

Focus Group Topic Guide: Understanding & Connecting Americans and Nature
Stephen R. Kellert (Professor Emeritus, Yale University) & David J. Case (D.J. Case & Associates)

INTRODUCTION

Hello, I'm _____, and I'll be your moderator for tonight's focus group.

Our topic is ***nature***—your interests and involvement in nature. We're not trying to “sell you” anything or convince you of anything. Our sponsors are just seeking your opinions, ideas, and interests.

We are doing a series of these focus groups across the country to learn about how Americans view nature. People's views vary across a number of different factors, and the sponsors of this study want to be sure to try to understand views of people from a variety of different backgrounds. They think this will enrich the study and their understanding of the American public more broadly – and so we are delighted that you could join us here today.

Our final report will contain your opinions, but they will not be attached to your names in any way. So, whatever your thoughts about or experiences with nature are, your opinions will remain anonymous. And any personal information you provide tonight will never be associated with your name.

[In addition, there are observers behind the glass here, and we are videotaping this meeting, but the tapes will only be used to help us accurately capture your thoughts and opinions. The results are for research purposes only.]

The process will be for me to ask a series of questions and then we'll discuss your thoughts and opinions by taking turns around the table. It's that simple. There are no right or wrong answers, so feel free to speak your mind. We very much appreciate your attendance here, and will be mindful of the clock and your time, so we'll dismiss promptly at 9:00p. Before you leave, be sure to see _____ for your participation incentive we promised; it's our way of saying thank you for sharing your valuable time and important thoughts and ideas. Are there any questions before we begin?

I have a statement that I am required to read to you.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act (44 U.S.C. 3501), please note the following information. I work for D. J. Case and Associates, and we are conducting these focus groups on behalf of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other partners. The results of these focus groups will help improve the design and delivery of new or existing programs aimed at engaging the public in nature-related activities. Your response is voluntary. We may not conduct or sponsor and a person is not required to respond to an information collection unless it displays a currently valid Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number. We estimate that it will take you about 2 hours to participate in the focus group. OMB has reviewed and approved these

focus groups and assigned OMB Control Number 1090-0011, which expires June 30, 2015. You may send comments on any aspect of this information collection to the Information Collection Clearance Officer, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1849 C Street, NW (Mail Stop BPHC), Washington D.C. 20240.

I have a copy of this statement if you would like to see it.

DISCUSSION ITEM 1: Ice-breaker

To get started, I'd like to go around the room and learn a little more about each of you. If you would, please tell us, very briefly in just a minute or two: [watch time!]

- Your *first* name,
- And share with the group a hobby you enjoy.
- [INTROS around room, at pace]

THANK YOU.

DISCUSSION ITEM 2: What is "nature"?

As I mentioned, we're very interested in your involvement with nature. And before I get any more specific—what comes to your mind when you think of the word "nature"? *Again, a reasonably short answer of several sentences on this question—and others to follow this evening—will help ensure that everyone has a chance to speak and we can fit all our questions in this evening.* And we'll go round the group in round-robin fashion, starting with a different person each time. Remember, there is no right or wrong answer.

So, what comes to mind when you hear the word "nature"?

[DISCUSSION]

THANK YOU.

DISCUSSION ITEM 3a: Interest in nature

Now, here's another question for you to consider: how much interest do you think Americans of today have in nature? A lot, some, or a little, and please explain why.

[DISCUSSION]

THANK YOU.

DISCUSSION ITEM 3b: Interest in nature

How do you think this current interest in nature compares to 50 to 100 years ago? More, the same, or less, and please explain why.

[DISCUSSION]

THANK YOU.

For the rest of the questions, I'm going to ask each of you to answer it personally—just as before. Then I'm going to ask how you think “American society” as a whole, or the “Average American” would answer it. We won't go around the room to get everyone's opinion on that, but I'd like to get a general sense of what the group thinks Americans in general think about these questions, so if you have thoughts on that, please share them. Any questions?

