

Confluence of States Education Series: Building Unbeatable Coalitions Behind Outdoor Recreation Initiatives

March 6, 2024

Will Abberger and Luke Metzger discussed the significance of conservation finance and effective communication for advancing outdoor recreation economy development. Abberger highlighted the importance of building coalitions and leveraging data, while Metzger emphasized the need for bipartisanship and engaging key decision-makers. Both speakers stressed the significance of public opinion research and actively seeking out alliances to achieve conservation goals. Metzger also shared his experience in leading successful campaigns to protect Texas parks, and emphasized the importance of expanding state parks to meet growing demand for outdoor recreation and conservation.

Action Items

- [] @Chris Perkins - Send "Language of Conservation" memo to attendees.
- [] Share polling firm recommendations that specialize in conservation measures.

Outline

Conservation finance in the outdoor recreation economy.

- State leaders in outdoor recreation economy gather to discuss conservation finance with REI's Tom Berger.

Messaging and targeting audiences for outdoor recreation and conservation ballot measures.

- Abberger shares insights on leveraging momentum for outdoor recreation and conservation in election year.
- Will Abberger, a leading voice in conservation finance, discusses successful campaigns to protect land and water in Texas.
- Land conservation is not a partisan issue for American voters, with strong passage rates in both red and blue states.

Ballot measure feasibility and public opinion research.

- Will Abberger discusses feasibility research, polling, and ballot measure development for conservation funding.
- Will Abberger discusses a \$50 million bond referendum in Indian River County, Florida, that was approved at 67% in 2004, and advocates are now seeking to renew funding for land conservation.
- In 2019, the county hired the Trust for Public Land to conduct a feasibility study on bonding for land conservation, which analyzed bond issuance sizes, property tax increases, and impact on taxpayers.
- Will Abberger explains that providing information on the cost impact of a ballot measure to voters can significantly increase support, as seen in Indian River County where support went from 54% to 63% after being told it would cost the average homeowner \$46 per year.
- The Trust for Public Land conducts feasibility research in-house, including the Indian River County study, and presents the results to voters to inform their decision.

Using polling data to inform conservation campaigns.

- Will Abberger highlights the importance of persuading Republican voters in November 2022 midterm election, particularly women, who may be initially hesitant but can be convinced with the right messages.
- Strongest messages among persuadable voters include the Indian River Lagoon's water quality problems, accountability for rising land prices, and preserving quality of life in Indian River County.
- Pollster recommends focusing on environmental messages to increase support among Republicans for a water quality ballot measure.
- Will Abberger highlights the importance of research and strategic campaigns in winning ballot measures.

Expanding Texas state parks and addressing funding issues.

- Luke Metzger shares how environment Texas secured a \$1 billion investment in state parks through a coalition of stakeholders, bold vision, and timely advocacy.
- Advocates worked to secure funding for Texas state parks, leading to the passage of Proposition 5 in 2019.

Increasing Texas state parks by a million acres.

- Luke Metzger faces resistance from conservation advocates when proposing a goal to double the state park system in Texas.
- Texas ranks 35th in parkland per capita, with 54% fewer acres than Florida and similar southern states.
- Luke Metzger and his team launched the "Million Acre Parks Project" to add a million acres of state parks to Texas, despite pushback from legislators.

- The team faced challenges in gaining support for the project, including a lack of funding and resources, as well as competition from other conservation efforts.

Texas state park funding and conservation efforts.

- Luke Metzger and a group called Texas 2036 found that 73% of Texans supported using \$1 billion of the state's surplus money for state parks.
- The chairman of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission, Beaver Applin, lobbied to save Fairfield Lake State Park, which was leased by a power company and sold to a developer, highlighting the importance of protecting state parks during the centennial year.
- Luke Metzger identified a potential ally in Doug Deason, a wealthy and influential Republican activist, through a Twitter exchange and subsequent research.
- Metzger pitched the campaign to Deason, who expressed interest and eventually became a key supporter, despite initial disagreement on wind power.
- Luke Metzger and tan Parker successfully advocated for a constitutionally protected fund for state parks in Texas.

Texas ballot measure to protect parks and open space.

- Pollster found messages on protecting water and land, and rapid growth of Texas, were most compelling.
- Speaker 4 highlights Prop 14 as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to preserve Texas parks for future generations (0:44:50)
- Luke Metzger expresses excitement about the billion-dollar Centennial Parks Conservation Fund, which will earn \$50 million in interest annually and fund parks across the state (0:45:39)

Park funding and access.

- Luke Metzger explains why the funding can only be used for new park acquisitions, not existing park improvements.
- Advocates should prioritize economic benefits of outdoor recreation, rather than solely focusing on conservation.

Conservation messaging and campaign strategies.

- Will Abberger and Luke Metzger discuss the importance of framing conservation messages in a way that resonates with voters, highlighting the need to speak to higher-level issues that make land conservation and recreation a need rather than a luxury.
- They emphasize the importance of identifying the audience and tailoring the messaging to appeal to them, whether it's outdoor recreation enthusiasts or the broader general electorate.
- Luke Metzger emphasizes the importance of prioritizing infrastructure for outdoor recreation in land acquisition.

- Luke Metzger emphasizes the importance of bipartisanship and engaging key stakeholders in conservation efforts.
- Will Abberger stresses the need for data-driven campaigns and understanding voter priorities through public opinion research.