Communication Plan

Comfort Lake Forest Lake Watershed District

August 2015
I. Summary

Watershed management is about working with people just as much as working with water. Effective communication is critical to garnering support and cooperation across stakeholder groups in order to realize District goals of protected and restored water resources.

This Plan covers three main communication objectives:
#1: Garner support and cooperation for District projects and programs through regular communication with partners and residents.
#2: Improve compliance with District rules and permitting program to foster sustainable growth and development and minimize impacts on water.
#3: Change behavior among residents, lake users, shoreland owners, and rural landowners toward more water-friendly practices.

This Plan includes strategies for making progress toward these objectives including identifying audiences, and modes and timing of communication. The Plan does not include specific educational messages or activities aimed at residents. That type of education is developed and implemented through a contract with the East Metro Watershed Education Program (EMWREP).

Although this Plan includes many different strategies, much of the improvement and changes in communication can be accomplished through a redesign of the District website, which is currently underway. The website should be designed with the end-user in mind to make access to information intuitive and easy. Additionally, the website should be easy to maintain by District staff as regular updates are needed to keep information current and complete.

The activities recommended in this Plan will take considerable staff time but the end result will be a more engaged community of partners, cities, lake associations, and residents – which in turn will help the District realize its goals of improved and protected water resources. The District should consider hiring part time staff or consultants to assist with communication and outreach efforts.
II. Communication Survey Results

During the development of this Plan a survey was conducted among lake association presidents (Forest Lake, Comfort Lake and Bone Lake); the city managers of Forest Lake, Wyoming, and Scandia; and the clerk for Chisago Lake Township. The survey was completed anonymously by six of the seven individuals through an online survey tool. Complete results of the survey are found in Appendix A.

Overall, the survey showed that multiple avenues of communication are useful and that different types of information are being sought by stakeholders. In short, a multi-faceted communication plan is needed. The communication plan should target multiple audiences with regularly scheduled and succinct information about District projects, meetings, programs, rules, and permitting.

In general, survey respondents indicated favorable communications from the District including 5 of 6 respondents rating CLFLWD communications as “good” or “excellent” (Question 1). The survey found that coordination with city administrators and lake association presidents is important as no respondents indicated the CLFLWD should communicate only with residents or lake association members (Question 2). When asked about what the District should communicate, no types of content were ranked as “not important.” Information about projects was ranked as the most important, followed by information about CLFLWD meetings, agendas, etc. (Question 3). When asked about the usefulness of different avenues of communication, respondents indicated that emailed updates are the most useful with presentations to groups and printed newsletters being the second most useful communication tools (Question 4). When asked specifically about the District website, 4 of 6 respondents indicated they did not currently use the website and one respondent indicated he or she could not find information being sought and thought the website should be updated more often (Question 5). Survey responses were mixed on the subject of rating a typical District communication. One respondent skipped the question, indicating that communication is so lacking it could not be rated. Another respondent indicated that communication is too technical, full of jargon, and too long and complicated. Other respondents indicated communication is timely and well written (Question 6). The survey found that District communications are being used and reprinted by cities and lake associations (Question 7). Finally, survey respondents indicated they typically communicate with the District through email, although meetings and phone calls are also used (Question 8).
III. Communication Plan

Objective #1: Garner support and cooperation for District projects and programs through regular communication with partners and residents.

Table 1. Audience, Communication Mode, and Communication Timing for Objective #1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUDIENCE</th>
<th>MODE &amp; TIMING OF COMMUNICATION</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Website</td>
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<tr>
<td>City Managers/Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>City Councils</td>
<td>Maintained regularly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lake Associations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agencies (State &amp; Local)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
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*Two-way dialogue and presentations through regularly scheduled meetings between District staff and the audience with the intent to update the audience and gather their input on District activities, and to hear news and updates from the audience group.

A. Information to Convey For Objective #1

CLFLWD Projects:
Information about District projects was ranked as the most important type of information that should be communicated by the District. Successful District projects should be highlighted through various venues. Upcoming projects should be vetted not only through the Board of Managers and technical partners, but also with residents, lake users, businesses, and others. Use the IAP2 Spectrum (developed by the International Association for Public Participation and found in Appendix B) to consider public participation goals and the public’s role in planning upcoming projects.