DISCUSSION ITEM 4: [AFFECTION]

4a. Some people say they feel a certain *affection* for nature—or in other words, they have an emotional attachment to nature, for example, something as simple as certain smells and sounds bringing to mind happy memories.

Thinking about this idea, could you briefly describe how nature holds any degree of affection for you personally?

[DISCUSSION]

THANK YOU.

4b. Now, how do you think the “Average American” would answer that question? That is, what would you say are the attractions that nature holds for most Americans? Anyone?

[DO NOT GET RESPONSES FROM EVERY PARTICIPANT. GET A FEW ANSWERS AND MOVE ON. CALL ON QUIET PEOPLE IF THE SAME PEOPLE SEEM TO BE GIVING ALL THE ANSWERS.]

DISCUSSION ITEM 5: [UTILIZATION/EXPLOITATION]

5a. Now some people say that nature is especially important as a source of natural resources that we use, like food, water, wood, energy, and many other things that we need every day; or even products of nature that you might use in your work or hobbies.

Thinking about this idea, could you describe for us your thoughts and experience with the importance of nature as a source of natural resources or for products that you might use in your work or hobbies?

[DISCUSSION]

THANK YOU.

5b. Now, how do you think the “Average American” would answer that question? That is, how do you think most Americans see the importance of nature as a source of natural resources that we use?

[DO NOT GET RESPONSES FROM EVERY PARTICIPANT. GET A FEW ANSWERS AND MOVE ON]

DISCUSSION ITEM 6: [ATTRACTION/AESTHETICS]

6a. Now, some people say they feel *attraction* to nature, say, for nature’s sights, sounds, beauty, shapes, and colors.

Thinking about this idea, could you briefly describe the attractions that nature holds for you personally?

[DISCUSSION]

THANK YOU.

6b. Now, how do you think the “Average American” would answer that question? That is, how important do you think affection for nature is for most Americans?

[DO NOT GET RESPONSES FROM EVERY PARTICIPANT. GET A FEW ANSWERS AND MOVE ON]

DISCUSSION ITEM 7: [AVERSION/AVOIDANCE/FEAR]

7a. Now, some people say that nature is uninteresting and can provoke fear and cause them to avoid it, such as fear of certain animals like snakes or insects like mosquitos, bees, or spiders, being alone in the outdoors, experiencing storms or wildfires—or recalling memories of such things.

Thinking about this idea, could you briefly describe things in nature that might hold particular fear for you, or things you try to avoid in nature?

[DISCUSSION]

THANK YOU.

7b. Now, how do you think the “Average American” would answer that question? That is, could you briefly describe how much you think most Americans are uninterested, fear, or try to avoid nature?

[DO NOT GET RESPONSES FROM EVERY PARTICIPANT. GET A FEW ANSWERS AND MOVE ON]

DISCUSSION ITEM 8: [MASTERY/DOMINION]

8a. Now, some people think that nature needs to be controlled to meet human needs.

Thinking about this idea, could you briefly describe some of your own experiences in trying to control and master nature?

[DISCUSSION]

THANK YOU.

8b. Now, how do you think the “Average American” would answer that question? That is, how important do you think most Americans think it is to control and master nature?

[DO NOT GET RESPONSES FROM EVERY PARTICIPANT. GET A FEW ANSWERS AND MOVE ON]

DISCUSSION ITEM 9: [REASON]

9a. Now, some people say that that there’s much we can learn from nature through our knowledge_ and understanding of how nature works.

Thinking of this idea, could you briefly describe what for you are the benefits of learning about nature, and your own experiences learning about nature?

[DISCUSSION]

THANK YOU.

9b. Now, how do you think the “Average American” would answer that question? That is, could you briefly describe the benefits of knowledge and understanding of how nature works for most Americans?

