

Blank Sample of Survey Format

- * I'm an intern with a nonprofit conservation group in town called Save Our Bosque Task Force. We're doing a quick, simple word-association survey. It should take five minutes or less.
- * Male/Female
- * Age: 0-10 10-15 15-25 25-35 35-50 50+
- * Have you heard of Save Our Bosque Task Force?
- *
- * Do you live in Socorro?
- *
- * How long have you lived in Socorro?
- *
- * Where are you originally from?

- * I'm going to say a word or series of words out loud, and I'd like you to say the first one word that comes to mind after I say it. We will do this for 14 words. Try your best to keep to one-word responses. Don't think, just respond.
- * If a word or concept is completely unfamiliar, say that it's unfamiliar.

Drought	
Cottonwood	
Bosque	
Nature	
River	
Low Flow Conveyance Channel	
Tamarisk (Salt Cedar)	
Climate Change	
Rio Grande	
Wild	
Flood	
Southwestern Willow Flycatcher	
Water	
Humanity	

Overview

The idea behind this word association survey was to learn something about local attitudes and feelings toward the Middle Rio Grande bosque ecosystem — and, by extension, about the human relation with the rest of nature. I chose to use a word association format not only for its practicality (a quick, *fun* (!!)) survey to entice participation), but with the intention of, ideally, revealing unconscious, visceral responses that would show something about people’s inner attitudes.

On three occasions and at three locations (Farmers’ Market, Socorro Post Office/Plaza area, and New Mexico Tech near the center of campus), I set up a folding table and hung our hip, flashy “Let’s Talk Bosque” posterboard sign from the edge of the table (thanks to Shannon for helping me out at New Mexico Tech and the Farmers’ Market, and drawing those fine cottonwoods on the poster). Then we waited.

In the midst of countless people walking by attempting to ignore our presence, staring into smartphones, avoiding eye contact, and generally busily going about their days without wanting to stop for a silly survey, we did manage to get thirty-one people to take the five minutes for some bosque talk. Nineteen of the respondents were New Mexico Tech students, and twelve were local community members met outside the post office or in Socorro’s main plaza. Eighteen respondents were male, thirteen were female. Twenty respondents were under 25, four were between 25 and 35, two were between 35 and 50, and five were fifty-plus.



The first day. Set up by one of the main quads on the New Mexico Tech campus, under the shade of two lovely, invasive Siberian Elms...

What Do People Know?

One more or less definite and practical aspect of the survey was simply discovering whether people knew of Save Our Bosque Task Force's existence, and also whether they were at all familiar with some of the more specific ecological aspects of the Middle Rio Grande region.

Save Our Bosque Task Force

Farmer's Market/Post Office/ Plaza (Locals)	NM Tech (Students)	Total
6/12 (50%)	2/19 (10.5%)	8/31 (26%)

Overall, about a quarter of respondents indicated they had heard of Save Our Bosque Task Force. However, half of the more local crowd who took the survey outside of the Post Office, at the central plaza, or at the Farmers' Market, had heard of us. Only two out of the nineteen New Mexico Tech students surveyed had heard of us, including one whose parents are members of Friends of Bosque del Apache.

Southwestern Willow Flycatcher

Farmer's Market/Post Office/ Plaza	NM Tech	Total
4/12 (33%)	0/19 (0%)	4/31 (13%)

Very few respondents (four out of thirty-one) seemed to know of the southwestern willow flycatcher, an endangered bird in the Southwest that nests along the Middle Rio Grande in the summer — all that did know of the bird were from the more locally rooted group (four out of twelve), while none of the NM Tech students had specific awareness of this bird and its status. Among those that did know the bird, word association responses were “pretty”; “beautiful”; “elusive”; and “wish there were more of ‘em.” Several people said things like, “some kind of bird,” without knowing our willow flycatcher specifically — this was not counted as “knowing of” the southwestern willow flycatcher. A few seemed to think it was a plant.

