COASTAL COMMUNICATORS

A newsletter for the nation's coastal management and research reserve programs.

In This Issue

> IF I WAITED FOR PERFECTION, I WOULD NEVER WRITE A WORD.

– Margaret Atwood

July 2025, Issue 73
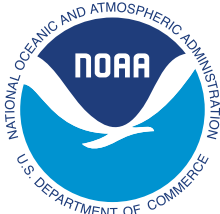
COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

TELLING YOUR STORY: HOW TO EXPLAIN YOUR WORK WITHOUT JARGON

Most people in the coastal management field didn't get into the work because they love writing press releases or social media posts. But communicating is part of the job—telling various audiences why what you do matters, where the funding goes, and who it helps. If you're reading this, you've probably had to explain your work to a stakeholder, a community member, or a friend who responded with a blank stare.

The good news: you don't have to be a communications pro to be a good communicator. You just need to speak human. Here's how.

Start with the Simple Why
Before diving into the details, start by answering the question your audience is quietly asking: Why should I care? Maybe your work protects local economies from storm damage. Maybe it helps fishing communities stay viable or keeps drinking water safe. That's your hook. Instead of, "We're studying nitrate concentrations in estuarine systems," try "We're making sure the water people swim in, fish in, and rely on is clean and safe—now and in the future." You're not "dumbing it down." You're building a bridge.

Replace Jargon and Acronyms with Real Words
This is a tough one—especially in science, where acronyms are ubiquitous and jargon can complicate rather than clarify. If you're talking to a general audience, use words that make sense to people who don't know the ins and outs of what you do.

- "stakeholders"–"people who live here or will be affected by the decision"
- "ecosystem services"–"the benefits nature provides, like flood protection, clean water, or good fishing"
- "coastal resilience"–"helping to ensure our coasts bounce back from storms"

And yes, sometimes you do need the technical term. Just define it once, clearly, and then move on.

Use Examples, Not Abstracts
Let's say you're restoring wetlands. That sounds important, but it might not mean much to someone who's never walked through one, so you must show them.

"This marsh acts like a sponge—it soaks up floodwater so nearby homes don't flood during heavy rain." Even better? If there's a real local story or image, use it. "During last year's storm, this area stayed dry because of the restored marsh." Now you've got their attention.

If It Sounds Like a Brochure, Rewrite It
People connect with people, not press releases. If your writing sounds like it belongs on a billboard, try again. You want warmth, not corporate speak. Clarity, not "leveraging scalable synergies." Try reading your writing aloud. If you wouldn't say it in conversation, consider rewriting it.

"Our team utilized integrated coastal adaptation approaches" becomes "We worked together to prepare this coast for future flooding." (Sidenote: the words "use" and "utilize" are not interchangeable—there's a nuanced difference in meaning. When in doubt, use "use.")

One Last Thing: Show the Impact
In coastal and environmental work, we often focus on the science, and rightfully so. But don't forget to highlight the economic, social, or community impact of that science. If your work saved homeowners money, supported local jobs, or helped a town rebound faster after a storm, say so, and say it in language everyone can understand. Those are powerful metrics that resonate with state and local leaders and the general public.

Bottom Line
You don't need to oversimplify your work or make it sound flashy. You just need to make it understandable. Keep it real and connect it to people's lives. Remember: your audience wants to get it—they just need your help. And if all else fails? Ask yourself: would my neighbor understand this? If not, try again.

Pamela Jacobs
Senior Communications Specialist
NOAA's Office for Coastal Management
Pamela.Jacobs@noaa.gov
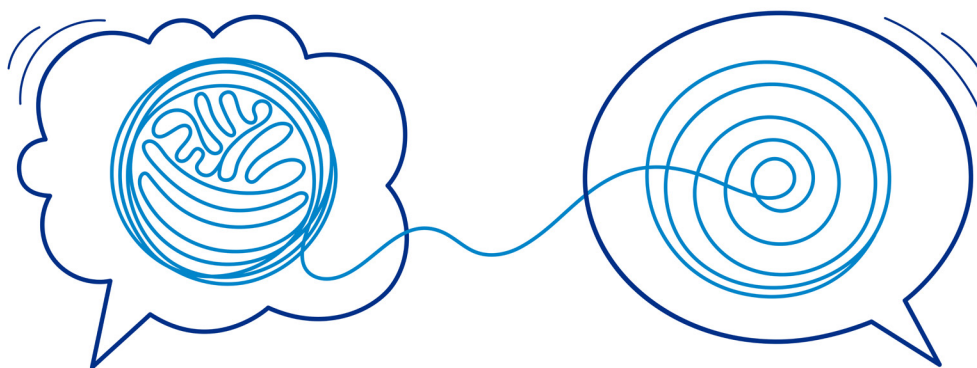
Communication Product of the Month

