

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Dear Tampa Bay: A Case Study

The more we understand how to effectively communicate and engage communities around climate risk and solutions, the greater success we'll have in addressing climate change. For many of us, figuring out what to do about climate change can be overwhelming. But building resilience is an urgent need and often starts at the community level. How do we help individuals and communities, especially those at high risk to climate impacts, feel empowered to engage and act to create a better future?



National Wildlife Federation's [Gulf Program](#), with support from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, explored climate change communication through innovative community engagement methods. Our project focused on the Tampa Bay area and analyzed how personal storytelling through film and expert-led field trips resonate and grow awareness of climate change risks and solutions. Through surveys and focus groups with community members, we assessed the effects of storytelling and experiential learning on climate risk and resilience beliefs, attitudes, understanding of risk, sense of ability to act, and support for available solutions. The findings can be applied broadly.



Project Summary:

The National Wildlife Federation worked across Tampa Bay to analyze how storytelling through film and firsthand experience through boat tours resonated and grew awareness of climate change risks and nature-based solutions.

The film, [Dear Tampa Bay](#), shares personal stories from neighboring Gulf coast community leaders in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi, as well as a community leader in Tampa Bay, highlighting how they have faced and are working to address their respective climate challenges. In the film, the climate impacts highlighted across the Gulf are the same as those facing Tampa Bay. The boat tours traveled along the southern portion of Tampa Bay and held expert-led discussions at key locations along the shoreline. These discussions covered topics such as community and wildlife impacts from sea level rise, storm surge, and coastal development, as well as the implementation of nature-based solutions in the region.

The primary goal for this project was to grow the understanding of how the engagement methods of storytelling and experiential learning resonate and grow awareness about climate risks and solutions. Understanding the effectiveness of storytelling and experiential learning as outreach methods will lead to more strategic efforts to increase community knowledge and willingness to engage on climate change issues.

The project measured the impacts local community members and civic leaders experienced from the film using 259 pre and post surveys, while the boat tours were evaluated through three focus groups and 35 optional online surveys. Project findings confirm both engagement methods tested are powerful tools to increase awareness of climate challenges and solutions as well as a sense of agency and motivation to further engage in climate resilience efforts.

Film Screening Findings:

Our film screenings targeted Tampa Bay coastal stakeholders including faith-based, academia/students, environmental, civic and business leaders, and local neighborhood associations. Our focus was on prioritizing diverse stakeholders who also held regular gatherings, aiming to optimize the turnout for the screenings.

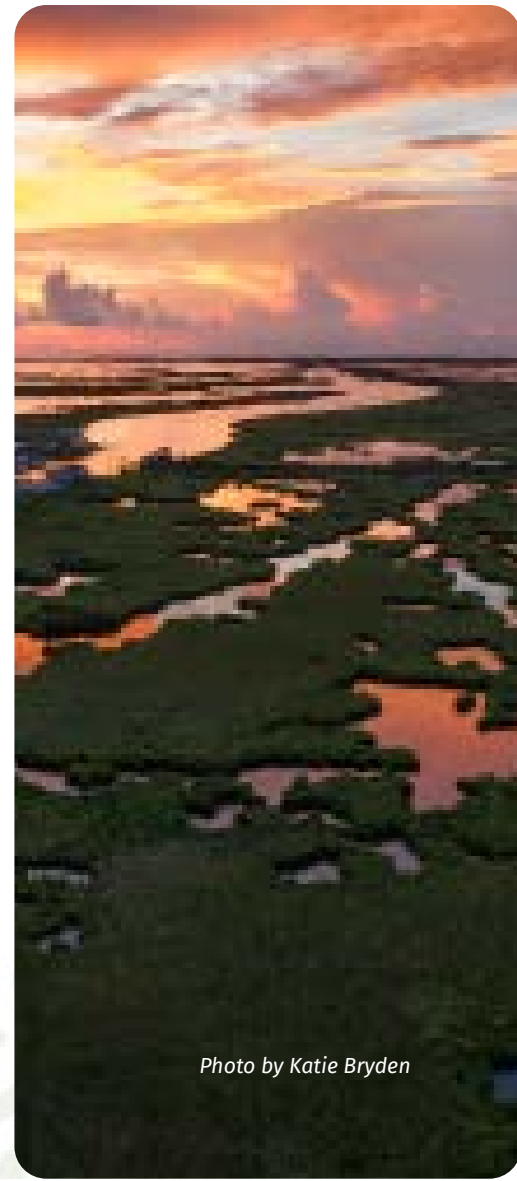


Photo by Katie Bryden

Highlighted findings from surveys conducted at over 50 film screenings across Tampa Bay include:

- ◇ a **240%** increase in willingness to work with a group to advocate for nature-based infrastructure to absorb storm surge and sea-level rise;
- ◇ a **214%** increase in willingness to work with a group to educate neighbors about the need for climate change policy solutions;
- ◇ a **149%** increase in viewers willingness to attend meetings to learn about city and county resilience initiatives and how to become involved;
- ◇ a **35%** increase in willingness to attend hurricane prep meetings;
- ◇ a significant increase in the participants sense of empowerment and capability to effect change to build resilience;
- ◇ a significant increase of knowledge in important issues such as temperature rise, storm surge, and the important of living shorelines;
- ◇ a shift away from reliance on state and federal government to be responsible for building resilience to climate change, and a shift toward reliance on self, community, local government, and the non-profit sector.



Boat Tour Findings:

NWF partnered with the local environmental NGO, Tampa Bay Watch to run the boat tours. Tampa Bay Watch is a long-standing local organization that runs commercial ecotours of the region. Three tours were run in summer of 2023. Boat tour participants were primarily recruited from film screening audiences. Roughly 100 stakeholders engaged in three boat tours.

Following the three boat tours, a subset of attendees participated in a focus group. Seven to twelve people participated in each focus group. Goals of the discussion included describing the experience of being on the bay, pinpointing specific places or moments on the tour that were impactful, and gauging overall impact on participants' engagement with climate related issues and their sense of competency and empowerment to act.

Highlighted themes from boat tour surveys and focus groups include:

- ◇ immersive learning fosters an understanding of climate challenges, while also fostering a generally positive, hopeful outlook if collective action is taken;
- ◇ recognition of the value of civic engagement, such as collective, community action and education and outreach to neighbors and community leaders;
- ◇ an emphasis of collective, community-scale action, rather than individual;
- ◇ and recognition of systemic inequity as a major climate challenge.

The overall impact of the boat tours is summarized well by one survey respondent:

“ I saw myself having little role and yet came away wanting to participate and help.”

Learn more about our project and read our full report [here](#). Questions? Contact Amanda at MooreA@nwf.org



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