



ASWM Wetland Communications Case Studies Project Report

Produced by

The Association of State Wetland Managers

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Association of State Wetland Managers

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PROJECT BACKGROUND

State and tribal wetland program managers working with their partners across the United States are tasked with communicating sound science, policy and engagement information with the general public and key stakeholders. Communications work is complex, requiring expertise in understanding target audience needs and messaging, as well as designing effective tools and developing feasible and impactful delivery strategies. There is also a need to evaluate the success of these efforts. In addition, wetlands are often poorly understood and complicated in terms of science, regulation and social value. State and tribal resources for wetland communications are often very limited. Finally, most wetland programs are managed by scientists and other technically-trained wetland professionals who commonly have limited communications training. For these reasons and others, wetland program managers often struggle with developing effective wetland-related communications.

Early in 2016, ASWM discovered there was great interest across the country in learning about successful wetland communications projects. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Water was receiving feedback from their state and regional staff as well. This set the stage for ASWM to lead a new project to identify and share case studies about effective wetland communications strategies.

ASWM'S COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT

ASWM's Communications Project was designed to inform communications planning and future research on wetland messaging and opportunities to initiate behavior change through targeted communication strategies and products. The overarching goal of this report is to improve wetland protection and support for state and tribal wetland programs through improved understanding by key stakeholders and the general public of wetland values, threats and needed actions. The project was conducted between September 2016 and May 2017.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- To develop a set of questions designed to gain a deeper understanding of state and tribal communications needs for use in a future formal communications needs assessment
- To identify and document a range of existing successful communication practices by states, tribes and nonprofits working on wetland issues
- To provide information that will inform future federal, state and tribal wetland communication efforts

FORMATION OF A NATIONAL PROJECT WORKGROUP

During the project period, ASWM formed a national workgroup of representatives from state and tribal wetland programs, federal agencies, and nonprofit organizations interested in improving communications around wetland issues, as well as ASWM staff. A list of workgroup members are provided in Appendix A of this report.

PROJECT TASKS

Working with members of the national workgroup, ASWM:

1. Explored and described elements of successful communication strategies.
2. Developed informal case studies of successful communications efforts (including available information about communication goals, target audience, key messages, context, staffing, funding and other resources, evaluation, outcomes, and lessons learned) with special attention to projects targeted toward private landowners.
3. Identified common elements.
4. Identified information needed to assess communication needs of wetland programs across the United States.
5. Developed a list of questions to share with state wetland programs for use in a future formal communications needs assessment with special attention to projects targeted toward private landowners.

CASE STUDY DEVELOPMENT

ASWM staff, working with the national project workgroup, developed ten case studies and analyses in order to: a) identify commonalities in successful outreach projects, b) identify messages that work (including where and in what context), and c) capture and share lessons learned. Planning calls were conducted with workgroup members to determine case study content requirements, as well as share work completed on the projects to date. Draft case studies were developed based on information provided by the case study representatives (see list of Case Study Contacts in Appendix B). Drafts were reviewed and revised by the representatives. ASWM staff conducted verification calls with the contacts for each case study before finalization. Each case study contact signed off on the final draft before it was included in the report.

Each of the ten case studies included in this report provide information on the following components: project need and context; project timeframe; project goals and objectives; target audience; communication/outreach messages employed; delivery approach; specific communications tools utilized; resources invested in the project (financial, staffing, in-kind contributions); project partners; evaluation results; and next steps for the project. Each case study wraps up by sharing advice and/or lessons learned; elements of the project that are transferable; where to get more information about the project; and links to resources related to the case study project.

PROJECT PRODUCTS

- A list of questions that can be used to gather information about state needs and practices.
- A final report approved by the national workgroup describing the tasks completed, documenting identified elements of successful communications strategies and information needed to assess communication needs of state wetland programs. The report includes ten case studies of state agencies and organizations that have developed replicable wetland outreach/communications projects, including lessons learned and information about adapting approaches and tools for use in other locations and applications.
- Findings were presented at the ASWM State/Tribal/Federal Coordination Meeting in April 2017 and at the Society of Wetland Scientists Annual Conference in June 2017.

CASE STUDIES

Ten case studies were selected for inclusion in this report. Case studies were selected to represent a range of geographic locations, target audiences, messaging goals, tools used and level of development. Figure 1 provides a map of the geographic distribution of the case studies contained in the report (including one case study from Canada and one working in the Great Lakes Region).

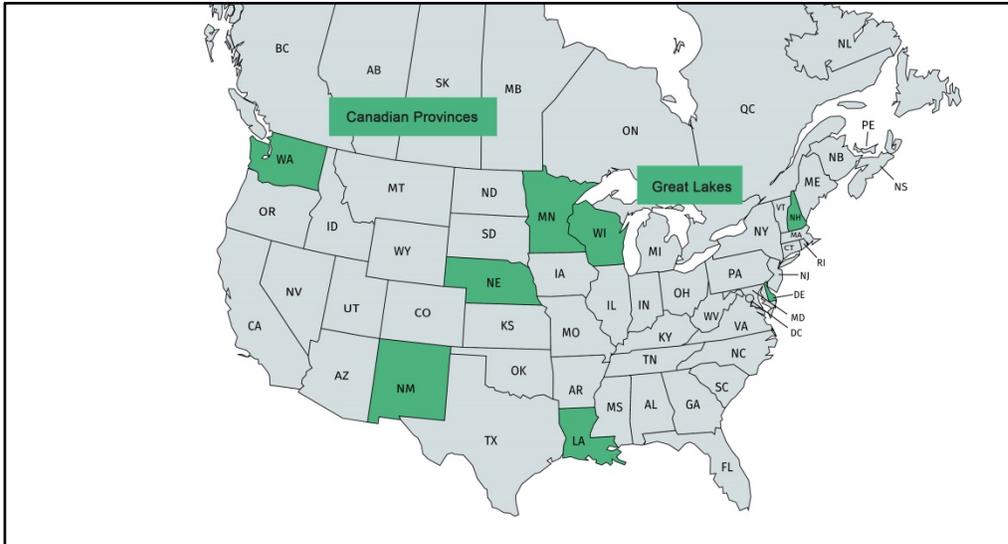


Figure 1. Case Study Geographic Distribution

ASWM COMMUNICATIONS CONTINUUM

Some states are at the base level of developing communications approaches, while others are somewhat experienced and yet others are highly sophisticated and reaching out with advanced approaches. To represent the variety of levels of development, the project team developed a Communications Development Continuum as a qualitative, visual representation of the different levels of communication sophistication among the ten case studies. The continuum includes levels 1-10. At a level one, the project is not part of any other wetland communications strategy and is rudimentary in its complexity/sophistication.

As a case study is placed higher along the continuum, the level of sophistication and/or the overall engagement in wetland outreach as an organization/program increases. At the far right-hand side of the continuum, where the level is 10, are organizations/programs engaged in advanced, complex communications strategies, usually with multiple efforts ongoing that require a significant amount of expertise and investment (staff and/or resources).

FUNDING

Funding for this project was provided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Grant #83581201

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about this project or materials used in the development of this report, please contact Jeanne Christie, Executive Director of the Association of State Wetland Managers, at jeanne.christie@aswm.org or call the ASWM Office at (207) 892-3399.

CASE STUDY MATRIX

Case Study Number/ Entity	1 America's WETLAND Foundation	2 Delaware Department of Natural Resources & Environmental Control	3 Ducks Unlimited Canada	4 Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources	5 Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Geographic Location	Louisiana	Delaware	Canada	Minnesota	Nebraska
Scale	Mississippi River Delta	Statewide	National	Statewide	Statewide & Regional
Focus	Wetland Loss	Citizens ID wetlands on their property	Wetland Protection	Increase acceptance of buffer law	Wetland Benefits
Target Audience	General Public; Stakeholders	Property Owners with Wetlands on their Land	Provincial governments on the Prairies, media and the general public	Property Owners	4 th & 5 th graders, landowners, sportsmen and recreationists
Key Messages	1) Louisiana's wetlands have global ecological significance; 2) they are critical to the energy and economic security of the region and the nation; and 3) it is a huge problem that you need to know and care about	1) There may be wetlands on your property; and 2) Purify, Provide, Protect	1) the magnitude of wetland loss; and 2) what the impact of this loss means	1) Local enforcement is better; 2) Buffers make a difference; and 3) Landowners get to decide	1) There are a variety and diversity of wetlands in Nebraska; 2) Nebraska's wetland resources have been altered; 3) wetlands provide services/benefits; 4) people are part of the landscape; and 5) there are conservation options to help protect and restore wetlands
Economic Focus	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES

CASE STUDY MATRIX, CONTINUED

Case Study Number/ Entity	1 America's WETLAND Foundation	2 Delaware Department of Natural Resources & Environmental Control	3 Ducks Unlimited Canada	4 Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources	5 Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Types of Outreach Tools	Extensive Multi-tool approach	Mailings, web tools, social media	Radio ads, billboards, letters to the editor, maps, billboards, presentations	Face-to-face, website, emails, template presentations, policy documents and reports, factsheets and press releases	Video, Magazine, Wetland Guide, website, social media, news releases, radio, tv
Professional Services Used	YES (In-House – Marketing Firm)	NO	YES	NO?	YES
Target Audience asked to Take Action	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO
Evaluation	High	High	Medium-high	TBD	Low
Timeline	2013-2014	2016 →	2009 ☐	2015 →	2002 ☐
Budget	\$2 million	10% FTE DNREC Communications Staff member and ~\$1,000 in printing/ mailing costs during pilot phase	The total amount invested is uncertain.	8-9 BWSR staff working on a semi-daily basis on some aspect of the project and its outreach. Total project spending \$600-\$700k, incl. outreach, development of guidance and tools for local governments, and grants to support local implementation paid by state funds.	Staff time, funding and in-kind support. The Commission received an EPA Wetland Program Development Grant for \$107k – most of which went to the video which cost around \$91k. Matching cash (State and DU) and in-kind contributions added up to around \$63k.
Outreach Continuum Score	10	8	10	8	10

CASE STUDY MATRIX, CONTINUED

Case Study Number/ Entity	6 New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services	7 New Mexico Environment Department	8 Saint Mary's University	9 The Nature Conservancy	10 Wisconsin Wetlands Association
Geographic Location	New Hampshire	New Mexico	Great Lakes	Washington State	Wisconsin
Scale	Statewide/ Watershed	Statewide - North/South	Regional (several watersheds)	Statewide	Regional
Focus	Culvert Inventory and Replacement	Wetland Issues	Watershed Planning	Integrated floodplain management	Wetland protection and restoration
Target Audience	Municipalities and their Taxpayers	Stakeholder Groups	Stakeholder Groups	1) Floodplain managers, restoration practitioners, private landowners and businesses and invested stakeholders; 2) Legislatures and funders; 3) General public	Landowners and natural resource professionals
Key Messages	Messages focus on how much inaction will cost through destruction of property, disruption of transportation and impacts to citizens. "Do you know how much this will cost?" Communications also to recruit volunteers for culvert inventory.	Targeted stakeholder meeting themes annually	1) better wetland data leads to enhanced decision support and management; 2) local property owner & stakeholder engagement provides improved public understanding and increased support for land management decisions; and 3) science-based, community-supported information can be used to support jurisdictional planning decisions	An integrated approach to floodplain management maximizes the many benefits our rivers provide to communities in Washington while minimizing the costs.	1) "Wetlands matter" (wetlands attract wildlife and benefit your land and water); 2) "You matter to wetlands" (Private landowners own 75% of Wisconsin's remaining wetlands, giving you a vital role in caring for wetlands); and 3) "We help you help wetlands"
Economic Focus	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO

CASE STUDY MATRIX, CONTINUED

Case Study Number/ Entity	6 New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services	7 New Mexico Environment Department	8 Saint Mary's University	9 The Nature Conservancy	10 Wisconsin Wetlands Association
Types of Outreach Tools	Face-to-face meetings, reports, website, factsheets about the culvert project as part of an ongoing NHDES factsheet series	Meetings, factsheets, web support	Stakeholder meetings and support materials	Factsheets, short documents, PowerPoint presentations w/wetland graphics, and ESRI Story Maps, listening sessions	Handbook, brochure, e-newsletters, website, workshops
Professional Services Used	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Target Audience asked to Take Action	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO
Level of Evaluation	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	Medium
Timeline	2015-Present	2013 →	2013 →	2013-2014	2012-2016
Budget	2 FTE DES staff working year-round and an additional 3-6 interns (vary by year) that work full-time, but only over the summer months. Other nominal expenses.	\$123k overall cost, incl. the wetland inventory. Outreach was \$45k, incl. 5 stakeholder meetings and outreach materials.	Costs of hiring professional facilitators for each meeting and staff time for planning and coordination (5% FTE)	The overall project cost was \$123k, which included wetland inventory work in addition to communications expenses	\$289k over four years
Outreach Continuum Score	8.5	8.5	3	6	10

PROJECT TITLE:

Branding a Disaster to Raise Wetland Loss Awareness

PROJECT NEED AND CONTEXT

Wetland losses in the Louisiana Delta Area are the highest on the planet. Fifteen years ago, the Committee on the Future of Coastal Louisiana released a report documenting that the state had already lost 1,900 miles of wetlands. Three factors contribute to this ongoing loss: subsidence of land, lack of nutrients from levees that cut off sediment and fresh water from the wetlands and sea level rise from climate change. Additionally, channelization, energy exploration and cypress harvesting divided existing wetlands. In combination all of these are effectively killing the remaining wetlands. The study predicted an equal amount of wetland loss in the next 60 years, if the current circumstances continued.

Louisiana had not been known for its national assets; especially not its nationally valuable wetlands. Citizens at the state, regional and national level did not understand that if wetland loss continued, so too would increasingly negative impacts to pipelines, fisheries, shipping, and other industries, all with major economic and social impacts.

To address the threat of continuing wetland loss, the state helped establish a foundation to create a national strategic communications plan aimed at raising awareness about the value of wetlands, ecosystem values, problems and solutions. The America's WETLAND Foundation was created to develop and implement the communications plan and the funds required to do this work. The result has included support for the largest master plan for an ecosystem in the world, with targeted funding for restoration work of \$50-\$70 billion over the next 60 years.

TIMEFRAME

The America's WETLAND Foundation was formed by the state in 2002. This case study focuses on the implementation of outreach plans by the Foundation during its initial years. The Foundation continues to conduct highly advanced outreach and communications in a wide range of forms and is funded to continue to do so into the foreseeable future.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- To increase stakeholder awareness about wetland loss in the Mississippi River Delta
- To increase stakeholder understanding of the impact of wetland loss on the economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being of the region

**LOUISIANA:
AMERICA'S
WETLAND
FOUNDATION**

Initial funding from state government and partners was used to develop an independent foundation with the mission to increase awareness and action by the public, business and other stakeholders on the issue of wetland loss in the Mississippi River Basin.

Continuum Level:
High (10)



- To encourage citizens, businesses and leaders to make decisions that support the protection and restoration of wetland resources in the Mississippi River Delta.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience for this project is broad, focusing on the general public, and more specifically, the voting public in the Mississippi Delta. In this initial phase of the project, there were many specific professional stakeholder groups that were targeted as well. These included, but were not limited to, representatives from each of the following areas: corporate/business leaders, scientific experts on specific issues, educators, engineers, elected officials, representatives of local civic organizations, and environmental leaders. A final audience expanded beyond the region, to include the much broader national general public. The Foundation wanted to raise awareness at the national level of the importance of the Mississippi Delta and its wetlands to the national and global economy.

