

# Community Assistantship Program

*...a program of the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA)*

## A Communications Plan for "Keep it Clean," Lake of the Woods

Prepared in partnership with  
Keep it Clean, Lake of the Woods

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# A Communications Plan for Keep it Clean, Lake of the Woods

Northwest Regional Sustainable  
Development Partnership

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
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# A Communications Plan for Keep it Clean, Lake of the Woods

January, 2020 | By: Andrea Kidder, Research Assistant

This is a co-publication of the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA), Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, and Keep it Clean.

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The Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership brings together local talent and resources with University of Minnesota knowledge to drive sustainability in agriculture and food systems, tourism and resilient communities, natural resources and clean energy. The Partnerships are part of University of Minnesota Extension.

Keep it Clean was created to protect, maintain, and promote cleanliness for the beautiful landscape, water resources, and shorelines of Lake of the Woods as a special place for everyone to visit and enjoy.

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# Executive Summary

The following report and communications plan was created for the Keep it Clean Committee through a Community Assistance Project with the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs. The research team consisted of Andrea Kidder, the graduate research assistant and author of this report, Vanessa Voller and C Terrence Anderson of CURA's community-based research department, Mike Hirst from the Keep it Clean committee and Linda Kingery of the Northwest Regional Sustainability Development Partnership. The goals for the project were to research and create a communications plan to bolster the committee's efforts to protect and preserve the beauty of Lake of the Woods, particularly considering the issue of trash left behind on the lake during the winter ice fishing seasons. This project is a recommended next step from a capstone project sustainability assessment conducted by students in the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota in Spring 2019.

Figure 1



Map © Wikipedia User:Indefatigable, via Creative Commons

As a premier ice fishing destination, Lake of the Woods is a vital resource for the community in northwestern Minnesota, as shown in the map in Figure 1. In 2012-2013, Keep it Clean (KIC) was established to protect, maintain and promote cleanliness for the beautiful landscape, water resources and shorelines of Lake of the Woods as a special place for everyone to visit and enjoy. An initial effort of the KIC committee was the provision of dumpsters at strategic lake access points. Ice anglers who recreate on the lake independently, without the provision of services from a resort, needed a convenient place to dispose of their trash. However, in 2018, KIC was no longer able to provide those dumpsters and some resort owners said they thought the amount of trash left on the ice increased, as did their burden to deal with it. Therefore, and upon the recommendation of the capstone report to continue a partnership with the University of Minnesota, the KIC committee requested the help of a CURA graduate research assistant to create a communications plan to

spread the message and mission of KIC to independent ice anglers through point-of-contact interactions with invested stakeholders like the resort owners who sell passes for these anglers to use their plowed ice roads to access the lake.

Utilizing the theory of planned behavior, the KIC committee should craft messages that respond to two important cognitive processes that affect the way a person behaves: the social norms regarding a behavior, and the perceived difficulty of a behavior. The messages used at point-of-contact interactions, as well as proactive messaging on social media, should seek to enforce norms of ethical environmental behavior as suggested by the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics, and should help alleviate the difficulty and inconvenience of trash disposal by increasing awareness of available dumpsters or garbage services for independent anglers.

The report contains a literature review of education and communications based on ethical behavior in the outdoors, as well as a discussion of a survey conducted by a CURA graduate research assistant, a SWOT analysis for the committee's position as a source for the messaging, recommended communications strategies in the short and long term, samples of messaging, as well as a plan for evaluating the effectiveness of the communications plan.

# Literature Review

## Introduction

Although littering is considered a misdemeanor that can carry a fine of up to \$1,000, littering is among the most common complaints that conservation officers with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources deal with on frozen lakes during ice fishing season (McLaughlin, 2019). It is difficult to police and enforce littering laws without officers constantly around to observe and remind anglers about the law, which isn't a feasible land management strategy. The heavy fines for littering are only assessed if conservation officers can catch violators in the act. The Keep it Clean Committee has engaged the Lake of the Woods community with various communications methods, such as brochures and banners, since its inception in 2012. But communication to raise awareness isn't enough; as will be discussed later in this literature review, studies suggest that it takes more than awareness of a problem to engage people in changing their behavior.

One of the goals of this CAP community-based research project to develop a communications plan for the committee is to focus on point-of-contact education for wheelhouse users in order to increase awareness of the aims of the committee to keep Lake of the Woods a clean and environmentally stable place for anglers to recreate

**Image 1:** *Trash collection at Adrian's Resort in Baudette, Minnesota.*



Photo taken by Andrea Kidder.

year-round for generations to come. Therefore, a more thorough consideration of theoretical frameworks and best practices supported by research literature regarding the efficacy and impact of communications intended to change attitudes and behaviors toward an environmental sustainability and personal responsibility orientation is required. This literature review will consider several theories regarding the use of education and communication in

influencing changes in depreciative behavior, as well as some recent developments in the use of Leave No Trace principles in the land management and educational communications efforts of protected areas.

## Theories

Overwhelmingly throughout the literature, a great emphasis is placed on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), developed by psychologist Icek Azjen as an extension of an earlier Theory of Reasoned Action, as a theoretical framework to guide strategic communications intended to result in some sort of behavioral change. (Vagias, Powell, Moore, and Wright, 2014; Brown, Ham, and Hughes, 2010; Marion & Reid, 2007). Both of these theories can help explain why establishing point-of-contact education with anglers enjoying Lake of the Woods in an independent wheelhouse can contribute to changed behaviors regarding litter on the ice. The theories posit that behaviors are dependent on intention, and that intentions are based on three important factors: attitudes concerning the outcomes of a given behavior, normative beliefs that imply social demands for a given behavior, and the actor's own perception of his/her ability to do a given behavior. Therefore, if we seek to change behavior through point-of-contact education communications, this theory suggests that we need to change one of the three factors that shape intentions. (Marion & Reid, 2007). Messages should educate people about the outcomes of the behaviors in a way that affects their attitudes, the norms regarding human behavior and the natural world, or the ease of alternative behaviors that impact the environment in more responsible ways.

Another theory that is important to consider is Decisionmaking Theory, which states that "behaviours are the outcome of decisions between different courses of action, and that expected benefits accruing from the alternatives guide choices." (Marion & Reid, 2017). A critical element of Decisionmaking Theory is that people are making rational decisions based on knowledge of a variety of alternatives. If people are unaware of environmental or social costs of a behavior like leaving trash behind on the ice, they can't account for those costs when considering particular courses of action. (Marion & Reid, 2017). Although it seems unlikely that anglers on Lake of the Woods who have invested in an independent wheelhouse would be unaware of the consequences of littering, it is helpful to think about lack of awareness or lack of depth in understanding when crafting messages designed to change behavior.

Several studies show that messages that are most effective in increasing knowledge and changing behavior are interpretive methods that provide a rationale for the recommended behavior and ethical appeals that explain "why" it is important to minimize their impact is as important as 'how' to minimize their impact." (Marion & Reid, 2017).