The following activities should be considered to disseminate information about District projects:
- Use the website to post information about current, past and future projects.
- Continue to use a fact sheet template for projects that includes important project components such as location, receiving water, brief project description, cost, targeted pollutants, partners, photos
- Post fact sheets online - include them in “news” section and have them linked to watershed map online showing project location
- Keep printed copies of fact sheets at District news distribution locations (District office, city offices, events, etc.)
- Update various audiences on projects through additional modes including presentations and meetings, tours, emailed updates, press releases, newsletters
CLFLWD Board Meetings:
Information about CLFLWD meetings was ranked as the second most important type of information that should be communicated by the District. Public and partner knowledge about upcoming meetings, agendas, and materials is one way to distribute information about District activities and to gather input from residents and partners - if they see an interesting agenda item and decide to attend a meeting.

The following activities should be considered to disseminate information about District meetings:
- Use the website to post meeting announcements, agendas, materials, and past minutes.
- Keep the website maintained and up to date by posting agendas and materials at the same time they are sent to Managers.
- Ask all cities, lake associations, residents, agencies, and other partners to be part of the email distribution list to receive meeting announcements and materials and/or a link to materials.
- Encourage meeting attendance by noting regular meetings in email updates and newsletters.

CLFLWD Programs:
Information about CLFLWD programs such as cost share programs and water monitoring programs was ranked as the third most important type of information that should be communicated by the District.

- Information on these programs should be developed once and kept current as needed.
- Cost share policies and application forms should be easily accessible online.
- Monitoring plans, maps of monitoring locations, and completed monitoring reports should be available online.
- Consider an online mapping tool that can be used to show water quality impairments, monitoring locations, monitoring data, and project sites.
- Post District’s Annual Report online – consider developing a one or two page executive summary that can serve as a fact sheet for use at meetings and events.

B. Further Considerations For Objective #1

In addition to the modes of communication listed in Table 1, other possible methods of communication and practices include:
- Attend existing meetings of partners or various audiences such as city planning commissions, lake associations, community groups, etc. [It’s often more effective to visit existing meetings rather than asking groups to attend a watershed-sponsored meeting.]
- Attend and participate in other community events, festivals, fairs, farmers markets, etc. to disseminate information about District projects, programs, water resources, and best management practices.
- Personally contact reporters with local media outlets to develop a rapport or relationship such that the reporter is more apt to print press releases and other announcements of the District.
- Keep all written communications succinct and to the point but with appropriate background information (without jargon) for the audience and consistent messages/terms across all communications. **Appendix C** includes some tips for effective written communication and some additional online references on writing for different audiences.
Table 2. Audience, Communication Mode, and Communication Intent for Objective #2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUDIENCE</th>
<th>MODE &amp; INTENT OF COMMUNICATION</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Regular Meetings</td>
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| City Manager/Staff                | Convey District rules & permit program. Determine how District and city can cooperate to achieve common goals. | Host NEMO workshops (non-point education for municipal officials) to educate about:  
• Sources and effects of stormwater  
• Effects of poor water quality on property values  
• Higher costs for restoration than for protection  
• Tools available to cities to improve and protect water  
• State and local regulations | Create graphical flow chart of permitting process to convey when District permit is required, timeline for review, and permit fees. | Maintain website with easy access to permit process flowchart, complete rules, application form, fees, and contact information. |
| Developers & Engineering Firms   | Convey District rules & permit program. Gather input to determine if District can streamline processes. | | | |
| City Councils & Planning Commissions | | | | |

Some of the activities in Table 2 are already being carried out by the District. Other activities should be considered as staff time allows and more input is gathered from stakeholders. The District could consider hiring a neutral, outside firm to conduct input sessions or surveys with city staff with the goal of determining precise city processes and how/where the District permitting program best fits in their overall development process. It’s very possible that the District’s permitting program process (not the rules, but the process of enforcing the rules) could be tailored by city to improve efficiency and compliance.

The use of examples or case studies could be used with some audiences to demonstrate how water quality was improved or degraded depending on compliance with watershed rules. The examples do not necessarily need to be from within the CLFLWD, but could generally show the impact of typical watershed rules on a waterbody. Additional examples could be used to demonstrate the impact of water quality on property values.
Communication with residents, lake users, shoreland owners and rural landowners for the purpose of changing perceptions, understanding, and behavior is a very large task! The East Metro Water Resources Education Program (EMWREP) coordinated and implemented by the Washington Conservation District is currently used by the District to carry out educational programs in the watershed. EMWREP is a partnership that serves 20 local units of government (through contracts and fee for service) in the east metro area, including the CLFLWD. EMWREP is a shared education program used to provide education about the impacts of non-point source pollution on local lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands and groundwater resources and to engage people and communities in projects that will help to protect and improve water quality in the region.

