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Words Matter: A Study of Justice-Oriented Communication by Chesapeake Bay Environmental Nonprofits

Rachel Merriman-Goldring
College of William and Mary

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A Study of Justice-Oriented Communication by
Chesapeake Bay Environmental Nonprofits

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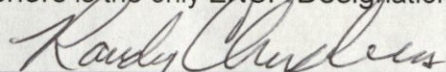The College of William & Mary

by

Rachel Merriman-Goldring

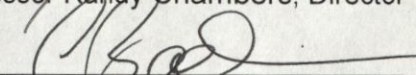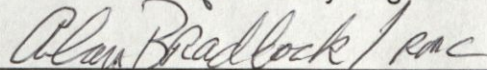Accepted for: _____HONORS in ENSP_____
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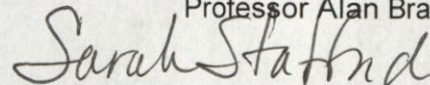
Professor Randy Chambers, Director

Professor Carey Bagdassarian

Professor Alan Braddock

Professor Sarah Stafford

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I would like to thank my family and friends for their tireless support. The path to this thesis has certainly not been a straightforward one, but it's been a path of discovery and joy, thanks to the people who helped me navigate it.

I would like to thank Professor Chambers for embracing my chaos, and supporting me in my many endeavors. Thank you to Professor Bagdassarian for always pushing me to think more carefully. Thank you to Professor Braddock for taking me seriously and showing me that my passions are mutually reinforcing. Thank you Professor Stafford for your thoughtful feedback and pragmatic advice.

Finally, my thanks go to everyone I have met in the environmental justice movement. I am intensely grateful for how warm and welcoming you have been, and the time you have taken to share your knowledge and insights.

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the extent to which Chesapeake Bay environmental nonprofits incorporate issues of environmental justice into their external communications. This study begins with a baseline assessment of the state of environmental justice communications for almost one hundred Bay nonprofits. The nonprofits' websites were coded by hand, and were extensively and methodically examined for environmental-justice oriented language. This quantitative study shows that nonprofits are exceptionally unlikely to have mission statements that engage with environmental justice. Nonprofits are somewhat more likely to engage with environmental justice on their issue pages and in their newsletters, but this engagement is sporadic, and is rarely indicative of a broader commitment to justice-oriented environmental communications.

This study also includes semi-structured interviews that explore the reasons for variation in the external communications of environmental nonprofits. It shows that some progress has been made in making environmental communication more effective, but that funders, mission statements, and organizational history all constrain progress.

Lastly, this study puts forth recommendations based on interviews and the results of the quantitative analysis. Mainstream environmental nonprofits should actively seek to build long-term partnerships with environmental justice groups, in which they leverage their privilege to elevate the voices of environmental justice groups. Mainstream environmental nonprofits should also let their messaging be shaped by communities, and should incorporate environmental justice more fully into their mission, programmatic work, and communications.

INTRODUCTION

Activists, community members, journalists, and scholars have documented the historical

existence and continued pervasiveness of environmental injustice within the United States.[1]

Simply put, communities of color and poor communities are consistently overburdened by

environmental degradation. This thesis aims to better understand the language and

communication used by environmental nonprofits around issues of environmental injustice.

I researched and wrote this thesis in 2016 and 2017, making it difficult to forget the importance

of the language people use. At the Women's March, a friend held a sign that simply stated

"Words Matter." Over the last several months, we've had a conversation on a national level

about the importance of language. The words that politicians use matter.

The words that nonprofit organizations use also matter, shaping their policies, programs,

partnerships, constituencies, and staff. As the EPA and the EPA's Office of Environmental

Justice are systematically dismantled, and as federal funding for environmental regulation,

mitigation, and cleanup at the state level is cut dramatically, local level action and nonprofit

action on the environment become even more essential. It's crucial to examine the language

those outside of the governmental sphere use to talk about the environment, and to discuss

ways in which justice does and does not figure into these conversations.

As a white middle-class woman, I am not and have never been at the front lines of

environmental justice. I come at this work from a position of relative privilege, and have aimed to

do this analysis with as much sensitivity and care as possible.

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[1] David Schlosberg, *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

History of the Environmental Justice Movement

Environmental injustice refers to the disproportionate effects that environmental degradation has on marginalized communities. Environmental justice movements aspire to achieve an equal distribution of benefits and burdens, ensuring that marginalized communities aren't overburdened by environmental degradation, and ensuring that these communities receive the benefits associated with environmental improvement.[2] According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, environmental justice is defined as "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies."[3]

In a 1999 interview, Robert Bullard, a founder of the environmental justice movement, said, "The environmental justice movement has basically redefined what environmentalism is all about. It basically says that the environment is everything: where we live, work, play, go to school, as well as the physical and natural world. And so we can't separate the physical environment from the cultural environment."[4]

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[2] Dominique Hervé Espejo, "Fair Distribution of Environmental Burdens Related to Access, Use and Enjoyment of Natural Resources," *University of Warwick,* 2013, http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/clusters/international/devconf/participants/papers/herve.pdf.
[3] "Environmental Justice," *United States Environmental Protection Agency,* https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice.
[4] Errol Schweizer, "Environmental Justice: An Interview with Robert Bullard," *Earth First! Journal,* July 1999, http://www.ejnet.org/ej/bullard.html.

Bullard also defines environmental racism, a more specific subset of the environmental justice movement: "Environmental racism refers to environmental policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color."[5] This thesis will focus more broadly on environmental justice, looking at injustices based on race and class.

Environmental injustice is both a product and a producer of broader systemic oppression. Peter Newell, in "Race, Class and the Global Politics of Environmental Inequality" notes "environmental inequality reinforces and, at the same time reflects, other forms of hierarchy and exploitation along lines of class, race, and gender."[6]

Environmental justice exists on a wide range of scales, from international to highly local. On a global scale, climate change is a classic example of environmental injustice; wealthy Western nations are producing the majority of greenhouse gases, while smaller, poorer, less developed nations are feeling the effects of climate change more acutely and more quickly.[7] Another tangible example of environmental justice on a global scale is the pattern of developed nations shipping their hazardous waste to developing countries for disposal. This system is a stark example of environmental racism.[8] Internationally, local communities resist these injustices. The "environmentalism of the poor" involves people from marginalized rural and indigenous communities fighting against an increasingly global extractive capitalism that involves environmental

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[5] Robert Bullard, "Confronting Environmental Racism in the 21st Century," *United Nations Research Institute for Social Development Conference on Racism and Public Policy,* 2001.
[6] Peter Newell, "Race, Class and the Global Politics of Environmental Inequality," *Global Environmental Politics 5,* no. 3 (2005): 70 – 94.
[7] Joerg Tremmel and Katherine Robinson, *Climate ethics: environmental justice and climate change* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
[8] Rozelia S. Park, "An Examination of International Environmental Racism Through the Lens of Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies 5,* no. 2 (1988): 660.

dispossession in pursuit of natural resources, including oil, gas, tree farms, and hydropower.[9] There are issues of equity and injustice between the Global North and Global South.

Injustice also exists on much smaller spatial scales, within and between local communities. This research focuses on environmental injustice within the United States, in the Chesapeake Bay, so this literature review will largely focus on the history of the US environmental justice movement.

Although environmental justice has a long history, the US environmental justice movement took shape in the 1970s and 1980s, largely around allegations of race-based discrimination in the siting of solid waste facilities.[10] In 1979, plaintiffs filed suit in Houston, challenging a permit granted by the Texas Department of Health, arguing that the decision was "motivated by racial discrimination".[11] Also in the 1970s and 1980s, controversy erupted over the siting of PCB-contaminated soils in a landfill in Warren County, North Carolina, which had a largely poor and black population. Warren County still stands as a classic example of environmental racism, of corporations taking advantage of people and communities with less of a political voice. In the 1980s, in

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[9] Joan Martinez-Alier, Leah Temper, Daniela Del Bene, and Arnim Scheidel, "Is there a Global Environmental Justice Movement," *The Journal of Peasant Studies 43,* no. 3 (2016), http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03066150.2016.1141198.

[10] Keith Rushing, "Environmental Justice Leaders Confront the 'Value Gap'," *Huffington Post,* September 8, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/keith-rushing/environmental-justice-leaders_b_11879118.html?utm_content=bufferaf4a8&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer.

[11] McDonald, Bean v. Southwestern Waste Management Corp, Texas 1979, http://home.sandiego.edu/~jminan/landuse/Bean%20v%20Southwestern.pdf.

response to cases like Warren, many former civil rights leaders became leaders in the environmental justice movement, bringing skills and media attention to the fight.[12]

Publications, including the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice's *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*, showed that "race was the single most important factor in determining where toxic waste facilities were sited in the United States" and that "the siting of these facilities in communities of color was no accident, but rather the intentional result of local, state and federal land-use policies."[13] Although black, Latino, and tribal communities had fought against environmental racism for decades, these protests gained increased publicity and led to the formation of a more cohesive movement fighting for environmental justice in the 1980s. In 1991, the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit was held in Washington, DC. The summit adopted 17 "Principles of Environmental Justice," which continue to shape local and national efforts for environmental justice.[14]

Environmental justice also arose in response to "mainstream environmentalism," which was and is largely led by white people and was and is largely removed from the realities of people of color, particularly the disproportionate burdens of environmental problems on communities of color.[15] With a grassroots focus and an emphasis on representation, environmental justice movements separated themselves from traditional environmental action.

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[12] Renee Skelton Vernice Miller, "The Environmental Justice Movement," *National Resources Defense Council,* March 17, 2016, https://www.nrdc.org/stories/environmental-justice-movement.
[13] Ibid.
[14] "Principles of Environmental Justice," EJNet, 1991, http://www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html.
[15] Jedediah Purdy, "Environmentalism Was Once a Social-Justice Movement," *The* Atlantic, December 7, 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/12/how-the-environmental-movement-can-recover-its-soul/509831/.

In 1990, the SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP) sent a letter to the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) and the Group of Ten, a cohort of environmental nonprofits. The letter called for a "people's strategy which fully involves those who have historically been without power in this society" and called on these nonprofits to "cease operations in communities of color within 60 days, until you have hired leaders from those communities to the extent that they make up between 35-40 percent of your entire staff."[16] The SWOP letter was one of many outside calls to action, and one of many efforts to push the environmental movement toward diversity and more meaningful inclusion.

In the intervening two and a half decades, progress has been made, but slowly. Some major non-profits have staff, divisions, or volunteers focused on environmental justice, but many continue to largely neglect issues of justice and the unequal distribution of environmental benefits and burdens.[17] In addition, mainstream environmental NGOs, foundations, and government agencies all remain wildly unrepresentative of the broader US population. In all three institutions, racial minorities represent less than 16 percent of the staff and board members.[18] Furthermore, people of color are less likely to hold leadership positions within these organizations than their white counterparts. Similarly, volunteers tend to be white.[19] The people involved matter because they frame the messaging and decide what work gets done.

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[16] "Southwest Organizing Project letter to Big 10 Environmental groups," *EJNet, 1990,* http://www.ejnet.org/ej/swop.pdf.

[17] Marty Durlin, "The Group of 10 respond: The big greens grade themselves," *High Country News,* February 1, 2010, http://www.hcn.org/issues/42.2/the-group-of-10-responds?b_start:int=1#body.