MESSAGES

This initial outreach effort had three key messaging themes: 1) Louisiana's wetlands have global ecological significance, 2) they are critical to the energy and economic security of the region and the nation and 3) it is a huge problem that you need to know and care about. The messages focus on the premise that people need to know there is a problem in order to want to act. Communications focus on the chain of actions that occur when wetlands are lost, as well as draw on triggering events.

Some of the Foundation's earliest messaging relied heavily on what they refer to as "branding a disaster," focusing on hurricanes and other large storm events to link the value of wetlands to reducing storm surge. Messages asked people to think about previous large hurricanes. For example, what if a storm like that happens again and coastal wetlands aren't there to buffer and protect the communities and critical infrastructure? Wetlands are a natural buffer for tidal/storm surge - what would it cost America and the region if those wetlands and their services disappeared? Messaging was adapted to emphasize local concerns, such as predictions that sea level rise and associated storm surge will result in the loss of the much of the state's coastline.

Specific language was used by the campaign over and over again, especially the quote that "a football field of land is lost every hour." Facts that were commonly employed included that the Mississippi River Delta includes the world's largest port system that facilitates the transfer of goods and services in and out of the country through the Mississippi River, that the majority of the nation's offshore oil and gas is supported onshore by Louisiana, that it contains the largest estuary in the world (supporting the lifecycle of 90% of marine life in the Gulf of Mexico), provides habitat for many endangered species, is the second largest flyway for waterfowl and songbirds in the U.S., and that there are rich traditions and cultures in the region --- all of which are put at risk of being lost if wetlands are lost.

Additionally, this project focused on creating a brand to help address this problem. Focusing on the fact that the entire U.S. would suffer from the loss of Louisiana's coastal wetlands, this effort to educate the public about wetland loss within the Mississippi Delta was branded "America's WETLAND." With the title, this brought the concept of American pride to the problem and elicited certain emotions and attitudes associated with pride and value.

DELIVERY APPROACH

Message selection was conducted through a series of convening sessions, bringing together thought leaders around specific issues (e.g. corporate, scientific, education, engineering, elected officials, local civic organizations, and environmental leaders). Leadership forums were conducted at the local level, where stakeholders worked through a series of activities to identify where they had deficiencies in infrastructure and resilience. Forum reports were developed and posted on the Foundation's website. Tied to this work was a significant amount of media exposure that increasingly began to share the message of wetland loss. These early convening sessions, according to the Foundation, gave the overall project "the authentic voice." The foundation focused strongly on spreading the messages through established, trusted voices.

Taking the information developed through the roundtable discussions, forum and meetings, the Foundation worked to craft messages that focused on the urgency to stem wetland loss and how wetland loss links to the economy. Efforts were made to communicate that a sustained environment (slowing wetland loss) is critical to a successful economy. Efforts were made to first let the public know there is a problem and then that there are opportunities to adapt that will help address this issue. Messages were designed in collaboration with and delivered by familiar voices. For example, when delivering messages to engineers, messages on wetland loss were delivered by representatives from the American Civil Society of Engineers. Academic information was always cited, quoting respected studies from credentialed experts.

Using these experts in a variety of fields, the Foundation has been able to work effectively with the media. During the course of this project, the media covered the campaign's efforts and events with millions of media impressions (that number is now in the trillions in 2017). Additionally, the Foundation relied heavily on empirical marketing polls and at least 20 focus groups during this first phase of message and communications tool development. The Foundation shares that everything they have done was tested prior to release.

A specific hallmark of the America's WETLAND Foundation communications work is the use of "message boxes" on communications documents, as well as the use of a lot of scenery images and metaphors. The most commonly used metaphors are the use of a football field as a proxy of acreage of wetland loss, and others such as a lifeline with a beating heart and a house in the winter with a gas flame.

SPECIFIC COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS

The America's WETLAND Foundation initial campaign was extensive. The campaign designed, tested and implemented a wide range of communications tools, allowing the Foundation to place the same images and messaging consistently where people would see it (on the news, on the web, at meetings, when they watched TV, in their mail, when they went to events, etc.) This extensive campaign included the use of each of the following elements over the initial four year period:

- Stakeholder meetings, focus groups, leadership roundtables and conferences
- Local and National Polls
- Website

- Public Service Announcements and Short Videos: The campaign has included numerous public service announcements developed for and run on both local and cable stations. In some cases, the Foundation would pay for playtime, but much of the time they were run at no cost by the stations.
- Printed materials (e.g. factsheets, brochures, progress reports)
- Reports/white papers
- Newsletters
- Billboards: Towards the end of this outreach period, the Foundation introduced “Don’t be a Big Loser” billboards for America’s Wetland.
- Partnership Education Programs
- Project Heroes: The Estuarians are mascots that are used throughout the region to assist with messaging. They are used at local and regional events. They include an eagle, a gator and others. They are recognized by the public and are a good tool to create interactive learning opportunities.
- Specialty items (e.g. bumper stickers, lapel pins, mini Tabasco bottles, mardi gras beads)
- Special events (e.g. After Hurricane Katrina when blue tarps were ubiquitous on roofs, the Foundation held a Blue Tarp Fashion Show, an event where designers had to make dresses out of tarps as a fund raiser and, just a few months prior to Katrina, the foundation wrapped an entire block in the French Quarter in New Orleans to show where water levels were predicted to be in the event of a storm without protection of wetlands.

Of specific note is the measured approach by the Foundation in working to garner media coverage, investing in developing positive working relationships with the media, providing media worthy stories and images and stewarding those relationships in ways that resulted in continuous, positive coverage of the Foundation’s work and messages.

PARTNERS

A branded marketing firm manages the Foundation, so the America’s WETLAND Foundation does all of its marketing work in-house (when it started the project, the marketing firm was already running highly successful campaigns to promote arts education and reduce the stigma of mental health challenges) and was able to apply their marketing expertise to the America’s WETLAND public education campaign.

RESOURCE INVESTMENT

The America’s WETLAND Foundation outreach component is funded at approximately \$2 million per year. This varies incrementally by year, depending on elements of the plan being implemented. Ten percent of the communications budget is provided in-kind by partners who run the ads, host events and contribute to other elements of the campaign. Outreach is conducted by a team of Foundation staff (number may vary, depending on the project). Additionally, the Foundation utilizes a wide range of contractors for specialized work, including film developers, producers, graphic artists, media placement specialists, and others. At times, the campaign may have up to 20 professionals working on an element of the campaign, when both staff and contractors are counted. The Foundation runs on a business model of only having people on staff that the nonprofit needs to conduct its work and hire contractors to do the rest.

EVALUATION RESULTS

The Foundation is committed to rigorous evaluation and tracking of outcomes. Evaluation has included web analytics and media campaign measures, measures of information flow, the pick-up of stories by the media, message testing results, political will and voting outcomes, the success of specific events (attendance, the repeating of phrases/statistics of the campaign during the event), whether specific campaign ideas or language is incorporated into policy, support and recognition of the Foundation's wetland restoration work, and more.

At the beginning of the project, the public was polled about their opinions. At that time only 20% recognized the importance of coastal wetlands and supported work on wetland issues. After four years of the outreach campaign, 80% of those polled recognized and supported wetlands. Additionally, 80% supported the passage of three constitutional amendments protecting wetlands. After 10 years, 72% of state voters indicated that coastal restoration is the "issue of their lifetime." Market research shows that America's WETLAND is the most recognized brand in the region. At the end of the initial campaign years, the state's coastal master plan was approved unanimously by the legislature. Another measure is that when the Foundation's wetland loss PSAs ran in the beginning, they used to be aired by television channels at 2 am. But by the end of four years, stations were running them during evening news segments on both local and cable stations.

NEXT STEPS

The public has, by large, transitioned from a place of not knowing or acknowledging that there is a wetland loss problem to recognizing the pressing need and working to identify adaptation strategies. The State of Louisiana is currently in the midst of the third iteration of its Master Plan, which is now updated every three years and the Foundation is a key supporter of that plan. A new facet of the campaign is released on average every six months, building on the foundation of outreach work that has been built previously. For the last several years, the Foundation has also incorporated social media into its outreach campaign efforts.

Climate change has upped the ante in the Mississippi Delta. What was the worst case scenario of wetland loss at the beginning of the Foundation's work is now the best case scenario. If sea level rise continues, a third of the state's coast will be lost in less than 50 years. Coastal Louisiana is divided by Interstate 10. Current scenarios indicate that much of the land south of I-10 could be lost within this timeframe.

ADVICE/LESSONS LEARNED

- Stay away from anything that tries to "control the message" – rely on research and polling (not the whim of someone who has a motive to control the message). The public needs to feel that the message is not contrived. If the public feels it is contrived, they will move away from it. Not serving the interest of any one person or group is the hardest and most important thing to do.
- For this project, it was critical to document the "litany of horrors" that could be used to convey the consequences of continued wetland loss.
- Use language in the campaign that people can understand.
- Have an honest case to make.
- Let branding and other marketing development work be done by professionals; professional standards will increase standing with sponsors/funders.

- When selecting a marketing firm, make sure they:
 - understand the primary strategies of professional communications campaigns;
 - understand that this is not a one shot deal, that attitudinal/behavior change takes time;
 - are willing to develop a plan with graduated steps over time;
 - know that you are not going to be able to do everything at one time; they should have laser focus on the specific actions that they are going to undertake during each step;
 - are not bound by political constraints; and
 - have measurable deliverables for all elements of the campaign.
- It is hard to get funding for broad messages that have integrity. The challenge for the Foundation, despite all the funding for this project, is still to get the funds to do the things necessary to change attitudes and behaviors.
- This will always be challenging work, as this is an uphill battle – we want nature to allow our lifestyle. However, if we don't make accommodations for nature, we will lose the natural assets that are important to our future. One must keep trying to bring people into a greater understanding.

TRANSFERABILITY

The work of the America's WETLAND Foundation is both unique and replicable. The uniqueness of the project is the state-led initiative to help create a private foundation that would serve as a strong, third-party voice that supported funding and restoration efforts by the state. Except for initial dollars provided by the state for research to get the Foundation off the ground, the Foundation is privately funded. Individual elements of the Foundation's work and the effort to create an overarching strategy to raise awareness and support restoration activities are scalable to any state's needs. This case study exemplifies what can be accomplished when major investments and efforts are made. The case study is valuable to other states by providing an example of what is possible when resources are made available and by providing seasoned advice and models that are applicable to wetland outreach efforts regardless of budget or location. The Foundation offers access to many resources below that can be adapted for use elsewhere. The Foundation staff encourages states interested in using some of their approaches or to adapt materials to contact them.

RESOURCES

America's WETLAND Foundation Website

<https://www.americaswetland.com/>

Issues and Why You Should Care

<https://www.americaswetland.com/custompage.cfm?pageid=257>

PSA Videos

<https://www.americaswetland.com/custompage.cfm?pageid=310>

Summit and Progress Reports

<https://www.americaswetland.com/custompage.cfm?pageid=267>

Outreach Videos

<https://www.americaswetland.com/custompage.cfm?pageid=269>

Sample Press Releases

<https://www.americaswetland.com/articleindex.cfm?id=2>

Sample Newsletters

<https://www.americaswetland.com/articleindex.cfm?id=1>

PowerPoint

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/8uixzjgp8hqacy/051815-AWF-DU-Board-PresentVM4.pdf?dl=0>

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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PROJECT TITLE:

Freshwater Wetland Outreach Toolbox

PROJECT NEED AND CONTEXT

Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) is seeking to increase support for freshwater wetlands in the state. Currently only coastal wetlands are regulated by the state. Earlier efforts to develop a regulatory program for freshwater wetlands were not successful. Instead, a bottom-up approach has been adopted, with DNREC working to develop citizen understanding of and support for freshwater wetlands. The first step in building this support has been to find a way to get landowners to understand what freshwater wetlands are, where they are and, over time, why they are important. DNREC has developed an interactive mapper tool, which is serving as a cornerstone for this outreach effort. The project has been designed to drive landowners to the web-based tool to see if there are freshwater wetlands on their land and then learn about them.

TIMEFRAME

This project was started in the fall of 2016 and is currently being implemented. If the pilot phase is successful in achieving its planned goals, the project is planned to continue and expand over the coming years.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

DNREC’s project has two primary goals: 1) to encourage people to find out if they have freshwater wetlands on their land, and 2) to get them to use the DNREC Interactive Mapper Tool. Secondary goals include: 1) informing the public about freshwater wetland basics, and 2) to get them to scroll down the wetland website to learn about other facts and resources, including the opportunity to make a pledge. The main output for the project is to drive the target audience to the website, with the planned outcome of those individuals having a better understanding of their own land.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience for this project is landowners in areas where they are likely to have freshwater wetlands on their property. In the pilot phase of the project (current), DNREC is focusing on two zip codes. Some information was known about the type of communities that exist in the targeted locations from a survey that was conducted about wetlands on the Delmarva Peninsula. The areas selected for the pilot are largely agricultural/rural communities. If the pilot is successful DNREC plans to expand the project statewide.

DELAWARE:

**DELAWARE
DEPARTMENT
OF NATURAL
RESOURCES &
ENVIRONMENTAL
CONTROL**

Delaware’s project works to encourage private landowners to identify if they have wetlands on their property by encouraging them to go to a Freshwater Wetland website created by DENREC that includes a mapping tool to assist in identification. Once on the site, the landowner can learn more about wetlands and their functions, as well as make a pledge to adopt wetland-friendly practices on their property.

Continuum Level:

Medium/High (7-8)



MESSAGES

The outreach effort focused on two messages: 1) The project focus message: “There may be freshwater wetlands on your property” and 2) DNREC’s ongoing wetland message (developed 4-5 years ago as part of DNREC’s logo redesign effort): “Purify, Provide and Protect.” Additionally, the project has incorporated two common factoids stating that “no matter where you are in Delaware, you are never more than a mile away from a wetland” and that “a quarter of the State of Delaware is made up of wetlands.” When designing the outreach materials, text included information about how much money can be saved by protecting freshwater wetlands that provide clean water and flood protection.

DELIVERY APPROACH

The project is built on information gathered from a Landowner Opinion Report in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, which indicated that landowners prefer to receive some form of tangible object (e.g. postcard) with information on how to access additional online information. DNREC does have limited regulatory control over freshwater wetlands, but the tools use non-regulatory language and phrasing to explain the state’s role in protecting freshwater wetlands. The elements and tools of this project were designed to de-emphasize the state agency’s role as the creator of the tools.

Design and images have been carefully selected to reflect and reinforce the meaning of the messaging words, rather than utilizing a more standard DNREC communications design. Images were selected to be inclusive and not leave out any of the potential target audience. The materials focus on clear language, manageable words and have been designed at the 7th grade reading level. DNREC used the Hemmingway App to help them select appropriate-level wording. The project uses wetland “metaphors” as a primary tool – incorporating icons of a colander, sponge and other items to convey the benefits of wetlands. However, the project specifically avoided terms like “ecosystem services” and others that they believe confuse and turn off landowners.