Featured product: Physics Fun

Source: *@Physicsfun* on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube

Submitted by: Pamela Jacobs, Lynker for NOAA's Office for Coastal Management

What it is: A social media account dedicated to demonstrating how physics makes toys and other household objects work. Created by a California State University professor, each *@Physicsfun* post showcases a playful experiment—like spinning a gyroscope or making a domino wave—paired with a clear explanation engagingly narrated in the caption.
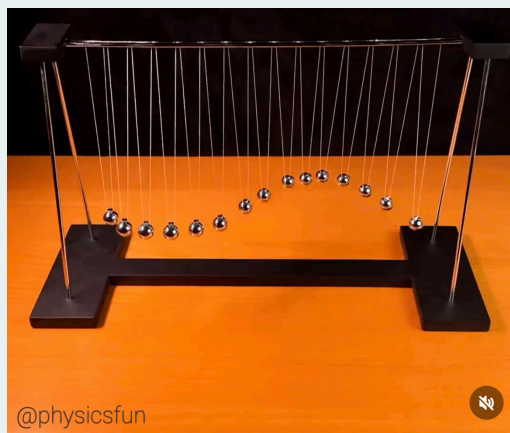
Why I like it: "A social media account dedicated to demonstrating how physics . . ." with two million followers. No TikTok-trend dances, no memes, no AI integrations. Just some simple objects and—did I mention?—physics. In a friendly and informal tone, without a hint of intimidation but with the exact right amount of playfulness, this account delivers science education with wonder and clarity. And while we often feature accounts that lean on trends and AI, because those do work, *@Physicsfun* shows that strong communication doesn't need fancy graphics or large budgets—just creativity and clarity. *@Physicsfun* also shows that two million people are in agreement: science is indeed cool!

(Please note: this is not an endorsement of the designers, websites, or any proprietary tools but simply this writer's opinion on a good communication product.)

@physicsfun

♡ 1,816   ♢ 9   ⊿ 52

physicsfun Balancing Dragon: weights in the wing tips create a center of mass below the dragon's (wyvern's) snout, making a system in stable equilibrium. Balanced here on the end of a bolt- no magnets used in this demo! ➡️ Follow the link in my profile for info on where to get a balancing creature and many other science curiosities featured here on @physicsfun #equilibrium #centerofmass #physics #physicstoy #balance #balancebird #dragon #balancedragon #rotationalinertia #science #scienceisawesome #unstableequilibrium

@physicsfun

♡ 1,680   ♢ 4   ⊿ 15

physicsfun Pendulum Snake: 15 independent swinging pendulums, each with a slightly longer period than the one to its left side, create mesmerizing wave patterns. As the pendulums get further out of phase with each other the waves become shorter and faster. ➡️ Follow the link for in my profile for info on where to get this pendulum snake toy and other amazing items featured here on @physicsfun #physics #phaseshift #pendulum #pendulums #pendula #pendulumsnake #physicsfun #galileo

From Us to You

Outreach Tool Spotlight— Stories from the Field

People often learn by example, so if you're trying to impart the benefit of a program or process, sharing a story of someone else successfully using it can be an easy and effective means of communication. The Digital Coast's Stories from the Field succinctly showcase the tangible ways state programs and reserves have made a difference. These stories can be searched and filtered by location, keyword, data type, or focus area (water quality or land use planning, for example), making it that much easier to tell a story specific to your audience's needs. Find the Stories from the Field here: *coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/stories/home.html*.

Upcoming Social Media Campaigns

Follow us on X, Facebook, and Instagram, and tag along with this theme:

- July 1 to 31: Parks and Recreation Month

NOAA Blue IQ

NOAA, in collaboration with the Ocean Positive Foundation and Smithsonian Institution, is launching a new video series called "Blue IQ." The series aims to enhance beach safety awareness before the busiest part of the summer beach season by educating people about common coastal threats. The videos seek to bridge the gap between actual ocean conditions and beachgoers' perceptions of safety and their swimming abilities. Not only are these videos an important way to help keep swimmers safe, they're a great tool for communicators. Share them with your own audiences and spread the safety awareness. Find the Blue IQ video series at *oceantoday.noaa.gov/blueiq/welcome.html*.
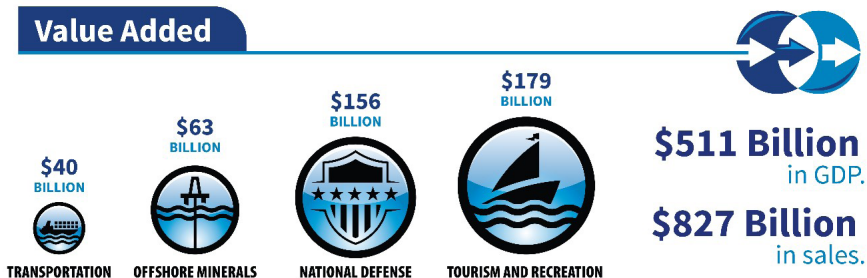
Fast Facts—Marine Economy

This is one of the many graphics and facts available for your use in presentations and handouts. Grab this one at *coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/marine-economy.html*. If you have an idea for a new group of fast facts or illustrations, please let us know.

AMERICA'S MARINE ECONOMY:
Based on Most Recent 2023 Data from Marine Economy Satellite Account

Value Added

$40 BILLION — TRANSPORTATION
$63 BILLION — OFFSHORE MINERALS
$156 BILLION — NATIONAL DEFENSE
$179 BILLION — TOURISM AND RECREATION

$511 Billion in GDP.
$827 Billion in sales.

Top Producers within the 10 Marine Economy Sectors

Improving communication skills, one newsletter at a time.