

directions

Journal of the Association of Nature Center Administrators

ANCA Blue Ribbon Project

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The Blue Ribbon project is commemorating the 25th anniversary of ANCA by looking ahead to the next 25 years. An anniversary is a time not only to look back at past accomplishments, but also to look forward to the future.

Since its inception, ANCA has been a leader for growth in the profession by focusing its vision on the future. Considering the significant economic and social developments in our country over recent years, now is as important a time as ever for our profession to peer into the proverbial crystal ball.

The goal of the Blue Ribbon

project is to identify major trends in how nature centers will change in the future. Some of ANCA's greatest strengths are the knowledge, expertise, and passion of its members. The Blue Ribbon project is engaging the membership in exploring this research question: *what do leaders in the nature center profession view as the societal and economic future of nature centers in the U.S. over the next 25 years?*

The answers to this question will be valuable for our profession as we work to strategically position our centers for success in the future.

The ANCA Blue Ribbon project is led by University of Wisconsin-



Stevens Point graduate student Andrew Revelle and Dr. Corky McReynolds, director and professor at Treehaven Environmental Learning Center. The project is currently in the data analysis phase. ANCA will publish a full report on the project's findings in early spring 2015. This "Project Update" will describe the

methodology of the research project as well as provide details on its findings to date.

Methodology

The last research into the future of nature centers was conducted

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Founded in 1989, the Association of Nature Center Administrators is a private non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and supporting best leadership and management practices for nature and environmental learning centers.

Serving more than 600 members, ANCA is the leader in the profession.



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Golden Flying Fox
photo courtesy of Organization for
Bat Conservation



Director's Notes

Voice of the Profession

Jen Levy
Executive Director
Association of Nature Center
Administrators
Logan, UT

At the past Summit in Kalamazoo we asked those in attendance "What does ANCA as the Voice of the Profession mean to you?" This is a question we have been contemplating for a couple of years and we needed to reach out to ANCA members for help. We have been compiling notes from the focus group interviews and are in the process of identifying action items to achieve innovative and progressive services and provide sustainability for ANCA as an organization.

Summit attendees provided valuable feedback on the ways we are already serving as the Voice of the Profession including sharing of best practices, our current member programs and services, and our communication strategies.


We also gathered valuable guidance on new strategies to consider going forward. Several of the focus groups interviewed asked ANCA to create and set professional standards for nature and environmental learning centers as well as vetting the idea of an organizational accreditation program. In addition, we will be exploring ways to be involved in the education and training of our future leaders.

A few suggestions came up that would involve ANCA taking the lead in the profession on the national stage. Several groups asked ANCA to advocate for both our member centers and the



profession. This would include partnering with and strengthening the efforts of other professional organizations like the Children and Nature Network, the National Association for Interpretation, and the North American Association for Environmental Education.

Also, a few focus groups suggested ANCA develop a national marketing campaign that elevates nature and environmental learning centers and communicates the significance and how our members contribute to their communities. In order to do this we would need to collect information to better demonstrate the collective impact of our member organizations. We can only take an educated guess as to how many students are served by our member centers' programs or how many acres are protected from development and made accessible to local community members for exploration, or how many families hold memberships with their local nature center.

All of this feedback will receive careful consideration as we move forward and continue to promote and support best leadership and management practices for the nature and environmental learning center profession. 

Just Say YES!

ANCA will be asking. Just say Yes!

Pat Welch
V.P. Development
ANCA Board of Directors
West Palm Beach, FL

Over the past five years ANCA's development committee has been working really hard to build an annual fund program and develop some best practices in the process. (Building an annual fund is a best practice!!)

In keeping with best practices, we set some benchmarks for ourselves which we have successfully achieved each year:

- 100% giving by board and staff
- 65% membership renewal rate with an intent to achieve 90% over time (we reached 83% last year!)
- 10% new donors each year (more than 30% last year!)

We located a benchmark budget survey for non-profit organizations similar to ours to compare ANCA's donation revenue. We found that we were about the same in terms of percentage of budget derived from individual donors, total dollars raised, and size of average gift. We also found some areas for improvement such as increasing the number of entry-level donors and online giving.


The annual fund is a really critical funding stream for ANCA. Since 2009, the annual fund contributions have doubled! This has allowed ANCA to secure some desperately needed staff support which in turn has led to increased membership and increased services and resources for members including: regional meetings, mentor program, tip sheets, and more!

YES!
DON'T CALL ME,
I'LL HELP NOW!

ANCA follows the best practice of maintaining diverse income streams with the annual fund contributing 30% of the budget.

As a wrap up to the 25th Anniversary Celebration we have a very ambitious goal of calling every member. What we are asking is that you just say yes to a conversation about ANCA, its role and future, as well as saying yes to considering our ask for a small donation. We would love to champion the best practices we promote by having 100% support from our members. With your help we could just do that!

If you have already received our call and agreed to donate - THANK YOU! If you get a call from ANCA in the next few months to ask for your pledge, please consider helping us reach 100% support from our members. Or click the button above or go online at <http://natctr.org/support-anca/annual-fund.html> to make a secure donation. Your generous gift made before June 30, 2015 will help us meet our goal. So far this fiscal year, we have 27 new donors!!!