While the project did not utilize focus groups, DNREC opted for a “soft launch,” piloting various elements of the project to get feedback and adapt them before a full launch. The project has been planned, developed and implemented by DNREC. Additional approvals have not been required.

SPECIFIC COMMUNICATION TOOLS

The project includes outreach via post cards, social media, press releases and face-to-face communication at events that drives landowners to a website where they can use an interactive mapper tool to determine whether or not they may have freshwater wetlands on their property. This project developed the following tools:

- **An Interactive Mapper Tool & Outreach-Focused Website:** This tool serves as a landing page for landowners who have received the postcard and want to see if freshwater wetlands are on their land. It was designed using the ESRI Story Map software, which is a map-based tool designed to help people understand data through the use of maps. ESRI is a GIS company. The tool allows users to enter their address and see if there are freshwater wetlands on their land. The website includes additional information about Delaware’s freshwater wetlands and the opportunity to make a Wetland Protection Promise pledge.
- **An Outreach Postcard:** The postcard incorporates design elements specifically crafted to attract the target audience, such as images, fonts that evoke feelings. The postcard provides the project’s

key messages and information on how to get to the website to find out if they have freshwater wetlands on their land (i.e. use the interactive mapper tool).

- **Hardcopy Checklist on Discovering Wetlands:** This document is an adaptation of Wisconsin's Wetland Checklist, allowing DNREC to provide resources to those who do not have Internet access. This checklist allows landowners to identify wetlands, based on checklist tool, not related to the Interactive Mapper Tool.

RESOURCE INVESTMENT

Primary funding for this project was provided by an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Wetland Program Development Grant. Staffing support has included approximately 10% of the communication staff person's time over six months to get the project to the launch phase. Primary costs have included website development by internal staff and occasional other work by DNREC's four member project team. Additionally, to date the project has purchased 6,568 postcards (\$890) and postage (\$163). Other support has been provided in-kind either internally or from project partners (e.g. reviewing the website and giving feedback).

PARTNERS

Project partnerships included other DNREC programs, the DE Department of Agriculture, the Natural Resource Conservation Service and others. While DNREC led the project and provided the primary resources to support the project through a grant, partners provided advisory support, in-kind review and other resources, and limited funding for the project.

EVALUATION RESULTS

This project is in the pilot testing phase. Evaluation will be occurring on an ongoing basis, but data is not available yet. Metrics include:

- Use of the website and analytics associated with website use
- Limited ESRI internal use tracking analytics
- Identification of who used the two interactive maps
- Who signed up for the Wetland Protection Promise pledge
- Tracking of who calls or emails DNREC staff about the project
- Tracking participation at face-to-face meetings

The project was officially launched on March 13, 2017. As of April 25, the site had 847 views. DNREC had twenty-nine people sign up for the Wetland Protection Promise (four via phone calls from individuals who didn't have access to internet). Nine of these individuals asked for wetland health checks. This response was to two mailers, social media pushes, and press releases.

ADVICE/LESSONS LEARNED

- Use adaptive management to revise and improve your outreach elements over time. Start with the knowledge that once you put something out to your target audience, you will likely have to tweak it based on their response. In many cases the changes will be based on something you didn't think about initially when you developed the materials.
- To do this, make sure to continue to assess your target audiences' response. In conversations with landowners at an event, DNREC staff learned that one of the barriers their project faces (and that

needs to be addressed as they continue) is that some landowners have the misperception that if a wetland is on a map, that it is regulated. This is not true and needs clarification. Event attendees came up to staff and asked how they could get their wetlands off the map.

- Recognize that there may be a political component that has to be taken into consideration. Working with the public can be challenging. One approach is to take public concerns as teachable moments and an opportunity to give people the correct information about what is and is not regulated, the benefits of the wetlands on their land and opportunities to protect and enhance those benefits.
- Be aware of technological constraints that affect the use of specific technological tools. For example, the ESRI Interactive Mapper tool does not work well on Internet Explorer, although it does work across multiple other browsers. However, the tool was selected in part because it does work on hand-held devices, which is highly desirable by landowners.
- Talk about wetlands in a non-regulatory way as much as possible, even when talking about regulated wetlands. The public does not understand (or want to understand) regulatory language. Instead focus on general concepts and provide links to additional information.

NEXT STEPS

DNREC plans to continue to refine its outreach materials and approaches based on feedback and formal evaluation. Depending on the level of interest, the agency is planning to host a number of open houses to encourage additional information sharing through face-to-face sharing opportunities. DNREC is starting work to create a website frame and mapping tools that offer more than what ESRI can provide. This would allow for more creative ways to share information and maps. Additional funding would be required to take the project to this next level.

TRANSFERABILITY

DNREC considers this entire outreach project to be highly transferable. The project's materials and plans could be adapted to work in other locations. The primary consideration would be the capacity to develop and keep up-to-date maps to support that component of the project. DNREC based elements of its project on work from Wisconsin and hopes that others will use what they have learned and developed to assist in creating greater awareness of wetlands and their benefits elsewhere in the United States.

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PROJECT TITLE:

Science and Economics to Affect Wetland Policy

PROJECT NEED AND CONTEXT

Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) realized that despite the efforts by many players, Canada was still losing wetlands and most provinces did not have a wetland mitigation policy. DUC felt that the communications materials they were using were not effective and that improved communications materials could help stem this loss.

TIMEFRAME

The initiative was started about 8 years ago. There is no determined end date for it (maybe once wetland protection policies are established across all provinces in Canada). This is a multi-year science project to provide information on wetland values (ongoing and adjusted as needed).

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

To obtain environmental and economic information that they could present to government and the media to encourage wetland protection.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience for this project is Provincial governments on the Prairies but also the media and the general public.

MESSAGES

DUC looked at messaging from many different ways: 1) the magnitude of wetland loss from around 1968 – 2005 with on the ground data at the watershed scale and that losses are continuing to happen; 2) what the impact of this loss means depending on what is going on at the time (e.g., algal blooms on Lake Winnipeg and the connection of wetland loss in relation to their ability to reduce phosphorus, reducing algal blooms, or the flooding in 2011 and how it is related to wetland loss). For example, X number of wetlands equals X amount of flood storage capacity. Messaging included information regarding specific functions of wetlands, ecosystem services of wetlands, and the economic value of wetland ecosystem services. In Canada, the farmers have a culture where it is important to be good to your neighbor, so if agricultural drainage is flooding downstream farmers this is important and relevant information for messaging within the agricultural community. Farmers in Canada have a powerful voice and the government listens to them. DUC is always looking for what is in the media and what the government cares about in order to develop relevant messaging.

CANADA:

**DUCKS
UNLIMITED**

Ducks Unlimited Canada's project is geared specifically toward gaining legislative protections for Class 3-5 wetlands and the development of wetland mitigation policies. Their efforts are ongoing and provide an interesting approach in a culture and government structure that is different than what is found in the United States. A key take-away is that information used must be relevant to the target audience and timing of the message is critical to success.

**Continuum Level:
High (10)**



DUC's internal communications, policy and science team decided on the appropriate facts and numbers to share. They conducted a survey to obtain a statistically quantifiable understanding of the level of awareness and impressions the general public had regarding wetlands in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The specific ask of the messaging is to protect class 3-5 wetlands and mitigate for any further losses.

DELIVERY APPROACH

DUC established credibility with its target audience by meeting with them and providing solid scientific background information. DUC makes the information relevant to provincial governments environmentally and economically by always trying to look through their eyes and trying to provide a solution to a problem they have. Provincial governments have been receptive to DUC because they like that DUC makes their information relevant to them and their constituents. It is important to understand the political environment and the issues – show them the pros and cons. The timing of the messaging is also important. If there are relevant environmental issues that need to be dealt with, provincial governments are often more receptive to the solutions that wetlands may provide to solve them.

DUC did not really choose a specific learning level. Instead they used comparisons to illustrate the science which they found to be very effective (i.e., how many football fields of wetlands have been lost, Phosphorus loss from wetland drainage is like dumping 455,000 bags of fertilizer into Lake Winnipeg, etc.).

SPECIFIC COMMUNICATION TOOLS

DUC uses radio ads, billboards, and letters to the editor – whatever is required at the time. They use many negative images in its communication materials, but the one that has worked best was a map of the number of wetlands in 1968 and the number of wetlands on that same watershed in 2005, showing how much drainage had occurred over that time period. It is visually striking. They found that billboards are not very effective.

Although the messaging may be for the public, in order to inform government it has to be messaging that is relevant to the government. Media coverage is very important for raising the importance of any issue. Every message DUC uses is backed by science. They also do a lot of presentations.

RESOURCE INVESTMENT

It's hard to fund policy and communications work but DU Canada felt it was worth its own investment. The total amount invested is uncertain, but DUC received \$80,000 in research grants to estimate the impact of flooding and also solicited donations from individuals and foundations, some of which was project specific.

PARTNERS

DUC contracted out with a number of universities to do research and consultants who did surveys and economic analyses. Partners who co-sponsored/co-branded the outreach materials include Rate Payers Against Illegal Drainage, Calling Lakes Eco Museum, Round and Crooked Lakes Flood Committee. DUC partnered with other conservation groups as well such as the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board to disseminate and use information that DUC collected.

EVALUATION RESULTS

DUC measures success by the use of their language, numbers, and messaging by government and others or when government approves policy changes based on their efforts. There are many more measures that they use, but here are a few examples:

- Number of expressions of support from government officials.
 - Government officials acknowledge the environmental and economic value of wetlands.
 - Government officials acknowledge the need for wetland protection for sustainable economic growth.
 - Government seeks expertise from DUC on wetland science.
- Governments incorporate wetland values statements in to their election platforms.
- Op-eds are printed in newspapers.
- Governments speak to media about wetland values.
- Partnership groups meet with the Saskatchewan Party and the New Democratic Party.

NEXT STEPS

DUC has wetland protection policies in place now in the east coast provincial governments, so they will continue to try and get them established in all other provinces. Provincial governments are getting pressure from other interests, such as the agricultural community, so DUC will need to address that effectively.

ADVICE/LESSONS LEARNED

Informing policy decisions is extremely difficult. There is definitely trial and error involved as audiences are complex and some aspects of messaging is constantly changing depending on the environmental issue of the day. For example, DUC showed that wetlands were valuable but did not provide any sense of urgency. That was a mistake - they needed to let people know that help was needed. Success is dependent on having the right individuals in place with the political knowledge, creativity in how to inform people, and good communication skills.

TRANSFERABILITY

DUC had to do a watershed scale study in each province because the government needs province specific information for it to be relevant. It is transferable, but only if people also consider and recognize that the information is relevant given similar conditions geographically. It would be necessary to point out similarities and differences in conditions between watersheds when looking to transfer.

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PROJECT TITLE:

Outreach on Buffer Initiative and Landowner Implementation

PROJECT NEED AND CONTEXT

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) has undertaken a major outreach initiative to assist local governments to take on implementation and enforcement of a new statewide Buffer Law. This law is the result of a statewide initiative to use buffers and other alternative methods to improve water quality by filtering out nitrates and other pollutants. BWSR’s outreach focuses on helping soil and water conservation districts assist landowners in complying with the law and counties and watershed districts in deciding whether they wanted to choose local enforcement with the alternative being enforcement by BWSR. Outreach has focused on encouraging the local enforcement option and providing soil and water conservation districts with outreach tools for their communication work with landowners.

TIMEFRAME

2013-Present (Ongoing)

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Help local governments understand the new Buffer Law
- Prepare local governments to be ready to help landowners
- Support local governments as they deliver outreach and technical assistance to landowners
- Provide information to support local decision making regarding enforcement

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Primary target audience: Soil and Water Conservation Districts, counties and watershed districts
- Secondary target audience: (Indirectly) Landowners (BWSR does not have a goal to reach out to the public/landowners, but to support local governments that do.)

MESSAGES

This project has two-fold messaging, as BWSR reaches out directly to SWCDs, counties and watershed districts, but also provides support for those local entities to conduct outreach to their landowners.

BWSR messages to SWCDs/ local governments: Messaging is focused on making “local choices.” These messages include: Local is better;

MINNESOTA:

MN BOARD OF SOIL AND WATER RESOURCES

This case study demonstrates an alternative approach to reaching out to landowners, by providing outreach supports to local governments who conduct the on-the-ground work with landowners. BWSR has undertaken a major initiative to provide outreach and technical supports to Soil and Water Conservation Districts counties and watershed districts, who in turn provide outreach on and elect to enforce compliance with a new Minnesota Buffer Law.

Continuum Level:
Medium (6)



Elect to enforce the law at the local level; What they need to be ready to do to help landowners comply with the Buffer Law; Details of how to assist landowners comply with the law (how to measure a buffer; the types of plants that should be in a buffer, etc.).

Secondary messages for use by SWCDs with landowners: Messages for landowners include: Many farmers practice good conservation; SWCDs are here to help you; Buffers make a difference; Landowners have to be in compliance with the Buffer Law; Landowners have options on how to reach compliance with this law; Landowners get to decide which options they want to use to achieve compliance.

DELIVERY APPROACH

In order to meet the communications needs of their target audiences, BWSR has focused on face-to-face communications at meetings with SWCDs and attending SWCD meetings as a resource to district staff where they interface with landowners. The development of communications documents and tools is only secondary to this effort. Face-to-face communications are focused on “telling a story” about the issue and the need for compliance. While the project does not focus on scientific messages, it does include a brief explanation that the wider a buffer is on the land, the better the nitrate removal that occurs (citations included). The message’s focus remains on the simple messages that buffers make a difference and landowners have to take action to be in compliance with the law.

BWSR also provides access to a new *Buffer Compliance and Tracking Tool* able to provide documentation of which parcels of land are obviously in compliance and which are not. This tool allows local government to notify landowners of their status (85%+ are currently in obvious compliance, but this differs significantly between counties). BWSR worked with many other state agencies and interest groups on the development of the new Law, which also helped inform communications/outreach approaches, message development and language selection.

SPECIFIC COMMUNICATION TOOLS

BWSR has developed a variety of communications tools using in-house staff resources, including a website, emails, adaptable PowerPoint presentations, policy documents and reports, factsheets, regular updates, and press releases. Tools are developed at the language level used by SWCD staff, but with jargon and acronyms removed. Specific images used throughout the project include a buffer width graphic, a photo of people talking at a site (to demonstrate the interactive nature of achieving compliance), and a picture of the website (where BWSR sends all parties to get more information and resources). Face-to-face opportunities to learn and discuss, as well as written materials and web-based resources are most important to SWCD and municipal staff to support their learning and work.

In partnership with BWSR, local governments have collaborated to develop a template of an informational postcard, which is being used across the state by SWCDs and other local governments. Local governments also send notification letters to landowners that appear to be out of compliance, including information about the Buffer Law, what it requires of landowners, and various ways to achieve compliance. Face-to-face meetings and basic written materials are most important to the landowners.

