

How to Engage Community in a Lake Plan

A process based on Mississippi Lake Planning
Project funded by the Ontario Trillium
Foundation

Mississippi Lake *Plan*





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Introduction

Background

The process of developing a lake stewardship plan relies on full involvement and participation of the community on and around the lake. The process is community-driven, and the resulting plan is a community plan. Recounting the experience of conducting a lake plan for Mississippi Lake can offer useful insights into how best to engage people in such a process.

The planning process was guided by a 25-member Planning Committee, and was facilitated by French Planning Services Inc., and Watersheds Canada (formerly Centre for Sustainable Watersheds). A Technical Advisory



Committee was also established, consisting primarily of government bodies whose advice and support was important to the success of the plan process. These two committees played a vital role in keeping the broad “community” informed and involved. Communications decisions and actions were directed and approved by the Planning Committee, and early in the process a Communications Strategy was developed.





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Communications Strategy

The communication strategy provided a framework for communication activities for the preparation of the plan. The strategy identifies objectives, target audiences, key messages and approaches and tools to be considered and applied at key points throughout the process. The application of the strategy evolved as additional opportunities to communicate with the public arose. The focus of this effort was to create opportunities to communicate with as many people as possible, representing a wide array of interests throughout the watershed, during the development of the plan.



The Mississippi Lake Planning Committee took the lead and French Planning Services provided assistance as necessary when communicating with the media and the public. The Planning Committee reviewed all communication activities before released to the public, and Rob Bell, Chairman, had final approval. Advice was sought from key interest groups at each stage of the planning process in order to apply the best communication approach at the time it is needed. A wide variety of communication approaches in both digital and traditional forms was used to ensure a greater participation rate in the development of the plan.





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Communications Objectives

The Communications objectives of the consultation effort were to reach a broad target audience, who would:

- ◆ Be aware of and understand the purpose of the Mississippi Lake Stewardship Plan.
- ◆ Participate in the development of the plan.
- ◆ Be aware of and be informed about the recommended actions and the reasons for their selection.
- ◆ Have input through a variety of approaches and be aware of the way they will be addressed as the project is implemented.
- ◆ Know who to contact or where to go for more information.
- ◆ Participate in the implementation of the plan.

As a result of these communication activities, we expected:

- ◆ Increased opportunities for people to get involved.
- ◆ A more informed audience.
- ◆ People sharing their knowledge about the lake.

Target Audiences

While the target audience for communication efforts was purposely quite broad, the priority was placed on those who live, work, and play on and around Mississippi Lake. Government contacts at all levels were also important, with municipalities and the conservation authority taking a degree of precedence, given their role in local decision-making and regulation. The following audiences were included within the scope of this strategy. It was not intended that all on the list would get the same degree and type of communications. Their degree of involvement, the types of messages sent their way, and the media varied.



Audience Targeted included:

- 1. Residential Ratepayers**
 - a. Waterfront (permanent and seasonal)
 - b. Rural (permanent and seasonal) in the immediate watershed
 - c. Residents of Carleton Place and Almonte
- 2. Business Operators**
 - a. Commercial Operators (resorts, stores); businesses who advertise in the Mississippi Belle; Carleton Place Chamber of Commerce
 - b. Real Estate Community
 - c. Farming – individual farmers; Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Lanark County Chapter; National Farmers Union
- 3. Government (Those who are represented on the Technical Advisory Committee are noted by asterisk).**
 - a. Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (MOECC)*
 - b. Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF)*
 - c. Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority (MVCA)*
 - d. Lanark County
 - e. Town of Carleton Place*
 - f. Beckwith Township*
 - g. Township of Drummond North Elmsley*
 - h. Township of Mississippi Mills*
 - i. Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit*
 - j. Canada Department of Fisheries and Oceans*
 - k. Canadian Wildlife Service
 - l. Ontario Provincial Police
- 4. General Public**
- 5. Recreational Visitors - Tourists**
 - a. Recreational fishers
 - b. Water access users
 - c. Commercial Resort Campground users/members/renters
- 6. Non-Government Organizations and Interest Groups**
 - a. Mississippi Lake Association
 - b. Roads associations
 - c. Federation of Ontario Cottagers Association
 - d. Mississippi Valley Naturalists
 - e. Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters
 - f. Lanark Fish and Game Club
 - g. Renegade Bass
 - h. Beautiful Eastern Ontario Association of Snowmobile Trails (BEAST)
 - i. Lanark Stewardship Council
- 7. First Nations**
 - a. Ardoch Algonquin First Nations
- 8. Media (tions); Carleton Place/Almonte Gazette;**