[DO NOT GET RESPONSES FROM EVERY PARTICIPANT. GET A FEW ANSWERS AND MOVE ON]

DISCUSSION ITEM 10: [SYMBOLISM]

10a. Now, some people see nature all around us—say in the shapes and forms of buildings, in art, in things we read about nature—even in the things we use to decorate and design our homes.

Thinking of this idea, could you briefly describe ways the images and forms of nature in art, architecture, decoration, reading, or music are important to you?

10b. Now, how do you think the “Average American” would answer that question? That is, how much importance do you think most Americans attach to the images and forms of nature in art, architecture, decoration, reading, or music?

[DO NOT GET RESPONSES FROM EVERY PARTICIPANT. GET A FEW ANSWERS AND MOVE ON]

DISCUSSION ITEM 11: [SPIRITUALITY]

11a. Now, some people say that nature provides a type of *spiritual* comfort to them; in some cases, a sense of meaning and purpose in life, or a sense of peacefulness.

Thinking of this idea, could you briefly describe how important to you is the spiritual comfort you obtain from nature.

[DISCUSSION]

THANK YOU.

11b. Now, how do you think the “Average American” would answer that question? That is, how important do you think nature is as a source of spiritual comfort or peacefulness for most Americans?

[DO NOT GET RESPONSES FROM EVERY PARTICIPANT. GET A FEW ANSWERS AND MOVE ON]

Okay, we're down to our last formal question. Thanks for hanging in there.

DISCUSSION ITEM 12: Barriers/obstacles to spending time in nature

Are there any barriers or obstacles that might keep you from spending more time in nature? For example, some people say they don't have a way to travel to natural areas or the outdoors; or some say they don't feel especially welcome in parks or outdoor areas, or “I don't have enough time.”

So, could you briefly describe the barriers or obstacles that keep you from spending more time doing nature-related activities?

[DISCUSSION]

THANK YOU.

WRAP-UP

That ends our discussions for this evening.

Before you go, please take a moment to answer a few additional questions on this sheet; notice that we only want you to include the number that was on your nametag. We will keep all of your information confidential, but for research purposes would like to connect your responses here with the information in the handout. And finally, remember to see ____ at the door as you leave

for your incentive—our way of saying thank you for the time you've taken to be with us this evening and share your thoughts and ideas. It's been a pleasure to meet you tonight, and I trust you found this evening's discussion interesting and perhaps fun as well. Thank you.

HANDOUT

Number on name tag: _____

Thank you so much for taking part in the focus group and filling out this short handout. Please leave blank any question you'd rather not answer. Many thanks.

How would you describe your interests in nature compared to your other interests? Would you say things of nature are....

- Your MOST enjoyable interests
- Among your MORE ENJOYABLE interests
- Neither more nor less enjoyable than your other interests
- Among your LESS ENJOYABLE interests
- Your LEAST enjoyable interests

Would you say your interests in nature are more, less than, or the same as your parents or those who raised you?

- More
- Less
- Same Don't know

Which best describes the area where you grew up? Was it...

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural

Which best describes the area where you live now? Is it...

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural

What is your sex?

- Male
- Female

What is your ethnicity?

- Hispanic or Latino
- Not Hispanic or Latino

What is your race? (mark one or more)

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African-American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White

What is your age?

- 18 to 24
- 25 to 34
- 35 to 44
- 45 to 54
- 55 to 64
- 65 to 74
- 75 to 84
- 85 or older

What is the last grade in school you completed, or degree you received?

- 8th grade or less
- High school incomplete (grades 9, 10, 11)
- High school complete (grade 12)
- Some college, no degree
- Associate degree
- College graduate/Bachelors
- Post graduate degree such as Masters, PhD, MD, JD

Which of the following income categories best describes your total household income?

- Less than \$15,000
- \$15,000 to \$24,999
- \$25,000 to \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$74,999
- \$75,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$124,999
- \$125,000 to \$149,999
- \$150,000 to \$199,999
- \$200,000 to \$249,999
- \$250,000 or more