RESOURCE INVESTMENT

This project is supported internally by BWSR, with 8-9 staff working on a semi-daily basis on some aspect of the project and its outreach. A total of 20 different BWSR staff members have been involved

(most peripherally). Resources include staff time to travel to local government meetings. An internal “Buffer Team” of six staff members meet weekly. Total spending on the project has been in the range of \$600-\$700k for the whole project, which includes outreach, development of guidance and tools for local governments, and grants to support local implementation, that is paid for through state funds. The 2017 Legislature is considering appropriating funds to local governments that elect to enforce the Law at the local level. To be qualified to receive these funds, counties and watershed districts will have to assume enforcement of the new law. These additional funds provide support for technical assistance, communications and outreach to carry out management and enforcement of the law at the local level.

PARTNERS

Primary partners in this project have been: SWCDs and local governments (delivery of messaging and technical assistance to landowners), the Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Association of Counties (access to SWCDs and municipal government staff), and the Department of Natural Resources (mapping and regulatory authority on construction in waterways). Other partners have included: Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (limited assistance with data), University of Minnesota, University of Minnesota Cooperative Extension (buffer education), Watershed Districts, agricultural commodities groups, and environmental groups (ex. MN Center for Environmental Advocacy).

EVALUATION RESULTS

Evaluation of the outreach element of the outreach project is currently taking several forms: 1) BWSR is currently tracking meeting attendance and information sharing activities; 2) Feedback is being collected on the usefulness of resources provided by BWSR for work with landowners; and 3) long-term evaluation of compliance is being conducted, using the Buffer Compliance and Tracking Tool to compare pre- and post-law buffers and use of alternative compliance approaches. While initial feedback has been positive, more time is needed to assess actual compliance changes, as the law comes into effect on November 1, 2017. Full evaluation will be complete in 2-3 years.

NEXT STEPS

BWSR plans to:

- Continue to strengthen outreach through the Associations – helping local governments know about the enforcement options they have
- Update the BWSR website to make it more user-friendly
- Move from planning/kick-off phases to implementation phase (support ongoing compliance work)
- Work with University of Minnesota Extension to develop webinar based trainings on buffers
- Conduct analysis of evaluation data and make changes to efforts as needed

ADVICE/LESSONS LEARNED

- Focus on credibility -- it is important to be open and transparent
 - Always focus on establishing credibility when talking to interest groups and the public
 - Work on developing a system of cooperation and trust
 - Reach out and communicate face-to-face whenever possible
 - Keep it simple - make messaging about landowner situations and compliance
 - Solicit input and make sure to take action based on this input to help build trust and cooperation
- Be prepared to adapt and change communications materials; how people interpret language and try to apply ideas to their situation often result in the need to rethink/revise messages/tools.
- It is useful for the state to reach out through local government, rather than through DNR (a regulatory agency) or BWSR (not as well-known and seen as “the state”) when connecting with landowners.

TRANSFERABILITY

This approach to rolling out a new regulation and working with local government to support their related outreach work can be replicated in other parts of the country (see template documents). The basic approach, planning and implementation steps can be replicated in other locations, with adaptations for state/local needs. BWSR was fortunate to have designated funding and state support to resource these efforts, the lack of which could be a limitation for transferability in other locations.

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PROJECT TITLE:

Wetlands of Nebraska

PROJECT NEED AND CONTEXT

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (referred to as the “Commission” from here on out) was regularly receiving requests from school groups, the public, and service groups wanting information about wetlands in Nebraska. It became clear that the Commission needed to develop a formal communications package. Ted LaGrange, the Commission’s Wetland Program Manager, spearheaded the effort and developed a list of commonly asked questions which resulted in an outline for the “Wetlands of Nebraska” publication and video. He also discovered a need for primary education materials while providing talks about wetlands to the local elementary school where his children were students. This spurred the development of the Trail Tales publication for 4th and 5th graders.

TIMEFRAME

2002 – 2005 (for initial development, but still ongoing)

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal for the Wetlands of Nebraska project was to educate the public about Nebraska’s wetland resources, the benefits they provide for people, and available conservation options.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Trails Tales was targeted at 4th and 5th graders, but the rest of the project was statewide and included hunters, anglers, park users, recreationists and landowners. The regional targeting mostly was related to a map that was developed showing the regional wetland complexes for the state and the associated partnerships operating in many of these regions that the Commission works with for planning and project delivery.

MESSAGES

The primary messages of the Wetlands of Nebraska project were: 1) there are a variety and diversity of wetlands in Nebraska; 2) Nebraska’s wetland resources have been altered; 3) wetlands provide services/benefits; 4) people are part of the landscape; and 5) there are conservation options to help protect and restore wetlands. Within the messages, information was included regarding the ecosystem services and economic value that wetlands provide.

**NEBRASKA:
NEBRASKA
GAMES AND
PARKS
COMMISSION**

This case study illustrates a broad brush approach to informing the public about the value of wetlands in their state and available conservation programs, with one component specifically designed for 4th-6th graders. It relied heavily on partnerships to develop and deliver their messages. This project has formed the foundation for ongoing communication efforts within the state.

Continuum Level:
High (10)



DELIVERY APPROACH

For this project, the Commission had a steering committee composed of conservationists, including biologists and educators, and the funding partners Ducks Unlimited and the U.S Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). They also received guidance from communications professionals who helped them make their products more timeless, i.e. they were advised not to include contact names on materials as staffing will change, and to not mention specific programs like the USDA Farm Bill programs because the programs and their names will also change over time. They were advised to provide good information but to keep it more general.

SPECIFIC COMMUNICATION TOOLS

The Commission produced an educational video, a special wetlands edition of their Trail Tales Magazine (that is distributed to every 4th grader in the state), a publication entitled "Guide to Nebraska's Wetlands and their Conservation Needs", and created a wetlands page on their website with a domain name to help direct people there (NebraskaWetlands.com). For other outreach efforts, they use news releases, radio spots, video releases, TV appearances, social media, newsletters, publications, their NEBRASKAland magazine, and their web site.

The video was geared toward a 6th grade learning level. Ted LaGrange worked with the Nebraska Educational Telecommunications (public TV) to produce the wetlands of Nebraska video that was distributed through DVDs and VHS tapes and has been uploaded to YouTube. The Wetlands of Nebraska video was aired on the state-wide public TV network and it continues to air periodically. The Commission has since produced about 4 or 5 additional printings for DVDs. They've given out around 1,000 DVDs, 600 VHS tapes, about 10,000 Guide to Nebraska's Wetlands publications, and 43,000 Trail Tales publications. Ted's guiding principle in regard to photos was to make sure that many of them included people interacting with wetlands in positive ways to show that wetlands and people interact.

Most of the communication and outreach products (news releases, video releases, publications, social media updates, etc.) are produced by the Commission's Communications Division. However, when working with some partnerships, they will use the expertise and assistance of some of the other partners for outreach (e.g., USFWS, NRCS, etc.). Approval is often needed from the Communication Division Administrator, and that process usually only takes a few days.

RESOURCE INVESTMENT

Staff time, funding and in-kind support were all used to implement this project. The Commission received an EPA Wetland Program Development Grant for \$107,000 – most of which went to the video which cost around \$91,000. Matching cash (from the State and Ducks Unlimited) and in-kind contributions added up to around \$63,000.

PARTNERS

There is a strong emphasis on partnerships to deliver conservation in Nebraska. There are three migratory bird joint ventures that are involved (Rainwater Basin, Playa Lakes, and Upper Mississippi River/Great Lakes), two Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers, and Great Plains), the Sandhills Task Force, the Saline Wetland Conservation Partnership, the Platte River Recovery and Implementation Program, and the Missouri River Ecosystem Coordinating Work Group. Most of these partnerships have members from NGOs, agencies, and private

landowners. The partners contribute by adding staff capacity, helping with outreach, planning, grant writing, project implementation, and research/evaluation.

EVALUATION RESULTS

The products produced were widely distributed and seemed to be well received, but there was no formal evaluation of effectiveness. The Commission is planning to start documenting the number of website hits on their newly updated webpage, NebraskaWetlands.com.

NEXT STEPS

The project is ongoing and is still used along with other more specific messaging efforts.

ADVICE/LESSONS LEARNED

There were no major mid-course corrections except for that when they started to produce the VHS tapes, the technology changed so dramatically they had to stop and focus solely on DVDs. They initially developed a draft of the video where they mentioned specific state and federal programs that have since changed names – so for the final video produced, they learned that it is better to be more general in order to make the videos more timeless. Working with the producers at the TV station was expensive but very helpful because of their specific expertise and guidance. For example, they were advised not to talk too much about partnerships because the general public will glaze over – it's not interesting to them. Instead they took a vignette approach with stories about wetlands across the state and limited it to 5-7 segments where the audience gets to know the person talking and relate to their story and they found this approach was very successful. The public TV network also has aired the video on their channels throughout Nebraska.

TRANSFERABILITY

Their approach worked well and could be tailored to other states. Other states would need to tailor their messages to the specific socio-economic demographic of the various parts of their state to make it relevant.

RESOURCES

Nebraska Wetlands website:

<http://outdoornebraska.gov/nebraskawetlands/>

Guide to Nebraska's Wetlands:

http://outdoornebraska.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/NebraskaWetlandsGuide_03182016.pdf

Trail Tales Special Issue:

<http://outdoornebraska.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/TTales-Spring-2006.pdf>

Wetlands of Nebraska video:

<https://youtu.be/DJBXYJmFiKo>

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PROJECT TITLE:

Assessing the Condition of Culverts across New Hampshire: A Public Engagement Process

PROJECT NEED AND CONTEXT

The genesis of this project dates back 10-12 years ago during a catastrophic rain event, when loss of life and property occurred. At that time, a roadway culvert became clogged with debris turning it into a dam. The situation led to erosion and the collapse of the roadway, releasing water into a channel that flooded the town. Since that time, many other culverts have washed out in the state. The older engineering norm for culverts (corrugated metal) is no longer effective and many culverts around the state are rotting out or collapsing and need to be replaced. This led to the need to inventory culverts across the state to help understand what types they are and what condition they are in. This need initiated a statewide effort to garner public support and volunteer assistance to assess culverts.

TIMEFRAME

2015-Present

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary goals for the culvert outreach project are to:

- protect public safety
- improve the state’s inventory of culverts; and
- create a robust plan for replacing culverts

Secondary Goals for the project are to:

- improve the health of aquatic organisms
- reduce sediment transport issues
- adapt to address the impacts of climate change
- convey that substandard or deteriorated culverts pose a risk to public safety, clean water and the environment in general; and
- create maps and datasets through participation in stakeholder meetings, generate reports – number, actions

TARGET AUDIENCE

This project has three related target audiences: First, New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) is reaching out to municipalities and the DOT to share with them the need to better understand their culverts and to work with them to identify their top ten culvert replacement projects. The second target audience is New Hampshire taxpayers, who need to have the political will to prioritize the replacement of culverts in their local budgets. For the same reason,

NEW HAMPSHIRE:

NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

New Hampshire includes outreach as a key element of a statewide initiative to engage citizens in a statewide culvert inventory project. Efforts have included outreach to citizens to increase awareness of culvert failures, the costs of replacing culverts without adjusting to new precipitation patterns, and engages them in volunteer activities that collect data at the local level. Outreach to municipal councils/ selectmen encourages the use of the database to help prioritize problem culverts for replacement.

Continuum Level:

Medium High (8.5)



NHDES project targets municipal selectmen/council members who also need to be supportive of these decisions and investments to enable culvert replacements to be prioritized and funded.

MESSAGES

Key messages of the project focus on the critical nature of improving public health, safety and environmental conditions through replacement of priority culverts. Messages reflect the urgency of the situation and emphasize that these are in peril if action is not taken. Messages focus on how much inaction will cost through destruction of property, disruption of transportation and impacts to citizens. A primary message asks citizens “Do you know how much this will cost?” when discussing the costs of inaction (leaving failing culverts in place instead of replacing them).

Outreach also includes communications materials to recruit volunteers to assist in the culvert inventory process being conducted by NHDES. The project messages are used not only to inform, but also to move people to personal action in the form of choosing to volunteer their time to the effort.

Project staff share that the climate has changed and storm events are different in New Hampshire than they were 20 years ago. Outreach focuses on sharing that the replacement of culverts with the same culvert specifications will result in the same outcome as currently being experienced, with wash-outs and damage. They share the costs of in-kind replacement with the cost of new culvert specification that will allow them to stay in place effectively for much longer periods of time.

DELIVERY APPROACH

Credibility for this project was established by working in partnership with municipalities and Conservation Commissions, who in turn work with taxpayers. New Hampshire fully embraces the concept of climate change and includes the impacts of changes to New Hampshire’s climate in messaging and images shared through the project. NHDES focuses on getting their target audiences to think about their personal experiences with changing weather patterns and specific weather events that have created risks.

SPECIFIC COMMUNICATION TOOLS

This project focuses on the communications basics – developing reports, a support website with links to essential project information and links to partner entities, as well as factsheets about the culvert project that are a part of an ongoing NHDES factsheet series. Efforts are largely focused on working with partners to recruit volunteers to assist with the assessment process and delivering trainings that allow volunteers to maintain quality in the data they submit.

PARTNERS

The culvert assessment project has been built on a strong network of partnerships. Funding partners include EPA, the NHDES Wetlands Bureau and Watershed Management Bureau. Another partner is the NH Department of Transportation, which provides both in-kind and funding support. Other partnerships include the New Hampshire Municipal Association, municipalities (which provide in-kind services through data collection and inventorying activities), Trout Unlimited (which provides engineering and in-kind data collection supports). Partnership with the NH USGS provides engineering support, in-kind data collection, intern management in the summer and other contributions. This partnership is key, as data comes in through the internship program and the internship program provides data QA/QC, analysis and presentation support to the project. Additional partnerships include

a Memorandum of Agreement with the New Hampshire Association of Natural Resource Scientists, providing guidance and technical assistance to the project. The University of New Hampshire and the New Hampshire Stormwater Center also provide technical support.

RESOURCE INVESTMENT

The primary investments in this project are related to internal staff time for management of the project and funding for summer interns to support data collection and management activities. Training is a large component of the time invested in this project, by DES staff and both the interns and the citizen volunteers who do the field data collection. This work is facilitated by the use of standardized forms and QA/QC when entering data into the master database. This also includes investments in training time. An estimation of DES staff time for the project is 2 FTE working year-round and an additional 3-6 interns (vary by year) that work full-time, but only over the summer months. There are some other incidental costs, but they are nominal. A portion of the funding for the project comes from a Wetland Program Development Grant awarded to NHDES by the US EPA.

EVALUATION RESULTS

NHDES reports that the project is currently highly successful. The goal of the larger project is to inventory all 1,600 culverts in the state. On this front, the NHDES is on schedule, having inventoried 35-40% of the known culverts in the state. Additionally, the assessment process has identified additional culverts that were not documented in the state database. This assessment effort is supported by the communications work that reaches out to municipalities and citizens to participate as volunteers in the inventory process. Collis Adams of NHDES reports that regional planning commissions are stepping forward to help with the assessment and lots of towns are engaged in the project. Volunteers have stepped forward in many areas, to an extent that NHDES has to work hard keep up with training all of them. NHDES shares that they believe that their communications efforts have settled on language and messaging that works particularly well.