## Leave No Trace

Leave No Trace (LNT) is a national program that was established in the 1990s as a consolidation of various educational messaging programs regarding low-impact practices for people enjoying public lands. (Backman et. al, 2018). Originally intended for use in federally protected wilderness lands (such as the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness), the seven principles of LNT are easily applicable in frontcountry situations like the use of independent wheelhouses on Lake of the Woods during ice fishing season. Of the seven principles promoted by the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics, the two that will most significantly influence the communications for

Keep it Clean are dispose of waste properly and be considerate of other visitors. (Backman et. al, 2018). In a study of compliance with LNT principles in two different backcountry settings, Vagias et. al (2014) used the three factors that guide intentions to perform behaviors according to TPB to understand the findings from research about recreators at Olympic National Park and Glacier National Park. Their analysis suggests that the two factors that would be most strategic to target are the perceived difficulty of a behavior and the group norms:

“We suggest that future strategic communication and education efforts focus on not only knowledge but also the social expectation regarding the appropriateness of performing LNT behaviors and the ease of performing these techniques as mechanisms to increase the adoption of recommended LNT practices.”

An important caveat mentioned by all the researchers: it is not realistic to take the results of specific communication and education campaigns at a particular park or outdoor recreational area and expect that the same strategies that proved effective there will necessarily be effective at a different location and time. The types of people who camp in the backcountry are different from those who haul a wheelhouse onto the ice at Lake of the Woods. The behaviors that they attempted to change with the messaging in the studies are different from the behaviors Keep it Clean would like to see change with users of Lake of the Woods. However, in the short time span of a semester that we have to work on this communications plan, it is helpful to consider the theories at play and examples of successful implementation of point-of-contact educational messaging efforts and an observable change in user behavior.

### Authority of the Resource

One reason that an appeal to the subjective norms around environmental stewardship can be effective is to rely on the “Authority of the Resource,” which transfers authority from laws or regulations to the requirements of nature itself. (Wallace, 1989). In other words, the best reason for changing behaviors that are not in line with LNT principles for low impact outdoor recreation is not because there is a law that says you can or cannot do something, but because there is a respect for the integrity of the resource and what it needs to continue to exist. By this logic, the conservation officer does not need to tell you to pack out all of your trash or warn you about the fine for littering if you have a conceptualization of the way that nature works in relation to human behavior and enjoyment of it. Wallace (1989) describes three steps that form the basic function of the Authority of the Resource Technique: an objective description of the situation (i.e. last winter we saw an abundance of waste left on the ice after the removal deadline), an explanation of the implication of the observed action (i.e. when the ice melts, the trash ends up in the lake, polluting the water and/or the shoreline in the warmer months and affects the fishery’s sustainability), and tell them how you feel and what should be done to prevent it (i.e. we’re concerned about keeping LOW an amazing place for fishing year round for generations to come, and we can all

do our part by packing out everything that we pack in.) Lake of the Woods is not a federally protected area, and in fact there seems to be some disagreement about who has authority and responsibility for various aspects of managing Lake of the Woods, between the county, the state, and private business owners. Therefore, it makes sense to hang the authority of the messaging regarding Keep it Clean and

LNT on the resource of the lake itself; its beauty and its contribution to the human lives that use it: local businesses and tourists alike.

**Image 2:** Frozen cattails on January ice at Lake of the Woods, Baudette.



Photo taken by Andrea Kidder.

## SWOT Analysis

The Keep it Clean Committee is faced with a large task to protect, maintain and promote cleanliness for the beautiful landscape, water resources and shorelines of Lake of the Woods as a special place for everyone to visit and enjoy. To that end, there are several strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that need to be considered before creating a communications plan targeting the problem of trash left behind on the ice during winter ice fishing season.

### Strengths

The strengths that benefit the Keep it Clean Committee are the longevity of the program, the prolific documentation of the problem of left-behind trash and debris, and the reputation of Lake of the Woods as a premier ice fishing destination of pristine beauty. Keep it Clean was established in 2012 after local stakeholders in Lake of the Woods County had had enough of the trash-laden lake in the spring when the ice melts. It started with placing dumpsters in strategic areas around the southern shore of the lake. The dumpsters were no longer provided in the 2018 fishing season, but the program remains visible in the community due to posters, banners, stickers, and word-of-mouth promotion by locals.

There is also no denying the fact that ice fishing produces trash, and a lot of it, and that many times anglers either do not bring it in with them or they accidentally lose track of their trash by not securing it tightly while traveling. This adds to the burden of resort employees, DNR officials, and other anglers who pick up remaining trash that isn't theirs, in addition to annual spring clean ups by the MN Conservation Corps. The Minnesota DNR has cited an increase in incidents of littering and abandoned trash or other debris, and there have been articles printed in the StarTribune and local papers and blogs. A survey of LOW resort owners also shows that the amount of trash is increasing, in part due to the increased use of the lake by anglers who bring independent wheelhouses out onto the ice.

Lake of the Woods is known as the walleye capital of the world, and is a premier destination for Minnesota ice fishing in the winter months. It is the second largest lake in Minnesota, following behind Lake Superior. It is more than 950,000 acres in area, 307,000 of which are within Minnesota borders. The authority of the resource is an important strength for affirming the goals of the Keep it Clean Committee: the lake itself is beautiful, historic, and worthy of protection.

## Weaknesses

However, despite these many strengths, there are some serious weaknesses that will have to be overcome. Even though the authority of the resource should commend people to behave responsibly when it comes to trash removal, the evidence shows that this is not always the case. Trash created while ice fishing can be particularly unpleasant and inconvenient, because of the primitive nature of being out on the ice without amenities like plumbing for an extended period of time. And unlike backcountry camping, there is no option of digging a cathole away from a source of water to dispose of waste. The only responsible option is to pack it out. It is not surprising that the unpleasantness of that task leads people to simply leave it behind.

Additionally, the increased use of independent wheelhouses, who have no contract or agreement with a professional resort outfitter, means that more and more people are accessing the lake without contacting someone who has a professional obligation to care for the lake. This limited interaction will make it difficult to implement a communications campaign targeted at independent wheelhouse users. Even if there is a chance to connect with them at a resort that sells ice road passes, the amount of time spent in that interaction is very brief, and there may not be time to communicate and educate them about ethical ways of handling trash and other waste or debris.

Another weakness for Keep it Clean to consider has less to do with the target audience and more to do with the relationship with local stakeholders who aren't committee members. In an online survey, some resort owners expressed frustration at the loss of the dumpster program in 2018, saying that it was an effective support for the waste management tasks of the ice fishing season and that it is unfair to expect private businesses to bear the costs of waste management on public lands. As business owners, it makes sense to advocate for an amenity that is paid for by local tax payers and benefits your customers. However, according to Mike Hirst, a member of the KICC

and a resource technician for Lake of the Woods Soil and Water Conservation District, the KICC couldn't provide subsidized dumpsters for every business on the lake. It wasn't fair to provide a publicly-funded trash service amenity to some businesses and not others. The dumpster program was a proactive approach to the growing trash problem, but in the end the KICC decided it was not sustainable.

