

RESEARCH

My work explores public perceptions, stakeholder values, and misconceptions, using these to inform the development of messages, materials, and programs. I also evaluate these programs, assessing outcomes such as knowledge gained, changes in hopefulness, and strengthened efficacy or capacity. I am particularly interested in the combination of understanding, attitude, value, and vision that enables people to take action. In addition to wildland urban interface issues, I have applied these skills to woody biomass, wildland fire, forest health, climate change, and water quality and availability issues. These issues vary on the degree to which there is broad agreement on the problem and solutions, with wildland fire sitting on one end and climate change lodged on the other. Most of these challenges are not easy for the public to understand or for natural resource managers and teachers to present. Florida, with a high percentage of private forest land, growing population, and lengthy coastline is on the cutting edge of wildland-urban interface issues and challenges associated with sea level rise. Insights and solutions practiced here can be broadly applied to many other states.

When beginning work in one of these contentious issues, the first step is to understand perceptions, opinions, and behaviors. I use a combination of interviews and surveys to gather perceptions (Monroe, Oxarart, Plate, 2013 and Bowers, Monroe, Adams, 2016 with climate; current activity in the Indian River Lagoon) or a card-sorting exercise to reveal mental models (current activity with FACETS). Based on the opportunity, the issue, and the need, these insights may feed into a community forum (Monroe, McDonnell, Oxarart, Plate 2009), instructional materials, or training programs (Monroe, Plate, Adams, and Wojcik, 2015).

Evaluation procedures can reveal not just the success of an individual program, but the data collection activity can provide insights into broader and more generalizable findings. In association with our climate change education program, my graduate student Christine Li developed a scale for measuring hopefulness in the context of climate change (Li, and Monroe, 2017) while graduate student Tracey Ritchie explored systems thinking. A review of several community-based youth wildfire education program provided insights into the development of effective partnerships (Monroe, Ballard, Oxarart, Sturtevant, Jakes, and Evans, 2016). The manner in which stakeholders are engaged can also build social capital (Biedenweg and Monroe 2013; Agrawal and Monroe, 2006).

The current interest in providing outdoor play areas for children (Oxarart, Monroe and Plate 2013) leads educators to think about the long-term educational outcomes of becoming more connected to nature. One of my students developed a scale to measure connectedness to nature (Cheng and Monroe, 2012) which has been used by educators and agencies in New Zealand and Great Britain. A recently funded project will build off these efforts to synthesize assessment strategies and produce a guide for practitioners to better select and implement various tools (Pisces Foundation project).

I have used the Reasonable Person Model (Kaplan and Kaplan 2009) to frame many of my programs and research activities, from community-based natural resource management opportunities and collaborative adaptive management processes to successful youth programs to reduce wildfire risk and a video to trigger perceptions of efficacy to adapt to climatic changes.