

“Don’t Mow it, Grow it! The Reduction in Geese Will Show it!”

Community Based Social Marketing Plan

Kate Carson and Casey Martinson

Introduction

Problem

Mirror Lake and Shadow Lake are two water bodies connected by a channel and found within the city of Waupaca, Wisconsin. The population with lake front property is largely made up of older, middle class families as well as senior citizens from the Bethany Homes community. The median age of the residents in the city of Waupaca is 45.5 years (2010 US Census), which is higher than the national average of 37.2 years. The shorelines of Mirror and Shadow Lakes are largely developed with single family homes and senior housing. Approximately 70% of the shoreline is made up of yards which are mowed to or nearly to the water’s edge without any significant buffering vegetation. Over the past several years a growing population of Canadian geese frequenting the lakes and their shorelines has become problematic. In response, the Friends of Mirror and Shadow Lakes group has taken measures to harass the geese and had previously raised funds for a one-time goose round-up. The round-up was expensive and largely unsuccessful, due to poor weather conditions. Control methods for the Canadian geese up to this point have been ineffective.

Behavior

According to the Minnesota DNR, landscaping that more closely resembles natural conditions of lake shorelines is considered to be the most environmentally responsible, effective, and long term solution to problematic goose populations. Natural shorelines tend to have tall vegetation surrounding the lake with some vegetation extending into the water in certain areas of the lake. The current mowed condition of the majority of the shoreline is attracting geese, since they prefer habitats along water bodies that have short grasses, allowing them to see potential predators ¹.

The purpose of this project is to adjust the lawn mowing behavior by individuals living on the lakefronts of Mirror and Shadow Lakes, so that a minimum 20 foot buffer of tall vegetation is present on the entire shoreline of both lakes. In order to be effective, this must be a repetitive behavior that the landowners participate in. By allowing a buffer of tall vegetation to form around the lake, the habitat around the lakes for the Canadian geese will be less desirable since they prefer open areas. This will lead to a decline in the number of geese frequenting the lakes and will relieve the negative consequences associated with excessive goose populations including fecal deposits and excessive nutrients entering the water from their waste. Planting native vegetation will also be encouraged, but the main goal is to first have people commit to providing the 20 foot buffer.

Barriers and Benefits

	Leaving an un-mowed 20+ ft buffer along shoreline	Mowing to water's edge
Perceived Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce number of geese around Mirror and Shadow Lakes • Feel good about engaging in activities that benefit the environment and community • Less time spent on household chores 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More area for recreation in yard • Aesthetically pleasing • Fits the current cultural convention
Perceived Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception that maintaining a buffer is complicated • Lack of education on the benefits of buffers to the lake ecosystems • Lack of knowledge of goose habitat preferences • Less recreational space • Forgetting to mow at least 20 feet away from the shoreline and instead mowing closer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time and economic investment

In order to overcome perceived barriers to maintaining the 20 foot buffer the benefits of the buffer over a completely mowed lawn will be emphasized. The message delivery will raise awareness of the many benefits that buffers have to offer, will disprove false assumptions about the buffers, and provide landowners with materials, contacts, and an informational session presented by experts to assist them in making the commitment.

Social Marketing Strategies

Message Delivery

Our message will educate individuals on the link between mowed shorelines, the problematic goose population, and the negative effects on habitat and water quality. The message will inform the audience that by simply maintaining a more natural, un-mowed shoreline they can make a significant impact on reducing the occurrence of geese on their property and around the lakes, as well as providing environmental and social benefits to the community.

Promotional and informational materials and presentations will deliver a 2-sided message, so that counter-arguments can be provided against the norm of mowed lawns. Residents and visitors to the lakes currently complain about the goose problem and the Friends of Mirror and Shadow Lakes group has already spent thousands of dollars trying to reduce the population without much success. This makes framing the argument around maintaining an un-mowed 20 foot buffer versus mowing lawns and dealing with the costly and problematic goose population more persuasive. Highlighting the wildlife, water quality, economic, community, and aesthetic benefits that buffers provide over mowed shorelines should be effective in convincing many people that these positives outweigh the benefits of completely mowed lawns.

One method of message delivery that this social marketing campaign will employ is the use of a slogan and a mascot. This was inspired by the successful "Bert the Salmon" campaign to promote natural lawn care in Seattle, Washington. Bert the Salmon was a mascot used to encourage the target audience to practice natural lawn care methods and to remind them of the benefits this offers to wildlife. The slogan used was "When it comes to your lawn, act naturally." The Seattle campaign used the mascot and slogan to deliver a simple message,

because it was found that complicated lawn care techniques were seen as a barrier to the behavioral change². The false perception that many Mirror and Shadow Lakes residents may have is that maintaining a buffer zone is more complex than simply mowing it, is a potential barrier; therefore the simple messaging that a slogan and mascot can deliver will help to break down this incorrectly perceived barrier.

