

**MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT**

**FOR**

**THE PREDATOR CONSERVATION ALLIANCE**

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**JANUARY 2001**

## OVERVIEW

At the May 2000 communications workshop in Bozeman, the point was raised that if marketing analysts are accurate, the average American is exposed to over 20,000 radio, TV and newspaper ads, sales pitches, flyers, coupons, signs and other promotional “impressions” every week. That creates an incredibly challenging arena for communicating about anything, whether it is a product, brand name, idea, issue, candidate or even the nightly news.

Even more challenging is finding ways to enter that arena to promote, or leave an impression about something as specific and complex as the conservation of predators and their habitat. As information streams continue to fragment, civic involvement continues to dissipate and people’s everyday lives become increasingly busier, the development of an effective communications program becomes a matter of survival. For Predator Conservation Alliance, that is a literal statement in many ways.

This analysis was designed to help identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current communications mechanisms PCA uses to pursue conservation of predators and their habitat, and to make strategic recommendations for improvement.

To that end, MCSR conducted a thorough review of the following PCA communications materials provided by staff:

- ☞ Five-Year Strategic Plan, dated January 2000
- ☞ Numerous press releases and clips
- ☞ The Home Range newsletter dating back to Summer 1998 edition
- ☞ Membership renewal mailings, donor mailings and new member acquisition mailings
- ☞ [www.predatorconservation.org](http://www.predatorconservation.org)
- ☞ *The Wild Bunch* and *Our Vanishing Wildlife on the Prairie Grasslands* videos
- ☞ At a Crossroads: report
- ☞ PCA brochure

In the course of analyzing these materials, MCSR has developed this report to assist Predator Conservation Alliance in improving their ability to communicate effectively. This report is divided into the following sections:

<b>I.</b>	<b>Whose Side Is PCA On?</b>	<b>p. 3</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>The Common Thread</b>	<b>p. 4</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>The Basic Profile: Name, Logo &amp; Make-Up</b>	<b>p. 6</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>Message Recommendations</b>	<b>p. 8</b>
<b>V.</b>	<b>Discussion of Materials</b>	<b>p. 11</b>

## I. WHOSE SIDE IS PCA ON?

The Predator Conservation Alliance mission refers eloquently to a “*place in the human heart and mind, where we work to improve the public’s understanding of, and appreciation for, the ecological role of predators through our education, outreach and organizing work.*”

However, the current program focus of PCA seems to restrict that notion of *understanding* and *appreciation* to a very narrow field. The notion that comes across seems prescriptive, meaning PCA appears to want people to understand and appreciate predators in the same ways and for the same reasons that PCA does. There is very little room for people to relate to predators on their own terms and for their own reasons.

Because of this, PCA risks positioning itself just on the side of predators, and not on the side of people. Coupled with the fear many people have of predators in general, bears and wolves specifically, this adds to the communications challenge confronting PCA.

We recommend developing programs that demonstrate to people that PCA is on their side, too. This is a much larger discussion than this report was designed to address, but here are two recommendations to consider:

- ☞ **Develop and promote outreach programs targeting recreational users of predator habitat:** “*How to hike and camp in Grizzly country*” Make it informative, interesting and fun: what they eat, where they sleep, how to recognize tracks & other signs, what to do during an encounter, etc.
- ☞ **Develop and promote outreach programs focused on household safety for people who live in predator country:** how to store your trash, when to bring your chickens in, how to know if a predator has been near the house, who to call, etc.

This is more than a brochure series we are recommending -- this is a functional role that PCA should be aggressively filling. We believe PCA should consider outreach programs in targeted communities to educate people about predators first, before trying to persuade or enlist them in the pursuit of policy goals. In providing basic, useful information to people, PCA opens the door for people to begin to understand and appreciate predators on their own terms – and thus develop a greater trust in PCA’s capacity to be an advocate for the well being of these animals and the places they call home.

## II. THE COMMON THREAD

There is an underlying common thread that permeates Predator Conservation Alliance's communications program, which is an obstacle to effective communications: **too much information, not enough connection**. Across all media, PCA tends to overload the audience by giving them all the information at once, before the audience is primed to receive it.