NEXT STEPS

NHDES will be continuing its culvert identification process until it is complete. Efforts to build the statewide culvert database will continue. As the inventory is completed in each watershed, NHDES will work with the public and municipalities to use this data to assess if they need to do something differently in terms of their culvert replacement strategies. As more datasets are complete, NHDES will be actively seeking to engage with municipalities in their local culvert replacement prioritization planning efforts.

ADVICE/LESSONS LEARNED

Project leaders were surprised to see how many people were willing to step forward to assist and volunteer for the project. Project staff believe that one of the strengths of the project is that it provides something tangible that people can do to respond to changes in weather patterns (climate change and flooding). Additionally, when the work is outdoors, with formal training and the provision of tools, people are likely to show up. NHDES emphasizes the importance of being ready to train and support all volunteers that respond to a call to participate.

TRANSFERABILITY

NHDES shares that their project can serve as a model for other states and organizations and is completely transferable. NHDES is pleased to share forms, their database set-up, outreach plans and materials, steps that went into creating and supporting the project and lessons learned with any interested party.

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PROJECT TITLE:

Regional Wetland Stakeholder Forums

PROJECT NEED AND CONTEXT

New Mexico is the fifth largest state and the third driest, with a population of around 2 million people statewide. It is made up of principally rural areas with large ranches and lots of public and tribal lands.

Communication strategies have to take into account that, even at the watershed level, each targeted group (community or watershed group) has its own “personality” and respond in their own ways to different methods of communicating.

New Mexico has an active Wetlands Action Plan Program that works with and communicates with watershed groups directly. The development of the first stakeholder forum was precipitated by the need to find in-kind match for monitoring grants. The creation of a statewide forum allowed for the contribution of match while building relationships with stakeholders. The New Mexico Wetland Program does not have a dedicated outreach person and only has 1-3 staff at any one time to run the entire program. Consequently, wetland communications have focused on relationship building, information sharing and identifying stakeholder needs. This case study shares the importance of face-to-face contact to understand stakeholder needs, encourage networking and create a venue to create shared messages and action.

TIMEFRAME

The first forum (called the “Wetland Roundtable”) took place in 2006. Wetland forums have an ongoing outreach effort since that time.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- To increase stakeholder awareness of wetland issues
- To facilitate networking between wetland stakeholders
- To engage local government actively in wetland issues

TARGET AUDIENCE

The primary target audiences for New Mexico’s Stakeholder Meetings are land managers, non-government organizations (NGOs), private landowners, and educators, as well as other smaller groups of stakeholders.

NEW MEXICO:

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

New Mexico is working to build a foundation of shared knowledge and support for wetland work through regional wetland stakeholder forums. This face-to-face approach to communications sets the stage for future communications and collaboration building efforts.

Continuum Level:
Low (3)



MESSAGES

Most of New Mexico's wetland stakeholder forums are built around a specific theme or communications message that promotes engagement in wetlands protection and restoration. Rather than focusing a targeted outreach campaign on one or two specific messages, this approach has allowed the state to continuously bring messages about wetlands to help build awareness and assimilation of wetlands into other water, wildlife habitat and ecosystem programs. Repeated messages that are incorporated into every forum include:

- New Mexico is the 5th largest state and the 3rd driest state
- There are wetlands in New Mexico (even though New Mexico is an arid state and the state's wetlands are often not visible)
- There are more than a million acres of wetlands in the state
- Our water has dried up, changed or been used up in many locations
- They are our wetlands and have important functions
- We need to protect them

DELIVERY APPROACH

Unlike other outreach case studies in this report, New Mexico's stakeholder group communications effort does not focus on a targeted message, seek to change awareness, or a specific opinion or behavior. Instead, their communications strategy concentrates on foundation-building, working to keep participants apprised about wetland topics in general to raise overall awareness and commitment to protecting wetlands. Initially, New Mexico worked to bring together state agencies in order to work collaboratively on focusing resources and expertise on wetlands. To meet this need, the state developed separate Agency and NGO roundtables with targeted agendas. Some meetings then were combined due to the importance/time constraints of the presenters/topics. Agency/NGO meetings worked well, so they were combined. Next, the state focused on garnering more participation from the southern part of the state. This has resulted in the establishment of two meetings (one in the northern and one in the southern parts of the state), each held twice a year in the fall and in the spring.

Over the years, MaryAnn McGraw (NM Wetland Program Manager), shares that participation in New Mexico's Wetland Stakeholder Meetings has broadened to other groups through "word of mouth, the thirst for information, and the caliber of presenters and topics". The roster of attendees now includes representatives from land management agencies and other agencies, regulators, tribes, NGOs, some private land owners (entire watershed groups at times), university staff and university students (some staff give their students credit for attending and students have also been invited speakers). Each stakeholder meeting has been approved as formal outreach for the Nonpoint Source Management Plan; meetings are well attended, in part, for this reason.

SPECIFIC COMMUNICATION TOOLS

New Mexico hosts regional stakeholder meetings twice a year focused on achieving specific communication goals. These goals include: ensuring that stakeholders receive updates from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, presenting plans and outcomes for specific restoration projects, sharing of technical techniques, building partnerships among participants, and carrying out processes during the meetings that are designed to identify duplicate efforts and set the stage for starting or strengthening collaborations.

In the development of each stakeholder meeting, a theme is established and emails are sent around to partners to brainstorm about potential presentations, speakers and demonstrations. Efforts are made to ensure speakers are experts on their topic. A total of 150-175 invitations are sent out each spring and fall, with approximately 100 attendees total participating from the combined northern and southern roundtables twice a year.

The New Mexico Wetlands Program does additional outreach through each individual project they conduct (11 projects in recent years), which include technical guidelines and documents that are distributed through direct contacts, via the web and through the stakeholder forums.

PARTNERS

Wetland stakeholders across the state, include agencies, local governments, NGOs, and others. Specifically, the project partners with the state Non-point Source Program, allowing the forums to count as outreach for compliance with NPS requirements.

RESOURCE INVESTMENT

The primary costs for the stakeholder forums have been the costs of hiring professional facilitators for each meeting and staff time for planning and coordination by the Wetlands Program staff (1 to 4 staff over the years). Planning and coordination takes approximately 20 hours per roundtable from each staff member, for a staff total of approximately 5% FTE (varies annually). These costs have been funded to date by CWA 104(b)3 funding. Non-federal participants provide match through reporting on monitoring and assessment projects at the meetings which is a task required for their projects. Refreshments are paid for by the Wetland Program or, if possible, sponsors. Venues are kept to public facilities to reduce cost. Staff note that the work of planning and coordinating four meetings a year is significant, but “the outcomes make the work worthwhile.”

EVALUATION RESULTS

Annually, evaluation includes feedback during meeting sessions including what they want on future agendas, whether the forums are meeting their needs, what they want to discuss and what coordinators can do to make the roundtable better. Feedback is received throughout the year from stakeholders. Note-takers document meeting proceedings and produce a shareable summary document from each. Specific results from the forums have included the following:

- Roundtables have increased capacity of the Wetlands Program to reach a variety of stakeholders with relevant and up-to-date information and data-sharing regarding wetlands in New Mexico.
- By getting participants more comfortable and knowledgeable about wetland topics and projects, a greater number of messengers have been able to take the information out to their own groups and share information using language familiar to them.
- Through networking and sharing of information and resources, wetlands have become integrated into normal statewide activities rather than as a sideline.
- Roundtables have increased networking and the ability for participants to get to know others engaged in wetlands work.
- Bringing individual meetings to separate locations was successful at attracting a much-needed additional audience of stakeholders (e.g. adding a second forum in the southern part of the state).

- Assessment has shown that forum participants have become partners on other participants' projects, events, newsletters, etc. as a result of meeting at the forums. Most importantly, as knowledge of the entire professional wetland community has increased, this information has been taken back to their communities, landowners and stakeholders, and has translated into action on the ground.

ADVICE/LESSONS LEARNED

- Stakeholder meetings must be designed to be timely, consistent and inclusive of anyone interested in attending.
- Meetings should include a component that allows coordinators to hear from participants about the participants' needs, interests, questions and concerns.
- Always have food at meetings; good food attracts participants and creates good will.
- Stay away from acronyms and technical language that is not accessible to the larger audience.
- Provide consistency with when, where and the key elements of the forums; this has led to a regular following in New Mexico. Participants put the roundtables on their calendar and plan on attending.
- Having a specific theme for each meeting allows coordinators to build a strong, focused agenda.
- Expert speakers with a variety of perspectives make an agenda stronger.

TRANSFERABILITY

The stakeholder forum concept is easily transferred to states and tribes. Attention must be paid to location, timing, consistency, quality of content and providing listening, networking and collaboration building opportunities.

NEXT STEPS

- Stakeholders are interested in consolidating one meeting a year to be a statewide meeting. Discussion about this effort is ongoing.
- New Mexico is moving towards the development of Designated Uses for wetlands. This work will be guided in part by work with stakeholders in the forum setting.

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PROJECT TITLE:

Lake Superior Watershed Framework for Assessment of Wetland Services

PROJECT NEED AND CONTEXT

The project area encompassed the Lakes Superior Basin drainages in Douglas County, Wisconsin (several HUC 8 level watersheds). This region in Wisconsin had the highest proportion of wetland mitigation sites because of limited development, low permeability soils, and large areas of former wetlands. Residents were becoming concerned over the conversion of potential farmland to wetland mitigation sites. They wanted to develop a more holistic plan for wetland mitigation that benefitted the county as a whole and accounted for balanced land development priorities (e.g. farmland preservation, tax base, ecological integrity and regulatory requirements). There were many knowledge gaps in terms of how to provide feedback to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) for wetland mitigation siting and planning.

TIMEFRAME

9/1/2013 – 8/31/2014

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Geospatial Services Department at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota has been focused on the development of landscape level tools using remotely sensed data to inventory and classify current and historic wetland resources and identify ecological functions that are currently being provided by wetlands across watersheds. The objective of these mapping initiatives is to provide accurate data for watershed planning decisions that address the management of water resources through the preservation, enhancement and restoration of wetlands. Project goals include:

- updating wetland inventory, enhancing wetland classification, linking wetland function to watershed issues (e.g. erosion and sedimentation)
- incorporating wetland considerations into watershed management plans
- identifying opportunities for wetland restoration that are focused on appropriate sites and that address watershed issues, and
- providing input to the design and location of wetland mitigation bank site development, and educating local stakeholders and property owners to wetland related issues.

DOUGLAS
COUNTY
WISCONSIN:

SAINT MARY’S
UNIVERSITY OF
MINNESOTA

This project was designed to assist stakeholders in Douglas County, Wisconsin in developing a landscape scale watershed assessment that they could use in a proposal to develop an in-lieu fee program with the Army Corps of Engineers. Key to the project’s success was effective communication with stakeholders about wetland functions and ecosystem services.

Continuum Level:
Medium (6)



Specifically the project was aimed at increasing the use of wetland functional assessments in the watershed planning processes, including assessment of mitigation banking proposals and ultimately to develop a watershed based in-lieu fee (ILF) program for Douglas County.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Citizens, property owners, county land administrators, development community members including utilities (Enbridge Pipelines), forestry companies and wetland mitigation bankers, in-lieu fee program managers, Regional Planning Commissions, and State Government Officials.

MESSAGES

This project had three primary messages: 1) better wetland data leads to enhanced decision support and management; 2) local property owner and stakeholder engagement provides improved public understanding and increased support for land management decisions; 3) science-based, community-supported information can be used to support jurisdictional planning decisions (i.e. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Interagency Review Team (USACE IRT), etc.). Communications included messaging about both wetland functions and ecosystem services as well as targeted discussions with stakeholders around how physical wetland characteristics contribute to understanding function.

DELIVERY APPROACH

Outreach materials were supported by graphic depictions of wetland functions as well as ground photos of different wetland types. Images and graphics were selected that were appropriate for the specific audience's level of knowledge. For example, audiences needed to know what a watershed was to begin with. The images used elevation to illustrate how surface water moves across a watershed. The images showed the height of the land and how a drop of water flows downhill and collects additional drops of water along the way into stream channels. Saint Mary's also developed diagrams of different wetland types along the elevation gradient to show how water collected into particular wetland types and was then released. The images and illustrations were drawn by hand to make them simpler and more approachable. Language for outreach materials was targeted at an 8th grade level for stakeholder groups and lay-audiences. It was set at a college level for interactions with professional wetland scientists.

SPECIFIC COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Saint Mary's used several communications tools, including factsheets, short documents, PowerPoint presentations with wetland graphics, and ESRI Story Maps.

RESOURCE INVESTMENT

The overall cost was \$123k, which included wetland inventory work. The outreach portion of that was \$45k, which included 5 stakeholder meetings and production of the outreach materials. The project was funded entirely by a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) grant (one of the project partners was the National Estuarine Reserve in Lake Superior which is run by NOAA).

PARTNERS

Partners in this work included: Wisconsin Wetlands Association (WWA), Douglas County Land Administration, the Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve (LSNERR), Northflow LLC, and local stakeholders. WWA and Saint Mary's University of Minnesota GeoSpatial Services (GSS) designed and delivered education and communication products for project communications to technical and non-technical audiences during listening sessions. The Douglas County Land Administration, LSNERR and Northflow facilitated stakeholder input meetings and provided distribution of materials and points of contact for user questions and observations.

EVALUATION RESULTS

The intended outputs/outcomes of this project were: increased education of local land owners and other stakeholders; improved understanding of the role of wetlands in the management of surface hydrology (in particular erosion, sedimentation and peak stream discharge); and, identification of willing landowners and potential sites for wetland restoration activities. Success was measured by increasing levels of participation during the project and the continued participation by stakeholders after the initial project was completed. The stakeholder-driven watershed plan was finished with submission to the ACOE for approval and stakeholders are now applying for their own locally driven, County-managed ILF program for the area.

NEXT STEPS

The next step is to replicate this approach in other jurisdictions.

ADVICE/LESSONS LEARNED

Diversity of the historic wetland landscape was unanticipated. It was discovered that much of the Lake Superior Basin was dominated by low permeable soils, so the water easily ponded on the soils surface and therefore wetlands could form anywhere a depression occurred, even small or micro-depressions. Historically, mitigation activities were sited with no apparent consideration for priority of wetland functions, watershed management issues and restoration needs.

In some cases, wetlands were created on sites where wetlands had never been located before and they were only holding water; not performing any other essential wetland functions. They discovered they needed to be more careful with site selection to create wetlands where they would provide the most functions and where they had more likely existed historically before hydrologic modifications of European Settlement or after. This changed the entire design process for mitigation. Historically there had been a mosaic of wetland types.

The localized value of land was also unanticipated. The project stakeholders were primarily from the agricultural production community. Some land that they thought was prime agricultural land was actually really only used as pastures or in some cases for growing grass forage for livestock. It took some convincing to get them to understand that some land was better suited for wetland mitigation because of the value for watershed purposes. In other words, looking at the value of sites based on their contributions to overall watershed health versus just site specific benefits. Some agricultural land had more value if taken out of agriculture.

Communicating information at the right level is critical. It is easy to get adversarial on both sides. A lot of messaging needs to be done to gain trust. Building relationships is critical. Don't underestimate the

amount of time needed to develop trust and relationships and make sure you provide sufficient time to do so.

