

# Lake Wildwood Wastewater Treatment Plant Improvement Project

## Public Outreach Campaign

Nevada County, California - 2003-2005

### Project Overview

The Nevada County Sanitation District No. 1 began a public outreach project in late 2003 when a new California Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWCRB) discharge permit for the Lake Wildwood (LWW) Wastewater Treatment Plant would necessitate significant plant improvements. To bring the plant into compliance with its permit by 2007, ratepayers could incur a two to three-fold increase in rates. The CSD's goal was to embark in a public outreach campaign that would inform the community of the need for WWTP improvements, involve the community in the selection of alternatives, and minimize public outcry about rate increases. With a well-planned campaign by maximizing the accessibility of information, the project team hopes that the community will understand the need for raising rates and support the CSD's efforts to improve the plant to comply with discharge regulations.

### Demographics

Lake Wildwood is 50 miles north of Sacramento and 80 miles west of Reno. Virtually all (97%) of Lake Wildwood's 4868 residents are Caucasian. Median age is 56.8 years and median household income is \$58,000 with the media home price of \$229,000 (source: Census 2000 Lake Wildwood, CA profile, DP1-DP4).

### LWW Public Outreach Goals

By keeping the community informed of the process to bring the WWTP into compliance with its permit, the CSD hoped to minimize public outcry, maximize support of the CSD's efforts and make the best possible decisions about improvement alternatives. CSD established a process to collect public input throughout all stages of the process -- planning to selection of alternatives. It was decided to engage in following primary activities:

- ◆ Hold regular public meetings to solicit public input about proposed alternatives and to inform about the status of the project
- ◆ Early in the process, reach out to potential stakeholders in outlying areas who may be affected by improvements
- ◆ Provide regular updates of the planning, permitting and design process to all interested groups and individuals
- ◆ Establish numerous methods for to solicit public input via meetings, websites, email, and in writing
- ◆ Make it easy for the public to locate any document about the process
- ◆ Maintain and support the impression of an open, inclusive process whereby the public's input would be a valid and valued part of selecting an appropriate alternative to bring the WWTP into compliance with its permit

### Activities

#### Public Meetings

Public meetings allow community members to meet project staff, learn about the project and various stages of planning, and to voice their opinions and concerns, while fulfilling obligations for public access and open meetings. Each meeting to date has emphasized a different element of the project. The initial project kick-off meeting alerted the community to the need for plant improvements, the timeline for meeting permit compliance, the public input process, and gave a general overview of the plant. This meeting established the exigence and emphasized the public's role in selecting the best alternative. Community members were encouraged to ask questions and make comments in person, in writing or via email.

## Public Meeting Notices

Notifications for each public meeting include direct mailed postcards or brochures, as appropriate, to each resident in the affected area. Packets of invitations were sent to interested stakeholder groups. This conveyed the planning team's sincerity for including the public in the decision-making process. Email reminders to key stakeholders reinforced this premise.

As appropriate, a newspaper advertisement was purchased announcing the meeting. The LWW Association received the news release and additional invitations and was encouraged to promote the meeting when possible.

## Website and Email

A Webpage dedicated to the LWW project was set up on the Nevada County Website [www.mynevadacounty.com/lwwtreatmentplant](http://www.mynevadacounty.com/lwwtreatmentplant). A consistent naming policy for all CSD supports the image of a well-coordinated and well-planned public outreach program, ie: /lwwtreatmentplant for Lake Wildwood, /loptreatmentplant for Lake of the Pines, and /cstreatmentplant for Cascade Shores.

Corresponding email addresses give the public a dedicated channel of communication and allow the project manager, public outreach manager, and engineering manager to monitor incoming emails. The public outreach manager then oversees responses and tracks public comments so that they may be included in the public record.

## News Releases/Calendar Announcements

A news release outlining the topic for each meeting was circulated to print, broadcast and online news sources including community calendars. As appropriate, a personal call or email message to area newspapers encouraged a reporter to attend each meeting.

## Collateral and Document Access

Documents created include:

- Community Calendar Announcements
- News Releases for public meetings, project milestones or the release of key documents
- Editorial submitted by County Supervisor
- Letters and email messages to stakeholders and community members as appropriate
- Public notices of upcoming meetings
- Meeting minutes
- Synopsis of public comments
- Brochures
- Postcard announcements of public meetings
- PDF of meeting presentation include charts, diagrams and presentation text

Every document produced by the planning team has been made available to the public on the project website and at Nevada County Docushare - a web-based repository of public documents. These documents are also available via email, phone or written request and key documents have been given out at public meetings.

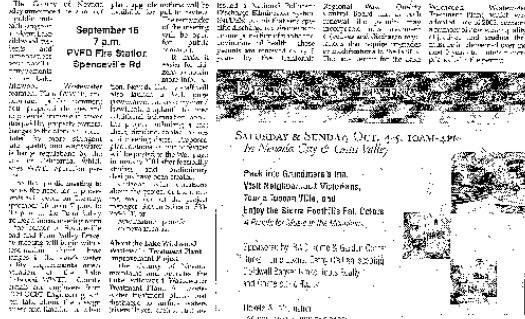
The screenshot shows the website for the Lake Wildwood Treatment Plant project. The header includes the date 'March 29, 2005' and navigation links for 'Emergencies', 'Government', 'Living Here', 'Working Here', 'Business', and 'Visitors'. The main content area features a 'Keyword Search' box, a 'Subscribe to News & Notifications' button, and a 'What's News' section with links to 'Read Maintenance Vegetation Management Plan', 'Proposed plan to control roadside weeds and grasses', 'Sanitation Division Capital Improvement Program Reg. MORE...', 'Integrated Waste Management (Solid Waste) Division Capital Improvement Program Reg. MORE...', and 'Engineering Division Capital Improvement Program Reg. MORE...'. The 'Links' section includes 'National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System', 'California State Water Resources Control Board', 'American's Clean Water Foundation', and 'Lake Wildwood Association'. The 'Contacts' section lists 'Project Inquiries' and 'Media Inquiries' with contact information for the County of Nevada and Jennifer Harrison.

## Messaging Strategy

Aside from specific tactics to reach the public (meetings, direct mail, news releases, etc), message strategy and image are key elements in an outreach campaign. The CSD No. 1 hoped to convey the

critical need for improvements to the WWTP were the result of fulfilling permit requirements from the RWQCB *and* that the public would be included in all phases of the decision-making process. An inclusion strategy where the public felt empowered and valued would encourage them to contribute their ideas and concerns, be proactive and cooperative, and consider themselves partners in reaching a viable solution.

### Comments sought on LWW Waste Treatment Improvements



Thus, all elements of the outreach plan supported this ideal: the schedule of meetings and their format, the easy access to documents, frequent news releases and meeting announcements, specific language used to describe the

project and public input process, and minute details like meeting layout, presentation, web address, etc. Laying this groundwork will benefit the project in future phases where more controversial topics will surely arise as the selected alternative undergoes environmental review and community members are faced with increased annual rates.

## Project Contacts

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