[18] Dorceta Taylor, "The State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations," *Green 2.0 Working Group*, 2014, http://www.diversegreen.org/.

[19] Ibid.

Although this research focuses on environmental nonprofits, which are non-governmental entities, these nonprofits work with and around federal, state, and local governmental agencies. Laws and statutes on environmental justice remain highly relevant to the work of nonprofits. First, and perhaps most central, is President Clinton's 1994 Executive Order 12898, "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations," which requires federal agencies to consider environmental justice in their actions.[20] EO 12898 rested on Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and was accompanied by a Presidential Memorandum that required that "each Federal agency shall ensure that all programs or activities receiving Federal financial assistance that affect human health or the environment do not directly, or through contractual or other arrangements, use criteria, methods, or practices that discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin."[21]

The National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC), is also an important actor at the federal level. NEJAC is a federal advisory committee that has been providing "advice and recommendations about broad, cross-cutting issues related to environmental justice" and "independent advice and recommendations to the EPA administrator" since 1993.[22] Action at the federal level is shaped by and shapes the work of mainstream environmental nonprofits and environmental justice groups.

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[20] Executive Order 12898 of February 16, 1994, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, *Federal Register* (1994): 1-5, https://www.archives.gov/files/federal-register/executive-orders/pdf/12898.pdf.
[21] Title VI and Environmental Justice, *United States Environmental Protection Agency*, https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/title-vi-and-environmental-justice.
[22] National Environmental Justice Advisory Council, *United States Environmental Protection Agency*, https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/national-environmental-justice-advisory-council.

History of the Mainstream Environmental Movement

Early environmental and conservation movements had two central threads. First, there was the environmental advocacy of the working class (farmers, local residents, and labor unions), which was dedicated to improving the environment and human health. Second, there was the environmentalism of the conservationists, who tended to be white, have financial means, and be dedicated to wildlife and land preservation. Environmental history has largely written off these earlier movements, particularly the fights led by working class people. Timelines and narratives of the environmental movement often begin with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring,* neglecting to mention or engage with earlier efforts.[23]

A deeper examination of history is needed to understand the current state of environmental activism. Much of the contemporary mainstream environmental movement has stemmed from, or is still led by, the organizations that were built on the legacy of wildlife conservation and idealized visions of pastoral landscapes. Many of the environmental movement's earliest actors, including the Audubon Society, founded in 1886; the Sierra Club, founded in 1892; and the Nature Conservancy, founded in 1946, remain important players in the mainstream environmental movement.[24]

Early notions of protecting the environment for the environment's sake persist in the environmental movement. The history of the conservation movement, in particular, continues to shape organizational missions and actions of environmental nonprofits.

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[23] Chad Montrie, *A People's History of Environmentalism in the United States* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 6-12.
[24] A Fierce Green Fire: Timeline of Environmental Movement and History, *PBS*, April 15, 2014, http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/a-fierce-green-fire-timeline-of-environmental-movement/2988/.

Many nonprofits' missions still fail to engage with the people and communities living near and affected by the 'natural' spaces that they're concerned about preserving. Furthermore, the demographic patterns of early conservation movements persist in the environmental movement; most staff and volunteers at mainstream environmental organizations are white, and many are middle- and upper-middle class.[25]

Environmental Injustice in the Chesapeake Bay Region

The Chesapeake Bay is the largest estuary in the United States. It covers about 4,480 square miles, and holds more than 18 trillion gallons of water. More than 150 rivers and streams feed into the Chesapeake; the largest tributaries are the Susquehanna, Potomac, and James Rivers. The Bay watershed, the area of land that drains into the Bay, is 64,000 square miles, including parts of Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Delaware, New York, and Washington, DC.[26] Although general environmental issues, including deforestation, air pollution, and climate change, are present in the Bay watershed, water pollution is of particular import. This thesis focuses on Virginia nonprofits that work on environmental issues that are, in some way, shape, or form, related to the domain of water.

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[25] Dorceta Taylor, "The State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations," *Green 2.0 Working Group*, 2014, http://www.diversegreen.org/.
[26] "Chesapeake Bay," *National Wildlife* Federation, http://www.nwf.org/Wildlife/Wild-Places/Chesapeake-Bay.aspx.
"Chesapeake Bay Facts and Figures," *Maryland Sea Grant,* http://www.mdsg.umd.edu/topics/ecosystems-restoration/chesapeake-bay-facts-and-figures.
"10 Things You Didn't Know About the Bay," *Chesapeake Bay Foundation,* http://www.cbf.org/about-the-bay/10-things-you-didnt-know-about-the-bay.

In 2010, with authority given by the Clean Water Act, the EPA set a Total Maximum

Daily Load (TMDL), a pollution diet for the Bay and its rivers and streams.[27] Efforts to

restore the Bay and its subsidiary water bodies have produced slow improvement, but

there's still much progress to be made on nitrogen, phosphorus, sediment, and toxic

inflows into our waterways.[28]

Historical and contemporary examples of environmental injustice in Virginia abound.

Many current debates center on the proposed construction of the Mountain Valley

Pipeline (MVP) and the Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP). Opponents have voiced particular

concern about the ACP compressor station slated to be sited in Buckingham County,

which is a "historically marginalized, low-income, rural and isolated community…where

people are less likely to have the resources to resist."[29]

The Hampton Roads area has the highest rate of relative sea level rise on the East

Coast of the United States, and "the area is also second only to New Orleans, LA, as the

largest population center at risk from sea level rise in the country."[30] Although much of

the media coverage of sea level rise in Hampton Roads has focused on threats to the

naval base, local communities are also already affected by flooding.[31] For example, after

Hurricane Matthew, in 2016, several Hampton Roads jurisdictions declared a state of

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[27] "Chesapeake Bay TMDL Executive Summary," *United States Environmental Protection Agency,* https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-12/documents/bay_tmdl_executive_summary_final_12.29.10_final_1.pdf.
[28] "2016 State of the Bay," *Chesapeake Bay Foundation,* January 2017, http://www.cbf.org/about-the-bay/state-of-the-bay-report-2016.
[29] Lara Mack, "Environmental Justice in Buckingham County," *Appalachian Voices,* October 13, 2016, http://appvoices.org/tag/environmental-justice/.
[30] Forbes Tompkins and Christina Deconcini, "Sea-Level Rise and Its Impact on Virginia," *World Resources Institute,* June 2014, https://www.wri.org/sites/default/files/wri_factsheet_virginia_final.pdf.
[31] Yuki Noguchi, "As Sea Levels Rise, Norfolk is Sinking and Planning," *National Public Radio,* June 24, 2014, http://www.npr.org/2014/06/24/324891517/as-sea-levels-rise-norfolk-is-sinking-and-planning.

emergency due to flooding and debris in roadways.[32] Furthermore, the 1.7 million residents of the Hampton Roads region are at risk from future hurricanes and flooding, though the risks are borne disproportionately by communities with fewer resources. Experts and politicians acknowledge that the region still has no viable evacuation or emergency preparedness plan in the case of a major storm.[33] For example, State Managed Shelters (SMS) only have the capacity to hold 20,000 of the 50,000 residents the state predicts would need public shelter.[34] In the event of a major storm, marginalized communities, particularly poor communities and communities of color, will be at the greatest risk.

Climate change is not a distant threat; residents in the Hampton Roads area are already experiencing the effects of sea level rise and increased flooding. In fieldwork conducted for the Safe Coast Virginia project, residents reported losing cars in high tides, churches reported considering relocating, and businesses reported persistent flooding.[35] In the Flood of Voices project, community members, largely people of color from the South Hampton Roads community, discuss their experiences with sea level rise. A child holds a poster saying "when it rains, I miss school and an opportunity to learn," and a woman in a wheelchair holds a sign saying "nothing is accessible if everything is underwater."[36]

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[32] Megan Woo, "Hampton Roads area declares state of emergency due to flooding from Matthew," *NBC 12,* October 9, 2016, http://www.nbc12.com/story/33349938/hampton-roads-area-declares-state-of-emergency-due-to-flooding-from-matthew.

[33] "Climate Change in Coastal Virginia," *Chesapeake Climate Action Network,* October 24, 2014, http://chesapeakeclimate.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/VA-Safe-Coast-fact-sheet-Sept-2014-cited.pdf.

[34] Julian Walker, "State shelters couldn't hold half of expected evacuees," *The Virginian Pilot,* January 8, 2013, http://pilotonline.com/news/local/weather/storms/state-shelters-couldn-t-hold-half-of-expected-evacuees/article_aafb10aa-0208-5f2c-ba77-47f94bc6e61a.html.

[35] James McGarry, Bill Kovarik, and Rae Tyson, "Safe Coast Virginia: Climate Change Threats and Practical Solutions for Coastal Virginia," *Chesapeake Climate Action Network,* 2014, http://chesapeakeclimate.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Safe-Coast-Virginia-Report-July2014.pdf.

[36] "Flood of Voices," *Flood of Voices Project,* http://floodofvoices.tumblr.com/.

Environmental injustices related to climate change are predicted to increase in the region as sea levels continue to rise.[37]

Coal ash, the waste produced from the burning of coal at coal fired power plants, has also become an important issue in environmental and environmental justice circles in Virginia and the Bay region in recent years. Coal ash contains many toxics, including heavy metals that pose health threats to local communities. A Virginia Conservation Network report notes that experts estimate that 2.73 million tons of coal ash are generated in Virginia each year, and that there are 31 active or inactive coal ash ponds in the state.[38] These ponds are often unlined, and toxic coal ash leaches into groundwater systems or drains into waterways. The burdens of these ponds are not equally shared; "seventy-six percent of the coal ash ponds and landfills in Virginia are located in areas that are below the average state income and/or in communities of color." For example, the Possum Point plant is sited in a community where 75 percent of residents are people of color. Communities of color and poor communities are exposed to unequal environmental burdens from coal ash ponds, and often lack health care, which compounds these effects. [39]

Air pollution continues to be a concern in Virginia, particularly in the Southeast Community of Newport News. The Southeast CARE Coalition reports that "respiratory

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[37] Michael Boyer and Erica Penn, "Tidal Turmoil: Environmental Justice and Sea Level Rise in Hampton Roads: A Norfolk Case Study," *Virginia Coastal Policy Clinic at William & Mary Law School,* 2013, https://law.wm.edu/academics/programs/jd/electives/clinics/vacoastal/documents/march2014reports/tideturmoil2.pdf.

[38] Virginia's Toxic Coal Ash Problem: The Need to Protect the Health, Safety and Water of Virginia," *Virginia Conservation Network,* https://content.sierraclub.org/creative-archive/sites/content.sierraclub.org.creative-archive/files/pdfs/1021%20VA%20Coal%20Ash%20Report%2005_web.pdf.

[39] Ibid.

disease rates for African Americans in Newport News are nearly twice the average rate in Virginia."[40] Furthermore, in 2013, the Southeast Community, which is 77 percent African American, was affected by 72 percent of the overall toxic air emissions in Newport News.[41] This air pollution comes from Newport News Shipbuilding, but also from car and truck emissions, coal piles, and other emissions that are difficult to pinpoint. Air pollution is an environmental justice issue in Virginia and the broader Chesapeake Bay region.[42]

Pipelines, flooding and sea level rise, coal ash, and air pollution are just some of the issues of environmental justice in the Chesapeake Bay. All environmental problems in the region have the capacity to, and often do, unequally benefit and burden particular communities in the Bay area.