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Delivering the Messages and Engaging People

It is always a challenge to find the best techniques and media to use when engaging the public and stakeholders during the course of a lake plan process. Members of the Planning Committee, FPSI, and Watersheds Canada all contributed to a wide array of techniques when preparing the Mississippi Lake Stewardship Plan:

Distribution List – A comprehensive distribution list was critical for information flow, and to get people interested in the process, and keep them interested throughout. The Planning Committee started with their lake association mailing list, and continually updated the list throughout the term of the process. Every event (AGMs, workshops, Carleton Place Home Show) included a “sign in” sheet, with any new names added to the list, and one member of the Planning Committee was responsible for maintaining the data base. Email addresses were sought and used whenever available, but since some people preferred or needed a hard copy, street addresses were included as well.

Website – A dedicated page was established on the MLA website during the development of the plan. The website was used as an important form of outreach and information exchange, and was used to complement other forms of communication. All documentation of the planning process was posted – for example, workshop summaries, draft and final versions of the plan, draft and final versions of the State of the Lake Report, minutes of the Planning Committee meetings. Links to other websites (municipalities, conservation authority) were also established.

Mississippi Lake Email Address - A separate email address was created for the planning process, and used as the primary contact for electronic mail – this



was done through the website. A mailing address was also created and provided for those who prefer this approach and for providing a return address for all contact on the project. A member of the Planning Committee monitored incoming mail, and responded when necessary.

Other Social Media Tools – A Facebook account was created and administered by a member of the Planning Committee. Where needed, the Twitter account of the MVCA was available to be used.

News Releases, Newspaper Ads, and Radio Spots – All these means were employed to get the word out about upcoming events (public workshops) and completed products (workshop summaries, draft and final State of the Lake and stewardship plan.

Bulletins and Notices – Short e-bulletins were developed and sent to everyone who had provided an email address. Hard copies were also made available at local gathering places (churches, stores) for those who prefer this approach. The bulletins contained timely information on the status of the Plan, facts about Mississippi Lake, upcoming events, and information on ways to improve the health our lake.

Surveys – Two surveys were conducted, to gain insights into the community's values and concerns, and to ensure greater participation in the process.

Public Forums – Over the 2 1/2 year timeframe of the planning process, three public forums were held. These events solicited the community's input to the plan at key stages and allowed for updates and presentations of material to those in attendance. Following each forum, a report was prepared and circulated to the full email list and was posted on the website. This feedback loop was one way to show those who were participating that their input was being taken seriously.



MLA AGM – The Mississippi Lake Planning Committee made presentations on the plan at the 2014 and 2015 AGMs of the Mississippi Lake Association. 2014 dealt with the timing of the planning process, status of the State of the Lake work, and upcoming Public Forums. At the 2015 AGM, the final plan was presented and the momentum at the time was used to engage numerous volunteers to take on implementation duties.

Municipal Outreach – The four townships and the Town of Carleton Place were invited to provide representatives on the Planning Committee, and through this, participate on a regular basis in the development of the plan. The Chair of the Planning Committee also made presentations to all councils (or Committees of Adjustment) at key points in the process, to ensure that all municipalities were well aware of the plan and its progress.

Property Owner Outreach – In addition to the variety of means already listed, more direct contact was also used. The Chair of the Planning Committee made presentations to each of the roads associations around the lake, and engaged them in further distribution of materials related to the plan. The Mississippi Belle, an annual, high quality publication was also used to advertise plan-related material and events. Door-to-door distribution of the Belle was also used as an opportunity for face-to-face contact related to the plan.