A small gift of \$25 is equivalent to 4-5 cups of designer coffee or a dinner on the town. One of our members has pledged \$5 per month - wonderful!! We can do this! You can support ANCA and make a difference. When you get the call, just say YES! 



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by the Natural Science for Youth Foundation (NSYF) in 1989. The NSYF study surveyed nature center professionals on what centers needed in order to grow in the future. The study also conducted interviews of 18 leaders, gathering their predictions of how the profession would change in the future. The NSYF study identified raising operating revenues, program evaluation, and the role of centers in their communities as major concerns for nature centers going forward.

The landscape for nature centers has changed since 1989. The 2008 economic recession, demographics, land use, and the way Americans perceive our relationship with the natural world, among other developments, have changed the landscape. The ANCA Blue Ribbon project is using the NSYF study as a framework to examine future development in a modern context.

Similar to the NSYF study, the Blue Ribbon project uses a two part research methodology: a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. The purpose of the survey was to establish a broad base of knowledge about the future from the nature center professional community. The survey asked respondents multiple choice, Likert-type, and ranking questions focused on how major aspects of nature centers will change. It examined developments in fundraising, staffing, programming, community role, physical

property, and governance. The survey was sent out to the ANCA membership last spring. Response to the survey broadly established how centers across the country are changing. Revelle and McReynolds then used the survey data to guide interviews of leaders in the field.

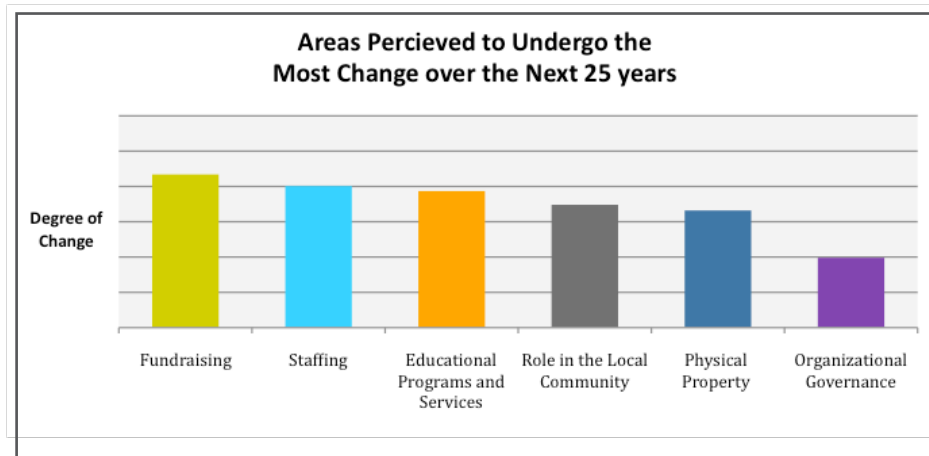
The in depth interviews sought to discover how leading nature center directors perceive centers changing over the next 25 years. Due to the scope of the project, the researchers were interested in hearing from veteran directors as well as the emerging new generation of directors who will be leading the pro-

fession into the next 25 years. Thirteen seasoned leaders with 15 or more years of director experience were randomly selected for interviews from the ANCA membership. Seven emerging leaders with five or less years of director experience were then nominated by respondents to the survey. The 20 interviews were conducted in the spring and summer of 2014. The interviews asked the directors open ended questions to draw out rich information on how the profession will change.

The Blue Ribbon project is currently in the data analysis phase. Revelle and McReynolds are synthesizing the interview data into major trends. The final Blue Ribbon report will discuss these trends and what they mean for nature centers. It will also provide recommendations for how ANCA can support nature centers in light of these trends. The sections below highlight significant findings from the survey as well as themes surfacing from the interview data thus far.

Findings from the Survey

The Blue Ribbon survey was sent out to the ANCA membership in March 2014. Response to the survey was successful, with 26.6% of the membership completing the survey. The full Blue Ribbon report



will display the survey data in its entirety. This document will highlight several of most significant data points.

The first question on the survey asked respondents to identify which aspects of the

nature center profession they perceived as undergoing the most change over the next 25 years. Respondents ranked fundraising, staff, and educational programs and services as the top three areas of change respectively. Role in the local community, physical property, and governance were ranked as the three areas undergoing the least change.

As an environmental non-profit profession, it is not surprising that the nature center field foresees significant change in fundraising operations. How-

ever, responses to specific fundraising questions reveal more detail. 89.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their organizations will increase the energy and resources they invest in raising funds over the next 25 years. 96.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their organizations would be raising funds from new sources. Clearly, nature cen-

Table 1: Fundraising Changes

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Your organization will increase the energy and resources it invests in raising funds over the next 25 years.	47.6%	42.2%	7.8%	2.4%
Your organization will raise funds from new sources over the next 25 years.	46.4%	50%	2.4%	1.2%
The effects of the recent economic recession will impact the way your organization raises funds over the next 7 years.	17.7%	62.2%	16.5%	3.7%

ters will be investing more resources into fundraising and are keeping their eyes open to tap new sources of funding. In the short term, these fundraising developments may be motivated by the 2008 economic recession. 79.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the effects of the recent economic recession will impact the way their organizations will raise funds over the next seven years.