In general, this is a weakness for all the stakeholders on Lake of the Woods: lacking the federal protections of a national park or other federally protected area, it is unclear who, if at all, has authority to make policies, enforce them, and bear responsibility for managing the use of the lake. One resort owner from the survey said, "with many different views of how and who should have or provide access to the lake it is difficult to have valuable or meaningful conversation with other business owners." Nevertheless, the survey conducted in November 2019 is one step in the right direction: the Committee should look for ways to increase contact and communication with the Lake of the Woods business community. 38 percent of resort owners are unsatisfied with their level of involvement with the Keep it Clean Committee. This is a significant opportunity to help increase the effectiveness of communication campaigns. Consistent messaging from the business community, tourism office, and other local government offices involved with the management of the lake will improve awareness of the Committee's mission and acceptance of the community's commitment. As Hirst said "I don't disagree with having more representation or direct engagement from resorts so both the committee and resorts can better understand ideas, potential solutions, and policies. I think that this understanding goes both ways."

## Opportunities

Following up on the weakness of decentralized authority for the resource of Lake of the Woods, the Keep it Clean Committee is presented with an important opportunity. The committee members already represent a variety of stakeholders concerned with preservation of the lake, from the tourism board to local government and state resource officers. The significance of the opportunity for the committee to serve as sort of a bridge between all the various sectors of the community in Lake of the Woods and Roseau counties is hard to understate. The communications plan should partially focus on the expansion of the committee to include more diverse membership from the community and to take seriously the input received from surveys and meetings with local community members. This will also ensure that the messaging from the communications plan remains consistent across stakeholders in LOW and Roseau counties. By engaging in conversation with resort owners and other local business owners, their input can be included in committee decisions and everyone can be on the same page regarding the objectives and strategy for communicating the LNT principles and educational messaging to all anglers who are enjoying the lake during the ice fishing season.

## Threats

In the final part of the analysis, we will consider what threats might prevent the committee from achieving the plan's objectives. While there are no competing

organizations in direct conflict with the Keep it Clean Committee, there are conflicting opinions about the use of independent wheelhouses on the lake and what impacts it has both on the environment and the business community. This might deter cooperation and collaboration on spreading the message to independent wheelhouse users, especially considering that it will already be difficult and inconvenient to reach many of them.

Secondly, the people who leave trash behind in the first place may readily ignore any sort of educational messaging or encouragement to bring their trash with them. As TPB suggests, behavior is intentional. The messages may aim to change perceptions about the ease of the task or attitudes about the outcome of the task, but first those changes require actually paying attention to the messages and allowing the meaning of the message to affect the way of thinking.

If wheelhouse users do not come into contact with the message, either in print, social media, radio, or word of mouth; or if they come into contact with it but choose to ignore it, the effects may be minimal.

A summary of this analysis can be seen in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**



## Methods

In addition to conducting a literature review about communication styles and theories, the research team wanted to understand what the community members who are most impacted by the wheelhouses and waste management decisions knew and felt about the situation. In addition to committee members, it was decided that the resort owners should be the target population for a qualitative survey. The survey was created and distributed to 75 resort owners, whose contact information was provided by one of the Keep it Clean committee members who is also a resort owner on Lake of the Woods.

The initial hope was to conduct interviews in order to get more detailed answers about the complicated issues and points of view regarding the responsibility for waste

management and monitoring the users of the lake in the winter season. However, the timing of the research was such that most of the resort owners were on their much-deserved vacations in the break between fall fishing season and gearing up for the winter ice fishing season. For this reason, and also because the capstone project the semester prior had good success with an online survey, it was decided to use a Google form survey to collect data. The sample was not randomly selected, nor was it large enough for the results to be statistically significant or representative; however, because the project is specifically targeting the ice fishing community in Minnesota's Lake of the Woods, it was relevant to ask such a small and select group in order to facilitate community involvement in the communications plan.

The survey was anonymous - no personally identifiable information was required to participate. All questions were optional and choosing not to answer one question did not invalidate the rest of the survey. To that end, the results are not always the same for each question because some questions were not answered by every participant.

## Results

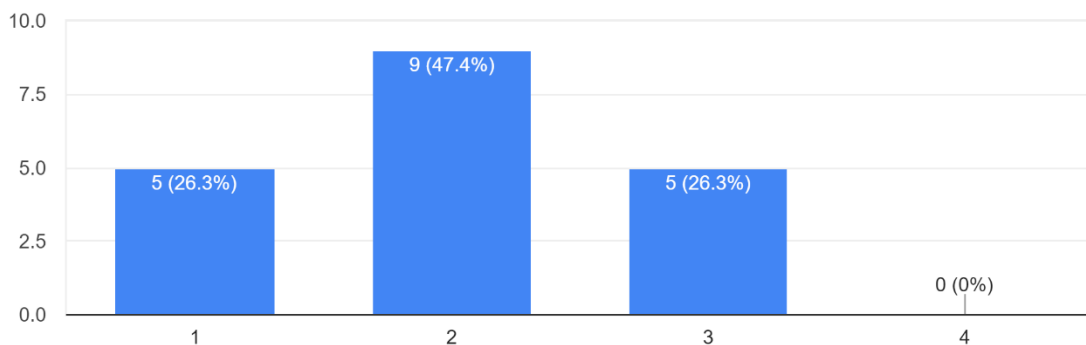
Over the course of two and a half weeks, there were 20 respondents to the survey, for a response rate of 27%. The research team agreed that this response rate was acceptable for the purposes of understanding the diverse opinions that resort owners have about the situation.

The first questions were to measure the resort owners' perceptions of their involvement and satisfaction with the work of the Keep it Clean committee using a forced Likert scale of 1-4, with 1 as not at all involved and 4 as very involved. The results can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Rate your current level of involvement with the Keep it Clean committee and its work on issues regarding Lake of the Woods.

19 responses



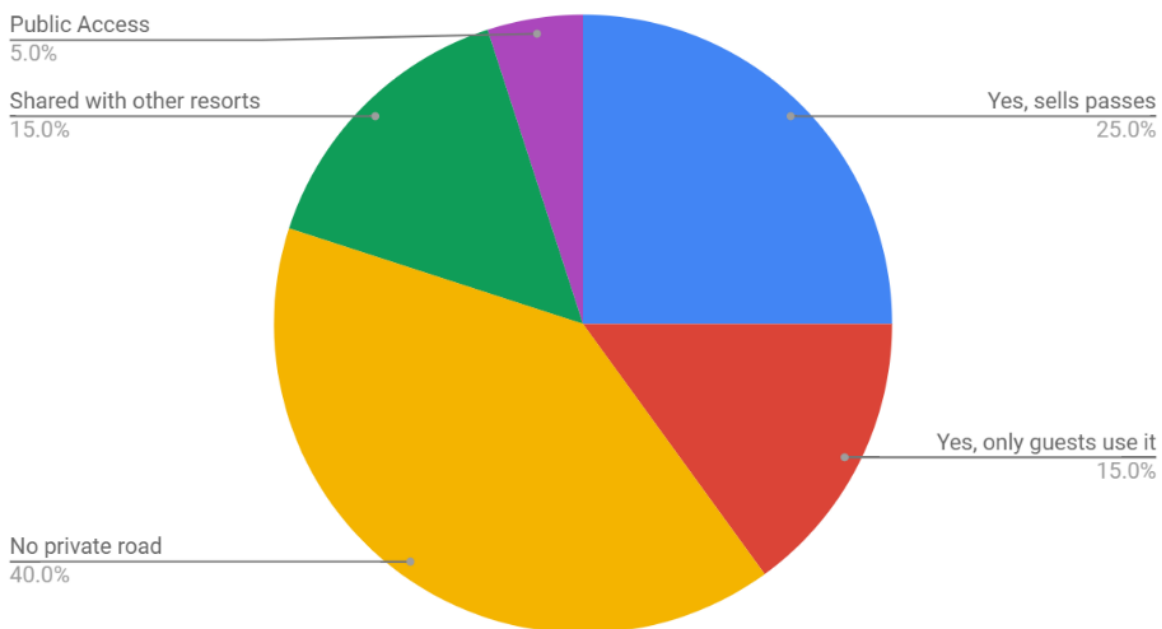
Next, there were questions about communication with other resort owners and membership in the committee. There was a wide variety of responses to this open-ended question, ranging from “none” or “very limited” to “daily” or “often” having contact with fellow resort owners. One respondent also suggested “We need a resort association re-established to communicate our issues and concerns.”

