

BLUESTEM

communications

Supporting coalitions • Building capacity • Inspiring action



Fall 2013

A newsletter exploring environmental communications strategies, coalition management tools and public opinion research for the benefit of North America's natural resources.

New Name. New Address. Same great communications services.

Biodiversity Project *is now* Bluestem Communications

Biodiversity Project was founded in 1995 to answer a basic question: can standard marketing tools used to sell cars and clothes also be used to get people to take action on biodiversity? Eighteen years, new staff and tons of new projects later the answer is unequivocal: absolutely yes.

What began as an initiative of the Tides Foundation has since evolved into an independent, dynamic, Chicago-based nonprofit organization. Our portfolio now includes a powerful compilation of skills, services and programs that truly set us apart as communications specialists.

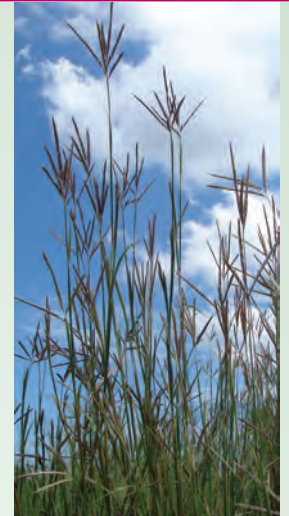
But, with our evolution, success and growing expertise, we simply grew into so much more than what the name Biodiversity Project would suggest. So, over the past year, we've brainstormed, surveyed partners and brainstormed some more to come up with a new name that would better reflect both our work in communications and coalition management and our commitment to North

America's most precious land and water resources. **Bluestem Communications** does just that.

Towering ten feet high in wind-swept prairie vistas, bluestem is a deep rooted prairie grass that helped create the fertile soil we depend on today. Its nutrient-rich stems have been the mainstay for native wildlife for thousands of years.

As an homage to this hearty prairie grass native to our home state, our new name reflects our commitment to the environment and conservation through compelling communications. Just as bluestem is a backbone of America's grasslands, **Bluestem Communications** provides backbone support to organizations, in the form of strategic communications, audience research, public outreach

continued on page 4



Bluestem: USFWS Mountain Prairie

As our organization has grown over the years to encompass more services and address more environmental issues, we have also had the great privilege to grow our staff. From just two employees in 2007, Bluestem Communications now has six full-time staff, one part-time staff and a regular crew of dedicated interns.

Bluestem Communications staff invite you to visit us in our new office! Pictured from left, Claudia Emken, Annette Anderson, Jennifer Browning, Meg Kelly, Rebeca Bell, Laura Brown and Amy Sauer.



10,000 People Have Joined the Campaign to Protect America's Greatest River

Are you a River Citizen?



River Citizens are from all 50 states and Canada, too!

research in crafting the campaign's message. By listening to people we were able to understand *why* people care about

Bluestem Communications has reached an important milestone; one of our largest communication campaigns, *I Mississippi*, has reached its goal of finding and connecting 10,000 River Citizens to the River and each other, a full six months ahead of schedule!

How did we do it?

The last newsletter update on our *I Mississippi* project in December 2012 focused on the importance of public opinion

the River. Throughout the year we have continued to incorporate the message into new marketing materials, focused newsletters around it and built it into our social media voice.

The results speak for themselves. *I Mississippi* has unified River Citizens like never before and created a central location to learn about River issues, events and experiences. Nearly 900 different kinds of events have been posted to the *I Mississippi* calendar: hikes, boat rides, community meetings, music festivals and farmers markets just to name a few. Each event provided River Citizens with an opportunity to take action for the River.

We know from our research River Citizens initially saw the classic "other", the government, businesses, or other people, as responsible for the health of the River. By talking about the River as a shared responsibility, a national treasure to be preserved for future generations and providing

What's New at Bluestem Communications?

(Besides our name, of course!)

■ Bluestem Communications had some great opportunities to share our work during two presentations this fall. In October, **Meg Kelly** co-presented at the Greentown Conference in Indiana with our partner **Jenny Gulick from Davey Trees**. Jenny discussed new research on the human and economic health benefits of trees. Meg followed with a conversation on how building values-based messages around this kind of research can more effectively change desired behaviors.

Jennifer Browning traveled to a conference at the Illinois Institute of Technology to share our lessons learned from working with corporate partners to develop a habitat conservation plan for the federally-endangered Hine's emerald



dragonfly. During this multi-year partnership, we've worked with ComEd, Hanson Material Service, Midwest Generation and several supporting partners, like Lewis University, to protect this rare insect. The presentation showcased the importance of working with diverse partners to achieve environmental success.

■ We're excited to announce that we've been awarded an education and outreach grant from the **Illinois Department of Natural Resources Coastal Management Program** to produce an atlas of natural history for the Calumet region.

The attractive and user-friendly atlas will showcase the great biodiversity of the Calumet region. We hope the final document, to be completed in September 2014, will be an indispensable resource for community leaders, local residents and educators to better understand the geologic, hydrologic, climate, natural and human history of this unique region. The final document, informed by stakeholder groups and focus groups of community members, will be a testament to the Millennium Reserve/Calumet region and why it should be protected. If you work in this region and would like to be part



Representative Cheri Bustos of Illinois is a River Citizen. Are you?

opportunities for individuals to take specific actions, *1 Mississippi* is connecting people's values to their will to make change. The campaign is helping River Citizens become an essential part of the solution to the problems facing the River.