Table 2: Staffing Changes over the next 7 years

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Your organization's education staff positions will increase.	35.5%	38%	22.3%	4.2%
Your organization's public relations staff positions will increase.	16.3%	36.1%	39.2%	8.4%
Your organization's fundraising staff positions will increase.	27.1%	35.5%	29.5%	7.8%
The role of the director in your organization will be different.	30.1%	47%	20.5%	2.4%

The survey data also indicates staff growth for nature centers. 73.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their organizations' education staff positions will increase. A smaller majority, 62.6%, indicated that their organizations' fundraising staff positions will increase. 77.1% of respondents also indicated that the role of the director in their organization will be different. Responses regarding public relations staff were mixed. These data regarding staffing points towards nature centers growing their programming and fundraising capabilities. This narrative is tangentially supported by the responses to

questions about programming. 52.4% of respondents predicted that their number of onsite school programs will increase while 35.5% indicated that they would remain constant. A larger portion of the respondents, 77.1%, predicted that their number of offsite outreach programs will increase. This increase in programming could potentially require the hiring of additional education staff.

The survey also explored how the structure of nature center programming may change in the future. Respondents were evenly split on whether their organizations will change their target audiences for their programs. While this does not indicate a change in audience for the entire field, it is significant that a strong number of centers are planning to reach different audiences. The survey also found that 76.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their organizations' relationships with school districts will change. Seemingly, developments are stirring that will affect the direction of nature center programming in the near future.

Table 3: Program Changes over the next 7 years

Statement	Increase	Remain Constant	Decrease
Your number of onsite school programs will	52.4%	35.5%	12%
Your number of offsite outreach programs will	77.1%	19.3%	3.6%

The final highlight of the survey data relates to the role of nature centers in their local communities. 76.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the simple statement that their organizations' roles in their local communities will change over the next seven years. This piece of data might be a signal that the way nature centers impact, connect, and interact with their local communities is fundamentally changing. The survey sought to capture meaningful concepts such as this one. The Blue Ribbon project gathered these concepts together to form a broad base of knowledge about how the nature center profession is changing. It then used that knowledge to inform and guide the interview process.

Table 4: Program Structure Changes over the next 7 years

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Your organization will change the target audiences for its programs.	17.5%	39.8%	39.2%	3.6%
Your organization's relationship with school districts will change.	18.7%	57.8%	19.3%	4.2%

Findings from the Interviews

The one concept that has emerged out of nearly every interview with a nature center director has been relevancy. The leaders in the field are focused on how their centers and the profession will stay relevant in an increasingly nature-disconnected world. It is through this lens that leaders discussed future changes in the nature center profession. Directors foresee strategic change at their centers in order to stay relevant to their communities, the changing environment, and the shifting landscape of non-profit fundraising.

In the interviews, directors spoke broadly about how they will continue to be relevant in the fabric of their communities. Directors described that what their communities want and need from nature centers has changed. Many directors spoke about expanding beyond school programming to provide a more holistic framework. Leaders in the field are seeking to create true opportunities for life-long learning at their centers. They are broadening their focus beyond school children to truly reach all audiences from toddlers to teens to families to the elderly. Directors emphasized offering more family, adult, and high school programs as well as connections to local colleges and universities. Many directors also highlighted the importance of the emerging trend of founding nature preschools. This “tsunami of interest” in preschools underscores the desire of directors to create “real champions for the environment.” Several directors described how they are hungry to invest in programs that take more than just the first step on the spectrum of environmental education goals. Many directors see life-long and in-depth learning to create environmental leaders as the future of nature center programming. The interviews also revealed the ethic that “it’s not just about environmental education anymore.” With the increasing impacts of nature deficit disorder in our society, directors are looking to “fill that gap” by being a sanctuary for reconnection to nature. Directors expressed that their centers will play a more profound role in maintaining the physical, mental and spiritual health of their communities in the future.

The directors also emphasized the need to be relevant in the face of a changing physical environment. Directors described how the advance of urban and suburban development is changing the role of nature centers. Rather than being “getaways” from the city, centers are increasingly becoming “island oases within sprawl.” This shift has many directors

promoting restoration and conservation efforts as key components of the future for nature centers. Directors stressed restoring the land on their property in order to serve as a model of healthy management to the community. Several directors are also looking to play a more active role in conservation and restoration efforts beyond their property by acquiring land and partnering with local land trusts.

In their longer visions of the next 25 years, nature center directors are seeking to understand how to incorporate the massive issue of climate change into their programs. One director plainly stated that “we have to be relevant to the extraordinary amount of change to the environment.” Another explained that “we need to be places where people grapple with this change and solve problems in their own communities.” Few directors were able to fully describe how their centers will address climate change in the future. Some indicated that the role of nature centers may need to shift towards advocacy. Others maintained that nature centers will be hubs of scientific information on climate change for the community. The lead-

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ers in the field are not certain how nature centers will deal with this challenge. However, it is clear that the nature center profession will be contemplating how to best tackle climate change in the future.

Directors passionately spoke about nature centers staying relevant in the shifting landscape of non-profit revenue and fundraising. For some nature centers, the 2008 economic recession forced budgets to tighten and directors to examine their programming with a critical eye. Directors of these centers are predicting a continued stagnation or decrease in school programs and are hedging their bets with other sources of income. One director identified how “volatility in the market has put pressure on raising money for our causes as there is still a lot of hesitation in the market.” However, the effects of the recession vary from center to center; some nature centers weathered the storm with little impact. Regardless, most directors emphasize the importance of centers being as nimble and resilient as possible by diversifying revenue streams.