Most respondents seemed to think the current membership of the KIC committee was good, but some recommendations included more local government like Baudette City Council and more membership involvement from resort owners.

The next section of the survey focused on the ice roads: who has them, who uses them, who monitors them, and who manages them. Table 2 shows the results. 40% of respondents do not have private ice roads. 15% share their road with another resort. 15% have a road that is exclusive to their guests, and just 25% have an ice road that they sell passes for private use.

**Table 2**

### Resorts with private ice roads

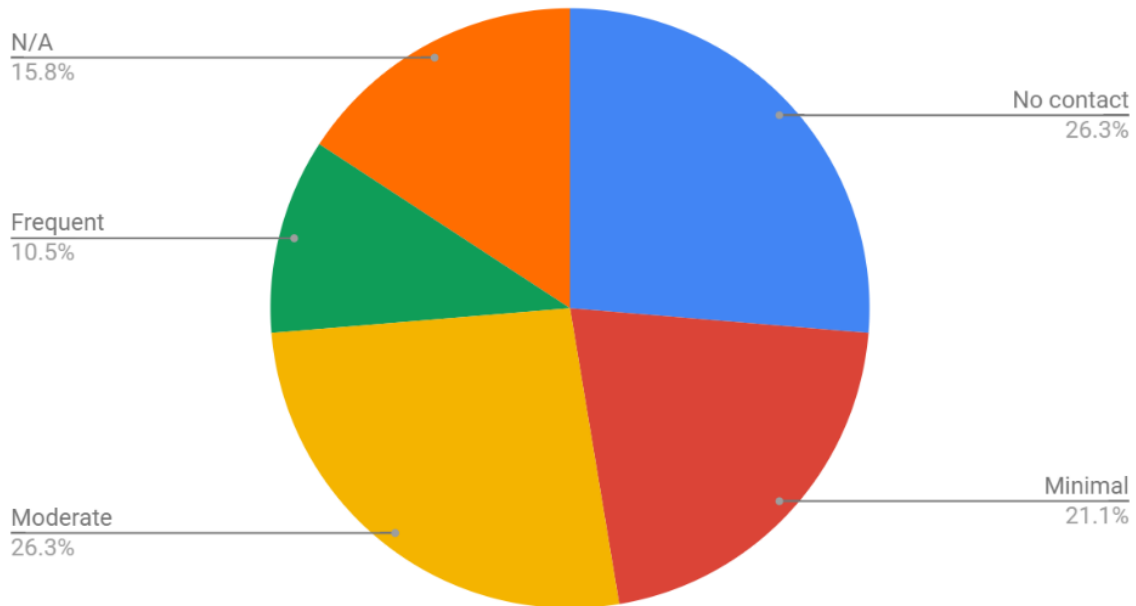


When asked about the frequency of customers using their ice roads, the 10 respondents who answered that they have an ice road for customers to use. Of those 10, 90% said 0-100 people use their ice access on an average day.

The sale of ice road passes mostly happens in-person at the resorts who sell them, and one resort said they also have a box at the access point for people to pay the fee if they arrive when the in-person sale is not available. Another resort owner said they want to create a system that employs a hanging tag to make it easier for their ice road customers to come and go from the lake and into town.

**Table 3**

### Resort contact with ice road customers



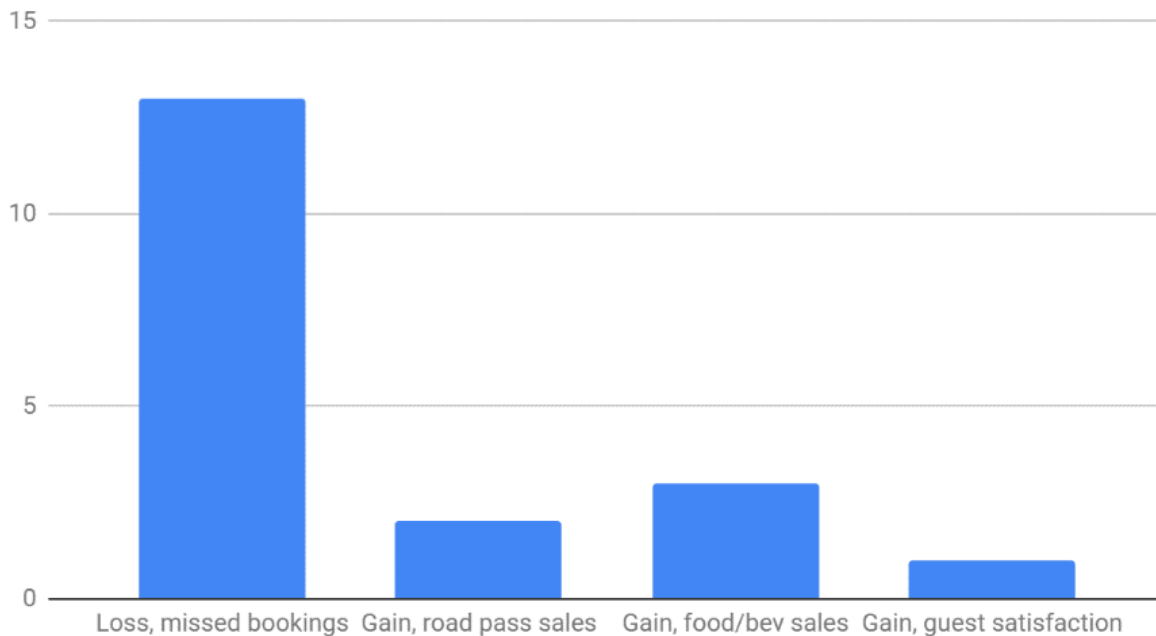
Even for resorts that don't sell ice road passes to outside customers, there is the potential to encounter independent wheelhouse users on the ice when servicing their resort guests. As Table 3 shows, 42.1% of the resort owners reported that they typically have no contact (or N/A) with independent wheelhouse users, 21.1% said their contact is minimal, 26.3% said they had moderate contact with wheelhouses and 10.5% said they had frequent contact.