Communication by Environmental Nonprofits

Simply put, communications by nonprofits matter, both for their success as organizations, and for the broader move toward environmental protection. In *Communicating Nature: How We Create and Understand Environmental Messages*, Julia Corbett, a scholar who specializes in environmental communications, says "it is communication that sparks people to join environmental groups, and communication that urges them to take action, give money, and renew membership."[43]

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[40] 2015 Air Pollution Solution Campaign," *Southeast CARE Coalition,* 2015, http://www.southeastcare.com/uploads/2/0/9/3/20933080/fact_sheet.toxics.docx.pdf.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Tamara Dietrich, "Southeast community bears brunt of city's air pollution, report shows," *Daily Press,* July 23, 2015, http://www.dailypress.com/news/science/dp-nws-air-pollution-southeast-community-20150724-story.html.
[43] Julia Corbett, *Communicating nature: how we create and understand environmental messages* (Washington DC: Island Press, 2006), 293.

Environmental nonprofits are often central actors in the framing of environmental

problems. Framing, originally described by the sociologist Erving Goffman, refers to the

ways in which people and organizations use certain framing (language, imagery, etc.) to

help people interpret and make sense of information.[44] The framing environmental

nonprofits use affects action in the nonprofit sphere, but also influences governmental

policies and public debate. Corbett notes "frames facilitate communication because they

carry a great deal of symbolic meaning and help organize and structure our social

world"[45] Furthermore, the framing done by environmental organizations, particularly

newer and more grassroots organizations, tends to be comparatively progressive, thus

pushing forward more static bureaucratic institutions.[46]

There are also noteworthy differences in environmental communications by grassroots

organizations and more mainstream organizations. As Corbett notes,

> *The current mainstream movement has defined and communicated the environment and environmental issues in a somewhat restricted fashion. Throughout its history, the movement has concentrated on preservation and pollution, and historically it has used institutional tactics…It's also true that from its inception, the environmental movement (like other movements) has attracted leaders and members who are white, middle or upper middle class, and well-educated social and intellectual elites. Appealing to a broader base has fallen to the relatively resource-poor, informal grassroots groups, such as those working for environmental justice.[47]*

In his article "Nonprofit Advocacy and Civic Engagement on the Internet, David Suárez,

a scholar who specializes in nonprofits and civic engagement, notes that "with the rise

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[44] Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience (*Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986).
[45] Corbett 308.
[46] Corbett 288 – 289.
[47] Corbett 307.

and the development of the Internet, Web sites provide a novel opportunity for nonprofits

to scale their social impact and expand their civic purpose."[48] Online communication

allows nonprofits to reach a far broader audience more efficiently.

Other scholars note the different ways in which mainstream environmental groups and

grassroots environmental groups communicate. In *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of*

Environmental Activism, Kevin Michael DeLuca, a scholar of environmental

communication and humanities, notes that the language used by environmental justice

groups serves to "undermine the culture-nature dichotomy," the notion that man and

nature are distinct separable entities, so commonly promoted by the modern political

system and mainstream environmental nonprofits working within it.[49] DeLuca goes on to

note that:

> *The rhetorical efforts of environmental justice activists to dislocate and redefine*
> *nature as the places people inhabit and to put humans among other living beings*
> *open up unprecedented opportunities for radical critiques of all forms of*
> *domination and for grassroots formulations of liberation projects previously*
> *constrained by modernism, enables such groups to focus on issues and deploy*
> *tactics that expand what counts as environmental politics. Characterizing*
> *mainstream environmental groups, as narrow, racist, classist, and bureaucratic,*
> *environmental justice activists' redefining of nature/environment authorizes them*
> *to care about wilderness and care about themselves and their communities. It*
> *enables them to organize on issues that go beyond wildlife and include people.[50]*

This scholarly work on nonprofits demonstrates the importance of environmental

communications, and the ways in which these communications differ between

mainstream environmental nonprofits and grassroots environmental justice groups. It's

worth noting that some of the communication done by environmental nonprofits,

particularly grassroots organizations, occurs in person. However, this thesis explores the

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[48] David F. Suárez, "Nonprofit Advocacy and Civic Engagement on the Internet," *Administration & Society 41,* no. 3 (2009), http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0095399709332297.
[49] Kevin Michael DeLuca, *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2005), 78.
[50] DeLuca 79.

importance of communications to an external audience, focusing on online communications.

Environmental justice communications are not necessarily a proxy for environmental programmatic action or internal justice-oriented measures. Organizations may well do justice-oriented work and fail to communicate that fact, or may discuss issues of justice while taking little policy-oriented action on environmental justice issues. Words and actions don't always align. This thesis does not aim to use justice-oriented language as a proxy for environmental justice-oriented action. Instead, it seeks to better understand the words that are being used in online messaging around environment and justice. In their own right, the words that are put to these issues matter.

Theoretical Work Relevant to Environmental Justice

Rob Nixon's work on slow violence is relevant to this conversation about environmental justice. Nixon points out that "falling bodies, burning towers, exploding heads have a visceral, page-turning potency that tales of slow violence cannot match. Stories of toxic buildup, massing greenhouse gases, or desertification may be cataclysmic, but they're scientifically convoluted cataclysms in which casualties are deferred, often for generations." He describes the difficulty of "giving symbolic shape and plot to formless threats whose fatal repercussions are dispersed across space and time," and goes on to discuss how the nature of these threats results in them being systematically under-discussed and under-covered.[51] Environmental injustice is often a slow violence against bodies that are already marginalized by other forms of systemic racism and oppression.

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[51] Rob Nixon, "Slow Violence, Gender, and the Environmentalism of the Poor," *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies 13* (2007): 14 – 15.

CHAPTER 2: THE OVERALL STATE OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMUNICATIONS AMONG ENVIRONMENTAL NONPROFITS

Establishing baselines is crucial, particularly for non-profit work. To evaluate the progress that has been made, it's important to have a sense of where the work began. In the second chapter of this thesis, I seek to develop a baseline for environmental justice communications among Virginia, Regional, and National Chesapeake Bay nonprofits.

For this research, data was assembled and analyzed to answer the question: To what extent do environmental nonprofits use their external communications to actively engage with the Environmental Justice dimensions of the issues they work on? More specifically, this research examines the extent to which Virginia members, Regional members, and National members of the Choose Clean Water Coalition discuss environmental justice on their websites.

Chanté Coleman, head of the Choose Clean Water Coalition, said in a phone interview on April 12 that "in my mind the environmental organizations working in the Chesapeake are pretty much all of our members." She went on to note that some nonprofits that work on food, land, civil rights, and agriculture haven't been brought into the coalition, in part because their missions may not perfectly align. The Choose Clean Water Coalition is broadly representative of nonprofits working on clean water issues in the region, and somewhat representative of the broader regional environmental movement.

Hypotheses

Overarching hypothesis:

I expect that Virginia, Regional, and National nonprofits are all unlikely to actively engage with the justice dimensions of the issues they work on.

Specific Hypotheses

1. I expect that nonprofits' mission statements will be unlikely to engage with environmental justice.

2. I expect nonprofits will be quite unlikely to have issue pages dedicated explicitly to environmental justice.

3. I expect nonprofits will be unlikely to have a significant number of hits (five or more) for the phrase "environmental justice."

4. I expect the "environmental justice" to "environment" ratio to be low (less than 1:10).

5. I expect nonprofits to be more likely to mention environmental justice indicators on their issues pages and in their newsletters than to have an issue page dedicated to environmental justice or to have environmental justice indicators in their mission statement.

Quantitative Methodology

I developed the coding scheme using the Choose Clean Water Coalition's list of Maryland members. I used a random number generator to randomly select 15 of the 75 Maryland Choose Clean Water Coalition members. Using their websites, I refined my initial coding scheme in an effort to best capture the extent to which nonprofits are engaging in environmental justice communications.

Once I developed the coding scheme, I applied it to the Choose Clean Water Coalition's Virginia members. Pulling from the Choose Clean Water Coalition list ensures that this research focuses on nonprofits that work in some way, shape, or form on clean water

issues, excluding some nonprofits that work solely on more general environmental

issues within Virginia and regionally.

For each nonprofit, I am assessing:

1. Whether their mission statement contains environmental justice indicators.

2. Whether their search tool turns up anything for the phrase "environmental justice" and then looking at the ratio of environmental justice: environment hits to get a sense of scale:
    a. Do they have more than 5 environmental justice hits
    b. Is the environmental justice: environment Search Ratio > 10%?

3. Whether they have a tab or page specifically dedicated to environmental justice.

4. Whether their issues or "work we do" pages contain environmental justice indicators.

5. Whether their newsletters (from 2016 – 2017) contain environmental justice indicators.

Environmental justice is about the unequal distribution of benefits or burdens;

environmental justice markers are words and phrases that acknowledge this inequity.

Discussion of race, class, disproportionate burdens, and justice would all fall into the

category of environmental justice-oriented communications.

The following words and phrases (and their variants) are coded as environmental justice

communications:

- African-American / Black
- Community of color
- Disproportionate
- Environmental Justice
- Hispanic / Latino
- Inequality
- Inequity / Equity
- Injustice
- Justice
- Low-income

- Marginalized
- Poverty
- Race
- Racism
- Socioeconomic status
- Tribal Community / Native American
- Underserved
- Unequal
- Vulnerable

It is possible that local nonprofits are engaging with environmental justice communications that aren't recognized by this coding scheme. In particular, they may refer by name to specific areas or communities that are environmental justice communities, which this coding scheme would not capture.

Baseline Assessment Results

Overall Results: Choose Clean Water Coalition Virginia, Regional, and National nonprofits

Mission statement mention of environmental justice indicator	Search for "environmental justice" on the site	Issue pages dedicated to environmental justice	Issue pages mentioning environmental justice indicators	Newsletters mentioning environmental justice indicators
3 of 84	39 of 65 had at least one hit for environmental justice; only 17 of 65 had more than 5 hits	5 of 81	19 of 81	6 of 21

VIRGINIA NONPROFITS

This section analyzes 40 of the 42 nonprofits from the Choose Clean Water Coalition's Virginia membership list. One nonprofit, All From One, was excluded because of a lack of a web presence to code, and the Shenandoah Riverkeeper was excluded because it is a branch of the Potomac Riverkeeper Network and shares a web presence. The

branches of the Potomac Riverkeeper Network are coded together under the Regional nonprofit category.

The Virginia nonprofits were coded along four major categories

1. Mission statements and environmental justice indicators

2. Searches of environmental justice on the site

3. Issues pages and "work we do" pages and environmental justice indicators

4. Newsletters and environmental justice indicators

Broad takeaways

Environmental justice was almost entirely absent from Virginia nonprofits' mission statements, and largely absent in searches of their websites and their newsletters. Slightly more of the nonprofits mentioned environmental justice indicators somewhere in their issues pages, but this was sporadic at best. Overall, the presence of environmental justice communications among environmental nonprofits was minimal.

Mission statements

Mission statements are an obvious place to start when discussing a nonprofit's external communications. All 40 nonprofits had mission statements or similar statements of intention. Of these 40, only two included any sort of environmental justice indicators in their mission statements. First, the Southeast CARE Coalition explicitly mentioned "ethnic identity" (which is close enough to my coding scheme, which includes "race") in

its mission statement.[52] Second, Virginia Organizing explicitly states that it is a "grassroots organization dedicated to challenging injustice."[53] None of the other 38 nonprofits used any of the environmental justice indicators, or any language similar to any of the environmental justice indicators.