The slogan "Don't Mow it, Grow it! The Reduction in Geese Will Show it!" will be used as a catch phrase to help residents remember the importance of maintaining the buffer. Along with the slogan will be a mascot of "Loosey the Goosey," a goose with a suitcase and hat on, surrounded by three goslings as if they are moving out together. This will be used in the advertising, promotional materials, bumper stickers, and in the corner of the yard signs.

Another method that will be used to deliver the message to the community is to host an informational session. This was found to be an effective strategy in a Canadian social marketing plan to reduce pesticide usage. The strategy included holding gardening talks by experts and providing informational packages to attendees, so that they remembered what was covered³. Like the Canadian social marketing plan, the Friends of Mirror and Shadow Lakes group will host an informational event educating landowners on the importance and maintenance of buffers. Speakers from the Wisconsin DNR, the UW-Extension, and Golden Sands RC&D will use their expertise to present the scientific reasoning behind buffers, using landscaping to reduce the occurrence of geese as well as providing valuable habitat for desirable wildlife and water quality benefits, and information on how to maintain the buffers. This event will be advertised in the local community newspaper and through flyers hung at the Shadow Lake kiosk, the lake

shelter, lifeguard station, and in local businesses. An informational packet will be given to all participants in order to mitigate the potential barrier that forgetting the information may present to landowners.

In an attempt to raise additional awareness of the informational event and to reach those who may not be able to attend, Golden Sands RC&D interns and volunteers from the Friends of Mirror and Shadow Lakes will go to the doors of each lakefront property to speak with the land owner/manager to deliver the message of leaving 20 foot buffers on the shoreline and invite them to the informational session. They will provide those they speak to with brochures advertising the event and containing information about the campaign and its benefits, as well as contact information for the Friends of Mirror and Shadow Lakes, Golden Sands RC&D, the UW-Extension, and the Wisconsin DNR, should they have any questions.

Commitment

Commitments will be used to encourage people to maintain a minimum 20 foot buffer between their lawn and the shoreline. Initially, landowners will be asked to commit to maintaining an un-mowed minimum 20 foot buffer along their shoreline by signing a pledge and providing contact information for future follow-up questioning. Landowners will be asked to make the commitment by the interns and volunteers going door to door and at the informational meeting hosted by the Friends of Mirror and Shadow Lakes. Once committed, landowners will be offered signs to put in their lawn showcasing their commitment to the health of Mirror and Shadow Lakes and to reducing the goose population through land management practices. This will be effective in promoting the desired behavior, because, as the survey indicated, people

care about their community and what their community members think of them. The signs act as a visual display and acknowledgement of their commitment, as well.

Once they are engaged in the behavior, information will be provided on further steps they can take to improve water quality, wildlife habitat, and the health of the lakes and community. The recommendations will include stopping the application of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides to their lawn, planting native plant species, and removing invasive species from their land.

Contact information for the UW Extension, Wisconsin DNR, and Prairie Nursery will be provided for landowners who would like guidance in choosing which native plants to plant. Coupons to Prairie Nursery will also be included, as well as contact information for the Friends of Mirror and Shadow Lakes if landowners would like volunteer labor to assist in the actual planting.

Prompts

One prompt that will be used is a sticker attached to the land owner's lawnmower, reminding them to leave the first 20 feet from the shoreline un-mowed. Sticker placement would have to be a voluntary action.

Another prompt will be the voluntary placement of yard signs placed at the buffer's edge.

These will be given to landowners and used to prompt them to avoid mowing their lawns past that point. They will have a choice between signs that say "Natural Vegetation Restoration Area to Reduce Problematic Goose Population" or "Wildlife Habitat Improvement Area: Do Not Mow". This will remind them of the behavior, some of the benefits of the behavior, and the reasoning behind the behavior, as well as encouraging others to participate. Signs explaining

the benefits of the buffer will also voluntarily be placed along the shoreline, so that people using the water can see them. These signs will serve the dual purpose of fostering a social norm, encouraging neighbors to leave a buffer area, and educating others on the importance and benefits of the buffers.

Norms

Bumper stickers will be used to foster a social norm of buffer zones, spread the word about the importance of buffers and how they can reduce the problematic goose population, put some pressure on those who have values which line up with improving shoreline habitat, and encourage people to stay consistent with their behaviors and beliefs. The yard signs mentioned in the above section on prompts will also act to foster a social norm of buffer zones. When people see their neighbors displaying signs and bumper stickers that state that they are actively taking steps to reduce the goose population naturally and protect the health of the lakes, it places pressure on others who value the lakes they live on and can make them look bad to others if they do not participate. Even if they do not value the lake, if they care about their community (or at least what their community thinks of them) there will be pressure to keep the lakes healthy for everyone and to do their part in reducing habitat for the geese. Having a mowed shoreline versus an un-mowed shoreline is very visible and can point out those that do and do not seem to care enough to take simple actions to reduce the goose population and improve water quality, especially if many people are not mowing. It also creates social pressure to participate in the relatively simple behavior to accomplish these goals, especially since everyone who lives on or visits the lakes are affected by the actions of those who do not

act to protect the health of the lakes. Having non-participation so visible and the creation of a buffer zone social norm, places pressure on those who do mow and care about their lakes and community to change their behavior, so that they stay consistent with their values and actions.