EMWREP uses multiple and varied approaches disseminate information, educate their audiences, and ultimately change behaviors. Some of EMWREPs educational activities include regular press releases to all local media outlets, participation at community events, development and coordination of workshops for various audiences, coordination of the Blue Thumb Program, development of literature like pamphlets and brochures and the “MS4 Toolkit” for use by cities or other organizations.

District staff has some input on EMWREP’s educational programming in the District and the District can and has requested additional, tailored mailings and workshops in the past few years. The District should continue to use EMWREP for most of its educational needs due to the efficiency of a regional program and consistency of messages to the public. The District could consider working closely with EMWREP staff to ensure adequate and appropriate programming within CLFLWD communities.

Additional suggestions for increasing the effectiveness of EMWREP activities in the CLFLWD include:

- Directly contacting specific reporters within the District to request printing of EMWREP press releases
- Reminding city staff and lake associations about the availability of the MS4 Toolkit, press releases, and other educational materials
- Marketing workshops and events through District website, email updates, flyers, etc.
- Communicating in a timely manner with Blue Thumb cost share applicants
- Participating on the EMWREP Steering Committee
- Planning a presentation from EMWREP staff to the CLFLWD Managers on plans for an upcoming year or results of a previous year

Objective #3: Change behavior among residents, lake users, shoreland owners, and rural landowners toward more water-friendly practices.
Appendices

Communication Plan
Comfort Lake Forest Lake Watershed District
August 2015

Appendix A: Communication Survey Results
Appendix B: IAP2 Spectrum
Appendix C: Writing Tips
Q1 How would you rate CLFLWD communications with your city or organization?

Answered: 6  Skipped: 0

- Excellent: 16.67% (1)
- Good: 66.67% (4)
- Poor: 16.67% (1)
Q2 Do you want the CLFLWD to communicate primarily with you or with your city residents/organization members?

Answered: 6  Skipped: 0

- Primarily with me as a representative of my city or organization: 33% (2)
- With me and with residents/organization members, equally: 67% (4)
Q3 Indicate the importance of different types of information the CLFLWD should communicate.

Answered: 6   Skipped: 0

![Bar chart showing importance ratings for different types of CLFLWD information]

- CLFLWD Projects - when, where, what
- Monitoring Data
- CLFLWD Meetings - dates, agendas,...
- CLFLWD Cost Share Programs
- CLFLWD Rules and Permit Process

- Very Important
- Somewhat Important
- Not Important
- Not Sure

Are there different pieces of information you're seeking from the CLFLWD?
Plans in the winter/spring Accomplishments/successes/completed projects (or why they weren't completed) in the fall. Any plans that affects our lake should be communicated to me. As plans come to fruition or the Watershed has results, communicate to lake shore owners.
Q4 Indicate the usefulness of different forms of communication from the CLFLWD.

Answered: 6  Skipped: 0

What other avenues of communication should the CLFLWD utilize?

I was unsure if you meant how useful are these vehicles now or could they be. Since we get very little now, I answered how useful they could be if they were used. CLFLWD website is not useful now. We don't get a newsletter currently.
Q5 Do you find that the CLFLWD website effectively provides the information you seek there? (Can check more than one.)

Answered: 6  Skipped: 0

- I can always find the information I seek on the website. 1
- I sometimes find the information I seek on the website. 1
- I am not able to find the information I seek on the website. 1
- Website should be updated more often. 4
- I do not use the CLFLWD website. 0

Do you have suggestions for improving the CLFLWD website?
Update it, make it interactive, re-purpose useful info from other watersheds or other organizations, have agenda and minutes up in a more timely manner, have links to helpful resources for lake shore owners.
Q6 Tell us about a typical communication from the CLFLWD. (Check all that apply.)

Answered: 5  Skipped: 1

- It is timely.
- Not in time to be useful.
- Too technical, full...
- Language is just right.
- Too long or complicated...
- It is a too short; does...
- It's length and deta...
- It is well written.
- It is poorly written.

