

Locke L. Mouton Award Submission Community Relations

Green River, Kentucky Watershed Summit

Army Corps of Engineers Louisville District Public Affairs Office Specialist Carol Labashosky

Executive Summary: The Louisville District Public Affairs Office Specialist Carol Labashosky served as communications advisor to plan the district's Green River Watershed Summit held February 20-21, 2014. The public affairs specialist and Chief Todd Hornback worked jointly with the district's planning section lead project manager, Nate Moulder, who had oversight of the summit. The summit brought together non-governmental organizations, federal, state and local agencies, private landowners, industry, academia and community representatives. The Summit served as a platform for education and outreach to enhance ideas for the future to improve the Green River Watershed. Organizations, agencies and interested individuals with a stake in the health of the Green River were invited to learn from experts, share ideas and build synergy around protecting this incredible ecological treasure in Kentucky. Internal and external communications were synchronized with three summit co-sponsors from outside agencies. The Corps' goals, plans, outreach and publicity for the summit were generated from four internal staff meetings and several conference calls which sometimes included the co-sponsors of the summit. These meetings were led by the public affairs office in the winter of 2013-2014, and the public affairs office coached the project manager to use effective communication techniques to improve the Corps' participation and execution of the summit. Additionally, several meetings were held with district commander Col. Luke Leonard and the strategic communications officer who had a vested interest to inform representatives and congressional members of the event's value.

Purpose: The public affairs office integrated, coordinated and oversaw communication planning for the Green River, Ky. Watershed Summit by hosting internal staff meetings among the district's Operations, Planning, Hydraulics and Hydrology, Engineering; Planning, and the Green River lake staff to communicate effectively the summit's purpose of ecosystem restoration. The public affairs office lent its

assistance to execute the summit in the most professional, personal and positive capacity possible. Public Affairs Specialist Carol Labashosky led communications, and did liaison assisted by Planning's Nate Moulder. Public Affairs Chief Todd Hornback emceed. The summit provided increased education, outreach and public awareness of the unique nature and the ecosystems of the Green River Watershed. The summit was the culmination of communication planning to build community relations by utilizing the partnership of Corps, the Kentucky Waterways Alliance, Kentucky Department of Wildlife, and The Nature Conservancy. The summit meeting sparked dialogue, generated new relationships and gathered information and public input for a future feasibility report for future study, forge partnerships and actions to improve the watershed.

Background: Conserving and preserving the biodiversity and endangered species of the Green River watershed is critical. The Corps studies the area to move forward conservation and environmental and biological improvements. The Green River and Lake are in the Green River Watershed lying amidst rolling terrain, steep bluffs and flowing streams. The area is home of some of the most biodiverse entities in the nation and world. Prior to the last ice age, the Green River was a smaller, more isolated, headwater tributary of the ancestral Ohio River. Because of this isolation, the main stem of the Green River supports the most unusual fish and fauna in the lower Ohio-upper Mississippi watershed. The fish of the Green River are among the most diverse in Kentucky, and they are nationally important in terms of fish zoogeography or "distribution" and need for conservation. The Mammoth Cave National Park and its waters are within the watershed where endangered species exclusive to the area exist. Kentucky waters support about one fourth of all North American freshwater fish/fauna. Two-thirds are from the Green River and its tributaries. The Green River and its tributaries are recognized as supporting one of the most diverse mussel faunas in North America. More than one-third of the species inhabiting the Green and Barren Rivers are rare, threatened or endangered at the state or Federal level, mostly due to changes in aquatic habitat caused by human alteration of land and water. The most significant factor is the absence of

some missing mussel species. This reduction in mussel habitat is associated with construction of the locks and dams on the Green and Barren River.

Communication Strategy and Activities: Two “pre” outreach meetings were planned and held by the Corps, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Kentucky Waterways Alliance in the winter prior to the summit to gather as many viewpoints as possible that span the Green River Watershed. The public affairs office suggested appropriate itineraries, agendas, goals and crafted messages for email invitations to these pre-meetings. PAO recommended the meetings be run by a professional facilitator to document input to use in the summit with these goals:

- a. Community education and outreach
- b. Protecting and improving water quality
- c. Developing a shared vision for the watershed

A news release and flier were distributed to highlight the summit’s goals, generate interest in the watershed and to invite stakeholders and media to the summit. For public involvement, a joint website was created by the public affairs office upon which resided a repository for the initial watershed assessment, links to The Nature Conservancy and Kentucky Waterways Alliance, and all documents, slide presentations and maps of the Green River Watershed. The website allowed public comments through the study process: <http://kwalliance.org/greenriversummit/> and

<http://www.lrl.usace.army.mil/Missions/CivilWorks/ProjectPlanning/GreenRiverWatershed.aspx>