Searches of environmental justice on the site

Although it's a blunt measure, I chose to check how frequently the phrase "environmental justice" appeared on nonprofits' websites. Nonprofits can be engaging with issues of injustice without explicitly using the phrase "environmental justice." However, it seems unlikely that nonprofits would use the phrase "environmental justice" without engaging with environmental justice in their communications.

Of the 40 nonprofits coded, 23 had a way for users to search their site. Of these 23, only seven had any hits for the phrase "environmental justice." Furthermore, of these seven, four had fewer than five hits. Only Appalachian Voices, the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter, and Virginia Organizing had more than five results.

To get a sense of scale for what the number of hits meant, I also searched each site for the word "environment." For Appalachian Voices, the ratio of "environmental justice" to "environment" hits was 627 to 9530, or approximately 1:15. For Virginia Organizing, the ratio was 50 to 225, or 1:4.5. For the Sierra Club, the ratio was 59 to 93, or roughly 1:1.5. It's noteworthy that only two of the 23 nonprofits with search capabilities used the

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[52] "About Us," *Southeast CARE Coalition,* http://www.southeastcare.com/about-us.html.
[53] "Who is Virginia Organizing," *Virginia Organizing,* https://www.virginia-organizing.org/who-is-virginia-organizing/,

phrase "environmental justice" more than a tenth as often as they used the phrase "environment."

Issues pages

Of the 40 Virginia nonprofits coded, 36 had an issues page or a "work we do" page. Issues pages were assessed along two different metrics: (1) Was there an issues page dedicated to environmental justice? (2) Did other issues pages mention environmental justice indicators?

Only one of the 36 nonprofits had an issue page explicitly dedicated to environmental justice. The Sierra Club's Virginia Chapter's website had a page on Environmental Justice that specifically mentions work on coal dust in Norfolk and air quality in Newport News.[54]

Five of the 36 nonprofits had issues pages that mentioned environmental justice indicators.

- Appalachian Voices used the phrase "environmental justice" under its Cleaning Up Coal Ash issue page.[55]
- Friends of the Rivers of Virginia mentions the effects a proposed reservoir would have on "Indian archaeological sites" on the Mattaponi Update page, acknowledging the burden these issues have on tribal communities.[56]

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[54] "Environmental Justice," *Virginia Sierra Club,* http://www.sierraclub.org/virginia/environmental-justice.
[55] "Cleaning Up Coal Ash," *Appalachian Voices,* http://appvoices.org/coalash/.
[56] Rex Springston, "Mattaponi Update: Newport News abandons reservoir plans," *Friends of the Rivers of Virginia,* September 22, 2009, http://www.forva.org/MattaponiUpdate.htm.

- The Partnership for Smarter Growth mentions the "Anti-Poverty Commission" in the context of the "Broad Street Bus Rapid Transit" page, acknowledging the disproportionate burdens of environmental issues along class lines.[57]

- The Sierra Club's Virginia Chapter mentions on its "Air Pollution Solutions" page that "Respiratory disease death rates for African Americans in Newport News are nearly twice the average rate in Virginia. African Americans compose 77% of the population of the Southeast Community according to the most recent census."[58]

- Virginia Organizing has a link titled "I Stand for Environmental Justice" at the top of its environment page.[59]

On these issues pages, the use of environmental justice terminology tends to be fairly sporadic, and often doesn't signify a broader engagement with issues of environmental justice. Nevertheless, even this low level of engagement is noteworthy, because it shows some level of understanding that environmental issues affect communities in unequal ways. This gives a base for nonprofits to build on.

Newsletters

Of the 12 nonprofits with newsletters, only two had any mention of environmental justice indicators. Appalachian Voices frequently mentions environmental justice issues in its newsletters, with article titles such as "How coal ash impacts civil rights" (April 2016) and

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[57] "Broad Street Bus Rapid Transit," *Partnership for Smarter Growth,* http://psgrichmond.org/content/broad-street-bus-rapid-transit.
[58] "Air Pollution Solutions," *Virginia Sierra Club,* http://www.sierraclub.org/virginia/air-pollution-solutions.
[59] "Environment," *Virginia Organizing,* https://www.virginia-organizing.org/category/the-issues/environment/.

"Environmental justice in rural Virginia" (October 2016).[60] The Elizabeth River Project

engaged with environmental justice in its Mudflats Summer 2016 Annual Report,

discussing "at-risk urban youth."[61] Although this terminology does not directly match

language from my coding scheme, it aligns with words like underserved, marginalized,

and vulnerable, and thus is counted as an environmental justice indicator in this context.

It's worth noting that some of the nonprofits coded had posted up to a dozen

newsletters, many of which were several pages long, and there were still zero mentions

of environmental justice indicators.

REGIONAL NONPROFITS

This section includes the 25 nonprofits from the Choose Clean Water Coalition's regional

membership list. As with Shenandoah Riverkeeper (under Virginia nonprofits), the

Potomac Riverkeeper and Upper Potomac Riverkeeper were all coded together as the

Potomac Riverkeeper Network (PRKN), as it's the unified web presence.

The Regional nonprofits were coded along four major categories:

1. Mission statements and environmental justice indicators

2. Searches of environmental justice on the site

3. Issues and "work we do" pages and environmental justice indicators

4. Newsletters and environmental justice indicators

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[60] "The Appalachian Advocate," *Appalachian Voices,* http://appvoices.org/advocate/,
[61] "Mudflats Summer 2016," *Elizabeth River Project,*
http://www.elizabethriver.org/sites/default/files/ERP%20Mudflats%20Newsletter%202016%207.
22-FINAL.pdf.

Broad takeaways

Environmental justice was almost entirely absent from Regional nonprofits' mission statements, and largely absent in searches of their websites. More of the nonprofits mentioned environmental justice indicators somewhere in their issues pages, but these mentions were often isolated. In their newsletters, there was more, deeper engagement with environmental justice. Overall, the presence of environmental justice communications among regional environmental nonprofits was minimal.

Mission statements

All 23 nonprofits had mission statements or similar statements of intention. Of these 23, only one included any sort of environmental justice indicator in its mission statement. The Chesapeake Foodshed Network's stated goal is to "build a sustainable, resilient, inclusive, and equitable regional food system."[62] The inclusion of the word "equitable" flags it as having justice-oriented terminology in my coding scheme. From a substantive perspective, the use of the word "equitable" shows an acknowledgement of the current inequities (and unequal distribution of access to food, in this case). None of the other 22 Regional nonprofits used any of the environmental justice indicators (or any language similar to any of the environmental justice indicators).

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[62] "About," *Chesapeake Foodshed Network,* https://chesapeakefoodshed.net/index.php/what-is-cfn/.

Searches of environmental justice on the site

Of the 23 nonprofits, 13 had some sort of search tool. Only four of the 13 nonprofits with a search tool had more than five hits for environmental justice: Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Envision Frederick, and the Southern Environmental Law Center.

To get a sense of scale for what the number of hits meant, I also searched each site for the word "environment." For Chesapeake Bay Foundation the ratio of "environmental justice" to "environment" hits was 10 to 3040, or approximately 1:300. For Envision Frederick, the ratio was 6 to 370 or 1:30. Lastly, the Southern Environmental Law Center had a ratio of 36 to 100, or 1:3. Again, this gives a sense of scale in terms of how frequently environmental justice is directly discussed by nonprofits in their external communications.

Issues pages

All 23 of the Regional nonprofits coded had issues pages. Issues pages were assessed using two different metrics: (1) Was there an issues page dedicated to environmental justice?, and (2) Did other issues pages mention environmental justice indicators?

Only two of the 23 nonprofits had an issue page explicitly dedicated to environmental justice: the Anacostia Riverkeeper Network and Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake. The Anacostia Riverkeeper Network's website has six challenges listed: one is environmental justice. The issue page notes that the Anacostia flows "through the poorest neighborhoods in the District," and mentions "toxic dumps" and the "health risks

of living near power plants and landfills."[63] The website also cites the EPA's Office of

Environmental Justice, as well as the 17 Principles of Environmental Justice.[64]

Unsurprisingly, given its geographic location and affected communities, the Anacostia

Riverkeeper Network actively engages with environmental justice issues on its website.

Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake also actively engages with environmental justice

on its website; under its Advocacy section, Environmental Justice is listed as one of the

six issues that they focus on. Their website says explicitly: "often, it is the most

vulnerable and politically disadvantaged communities that bear the brunt of negative

environmental impacts from pollution. This environmental injustice and environmental

racism is unfair and immoral."[65] They focus their work on injustice in the form of

environmental racism, as well as intergenerational justice, saying that "beyond the

environmental injustices we witness borne by the impoverished and communities of

color, poor stewardship of the environment also represents an immense injustice to the

most voiceless of populations: the unborn generations that will follow in our footsteps

here on Earth."[66]

An additional seven of the nonprofits engaged with environmental justice in some way

on their issues pages. The Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay mentions a program that

"will help engage the urban African American community in environmental activities, a

community that is mostly underserved by our current network of partners."[67] The

Anacostia Watershed Society noted that "existing fish consumption advisories are not

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[63] "Environmental Justice," *Anacostia Riverkeeper,*
http://www.anacostiariverkeeper.org/environmental-justice.
[64] Ibid.
[65] "Environmental Justice," *Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake,*
http://www.interfaithchesapeake.org/ej,
[66] Ibid.
[67] "Key Programs: Reducing Stormwater Runoff," *Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay,*
https://www.allianceforthebay.org/our-work/key-program-focuses/reducing-stormwater-runoff/ready/.

adequately penetrating at-risk populations," noteworthy given the subsistence fishing that working class people in the region rely on.[68] The Chesapeake Foodshed Network discusses the importance of addressing "disparities in power, money, land access, and other resources that harm people of color, people with low incomes, immigrants, and other marginalized groups," explicitly engaging with the fact that communities are not equally burdened.[69] The Coalition for Smarter Growth mentions environmental justice indicators on several of its county and city-specific pages, mentioning lower-income communities and an area in Prince George's County that is a "strong immigrant community, with half of the residents born outside of the United States."[70] The Green Muslims' website also actively engages with environmental justice; on their programs page, the caption on a video of the director mentions "lessons from Islam that inspire her commitment to work for environmental justice."[71] Last, Interfaith Power and Light mentions a Climate Ethics Campaign that calls for policies that "act in a just and equitable manner."[72] While much of this engagement is still fairly limited, it shows a broader willingness to engage with issues of environmental injustice.

Newsletters

Of the six Regional nonprofits with newsletters, three mentioned environmental justice indicators. The Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay had 12 newsletters, which mentioned multiple times an event they collaborated on, an "Environmental Justice Forum in

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[68] "Subsistence Fishing on the Anacostia River," *Anacostia Watershed Society,* http://www.anacostiaws.org/fishing.

[69] "Regional Discussions: January 2017 Network Development Series," *Chesapeake Foodshed Network,* http://chesapeakefoodshed.net/index.php/january-2017-2/.

[70] "Prince George's County," *Coalition for Smarter Growth,* http://www.smartergrowth.net/maryland/prince-georges-county/.

