PANEL · TUE, OCT 13 · 5:40-6:15 PM

Two Years Later: Where the Climate Fight Actually Lives

Benji Backer, Founder and CEO, United by Nature; Nadia Gill, Filmmaker, director of The [Conserv]atives; Anna Robertson, Board Member, Mountain Towns 2030

Benji Backer and filmmaker Nadia Gill argue the climate fight now lives locally: about 90% of Americans say they care about the environment, yet only 7% have taken part in any environmental group in a decade. Their advice: rally neighbors around local issues nearly everyone shares, and take the politics out.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **The gap is participation, not concern.** Only 7% of Americans say they've done anything with an environmental group in 10 years, counting garden clubs and hunting groups. Backer is now organizing the other 83% who care.
2. **The words got weaponized, not the values.** 80% of Americans called themselves environmentalists in 1990; 36% do today. Backer says people didn't stop caring, the terms became partisan.
3. **Local "90/10" issues move people.** Saving the saguaro in Arizona, keeping Tahoe blue: every community has an issue almost everyone agrees on. That is where mobilization starts.
4. **Mountain towns can cut through polarization.** Gill says neighbors in small, somewhat isolated towns rely on each other. Many who doubt climate change still worry about fire and water.
5. **Extractive-industry workers want a path.** Miners and coal workers don't want to be vilified; they want good jobs without having to move. One coal community was excited about converting to nuclear.

WHAT LOCAL OFFICIALS CAN DO

- ☐ **Ask residents what they care about.** A self-described skeptic may be deeply worried about forest fires and drought. Act on that, not on the label.
- ☐ **Frame around local benefits.** Backer's outreach on the right stressed forest health, water and public lands in rural places. A farmer in the film sold cover crops and no-till as resilience.
- ☐ **Work with whoever is in office.** Backer's advice to towns in Republican states with Republican legislatures: if you don't try, you automatically lose. Try, then call results honestly.
- ☐ **Organize collective projects, not just individual ones.** Gill distinguishes this from buying an EV: she is exploring a Truckee community solar project with 600 to 700 neighbors pooling their power.
- ☐ **Give residents easy, fun ways in.** Saturday volunteer events, native planting with kids, scavenger hunts with local zoos and aquariums. Make it fun and personal: the environment is supposed to be positive.
- ☐ **Tell smaller, local stories.** Gill says environmental film works better aimed at one state or town, focused on changing behavior, not just minds.
- ☐ **Host a screening.** The [Conserv]atives is touring small and midsize towns for community screenings; contact the filmmakers to bring it to yours.

BY THE NUMBERS

7%
Americans active in any environmental group in 10 years

90%
Americans who say they care about the environment

80% to 36%
Self-identified environmentalists, 1990 vs. today

150,000
People United by Nature recruited in its first year

60%
Click-through on its playful megafire action campaign

5M by 2035
United by Nature's goal for a unified movement

WATCH OUT FOR

- ! Partisan labels stick: Backer says the Inflation Reduction Act was framed as partisan, while the bipartisan infrastructure law, which Republicans voted for, has not been undone.
- ! Federal wins can stall: an environmental executive order Backer helped secure within six months has not been followed by action. Try, but call results honestly.

RESOURCES

The [Conserv]atives (film and community screening tour)
theconservativesfilm.com

United by Nature
Backer's group; 8-pillar roadmap to 2040 and the Fire Pit series on YouTube

Environmental Voter Project (activating environmental voters)
environmentalvoter.org

American Conservation Coalition
acc.org

Watch this and every SV26 session recording
mt2030.org/sv26sessions · Use the attendee password.

Summarized from the session recording and presenter slides. Figures are as presented; confirm with presenters before citing.

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