The Army Corps of Engineers Commander Luke Leonard was chosen to be a keynote speaker on the “Green River Watershed – Past, Present and Future.” This presentation sought to highlight historical developments in the watershed, current efforts and look toward future trends that would impact the health of the system. Accordingly, Col. Leonard’s segment of the presentation focused on the historical events and past transportation needs that spurred the construction of the four flood control reservoirs and seven locks and dams in the watershed. Current efforts were explained that are under way or in development by USACE to reduce the impact from these large infrastructure projects. This includes the Green River Dam Modification Study, which considers alternatives for increasing the selective withdrawal discharge

capacity to meet temperature targets for spring releases from Green River Lake. Another example shared was the re-operation of Green River Lake which was a direct result of the Sustainable Rivers Program – a cooperative and national award-winning effort by USACE and TNC.

Messages were developed in the communication plan:

- The Green River is a critical and distinctive resource.
- Communicating this message to local and regional stakeholders is foundational to future conservation efforts.
- The USACE reservoirs, locks and dams in the watershed play a large role in the ecological health of the system.

Budget: Salary two public affairs staff members - four hours per week from December of 2013-February 2015 - \$1,300; 32 hours of salary for two PAOs at the summit - \$2,500. ACEIT AV \$1,000. Total: \$4,800

Results: The news release was picked up by state-wide media and AP resulting in a special in-depth feature article, videos and blogs by the Louisville Courier Journal, the second highest circulation daily paper in the district and the Bowling Green Daily News, Kentucky. A radio interview was broadcast through the region. A new relationship was forged with the Daily News reporter. The public affairs office generated subsequent articles in this newspaper on the positive environmental benefits of Green River Lake Dam water temperatures/Green River Watershed Study, and more publicity was similarly generated with the Courier Journal that has continued for nine months.

With telephone calls, personal contact and intense urging to encourage invitees to attend the summit from PAO and the team for follow up -- pre-summit -- to increase stakeholder attendance, more than 150 guests attended the summit, who in turn went back to their agencies and spread the word about the value of the Watershed and its resources. Based on an enormous amount feedback from one-half of attendees from the two outreach meetings, and the summit, there was a particular interest from stakeholders in

understanding historic and current USACE projects in the watershed. The commander's presentation was tailored to these requests and was provided to the attendees. PAO created web sites/repository <http://www.lrl.usace.army.mil/Missions/CivilWorks/ProjectPlanning/GreenRiverWatershed.aspx> to be used by the district's planning department and public for future study input and stakeholder use. A robust stakeholder list was developed and was divided into eight categories: agriculture, recreation, tourism, academia, industry, local government, state government, federal government, and non-governmental organizations /non-profit. These stakeholders/attendees – because of the summit -- have rallied for unity, change and continued work in the watershed and gave of their time to create recommendations, propose grants and form, for example, a Harmful Algal Bloom work group.

Summit attendees included interested members of national organizations who said stakeholders and the Corps's plans for the watershed will have “far-reaching impacts beyond the region – the bigger picture, including the Mississippi River Watershed.” This vision was further spread by a quote printed in a newspaper article. Some examples of attendees were river-area landowners in the USDA's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), USGS, The National Weather Service, city and county managers, environmental services contractors, Western Kentucky University, University of Louisville, county tourism directors, the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission, and the Ky. state director of ecotourism. Input from the summit was meticulously gathered, shared and used for subsequent proactive communications, repositories, meetings, study products and news media. A consistent message from stakeholders was that the summit event should serve as a starting point for continued collaboration on the issues explored during the two-day event. Significantly, a topic-driven committee on Communication and Information Dissemination was formed as a result of the summit and others on physical barrier removal (e.g. aging infrastructure); and Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs). The summit led to more public input on Green River Locks & Dams 3, 4, 5, 6; Barren River Lock and Dam 1 Feasibility Study <http://www.lrl.usace.army.mil/Missions/CivilWorks/ProjectPlanning/GreenandBarren.aspx>

The coordinated teamwork of Labashosky, Hornback and Moulder to form and execute the agenda, topics, and obtain highly-credentialed guest speakers provided critical information to the Corps to make decisions and prioritize issues. This resulted in very focused feedback that was used to improve the watershed.