[71] "Programs," *Green Muslims,* http://www.greenmuslims.org/programs/.

[72] "Speak Out," *Interfaith Power & Light,* http://gwipl.org/speak-out/.

Newport News, VA." They also mentioned other environmental justice-oriented events,

including a "Free African American Health Program Community Day" and a talk by Jorge

Ribs, President and CEO of the Mid-Atlantic Hispanic Chamber of Commerce on the

"importance of involving businesses, especially minority-owned businesses, in local

environmental initiatives."[73] In its Summer 2016 newsletter, the Chesapeake Legal

Alliance mentioned its work to help support the EPA's 2020 Environmental Justice

Action Agenda. More specifically, the newsletter mentioned "overburdened

communities," "tribes and indigenous people," and "lead disparities."[74] Last, Interfaith

Partners for the Chesapeake mentioned environmental justice indicators in several of

their newsletters, including "water justice," and "the marginalized and vulnerable."[75] They

also discussed how "Baltimore's poorest neighborhoods…saw how the environment was

harming some people a lot more than others" and moral cases to be made for

environmental justice.[76]

Overall, the three newsletters that engaged with environmental justice did so in

moderately extensive ways, discussing both specific communities and the realities of

disproportionate burdens.

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[73] "Newsletters," *Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay,* https://www.allianceforthebay.org/news-and-events/newsletters/.
[74] "Newsletters," *Chesapeake Legal Alliance,* http://www.chesapeakelegal.org/index.php?/news/newsletters/.
[75] "The Latest News Archive," *Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake,* http://www.interfaithchesapeake.org/emails_archive.
[76] Ibid.

NATIONAL NONPROFITS

This section includes the 22 nonprofits from the Choose Clean Water Coalition's national membership list.

The National nonprofits were coded along four major categories:

1. Mission statements and environmental justice indicators
2. Searches of environmental justice on the site
3. Issues and "work we do" pages and environmental justice indicators
4. Newsletters and environmental justice indicators

Broad takeaways

Environmental justice was absent from national nonprofits' mission statements. However, more of the national environmental nonprofits had hits for environmental justice on their websites, and more had a higher level of engagement. More of the nonprofits mentioned environmental justice indicators somewhere in their issues pages, but, again, these mentions were often isolated. Newsletters were largely not used by National nonprofits.

Coding the National nonprofits from the Choose Clean Water Coalition list was more complicated, because some of the work they do isn't strictly environmental or Bay-oriented. I chose to code all of their communications because it wasn't possible to effectively distinguish "relevance." Furthermore, the language they use in their broader work still matters, and shapes the way their environmental justice communications are produced and received.

Mission statements

All but one of the 22 nonprofits had mission statements or similar statements of intention. None of them mentioned environmental justice indicators or anything that approached an environmental justice focus. National nonprofits tend to be larger, and, therefore, may refrain from using environmental justice-oriented language in an effort to seem more universal and appeal to more people.

Searches of environmental justice on the site

As with the Virginia and Regional nonprofits, I searched for "environmental justice" to see how frequently the phrase appeared in nonprofits' external communications. All 19 of the nonprofits that had functional search tools had at least one hit for "environmental justice."

However, 10 of these 19 nonprofits had fewer than five hits for "environmental justice." Many of these organizations had several hundred hits for "environment," thus having extremely low "environmental justice" to "environment" ratios. Among the nine that had at least five hits for "environmental justice," there was significant variability, with "environmental justice"/"environment" ranging from 1 percent (e.g. one environmental justice mention for every 100 environment mentions) to 24 percent (e.g. about a 1:4 ratio of environmental justice: environment hits). Three organizations had at least a 1:10 ratio of "environmental justice" to "environment."

Issues pages

All 22 of the National nonprofits had issues or "work we do" pages that could be assessed for whether they were explicitly devoted to environmental justice or whether they engaged with environmental justice.

Only two of the 22 nonprofits had an issue page explicitly dedicated to environmental justice: The Center for Progressive Reform and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). On their website, the Center for Progressive Reform had an Environmental Justice page under the environmental policy section of their Research & Issues page, which explicitly stated "pollution and the negative health effects it causes affect all of us, but not equally."[77] Similarly, the NRDC lists Environmental Justice as one of its 16 core programs on its mission statement page, explicitly stating that "across America, low-income communities and people of color are forced to shoulder pollution's heaviest burdens and often don't have a fair share of basic environmental amenities, such as access to open space, healthy foods, and public transit."[78]

Of the 22 nonprofits, seven nonprofits engaged with environmental justice somewhere on their issues pages, including the two that had an issue page dedicated specifically to environmental justice.

Some of these nonprofits merely cite or highlight articles about environmental justice. For example, the Clean Water Action has articles on Standing Rock and "native folks"

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[77] "Environmental Justice: Pollution's Peril Amplified," *Center for Progressive Reform,* http://www.progressivereform.org/environmentalJustice.cfm.
[78] "Environmental Justice," *National Resources Defense Council,* https://www.nrdc.org/about/environmental-justice.

and "ancestral lands," as well as their Toxic Chemicals Page, which highlights a press release called "Newark Makes History With First-In-The-Nation Environmental Justice Ordinance."[79] Similarly, the Environmental Working Group references a piece called "Trump's EPA Budget Cuts Will Hit Low-Income Communities of Color Hardest."[80] The National Parks Conservation Association highlights an article called "Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument Will Preserve Pivotal Sites from America's Civil Rights History," which mentions the "struggle for equality."[81]

Three of the five nonprofits that had issue pages that mentioned environmental justice discussed environmental justice in the context of the work they are doing or an explicit organizational focus on environmental justice. First, the Izaak Walton League of America mentions efforts to "build an effective low-income Community Solar Garden model."[82] Second, the National Wildlife Federation has a subpage on its Extreme Weather Page called "Disproportionate Impact" that says that "some people are more vulnerable than others to intensifying weather and climate extremes. People of color, Indigenous peoples, low-income communities, and people who are old, young, or already sick are at greatest risk."[83] Lastly, on the NRDC website, the Climate Change, Communities, and Health pages all link to their Protecting Communities page: "Low-income communities

[79] "Newark Makes History With First-In-The-Nation Environmental Justice Ordinance," *Clean Water Action,* http://www.cleanwateraction.org/features/newark-makes-history-first-nation-environmental-justice-ordinance.

[80] "Trump's EPA Budget Cuts Will Hit Lower-Income Communities of Color Hardest," *Environmental Working Group,* March 1, 2017, http://www.ewg.org/testimony-official-correspondence/trump-s-epa-budget-cuts-will-hit-lower-income-communities-color.

[81] "Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument Will Preserve Pivotal Civil Rights History," *National Parks Conservation Association,* January 12, 2017, https://www.npca.org/articles/1442-birmingham-civil-rights-national-monument-will-preserve-pivotal-civil#sm.001dc8e2o1cobf8iqic1kgymwtcsr.

[82] "Conservation: Clean Air & Energy," *Izaak Walton League of America,* http://www.iwla.org/conservation/clean-air-and-energy/local.

[83] "Extreme Weather and Climate Justice," *National Wildlife Federation,* https://www.nwf.org/Wildlife/Threats-to-Wildlife/Global-Warming/Global-Warming-is-Causing-Extreme-Weather/Extreme-Weather-and-Climate-Justice.aspx.

are disproportionally affected by health problems associated with fossil fuels."[84] These three nonprofits' references to environmental justice are tied to their programmatic aims or their areas of focus.

Newsletters

Only three of the National nonprofits had newsletters available from 2016 or 2017. Of the three, only the River Network engaged with environmental justice in its newsletter. In the January 2017 edition, it mentioned several issues relevant to environmental justice: (1) an article on Integrated Water Management talks about working to "ensure equitable outcomes", (2) it discusses "cost-effective and equitable ways to do this" that will bring additional benefits to the affected communities in an article on NJ water infrastructure, (3) it mentions that "the historically black neighborhoods surrounding Turner Field have endured decades of infrastructure-driven injustices", and (4) references ECO-Action, a "local non-profit focused on issues of environmental justice."[85]

OVERALL FINDINGS

	Mission Statement	Environmental Justice search (at least 1 hit)	Environmental Justice search (at least 5 hits)	Environmental justice: environment	Issue page dedicated	Issue page mention	Newsletter
Virginia	2 of 40	7 of 23	3 of 23	2 of 3 had at least 1:10	1 of 36	5 of 36	2 of 12
Regional	1 of 23	13 of 23	4 of 23	1 of 4 had at least 1:10	2 of 23	7 of 23	3 of 6
National	0 of 21	19 of 19	9 of 19	3 of 9 had at least 1:10	2 of 22	7 of 22	1 of 3

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[84] "Protecting Communities," *National Resources Defense Council,* https://www.nrdc.org/issues/protecting-communities.
[85] "River Voices Newsletter," *River Network,* https://www.rivernetwork.org/get-involved/stay-informed/river-voices-newsletter/.

Overall, engagement with environmental justice in mission statements was minimal across Virginia, Regional, and National nonprofits. Similarly, across all three groups of nonprofits, the vast majority of nonprofits did not have an issue page dedicated to environmental justice. Both of these findings are relatively unsurprising; incorporating environmental justice into a mission statement or dedicating an issue page to environmental justice both take a different level of commitment than mentioning an environmental justice indicator on an issue page or in a newsletter.

Again, logically, other indicators seem to show a higher rate of engagement with environmental justice, particularly the issue page mentions of environmental justice indicators. Issue page mentions of indicators sometimes referred to internal efforts or commitments to justice, but also sometimes discussed outside efforts on environmental justice issues. An isolated issue page mention is not necessarily illustrative of a broader commitment to environmental-justice-oriented communications.

In the same vein, having at least one hit for environmental justice is not a high bar, yet it's a bar that almost 75 percent of Virginia nonprofits and almost 50 percent of Regional nonprofits did not meet. Environmental justice: Environment ratios also show that, even when nonprofits do mention environmental justice, it tends to be infrequent.

There were not many newsletters overall (less than 20), and the majority were from Virginia, so they don't necessarily lend themselves to comparative work. Broadly, however, it's useful to note that newsletters are a much more heavily employed communication tool by Virginia nonprofits than by Regional or National nonprofits.

Overall, coding of mission statements, search results, issue pages, and newsletters broadly supported the hypotheses: Virginia, Regional, and National nonprofits are all unlikely to actively engage with the justice dimensions of the issues they work on.

1. I expect that nonprofits' mission statements will be exceedingly unlikely to engage with environmental justice.

    This hypothesis is supported by the data: only three of 84 nonprofits with a mission statement had an environmental justice indicator in their mission statement.

2. I expect nonprofits will be quite unlikely to have issue pages dedicated explicitly to environmental justice.

    This hypothesis is supported by the data: only five out of 81 nonprofits with issue pages had an issue page dedicated to environmental justice.

3. I expect nonprofits will be unlikely to have a significant number of hits (five or more) for the phrase "environmental justice.

    This hypothesis is supported by the data: 16 out of the 65 nonprofits had five or more hits (though nine of those were National nonprofits, which had a larger web presence and more hits overall).

4. I expect the "environmental justice" to "environment ratio" to be low (<1:10).

    This hypothesis is supported by the data: only 6 out of the 65 nonprofits had a ratio of "environmental justice" to "environment" that was higher than 1:10.