Leaders in the field also identified how the way centers raise money from grant sources is changing. Foundations are increasingly looking to fund programs with far-reaching impacts. Thus, directors per-

ceive true partnerships as vital to growth of the field. Directors are calling for nature centers and other institutions to unite to have a greater collective impact. They passionately speak about how collaboration will enable nature centers to achieve the big grants, jointly market programs, and support one another as they grow the market. Several directors even referenced the concept of larger nature center coalitions that could influence legislation and promote the value of nature centers to the public. The leaders in our field consistently identified partnerships as essential to the growth of nature centers in the future.

The directors who participated in the interviews provided the Blue Ribbon project with a great wealth of opinions, perceptions, and predictions about how nature centers will change over the next 25 years. This “Project Update” only touched upon the most evident trends currently emerging from the survey and interviews. The full Blue Ribbon report will provide a comprehensive analysis and discussion of this data.

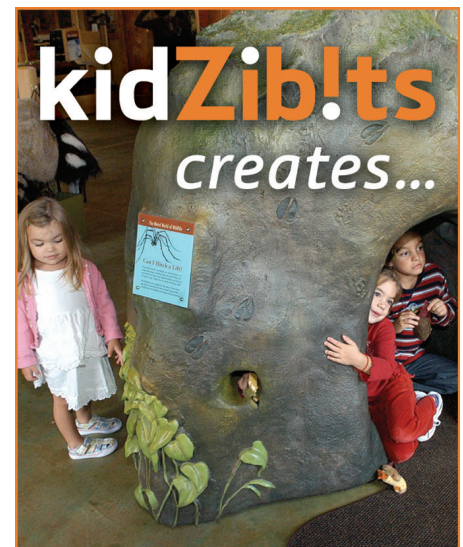
Andrew Revelle and Dr. Corky McReynolds would like to thank all of those who participated in the survey and interviews as well as ANCA for its continued support of the project. If you have questions regarding the Blue Ribbon project, please contact Andrew Revelle via email at andrew.revelle@conserveschool.org. 



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Profile:

Getting Children a Head Start on the Farm

Christy Merrick
Director, Natural Start Alliance
A Project of the North American
Association for Environmental
Education (NAAEE)

The city of Dayton, Ohio—like many US cities—has been hit hard by the recession and the national loss of manufacturing jobs.

And the economic changes have not just taken a toll on the city's working adults: Some 40% of preschool aged children in the Dayton area do not attend preschool, and 75% of high-needs children are unprepared for kindergarten.

It's no wonder, then, that Dayton's Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm has made a commitment to its community, and in particular, to its children. Aullwood operates both a nature center and a working farm, where visitors can stroll through prairies and woodlands, explore wetlands and ponds, or sit by a stream. The Aullwood farm, which has made a commitment to sustainability in its farming practices, includes a Farm Discovery Center, a farm yard, pastures, barns, spring house, gardens, chicken coop, an orchard, and a sugar maple forest with a sugar house.

Charity Krueger, Aullwood's Executive Director, says that Aull-

wood's staff and board looked at all the resources their center had to offer children and families in their community, and asked "How can we create a really unique collaboration that will make our community stand up and take notice?" Knowing that Head Start served children who need early educa-

of the collaboration was in the shared vision that a working farm can be used not just to raise plants and animals, but also to bring up children. Krueger explains that, from the beginning, both partners agreed that "the children should be outside every day on what would be their farm."



photo courtesy of Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm

In building the relationship, Aullwood agreed to provide the classroom space and rent the space to MVCDC, provide access to the farm, and provide naturalists and farmers who could work with the children. The Head Start operator would hire the teachers and administer the program. Two years later, the partnership is as strong as ever.

tional opportunities the most, Aullwood approached the Miami Valley Child Development Centers (MVCDC)—the operator of Head Start programs in the area—about creating a ground-breaking partnership to bring a Head Start classroom to a working farm.

Creating a True Collaboration

Great partnerships require a common vision, and each partner must bring their own skills and resources to the collaboration. In this case, the most critical piece

Krueger credits the teachers in the classroom with the program's success. "We need to have the right preschool leader, so we worked with MVCDC to place the right person in the position. We've been blessed to have good teachers who are there because of their philosophies on the value of nature experiences and farm play." The classroom's Lead Teacher, Megan Miller, agrees. "The other teachers and I definitely have a love of being outside, and that requirement

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was specific in the job description when we applied for the job. We knew what it would entail, and we shared that vision.”

A Day in the Life of a Farm Preschool

As far as these partners are aware, the Head Start class at Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm is unlike any other Head Start classroom in the nation. Of course, the program meets the requirements of Head Start programs, such as providing meals to the children, setting aside time for brushing teeth, and following a curriculum (in this case, the High Scope curriculum that’s used by many Head Start programs).

But unlike other Head Start programs, children at Aullwood also spend time outdoors on the farm every day. They go on nature walks with their teachers, tend the gardens, and spend time with Aullwood naturalists who help the children explore their interests outdoors. The children help Aullwood’s farmer with farm chores such as feeding animals and gathering eggs, and the children gather water from the rain barrels and help water the gardens. In the process, they learn valuable skills that help prepare them for kindergarten, and life beyond the classroom.

