

# 5-Year Strategic Planning Priorities

## Notes from 9/30/24 Staff Meeting

*The mission of the Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District is to protect and improve its water resources through adaptive management and education of local stakeholders.*

Recurring WMP Themes (High Priority Items)		
Rules/Permitting (3001/3002) "Smart Growth"	Shoreline Restoration/Cost-Share (3004)	Education & Outreach (3005)
Interagency Communication (3006)	Climate Resiliency (3013/5100)	Lake Water Quality (5200)

Mike K.

- SWCDs' principal role is conservation; WDs have an engrained watershed approach due to specialized boundaries – we aren't trying to supplant SWCDs' land mgmt./conservation work
- Evaluate return on investment for any rule revisions; Minimal Impact Design Standards (MIDS) is a way to coordinate across boundaries
- Automated lake levels posted on website
- Local politics come into play a lot with partnerships (e.g., school districts)
- Groundwater sampling often focuses on nitrogen

Aidan:

- Aidan has an important role interfacing with partners, landowners
- Aiming to SUPPLEMENT available resources rather than SUPPLANT – leverage partnerships and promote efficiency in coordination/communications
- Finding where the watershed fits in its partnerships – establish roles and responsibilities where most appropriate
- Julia will be doing outreach with local high school science club's salt watch program
- General changes in public perception (e.g., lawn replacement w/ native plants)

Mike S.

- Permitting improvements:
  - o Rules for shorelines
  - o Similar rules to other WDs... each WD is unique, but there is some streamlining that could occur which would be an overall improvement (i.e., improved compliance by contractors)
  - o Ensuring maintenance on stormwater infrastructure
- Forest Lake continues to develop... there is some redundancy in city/WD inspections, but city inspections don't prioritize water quality as much as our rules demand (more like building inspections, and ESC isn't as big a priority)

- Promote the District through permit inspections – cross-promote other programs like cost-**share/shoreline** (e.g., **welcome coolers**)

## Blayne

- Become a leader in natural resource mgmt. **partnering with local municipalities** to encourage **smart growth, improve local surface WQ, prepare for a changing climate.**
- Leader in natural resource management – have our website be a hub for all things natural resource related... provide links to necessary resources (DNR Lakefinder, etc.). **People can come to us first and find the info they need.** They can find info on groundwater through us/our website.
- **Outreach/marketing** specifically to new homeowners during their “nesting” period

## Adam

- **WD is the go-to partner**, then we **direct them to the right folks as needed**
- Need to **increase general awareness** (beyond the usual suspects who already know us and keep coming back)
- Need to get creative and try new approaches than what we’ve done in the past; can’t always lean on the same partners that we’ve worked with a lot in the past
- Good old fashioned PR and leg work – get in front of people and connect with them.

## Victoria

- **Reaching people at boat accesses** is a good connection point; watercraft inspectors hand out stuff for us – promote the District through watercraft inspections
- **Job shadowing through the high school** (separate/different from the Career Launch Internship)
- Focusing more on groundwater might result in/necessitate **outreach to upland residents elsewhere in the watershed**
- Studies on PFAS in groundwater?

## Tori

- **I <3 My Watershed yard signs**
- How do we incorporate diversity, equity, inclusion? BIPOC communities often face the brunt of climate change and environmental issues... promote diversity among our board in terms of race, age, economic status
- Our focus on lakeshore may create a socioeconomic barrier

## Jackie

- **Relationship with the high school...** way to get in contact with families that might not otherwise come in contact with our messaging (but teachers are busy)

## Julia

- Supportive of **community outreach** ideas – expand awareness of watershed residents that don't live on the lake
- Importance of groundwater... (again a connector to non-lakeshore residents)

## Emily

### Primary focus: Improve sustainability and resiliency in our watershed

- a. **Headline:** Mitigate the negative effects of climate change within our boundaries in order to equitably protect people, water resources, and infrastructure. In doing so, protect the taxpayers' investment in the water quality improvements we've achieved for priority lakes.
- b. **Detail:** Top 5 WMP goals (or goal areas) associated with this, in recommended priority order (recognizing that there is an interconnectedness/overlap among all of them):
  - i. **Core/Critical Capacity** – ensure capacity and budget to satisfy all core/critical items required by statute (e.g., **permitting program**, project O&M, ditch law, some administrative requirements like audit/annual report). This is articulated in [Workload Analysis Attachment A](#).
  - ii. **Lake WQ** – get lakes off the impaired waters list *and keep them off* (and in some cases, go above and beyond state standards). See 5200 section goals.
  - iii. **Floodplain/Climate Resiliency** – add a total of at least 99 ac-ft of storage, in key prioritized areas, and improve community preparedness in partnership with other government agencies (per floodplain vulnerability assessment). The greenway corridor may be an implementation strategy in this, and intergovernmental relationship building will be key – each gov't partner has their role to play in this work. The initial idea is to focus on projects/mitigation strategies, but the reality is, we'll probably need to set aside more and more staff time to address flooding complaints in the coming years (i.e., responsive customer service in addition to managing our own projects).
  - iv. **Public Outreach** – achieve 3005 program goals in key priority metrics (shoreline buffers, compliance with District Rules, yard waste dumping, and chlorides) and generally increase public recognition of the District and its work, and public support for the District's work – District residents have their part to play in natural resources protection. We also want the public's support in our office space endeavor. We also probably want to educate the public about what to expect with climate change, roles of gov't, ditch law, what it means when your backyard is a wetland, etc.
  - v. **Lake Shoreline** – get as close to our lake shoreline goals as possible to mitigate shoreline erosion from increased water levels and wave action (and if we don't achieve those goals, ask ourselves if they are feasible given the timeframe/costs/landowner willingness). [Some might define the greenway corridor in terms of nearshore land use as well \(July 2023 workshop slides\)](#).
  - vi. **All Other Program Goals** – ensure we have the capacity to do all of the above PLUS maintain the level of service we've established for numerous other programs. In most cases, these ongoing programs provide critical support to the priorities above. These programs are still important, but we need to prioritize – if everything is a priority, nothing is a priority.

- c. Some key elements to achieving the priorities described above include:
  - i. Maintaining an in-house staff of professionals (workload analysis called for 11-12 FTEs), and providing the space/resources for those professionals to accomplish the objectives described above. Administrator succession planning and general workload planning is key.
  - ii. **Building partnerships** with other government agencies, non-profits, and other local stakeholder groups
  - iii. Thoughtful financial planning to repay debts, leverage grant funding, and increase the levy in a way that is politically palatable