The information collected from guests is mostly general contact information and information about their trip. Resort owners also provide information for their guests and ice road customers, including safety tips, a map of the lake and the plowed areas, and where to dispose of their garbage. However, the information provided is not consistent; not every resort has the same information available for all anglers on the lake, whether resort guests or independent wheelhouse users.

There are a wide range of opinions about independent wheelhouse users on the ice, especially among the resort owners who feel different levels of impact on their business. Table 4 shows a number of felt impacts. One commonly mentioned impact that participants filled in was the impact on the resource of the lake and the fishery, and questions about the future opportunity costs of gaining revenue from ice road pass sales now but potentially limiting the ability for future generations of ice fishing because of depleted natural resources, both in fish populations (particularly walleye and sauger)

**Table 4**

### Resort Business Impacts from Independent Wheelhouse Users



as well as water quality.

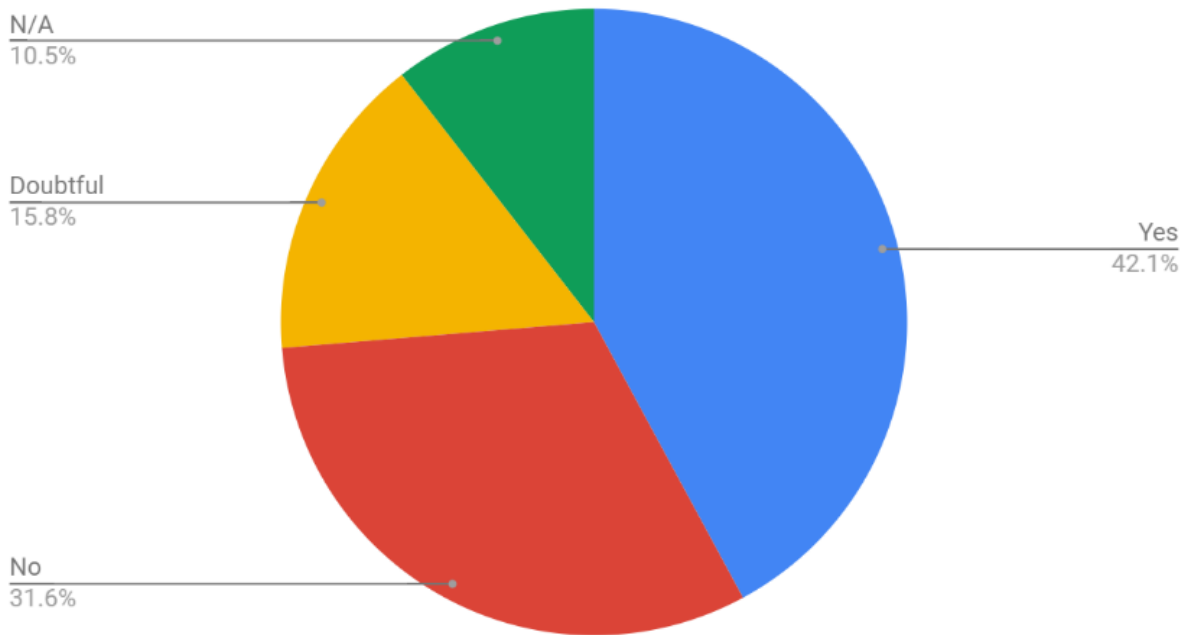
The provision of trash services from resort owners varies, especially depending on who accesses the lake through the resort. For the resorts that don't have a private plowed ice road available for independent wheelhouse customers, most provide trash service for their guests. Theft of service of private resort dumpsters (use of the dumpsters from Baudette citizens, not resort guests or ice road customers) was also mentioned as a problem and impact of an increase of wheelhouses and the loss of the Keep it Clean program dumpsters that were available at access points. Additionally, some participants noted increased labor costs from their employees' efforts to handle or report trash left behind on the lake from non-guests. 83% of participants said that their employees are involved in ongoing trash cleanup during the winter season, including self-policing the area around their resort or sleeper-houses, picking up stray trash as they are inspecting and doing other daily work around the ice, and weekly shoreline cleanups.

73% of the participants said they thought the amount of trash left behind on the lake has increased over the past 5 years; a few stated that they noticed a decrease in the years when the Keep it Clean dumpsters were available. However, 70% of

participants said that they don't usually report leftover trash to the DNR. One participant said they used to report bigger items but said it seemed to be ineffective, so they

**Table 5**

### Opportunity for point-of-contact for campaign



stopped.

The original plan for this project was to use an educational communications plan to encourage all anglers to follow the Center for Outdoor Ethics principles of responsible behavior. 45% of survey participants said they thought a campaign like this would work, whereas 55% said they didn't think it would work. Even so, 42.1% said their resort could be an opportunity to have a point-of-contact interaction for anglers to receive some kind of communication from the Keep it Clean committee, whether it's a video, pamphlet, or pledge to participate in responsible outdoor ethics. 15.7% of survey respondents expressed some doubt that this could work, and 31.5% said there is no opportunity for this at their property. These results can be seen in Table 5.

As mentioned in the SWOT analysis above and revealed by survey data, there is an important opportunity for stronger involvement of resort owners within the committee as stakeholders for the protection and management of Lake of the Woods. The capstone project also emphasized the need to highlight the common ground of love for Lake of the Woods as KIC involves parties with differing ideas. For example, strong opinions were voiced about independent wheelhouses on the lake, such as: "The independent wheelhouse traffic on Lake of the Woods is OUT OF CONTROL," "...more damage done to resource than value they bring to my business,"

“...those wheelhouses end up using our road system and drilling holes in the middle of our roads and setting up right next to our houses, they leave garbage everywhere for us to clean up, they use our outhouses and make huge messes for us to clean up.”

There were also respondents who suggest that those who collect fees for ice road access should use some of that revenue to help with cleanup or management of waste for independent customers who don't have a resort outfitter taking responsibility for their time out on the ice.

## Interpretation & Discussion

Among the various stakeholders in Lake of the Woods, there is a general consensus that a problem about trash left on the lake exists. However, there is a wide range of thoughts about the source of the problem, the right solutions to the problem, the parties responsible for enacting the solutions. The survey was intended to measure the awareness and attitudes regarding the efforts of the Keep it Clean Committee among the resort community in Lake of the Woods; however many times the direction of the comments and responses veered toward the issue of increased pressure from independent wheelhouses on the lake or the discontinued KIC dumpster program. Although this focus was not altogether surprising, it demonstrates how complicated this issue is for the communities in Baudette, Warroad, and throughout LOW county and reinforces the idea that there will not be a one-size-fits-all solution to the problem. However, keeping the goal of a communications plan in mind, there are some important takeaways from the data that are discussed below.