TRANSFERABILITY

This model is highly transferable because of the mix of tools and processes that were developed. It was not just a scientific exercise – it also included a critical stakeholder engagement component. The tools, techniques and approaches developed are applicable to wetland and watershed planning and will be utilized in other jurisdictions.

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PROJECT TITLE:

Floodplains By Design

PROJECT NEED AND CONTEXT

Floodplains by Design (FbD) is a statewide program that promotes and supports integrated floodplain management. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) recognized that there was a lot of work going on in Puget Sound watersheds, including salmon recovery and flood control projects that were often implemented separately, even though one project was often directly upstream from another. There were clearly opportunities for integration and more efficient use of public funding for floodplain management. The program has evolved to also support the agricultural community within these watersheds. Participation from diverse stakeholder groups is encouraged through the promotion of multiple benefits such as salmon recovery, flood control, agricultural vitality, water quality improvements and enhanced recreational opportunities.

TIMEFRAME

2013 – present (ongoing)

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Reduce flood risks
- Restore salmon habitat
- Support agricultural vitality
- Improve water quality
- Enhance outdoor recreation

TARGET AUDIENCE

- 1) Floodplain managers, restoration practitioners, private landowners and businesses and invested stakeholders
- 2) Legislatures and funders
- 3) General public

MESSAGES

The overall message of the program is that an integrated approach to floodplain management maximizes the many benefits our rivers provide to communities in Washington while minimizing the costs. Strategic messaging to select audiences includes information regarding specific floodplain functions, specific ecosystem services and the economic value of ecosystem services of wetlands. However, they focus the language on highlighting the goals of the program and try not to get too technical about ecosystem functions. TNC came up with the idea and has been the

WASHINGTON:

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

Floodplains by Design is an innovative public-private partnership between The Nature Conservancy, Washington Dept. of Ecology, and Puget Sound Partnership to support large-scale, multiple-benefit projects across the state of Washington that reduce flood risk and restore habitats.

Continuum Level:
Medium (6)



lead on all communications work. The TNC Marketing Team helped to craft messaging that is more inspirational, and less technical. TNC also hired a communications firm (Caravan Lab) to help develop a strategic communications plan. The primary message was crafted to build momentum amongst floodplain practitioners developing integrated floodplain projects, and the secondary audience of legislators and funders who fund these projects.

DELIVERY APPROACH

TNC had established credibility with their target audiences through previous restoration projects with local communities, particularly two recent projects that were designed and implemented with agricultural partners. They took the lessons learned from those experiences to other projects in the area and continued to build their credibility. The partnership with the Washington Dept. of Ecology and the Puget Sound Partnership built on each partner's expertise and specific responsibilities in managing the state's floodplains. TNC had already established and continues to build those critical relationships with agency partners.

TNC designed communications materials to reach diverse audiences but they did not choose any specific reading level in their outreach materials. Convening quarterly workshops in the region has been critical to their success – the last workshop had over 200 people in attendance. TNC prioritizes using strong and compelling images in all their communication materials to illustrate the connections between people and the floodplain, or construction images that show progress in floodplain management. They also frequently use photos that illustrate flood risk and illustrate the problem.

SPECIFIC COMMUNICATION TOOLS

TNC has produced fact sheets demonstrating project outcomes and an inspirational video. The fact sheet has been critical in garnering support from the legislative audience, with clear metrics of outcomes that build a case for continued funding. They also maintain a listserv and website for more than 500 floodplain managers, restoration practitioners, and invested stakeholders.

RESOURCE INVESTMENT

This project has invested staff time, cash and in-kind support. TNC also subcontracted with an outside communications firm to receive help in developing the website and communications products. The main source of funding for projects comes from the state capital budget to the Department of Ecology and must be renewed every two years. About \$80 million has come through the state for projects since 2013. TNC's participation has been funded via a U.S. Environmental Protection grant from the Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds National Estuary Program. Over the past five years, they have received two \$500,000 grants. Overall they have leveraged over \$100 million to support 29 projects on 10 major floodplains.

PARTNERS

TNC was the genesis for the program and has provided the regional vision and momentum building. The Dept. of Ecology manages the grant program and the Puget Sound Partnership is involved in all aspects. All three partners are involved in grant review and in developing the program. Numerous local partners implement FbD projects throughout Washington State.

EVALUATION RESULTS

Website analytics are used to inform their communication strategy. They track the program's success through specific accomplishments such as: number of projects, number of counties with projects, number of floodplains included, miles of new levees, number of residences and communities protected, total acres of floodplains reconnected, miles of rivers restored, acres of prime agricultural land protected, and number of rivers with increased public access and recreational trails (see factsheet on accomplishments at http://www.floodplainsbydesign.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/FbD-2016Accomplishments_FINAL.pdf.)

NEXT STEPS

Work is ongoing and they have established 2 year and 5 year goals. Continued progress and next steps depend on continued funding. TNC is doing more communications work including success stories and human impact stories. They are also working at doing a better job of integrating climate resilience into projects and developing more specific regional climate guidance. They are also working to expand and better integrate agriculture into the program as they have discovered big hurdles related to drainage and water availability.

ADVICE/LESSONS LEARNED

The program is still relatively new – they have only gone through two rounds of funding to date. One big piece of advice is to not start messaging efforts with too much technical language. Working at both the regional and the local level can pose challenges to supporting each group's objectives. Each watershed is different – some are more urban while others are more agricultural so no approach will fit every situation. Scientific analysis needs to be developed at both the regional and local level and both audiences need to be talking to each other. It is important to support the development and use of the local community's own science.

TRANSFERABILITY

The integrated management approach is transferable to many other projects and programs that have multiple benefits. Also the approach of supporting local community efforts at a broader scale is transferable.

RESOURCES

Website: <http://www.floodplainsbydesign.org/>

Video: <https://vimeo.com/182925439>

2016 Accomplishments fact sheet: http://www.floodplainsbydesign.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/FbD-2016Accomplishments_FINAL.pdf

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PROJECT TITLE:

My Healthy Wetland

PROJECT NEED AND CONTEXT

Wisconsin Wetlands Association (WWA) knew that 75% of Wisconsin’s wetlands were privately owned and identified a need to engage this audience in order to be successful in protecting the landscape in Wisconsin. Knowing they already had several partners who interacted with private landowners, their first step was to conduct a needs assessment to better understand what their role vis-a-vis private landowner outreach should be. They conducted extensive interviews with other Wisconsin partners who work with private landowners to understand what other work was already being done and what services and/or tools would add value to these efforts. Their needs assessment also involved talking with their target audience to better understand their challenges and interests. They reached out to landowners who hold easements as part of the USDA’s Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)¹, an audience of more than 600 easement landowners across the state. Through surveys and workshops, WWA assessed this audience’s needs and opportunities for improving their engagement with their wetlands.

The results of this needs assessment guided WWA’s private landowner program development. Top needs identified included a written, printed primer on wetlands as well as direct (face-to-face) outreach to and training for interested landowners. Additionally, the needs assessment identified that additional training about wetlands for natural resource professionals who work with or serve private landowners would help achieve landowner outreach goals.

TIMEFRAME

July 2012 – June 2016

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of this project was to provide wetland landowners with information about wetlands, equip them with basic tools to help them engage in caring for their wetlands, and connect them with natural resource professionals who could provide technical assistance.

¹ In 2014, the WRP Program was discontinued by the USDA and replaced with the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). FMI:

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/easements/wetlands/>.

WISCONSIN:

**WISCONSIN
WETLANDS
ASSOCIATION**

The Wisconsin Wetlands Association’s approach was to connect with private landowners in a meaningful way in order to understand their concerns and provide them with useful information and the tools they need to care for wetlands on their property. Partnerships were critical to the success of this project and the relationships developed have provided momentum for further collaboration and outreach.

Continuum Level:
High (10)



TARGET AUDIENCE

Outreach was primarily focused for private wetland landowners in northeast Wisconsin -- people who owned wetlands and wanted to take care of them (not landowners who were hoping to drain, develop, or farm their wetland or otherwise do something that was more about "developing" wetlands than protecting them). The audience was already more or less convinced that wetlands were good, and just needed guidance on when and how to get involved with caring for their wetlands. Ultimately this effort was broadened to the Lake Michigan basin of Wisconsin.

Local natural resource professionals were initially also a target audience, but became an "indirect audience" after WWA received feedback that they weren't interested in receiving training directly (they felt they didn't need it). No outreach was done directly to this audience but rather natural resource professionals were involved in developing and implementing outreach to landowners.

WWA ultimately felt that "interested private landowner" was perhaps still too broad. Agricultural landowners had a different set of needs and opportunities than did retired or vacation owner landowners. Future projects should try to identify a more focused audience (e.g. landowners within a certain watershed, or agricultural landowners). Focusing on this broader audience did help them develop and test messages and approaches that will be useful when they further refine target audiences for additional outreach work.

MESSAGES

Messaging was developed in two phases: The first was in writing and designing the handbook for wetland landowners. The second was in designing workshops for wetland landowners. Additionally, messaging for this project was done in a parallel process with an organizational-wide effort to refine WWA's messages as part of a rebranding effort that included revamping their website. The landowner outreach project was started first, then the overall communications project for WWA, but they were intertwined with and informed each other.

In its survey and workshop work with WRP easement holders, WWA had asked, who are you and what is it you love the most about your wetlands? The stories that people shared in the introductions were 9 out of 10 times about wildlife, so this became an underlying theme for the handbook and workshops.

The core messages for landowners were three-fold (sequential): 1) "Wetlands matter" (wetlands attract wildlife and benefit your land and water), 2) "You matter to wetlands" (Private landowners own 75% of Wisconsin's remaining wetlands, giving you a vital role in caring for wetlands), and 3) "We help you help wetlands" (WWA can provide guidance and connect you with the information and support you need to care for your wetland).

WWA aimed for a 9th grade reading level for the handbook. They specifically avoided language that felt like "jargon" and tested this by getting feedback on the handbook from people who were not knowledgeable about wetlands before they went to press. WWA deliberately did not use the terms "wetland functions," "ecosystem services," or "economic value of wetland ecosystem services" as they felt they were too technical for their audience. Instead they talked about these concepts, using terms like "natural benefits," "how wetlands help the environment and wildlife," and/or "how wetlands help our communities, our economy, and our quality of life."

Messaging was focused on getting people to understand their wetland -- where their wetland is in the landscape, how it functioned historically, what's changed about their wetland and/or the landscape around it that might affect its health today, and what they can do to bring back natural processes from the past, given the reality of today. While they did spend time on the handbook and at workshops talking about specific actions like invasive species control, they encouraged folks to think about the entire system before they thought about working on specific parts.

DELIVERY APPROACH

WWA created the handbook and promoted it to 5,000 probable wetland landowners in the target Wisconsin counties via a direct-mail piece that offered the handbook for free. The response rate for this direct mailing was 5-6%, which is very good for this type of "cold" promotional piece. People who requested copies of the handbook were then the target audience for a workshop held in their community in the year or two following their handbook order.

Because WWA was not a known entity with most of the target audience before the project, they partnered with local organizations and agencies likely to be familiar to the audience in order to plan landowner workshops. WWA formed committees with representatives from local organizations to develop workshop agendas to take into account local conditions and issues. Involving local partners also helped WWA reach these partners with information and training indirectly. Determining the right partners in each community was key: who was perceived positively by the target audience and who had the skills and programs needed by the target audience? Partners included land trusts, county agency staff, NRCS field staff, and other wetland-related NGOs. Key to choosing partners for these committees to work with was consideration of which partners landowners would be comfortable receiving information from and interacting with. This point is key: who is the best messenger for working with private landowners? Often, the best messenger may not be a state wetland program employee.

To learn how to focus the workshop content to meet the needs of landowners, WWA held "field days" in two different communities during the fall of the first year (2014) to listen to the issues and concerns of landowners. They heard that people wanted help understanding and repairing their wetland's hydrology; help managing invasive species; help finding and obtaining maps and aerial photos; help understanding how to set priorities and plan for management of their property; and help on when to consult with an expert vs trying to do it alone. WWA took this input and developed workshops that were held the following spring. Key to these workshops was outdoor field-based learning held at sites where little to no management had been done as opposed to places where a lot of money had been spent to restore a wetland. WWA learned that, at these "done" sites, folks could not see how they would ever be able to afford such a project and thus shut down their ability to "see" their own land in the example they were being shown.

SPECIFIC COMMUNICATION TOOLS

WWA produced a handbook (100 pages, soft cover, no pdf available), a marketing brochure (sent to 5,000 likely wetland landowners offering them a copy of the handbook for free if they returned the postage-paid postcard), and a quarterly electronic newsletter for landowners (distributed to all of the landowners who had provided an email address when they ordered their handbook). WWA has since re-done their organizational web pages and now has a suite of pages dedicated to private wetland landowners (<http://wisconsinwetlands.org/for-landowners/>). Much of the content for these new webpages for landowners came directly from the handbook and WWA's experience working with

landowners at the workshops. Copies of the handbook were also given to collaborating partners so that they could distribute the publication directly to wetland landowners with whom they work.

One other product in a later phase of this project was a collection of "wetland ambassador" stories. WWA highlighted wetland landowners and promoted these stories in the local media in the community where that landowner lived as a way of creating a "social norm" that caring for wetlands is something that people do. WWA was successful in gaining coverage of these wetland ambassador stories in some markets, but not in others. They are also promoting the stories through their own organizational website and the e-newsletter for landowners.

The handbook, brochure, and e-newsletters all include a lot of images in order to make the pieces attractive, accessible, and inviting. WWA tried to include photos of people in wetlands whenever possible. They also featured photos of common or particularly attractive species (plant and animal) that folks might see in wetlands. Because the handbook they produced was targeted at landowners in NE Wisconsin, they also tried to feature images from that landscape so that it "looked like home."

RESOURCE INVESTMENT

The project has cost \$289k over four years. In each of these years, core funding was provided by the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program (WCMP) (up to 50% each year), with the remainder coming from foundation and member support and from partner in-kind match.

The first year (2012-13) was the needs assessment, which cost around \$50k (\$25k from WCMP).

The second year (2013-14) cost around \$110k (\$43k from WCMP) and included handbook development, printing, promotion, and distribution.

The third year (2014-15) cost around \$61k (\$30k from WCMP) and included developing the workshop and holding it in two communities.

The fourth year (2015-16) cost around \$67k (\$30k from WCMP) and included three additional workshops and development and promotion of wetland ambassador stories.

PARTNERS

Partners included private landowners, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, Ducks Unlimited, Wisconsin counties, land trusts, and local communities. The Aldo Leopold Foundation (ALF) was another key partner. WWA developed their handbook using ALF's award-winning "My Healthy Woods" handbook and program for woodland owners. ALF already had experience finding good language with their target audience who were not well versed and they already knew about what words to avoid and how to keep it simple. WWA also contracted with ALF to do the layout and design for the handbook (to build on the success of the My Healthy Woods handbook) and to provide editorial review (to ensure that the language was clear and accessible). All of the partners above participated in the needs assessment phase, assisted with handbook review during development, and were involved with implementing local workshops.

