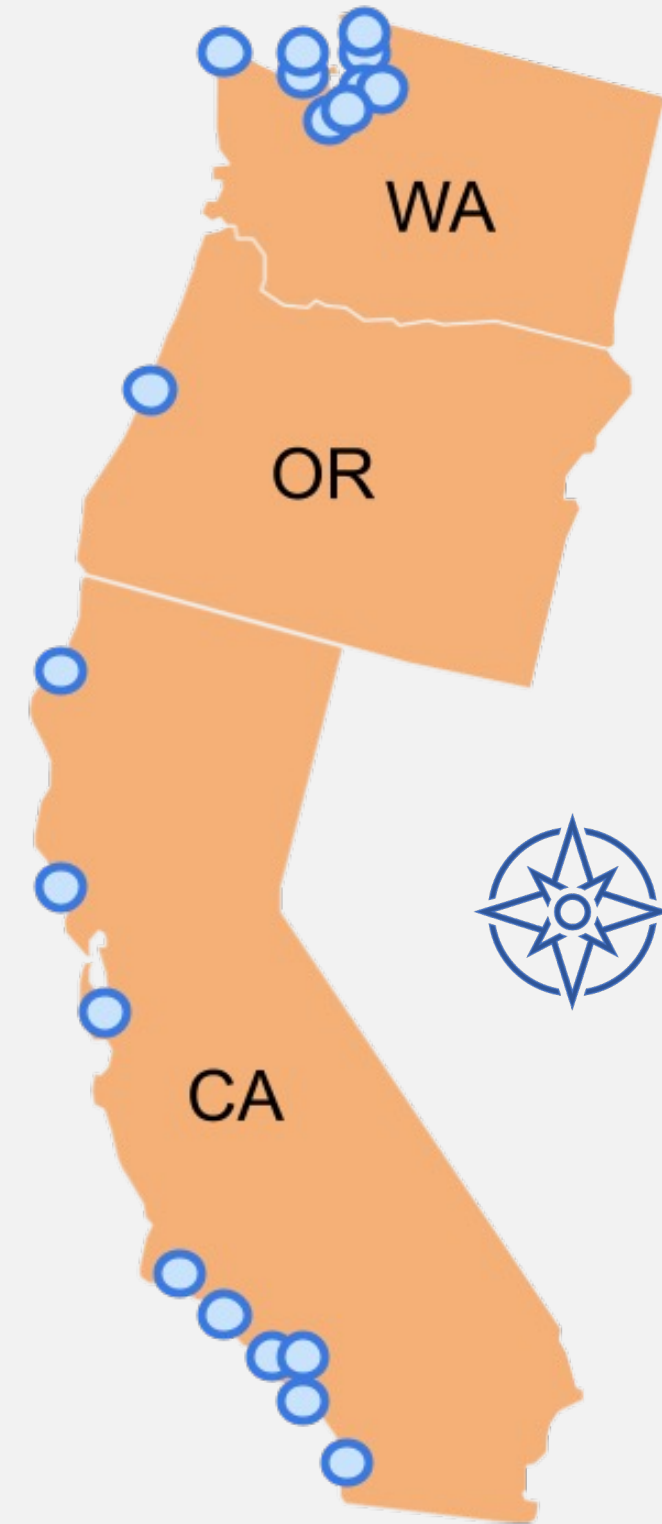


Figure 3: Diagram depicting how to utilize knowledge of a community's values to identify messages to focus on while communicating the marine mammal science.

SIGNIFICANCE

- Decrease in harmful human-pinniped interactions, preventing injury to seals, sea lions, and beachgoers, and preventing wildlife harassment penalties
- Build ocean stewardship through animals whose charm evokes personal connection, strengthening commitment to pro-environmental causes
- Strategies amplified in this topic can be applied when communicating about other marine life. (see fig. 4)



Experts spoke of similar communications issues as those I observed with pinnipeds for a breadth of other marine mammals. These findings came from a project I completed with NOAA Fisheries WCR, involving interviewing organizations on the west coast.

Figure 4: Map of the nineteen West Coast Marine Mammal Stranding Network partners that I interviewed and wrote appreciation web stories on throughout my summer internship with NOAA Fisheries WCR.

LIMITATIONS

The challenge of measuring the success of pinniped science communication tools requires further development.

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