Describe CLFLWD communications.
Except for meeting minutes, it is nonexistent so can't be rated.
Q7 Do you reprint or use CLFLWD news in your own communications with residents or members?

Answered: 6  Skipped: 0

- Yes - multiple times a year: 3
- Yes - a couple times a year: 1
- Yes - but very rarely: 2
- No: 0

What type of news or information from the CLFLWD do you reprint?
I work very hard to get information to use in our lake newsletter. It is not given to me in a timely manner nor in a way I can reprint it. I usually use my notes from CLFLWD meetings to write articles.
Q8 Tell us how you communicate with the CLFLWD and other groups.

Answered: 6  Skipped: 0

With the CLFLWD through...

- Regular meetings: 2
- Email: 4
- Phone calls: 3
- In writing: 1

With other groups most...

- Regular meetings: 2
- Email: 4
- Phone calls: 3
- In writing: 2

Other (please specify):
The emails and phone calls are usually initiated by me. Would prefer a more formal communication.
Q9 What's an example of an organization that does a good job of communicating? What makes them effective at communicating?

Answered: 2  Skipped: 4

Timely electronic Communication

Hazelden - they find what interests you and send info on that. Guthrie theater - send updates so you don't forget what they do
Q10 What ideas or comments do you have for the CLFLWD regarding communication?

Answered: 1    Skipped: 5

Do more of it, do it consistently and do it well.
# IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

## Public participation goal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inform</th>
<th>Consult</th>
<th>Involve</th>
<th>Collaborate</th>
<th>Empower</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.</td>
<td>To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.</td>
<td>To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.</td>
<td>To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.</td>
<td>To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Promise to the public

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<tr>
<td>We will keep you informed.</td>
<td>We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</td>
<td>We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</td>
<td>We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.</td>
<td>We will implement what you decide.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Example techniques

- Fact sheets
- Web sites
- Open houses
- Public comment
- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Public meetings
- Workshops
- Deliberative polling
- Citizen advisory committees
- Consensus-building
- Participatory decision-making
- Citizen juries
- Ballots
- Delegated decision
Tips for Effective Written Communication

Effective communication, both written and oral, is purposeful and clear. Now that you have a communication strategy, you should know the intent of your message. Be mindful of language and specific terms that resonate with your intended audience, remembering it may be useful to tell a story or use real life examples to help illustrate your point. If your message is intended to compel people to take action, keep this easy acronym in mind: AIDA

Attention: Get your audience’s attention
Interest: Keep their interest with case studies, stories, or photos
Desire: Appeal to their hopes for change or desire to make a difference
Action: Don’t forget to tell them what they can or should do

Basic Writing Tools and Tips

Think about the wide variety of ways we communicate in writing. The list of written communication pieces is long and varied. Examples include:

- Memo – internal communication
- Letter – external communication
- Email
- Press release
- Newsletter article
- Fact sheet
- Brochure or pamphlet
- Technical Paper
- Poster presentation
- Website or social media
- Grant application
- Program or organization policy
- Program information or handouts
- Event flyer
- Watershed Plan
- Project report (interim report or final report)
- Meeting minutes

Every time you write, your language should be clear, simple, and concise. It should contain all of the important information without redundancy and unnecessary words. It is useful to start with an outline of your piece, paying attention to the logical order and flow of information. As you write, it is helpful to put yourself in the place of the reader. Assume your reader knows little or nothing about your content so remember to include even basic information like dates, locations, and key partners.

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Tips for Effective Written Communication

Editing and re-writing is an important part of the overall writing process. Read your piece to yourself or aloud to a colleague. This will help ensure that punctuation is in the appropriate place and that the piece flows well. Make sure paragraphs begin with a topical sentence containing the main idea or purpose, and that the rest of the paragraph follows with supporting information.

Developing written educational pieces takes more skill than just good writing. Components like photos and captions, diagrams, maps, sidebars, white space (blank areas surrounding photos and text), shapes and other objects of interest can all be used to help convey your message. However, cluttered or disjointed pieces may frustrate or confuse your readers.

For Further Reading or Reference:

1. For a good list of effective terms for communicating about water and the environment: [http://waterwordsthatwork.com/](http://waterwordsthatwork.com/) (Particularly “The Method” Section)