Funding came from foundations (Brown Family Foundation, Forest County Potawatomi Foundation) as well as public grants (WCMP through NOAA) and partner support (The Nature Conservancy, NRCS, USFWS, DU). Greatest involvement of partners was in the needs assessment phase (determining what outreach would be most helpful for WWA to provide in reaching landowners with info about wetlands)

and in developing and hosting workshops (4 held in 2014-15, 3 held in 2015-16). WWA did logistical organizing for workshops, but partners helped determine agenda/curriculum, delivered material at the workshops, and facilitated field trips that were a part of each workshop.

WWA relied on their county partners to generate a mailing list of probable wetland owners, reaching out to Land Conservation Departments and their GIS capabilities to pull together mailing lists of property owners whose land overlapped with the Wisconsin Wetlands Inventory. In some cases, they refined this list with other layers (e.g. priority environmental corridors).

One of the partners deliberately kept in the background during the project was the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). Not only was the staff there less able to engage because of time and programmatic limitations, but WWA found that generally the WDNR triggered a lot of mistrust and frustration among their target audience. WWA did work behind the scenes with WDNR staff in creating the handbook and content for the e-newsletter, but generally did not involve WDNR staff in the in-person workshops.

EVALUATION RESULTS

WWA measured response rates to their promotional brochure (for ordering the handbook) and to the workshop invitations (sent to everyone in that area who had ordered a handbook). They had a 6% response rate to their direct mail brochure campaign, which is much higher than average for this type of direct mail campaign (the average rate of return on direct mail campaigns is generally 1/2 to 2 percent, according to JWM Business Services). They also measure how many people who received their e-newsletters open the emails and how many people click on each link in the email (which helps determine which content is most attractive to the reader).

They distributed nearly 5,000 handbooks directly to landowners and through their partners, which was the goal. They continue to distribute handbooks at outreach events and through online sales from the WWA website. They have now transitioned the focus of their landowner-based outreach in a more geographically-focused way (e.g., by watershed).

Long-term, WWA is more interested in measuring the impact on the ground to the health of peoples' wetlands as a result of their outreach to wetland landowners and this is a much harder task, particularly as they don't have any "before" data that they track by landowner. They have yet to develop the capacity to figure out a way to track individual landowner actions as a result of receiving the handbook and/or attending their workshop, other than anecdotal stories people share with them when they call for follow up or reply to emails.

NEXT STEPS

Because the landowners WWA reached with their handbook and workshops were scattered across the landscape, their individual actions don't/won't necessarily translate to a measurable change in the landscape. In the past year, WWA has shifted their landowner outreach to be more geographically specific (e.g. working with key landowners within one watershed) with the goal of being able to see more direct impacts from their outreach efforts. This approach also helps landowners see their land as part of a system where their actions affect others (and others' actions affect them) and where collective action can be more powerful than individual action. WWA is currently working in at least two communities, identifying places where wetland restoration and/or management would help achieve community goals (e.g. water quality improvement, flood abatement), and identifying privately-owned

land where this wetland restoration could/should occur. This is harder, as not all of the priority landowners are necessarily interested in (or open to) wetland restoration and management at the outset, but in the long run is more important to achieving the goal of measurable change on the landscape.

ADVICE/LESSONS LEARNED

WWA deliberately did not make the handbook available as a pdf copy for a couple of reasons. First, their survey work of wetland landowners (done during the needs assessment) determined that their target audience did not get their information primarily from the internet or electronic sources but preferred to get hard copies of materials and/or in-person one-on-one interactions with professionals. Second, WWA wanted to get contact information for people who ordered their handbook so that they could follow up with them, invite them to workshops, etc. While there are mechanisms for obtaining this contact information from internet downloads, because of reason #1 they didn't feel like that was a useful option for their target audience, at least currently.

Image procurement was a very challenging part of this project. Often, WWA wanted a certain image for a particular section in the handbook and just didn't have one. They reached out to partners to get images from them with some success, although they were routinely challenged by low-resolution images (not fit for printing) and images for which they had no information to provide photo credits. Partnering definitely helps with image acquisition. Think through the images you think you will need and ask for images early. It's much easier for people to respond to image requests when you give them a very specific request ("I need a photo of a marsh that doesn't show just cattails" or "I need photos of kids in wetlands"). Often this is harder to do than you might think because often you don't know what you need until you see the layout on the page. Many private photographers may be willing to share their images with you if you are a non-profit organization if they get photo credit and if your use of their image does not preclude them from selling the image to others.

A focus of WWA's strategy long-term for their private landowner outreach program is to build the capacity of local natural resource professionals to be the "go to" for private landowners by arming these local professionals with the information and skills they need to help wetland landowners. This audience was reluctant to have direct training from WWA (thinking they already knew what they needed to know about wetlands). So WWA involved them in planning and conducting the workshops for private landowners instead. Not only did natural resource professionals folks become "known quantities" for the landowners attending those workshops (making it more likely that these landowners reach out to them for future assistance), the natural resource professionals also indicated that they themselves had learned a lot about wetlands from having attended the workshops.

One barrier WWA discovered in the course of this project was that a lack of broad consensus on wetland terminology in the broader public (and even within the natural resource community) leads to problems when it comes to landowners protecting and caring for wetlands. Many people do not know a wetland when they see it (if it doesn't have cattails and a duck), and most landowners don't know the right words to use to describe what they want to do with their land. They'll use words like "pond" or "scrape" because those are the only words they know. Many natural resource professionals don't know or don't have the time to ask clarifying questions or even visit the property to better understand a landowner's goals, and as a result may send a landowner down a path that isn't what the landowner was looking for. For example, if a landowner says she wants to build a pond, this term may trigger one set of flags and processes for a regulator when what the landowner is actually looking for is improving

habitat for frogs (so she may not be looking for a “pond”, really). Getting stuck in a regulatory quagmire that doesn’t actually address her desires can be very frustrating for a landowner and turn them off from wetland protection and restoration altogether.

Sometimes WWA did not get as many people to attend the workshops as they expected or had hoped for, so they asked the question, how do you reach more people? The ambassador project was an offshoot of this problem as a way to get stories out into the public and broaden their audience reach. WWA only budgeted for one round of promotion for the handbook, and in hindsight thinks two or three rounds would have been more effective at reaching the goal of getting landowners to order the handbook. Having the reply postcard be free was essential to the success of the project.

TRANSFERABILITY

About 75% of the handbook could work for anywhere in Wisconsin. The approach is transferable broadly but would have to be tailored to the region and target audience. GIS would have made the project more focused and more strategic but WWA did not have that capacity at the time of the project.

RESOURCES

For Landowners webpage: <http://wisconsinwetlands.org/for-landowners/>

This webpage provides links to the resources and tools developed for landowners such as:

- Learn about your wetland: <http://wisconsinwetlands.org/for-landowners/learn-about-your-wetland/>
- Care for your wetland: <http://wisconsinwetlands.org/for-landowners/care-for-your-wetland/>
- Resources for wetland owners: <https://wisconsinwetlands.org/for-landowners/resources/>
- A handbook for landowners: <http://wisconsinwetlands.org/for-landowners/handbook/>

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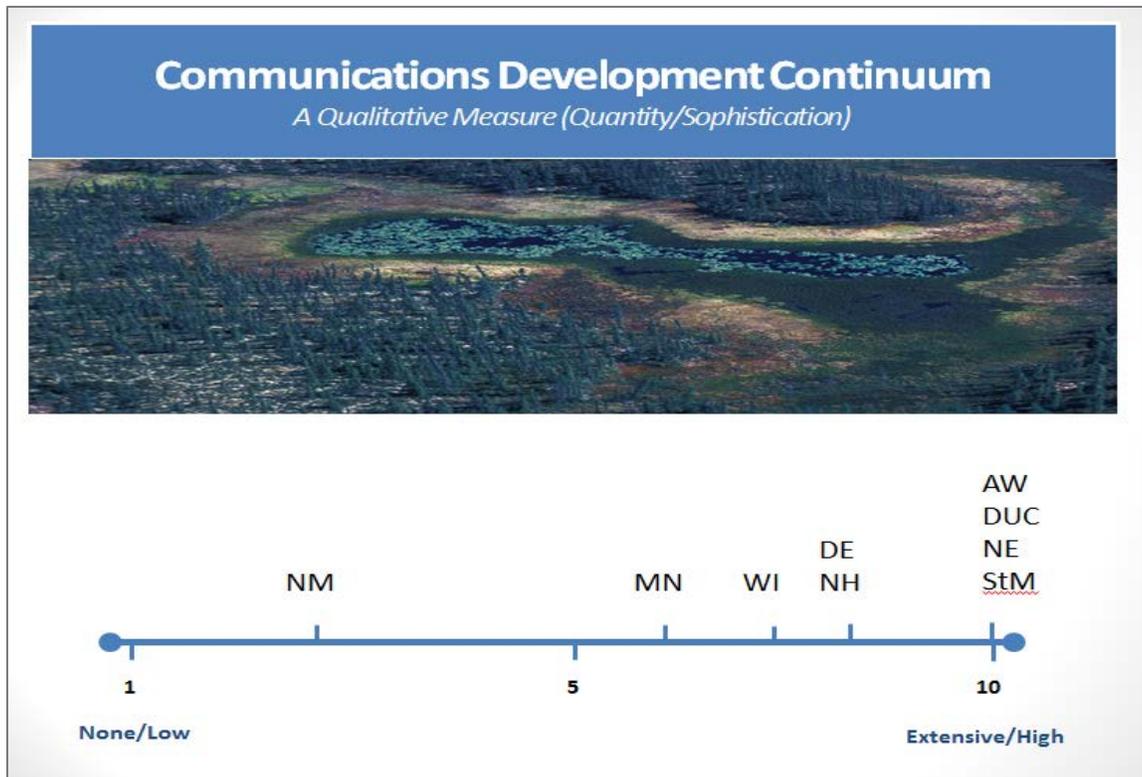
FINDINGS – LEVELS OF DEVELOPMENT ASWM COMMUNICATIONS CONTINUUM

One of the findings of this report is that there are high quality communication efforts that work on wetlands outreach at all levels of development. Some states are at the base level of developing communications approaches, while others are somewhat experienced and yet others are highly sophisticated and reaching out with advanced approaches. Factors that can influence the level of development may include budget, target audience, or others.

As already shared in the introduction section of this report, the project team developed a Communications Development Continuum as a qualitative, visual representation of the different levels of communication sophistication among the ten case studies. The continuum includes levels 1-10. At a level one, the project is not part of any other wetland communications strategy and is rudimentary in its complexity/sophistication.

As a case study is placed higher along the continuum, the level of sophistication and/or the overall engagement in wetland outreach as an organization/program increases. At the far right-hand side of the continuum, where the level is 10, are organizations/programs engaged in advanced, complex communications strategies, usually with multiple efforts ongoing that require a significant amount of expertise and investment (staff and/or resources).

The project found most of the case studies lie above the mid-mark of the continuum with four at the highest level and only one at a low level (3). However, the range of levels among the case studies indicate that there can be successes at all levels and that for those seeking to use these case studies as models to look at for their own work, there are options for organizations/programs at many different levels of capacity.



FINDINGS - THE BIG PICTURE
WHY UNDERTAKE COMMUNICATIONS PROJECTS?

The first element of planning a communications strategy is to identify the reasons why a state or tribal program needs to undertake a wetland communications project - for what purpose and to what end? Findings from this project indicate that many and varied reasons served as impetus for the communications projects included in this report’s case studies. The following list summarizes key motivations that led to the development of the projects highlighted in this report.



Reason Communication Work was Undertaken	Question for stakeholders addressed by approach	Communications work can help wetland programs...
To build understanding	What is the issue?	...increase understanding about specific issues or concerns, new laws and regulations, or changes over time
To make issues relevant to stakeholders	Why is this issue important?	...share information in ways that allow target audiences to better understand the scope and reach of an issue
To help stakeholders make a personal connections to an issue	Why should I care?	...connect the dots between an issue and how that issue is of personal importance to the target audience
To garner support for programs and projects	What can I do about it?	...provide guidance about actions the target audience can do to address an issue
To understand stakeholder interests, opinions, actions or motivations	This is what matters to the target audience; what they believe, what they typically do and why they chose to do so	...better understand the people to whom they are seeking to reach out (improve targeting of communications efforts to be more effective)
To build political will for specific actions	Target audience is willing to give up one thing for another	...create a support network that can be activated when needed
To change opinions	Target audience used to believe X, but now they believe Y	...encourage people to re-evaluate their opinions by sharing sound science and motivational messaging
To stimulate behavior change	Target audience used to do X, but now they do Y	...encourage people to change behaviors that are un-supportive of wetlands to those that are
To garner support	Target audience will chose to vote, approve, allocate	...encourage people to support specific initiatives

FINDINGS - COMMONALITIES AMONG CASE STUDIES

Analysis of the case studies as a group provided insights about characteristics common to all ten selected case studies. While these characteristics may or may not be the cause² of project success, they should be noted and explored further.

All ten case studies:

- **Share specific information to help others make informed decisions**

The case studies described in this report did not tell people to simply “value wetlands” or “support your wetland program.” Each was tied to providing information for a specific purpose. Communication was action-based, asking people to do or change something, e.g., look at a map to see if wetlands are on your land, support investments in adaptive culvert replacement, learn these things you can do, take a pledge to do X, Y and Z.



- **Are based on a compelling need**

In each case, information was shared to create a strong sense of need or urgency. In some cases, negative images of flood waters, destroyed infrastructure or others were employed. Others showed images of recreation or wildlife. Whatever the need, the communications were structured to share the compelling nature of what was being asked of the target audience.

- **Communicate with a specific target audience**

Contacts for each case study shared repeatedly the importance of creating a precise, limited target audience. For example, landowners with the potential for wetlands on their property in two state zip code areas. With this information, the communication planners were able to research and adapt their messages, tools, approaches and evaluation to that group of individuals, based on how they prefer to receive information, their access to technology, and other considerations.

- **Employ multiple communication tools**

These case studies integrated the use of multiple communication tools simultaneously. None of the projects relied on a single method of connecting with their target audience. The projects used multiple efforts to reinforce the same message(s).



- **Identifies and uses a credible messenger**

² The qualitative analysis conducted for this report does not provide statistical evidence of causality, but does point to areas that were common among the case studies. To better understand this relationship, future research should be conducted to determine whether there is a causal relationship between performance measures and the presence/absence of these project characteristics.

Of utmost importance for these projects was identifying and capitalizing on the use of a credible messenger. A credible messenger was identified, using many different terms, to mean someone that was a trusted expert or leader in the eyes of the target audience. For citizens, this might be a conservation district or a watershed group or a local leader. For professionals, the credible messenger was often in the form of a professional association or a leading academic in their field of expertise. For businesses, the credible leader was often another business leader.

- **Deliver at least part of the communication effort using face-to-face communications**

While there are more communications tools available to wetland professionals than ever before with the advent of electronic communications tools and high quality video, audio and print materials, among the case studies there was a resounding reminder that much of their success was based on a solid face-to-face communications component to their strategy. Where the building of trust was such an important element of each project in order to change understanding, opinions or actions, each project had at least one major component where staff or their credible messengers were delivering their communications messages in-person with the target audience.



Buffer Forum Full of Farmer Questions

- **Supported by strong partnerships**

Lastly, every case study in this report was supported by strong partnerships. Projects were strengthened by a range of relevant partners. Some of these created a broader base of support and some created more depth within a specific area that was the focus of the project. In most cases, there were both collaborations among government agencies and cross-sector (government-nonprofit, non-profit-academic, government-private sector, etc.)

