

Bassett Creek Watershed Lake Leaders Workshop

October 3, 2018 Workshop Summary

Prepared by

FRESHWATER

2424 Territorial Road Suite B | Saint Paul, MN 55114 | freshwater.org

INTRODUCTION

On October 3, 2018, neighbors and leaders from five lake groups in the Bassett Creek watershed gathered for a workshop to review and discuss options available to further organize. The workshop was commissioned by Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission (BCWMC) in the recognition that community members play a vital role in caring for the health of local water bodies, and that further organizing can help groups increase the efficiency and effectiveness of limited volunteer time and resources to achieve water resource goals.

Representatives from the following lakes were in the room:

- 💧 Lost Lake
- 💧 Medicine Lake
- 💧 Northwood Lake
- 💧 Parkers Lake
- 💧 Sweeney Lake

Each of these groups is at a different stage in their development, has different issues they're working to address, and different opportunities available to them. For that reason, three case study examples were provided to help each group understand options to further organize on different scales, and with different levels of formality in collaborations. Those case studies were:

- 💧 **Lake Association:** Long Lake Waters Association (represented by Cassy Ordway)
- 💧 **Coalition of Lake Associations:** Coalition for Minnehaha Creek Waters/Minnesota Coalition of Lake Associations (represented by Joe Schneider)
- 💧 **Lake Improvement District:** Chisago Chain of Lakes Improvement District (represented by Jerry Spetzman)

Following the presentations, the groups were led through a facilitated discussion by Freshwater to explore relevance of the different options, opportunities of interest, and next steps for each of the groups. Participants took their own notes. Each note was transcribed by Freshwater and distilled into major themes using qualitative analysis. The summary of the conversations is included in the following pages.

WORKSHOP OUTCOMES BY LAKE GROUP

Lost Lake

Lost Lake participants noted that their group is small, and their focus narrow. Fittingly, the funding required for further organizing, as well as the involvement of dedicated volunteers, stood out to Lost Lake participants as they considered what further organizing would look like. Participants also noted that, should they look to make changes, “wheels” have already been invented and a network to tap into already exists.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for Lost Lake leaders coming out of this meeting is in identifying fully the role they can play to improve Lost Lake and support others in the watershed. Increased communication with other lake groups and the BCWMC is on the top of their list for what to work on, something already begun in the workshop by members visiting the tables of other groups. Specifically, the group identified the following next steps:

- 💧 Develop a Facebook page for the lake
- 💧 Share challenges, opportunities, and ideas with Sweeney Lake
- 💧 Interact with BCWMC more
- 💧 Interact with Northwood Lake more
- 💧 Pass on what was learned in the workshop to members of the lake association

Medicine Lake

The Association for Medicine Lake Area Citizens (AMLAC) is currently focused on two major issues—AIS and chlorides—both of which the group feels urgency about along with a need to maintain momentum. As they reflected on the options available, conversation centered on the group's goals, how different structures supported those goals, the challenges they're currently experiencing, and the challenges they see with the different organizing options. The narrow focus of the organization's two issues brought up a conversation about the potential for success in combating those two issues and if there are examples of lake groups who can be a case study.

The group also surfaced a number of questions that need to be answered. Those questions include:

- 💧 What goals should we set?
- 💧 What structure will best address these issues?
- 💧 Is there a formal structure needed (such as a 501c3)? What is the cost/benefit of setting one up?
- 💧 What is currently available from BCWMC for Medicine Lake, and what is the value add for these options?
- 💧 Is Hennepin County open to more Lake Improvement District (LIDs) forming?
- 💧 How expansive should membership be? Just Medicine Lake? Just Plymouth? What makes sense?

AMLAC participants identified the following steps to begin integrating takeaways from the workshop:

- 💧 Cultivate an AIS 5-year plan
- 💧 Develop a social media presence

Northwood Lake

The Friends of Northwood Lake (FNL) group is interested in having a larger seat at the table when participating in decisions affecting their watershed. They specifically see an opportunity to gain momentum and visibility by working with Lost Lake as a partner to have a bigger influence with the City of Plymouth as they have mutual interests and goals.

Questions that came out of the conversation included:

- 💧 How would a Coalition of Lake Associations (COLA) interact with and influence different levels of government?
- 💧 What is the difference between what a COLA could offer and what is offered by BCWMC? What would the benefits be?
- 💧 How would a LID benefit an individual lake association?

