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Using Natural Resource Marketing to Encourage Lakes Protection-

Research in behavior change suggests that we humans are resistant to change—and we don't like being told what to do. We often tend to use those techniques in our personal relationship too... often with disappointing results. Many counties and states have for years taken a rather awkward approach to messaging with top-down directives. The public's been told what not to do, rather than what they should be doing. While sometimes necessary it's not always the most effective approach.

Tips on shoreline protection, lake lawn care, lakeshore erosion or shoreline buffers fall on deaf ears when couched in a bossy, negative tone. How do you overcome this challenge? Keep a few concepts in mind.

Know your audience—more than just lake shore property owners, it helps to know if they are young or old? Knowledgeable about lake protection or not? Local or out of state residents? What is lakeshore features or activities are most important to them?

Determine barriers for change—that means you have to talk to your audience. Market research firms or the University of Wisconsin Extension can help design and conduct surveys, community discussions, and focus groups. DNR lake grants can provide funds to get the work done. You need to know what prevents lake shore owners from protecting lakeshore habitats or any other behavior that is a focus of lake concern. Is it cost? Confusion? Needing reminders? Or just they just plain don't know?

What messages will stick—your surveys can help determine if they want details on what to do, how to do it, why is it important or how to have healthy lakeshore that are not “jungles” or “frogs for the grand kids” leave some vegetation growing in and along the water's edge. Provide options and choices that are both important for lakes protection and do-able.

• **How to communicate with them**—that is, what media to use. Radio? Newspaper ads? Direct mail? Lake newsletters? Obviously you likely have budget concerns, but you need to speak where they'll listen.

Sending kids home from school with coloring books on lakeshore erosion or lake lawn care probably won't work when more than 80% of property owner don't live in the county and the other 20% don't have kids in area schools.

Find a Credible Spokesperson or group—You may find having a “Joe” lake shore owner of trust speak about your efforts can go a long way to success. The person doesn't need to be technical, just believable and real and somewhat recognizable, otherwise he or she could be disregarded as an actor.

Make Your Messages Vibrant and Memorable—Tell the truth. You turn away from dull advertising, too. Most people do. The use of humor or upbeat messaging usually works best. Fear only works if something tragic has happened (and even then it's only temporary; after threats

pass, we all lull ourselves into some feeling of security). Don't forget to tell, show or imply why the action you want taken is necessary—for the individual and for society.

No matter what the issue, no matter how important it is for your community, there exist two populations you'll never reach. The Choir and the Never Wills. The Choir you know. They already show up at all the workshops and read all newsletters and clamor for more. The Never Wills are very unlikely to change. Don't spend precious resources on either group.

Simply put, Natural Resources marketing uses traditional advertising and marketing approaches to work to create changes in behavior. Getting people to quit smoking is a change for personal good. Getting people to maintain their septic tanks is a change for our common good, that is, public and clean, healthy water.

Changing Human Behavior is Hard, But Not Impossible. Natural resources marketing delves into barriers to change and addresses those issues while delivering messages that encourage appropriate behaviors.

Long and Des Moines lakes and the Burnett County Lakes and Rivers Association are currently working with the University of Wisconsin Extension and other partners to take a look at how natural resources marketing can help protect and enhance clean and healthy lakes. Project updates will be included in future additions of the Lake Lines.