The approach does take some getting used to for children and their parents. “Some of the children that come to us haven’t been around big livestock before,” Miller explains. Feeding an ani-

mal that’s many times your size can take some getting used to. Parents have to adjust, too. Miller says that while they do explain to parents at the beginning of the year that their children will be participating in farm life (and there’s a detailed permission slip that parents must sign), parents are often surprised by how dirty farm work can be.

She says at the beginning of the year, parents often ask, “Why are they getting dirty all the time?”



photo courtesy of Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm

She says that the teachers have to reinforce how important it is to come prepared for school on the farm by wearing old clothes, mud boots, snow boots, or whatever the weather and activities demand. “Some parents need a little more convincing, but they all get on board as they see the results.”

A Family Affair

Parents aren’t just involved by dressing their children for success on a farm. Krueger explains that one of Aullwood’s goals for the program is to invite the preschool families to take advantage of the center and farm as a family. Families might come out after school

or on weekends for picnics, wagon rides, nature walks, festivals and more.

Krueger remembers one preschooler, in particular, who became especially attached to the farm. After the child graduated from the program and moved on to kindergarten, his mother would bring him back to the farm on Sundays so he could continue to help the farmer, Bill, with farm chores. His mom appreciated that her son had found a positive role model, and wanted to keep that special relationship alive.

A Model for Other Programs


By all accounts, the Aullwood experiment is working. “It’s really been a dynamic program,” explains Krueger. While Aullwood’s aim was not to make money from the program, they have succeeded in their goal of serving children in their community who need high-quality early childhood education the most. And they’re providing rich, nature-based experiences that maximize the farm’s educational potential.

Miller agrees that the partnership is a success and that it could serve as a model for other programs. “Instead of learning about farm animals in a book, the children can experience these things first hand.” It’s a far cry from the urban settings where she worked previously.

But Krueger acknowledges that there are risks to environmental

education centers who partner with outside agencies such as Head Start. Centers that operate their own independent schools can set their own curriculum, and make it exactly what they want. Partnering with another organization does require giving up some of that ownership. “We may not reach the nirvana that [other nature preschools] may have, but we’re providing an exceptional opportunity for the children outdoors.”

And, Krueger says, she wouldn’t have it any other way. Aullwood was not, and is not today, prepared to take on the challenges of licensing, curriculum development, staffing, and more that are required for operating a high-quality preschool program. “To us, the only way to do this was to have a strong partner.”

And, as the program continues through its third year, it appears that the partnership will continue to grow, helping the Dayton community ensure that its children are ready to learn when they enter kindergarten, and ready to earn when they graduate from school as young adults. 



photos courtesy of Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm

Christy Merrick is the Director of the Natural Start Alliance, an initiative of the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) to advance early childhood environmental education. For more information about Natural Start, visit their website at naturalstart.org or find them on Facebook at fb.com/naturalstartalliance.



Nature-Based Preschool National Conference

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From The Field:

National Conservation Campaign Launches to Save the Bats

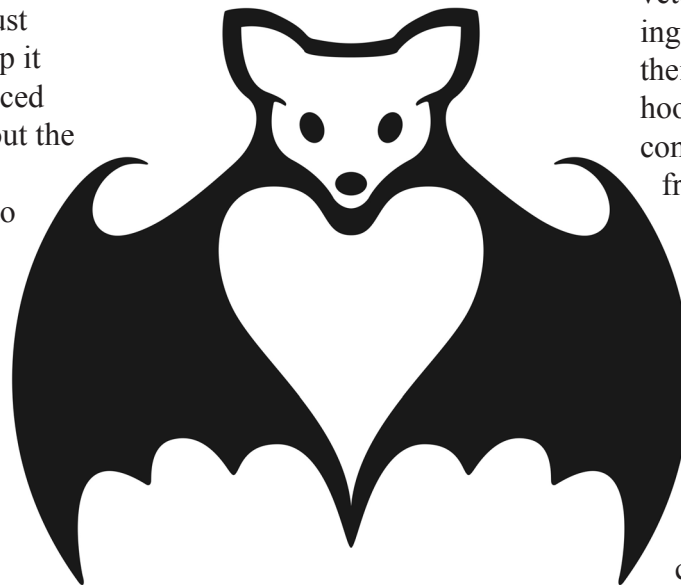
Danielle Todd
Director of Communications
Organization for Bat Conservation
Bloomfield Hills, MI

Melting ice caps. Starving polar bears. Plastic islands in oceans. Humans are putting great stress on the Earth's resources and the impact is here—and growing. We see the decline in biodiversity increasing just as the public's ability to stop it is decreasing. Americans faced with constant messages about the environment's collapse are also bombarded with calls to consume and waste. How then can we as environmental education professionals tackle what seems insurmountable?

We believe that addressing this issue successfully will require three main tracks. First, the communication style needs to be current with mass communication trends. We are competing with Disney, Apple, Google and we need to stay in step with modern communication styles. Second, the issues need to be relevant to the public in a way that demonstrates personal impact. Lastly, we need to amplify our efforts by relying on the power of social contagion. By taking cues from social science research, we can use peer pressure for good and make an even greater impact.