In a follow up to the data captured in Table 1, one respondent suggested re-establishing a resort association to communicate with each other about the concerns, which aligns with the recommendation in the SWOT Analysis to encourage more resort

**Image 3:** Adrian's resort paved ice road shared by a number of other neighboring resorts in Baudette, Minnesota.



Photo taken by Andrea Kidder.

owners presence and input in the KICC, although a specific resort association as suggested would allow the resort community to cover more content than just trash on the lake. This is worth mentioning because it identifies an important key audience for the communications plan – in addition to increasing the reach of the main message of Keep it Clean to anglers recreating on the lake, the committee can have an additional focus of increasing relationships with existing networks within the local community.

Additionally, the division of ownership and authority on the lake is not always clear. Table 2 shows that the business models employed by resorts who provide access to the lake differs, with some offering full-service packages that are more closely monitored by staff while others provide independent access that inherently has less oversight and control over the recreators' activities on the lake. Some resorts share road access with Adrian's Resort, and some resorts utilize public lands for accessing the lake but provide the service of plowed ice roads that enables them to charge an ice road fee. Because of this, it is imperative for the KICC to utilize a communications plan that seeks to help get people on the same page and saying the same thing regarding trash left behind on the lake. The committee can also use this as a way to guide conversations that can lead to a recommendation to the government at city or county levels, where there is more decisive authority to enact policy change like the suggested permit fees.

Furthermore, the survey data in Table 3 revealed the very limited opportunities that resort owners have to have a point-of-contact interaction with independent wheelhouse users - only 25% of the respondents sell ice road passes, and those who don't sell ice road passes have few opportunities to engage with independent anglers. While those who do sell passes mostly have face-to-face interactions as they make the sale, they face the challenge of consistently communicating with anglers about the trash issue in a way that is convenient and convincing. Usually, people who are coming independently want to get out onto the ice as quickly as possible, and may not be willing to watch a video or read an extra pamphlet.

Table 4 shows some of the negative impacts of independent wheelhouse usage on Lake of the Woods' businesses, and in comments about the options many respondents remarked not just about immediate economic effects like lost bookings, but also about the long-term effects on the fishery and the sustainability of resort business if the lake gets over-polluted. The fishery is mostly governed and monitored by the Department of Natural Resources, and is beyond the scope of what the Keep it Clean Committee can and should do, but the common concern with the environmental and economic sustainability of the lake will be an important point of consensus among the many stakeholders of Lake of the Woods. The KICC is not necessarily focused on the economics of the lake, but as the dumpster program showed, economics and financial responsibility for taking care of the lake is an important and sometimes contentious factor when it comes to ongoing dialogue with business owners.

Lastly, Table 5 shows that there are some resort owners who think that point-of-contact communication will be effective, while a similarly sized group of them think that it will not be effective. The capstone project strongly recommended this strategy, and while realistically in a short timeframe it may not provide huge improvements of behavior change in anglers who leave trash behind on the lake, it is a relatively inexpensive strategy that can loop resort owners into the mission and engagement of the KICC. The research team recognizes that not every resort will be on board with this part of the plan, and for some it may not be about willingness but about feasibility. Nevertheless, if we seek to change behavior following the theory of planned behavior, we need to convince people that their attitudes and aptitude for ethically recreating on public waters can be changed. Research shows that messages in parks can affect

people's behaviors on trails and in other "frontcountry" situations, and so it is worth trying a similar strategy on Lake of the Woods.

All of this data points to the main conclusion of disagreement about the best solutions to resolve the problem of trash left behind on Lake of the Woods, despite clear agreement that it is a problem that needs intervention to be resolved. While many of the resort owners interviewed suggested solutions that involve some sort of official regulation about the number of independent wheelhouse users, whether proactive like charging user and license fees similar to a campground, or reactive like punitive fines for littering, drilling, and theft of services, those suggestions are beyond the scope of this project and the mission of the Keep it Clean committee. Instead, the research team continues to advocate for clear, consistent, and convincing communications both with and from various stakeholders: the business community, tourists, and local and state government entities like the soil and water conservation districts and the Department of Natural Resources. Uniting around the common interest of protecting and preserving Lake of the Woods can provide clarity even when there are strongly held differing opinions about the issues affecting the lake.

## Communications Plan

In order to streamline the efforts of the Keep it Clean Committee's mission to protect Lake of the Woods, and upon the suggestion of the UMN graduate students' capstone project, the research team presents the following communication plan.

### Objectives

By utilizing the recommended communication strategies, the KICC will

1. Improve the flow of communication between the committee and the resort business community by increasing interactions.
2. Increase awareness of the mission and activities of the KICC among out-of-town anglers on the lake by using geotargeted messages on social media.
3. Increase engagement with social media posts by emphasizing the authority of the resource, humor, and neutral stance on contentious issues that are not directly related to the mission statement (such as wheelhouse users on the lake).
4. Streamline communications by providing stakeholders with resources to ensure consistent messaging.

## Recommended Communication Strategies

Community engagement is the first recommended strategy, and it focuses on achieving objectives 1 and 4. There are two key audiences, or communities, that the

**Image 4:** KIC banner at Border Bait & Tackle Co. in Baudette.



Photo taken by Andrea Kidder.

Keep it Clean Committee should seek to engage: the resort business community and the tourist community. The survey data and SWOT analysis have already highlighted the important relationship that business owners have to the lake and to the anglers who recreate on it and contribute to the problem of trash left behind on the lake. The KICC should invite more participation from those interested within the business community in committee membership so that communication is two-directional and can be proactive when making decisions that have impacts on a multitude of stakeholders. Additionally, there

are many businesses around Lake of the Woods that display banners and signs with the Keep it Clean logo and encourage visitors to take all trash off the lake. This is a good partnership that the committee should keep going, and is especially helpful to create a sense of consistency in what the expectations and social norms are for behaviors about anglers' personal responsibility for their waste. The second audience that the committee can engage with are the tourists, particularly out-of-town anglers who bring their wheelhouses to fish on the lake. The survey showed that it is hard to find opportunities for rich, in-depth communication with every angler on the lake, but there are some options that go beyond point-of-contact interactions, which will be discussed in the next strategies. Uniting the committee, the resorts, and the visitors will mostly likely happen in the resorts when they are coming to buy supplies or ice road passes. These point-of-contact interactions will rely on the solid relationships that the committee has built with the resorts to disseminate the message of Keep it Clean: pack it in, pack it out. By providing resorts with the resources like banners, signs, coasters and also intangible resources like knowledge and messaging, the committee can reach both target audiences with their mission.

The second strategy for the communications plan is to have increase the committee's presence on social media, especially Facebook. In addition to the convenience of social media, paid promotions on Facebook provide the opportunity to geotarget posts. In other words, the settings can be altered so that people within a certain radius of a given area will be shown the post on their feed. There are many settings that can be adjusted, including showing the post based on geographic location, interests, or previous interactions. This is a helpful tool for reaching first-time visitors who may not be familiar with the issues on Lake of the Woods, or who have never head of Keep it Clean. Another important part of social media strategy is what exactly to say.