This thread is actually a common trait in many organizations comprised of highly motivated, dedicated and educated advocates working hard to recruit support from the broader public. PCA works on many fronts, needs a lot of help and has a lot to say. And while opinion research tells us that the broad trends in public attitudes support PCA's basic goals and values, the problem lies in the fact that PCA's communications efforts do not convey those goals and values clearly and effectively, nor do they speak to a broad audience.

Specifically, the problems consistent across PCA's communications occur where there is a tension or imbalance between critical communications components:

- ☞ **Process & Motivation:** You focus more on the **PROCESS** of your work, as opposed to the **MOTIVATION** for doing it.
- ☞ **What You Do & Who You Are:** Similarly, you describe at length **WHAT YOU DO**, but do not ever communicate **WHO YOU ARE**.
- ☞ **Words & Pictures:** You rely too heavily on **WORDS** when you have amazing **PICTURES** at your disposal. "A picture says a thousand words" is not just a cliché, it is a fundamental truth in communicating effectively.
- ☞ **Facts & Feelings:** You maximize the use of **FACTS** without communicating enough about **FEELINGS**.

The good news: fixing this problem is primarily a matter of attaining a better balance.

- ☞ **Process & Motivation:** When defining the project work it does, PCA needs to communicate the **WHY** before the **HOW**.  
*For example, when PCA files a lawsuit to challenge off-road vehicle use on the Gallatin NF (2/15/00), the lawsuit is not the message. The threats ORV's pose to the National Forest is. See Discussion of Materials: Press Releases*
- ☞ **What You Do & Who You Are:** When defining the organization itself, PCA needs to define **WHO** comprises it before defining **WHAT** it is trying to accomplish.  
*For example, the first link on the left menu of your home page is "What is the PCA." There is no mention anywhere on the page of who comprises the PCA, meaning there is no opportunity for an individual to associate with PCA based on common interests besides predators. The opening line*

*of that page could be rewritten to say: Predator Conservation Alliance is made up of hunters, fishers, small businesses, conservationists, scientists and volunteers working to conserve and restore ecosystem integrity by protecting predators and their habitats.*

- ☞ **Words & Pictures:** When telling a story, PCA needs to present photographs in a manner that allows them to speak for themselves, instead of using them to reinforce a point made primarily in narrative.

*For example, the Summer 2000 newsletter with the full-page, color photograph cover is the single best use of imagery reviewed by MCSR.*

- ☞ **Facts & Feelings:** When communicating through any media, PCA needs to establish an emotional, values-based connection with the audience, before delivering factual information to educate, empower or enlist them.

*A good example of doing this effectively is the 3/28/00 membership renewal mailing. The clever hook with the word 'keystone' to communicate PCA's relationship to its members establishes an emotional context within which the rest of the information is delivered. That is effective communications.*

### III. BASIC PROFILE: NAME, LOGO & MAKE-UP

#### THE NAME: *PREDATOR CONSERVATION ALLIANCE*

As has been discussed, the term predator is laden with negative associations and makes PCA's communications landscape extremely rugged. The organization begins communicating from a point of weakness right out of the gate.

The best solution begins with good research. PCA can be in a much better position to know precisely how to get across that challenging landscape with a better understanding of how people define the 14 species PCA works to protect, how they react to the term predator, how they react to PCA's facts and rhetoric, etc.

Until then, PCA is basically flying blind. If there is one recommendation in this report that is most critical in MCSR's opinion, it would be **to commission a professional focus group study to determine exactly what liabilities are associated with the term predator so you can begin to understand how to get around them.**

Conservation and alliance are very positive terms and position the organization well.

#### THE LOGO

Overall, the logo is too informal and old-fashioned.

The combination of abstract pencil drawing and the font chosen speaks to what PCA may prefer aesthetically more than anything else.

PCA's issues are powerful and its focus is on the future. This logo is soft and old fashioned when it should be strong, sharp and cutting edge.

The pencil art is washed out on some computer screens and after one or two generations on the fax machine it is barely decipherable. This is very problematic. PCA should consider hiring a professional brand developer to assist in the development of a new logo. The focus group study recommended above would be a natural place to test new identity concepts.