5. I expect nonprofits to be more likely to mention environmental justice indicators on their issues pages and in their newsletters than to have an issue page dedicated to environmental justice or to have environmental justice indicators in their mission statement.

    This hypothesis is supported by the data. Nonprofits were more likely to have environmental justice indicators on their issue pages (19 of 81) or newsletters (6 of 21) than they were to dedicate an issue page (5 of 81) to environmental justice or to have environmental justice indicators in their mission statements (3 of 84).

CHAPTER 3: ANALYSTS AND ADVOCATES ADDRESS COMPLEXITIES AND IMPLICATIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMUNICATIONS

In an effort to better understand the complexities and implications of environmental justice communications, I conducted eleven semi-structured interviews with individuals from environmental nonprofits, the environmental justice movement, the government, and academia. In interviews with individuals from environmental nonprofits and environmental justice groups, I tried to speak with people from different scales and types of organizations. In particular, I aimed to speak both with individuals at nonprofits that do engage with environmental justice and individuals at nonprofits that don't engage with environmental justice. Understanding the spectrum of presence to absence of environmental justice communications gives a more nuanced understanding of the current baseline of environmental justice communications and the prospects for progress.

I conducted phone interviews with the following people:

- o Nik Belanger, Southside Organizer, Virginia Organizing, April 5

- o Chanté Coleman, Director, Choose Clean Water Coalition, April 12

- o Kendyl Crawford, Conservation Program Manager: Richmond, Sierra Club, April 7

- o Kenny Fletcher, Virginia Communications Coordinator, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, March 31

- o Ben Hawkins, Volunteer Coordinator, James River Association, April 4

- o Molly Moore, Editorial Communications Coordinator, Appalachian Voices, April 5

- o Amanda Pohl, Director of Communications, Virginia Organizing, April 3

- o Andrea Simpson, Associate Professor, University of Richmond, March 31

- o Whitney Tome, Executive Director, Green 2.0, April 6

- o Harrison Wallace, Hampton Roads Coordinator, Chesapeake Climate Action Network, April 5

- o Simone Walter, Communications Specialist, EPA's Office of Environmental Justice, April 5

Interview subjects varied widely in their backgrounds and their perceptions of environmental justice and environmental justice communications, but several central themes emerged.

1. *Perceptions of environmental justice.* Many interviewees discussed what environmental justice means to them, the extent to which online communications around environmental justice matter, and the current state of environmental justice communications in the Bay.

2. *Reasons for the current state of environmental justice communications.* Interviewees discussed reasons why environmental justice communications are where they are, noting the importance of the history of mainstream environmentalism, mission statements and organizational history, the goals of funders, and internal and external action-forcing events.

3. *Moving forward on environmental justice conversations.* Interviewees spoke about their hopes for change in an institutional context, as well as change that can come about with better communications and networking. Last, they spoke to the ultimate goals of environmental justice movements.

SECTION 1: PERCEPTIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

What is Environmental Justice?

When asked what environmental justice meant to them, interviewees had a wide range of answers, although all of them discussed, directly or indirectly, the unequal benefits and burdens borne by marginalized communities.

Dr. Andrea Simpson, a scholar of environmental justice and professor at the University of Richmond, notes that environmental justice is always about "contesting the unequal distribution of environmental goods…that's what [environmental justice movements] are all about." She also notes that environmental justice is really a "conglomeration of small localized movements" that often lacks an overarching structure or umbrella organization. Similarly, Kenny Fletcher, Chesapeake Bay Foundation's Virginia Communications Coordinator, says that when he thinks of environmental justice, he thinks of "how certain communities, especially vulnerable or impoverished communities, may be more susceptible to environmental abuses."

Amanda Pohl, director of Virginia Organizing, talks about environmental injustice as "another act of violence" and "a continuation of racist and oppressive policies that have been in place for many years." She also directly addresses the intentionality of environmental injustice, noting that poor communities and communities of color tend to be most at risk. This "intentional design" takes advantage of communities that may not have a political voice.

Last, Simone Walter, a Communications Specialist at the Environmental Protection

Agency's Office of Environmental Justice, discusses environmental justice in opposition

to mainstream environmentalism. She argues that we need to "expand our interpretation

of what the environment is," and that environmental justice does so:

> *Environmental justice extends beyond protecting the environment for the environment's sake and it extends beyond keeping the air clean just so we have pretty skies to look at. Environmental justice is the amalgamation of all of the factors that enable or disable us to live healthy productive lives where we can work, live, and play. And so that requires that we look beyond just protecting this stream, or keeping this sky blue. It asks us to look at issues of, you know, housing, healthcare, transportation.*

Individuals and nonprofits operate with different definitions and conceptions of

environmental justice, which shape their work and their communications around issues

of environment and environmental justice.

What Role Do Online Environmental Justice Communications Play?

When asked about the extent to which online communications, including materials on

websites, mattered for outreach to environmental justice communities, interviewees

tended to say that they are important, but not as important as in-person outreach.

Interviewees also highlighted the role of online environmental justice communications in

informing a broader audience of the existence of environmental justice issues in the Bay

region. Many of my interview subjects viewed online communications as supplemental to

broader organizational outreach efforts.

Ben Hawkins, Volunteer Coordinator at the James River Association (JRA), criticized

"passive online outreach," nothing the importance of meeting people face-to-face and

building networks. "I don't know if online outreach is even really reaching the people that

we need to reach." Harrison Wallace, Hampton Roads Coordinator for the Chesapeake Climate Action Network, noted that Facebook has helped CCAN build a younger base and a larger base, but that person-to-person contact, "just like people who organized 30, 40 years ago," remains crucial for environmental justice work.

Harrison Wallace (CCAN) also noted that phone calls aren't particularly effective in the low-income areas he works in, because people move a lot and change their phone numbers frequently. In a similar vein, Dr. Simpson (U Richmond) said that environmental organizers need to do a better job of asking how communities get their news and organize. "In the black community, radio is a huge deal; the black community still listens to radio a lot. Why? You know, working class people don't have money for SiriusXM…not only is there not that much money for SiriusXM, but black people don't necessarily want their radio listening to be free of commercials or information…'cause an awful lot of information gets to us through black radio."

Nik Belanger, the Southside Organizer for Virginia Organizing, said he tends to believe in the power of on-the-ground work, but noted that this comes from a "well-established personal bias," rather than "any kind of informed, studied perspective." He said that in his experience as an organizer, virtually none of the people he interacted with had ever heard of Virginia Organizing, let alone looked at their website. When he began working as an organizer in Danville and Martinsville counties in 2009, many people didn't have internet access, and community members weren't engaging with the organization online.

Molly Moore, Editorial Communications Coordinator at Appalachian Voices, also noted the importance of traditional outreach, but said that this outreach is "not really so much public-facing communications, as it is part of the organizing work." Yet, in her

responsibilities for the monthly e-newsletter and for the print Appalachian Voices newsletter, she sees the importance of elevating issues of environmental justice.

Kenny Fletcher (CBF) sees the outreach work and communications work as inextricably linked: "I definitely think the work we do through communications can augment the outreach work…get new people involved." He discussed the work CBF does on social media, mentioning their first-ever quiz in Spanish on Facebook, noting that this quiz helped them connect to new communities that they can reach out to in the future.

Other interview subjects also saw outreach and communications work as connected and mutually reinforcing. Whitney Tome, Executive Director at Green 2.0, a green diversity initiative, said "my argument is do it." She argues that environmental nonprofits should start making their external communications more justice-oriented in order to "attract new constituencies, new people to this work, and/or new employees."

Whitney Tome (Green 2.0) cites examples of organizations beginning to do this work on specific issues. She discussed her surprise at CEOs of environmental organizations putting out statements in support of the Black Lives Matter movement and condemning the Orlando shooting. She said the most recent example of environmental nonprofits moving toward more justice-oriented language came as part of work around the border wall, which for the environmental community is often viewed as a problem because of how it disrupts wildlife routes.

> *Defenders of Wildlife made a really interesting statement about the border wall that was largely focused on the wildlife side of the house, but they also made this really sort of…and I'll give my bias here…this wonderfully sort of resonant commentary about immigrants in their press release. And I was like you all really took a leap out here… their care and desire to ensure immigrants still had*

passage and a place to come. So it was just a fascinating thing, so I see it more and more, and for a lot of folks, it, in part, takes a leap of faith knowing that you're also maybe going to get it wrong the first couple times, but you're going to keep doing it.

Change in Environmental Justice Communications in Recent Years

When asked about changes they've seen in their time doing environmental work or environmental justice work, many interviewees talked about changes within the last year or two, but some argued that the movement has remained relatively static.

Harrison Wallace (CCAN) talked about how the number of organizers working with him in the region has increased dramatically since he arrived. Yet, he said that despite this increase in attention, there hasn't been as much progress as one might hope.

I haven't seen too much actually change, so that's been a little bit of a bummer…there's a lot more people here, but the politics are still kinda the same, and the Virginia government moves really slowly, the federal government isn't moving at all, so as far as getting investment here, that's been pretty much the same. A lot more studies, not a whole lot of action…

Nik Belanger (VA Organizing) saw little evidence of change: "I don't know if I can say so much that there's been a real shift in the direction of environmental work taking on a justice lens…I can't think in my experiences, of a real clear shift, where I've seen things move in the direction of being more people-focused or justice-focused, nothing comes to mind on that one."

Yet others in the region, including Kendyl Crawford, the Richmond Conservation Program Manager for the Virginia Sierra Club, noted internal organizational shifts toward

more justice-oriented work. She said that "there has really been a push for the organization to really try to be more equitable, inclusive, and just." When she began working for the Sierra Club three years ago, she said there was less of an environmental justice focus, and virtually nothing on the website about environmental justice. However, despite these shifts toward justice, she says she still doesn't think that environmental justice issues are "talked about at the level they should be talked about."

Whitney Tome (Green 2.0) discussed these issues from a more national perspective, saying that the mainstream environmental movement has "really taken a harder look as to what they're doing and how this looks." She discussed how mainstream environmental organizations have been pushed to be more diverse, equitable, and inclusive by a variety of concerns, including moral concerns, political and economic implications, and the desire to "stay relevant in a changing society." She noted movement toward more environmental justice-oriented work and communications:

> *I feel like that, at least the mainstream movement, has turned a lot of the corner, it's obviously not all of them, but some of them, when it comes to really both caring about and really trying to work on these issues going forward…I think what's happening, still hasn't fully happened…some people are really trying to take stock of this in their communications and outreach and either have done it in the way in which they describe people, actually being more careful about word choice. The other thing is people are starting to think about other languages in which they communicate their message.*

Harrison Wallace (CCAN) echoed some of these optimistic messages: "So I think we'll see more old-timey groups come together and do this, like the League of Conservation Voters I think will start moving this way and Chesapeake Bay Foundation may step outside of its just focusing on Bay restoration and talk a little more about coal ash and things like that."

Current State of Environmental Justice Communications

To link my quantitative work and my qualitative work, I asked interviewees about their

perceptions of the current state of environmental justice work and communications in the

Chesapeake Bay region

Kendyl Crawford (VA Sierra Club) said "I'm happy that, finally, environmental justice is

getting a little bit more visibility, in terms of communication, but I don't think it's near

where it needs to be in the state of Virginia or in the region for that matter."