We created “Professional Branding for the Project including a logo and a Document Template





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Key Lessons Learned

- **Use a Variety of Means** – there are a wide variety of people and they need to be reached using a wide variety of media/means. Websites, social media, hard copy, newspapers, radio, and others
- **Feedback is Important** – When people become engaged in a process, their participation must be validated and encouraged through regular feedback. Examples used for the Mississippi Lake Stewardship Plan included the distribution of workshop summaries and a Discussion Paper on Issues and Actions.
- **Personal Contact is Best** – Wherever possible, personal contact via door-knocking, dock-visits, or phone calls has a much stronger response rate than a piece of mail, newspaper ad, web post, or email.
- **Communicate, Communicate, Communicate** – There is no such thing as too much communication.

LOCAL NEWS Mississippi Lake Plan benefits lake's natural ecosystem

By TARA GEMER
tgem@perth.ca

News – The condition of Mississippi Lake impacts the quality of life enjoyed by those living, working and recreating in the watershed.

Last Tuesday, April 1, Carleton Place council heard the development of a Mississippi Lake Plan (MLP) would identify, protect and restore the natural, physical and social integrity of Mississippi Lake's ecosystem.

"This is really about preserving what we have today rather than trying to fit what gets broken in the future," Rob Bell said.

Bell is a Mississippi Lakes Association (MLA) director and is also the MLP committee chair.

"The Centre for Sustainable Watersheds (CSW) has partnered with the MLA, French Planning Services Inc. and Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority (MVCA) to create the MLP.

"Mississippi Lake is reasonably healthy today, but there is always a risk owing to development and abuse," Bell said. "I think our lake is taken for granted and I think we need to change that."

The MLP committee is a volunteer body affiliated with the MLA.

"A couple of years ago this process began," Bell said, "and we are here to make known to the municipalities that 2014 is the year of action."

There has been much talk so far, and the MLP committee is about to have public consultations and produce reports that "we are very anxious to share with our stakeholders."

The Town of Carleton Place is a key stakeholder.

"We are coming to put a face to the name, meet everyone and answer questions," Bell said.

The group is working in combination with a couple of key organizations, MVCA and CSW. Executive director Barbara King heads up the CSW.

"She is the professional brains behind the operation," Bell said. "She has been very helpful to us, bringing us along and directing our energy."

Next steps

"We've put some information together for the municipalities to let you know where we are heading," King said. "We would like you to be able to participate."

She explained French Planning Services Inc. was recently hired to assist with the lake planning process "as we continue to the next phase."

"We would like to invite you to participate in the review of our state of the lake report (called Mississippi Lake Today, which will be released on April 22," King said.

A technical advisory committee meeting will be held a month later, and the first MLP community values and visioning workshop will take place on June 21.

"This is where we really get people involved in the communities," King said. "We really want to bridge the gap between residents, users of the lake."

Coming together for some common values and interests on the lake, she continued, "and this will be facilitated by French Planning Services Inc."

There will be three community workshops in total over the next year. The second, MLP issues and action strategy workshop, will take place on Sept. 1.

"The final document will be available for review on March 1, 2015," King said, "and finalized from there."

The MLA's Mississippi Lake Today publication is coming out in two months' time and will be the result of a survey of lake residents, which has been running for the last two years.

"We have 350 contributions to the survey," Bell said, "and it gives us a pretty good piece of feedback on what the folks in this community feel about the lake."

The top three things learned by the survey are: feelings concerning quality of water, boating safety and development.

"When we have the state of the lake report that really identifies the current status of everything in terms of water quality, invasive species, issues with the levels of nutrients and more, we can formulate an action plan," Bell said.

Cover: Doug Black told Bell they needed to meet a gentleman in the audience – Carleton Place Mayor Doug Stoddon.

"Doug has done a significant amount of cleaning out of the Mississippi River in lower," Black said, "and I am embarrassed to say how many tons he's taken out."

