

Marketing clarifies protection-based plan



Left: Lake Edward east of Nisswa is one example of the lakes that benefit from Crow Wing County's protection-based approach to water management planning. A Clean Water Fund grant from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources helped the county explain the new approach through an array of marketing tactics.

Below: Some marketing efforts related to the plan focused on the concept of keeping Crow Wing County "Minnesota's Favorite Place."

Photo Credits:
Chris Pence, BWSR

Crow Wing County introduced a new approach to watersheds; followed up with easy-to-accomplish suggestions



The message Crow Wing County sent to property owners was clear and concise: You want to do the right thing to keep lakes clean. We can help.

Crow Wing County had just updated its local comprehensive water management plan with a first-of-its-kind watershed approach focused on protection instead of restoration. Two years later, in 2015, the county received an Accelerated Implementation grant from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) to help explain that protection approach.

The effort replaced text-heavy, jargon-filled documents with short, easily digestible publications. The county



reached landowners through print media — including a series of graphics-heavy brochures — as well as social media and video.

“Crow Wing County is interested in changing behaviors when it comes to our citizens understanding lake management” said Environmental

Services Supervisor Jake Frie. “We believe people want to do the right thing and we see it as our role to help provide them some simple things they can do on their properties to help the lakes.”

Brainerd-based BWSR Board Conservationist Chris Pence, who was Crow Wing County’s land services supervisor at the time, explained some of the those behavioral changes.

To vacation homeowners accustomed to maintaining city lawns, county staff relayed how shoreland buffers helped to maintain water quality. The key was offering simple, manageable solutions — such as adding a rain garden, maintaining septic systems, or changing the direction of the roofline on a remodeling project to help curb runoff.

County staff brought the message to lakeshore associations, garden clubs, the county fair, home and garden shows, real estate professionals and contractors. Contractors might, for example, suggest working a rain garden into landscape design. During annual workshops with contractors, county staff told them about cost-share money available to landowners.

“We were just trying different ways to get the message to different groups of people,” Pence said. “It was surprising how getting that information out there got more projects going.”



Crow Wing County leveraged local recreation fund dollars to create a display that contains brochures about managing natural resources.

Previously, printed information was relayed in a magazine format.

“You kind of had to know what was going on to understand what the document was trying to convey,” Pence said.

For example, few people outside the industry refer to a 100-year storm event. The term “stormwater management” brought to mind large, unattractive city sediment ponds.

A Brainerd media company designed a folder that contained a pamphlet for each water plan priority: surface water, groundwater and aquatic invasive species.

Video
Crow Wing County’s promotional video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_h4XH-pUoP7Q

The publications centered on four things landowners could do in each area.

Rack cards covered topics such as forestry management and agricultural land management. More than 25,000 documents were printed as part of the project.

Leveraging local recreation

fund dollars, Crow Wing County created a display to hold brochures about natural resources management. That information helps landowners applying for land-use permits, variances and conditional-use permits.

Other marketing efforts made printed materials available online in a digital format. A new YouTube video focused on the concept of keeping Crow Wing County “Minnesota’s Favorite Place” and introduced the brochures. Crow Wing County augmented the marketing campaign with five paid Facebook posts that targeted residents by ZIP code. In 2018, the county created 22 water-plan-related Facebook posts, and posted something new on Facebook each week.

Pence said developing a focused message and delivering it repeatedly across a variety of platforms worked in Crow Wing County. No matter how or where they saw the message, people responded better when presented with a manageable list of options.

“Just do one thing,” Pence said.

“Things are being done because people have the information and they know what the right thing to do is. It builds that momentum, and then people are willing to talk to you about the next thing because the previous one went so well,” Pence said.