Dr. Simpson (U Richmond) criticized the spotty engagement of environmental nonprofits

in environmental justice work, noting that the national branches of major environmental

nonprofits such as Sierra Club and Greenpeace have not been active enough in Flint,

Michigan since the lead crisis.

Some individuals also acknowledged their own organization's room for progress. Kenny

Fletcher (CBF) said that,

> *…here at Chesapeake Bay Foundation, we are definitely becoming more and
> more aware of these issues and doing our best to ensure that all communities
> are included in work on problems that may be affecting these more vulnerable
> communities. I think everybody will agree that we still have a way to go to make
> sure we're being as inclusive as possible…we're on the path there…there's still
> some work to go…*

Similarly, Ben Hawkins (JRA) said that environmental justice is a new frontier for the

James River Association, and that they've been more involved in environmental justice

issues over the past year. He notes that environmental justice is not JRA's area of

expertise and that they've had to "build credibility through projects…certain individual

projects in different specific communities." Rather than implementing an environmental justice-oriented "organization-wide policy or program," JRA is using its existing programming to work on these issues.

Amanda Pohl (VA Organizing) critiqued the short-term approach of some environmental nonprofits working in the justice sphere: "they may send in an organizer or someone to do some work in the community locally but then they're done, like once that environmental crisis is over, they're out and they get out quickly because they don't have the funding to stay…so we try to help them understand how these things are connected…but I think as you probably know, different groups have different missions and goals and sometimes they have to fulfill those in order to keep their funding…"

Nik Belanger (VA Organizing) says he still sees major disconnects between peoples' concerns and the work of environmental organizations. He describes much of the work that's being done as "not largely connected to peoples' lived experiences." Yet, he sees sources of hope in the pipeline opposition work in Western Virginia and the Shenandoah Valley: "I think that they're finding messages that connect with people and that it's more rooted in peoples' lived experiences."

SECTION 2: REASONS FOR CURRENT STATE OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

COMMUNICATIONS

History of Mainstream Environmentalism

Dr. Simpson (U Richmond) spoke of the warranted distrust some people in the

environmental justice movement have of mainstream environmental organizations that

have traditionally privileged white middle class concerns, and largely ignored or

overlooked the disproportionate burdens that communities of color and poor

communities face.

> *I have talked to environmental justice activists who tell me 'I don't want an association with the Sierra Club. I don't want that 'cause I think that that whole organization is about elitism.' You're talking about preservation of green spaces…sit and watch the sunset. Now that is a privilege that many working class people don't have. Many working class people can't afford to take advantage of the green spaces and nature preserves that are out there for others to enjoy. I think everybody has to be a lot more thoughtful about what environmentalism really is, and expand the definition beyond preservation, to also prevention and remediation, that is, the prevention of environmental toxins being dumped in our communities, no matter what they are, and plans to locate industry or landfills or what have you within different communities…*

Mission Statements and Organizational History

Interviewees spoke in great detail about the ways in which mission statements and

organizational history can push forward or constrain their environmental justice work and

communications. Often, mission statements were seen as narrowing their work and

preventing more engagement with environmental justice. In contrast, some interviewees

spoke of the ways in which working for a relatively new organization, founded on a more

justice-oriented base, allowed them to do more environmental justice work and communications.

Ben Hawkins (JRA) spoke of the importance of organizations sticking to their missions, saying they should "remain mission-focused so that we don't, you know, mission creep, and start doing things that aren't relevant." Kenny Fletcher (CBF) spoke of the ways in which this constrains some of the work people do at CBF. "When you talk about toxics affecting vulnerable communities, that doesn't always line up with our main priority, which is reducing nutrient pollution." Kenny goes on to discuss the ways in which the specific mission of CBF shapes its work in the justice context.

> *Our main mission at CBF is to clean the Bay, clean the rivers. We focus a lot more on nutrient pollution and sediment pollution than toxics. For example, you'll hear a lot more about runoff from farms and from cities, which can lead to excess nitrogen and phosphorus which leads to algal blooms in the bay. You'll hear a lot more about that than…coal ash, which is a toxic that goes into the river...the James River Association has worked a lot more on coal ash…our main priority is always this nutrient pollution*

Other organizations were founded more recently and with more explicitly justice-oriented aims, making it easier for them to engage in environmental justice work and communications. Molly Moore (Appalachian Voices) said that her organization was doing environmental justice work "before that phrase even caught on in more recent years." The founders and early members of Appalachian Voices were concerned with issues of justice: a founder would say "what you do to the land, you do to the people." They emphasize the human burdens and disproportionate effects of mountaintop removal.

Other organizations come to environmental issues from a social justice context, so it's no surprise that their organizational history and mission make environmental justice-

oriented communications more likely. Virginia Organizing, according to Amanda Pohl, was built on an anti-racism, anti-oppression foundation. Since its founding more than two decades ago, the board was concerned with oppression, and recognized that environmental injustice is not an accident. This history leads Virginia Organizing to actively engage with environmental injustice in its communications and work.

Yet, some still question the role that mission statements and organizational history play. Harrison Wallace (CCAN) acknowledges that CCAN's founding has made it easier to do environmental justice work, but questions the notion that other nonprofits can't fit environmental justice into their mission. He says that he believes "it fits into pretty much every…at least every environmental group's mission statement, you can fit in environmental justice." He discussed CCAN's work on coal ash, which he describes as a bit of a "passion project," which doesn't fit quite as directly into their mission, but is still a crucial fight.

> *That's what I'm saying; pretty much any group that is fighting for our environment in some way can work [environmental justice] into their plans. So I do think it was easy for us, but I do think it's easy for any group to get involved in environmental justice and also social justice."*

Role of Funders in Environmental Justice Communications

Funders also play a key role in determining what work does and does not get done, and the extent to which nonprofits can, or feel they can, engage with environmental justice work and communications.

Amanda Pohl (VA Organizing) spoke of the flexibility that comes from having much of their funding come from grassroots donations. She said that "when your money comes from somebody that says you have to meet these deliverables, it's very difficult to focus on anything but those specific deliverables." Sometimes mainstream environmental groups may wish to be more intersectional or justice-oriented, but that shift may be difficult "within the context of their structure," particularly their funding structure.[86]

Whitney Tome (Green 2.0) sees sources of hope, however, saying that "funders are coming around to this conversation more and more." Funders are beginning to figure out how to better support organizations that are led and staffed by people of color and low-income people. "So it's starting to happen, but…the funding community lags a little, they usually go through a strategic process as to what they fund and where it goes, and usually that is happening while things are in motion, you know, because the work doesn't pause and wait, you know?" She discusses this lag in the context of the Trump administration, noting that the funding community isn't effectively getting money to people or organizations who "need to defend things right now." The funding community doesn't tend to be nimble enough to address needs as quickly as they arise in our rapidly changing political sphere.

Whitney Tome (Green 2.0) also discussed the importance of impact and scale for funders, noting that they often want projects that are quicker and have more obvious deliverables than environmental justice projects may be. Funders have often constrained

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[86] Kimberle Crenshaw defined intersectionality in her 1993 article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." Although the definition has shifted in the last two decades, it tends to refer to the ways in which various identities (such as race, class, gender, and ability) intersect with each other in the context of identity and oppression.

mainstream environmental organizations and overlooked environmental justice groups,

but there seems to be a shift toward a more justice-oriented pattern of funding.

Internal and External Action-Forcing Events

My subjects also spoke to specific events that have pushed forward the conversation

around environmental justice work and environmental communications.

Amanda Pohl (VA Organizing) discussed recent internal awakenings: "We teamed up

with a bunch of groups to do the March on the Mansion back in July…Groups very

clearly recognized this was not as diverse as we wanted it…Virginia Organizing brought

the diversity to this march, but it was very white when you looked out on the crowd." This

whiteness is largely representative of broader patterns of staff and volunteers in

environmental groups. Amanda Pohl describes how the lack of diversity at the march

pushed Chesapeake Bay nonprofits to focus on how to get more people of color

engaged, how to "get more people who are not traditionally at the table around

environmental issues."

Others spoke about how specific threats had led to more justice-oriented work and

communications. In particular, Harrison Wallace (CCAN) explained how fights over coal

ash and pipelines have brought more diverse groups to the table. He talked about how

the debate over the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, in particular, has involved a broader

audience than is typical. He also spoke in detail about the role of the "coal ash epidemic"

in shaping the conversation about environmental justice in the region.

> *Dominion Power has been dumping it in estuaries and streams near large bodies of water, so it's kind of become an environmental justice clean water issue for a large portion of the state that kind of breaks a few of the racial barriers that we usually see, because it's, you know, Northern Virginia near Quantico, down here in Chesapeake in multiethnic neighborhoods and that's been like the turning point for a lot of our conversations.*

He also pointed out another galvanizing source: President Trump's administration and the increased aggressiveness of corporations that build fossil fuel infrastructure.

> *I mean, the Sierra Club, which is, you know, a group that's been around since the 1800s, is starting to really really take a stance on this. I think we're starting to see it more now just because of who our president is, I think it's sexier, so a lot of groups are starting to really focus on environmental justice because it's more of an open attack on it instead of kind of veiled attempts to poison peoples' water or build more coal fired power plants near impoverished areas.*

Specific environmental threats can be the impetus for more justice-oriented work. Harrison Wallace says that the fights over coal ash and pipelines have been "galvanizing" and that "the communication has been improving every year."

Chanté Coleman (Choose Clean Water Coalition) says that we still haven't seen the sort of major forcing event that other regions have had, mentioning New Orleans after Katrina and the water crisis in Flint. She observed that environmental nonprofits in New Orleans had "…taken a hard look at their communications and how they're reaching out and who they're talking to and why. And I don't think that's happened here yet." Similarly, in Flint, she said that the lead crisis has pushed environmental nonprofits to "reflect on their communications and make them stronger and more effective in terms of environmental justice," something she said a lot of groups in the Chesapeake haven't done yet.

> *The people who are further ahead at thinking about EJ [environmental justice] communications are the ones who have really been sort of struck with a pretty serious EJ issue.*

Groups May Not Have Been Aware or Ready

In some of my interviews, subjects used the sort of universalizing language that has been, and continues to be, commonplace in environmental communications. Kenny Fletcher (CBF) said "we all need water for life" and "we all have the same interests in common, no matter where you're from originally and what language you speak, people like to go down to the river and spend time." He also spoke to the fact that "a lot of people can relate to spending time on the waters because they are public spaces." Ben Hawkins (JRA) said that "we like to just show that we're all in the same fight and it all leads back to kind of the natural environment, ecosystem services." Other interviewees critiqued this sort of language, noting that, although we all need these resources, marginalized people are starting with less access, due to systems of racism, classism, and oppression. Dr. Simpson (U Richmond) reminded us "many working class people can't afford to take advantage of the green spaces and nature preserves that are out there for others to enjoy."

Many people working in the environmental sphere lack significant exposure to environmental justice and environmental justice communications. This makes it difficult to do effective environmental justice work or to integrate environmental justice into their external communications. Kenny Fletcher (CBF) said "to tell you the truth, [environmental justice isn't] something that personally I have incorporated consciously into a lot of our messaging so far, but I would hope that we move towards that."