Agenda Feb. 20

<i>Start</i>	<i>Stop</i>	<i>Description</i>
9:00 AM	10:00 AM	Registration Opens
10:00 AM	10:15 AM	Welcome: USACE LRL Commander Col. Leonard; Bobby Carson, Chief, Science and Resources Mgt. Division, Mammoth Cave Natl. Park
10:15 AM	10:45 AM	The Green River: A Living Tapestry-Guest Speaker Mr. Terry Cook, State Director, The Nature Conservancy (Global Services)
10:45 AM	11:45 AM	Green River Watershed: Past, Present, Future-Guest Speaker LRL Commander Col. Luke Leonard
11:45 AM	1:15 PM	Lunch
1:15 PM	5 PM	Concurrent Breakout sessions/speakers and wrap up

Agenda Feb. 21

8:00 AM	10:30 AM	Registration, plenary, break out sessions
10:30 AM	12:00 PM	Reports from watershed breakout sessions
12:00 PM	12:15 PM	AJOURN/ Scientists meeting to follow until 3:00 PM

Presenters and Occupations - Break out Sessions

Watershed-Smart Planning: Tools and Resources for community planners, officials, business

leaders; Brian D. Lee, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Landscape Architecture University of Ky. College of Agriculture, Food and Environment

Sustainable Agriculture, Soil Health and The Brown Revolution: Soil Health Specialist John Graham,

Soils Staff/State Resource Conservationist State of Ky.; and Steve Blanford, Ky. State Soil Scientist

Data Collection: Water Forecasting & Analysis -what we have & what we do with it; Hydraulic

Engineer Mark Philips, LRL Army Corps of Engineers; Mike Callahan, Senior Service Hydrologist,

National Weather Service and Michael S. Griffin, Acting Director of the Indiana-Kentucky Water Science Centers, USGS

Ecotourism Opportunities within the Green River watershed: Using The Green to Make Green

While Staying Green! Elaine Wilson, Executive Director, Office for Adventure Tourism, Tourism, Arts,

and Heritage Cabinet, Commonwealth of Kentucky; Russell Clark, Community Planner & Landscape

Architect, National Park Service–Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program

Cave and Karst Landscapes-Green River Basin: Resources, Threats, Protection: Chris Groves, Ph.D. University Distinguished Professor of Hydrogeology, Western Ky. University and Director Crawford Hydrology Lab

On-site Wastewater /Innovative septic systems: how to pay for them and why they are needed: Barry Topping, senior level water resources and environmental planning and policy specialist; Tessa Edelen, Kentucky Waterways Alliance Watershed Program Director



Green River Watershed, Ky. Summit attendees look at a map of the region to examine where sustainable agriculture can improve the area. Photo by Carol Labashosky

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Officials: Green River a resource that needs spotlight, protection

By **CHUCK MASON**

Posted: Sunday, February 23, 2014 1:00 am

The Green River is rich in its ecological resources, drawing interest from educators and naturalists around the state. "It's one of the most unique natural landscapes in the world," said Richie Kessler, a biologist and professor at Campbellsville University and former interpretative specialist for Mammoth Cave National Park. The river hosts more than 150 fish varieties and 70 types of freshwater mussels. Children are a great resource to spotlight the river. "Take these kids out to and see some of these things, and their mouths will drop to the floor," Kessler said. The river is home to the bottle brush crayfish, which Kessler said cannot be found anywhere else in the world. "I know it's not a panda, but it's still charismatic," he said. "What is our 50-year vision for this (Green River) watershed?" asked Terry Cook,

state director of The Nature Conservancy of Kentucky. “No matter where you go in the world, we have something special here. If the river stays intact, our communities will prosper.”

The two were among those who attended a two-day Green River Summit last week at Mammoth Cave National Park. By changing the flow rate of the river several years ago, the number of species reproducing within its waters is slowly increasing, Cook said. Col. Luke Leonard, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the Louisville District, said a disposition feasibility study is seeking public comment on a plan to work with locks and dams on the river that don’t have a purpose anymore. For example, a locks and dam adjacent to Mammoth Cave National Park could be removed, restoring 17 miles of free-flowing river, Leonard said. “It (the study) is scheduled to go to a chief’s report this summer,” Leonard said, meaning the proposal will climb another rung of the federal bureaucracy. The plan “will restore quite a bit of the river to its natural state.”

Cook said the summit effort begun Thursday needs to continue. “I hope this is not the last time we get together,” he said. Cook said those who look at Green River’s future also need to look at a much bigger picture: the Mississippi River Watershed. Compatible infrastructure, resilient flood plains, sustainable agriculture and conversations among stakeholders are some elements of that larger picture.

“Natural resource concerns cannot be treated in isolation,” Cook said. Seeing Green River designated as a federal “blueway” through the National Park Service will be the topic of a 2 p.m. meeting March 25 at the Barren River Area Development District office in Bowling Green, according to Russell Clark, a community planner for the National Park Service. The idea is to tap into the \$646 billion outdoor recreation industry in America.

Elaine Wilson, executive director for the Office of Adventure Tourism for Kentucky, said river recreation opportunities may be packaged with local crafts and foods in the state’s communities lining the river banks. “People want that unique experience, authentic products from a community,” Wilson said.