Pilot Test

The pilot test will be delivered to five different groups. The groups will be assigned by randomly drawing landowner's information out of a hat. The first will receive only the commitment strategy; the second will receive prompts in the form of a lawnmower sticker and a yard sign; the third will receive only public recognition; the fourth will receive a combination of the first three; and the fifth will be a control group receiving no strategy. The testing period will last four weeks.

Monetary investments will be analyzed for cost-effectiveness. The effectiveness of the investments will be determined by comparing the monetary input versus the number of individuals who change their behavior in each of the groups. Behavioral change will be determined by monitoring participants' shorelines from a boat at the end of the four week pilot test period. The results of each of the four groups receiving the different tactics of the marketing strategy will be compared and contrasted to the control group that did not receive any marketing strategy. Whichever strategy provided the greatest behavioral change for the least amount of money will be chosen for the campaign strategy, unless compelling circumstances justify greater benefits from a costlier option. The pilot's strategy will be revised

until it is deemed effective and efficient enough to be implemented across the entire community.

Evaluation

In order to determine the effectiveness of the social marketing campaign, an evaluation of the strategy will be carried out 4 weeks after the campaign's launch. Information on the level of involvement will be compared with the baseline data of the lawns around the lake which had at least 20 foot buffers prior to the campaign's launch. Involvement will be determined by visual observation of shorelines surrounding the lake, as well as visiting randomly-selected participating households to ensure that the buffer is at least 20 feet wide.

A mailing will also be sent after 4 weeks to all residents who have lakefront property, updating them on how many households are participating and encouraging those who have not yet joined the effort to do so. Contact information for the Friends of Mirror and Shadow Lakes, the UW Extension, Wisconsin DNR, and Golden Sands RC&D will be provided, so that those who would like to get involved or those already involved will have a way to receive guidance. In the mailing, tips on planting native plants and restoring shorelines will be included to encourage those participating to take it one step further. Information on who to contact to receive advice on native plants suitable for their shoreline and how to get volunteers to assist with native plantings will be included at the end of the section. The newsletter for the Friends of Mirror and Shadow Lakes will also include a "yardstick" indicating what percentage out of 100 of the shoreline is being maintained with 20 foot buffers that will be updated periodically by the lake group.

After 6 weeks from the start of the initiative, a random selection of residents with waterfront property on the lakes will be chosen for follow-up questioning on their current and potential future engagement in the behavior. They will be contacted by phone or mail (if a phone number is unavailable) and asked three questions:

- 1) What are the main factors that have led you to stop mowing your entire lawn and to create a 20 foot buffer zone along the shoreline? If you have not stopped mowing to create a 20 foot buffer, what are the main factors preventing you from doing so?
- 2) Will you continue to maintain a 20 foot un-mowed buffer between the mowed area of your lawn and the shoreline? Why or why not?
- 3) Have you noticed any changes in the abundance of nuisance geese in the past 4 weeks on your property? Have you noticed any changes in their abundance around the lakes?

The information collected from the visual observations done during week 4 and the follow-up questioning carried out during week 6 will be used to determine the effectiveness of the campaign and inform future efforts.

Eight weeks after the initiative's implementation, an article will be written and submitted to the local newspapers. This article will include information on how much of the shoreline is being maintained with 20 foot buffers, a listing of participants, and information on how to get involved and/or volunteer to assist with the efforts. There will also be a report on the amount of complaints about nuisance geese around the lakes. The information for this report will be collected from the surveys and also by contacting the Friends of Mirror and Shadow Lakes, the

Wisconsin DNR, and the city of Waupaca to inquire about the number of complaints received about nuisance geese.

The following spring, the newsletter for the Friends of Mirror and Shadow Lakes will have a section reminding people to leave 20 foot buffers around their shoreline. Advertisements will also be submitted to local newspapers, flyers will be hung in the community, and a billboard display will all include messaging that encourages people to leave their shorelines un-mowed for the first 20 feet. Households will also be contacted to attempt to get commitments from the landowners to maintain the 20 foot buffers, obtain any comments about the practice, and congratulate those who participate in the behavior on actively taking steps to effectively reduce the problematic goose population while simultaneously protecting the health of Mirror and Shadow Lakes. The number of continuing and new participants will be collected and analyzed to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of the campaign.

Works Cited

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