FINDINGS - ON THE GROUND PLANNING

Once the decision has been made to undertake a wetland communications effort, there are many decisions that need to be made about how to craft an effective strategy, who to bring in as partners, how to resource the effort, specifics for on-the-ground implementation, and measures of effectiveness/impact.

The following list represents specific findings that are common among the case studies related to the effective crafting of communications projects.

- **Have specific goals and planned outcomes**

As with any well-crafted project, whether communications or other, it is important to start a project with a set of clear, concise, realistic and measurable goals. Most of the projects in this report had specific planned outcomes and ways of measuring those outcomes from the outset. As one case study contact shared, it is important to “laser pinpoint your outreach efforts – don’t try to do everything.”

Creating specific goals requires careful research and planning, so it is important to do adequate background work before launching a communications campaign.

A formal, written strategy should be developed and agreed upon by the project leadership and partners. Everyone should know what the project is designed to accomplish and how they will measure whether those goals were achieved.

- **Identify and plan based on specifics of the target audience**

This theme is a repeated one throughout this report -- one of the most important elements of communications planning is rigorous research on and input from the target audience. This involved:

- Identifying and stratifying the target audience into groupings that allow messages and tools to be targeted;
- Utilizing existing training resources available to help target messaging;
- Use of tools designed to research target audiences, such as polling, stakeholder meetings, and focus groups.

Almost all of the case studies shared that their work on messaging to their target audiences was an iterative one, with at least one (and in some cases, many) refinements through the life of the communications project.

The ability to access information and guidance from a professional marketing firm knowledgeable about the target audience was also seen as a major asset if the resources are available to fund use of outside expertise.

- **Focus on building trust**

A primary component of each of the projects in this report was a focus on building trust. Through the planning process, thought was invested in identifying who the target audience trusts, which

messages are effective in eliciting the desired response, and what tools allow the target audience to access and connect with the information in ways that make them comfortable and feel supported. As mentioned in the previous section of the findings, face-to-face communications was a major component of trust building in each case. For this reason, the development of face-to-face opportunities should be considered and, if possible, incorporated into most communications projects. Examples include stakeholder meetings, conferences, special events, meeting with people in their communities during existing events, and being available to answer questions or come to a site upon request.

Also of importance was the willingness of communications team members to go to existing events, rather than expecting the target audience to come to an event that was created for the purpose of the communications. For example, providing outreach about the issue at a popular festival, speaking at a monthly District meeting, or at a professional conference where the target audience is already there.

- **Carefully craft messages that will resonate with your target audience**

Most of the communications projects in this report worked with their target audience(s) directly to better understand how to effectively message key concepts to them. This work involved, in many cases, pre-testing messages through polling or focus groups. In some cases this involved simply going to an event and asking participants that are in the target audience their opinions on different messaging options. Since those planning the outreach are not the target audience, it is critical to better understand what resonates with the target audience. Whether a full marketing research effort or an informal gathering of opinions, this information was critical in helping the different projects refine their messaging to better reach the target audience. An investment in professional assistance to do this work was advocated by the majority of the projects, if funds are available.

Additionally, the case studies all made clear that their messaging was based on sound science. While the messages themselves might not include scientific references or language, they were all based on a scientifically-sound foundation. Most strategies included in some form, references or quotes from individuals or organizations that the target audience would recognize as experts, e.g., engineers, scientists or educators.

An additional finding was that the projects made the effort to get their partners on the same page, using the same language, catch phrases, statistics, etc. Outreach, they shared, is made more effective by agreement among those sharing information on the “facts.” Additionally, use among many parties of the same metaphors, statistics and such provide that all important marketing exposure required to “sink in” to the target audience. That old marketing adage, “you have to hear the same message X times before someone will remember it” seems to hold true here as well.

- **Select tools, format, language, and images based on target audience**

Once the messages have been crafted to meet the outreach needs of the audience, this study found that the selection of communications tools and their content was also critically important. This included the selection of format, language and images, as well as the use of storytelling.

Specifically, the case studies in this report indicate that planning should focus on:

- Developing a compelling narrative with a strong emphasis on “storytelling”
- Keeping messages simple, but not simplistic
- Appealing to emotions and sense of personal need
- Finding metaphors that work to describe complex topics
- Making images accessible to the range of people viewing them (e.g. race, gender, economic status, use of resource)

- **Pre-test or start with a slow rollout**

Once the content has been developed into the communications tools and the strategy is ready to be implemented, most of the projects in this report relied on pre-testing or a slow roll-out. This means that the project staff started with a small group of the target audience to see their response and troubleshoot any issues that arose, prior to sending out all the materials and having to recall or correct an issue. One example of this was a slow rollout by Delaware, where they learned that a portion of their target audience thought that if a wetland was on a state map it was automatically regulated. This led to concerns about identifying wetlands on their property, which complicated their outreach process. By finding out this information early on, they were able to modify their messaging to include an explanation and more effectively launch the full campaign. Some of the projects did a pilot within one county or region, before expanding to the full state or region.

- **Conduct evaluation as an ongoing part of the project**

Under planning recommendations in the report, the development of planned outcomes and measures to determine whether those outcomes were achieved or not was one finding of this project. An additional finding was that most of the projects conducted evaluation throughout the project, not just at the end. This allowed the communications project staff to better understand if they were moving in the right direction and to make changes midcourse.

- **Build in adaptive management**

The projects in this report all shared that they have had to make some changes to their approaches and tools over time. Some of the projects started with an adaptive management approach, others found they had to turn to one based on ongoing adjustments that needed to be made in response to how communications efforts were received and responded to by their target audience. The incorporation of an adaptive management approach from the outset was advocated.

FINDINGS - IMPLEMENTATION

Once a project has clear goals, measures, messages, tools and strategies in place, the next phase is implementation. Implementation often required mid-course corrections or fixing initial missteps. Several key themes arose from the case studies:

- **Provide consistency in delivery of message (across project, partners and media)**

While consistency and repetition should have been incorporated into the planning process; both internally (across the project and various tools) as well as with partners and the media, keeping true to this remained a challenge for the case studies in this report. A key theme among the case studies was a focus on working through the implementation phase to continually provide checks on whether the message was being delivered consistently, needed to be adjusted to meet new realities or if partners were continuing to stay on-message with the language and information they were each sharing.

- **Engage credible messengers**

Efforts continued to be made throughout each case study to connect the communications messaging with the target audience through credible messengers. These messengers are seen as leaders to the target audience, whose communications they tend to listen to and whose behaviors they tend to want to emulate. Appropriate messengers for a specific communications strategy may change over time or access to messengers may emerge. Continuing to focus on making sure the messages come from trusted sources was an important implementation task.

- **Capitalize on opportunities that arise**

While project plans work to envision what possible communications opportunities can be created by the project, during the implementation phase new opportunities may arise. Most of the projects in this report were adept at capitalizing on these new opportunities as they arose -- whether a contact point, a new opinion leader, an event, partnership or access to a tool.

- **Continue to identify new ways to get messages out**

Ongoing evaluation allowed the projects in this report to continue to identify new ways to get their messages out to their target audience. This involved listening and getting feedback from their target audience as well as expanding the project to new partners and securing additional funding to refine the strategy for additional outreach.

- **Adapt**

Every project in this report continued to adapt over the course of their communications project. They pointed to the need to keep the delivery process iterative, troubleshooting the process and making mid-course corrections. This required a commitment of time and financial resources to conducting ongoing evaluation. This evaluation not only included the collection of data on the progress of the project, but analysis and incorporation of findings into revised project plans and their implementation in the ongoing project. The next section of this report outlines some of the key evaluation findings from this project.

FINDINGS - HOW IS SUCCESS BEING MEASURED?

The final section of this report outlines findings on the evaluation of communications projects from the case studies in this report. The communications projects in this report used many different and diverse measures to determine whether or not they had been successful in achieving their planned outcomes.

Communications Project Outputs

Some of the measures used were outputs (e.g. products or participation counts). Measuring outputs is a standard way to document if a project completed the activities and created the products that it set out to deliver. The following is a list of the measures used by the communications projects in this report:

- Numbers participating
- Numbers distributed
- Funding/support secured
- Website/social media analytics
- Meetings with political representatives
- Presentations made
- Completion of a plan/doc
- Number of partners
- Op Eds printed
- Opportunities to speak with the media
- PSA reach and frequency
- Tracking of map use



Communications Project Outcomes

Often more challenging to measure are project outcomes. Outcomes measure the value or impact of the communications strategy. They look at the level of performance or change that the communications project produced. This measure is critical to understanding what the change in the target audiences understanding/opinions/behaviors were before and after the strategy was implemented and (if possible) how much of it was attributable to the strategy's efforts. The following list documents the various outcomes that were measured by the communications projects in this report:

- Changes in opinion/behavior
- Pre-post compliance measures
- Pledges made
- Repeat of phrases or statistics
- Value statements are shared
- Calls/emails received
- Requests for technical assistance
- Increased engagement
- Political will (variety of measures)
- Poll results
- Voting outcomes
- Expressions of support by government officials
- Became a "known quantity"

An Important Evaluation Takeaway

What is especially informative about this list is that the measures used are not all common in the standard evaluation literature. This is an important takeaway for wetland professionals and the communications professionals they work with, because there are innovative measures that can be used to get at the “heart” of measuring changes that wetland professionals want to achieve. For example, “becoming a known quantity” might not be a standard evaluation measure for science projects, yet with much of communications work requiring trust-building, being a known entity (with a positive agenda and offerings) becomes a very important measure. The list in this report provides a valuable set of outcomes that may serve as a useful guide for others working to evaluate the success of their efforts.

A Communications Planning Resource for State Wetland Program Staff

The findings from this report indicate that planning, implementation and evaluation are all key components to the success of a wetland communications project. Understanding how to do this work effectively requires training in communications techniques and practices. Wetland staff seeking to engage in communications work would be well-served to take part in communications training and to work with communications specialists.

In 2013, the Association of State Wetland Managers (ASWM) published a downloadable "[Wetland Program Plans Handbook](#)" for developing wetland program plans which provides some initial information for wetland professionals that can serve as additional guidance. The handbook includes a chapter on Developing Strategic Communications Plans (Chapter 3). The chapter includes guidance on how to work through development of a strategic communications plan:



- Identifying the Purpose and Goals for Your Communications
- Determining your Specific Communication Objectives
- Identifying your Audience
- Planning and Designing your Message
- Selecting a Communication Method
- Determining Timing
- Creating Your Action Plan
- Planning for Obstacles and Emergencies
- Strategizing how to Spread Your Message – Partnering and Capitalizing
- Developing Evaluation Mechanisms
- Compiling the Communication Plan Document & Getting Everyone on the Same Page
- Implementing the Communication Plan
- Utilizing Evaluation Results to Modify the Communication Plan over Time

For more information about this project or the ASWM Handbook, please contact ASWM at info@aswm.org or by calling the ASWM Office at (207) 892-3399.

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ASWM Wetland Program Plans Handbook
Chapter 3: Developing Strategic Communications Plans (www.aswm.org)

Appendix A: ASWM National Communications Project Workgroup

ASWM National Communications Project Workgroup Members (2017)

- Collis Adams, Director, Wetlands Bureau, New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services
- Katie Beilfuss, Outreach Programs Director, Wisconsin Wetlands Association
- Jeanne Christie, Executive Director, Association of State Wetland Managers
- Shane Gabor, Head of Policy Strategies, Institute for Wetland and Waterfowl Research, Ducks Unlimited Canada
- David Weirens, Assistant Director for Programs and Policy, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources
- Brittany Haywood, Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Program, Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control
- Ted LaGrange, Wetland Program Manager, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
- Val Marmillion, Executive Director, America's WETLAND Foundation
- Maryann McGraw, Wetland Program Manager, New Mexico Department of the Environment
- Julie Morse, Regional Ecologist, The Nature Conservancy
- Jim Pendergast, Retired
- Andy Robertson, Saint Mary's University Minnesota
- Marla Stelk, Policy Analyst, Association of State Wetland Managers
- Brenda Zollitsch, Policy Analyst, Association of State Wetland Managers

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONS THAT COULD BE USED TO COLLECT INFORMATION FOR ADDITIONAL WETLAND COMMUNICATION CASE STUDIES

Project Background

1. What is the backstory/context/landscape for this project?
2. How was the need for the project identified?
3. What was the project scale (national/regional/statewide/local)?
4. How is this project connected to other ongoing communications/outreach efforts (part of larger outreach strategy/stand-alone project)?
5. Where does this project lie along the continuum, i.e. at what stage is state/organization at regarding wetland outreach? A qualitative assessment of placement along a 1-10 continuum, where 1 = no other outreach happening to 10=advanced, well-organized and comprehensive communications program. (See page 8).
6. Who are the partners in this project? (Roles, levels of participation and their contribution of resources (advisory, funding/in-kind support; other)

Project Goals, Outputs and Outcomes

7. What are your project's goals?
 - a. Primary goals
 - b. Secondary goals
8. What are the project's planned outputs and outcomes?

Target Audience

9. Who is the target audience(s) for this project?
10. What is known about the target audience(s)?
11. How does the project establish credibility with the target audience (e.g. research cited, opinion leaders, examples)?
12. Were there any specific considerations that were incorporated to meet the communication needs of target audience(s)?
13. Were there any considerations that you did not understand initially about your target audience that ended up being a barrier to your work and how they were/could be corrected?

Messaging

14. What were the key messages of the project?
15. How were the project's key messages selected?
16. What was the target audience(s) asked/expected to do as a result of the project?
17. Were any specific scientific facts or numbers used in the project (incl. why they were selected)?
18. Did the project employ any messaging on ecosystem services/economics/wetland functions and values?
19. What grade-level language was used in communications materials?
20. What specific graphics/icons/images were incorporated?

Outreach Tools

21. What outreach tools have been developed by the project?
22. How/why were these specific tools selected?

Assistance Developing the Project

23. Did you use any outside assistance to help craft the project's messages or tools (e.g. focus groups or input; use of professional consultants or other expertise)?

Resources to Support the Project

24. What was the total cost for the project?
 - a. Funding
 - b. In-kind Support
 - c. Staffing
25. What kind of supports and approvals did you receive for this project from your state/agency/organization?
26. Were there any timing or approval requirements that affected the project?

Project Evaluation

27. What were the outputs and outcomes your project evaluated?
28. What were the measures (metrics) used for each?
29. What were your evaluation methods?
30. Were your project outputs/outcomes achieved? Why/why not?
31. What impact has your project had on wetlands work in your state?
32. Were there any specific language/messaging that worked particularly well in the project?
33. Were there any unexpected outcomes/impacts/benefits/unintended consequences from the project?

Transferability and Lessons Learned

34. What are the transferable/adaptable portions of the project for potential use by others? Please provide information about conditions and resources required for use.
35. What are some lessons learned/advice you would like to share with others seeking to replicate/adapt project?
36. What are the next plans for communication work (e.g. follow-on, enhancements, new project, none)?
37. Please share any other pertinent information that will assist in understanding the elements of your project, its evaluation and usefulness to others seeking to develop similar efforts.