The Organization for Bat Conservation (OBC) in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan is bringing this

three-pronged approach to the protection of bats, animals that play a key role in keeping us healthy. Our new Save the Bats campaign takes aim at the devastating decline in the North American bat population through a populist, family-friendly drive to inspire millions of Americans to become involved in conservation.



SAVE THE BATS

How Save the Bats Works

The campaign is rooted in education and scientific literacy. Americans who perhaps are unaware of the role of bats or who fear bats are invited to learn about the animals through in-person events, online education tools, and live animal experiences. These backyard animals that provide us with important insect control are celebrated as a critical part of our ecosystem.

Once people realize the impact of bats on their own lives and become inspired to become friends of bats, the campaign includes tools people can use to protect habitat and to become ambassadors for the animals. The website www.savebats.org and the Facebook page www.facebook.com/savebats guide budding and veteran conservationists in creating a wildlife-friendly habitat in their backyards and neighborhoods, making nature-friendly consumer decisions, teaching their friends and family about the importance of protecting wildlife, and influencing local elected officials and decision-makers about the economic value to a healthy ecosystem.

As the groundswell of supporters multiply, individuals are given the opportunity and guidance to start collective conservation efforts.

We envision clubs focused around kids, wildlife, and gardening, groups organized for habitat clean ups and restoration projects, volunteers donating their time, talent and treasure to the cause, and young and old to have opportunities to engage in meaningful citizen science research.

The campaign has already received support from national conservation organizations, federal agencies, and even Batman himself. Batman vs. Superman film director Zack Snyder signed up to help after learning about the

(continued on page 12)

devastation to bats in his home state of Wisconsin and other parts of the country. Assisted by the cast and crew, Zack and OBC's Rob Mies built more than 100 bat houses, repurposed from the movie set. The bat house-building event was turned into a short video featuring stars Ben Affleck and Amy Adams adding their support to the cause. The video is available on www.savebats.org and was viewed 1 million times in the first week. Signed bat houses built from the movie set will be available for purchase at a later date.

Why Save the Bats?

A healthy environment takes healthy bats. Bats around the world help plants grow by pollinating flowers and dispersing seeds. In North America, most bats are insect-eaters, eating crop and backyard pests like spotted cucumber beetles, tomato hornworm moths, emerald ash borer beetles, and June bugs as well as many invasive insect species. In fact, a single bat can eat up to 5,000 insects in one night! This level of insect control alone has been valued at \$23 billion in annual savings to the American agricultural industry.

Beyond their role in our environment, bats are involved in key industries including tourism, research, and technology. Local economies benefit as bat-watchers turn out to view bats exit caves at dusk in search of food. For example, it is estimated that tourists visiting Congress Avenue Bridge

in Austin, Texas, where 1.5 million Mexican free-tailed bats call home, add \$3 million to the local economy. Over the years, bats have inspired advances in technology, particularly related to echolocation and sonar. Research has led to the development of anti-clotting medication that simulates vampire bat saliva to help stroke victims. Current research also is being done on the bat's wing structure in order to identify ways to increase the maneuverability of airplanes.



photo courtesy of Organization for Bat Conservation

What is Happening to Bats?

In North America, bat populations are declining at an alarming rate and scientists are worried that some bat species may go extinct. White-nose Syndrome, named after the white powdery substance found on bat muzzles and wings, is bat threat number one. It's a devastating disease that affects hibernating bats, particularly Little Brown bats. WNS was first discovered in New York in 2006, and has since spread to 25 other states and 5 Canadian provinces, killing more than 6 million bats to date. This fungal infection is primarily spread bat-to-bat

where they prefer to hibernate. The fungus itself doesn't kill the bats, but starvation does. The fungus causes bats to use twice the energy during hibernation as non-infected bats. Researchers are working diligently to find a way to stop it from spreading, yet to-date no cure has been found.

Wind turbines are also wreaking havoc on bats. Wind farms designed to improve our use of energy are having the unintended consequence of killing millions of migratory bats and birds. Research-

ers believe that bats are attracted to the turbines, mistaking them for tall trees where they can find shelter. Yet as the bats approach the turbine, they run the risk of either being struck by the blades or having their lungs explode from the change in air pressure. In 2012 alone, it is estimated that close to 1,000,000 bats died from wind

turbine effects.

Given the role of bats in our environment and economy, their dramatic decline—roughly 2 million bats a year—is deeply troubling. No one truly knows what a world without bats would look like but we do know that fewer bats means a lot fewer food choices and a lot more pesticides used in growing our food. We can't afford to let these animals disappear from our natural world and it's up to all of us to make sure that doesn't happen.

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About the Organization for Bat Conservation

OBC has been working for 17 years to dispel myths about bats and to teach people that bats play a key role in the health of the environment. At its home base, the Bat Zone, found on the grounds of Cranbrook Institute of Science, OBC cares for close to 200 bats, comprising 12 species that are found around the world. Trained educators bring the bats to schools, nature centers, libraries, and museums across the country, allowing kids and adults to see the animals live and up close and to learn why bats are important. The public can also visit the Bat Zone for behind-the-scenes tours where they can see all of the animals at one time. In 2014, OBC reached 100,000 people across the country.