Measuring the knowledge of River Citizens on River issues is done annually through a survey. Between 2012 and 2013:

- more River Citizens identified fertilizer runoff from agriculture as the most pressing issue facing the River
- more were aware of the cause and timing of the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico
- more were willing to speak up to their Members of Congress to tell them that the River is important.

Furthermore, River Citizens identified the actions they are most willing to take to help support the health of the Mississippi River, including: shop for produce at a farmers' market (82%); pick up litter (77%); reduce or eliminate use of fertilizer containing phosphorous or nitrogen (63%); vote for leaders who protect the River (65%); choose native plants for their yard (53%); and volunteer at a River clean up (52%).

The results will guide *1 Mississippi's* future educational outreach and event planning, keeping us responsive to what River Citizens need to know, but don't, and helping us to plan activities that are interesting and accessible.

As we celebrate this milestone with the Mississippi River Network's 50 member organizations, we hope more people will continue to join. You can join the campaign and become a River Citizen at www.1mississippi.org. You can also view our original "POP" – Power of the People – video to celebrate our 10,000 supporters on that site.



Thomas Hawk

Mississippi River in Memphis, TN

of the steering team of advisors, please contact Meg Kelly at mkelly@bluestemcommunications.org.

■ We will also be working with **Lake Forest Environmental Collaborative** on a portion of a grant they were awarded by the Coastal Management Program to restore and educate homeowners about



the incredibly important and rare ravine ecosystems in Lake County, Illinois. As our portion of this multi-faceted project, we will help the partners develop a communications strategy and materials to inspire homeowners to adopt behaviors that will promote ravine health.

■ Bluestem Communications is pleased to announce a new board member: **Theresa Salus, Outdoor Programs and Outreach Market Manager for REI** (Recreational Equipment Inc.). She oversees REI Outdoor education, volunteerism, recreation programs, and events within the Chicago region. Theresa's unique experience will be a great asset to our board. Welcome, Theresa!



Bluestem Communications is happy to welcome our new fall intern: **Julie Nicewander!** We are excited to have Julie on board as we navigate this busy season!

NEW NAME

continued
from page 1

Combining strong communications and coalition support can lead to collective impact on the most pressing environmental issues.

and coalition support to successfully revive natural landscapes and protect the resources that sustain all life.

Our Work

Based on public opinion research, we know that Americans are concerned about environmental problems, but, at the same time, they don't believe that their actions impact the world around them. While they don't believe it, we know that the public truly does have the power to affect real change through personal actions. Bluestem Communications designs communications strategies to help people bridge that gap between what they care about and what they actually do.

The environmental movement, like prairies, is a diverse tapestry of people working to protect our natural world for future generations. Government agencies, nonprofits and corporations all have roles to

play as we work toward sustaining our land and water resources. No matter their angle or their unique role, all need to communicate effectively to a broader audience.

That's why Bluestem Communications partners with organizations and coalitions to increase their communications capacity. Our recent projects include:

- using a values-based messaging approach to develop and implement Chicago Wilderness communications
- implementing a public engagement process for a partnership around Lake Winnebago in Wisconsin
- facilitating complex coalitions like the Mississippi River Network to reach shared goals

We know that environmental success stems from good communications. We believe that our new name will help us more effectively reach out to partner groups and share our mission. We have a new name and a new address, but our passion for protecting our planet through public education and outreach has remained our true north, our guidepost.

To accommodate our growth, **Bluestem Communications** has now moved into a fantastic loft space in Chicago's West Loop neighborhood. Close to downtown and public transportation, our new location offers more space from which we can continue to grow and implement our mission.

We would love to give you a tour of our new space! You can visit us at:

14 N Peoria St., Suite 4F
Chicago, IL 60607
312-754-0402

Of course, a new name also means a new website. Check out our virtual home at www.bluestemcommunications.org.



14 N Peoria St., Suite 4F
Chicago, IL 60607
312-754-0402
www.bluestemcommunications.org

This newsletter is published by Bluestem Communications. Send inquiries to info@bluestemcommunications.org

Staff

Jennifer Browning *Executive Director*
jbrowning@bluestemcommunications.org

Rebeca Bell *Communications Director*
rbell@bluestemcommunications.org

Laura Brown *Communications Coordinator*
lbrown@bluestemcommunications.org

Megan Kelly *Program Manager*
mkelly@bluestemcommunications.org

Amy Sauer *Mississippi River Program Manager*
asauer@bluestemcommunications.org

Annette Anderson *1 Mississippi Outreach Coordinator*
aanderson@bluestemcommunications.org

Board

Chair: Sara Race
Commonwealth Edison, Evanston, IL

Todd Cywinski
Imagination Publishing, Chicago, IL

Dennis Dreher
Geosyntec, Oak Brook, IL

Theresa Salus
REI, Chicago, IL

Rey Phillips Santos
City of Chicago, Department of Law
Chicago, IL

John Sentell
Lake Forest Open Lands Association
Lake County, IL

Gary Wilson
Grimard Wilson Consulting, Inc.
Oak Park, IL



1 Mississippi is a public campaign of the Mississippi River Network, a coalition working together to protect the land, water and people of the Mississippi River region. Bluestem Communications manages the coalition and coordinates the campaign.