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Western meadowlark, Medicine Lake NWR, Montana

Outreach

Communicating

Communication is the critical aspect of making it all work. Clear and effective communication is the backbone that supports all of your organization's other activities. Good communication means everyone understands their roles and responsibilities, and the work of the organization will be clear to members, refuge staff and the public. Poor communication will result in confusion and mistrust.

To be effective, your group needs to find ways to reach out to the public so they understand your group's mission and objectives and become aware of refuge issues. Ultimately, you want your outreach efforts to result in an increased membership and support of the refuge.

A great resource book for outreach:

Getting the Word Out in the Fight to Save the Earth by Richard Beamish

The Johns Hopkins University Press – ISBN 0-8018-4895-4

Monomoy NWR consists of two small barrier islands of 2,740 acres with official wilderness status, off the “elbow” of Cape Cod. The islands host more than half a million birds, some rare and threatened species. Over time, gull populations began to overwhelm smaller species. In 1994, the Fish and Wildlife Service, in a management decision, designated 175 acres as a gull-free zone. In 1996, the FWS implemented their management plan by poisoning several thousand gulls on Monomoy. Unfortunately, hundreds of these gulls died on the Cape Cod mainland, which upset the residents and created a firestorm of controversy . . .

The Story of . . .

The original Friends of Monomoy NWR were a group of retirees whose focus was to carry out work projects on the refuge. The group wasn't ready for the controversy that erupted when the US Fish and Wildlife Service made the decision to reduce the gull population. In hindsight, Dean Steeger, a Friends of Monomoy Board member, wishes his group had planned ahead, well before the issue hit, even though outreach wasn't the group's original focus. Steeger believes one obligation

of Friends groups is to be a voice of support for their refuge. To do this, he said, all groups should form relationships with people in their area who are the decision makers and establish contacts in the offices of local and State political representatives. Groups also should establish a relationship with the media, raising interest in the refuge in general before any issues arise. His advice, “The key is in the formation of your board. Get one or two people on the board who are

Friends of Monomoy NWR

willing to do outreach, who are articulate. Your political success will depend on those one or two people.” He sees his role at Monomoy as that of an individual who is a member of the community and a Friend who can be a counterpoint between the opposition and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in situations where the FWS must tread lightly. The voice of Friends carry weight in the community, because they're the public, too —they're not the Federal Government.

Good outreach begins with clear internal communications between board members and with the membership. Everyone should be aware of and informed about what the group is doing, when events are taking place, and plans for the future. In other words, no surprises. Identify who will be the spokesperson (or people) for your group. It should be someone who can articulate clearly and concisely. Make sure that person has all the facts, and support that person.

Communication also must be clear between Friends and the refuge manager and staff. Here again it needs to be two way communication with no surprises. Build the relationship through good, consistent communication.

Tools for outreach

- Reach out to other groups and organizations. Re-inventing the wheel is too time consuming.
- Start educating the public by speaking at organizations (not just environmental organizations) and to the broadcast media.
- Contact and enlist the users of the refuge.
- Involve politicians at the local, state, and national levels.
- Use your name. Make it visible. Get it out in front of people.

Advice from Friends of Monomoy

Remember your job as Friends:

- *To promote the National Wildlife Refuge System and its sound management.*
- *To serve as a litmus test to FWS. As members of the general public, they can see how their management decisions will “play” with the public by asking you first.*
- *Most members of the FWS are scientists. Friends can help them explain and interpret technical information to the general public.*

Ways to reach the media:

- *Respond to newspaper articles with letters to the editor.*
- *Go to local and cable TV stations. Get a Public Service Announcement (PSA) made. Stations are obligated to run PSA's for free.*
- *Use the Internet, get a web site, publish your address in your brochure and anything you send out.*
- *Be professional in your image. Create a great logo, edit carefully.*
- *Call editors (not reporters) with story ideas, or even just to give your opinion on an issue. They usually ask questions and listen.*

Internal communication

Develop a way to communicate. Possibly use a newsletter and phone tree.

Communicate with all members regularly.

Meet regularly and often, possibly on a monthly basis.