If the goal is to change behaviors, or even public perception of behaviors, the messaging needs to hold people's attention and also convince them of something new. There are a few different ways that can work, but the research team recommends using humor and staying positive when discussing the behaviors of leaving trash on the lake. One

**Figure 3**

@AskTSA Can I bring a life-sized plastic skeleton as carry on, folded up?



example of an organization that somewhat surprisingly handles that balance of humor, gravity, and information well is the Transportation Security Administration's social media platforms, which have won several Webby awards for their creative and funny posts. An example is shown in Figure 3, where they are responding to a passenger's question about packing an unusual item for their flight. KICC social media posts can follow a similar light-hearted and approachable voice so that people are not shamed or embarrassed by past behaviors but also are able to see that trash left behind on the ice has greater social and environmental costs than they may have previously acknowledged. Lastly, a note about the dangers of social media: it is very easy for people to be offended or to spin a tangled web of unfortunate words online because people can't perceive tone or body language, and it is much more comfortable to use strong emotions behind a computer rather than in person. As such, the research team recommends trying to stay positive when engaging with people online, or at least a neutral stance. If nothing else, try to bring it back to the mission statement of Keep it Clean and turn the focus back to the Lake and its preservation.

In order to increase interaction between audiences and the social media platforms, the committee discussed strategies such as photo contests with prizes that benefit anglers and bear the KIC logo, as well as ways to honor and publicly thank the ice road workers who take care of picking up debris and trash that others leave behind throughout the season.

A third recommended strategy is to follow the advice from the capstone project report and have strong engagement at point-of-contact interactions with anglers. The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness has a series of videos that visitors are required to watch, and although that sort of mandate would be difficult to accomplish for Lake of the Woods ice fishing, a video is a great way to have impactful and consistent messaging that is easy for resort owners to distribute. The videos should be short enough to hold people's attention, and have a great opportunity to rely on the authority of the resource by displaying the beauty of the lake and the nostalgia of the pastime of ice fishing as a part of the heritage of Lake of the Woods. Furthermore, the videos can also be included as social media posts on the Lake of the Woods Tourism Facebook page so that anglers who do not get to have a face-to-face interaction with resort staff can still be reached with the videos.

Additionally, a useful resource that can be helpful for visitors is a map or list of locations where trash can be collected. One of the important parts of the theory of planned behavior is changing people's perception of their ability to do the desired behavior. If the committee can help to eliminate confusion and increase knowledge of where trash can be deposited, anglers might be more inclined to take their waste off the ice with them.

### Sample Messaging

Below are some examples of the tone and content that align with the social media strategy of being humorous, informative, and positive.

(include a picture of trash found on the lake)

"You probably won't catch many walleyes with this on your hook. Trash like this is best deposited in a dumpster. Remember to pack it in and pack it out. Instead of trash, help leave behind a legacy of ice fishing for generations to come. For a list of available dumpsters near Lake of the Woods, visit [www.lakeofthewoodsmn.com/keepitclean](http://www.lakeofthewoodsmn.com/keepitclean) #keepitclean #LOWicefishing #packitout"

(side-by-side shots of clean ice + an area with a lot of debris)

"Let's vote! Which view do you prefer? A classic LOW ice fishing experience should reveal the unspoiled beauty of nature. Don't spoil it for others! Remember to pack it in and pack it out. For more information, check us out online at [www.lakeofthewoodsmn.com/keepitclean](http://www.lakeofthewoodsmn.com/keepitclean) #keepitclean #nofilterneeded"

"PHOTO CONTEST! There's no place on earth quite like our Lake of the Woods. Submit and then vote for your favorite picture of Lake of the Woods from your ice fishing trip this season. Winners might be featured in our newsletter! Keep it Clean thanks you for your efforts to help preserve the beauty of our lake now and for generations to come! #keepitclean #exploreMN #icefishing"

(picture of an unusual item of trash)

Name your top 5 most favorite things about fishing on Lake of the Woods! We're guessing this won't make the list. Want to know more about how to keep LOW an amazing destination for ice fishing? Visit us online at [www.lakeofthewoodsmn.com/keepitclean](http://www.lakeofthewoodsmn.com/keepitclean) and remember to pack it in, pack it out!

### **Video Script #1**

*Walleye capitol of the world!*

*Lake of the Woods has maintained a rich fishing legacy for generations. (Cycle through photos and video of walleye fishing on the ice.) When our lake thrives, we all thrive. The sustainability of our fishery and our economy depends on it. We love our lake and our north woods way of life. We also know that great fishing comes by way of great water quality. Threats to water quality are concerning. (Video of trash frozen and snowed in to the ice.) Each year trash is forgotten or lost on the ice when ice anglers leave. In the spring the trash is consumed by the lake itself. But it doesn't have to.*

*Many of the local resorts provide access to dumpsters for ice anglers. We all have the responsibility to keep the lake clean. Please do your part to remove waste from the lake when you leave.*

*(Video of anglers pitching a bag or two of trash into the dumpster.)*

*The cleaner we leave the lake the better the fishing will be next year. (Back to photos/video of pulling fish out of the ice.) If you like big walleyes, you like clean water, because big walleyes like clean water. All eyes are on you! Help us "Keep it Clean".*

### **Video Script #2**

*This is the face a Walleye makes when it finds out someone left trash out on the ice! (Video of walleye mouth gaping wide in shock!) Each year trash is forgotten or lost on the ice when ice anglers leave. In the spring, the trash is consumed by the lake itself. (Video of trash frozen and snowed in to the ice.) That's not good for water quality. And we know great fishing comes by way of great water quality. Lake of the Woods has maintained a rich fishing legacy for generations. We are the Walleye capitol of the world! The sustainability of our fishery and our economy depends on our lake. When our lake thrives, we all thrive. We all love Lake of the Woods and our north woods way of life. So naturally we all need to get protective of it.*

*Many of the local resorts provide access to dumpsters for ice anglers. We all have the responsibility to keep the lake clean. Please do your part to remove waste from the lake when you leave.*

*(Video of anglers pitching a bag or two of trash into the dumpster.)*

*The cleaner we leave the lake the better the fishing will be next year. (B-roll of pulling fish out of the ice.)If you like big walleyes, you like clean water. because big walleyes like clean water. All eyes are on you! Help us "Keep it Clean".*

## Evaluation

Finally, it is important to consider how to evaluate the effectiveness of the communications plan. How will the committee know if they were successful in accomplishing the stated objectives? Community engagement is somewhat messy and can be difficult to measure, but there are some ways to evaluate effectiveness both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The social media strategy will yield strong quantitative evaluation indicators thanks to the analytics that are captured through Facebooks ad manager system. The committee will be able to view data such as the number of views, the demographics of people who viewed content, the number of clicks through to the website or other provided links, how long content was promoted and the amount of money spent to promote each post. Another quantitative indicator that the committee has used previously is the amount of trash collected in spring clean ups with the Minnesota Conservation Corps. However, it is not possible to know for sure that the communication plan caused any change in the amount of trash, so that data helps to tell the larger story of the sustainability on Lake of the Woods rather than specific strengths or weaknesses of the communication plan. A third quantitative indicator could be another round of surveys. Ideally, the committee would be able to get surveys out to anglers on the ice to measure their awareness and attitudes pre- and post-exposure to the communications plan, but that would require a lot of time and effort with no guarantee that enough respondents would participate to do much with the data. An online survey could also prove useful here. The relationships with resort owners will also prove useful as they can provide information about the number of anglers who they provided with KIC materials or information.