In the summer of 2012 and 2013, Stoddon, using only his hands and a rowboat, removed a number of tonnes from the river including hundreds of tires, close to 30 bicycles, one motor drive shaft, a 200-gallon oil tank, aluminum siding, two docks, a microwave oven, television, vacuum cleaner, plastic shed, industrial air conditioner and arcade game, just to name a few.

"It has been absolutely fantastic," Black said, "and I know he wants to work with the Mississippi Lakes Association."

"You guys need to get in touch with him because he has done an absolutely fantastic job," he continued. "We had more citizens doing that kind of undertaking, what a great river and lake system it would be."

Mayor Stoddon said Stoddon's work brought attention to the fact that "we need to be more active in the health of our river and lake."

"The pictures (of items removed) were a shock to people," she said.

In regards to the MLP, Lefebvre commended Bell, King and their participation.

"It sounds like an onerous task, but it sounds like it is a labour of love," she said. "You love the lake, the watershed and want to make it better. I appreciate what you are doing, what you have done and what you are going to do."





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Planning Schedule & Public Engagement

The steps in the planning process, timing, and means to engage people are presented below:

STEPS IN THE PROCESS		Means to Engage People
Step One – PREPARATION AND DEFINING THE SCOPE OF THE PLAN		
1. <i>OTF Announcement</i>	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive news story published in local papers and reported on local radio station • To thank Trillium for funding and to announce the plan
2. <i>RBC Event</i>	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ditto for RBC
Step Two - ENGAGE COMMUNITY – Background Stage		
3. <i>Develop website and social media tools</i>	April, 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Branded webpage and Facebook page developed specifically for the Mississippi Lake Stewardship Plan • Announcement of future events
4. <i>Survey</i>	2012-2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey of all lakefront property owners • Results posted in Mississippi Belle and on website • Results presented at Public forum #1
5. <i>Township Presentations</i>	April 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations to each of the townships and Carleton Place to introduce the process and request their involvement
6. <i>Release Draft State of the Lake Report for comments</i>	June 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Release summary in advance of Public forum #1 – use media outlets, website, email distribution • Seek feedback at Public forum #1



STEPS IN THE PROCESS		Means to Engage People
7. <i>Mississippi Lake Association AGM –</i>	<i>May 31, 2014</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Provide a status report on the plan</i> • <i>Invite AGM participants to the upcoming Public forum.</i>
8. <i>Public forum #1 – Residents and Lake Users</i>	<i>June 21, 2014</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Public forum notice published in local papers.</i> • <i>Invitations sent to mailing list.</i> • <i>Insert/invitation placed in Mississippi Belle publication in April</i> • <i>Public Forum dealt with values, issues, and preliminary ideas for actions</i>
Step Three - ENGAGE COMMUNITY – Issues and Actions		
9. <i>Release Discussion Paper, “Reviewing Potential Actions for the Mississippi Lake Plan”</i>	<i>September, 2014</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Discussion paper summarized issues and actions learned for Forum #1 and survey</i> • <i>Released to email list, published on website</i>
10. <i>Public forum #2 – Residents and Lake Users</i>	<i>September 20, 2014</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Public forum notice published in local papers, posted on website.</i> • <i>Emails sent to mailing list.</i> • <i>Presented and confirmed issues and actions from discussion paper</i>
11. <i>Meetings with Township Councils</i>	<i>Fall 2014</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Presentation by Chair of Planning Committee to update councils on progress</i>
Step Four - PREPARE DRAFT LAKE PLAN		
12. <i>Prepare Draft Plan</i>	<i>Winter 2014-15</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
Step Five - REVIEW DRAFT PLAN		
13. <i>Meetings with Township Councils</i>	<i>April 2015</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Draft Plan presented to township councils</i>
14. <i>Review of Draft Mississippi Lake Stewardship Plan by Planning Committee and Technical Advisory Committee</i>	<i>April 2015</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Presentation to both committees and comments sought</i> • <i>Plan revised based on comments received</i>
Step Six - FINAL PLAN		
15. <i>Release Final Plan</i>	<i>May 30 2015</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Plan presented and formally released at the MLA AGM</i> • <i>Press releases with all outlets</i>