Learn More

Visit www.savebats.org or follow the campaign on www.facebook.com/savebats to get involved. Or, call the Organization for Bat Conservation directly at 248-645-3232 to learn how you can bring Save the Bats to your community. 🌿

Danielle joined the Organization for Bat Conservation in September 2013. As Director of Communications, Danielle is responsible for marketing, development, public relations, special events, and branding for the organization and the Save the Bats campaign. Before joining OBC, Danielle spent 10+ years in marketing and communications in both corporations and nonprofit organizations in Detroit and Chicago. Danielle holds an MBA from Wayne State University and a BA from the University of Michigan.

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ANCA provides important peer connections, a great example is the professional friendship that exists between two ANCA members, Jason Meyer, President and CEO of Blandford Nature Center and Susan Westhoff, Executive Director of Leslie Science & Nature Center.

Jason and Susan met at a crucial time in both their careers. Both were relatively new to their jobs and realized their nature centers had similar growing pains and that they could use each other as sounding boards, sources of ideas and advice, and inspiration.

“At Fenner Conservancy, where I worked formerly, we were still in the early growth stages of our nonprofit being the managing entity. We were rebranding, rebuilding our board, and starting to implement a bona fide fundraising plan. Our center had been on the cusp of closing until our nonprofit began to manage it, and we had a LOT of work to do” says Jason.

Susan agreed, “Ditto in many ways – LSNC was relatively newly transitioned into a nonprofit after being with the city for two decades. We were working on solidifying our budgeting process, coming up with fundraising direction and defining who we are and how we were moving forward with a solid board and staff.”

Their professional relationship gave them someone in their corner they could trust with just about anything. Such as, Jason admitted, “those things that you can’t say to board members, your family, or even your therapist....Susan is always there with words of advice, encouragement, or caution when I need them. I would say this is true of many of my “professional” relationships in ANCA - they also become deeply personal. When somebody “gets it” - the stress of the job, the complexities of managing a nonprofit, the impact of all of this on your personal life - that person becomes an incredible asset to your life.”

Susan agreed, “Sometimes just having someone I could talk out loud to, allowed me to get outside of my own head and see the priorities more clearly. Other times, Jason was able to be a much-needed mirror, to reflect back and push my comfort zone or challenge my priorities. It is immensely helpful to have someone you trust and whose opinion you trust, to be that reflection.”

“As an organization, ANCA has been great at linking me to people who can answer very specific questions, explained Jason. “My mentor, Dave Catlin, helped me considerably during the time that I was seeking new employment, including advice on career paths, how to communicate my decision to my board, and more. Summit sessions always seemed to be timely for me, too - there is so much to learn!”

“ANCA really linked me to the resources I needed to feel comfortable staying in the nature center field,” said Susan. “I have peers, and they are accessible, and they are supportive, and that is a pretty phenomenal thing in this day and age.”

“Being a nature center administrator requires such a wide breadth of knowledge,” explained Jason. “Being able to reach out to another administrator whose farm is doing well, or a director who has closed out his seventh successful multi-million dollar campaign, or any other specific need not only helps me and my center, but our profession as a whole. We really are all in this together, and to me, that’s the beauty of ANCA. We can each be in our own place, yet also be part of the movement to make our world a better place to live.”



ANCA Leadership Awards

Do you know someone who has demonstrated best practices in leading a nature or environmental learning center? Have you been mentored by a fellow nature center administrator or know of a new leader who is doing an exceptional job? Recognize this person by nominating them for an ANCA Leadership Award!

- **Nature Center Leadership Award**

The ANCA Nature Center Leadership Award is intended to recognize outstanding professionals in the field of nature center administration. Candidates should be employed (or formerly employed) in a top leadership role in a nature center.

- **Outstanding New Leader Award**

The ANCA Outstanding New Leader Award is intended to recognize outstanding new leaders with less than five years of full-time work experience as the director, executive director, president or other administrator at the highest administrative level at an environmental learning center.

Nominations for both awards are due April 1

[Click here for more info and to download nomination forms](#)

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Recent ANCA Gatherings Around the Country

The Pocono Environmental Education Center in Dingmans Ferry, PA, was the host of the 2015 Residential Environmental Learning Center Gathering.

PEEC is located in the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area on the former site of Honey-moon Haven, a rustic resort facility complete with heart-shaped mirrors, sunken tubs, and swimming pools. One of the more creative renovations includes a beaver lodge and a cave constructed in the deep end of one of the indoor swimming pools. The shallow end provides the perfect setting for RELC talent!



Participants enjoyed exploring PEEC's EcoZone including an eagle's nest and a life-size bear skeleton puzzle.



↳ Attendees of the Florida Regional Meeting enjoyed a brisk walk on the boardwalk from Oakland Nature Preserve to the pavilion on the shore of Lake Apopka.



↴ More than 50 people attended the 2015 ANCA Midwest Regional meeting hosted by the Cincinnati Nature Center.



Thank You to our Business Members!

We are grateful for the financial support and expertise of our Business Members. We hope the ANCA membership will consider these businesses when they are in need of market resources. Please visit their websites to see what they have to offer!