#### THE MAKE-UP

*Who are these people telling me all this stuff about predators? Do I like these people? Are they anyone I know? Who else supports the Predator Conservation Alliance agenda?*

These are the questions that people ask when they are presented with new information. Unanswered, these are barriers to opening a channel of communication with people. But

if these questions are preempted, people might stick around long enough to listen to, remember, and eventually, act upon your message.

In PCA's January 2000 five-year strategic plan, the *Voices for Predators Program* plan discusses intentions to *inform* a broader and more diverse constituency. From a communications standpoint, PCA needs to go beyond informing these audiences, and begin identifying, targeting and developing active partnerships with a diverse set of constituencies.

After all, an alliance needs allies. And for many people, the messenger is the first and most important part of the message.

It is not enough to just reach out to new constituencies and activate them when it is time for action. The people who comprise your alliance also define it for new audiences. Those new audiences may be deciding their position on your issue by looking to see who is on either side of the debate. When it comes to matters of complex public policy, people are not going to take the time to learn every detail of the issue, and will tend to align themselves with those they know or like best.

In short, PCA needs to develop a personality. This will give people more opportunity to find reasons to listen to PCA's message, share PCA's values and further PCA's agenda. And the more breadth and diversity there is amongst the allies, the harder it is for opposition forces to pigeonhole you as "a bunch of environmentalists."

Some constituencies to consider targeting:

- ☞ **Clergy**
- ☞ **Scientists**
- ☞ **Outdoor Recreation Businesses**
- ☞ **Neighborhood Associations**
- ☞ **Hunting/Fishing Organizations**
- ☞ **Cub Scouts/Girl Scouts**
- ☞ **College Campus groups**
- ☞ **Civic Organizations – i.e. Lions Club, VFW, Kiwanis, League of Women Voters**

## IV. MESSAGE RECOMMENDATIONS

### MINIMIZE USE OF THE WORD PREDATOR:

PCA will not be able to counter the negative associations with the term on its own. Until there is a researched understanding of those associations, we recommend limiting the term's use in narrative throughout communications, and begin replacing it at times with less challenging language. Oftentimes, it can be simply replaced with the word *wildlife*. For example, take this sentence from the Living With Predators page on the web site:

*Predator Conservation Alliance seeks to ensure that people living and working in predator habitat of the Northern Rockies and High Plains do so harmoniously with predators by reducing human/predator conflicts and resolving conflicts without lethal measures.*

It could be rewritten as follows:

*Predator Conservation Alliance seeks to ensure that people living and working in wildlife habitat of the Northern Rockies and High Plains do so in a balanced manner, by reducing conflicts and trying to solve problems first, without killing innocent wildlife.*

### MAXIMIZE USE OF PICTURES:

Our recommendation for the best images to use are those photographs with animals that are looking at the lens of the camera, as in several of the The Home Range's cover photos. These images strike the most responsive chord and are most effective at reaching people at a critical emotional level first, before asking them to do the hard work of understanding facts and opinions. You do need to watch out for signs of aggression in the photos so as not to scare people. Other recommendations on the use of images:

- ☞ **Use more big pictures, more color photographs.** Too often, the photographs used, particularly in the newsletter, are too small to convey any meaning or emotion. *The Home Range* should be full color, from cover to cover.
- ☞ **Identify the animals, the place and the date.** Giving a specific context for an image allows people to put themselves somewhere in time and place in their own minds, making a stronger connection.
- ☞ **Include more pictures of people in the wild,** and identify them specifically. For example "*PCA volunteer John Doe and family hiking in grizzly habitat on the Gallatin National Forest.*"
- ☞ **Limit the use of the line art drawing to internal communications.** It is too subjective and informal for reaching out to new audiences.



## **HEIGHTEN THE THREATS/DEFINE THE BAD GUYS:**

Fear and empathy are important emotions/feelings to invoke in communications. When it comes to matters of public policy, people are more quickly motivated to help prevent something bad from happening, than they are to help initiate a benefit. That's where you identify bad guys, their intentions and the consequences of their actions on predators and habitat. An embodied threat is always more imminent than a rhetorical one. PCA needs to explicitly define

- ☞ Who is engaged in activity that is destroying or endangering predator habitat?
- ☞ What are their financial motives?
- ☞ What is their record on other environmental issues (pollution discharge, permit violations, spills)?