Qualitative evaluations will mostly look at the amount of and the kinds of comments, dialogues and other interactions had between the committee and its audiences. Among the business community, what kinds of conversations were had? What topics were of the greatest concern? What solutions, if any, were reached? What actions, if any, were taken as a result of the interactions? Similar questions can guide the evaluation of social media interactions, especially reading the comments that other users leave on posts about Keep it Clean. The use of hashtags can help keep track of posts surrounding a certain topic. Surveys are also useful for qualitative evaluation, and after a year of increased communication with resort owners, a similar survey to the one

conducted in this project could be used to measure changes in attitudes and participation with Keep it Clean committee and initiatives.

## Conclusion

In sum, Lake of the Woods is facing a complicated and growing problem, but also an important one to continue to work on for the environmental and economic vitality of the region. A lack of places for people to dump their trash if not with a resort or professional outfitter is one of the main aspects of the problem, as well as the intentions and behaviors that result in trash left on the lake to begin with. Keep it Clean in Lake of the Woods is a unique effort of active community members who love their lake and their lifestyle and want to do their part to protect it for many generations. There is not going to be an easy solution for a problem that has so many players and so many layers. A communications plan such as the one recommended in this report can help smooth tensions and foster understanding amongst stakeholders so that everyone's vision of a healthy, beautiful and sustainable Lake of the Woods can be achieved.

Recommendations for next steps in addition to the strategies discussed in the communications plan is for the committee to work with the business community to write a resolution or policy recommendation for the Lake of the Woods County Commission. The committee is strong in its diverse expertise in membership, and the lively discussions at committee meetings can help steer the conversation among those who have the elected political authority to make changes that are enforceable and can benefit the community at large.

# Lake of the Woods Resort Owners and Keep it Clean Communications Survey

This survey is part of Keep it Clean committee and the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs partnership to create a communications plan to help accomplish the committee's mission to protect, maintain, and promote cleanliness for Lake of the Woods. Andrea Kidder is a Graduate Research Assistant at UMN who is investigating the problem of trash left behind on the lake during the ice fishing season and how the Keep it Clean committee can work together with the LOW business community to educate and communicate with people who enjoy Lake of the Woods, and encourage them to take care of the lake by bringing all their trash off the lake when they leave.

We hope to better understand your involvement and ideas for tackling this problem together. The information you provide in this survey will help us to tailor messages specific to anglers using Lake of the Woods and will help us to strategically place any communications materials we create at the most effective points of contact with independent wheelhouse users. We hope to increase the level of engagement between the committee and people recreating on the lake and with the business community, especially resort owners like you.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary, and your answers will be kept confidential. You are free to choose not to respond to any question. Choosing to skip a question will not invalidate the rest of your responses. If you have any further questions, comments, or concerns, or if there is something that is not addressed in the survey that you think we should know, please contact Andrea at [kidde039@umn.edu](mailto:kidde039@umn.edu).

## 1. Rate your current level of involvement with the Keep it Clean committee and its work on issues regarding Lake of the Woods.

1 - Not at all involved (I have never attended a meeting) 2 - Somewhat involved (I get updates on their work but don't attend meetings) 3 - Involved (I get updates on their work and sometimes attend meetings) 4 - Very involved (I get updates on their work and regularly attend meetings)  
*Mark only one oval.*

|                     |                       |                       |                       |                       |               |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
|                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     |               |
| Not at all involved | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Very involved |

## 2. Rate your level of satisfaction with your current involvement with the Keep it Clean committee.

*Mark only one oval.*

|                      |                       |                       |                       |                       |                |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
|                      | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     |                |
| Not at all satisfied | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Very satisfied |

## 3. Describe your communication with other LOW resorts and business owners.

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4. **Currently the committee members include parties from LOW County Tourism Board, LOW County Government, LOW and Roseau Soil and Water Conservation District, DNR Fisheries, DNR conservation officers and Zippel Bay State Park Friends Group. What other parties, if any, do you think should be more involved?**

\_\_\_\_\_

5. **Does your resort have a private plowed ice road?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes, and we sell ice road passes to the public
- Yes, and we only allow our resort guests to use our road
- No, we don't have a plowed ice road.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. **On an average day during the ice fishing season, how many vehicles use your ice access?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- N/A, we don't have a plowed ice road.
- 0-100
- 101-200
- 201-300
- more than 300

7. **How do most customers purchase an ice road pass from your resort?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- In-person at the resort
- Put money in a box at the entrance
- Our resort does not sell ice road passes
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

8. **How often do you or your employees have contact with your ice road customers who bring their own wheelhouses?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- No contact
- Minimal contact (once per visit)
- Moderate contact (two or three times per visit)
- Frequent contact (four or more times per visit)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

9. What information, if any, do you collect from customers who purchase an ice road pass?

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10. What information, if any, do you give your ice road customers about your expectations for them regarding the use of the ice road?

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11. In what ways do you think your business is impacted by independent wheelhouses on Lake of the Woods? Select all that apply.

*Check all that apply.*

- Loss of profit from missed bookings
- Increased revenue from ice road pass sales
- Increased revenue from food and beverage sales
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

12. What level of responsibility do you have to your customers that have paid you to access the ice with respect to hazardous conditions (weather, winds, blizzards, ice conditions)?

*Mark only one oval.*

1      2      3      4

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No obligation                    Huge obligation

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13. Do you provide customers that pay you to access the ice, dumpsters or garbage service?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

14. Regarding the previous question about providing your customers with trash service, why or why not?

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15. Describe what impacts, if any, trash left behind on the ice has on your business.

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16. Has the amount of trash left on the ice increased or decreased in the last 5 years?

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17. Are you and/or your employees involved in any sort of ongoing clean-up or trash removal during the winter season?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

18. Are you and/or your employees involved in any sort of clean-up or trash removal in the spring?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No

19. If you and/or your employees are involved in clean-up activities throughout the year, please describe what that looks like.

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20. **Do you have a policy for reporting leftover trash to authorities like DNR conservation officers?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

21. **If yes, please describe your policy for reporting leftover trash.**

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22. **What other comments or ideas do you have about preventing trash from being left on the ice, the Keep it Clean program or anything helpful to Keep it Clean?**

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23. **Do you think that an educational communication campaign is effective in changing the behavior of anglers, resulting in having less garbage / debris left on the ice?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

24. **Do you have any recommendations for the best way to reach independent wheelhouse users with communication about Keep it Clean?**

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25. **As one of the only opportunities for a point-of-contact with independent wheelhouse users, do you think there could be an opportunity to have them watch a quick video/read a pamphlet/sign a pledge regarding Keep it Clean when they purchase an ice road pass?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

26. **Would you be willing to help facilitate some kind of educational communication to independent wheelhouse users who come into your resort?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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