Let everyone know what it is that you are doing.

Ensure open communication between the friends group and the refuge staff.

Share your technical knowledge.

Learn what kind of communication works best between members. Do not assume everyone knows.

No surprises!!!

Summarize meetings so everyone understands what was discussed.

Make sure there are no breaks in the lines of communication.

Do not keep quiet when you disagree or do not understand.

Do not burn any bridges.

Other Suggestions

Do your homework so that you know what you are talking about.

Develop and maintain credibility.

If you don't know, say so! Offer to find out, then do it.

Keep the channels of communication open between the group and the refuge and within the group.

Be factual and honest.

Desire to work together.

Maintain a sense of trust - off the record "trust" means you don't repeat something you promised not to.

Communicate frequently.

Share information before it becomes public.

Attend to good manners and show respect.

Share photographs (visual communication).

The newsletter and membership brochure

Two outreach tools you will find useful are the newsletter and the membership brochure. These will help inform your members about the activities of your group and get your message to potential new members, legislators and people in the general community.

Even in the beginning when your budget is limited, take the time and spend as much as you can afford to produce a good product. Appearance counts. Graphics, eye catching headlines and distinct, easy to read type are all important ingredients to an effective newsletter or brochure.

Strive to be interesting and readable. Assume an intelligent audience, but don't assume they know the background and details of your story. Explain things clearly and completely.

Avoid dense text. Tell the story with pictures. Observe the one-third/two-thirds rule: Devote two-thirds of the publication to graphics, headlines and white space and one-third to text.

Who gets your Newsletter?

- Members.
- Town/City Council.
- Conservation Commission.
- State and federal elected officials.
- Local library.
- Chamber of Commerce.
- Local conservation groups and other refuge stakeholders.
- Media contacts.

Once you have your nonprofit ruling, your group may be eligible to use bulk mail. Check with your post-office about their requirements. The rules are somewhat complicated, but worth checking into, as the savings are considerable.

Newsletter and Brochure Tools

■ Collect newsletters and brochures you like. Use them as models in your own design.

■ Look for a printer with reasonable prices. Initially, when you have limited funds, see if your refuge will allow you to use their copy machine.

■ Do a production schedule a year in advance for a newsletter. Establish deadlines for preparation, printing and mailing.

■ Information should be concise, readable and to the point.

■ Avoid technical jargon, language, and acronyms.

■ Use a typeface that is clear and easy to read.

■ Edit. All writing can be made tighter. Get someone to proofread.

■ Keep your audience in mind.

■ Use lots of white space and graphics.

■ Good reference books:

Elements of Style by Strunk & White; *Chicago Manual of Style*; *Getting the Word Out* by Richard Beamish.

Words of Wisdom From Other Friends Groups

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Make sure everyone understands - translate technical language into familiar terms (define acronyms, place names, technical terms, jargon).

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Tap into existing communication opportunities.

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Be visible – show momentum.

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Pick a name that people can remember – keep it simple.

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Use graphics to capture and express the passion.

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Be positive.

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Make it look fun, even if it isn't!!!

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Demonstrate awareness, understanding, caring, and action.

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Edit – be professional with polished products.

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Dress professionally.

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Be consistent with your message.

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Know who is speaking for your membership.

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Conduct yourself professionally, even in adversarial situations.

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Be appreciative – say thanks (in many ways)!!

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Follow through and follow up.

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Toot your horn – often and loudly.

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Outreach Checklist

Clear and effective communication is the key to your organization's success.	
Build public support for your group's activities by getting the word out about your group's activities to the public.	
Develop relationships with key editors in the media and political arena. Involve politicians at the State and local level.	
Be visible to the public. Find ways to use your name frequently, in a number of ways. Use all mediums available: newsletter, newspaper, cable, internet.	
Create and maintain a professional image. Develop an appropriate logo, edit everything you send out carefully.	
Know who your spokespeople are and let them carry your message. Make sure they have accurate information so they know what they're talking about. Be consistent with your message.	
Create an outreach plan and form those relationships before you need them!	
Interpret technical language into common language.	