## **OTHER MESSAGE ELEMENTS:**

These are existing elements to the PCA message that need to be more consistently repeated throughout communications:

**Predators try to avoid humans.** This is an important characteristic to communicate, but a potentially confusing message. Works best when describing or showcasing specific animals. Playing up their shyness can begin to counter the fear they cause in people

**PCA's work is based on science, not politics.** It is not enough to say just the first half, you've got to establish the contrast with politics to reach people.

**Values, Values, Values:** Balance, responsibility, accountability and freedom are critical values people share. They are also important elements to PCA's message:

- ☞ *We have a responsibility to balance the needs of people and wildlife (predators) in the Northern Rockies.*
- ☞ *When government officials are unnecessarily killing too many animals, PCA works to hold them accountable.*
- ☞ *When off-road vehicle manufacturers, timber companies and special interests have too much influence on the government's wildlife management decisions, the system is out of balance. We have a responsibility to hold them accountable.*
- ☞ *Bears, wolves and other wildlife predators need space and the freedom to roam in order to survive.*

## **LANGUAGE CHECK:**

There are a number of categories where PCA needs to implement checks and balances on its use of language. They are identified here, along with some examples.

- ☞ **Watch out for technical jargon.** For example, don't use words like extirpation, persecution or lethal measures – talk about extinction and killing.

- ☞ **Watch out for esoteric language.** For example, don't use harmonious – talk about balance.
- ☞ **Watch out for elitist language.** Remember that you are more educated than 95% of those you are reaching out to. That doesn't mean you are smarter, you just probably have a bigger vocabulary. When crafting message, use Bob Ekey's Aunt Ruth test: Call up someone you know who doesn't know anything about your issues and run your top message by them. If they don't get it, go back to the drawing board. (Bob Ekey's email is [bob\\_ekey@twi.org](mailto:bob_ekey@twi.org), drop him a line to request his Aunt Ruth's phone number. Tell him Lamson sent you!)
- ☞ **Watch out for absolutist language.** *Never, always, any* and *all* can be dangerous words because they are signs of absolutism and inflexibility. That is bad positioning for PCA and easy pickings for your opposition.

## V. DISCUSSION OF OTHER MATERIALS

This section lists some of our observations and offers a few suggestions on how to improve the effectiveness of PCA's primary message delivery mechanisms. For all of them, remember the elements discussed in the Common Thread section of this report:

- ☞ Express the **MOTIVATION** behind your action before describing the **PROCESS**.
- ☞ Define **WHO YOU ARE** as the first step in defining **WHAT YOU DO**.
- ☞ Use **PICTURES** to carry emotions, **WORDS** to tell the story.
- ☞ Establish an emotional connection based on **FEELINGS** before you ask your audience to do the hard work of understanding your **FACTS** and opinions.

### PRESS RELEASES

A press release should be an article for the newspaper, not an essay on the issue at hand. The headline of the press release should be the optimal headline you would want to see in the paper, and it should contain short, snappy, newsworthy material only. There is no responsibility to tell the "other side of the story," or too explain all the background to the issue – just the news of the day, validation thereof and good quotes from *diverse messengers*.

Based on the recommendations in this report, we have rewritten the headlines and opening lines of the press releases reviewed, as an example of how to begin repositioning your communications profile in the press:

*August 2, 1999*

Originally: **Conservationists Challenge New Grizzly Bear Policies in Wyoming**

Recommendations:

- **Grizzly Bears Not Protected Under New Government Guidelines**
- **Grizzly Bear Protections Ignored Under New Government Guidelines**

After federal and state officials failed to uphold provisions of the Endangered Species Act with respect to Grizzly Bears, several conservation groups fought back....

