



TO: Partners and Supporters
FROM: Gail Gatton, Executive Director
DATE: December 1, 2016
RE: Lessons Learned from the I-732 Campaign

During the 2016 election cycle, Audubon Washington partnered with the *Yes on I-732* campaign to promote the first state-wide, revenue-neutral carbon tax in the United States. While the ballot measure did not pass, we built important alliances, stood apart from other environmental groups as a centrist voice for progress, reached significant numbers of voters, and learned a great deal that will prepare us for the next opportunity to advance carbon policy.

Many of I-732's early indicators were not strong. Audubon Washington decided to support the initiative because our members and chapters understand that climate change is the biggest threat to birds and people, and this initiative represented the common sense, bipartisan approach that we espouse. When Audubon Washington and the campaign launched a final educational push on October 21, only 34% of voters said they were in favor of I-732. Three weeks later on November 8, 41% voted "yes." In spite of confusion about the initiative and a surge of late investment from the opposition, more than 1.26 million voters supported climate action. Another 300,000 people willing to take action on climate represent the difference between winning and losing.

Our outreach and educational campaign generated 27 million media impressions. We used cutting-edge social and digital strategies to reach 800,000 voters, many of them within our target audience of people we knew to be persuadable on the issue of climate change. We engaged millennial leaders who will be fighting to control carbon for decades, and we were joined by a remarkable group of allies, from [Dr. Katharine Hayhoe](#) to [Leonardo DiCaprio](#) to our own National Audubon board member [Lili Taylor](#).

Audubon Washington received more than \$1.2 million from approximately 120 donors to help educate voters about I-732 over the final three weeks of the campaign. A small number of supporters were existing Audubon members or donors. The majority were new to Audubon, inspired by their concern about the need for climate action and involvement with *Yes on I-732*. We are working to keep these folks engaged in our continuing efforts around climate.

Overall, things we really liked about our involvement with I-732 include:

- Campaign's genuine diversity, from its millennial leadership to the endorsement of prominent Republicans (three sitting Republican state senators, a former Republican U.S. Senator, and Washington's former Republican Secretary of State), forward-thinking business leaders and tribes. Thanks particularly to the Jamestown S'Klallam tribe – Olympic Peninsula Audubon's partner at the Dungeness River Audubon Center – for its endorsement and funding support.
- Opportunity to utilize a sophisticated and targeted social media strategy that included leading edge Get Out The Vote efforts.
- Support from major media outlets, like *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *Bloomberg*, as well as influential local media, which were able to rise above focusing on the divergence in the environmental community and point out the urgency that dictated taking advantage of the opportunity provided by I-732.
- Deep and enthusiastic engagement from our network of climate activists and ambassadors from all corners of the state.

Factors that may have hindered our overall effort include:

- The late start of the intensified voter education campaign, which went into the field when a strong “Get Out The Vote” effort should have been underway.
- Negative response from the environmental community, which ranged from neutral or silent to outright opposition.
- Confusing language on the ballot, which used the word “tax” five times and may have negatively influenced the important group of voters who were not educated on the issue.
- A competing ballot measure in our most populous counties around public transportation that claimed to do more for climate than any other initiative.
- A well-funded traditional opposition campaign that was able to sow confusion about what the measure would cost individual households.
- Lower than anticipated voter turnout - around 77% - significantly down from 85% in 2008.

Lessons learned – what we’ll do differently next time:

- We will engage earlier. To run an effective grassroots effort takes more time to execute than we allowed ourselves by not endorsing until July.
- We will look for opportunities to weigh in earlier on development of the policy to ensure clarity for voters and ability to help develop messages that will stick.
- Increased grassroots training and broader engagement with our network, utilizing experienced millennial connections from I-732.
- We will actively seek investments and support from climate funders earlier in the process.
- We will focus on bringing national attention to state efforts earlier: the coverage received from major, national media brought us new supporters, which would have been even more valuable earlier in the campaign.

Clearly, ballot measures provide a powerful way to demonstrate demand for change because they put the power to enact climate solutions directly into the hands of the voters. Audubon Washington will continue to recognize them as opportunities, while concurrently working with decision-makers at various levels to move the needle on climate change. We will also bear in mind that we haven’t yet seen the full force of communities that oppose climate action, particularly the fossil fuel industry.

Above all else, the outcome of the election, both at the state and national level, has taught us that we cannot succeed if climate change remains a polarized issue associated with liberal-leaning constituents and the Democratic party alone. We must double down on our efforts to engage people from all corners of our state who care about birds to share their concerns about climate change with their elected representatives and others. And we must work to find and educate the 300,000 voters we need to make a difference the next time we have the opportunity to vote for birds and climate.

One of the things we heard millennial volunteers say repeatedly was, “climate change won’t wait.” The power of this statement reminds us that anything we do now, even if it’s imperfect, actually matters more than what we do a decade from now. This was a sentiment repeated often by our own membership, which recognizes deeply the urgency we face around climate change.