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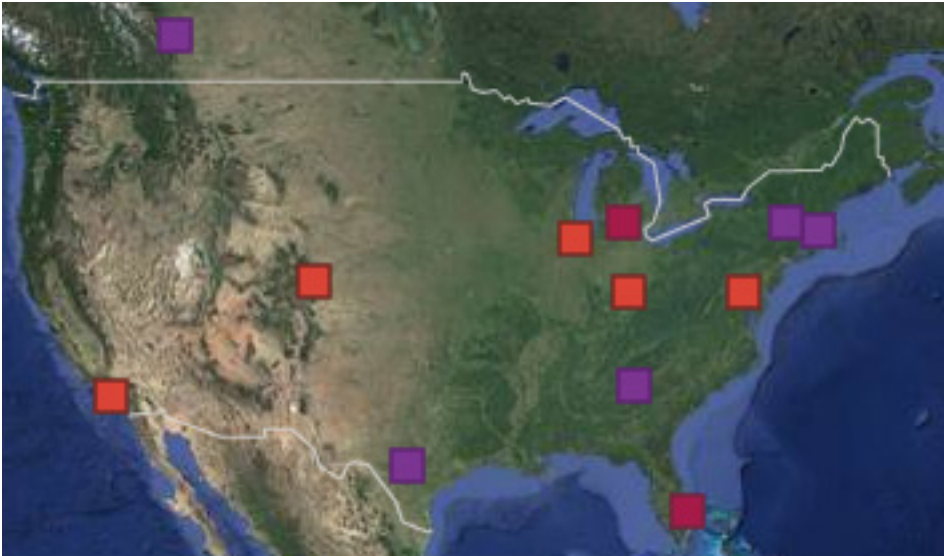
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- microEYE INTERACTIVE
- Nature Watch

Bronze:

- Alpen Optics
- 106 Group
- PEER Associates



ANCA Regional Meetings

In an effort to connect our members regionally, ANCA is now offering peer-to-peer opportunities for professional development in several regions across the country.

Click on the adjacent map to see if there's a meeting near you!

Peer Consults - We know the business. We're in it too!

ANCA offers consulting assistance to nature centers and other environmental education organizations at very reasonable rates.

The cost includes transportation, lodging, and meals for the team, plus a \$3,250 fee that goes toward supporting ANCA's professional services. Our board of directors and members provide these services with no personal financial gain, while you gain the advantage of advice and guidance from some of the profession's most respected and experienced leaders.

What can be covered? Well, just about anything involved with planning, funding, and operations.

Some topics include:

- Assistance with long range and strategic planning
- Review facilities and trails
- Program evaluation
- Personnel & human resources issues
- Fundraising and fiscal management
- Green building
- Exhibits
- Starting a center
- Organizational structure

Join the Team!

ANCA's Consult Services are a success because of it's members' participation on Consult Teams. Please consider sharing your experiences and lessons learned.

Consult Team members donate their time but all expenses are paid. Participating in a Consult is a great way to see other parts of the country, learn about other nature centers, and take home valuable knowledge for your own center.

So don't delay!!!

PLEASE fill out the skills survey in the Member's Section on ANCA's website at www.natctr.org.

To find out more about ANCA's Peer Consults contact:

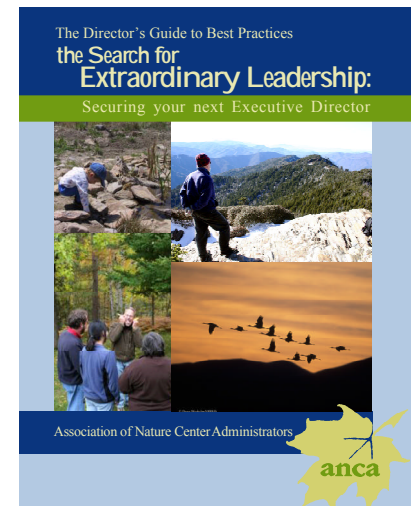
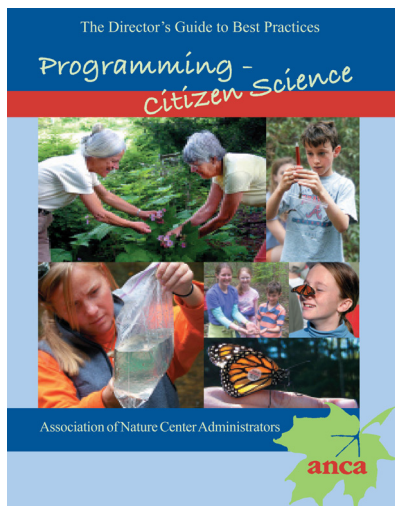
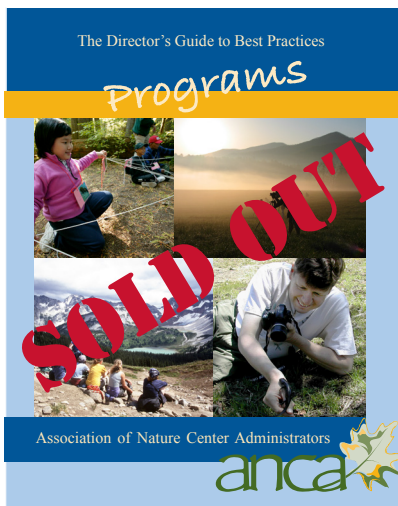
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