*April 19, 1999*

Originally: **New Report Examines Future of Northern Rockies Wolves**

Recommendations:

- **Wolves Can Achieve Full Recovery from Possible Extinction According to New Report**
- **Report Supports Claims That Changing Wolf Status Will Harm Recovery Efforts**

Conservation efforts to bring the wolf back from the edge of extinction are in danger of being reversed by recent government attempts to change the status of the animal....(then go into the report, its findings which back up the above claim)

*April 28, 1999*

Good original: **Majority of Gallatin NF trail users Want Fewer Motorized Trails**

A Gallatin National Forest trail user survey indicates that forest visitors would prefer less motorized vehicle use on trails. The survey also found that motorized trails were more prevalent than trail users believed.

*June 1, 1999*

Original: **Wolf Summit to be a Landslide**

Recommendations:

- **Senator Ignores Key Constituency In Planning Wolf Summit**
- **Conservationists Left Off Senator's List Of Summit Invitees**
- **Wolf Recovery Future To Be Discussed Without Key Interests Represented**

Senator Conrad Burns has called a summit to discuss the future of wolf recovery, but has left conservationists off the invitee list. The summit, which will include representatives from the MT Stockgrowers, Farm Bureau, etc, appears to be a one sided attempt by wolf opponents to address wolf recovery concerns according to....

*June 9, 1999*

Original: **House Defeats \$7 Million Cut in Lethal Predator Control**

Recommendations:

- **Taxpayer Money Will Continue To Be Wasted On Wildlife Killing After House Amendment Is Defeated**
- **Outdated Federal Program Will Continue After House Amendment Is Defeated**

A House amendment that would have cut \$7 million from an outdated federal program that kills nearly 100,000 predators each year in the West was defeated yesterday. The US Dept of Agriculture's Wildlife Services program which was created to protect livestock by killing predators will survive despite research that shows lethal control does not diminish livestock losses.

*January 11, 2000*

Original: **Groups File Notice Against Delay in Lynx Protections**

Recommendations:

- **Imperiled Lynx In Danger Of Extinction Without Protection**

Several wildlife protection groups have filed a notice of intent to sue the federal government over the continued exclusion of the lynx from Endangered Species Act protection.

*February 15, 2000*

Original: **Conservation Groups File Lawsuit To Challenge Off-Road Vehicle Use On Gallatin National Forest**

Recommendations:

- **Off-Road Vehicle Use That Threatens Wildlife Is Challenged In Lawsuit**

In an attempt to stop off-road vehicle use, which damages wildlife habitat and threatens wildlife survival, conservation groups have filed suit against the US Forest Service.

*Feb. 28, 2000*

Original: **Groups Protest Lowering Wolf Recovery Goals**

Recommendations:

- **Wolf Recovery Efforts Threatened By Federal Proposals**
  - **Proposed Federal Action Could Hurt Wolf Recovery Efforts**
- Subhead: Conservation Groups Protest Wolf De-Listing**
- **Proposed Wolf Status Change Could Hurt Recovery Efforts**

A reduction in wolf recovery goals by the US Fish and Wildlife Service has prompted protests from 28 different conservation groups. The changes, which have not been officially proposed, would speed up the de-listing of wolves.

*March 13, 2000*

Original: **Groups File Lawsuit Against Delay In Lynx Protections**

Recommendations:

- **Lynx Still Not Listed As Endangered Species Despite Protest**
- Subhead: Conservation Groups File Lawsuit To Protest Exclusion**
- **Deadline Passes, Lynx Still Not On Endangered Species List**

In an effort to protect the lynx, conservation groups filed a lawsuit urging the US Fish and Wildlife Service to include the species on the endangered list . . .

## **THE HOME RANGE**

There is a lot of good information and good writing in the newsletter, but its focus as a member newsletter limits its utility as an outreach tool to new audiences. It assumes too high a level of understanding and engagement of the issues.

One way for PCA to consider expanding the newsletter's utility is to imagine someone in a waiting room, who has 5 minutes before they get called up. They find a copy of *The Home Range* on the table and want to flip through it. Right now, there isn't much to

come away with in 5 minutes. The pictures are too small to grab you when flipping through, the articles are too long, and there's no gossip, trivia or other easily digestible information.

