CONSERVATION ACTION |

The reasons for our current conservation challenges are not altogether scientific in nature; a variety of interacting socioeconomic factors are responsible. Yet, scientists are the ones charged with developing solutions to these challenges (Schaller, 1992). If we are to develop solutions that help mitigate the human-caused conservation issues, and thus reduce the likelihood of a research-implementation gap, we will need to take a broader approach to community engagement (Knight et al. 2008, Reyers et al. 2010).

A basic understanding of how people make choices can help guide programming and services intended to promote conservation. As Cincinnati Nature Center works with communities to identify their most pressing conservation goals, we can help them to design programs and messages keeping the following points in mind:

- People need accurate knowledge about nature. The majority of Americans indicate that they care about nature and the environment, but Roper studies show that they have a poor understanding of it. (https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/public-understanding-science-technology-nsf/ Jan. 2015). For this reason, Cincinnati Nature Center provides on-site and offsite education for a wide range of audiences. As people develop their awareness, knowledge, and values, an emerging focus on conservation social sciences may help us understand how to motivate people to act.
- People give more weight to a possible loss than to a possible gain (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979).
- People have a tendency to discount risks where the negative effects will be felt in the distant future (Frederick et al., 2002; Marshall, 2014).
- People tend to think things are more probable if they can quickly recall an example of it occurring (*Schwarz et al., 1991).*
- Faced with a conflict between a desire for self-gratification through unsustainable behavior and the knowledge that the environment is threatened by such behavior, people often repress their awareness of the conflict, deny or displace the threats, and rationalize their actions, especially when they feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problem (Marshall, 2014).
- People appraise threats by first assessing their ability to respond and then by considering the costs and benefits of doing so (Lazarus, 1966). If the threat seems low, no response occurs, if the threat and the person's ability to respond is high, problem-solving behavior occurs, if the threat is high but one's ability to respond seems low, fear, anxiety, and helplessness lead to avoidance, denial, wishful thinking, religious faith, fatalism, and desensitization. People will take action when faced with medium levels of fear but are inhibited by over-arousal (Berlyne, 1960).
- Individuals who feel highly identified with their group are more likely to voluntarily limit their own use of a collective resource in order to protect it for the group (Clayton, 1998, 2000).
- An environmental identity may encourage a sense of oneself as a member of a collective which tends to encourage more group oriented behavior. It involves an experience of being part of something greater than oneself (Kramer & Brewer, 1984, DeCremer & Van Vugt, 1999).

- Emotion (such as empathy) drives moral behavior and reason comes in after as rationalization (Haidt, 2012; Marshall, 2014; Schultz, 2010).
- Social norms make it likely that people will do what they see other people doing. (McKenzie-Mohr, 1999).
- It is important to nurture someone's environmental identity in order to encourage more attention to care for the natural world. Giving people the opportunity to be involved together in conservation activities allows them to label themselves as conservationists and to be labeled so by others, which is effective when those labels are socially valued (McKenzie-Mohr, 1999).

While specific behaviors must be determined by the stakeholders within each community, Cincinnati Nature Center can use these guidelines to help us understand our audiences and develop program recommendations. One salient point is that people must remain hopeful and empowered to act.