Perhaps there hasn't been a wake-up call yet on the importance of environmental justice and environmental justice communications. Whitney Tome talks about how the Green 2.0 report, published in 2014, was really a wake-up call on the question of diversity in

environmental nonprofits. She notes that a quantitative assessment of diversity in the

region was "the right tool" because "it's actually quite a data-driven group." The findings

of the Green 2.0 report were stark, and showed a broad lack of diversity in the

environmental movement. Perhaps a similar awakening is needed for environmental

justice-oriented work and communications in the Bay region.

SECTION 3: WHERE IS OR COULD ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE WORK AND COMMUNICATIONS BE HEADED?

Change in an Institutional Context

Kendyl Crawford (VA Sierra Club) spoke to the formal changes she hopes to see over

the next couple of years. She mentioned that Ralph Northam included a suggestion from

the Sierra Club in his environmental platform, saying that he would support the creation

of an environmental justice advisory council in Virginia.

> *Of course, what politicians say and what they do, completely different things, but that was really exciting because that was actually an idea that had originated from this Environmental Justice collaborative, and so I'm hoping that in the next few years, …hopefully the idea will get some wind in its sails and we'll be able to establish a permanent environmental justice advisory council for the state of Virginia, so that…one that will report not just on climate issues, but on all issues that will impact environmental justice communities, that there will be a permanent seat at the table for those community leaders.*

She also said she'd like to see an Environmental Justice leadership training, either the

EPA version or any intensive training, "to help build up the existing leaders that we do

have here in the state," to give them the "tools to make sure they stay supported, can

delegate tasks, know how to manage volunteers and people coming in to help out, so

they don't get burnt out, because that's a real problem in community organizing in general, especially with environmental justice organizations."

A Shift toward Better Storytelling and Communications

Simone Walter (EPA) talked about the critical role of communications in this work, saying that "there are success stories everywhere we go and it's my responsibility to try to find where those successes are and try to magnify them." She sees this amplification as crucial in promoting future environmental justice work, particularly from a funding perspective: "only by telling those stories of why you're investment worthy can you control the narrative of whether you're worthwhile or not." In a much broader sense, Dr. Simpson (U Richmond) speaks to the role of communications in social movements: "In order to sustain a social movement, your story has to be compelling; you have to get an opportunity to tell your story…frequently."

Part of this storytelling and communications work involves media access and political access, something that grassroots organizations often lack. Better networking among organizations can be a crucial step in gaining access and publicity, through leveraging the media access and contacts of mainstream environmental organizations.

Better Networking of Environmental Justice Groups and Mainstream Environmental Organizations

Many of the people I spoke with discussed the importance of better networking between mainstream environmental nonprofits and environmental justice groups. Kendyl Crawford (VA Sierra Club) spoke to the lack of sufficient communication, noting that

groups don't always have a sense of the other groups doing this work, and that they

don't have effective long-term relationships.

Dr. Simpson (U Richmond) sees the onus of building these relationships as falling

largely on mainstream environmental organizations:

> *It's kind of more on them to reach out to the leaders in the environmental justice community…'cause they're the ones with the resources…I know that some activists would not even know you're interested in their issues unless you tell them…so I definitely think it behooves larger organizations to look at what's going on with other smaller more grassroots communities and to offer to join forces or to help…*

In particular, many people emphasized the importance of mainstream environmental

nonprofits collaborating with environmental justice groups and sharing resources,

including funding, supplies, media access, and staff time. Dr. Simpson (U Richmond)

says that "local organizations are resource poor" and discusses how her research finds

that environmental justice movements will be more effective if they link up with

mainstream environmental movements. "Even though environmentalism is about the

preservation of environmental goods…these [environmental justice] organizations are

concerned about the unequal distribution of environmental bads…that's just the two

sides of the same coin…"

She also spoke directly to the importance of media access, saying that news reporters

like to speak with people that they recognize as legitimate, often representatives of

mainstream environmental organizations, or those deemed to have relevant expertise.

She encouraged environmental justice movements to use mainstream environmental

organizations' "media contacts and their visibility…to further their own cause."

Kendyl Crawford spoke about the ways in which the Sierra Club's partnership with the

Southeast CARE Coalition, a volunteer-led environmental justice group in Newport

News, has aimed to share resources in the fight against toxic air pollution. She spoke

about the importance of sharing credit. In "any media work we do, [Southeast CARE

Coalition has] quotes, sometimes I don't have a quote, just because you know, I'm kind

of aware that Sierra Club is this freaking gigantic organization, the nation's oldest largest

grassroots environmental organization, and we just don't need the exposure, we don't

need it…so I just try to highlight them, doing as much as I can to." She spoke about

other resources that are shared, including funding and her time as a staffer. She also

discussed the importance of sharing other more basic resources that grassroots

volunteer-led environmental justice organizations might not have access to, such as

printers, copiers, and paper cutters.

She also spoke to the importance of understanding power dimensions in these

relationships, and the privilege that is "just kind of inherent because of the resources that

mainstream organizations have." She discussed how crucial it is to form true

partnerships, where "environmental justice organizations are at the table, and they're

speaking for themselves, and it's not mainstream environmental organizations just co-

opting their work." She finished by saying that mistakes will be made in this work, but

that it's important to go in with good intentions, honesty, and flexibility.

Ultimate Aims of Environmental Justice Work and Communications

The path toward environmental justice work and environmental justice communications

has not been and will not be simple or straightforward. Whitney Tome (Green 2.0)

discussed how important it is to do justice work and diversity work authentically and with

true commitment, noting that "it becomes problematic for organizations if the leader at

the top is doing it to do it, rather than doing it because they truly care." She describes the

need for:

> …an internal mental shift, around the way in which you think about the world. It can be slight for some people it's just a little turn, that's all of a sudden 'I didn't realize I do that', or 'that's how that works, are we sure about that?'…to people who are like 'I wasn't even aware this was happening'. But that shift actually has to happen for it really to be like the heart and soul of what somebody does and to hold other people accountable that they actually deliver on making adjustments based on that. But that is actual work.

> While Green 2.0 has a mission to increase the racial diversity of theenvironmental movement, what we really want is inclusion. Because I can get the numbers up from here 'til Christmas, which is great, I want more people in, but, at the end, I want them to be as valued and respected and their thoughts and ideas included in the decision making and then it actually affect the outcome of the work that these organizations do.

CHAPTER 4: POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This research was conducted with the explicit aim of better understanding the current state of environmental justice communications and work in the Bay. Seeing where the work stands is crucial to know how to move forward. Based on my interviews and broader research on environmental justice communications, I have developed recommendations for environmental nonprofits and other actors in Virginia.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL NONPROFITS

1. **Mainstream environmental nonprofits should listen more and speak less.**
   o Listening to community concerns is crucial for effective long-term engagement, particularly for mainstream environmental nonprofits that do work at the community level.

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2. **Mainstream environmental nonprofits should change their mission statements if they don't fit the work they'd like to be doing in a justice context.**
   o Nature-centric mission statements that aim to protect particular bodies of water often don't leave much flexibility for the concerns of people living along waterways, let alone those most disproportionately burdened.
   o Mission statements should evolve as the needs evolve; a shift towards justice-oriented work will allow nonprofits to remain relevant in the changing field.

3. **Mainstream environmental nonprofits should actively seek to build long-term mutually beneficial partnerships with environmental justice groups.**

o   Mainstream environmental groups should actively seek ways to leverage their privilege to elevate the voices of environmental justice groups – this can include media access, sharing staff time, and providing funding or sharing grants with affected communities.

4. **Mainstream environmental nonprofits should incorporate environmental justice-oriented language and storytelling into their communications materials.**

o   Elevating these issues brings crucial awareness of the disproportionate burdens borne by communities of color to the broader audiences of these nonprofits.

o   Elevating these issues may bring people into the environmental movement as volunteers and staff who would not be drawn by traditional nature-centric messages.

5. **Mainstream environmental organizations should think more deliberately about how communities get information and the language they use.**

o   Bilingual materials can help reach Spanish-speaking communities that may not typically be reached by environmental communications.

o   Nonprofits should continue using face-to-face communications and online communications, but should also consider other outreach strategies, such as reaching communities through radio stations that primarily serve people of color.[87]

o   Nonprofits should aim to more effectively incorporate the language communities use to frame the problems they're facing.

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[87] The suggestion of reaching black community members through radio came from Dr. Simpson.

6. **Mainstream environmental organizations should actively seek diversity in their hiring decisions, working to hire people from marginalized communities.**

    o The voices in the room matter; having people who understand environmental justice through their lived experience is much more effective than people who have not had these experiences.

    o The decision to move toward diversity has to be an active one – nonprofits should list diversity as a criterion and a key priority in the hiring process.

    o Nonprofits should also recruit interns and volunteers from diverse communities. Sending out opportunities on listservs for organizations that serve diverse communities, such as those maintained by Historically Black Colleges and Universities, can help.

7. **Mainstream environmental nonprofits should avoid universalizing language.**

    o We all need clean water and clean air, but we don't all have equal access to those resources right now. The language nonprofits use should pay more attention to the current disparities in access to resources.

8. **Mainstream environmental organizations should shift their framing of environmental issues from preservation to public health.**

    o Polling done by the Choose Clean Water Coalition has found that communities tend to be much more likely to engage with environmental issues when they're framed as risks to public health.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

9. **The Commonwealth of Virginia should establish an Environmental Justice Advisory Council.[88]**

   o The establishment of this council within the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality will create the infrastructure to ensure that environmental justice is a formal priority in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

10. **Training programs should be implemented, both for environmental justice groups, and for mainstream environmental groups working to do more justice-oriented work**

    o The EPA has arranged environmental justice leadership training programs in other regions for marginalized communities working on justice. Bringing one of these training programs (or similar training) to the region would allow current environmental justice advocates to acquire the tools to do their work more effectively.

    o Many mainstream environmental organizations don't know where to start with making their programs and communications more justice-oriented. Training programs will help environmental nonprofits more effectively approach and work with environmental justice groups, using their resources to amplify and elevate the work of environmental justice communities.

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[88] This suggestion came from Kendyl Crawford.

11. **Funders should support work that explicitly engages with environmental justice, and should support organizations that engage with justice in their external communications.**

   o Funders are a major driver of the work that gets done in nonprofits. They can push environmental work to be more justice-oriented by making an explicit effort to fund organizations that work on environmental justice or that work with environmental justice groups.

CONCLUSION

This project is an important step in understanding the state of environmental justice communications and work in Virginia. Future research can and should expand on this study to better assess the current state of environmental justice communications, both in the Chesapeake Bay and nationally. In particular, research can aim to better understand the ways in which people from environmental justice communities and from non-environmental justice communities engage with environmental justice-oriented communications. Focus groups or experimental work would be particularly well-suited to this task.

Future research can also explore the many explanations for the current state of environmental justice communications that this thesis puts forth. It can untangle possible explanations, including organizational history, mission statements, awareness or readiness, the wishes of funders, and action-forcing events. All of these explanations intersect; future research can determine which explanations are most influential. Future research can also delve into a more direct analysis of organizations' programming and the relationship between programmatic work and external communications. Such work can look explicitly for best practices that nonprofit organizations can use to make their work more effective and more thoughtful.

Ultimately, this research is about how we can make peoples' lives better. If we better understand successes and failures in making environmental work and communications more justice-oriented, we can work to make the environmental movement more inclusive, equitable, and intersectional. A more inclusive environmental movement will be better equipped to fight for this world and for the marginalized communities that have been systematically denied a right to a safe, healthy, livable environment. This work matters because people matter.

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