You want the reader to put the magazine down after 5 minutes and say to himself or herself, "that was interesting, I've never thought of wildlife that way."

Here are a few observations to begin that process:

## LAYOUT/DESIGN

Overall, the layout and design are limiting your communications potential instead of maximizing it. It looks and feels informal and less than professional, undermining the serious nature of your work, and the credibility you need to get your message across. Some suggestions for improvement:

- ☞ Images need to be full-color, larger and printed at a higher resolution. The photographs of landscapes and wildlife are being underutilized. These are beautiful places and creatures, yet they are confined to little 2x2 gray boxes where they lose the ability to convey meaning or emotions. The charts/maps are too small to chart or map anything.
- ☞ Images need to be specifically labeled and given a context. All of the photographers are given credit, which is nice – but how about some recognition for the animals themselves and the great places they inhabit!
- ☞ There is simply too much text, leaving very little white space and no room to increase the size of the images. Try reducing every article submitted by 25% of total word count.
- ☞ The font used is too casual, particularly for issues with headlines such as "Wyoming County to Poison Prairie Dogs." The informal presentation undermines the seriousness of the issues and questions the validity of the claim.
- ☞ Consider using a glossy paper stock, at least for the cover. This will help make photographs sharper and give the newsletter a more professional look. There is post-consumer recycled glossy paper stock readily available in the marketplace.

## CONTENT:

- ☞ **The calls to action are buried in the articles.** Explore ways to break them out of the articles and highlight them more. Calls to action are an important part of your message. Whether or not people respond to them, the public views that as your role. The higher the profile of those actions, the more credibility you gain by being true to your cause. You might consider a Call to Action page.
- ☞ **Use Factoids.** Use them liberally. They are effective means of getting small important pieces of information across, they are handy ways to reinforce articles and they provide options and flexibility in layout. With big captivating pictures and factoids sprinkled throughout – you start passing the 5 minute test.

- ☞ **Expand the writers' circle.** The consistency of staff writing the articles is both a strength and a weakness. It builds an important relationship between the readers and the content, but it also limits the PCA profile to a very small circle of individuals. Explore ways to expand the writers' circle with a rotating guest column to be filled with diverse supporters; try getting permission to reprint articles from other media; enhance the profile of the Rendezvous Site to include photographs or other information about members' activities. This diversification of messengers will serve to enhance and broaden the profile of WHO the PCA is.
- ☞ **Spread the light stuff around.** Currently, all the articles precede everything else. Take some of the calendar, book review, t-shirt sales, meet the staff or other lighter items and sprinkle them throughout the publication to break it up some.

## WEB SITE

There are three things that any web site must deliver to its users: **information, entertainment and interactivity.**

As of December 4<sup>th</sup>, the home page of [www.predatorconservation.org](http://www.predatorconservation.org) had 28 links and 20 photographs. Too much information and interactivity, not enough entertainment!

Consider putting a splash page up before the home page – something that simply has a large beautiful photograph, name and logo, and an 'enter' click. Perhaps even sound effects, if the photograph is appropriate (as on the Living with Forest Predators wolf page)

The web site is ahead of the other media in terms of using color images – but they still need to be larger.

When looking at how to utilize your web site, as an exercise, consider that the user doesn't have a scroll bar on the right hand side. PCA has to get its primary information across to the users who don't or won't scroll down and read everything. Pictures. Factoids. Emotions first, then move them towards more substantive information. A person looking for information about predators and PCA will find it by moving around the site, but PCA's job is to have a web site that captures people and holds them there, even if they didn't come looking for anything.

Consider having some freebies through the web site -- photographs, screensaver, e-mailboxes.

Consider having a "What you can do" page that incorporates traditional advocacy calls to action along with volunteer opportunities. Currently, it seems as though you have to join PCA in order to help protect predators. Many people may be more comfortable with a smaller, preliminary step.

## **MAIL**

PCA's mail is well-crafted and is already effectively incorporating the emotional element and communicating the motivation behind PCA's work. Beyond some adjustments in language, the only critical element it is missing is the definition of who comprises the PCA -- which is particularly important in the prospecting mail.