FNL participants identified the following steps to begin integrating takeaways from the workshop:

- 💧 Increase the number of non-lakeshore members
- 💧 Enhance relationship with BCWMC
- 💧 Identify ways to partner with Lost Lake
- 💧 Work with the City of Plymouth

Sweeney Lake

The Sweeney Lake Association (SLA) sees itself as an outlier in the lake groups because they feel their lake is different enough that goals of their own don't entirely align with other lake groups. For this reason, along with present and pressing concerns the group is trying to address, their conversation focused on organizing further to have more influence (specifically with their city). In addition to growing political clout, the group also noted that further organizing would bring the benefit of increased access to funding and opportunities to learn from others. However, balancing that growth with the added work that would come from a COLA or LID was something the group was wary of throughout the meeting.

Questions that came out of the conversation included:

- 💧 How can changes to organization structure change SLA's ability to influence decision makers?
- 💧 Will operating as a LID give us more negotiating power with City of Golden Valley?
- 💧 What is the full extent of power of a LID?

- ↳ Would OUR voice be heard if we organized with other lake groups?

SLA participants identified the following steps to begin integrating takeaways from the workshop:

- ↳ Develop relationships with other lake groups to align goals and find commonality
- ↳ Implement a plan to help regulate water levels
- ↳ Further develop AIS control, enforcement, decontamination stations, launch restrictions, etc.
- ↳ Build membership outside of lakeshore

Parkers Lake

The Parkers Lake group is currently unorganized, and after weighing some ways of establishing themselves, they focused on how to organize as a lake association and develop a direction for the group before entering into a more complicated organizational group with other lakes. Through this discussion many opportunities and needs arose. The most immediate need seemed to be building the group's base through recruiting volunteers to participate in the organizational structure and plan. This is a challenge based on the number of lakeshore owners, so targeting recruitment to reach lake users as well as shore owners will be important.

The group came away with a list of needs and hopes for their future organizing. They did wonder if the city would be willing to be a part of sponsoring the organization.

Participants identified the following steps to begin integrating takeaways from the workshop:

- ↳ Write up a history
- ↳ Increase recruitment through flyers, in person conversations with neighbors, Next Door, and other avenues
- ↳ Define mission of group and goals
- ↳ Develop a method for funding the group
- ↳ Establish a group by December 31st
- ↳ Investigate if the city would be interested in helping sponsor an official Parkers Lake group

NEXT STEPS

This meeting touched on a need in the community to not only help groups think about how to strategically grow, but to connect with each other. Though case study examples were brought in, the breadth of conversation in reporting out from small group conversation—mixed with participants literally running over to other tables to ask questions and brainstorm next steps—demonstrated that the groups had a lot to learn from (and desire to work with) each other. These inter-group interactions indicate that further opportunities for the groups to get together should be hosted. This does not necessarily mean that the participants would most readily be interested in a LID or COLA, but that even informal opportunities to build relationships and work together would be beneficial.

Beyond offering ways for further, informal collaboration, BCWMC could look at offering specific opportunities to help groups advance goals in common, as well as address some of the questions included in the previous section of this report.

- 💧 **Political clout:** An attractive benefit of further organizing for many participants was that of increased political clout, visibility, and influence. How to strategically grow that influence and build relationships with decision-makers –even without further organizing – would be a beneficial area of training, as would a deeper dive into the varying levels of water governance. Additionally, the BCWMC has a unique opportunity to serve as a convener, and could work with lake groups and cities to identify ways to support constructive interactions that help all parties pursue and meet water resource goals.
- 💧 **Current relationships:** It would be useful to groups to clarify the role of the BCWMC and how that could fit into the picture of a COLA or LID. Several of the comments referenced a desire to better understand what the watershed commission does and how that relates to the goals of the lake groups. This will help inform current interactions, as well as help several groups better weigh the benefits and costs of considering a LID or COLA.
- 💧 **Outreach and education:** Expanding membership and building environmental awareness and ethic – especially beyond the lakeshore – was mentioned by the groups multiple times throughout the night. It would be beneficial to present and train group members in possible strategies for how exactly the groups could do that, from messaging to working with Master Water Stewards.
- 💧 **Access to resources.** In addition to increasing the volunteer base, several groups also commented on the benefit of increased funding. Cost sharing, partnering on grants, and other opportunities are available with or without further organizing, and could be used to strategically advance common goals.

No matter what, it is clear that the groups want to continue to build their own capacities while working with others. The conversations that were started in this meeting are sure to continue, and the energy in the room at the end of the event bodes well for the success of future endeavors.