

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** MCWD Board of Managers  
**From:** Telly Mamayek, Communications Director  
**Date:** November 7, 2014  
**Re:** Subwatershed Direct Mail Pilot Program Update

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### Background

In late 2013 the Board of Managers requested staff conduct a pilot program for a direct subwatershed-based outreach plan. It was hoped using direct mail would help draw a connection in residents' minds between the stormwater that falls on their property and the impact of that stormwater on the lake, stream or wetland their property drains to.

Education and Communications staff collaborated on developing and implementing the campaign, which was presented for review by the Board of Managers in January and July 2014, and the mailings went out in August of 2014.

### Method

The pilot project focused on residents in areas that drain to three different types of water bodies – a stream, lake and wetland:

- Minnehaha Creek - Interlachen Park neighborhood in Hopkins
- Mooney Lake - Mooney Lake subwatershed
- Six Mile Marsh - Residents near Six Mile Marsh

Each resident received a postcard explaining how water travels untreated from their property to the nearby water body.

The postcards were highly targeted. They included a nice photo of the water body in question and specifically included the resident's address in the text. For example, a resident near Mooney Lake who lives at 123 Test Street would have received a postcard with the following text: "When water falls on your property, 123 Test Street, it drains directly into Mooney Lake and carries pollutants like fertilizer, pet poop and yard waste along with it."

Each postcard asked the recipient to visit a unique web page where they could learn more and take a Clean Water Commitment. Each web page had information about the District's work in the area, the associated lake or stream association, additional clean water practices and more. Additionally, the Minnehaha Creek subwatershed web page included a section where a resident could request a

complimentary “Runoff Audit” to determine how water flows off their property and provide recommendations on how to prevent runoff.

Each resident also received a refrigerator magnet with seasonal tips for protecting clean water on their property.

## **Results**

- Postcards and magnets were mailed to a total of 1,435 residents.
- The web pages listed on the postcards were visited a total of 16 times (Minnehaha Creek - 7; Mooney Lake - 6; Six Mile Marsh - 3).
- No Clean Water Commitments were submitted.
- No requests for a runoff audit were submitted.

## **Challenges**

### *Measurement*

The biggest challenge was measuring the effectiveness of the campaign's goals which were:

- Generate awareness of the connection between a resident’s property and the local water resource,
- Increase the understanding of the impacts of runoff and how to prevent it,
- Increase the likelihood they’ll take steps to protect their local body from runoff, and
- Increase awareness of what MCWD is doing to protect water quality.

Due to the cost and time of directly following up with recipients, the campaign’s measurement strategy focused on counting the number of Clean Water Commitments submitted. However, this approach does not accurately measure the level of awareness or understanding recipients had after reading the information on the postcard, magnet and webpage.

### *Printing error*

While the final draft of the postcards that were sent to the printer included a unique URL for each target area, the printer errantly used an earlier draft in which all postcards contained the same URL: [www.minnehahacreek.org/minnehaha-creek-commitment](http://www.minnehahacreek.org/minnehaha-creek-commitment). Once aware of this issue, staff converted the "minnehaha-creek-commitment" page to a landing page with links to each subwatershed page.

## **Costs**

Including staff time, the total cost for developing, designing, printing and mailing postcards and magnets to the three test areas was about \$7,500.

## **Looking forward**

Given the apparent limited impact of this pilot program, some serious consideration should be given to revising this approach before attempting to repeat this strategy in other parts of the watershed district. Reducing costs and improving the effectiveness of the measurement tool would be key factors in an updated direct mail strategy. Staff recognizes the value of direct outreach to property owners and, provided the Board of Managers supports it, will explore alternate approaches that will have a more measurable impact.