

Déjà vu all over again
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Back in 2002, when it was determined that the creation of things called marine protected areas (MPAs) might be sold politically as a mechanism for “saving the oceans,” the people at the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Conservation Law Foundation and several other ENGOs hired a marketing firm, Edge Research, to demonstrate that New Englanders and Maritime Canadians would be firmly behind using them to put even more fishermen out of work. They used what they termed “public opinion polling” to demonstrate this. I devoted a couple of thousand words to a critique of this exercise, and that FishNet is available at <http://www.fishingnj.org/netusa21.htm>. Replies from Sara Clark Stuart at the Conservation Law Foundation and from Lisa Dropkin at Edge Research (to which I added additional comments) are at <http://www.FishNet-USA.com/AnnotatedDropkinMemo.pdf>.

Well, borrowing from a line made popular by the late Heather O’Rourke in the movie *Poltergeist II*, they’re back! Only this time they’re trying to convince the Obama White House that two areas off the New England coast are deserving of protection in perpetuity by being designated as National Monuments.

Needless to say, their campaign to do this comes with the expected major PR blast, getting as much mileage as possible from what appears to be saturation-level social media manipulation and another Edge Research “strategic marketing survey.”

One of the more clever things in this most recent bout of “market research” was the lumping of mining, drilling and fishing together. This seems to me to be tantamount to asking people how they feel about crimes committed by “murderers, rapists and shop lifters.” After the recent (and very possibly still ongoing) BP disaster in the Gulf of Mexico we all have a pretty accurate idea of what the potential downsides are to drilling in the oceans, and who hasn’t seen pictures of huge open pit mines (if you are one of the few who hasn’t, Google “open pit mine” and click on “images”)? Not in our ocean, huh?

But in U.S. waters can anyone make a rational comparison of the potential impacts of mining, drilling and fishing? Is there any comparison between the fallout from the gross negligence practiced by our federal regulators and the offshore oil industry and a fleet of fishing boats working sustainably to provide our consumers with healthful seafood? Can tearing down mountains and creating holes that rival the Grand Canyon be equated with the “damage” done by hooks and nets? Not in the real world, for sure. But in the fantasy ocean world that mega-foundation millions are being spent to create there’s apparently no difference – or the people who have been bought by those foundation’s millions want everyone to believe there isn’t.

Regardless of how respondents feel about the relative impacts of fishing, drilling and mining, the pollsters have forced them to approve or disapprove of all three of them as a group. How many respondents were ok with fishing but objected to a repeat of the Macondo disaster or a huge minerals extraction operation offshore of their beaches? Remember that fishing has been a part of the New England heritage since colonial times. But the “pollsters” at Edge Research found a way to mute the voices of people who felt that way.

In a memo presenting their survey results and their conclusions, the Edge Research pollsters write “*while there is currently no drilling and mining in these areas, there is some commercial fishing activity. Protecting these areas would prohibit the fishing activity in these limited areas and could result in a small adverse economic impact on commercial fishing.*” It’s axiomatic but it probably doesn’t hurt to state that what is “*a small adverse economic impact*” to the people at Edge Research, at Pew, at the Conservation Law Foundation or at any of the other involved organizations with their multi-million dollar (or more) budgets, people who can with clear conscience equate the impacts of fishing with the impacts of mining and drilling, is unquestionably the difference between staying in business and bankruptcy to dozens of small New England businesses.* But the drillers will keep on drilling and the miners will keep on digging, just like always.

Should our federal fisheries policy to be a result of manipulations by professional pollsters working for anti-fishing ENGOs and the foundations that support them? Should the fisheries that our seafood lovers depend on be controlled by politically spawned dictates from the White House or by a science-based system that depends on input from fishermen and other stakeholders?

This isn't just a New England problem. This allows any anti-fishing group with enough dollars and enough political clout to ride roughshod over a fisheries management system that, while not yet perfect, is something that we've all invested a tremendous amount of effort into improving.

New York Congressman Lee Zeldin has prepared legislation that, while not a permanent fix, will put the Foundation/ENGO plans on ice for a year. It passed in the House on Wednesday night. Our next hurdle is the Senate. If it becomes law it will allow us time to work on a permanent solution, so call your Senators' offices and let them know how important this issue is to science based fisheries management and to the future of fishing in U.S. waters.

Thanks for your attention,
Nils Stolpe

*For an indication of what might be behind that “so what” financial attitude, below are listed the salaries for the most highly paid employee of each of the organizations that are members of the Protect New England’s Ocean Treasures Coalition (all from the most current IRS Forms 990 from Guidestar):

	Position	Organization	Salary	Perks	Total
Rebecca Rimel	Exec Director	Pew Trusts	\$1,042,946	\$50,812	\$1,093,758
Neera Tandan	President	Center for American Progress	\$301,274	\$38,912	\$340,186
Peter Shelley	Interim President	Conservation Law Foundation	\$116,767	\$13,253	\$130,020
Donnell Van Nopen	President	Earthjustice	\$380,377	\$48,578	\$428,955
Margie Alt	Exec Director (1/2 time)	Environment America	\$53,129	\$3,932	\$57,061
Denise Armstrong	Exec VP	Mystic Aquarium	\$217,080	\$20,869	\$237,949
Tracie Winbigler	Chief Operations Officer	National Geographic Society	\$664,498	\$16,560	\$681,058
Larry J. Schweiger	President	National Wildlife Federation	\$339,450	\$26,458	\$365,908
Frances Beinecke	President	Natural Resources Defense Council	\$383,324	\$52,408	\$435,732
Suellen m. Peluso	VP Development	New England Aquarium	\$203,099	\$13,046	\$216,145
Andreas Merkel	CEO	Ocean Conservancy	\$333,482	\$33,568	\$367,050
Andrew F. Sharpless	CEO	Oceana	\$301,396	\$50,283	\$351,679