Low Flow Conveyance Channel

Farmer's Market/Post Office/ Plaza	NM Tech	Total
6/12 (50%)	7/19 (37%)	13/31 (42%)

A significant portion of respondents (42%) did seem to have heard of the Low Flow Conveyance Channel, a large ditch that flows immediately to the east and below the surface water level of the river between San Acacia and Elephant Butte Reservoir, and which has wide-ranging ecological and cultural implications. Word associations were generally neutral, such as “arroyo” or “irrigation,” although one respondent said “silvery minnows,” perhaps indicating knowledge of the channel's use at times to maintain silvery minnow habitat when the river is especially low.

Tamarisk/Salt Cedar

Farmer's Market/Post Office/ Plaza	NM Tech	Total
10/12 (83%)	7/19 (37%)	17/31 (55%)

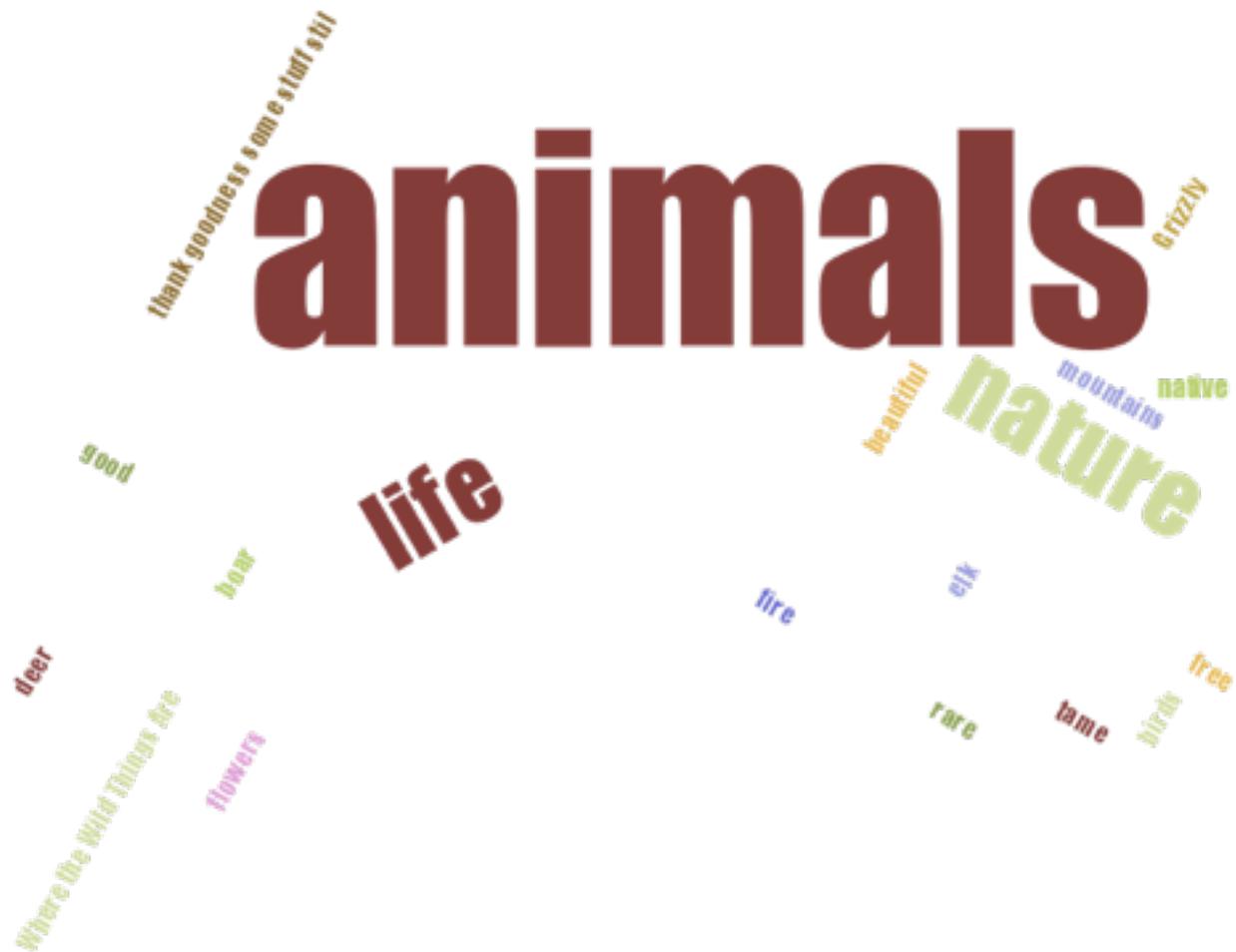
Tamarisk, or salt cedar, an invasive tree along many Southwest rivers including the Rio Grande, seemed to be the most commonly known (55%) of these less familiar words on the survey. Nearly all the locally-based respondents had some knowledge of the tree, and a relatively high portion of the Tech students (37%) did as well. Often, respondents didn't know “tamarisk,” but did know “salt cedar.” Responses were generally negative (“invasive”; “die...just die!”), though a few local respondents associated it with wood carving or firewood.

A Few Important Words...



Nature

Respondents' associations with "nature" tended to be broad and benevolent. "Pretty" came up three times, "beautiful" came up twice, and "wonderful," "enjoyable," "fun," and "nice" each showed up once — these nine associations of the word "nature" with pretty much pure, basic positive emotion represent nearly a third of responses (29%). "Nature" tended to be associated with plant life ("green" twice; "plants" twice; "trees," "flower," and "forest" once each) and environmental features or the environment as a whole ("air," "mountain," "river," "environment," "outdoors," "color"). Interestingly, only once was "nature" associated with animal life ("birds"), a distinct difference from associations with "wild" as we'll see next. Two responses associated "nature" in a conservation-related way ("perishing" and "preserve").



Wild

By far the most common association with the word “wild” was “animals.” This response showed up ten times, about a third of all responses — this makes it one of the most common of any response associated with any of the words in the survey. Much of this could be due to a kind of tendency to complete the phrase “wild animals” after hearing the word “wild.” This might explain responses like “flowers,” “fire,” and “life” as well. But there were also five other occasions in which the word “wild” elicited an *animal* response — “deer,” “boar,” “birds,” “elk,” and “Grizzly.” This means that nearly half (fifteen out of thirty-one) of responses to “wild” were associated with animal life, compared to just one animal-associated response to “nature.” Only two responses to “wild” were purely positive basic emotions (“good” and “beautiful”), compared to nine such responses to “nature.” It could be that “wild” is in some way a *wilder* word than “nature” — whereas “nature” perhaps tends to be thought of in broad, static, pleasant, conceptual terms, the word “wild” seems to foment more animal imagination in the mind, bringing forth moving creatures, and in a more specific way.



Bosque

For “bosque,” the two most common associations were “forest” and “river,” each arising four times. This is fitting, given that the bosque ecosystem entwines these two aspects as its most significant overarching and interacting components. Several people tended to want to “complete the phrase,” as in the two “del Apache” responses and two “Farms” responses (apparently referring to the town of Bosque Farms north of Los Lunas). Again, basic positive emotional connotations came up like “pretty,” “beautiful,” and “peaceful.” “Cranes” came up twice, likely either relating to Bosque del Apache or the wetlands historically associated with the riparian bosque ecosystem. “Mosaic” was my favorite response, and caught me off guard for its aptness.



Humanity

I intentionally saved “humanity” for the last word on this survey. Perhaps the most diverse and contradictory collection of associations arose from this word, reflecting the tangled connections and disconnections that characterize our strange, messy, complicated species. I was interested in seeing people’s associations with this word, after being primed by the thirteen previous words related to natural systems and environmental thinking. In other words, what might people unconsciously feel about humanity’s relationship to the rest of nature? It was tough for many people to respond to this word quickly without thinking. Groans, “umm’s,” “hmms,” “Oh god’s,” or just extended silences filled the space before their chosen word finally worked its way out. Interestingly, in a loose analysis, about a third of responses to this word were positive, a third negative, and a third basically neutral or descriptive. Some people seemed to think of the word (as I mostly did) as a term for the human species as a whole; others thought of it in the sense of its definition as a description of empathy, kindness, and goodness — as in “humanitarian.” Responses associated with the word “lack,” were the most common, coming up three times, apparently in regards to a sense of a “lack” of humanity (in terms of the empathy definition) in modern life or political discourse. In a memorable and somewhat poignant response, the association that came up for the youngest respondent to the survey was, simply, “me.”

The Rest (for your own leisurely perusal and contemplation...):

Drought



Cottonwood



River



Climate Change



Rio Grande



