



Coon Creek Watershed District Comprehensive Research Report



Photo Credit: Coon Creek Watershed District

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Executive Summary

The Coon Creek Watershed District (CCWD) contracted with MP+G Marketing Solutions to conduct market research in 2024-2025 to better understand what motivates municipal leaders in the District to support, plan, and allocate the necessary tax funding for stricter water quality standards that will come into effect in 2045. Because budget-setting elected officials are accountable to voters for their decisions on water management issues, CCWD also undertook research with a group of District residents who are registered voters. This report summarizes the market research findings.

Key Market Research Findings

- The municipal leaders and residents who participated in these interviews and surveys are most motivated to support water management programs and funding to **protect water quality for drinking and recreation**.
- **Preventing pollution to preserve the environment, wildlife and fishing** is the second most compelling reason to support water management.
- **Preventing flooding and protecting infrastructure** is important to leaders and residents.
- **Communities working together** to protect water quality and prevent flooding is highly valued by residents.
- **The Coon Creek Watershed District is a trusted source of information** for those that have contacted it and/or are aware of its services.
- Many participants said that **regular progress reports from the District** would/do encourage support for water management funding and programs.
- **Participants that were kept informed by city staff members and the CCWD about water management issues, and particularly about the 2045 TMDL requirements, appeared more ready to meet those goals.**
- There were few meaningful differences between those who appear to support water management investments and those who do not. Some differences in perceptions were detected based on age and income.

- Those 18-39 are more willing to support a tax increase for reasons of public health and safety.
 - Those over 60 and those with incomes over \$100,000 are more likely to be familiar with CCWD.
 - There is limited awareness of 2045 changes in water quality standards—especially among those not familiar with CCWD.
 - Those over age 60 are more likely than younger residents to accept any of the potential claims describing the activities of CCWD.
- A number of respondents said that explaining water management science to others was a challenge. **Plain-language tools are needed** to teach “why,” “how,” and “how much.”
 - **Many respondents asked for CCWD to do more of what they are doing well: public outreach and education.**
 - **Residents don’t know what they currently pay for CCWD.**
 - Residents were asked what additional tax amount would be acceptable to pay for increased water management efforts. Very few residents were able to even guess at an amount, primarily because none of them knew what they currently pay, nor what added amount might be proposed. Others were unclear whether the tax they now pay comes out of property taxes or another source.

Recommended Key Messages Across All Audiences

Coon Creek Watershed District works across communities to:

- 1. Keep water safe for drinking and recreation***
- 2. Help control pollution to keep people, fish, and wildlife safe***
- 3. Prevent damage from flooding and erosion***
- 4. Protect roads and bridges through responsible water management***
- 5. Protect water for future generations***

Purpose of the Market Research



Photo Credit: Coon Creek Watershed District

Background and Purpose

The Coon Creek Watershed District (CCWD), and all but one of the municipalities within its jurisdiction, are federal and state MS4s (municipal separate storm sewer systems). As MS4s, these entities are required to address impaired waters that do not meet water quality standards by 2045 under the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). TMDLs are action plans to restore clean water by defining how much of a pollutant a water body can tolerate and meet water quality standards.

The cost associated with addressing these impaired waters by the 2045 deadline is approximately \$70 million over the next 10 years and \$103 million over the next 20 years. This places a significant financial burden on the local tax base and raises several concerns related to the need for increased state and federal

funding, functional classification changes, and extension of the 2045 timeline. It also has the potential to create further divides between the public and the various government entities tasked with achieving the TMDL.

Additionally, these entities are faced with the risk, uncertainty, and costs associated with random damaging weather events, aging infrastructure, demands for tangible results, and growing public skepticism.

As public skepticism increases, particularly skepticism of state and federal government, it is becoming increasingly hard to connect with local stakeholders both on a personal level and a community level. The District should be able to navigate this growing skepticism by continuing to be a trusted resource for local municipalities.

How do the local government entities responsible for the TMDL fund, and staff, the necessary water management efforts in the next 10-20 years while continuing to deal with the developing needs of the present?

The purpose of the research is to better understand the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, policies, and other factors that increase willingness of municipal leaders and residents in the District to support tax increases and other beneficial actions that advance CCWD's water quality improvement and protection programs, as well as those factors that decrease willingness. In addition, we are seeking insights into the communication messages, messengers, methods, and engagement tools that might increase or decrease willingness among the target audiences.

Research Approach: Phase 1

Qualitative data has been collected through 13 Zoom or phone interviews with elected officials and city staff members (e.g., city engineers, public works, planning and zoning, and/or city information officers). Shaped by the interviews, survey questions were developed and quantitative data collected through a survey sent to approximately 82 elected officials in the District, of which 25 were returned. Names and contact information for the interviews and survey were supplied by CCWD.

Mary Pat McNeil and Danie Watson of MP+G Marketing Solutions structured the interviews, and wrote the interview guide and survey questions—aligning each with the research questions—and submitted these to CCWD for approval.

The interview guide and survey began with an explanation of the “who, what, and why” of the research, and set a respectful tone. Before the interviews began, participants were asked for permission to record their conversation (for note-taking purposes). Audio recordings were made; notes were taken simultaneously. The survey was conducted online.

The data was analyzed by Danie Watson, research lead, for themes, key messages, trusted messengers, and other factors influencing decisions around water quality management and resource allocation. The findings for Phase 1 are summarized in this report.

Research Approach: Phase 2

Qualitative data has been collected through 10 Zoom or phone interviews with CCWD area residents who had contacted CCWD with questions or concerns in the past. Shaped by the interviews, survey questions were developed and quantitative data collected through a survey sample of 114 registered voters in the District. Names and contact information for the interviews were supplied by CCWD; names and contact information for 104 of the surveys were provided by Dynata, a market research firm. The additional 10 surveys were completed at the 2025 North Suburban Home Show supervised by Jesscia Lindemyer, CCWD Engagement Coordinator.

Mary Pat McNeil and Danie Watson of MP+G Marketing Solutions structured the interviews, and wrote the interview guide and survey questions—aligning each with the research questions—and submitted these to CCWD for approval.

The interview guide and survey began with an explanation of the “who, what, and why” of the research, and set a respectful tone. Before the interviews began, participants were asked for permission to record their conversation (for note-taking purposes). Audio recordings were made; notes were taken simultaneously. The survey was conducted online.

The data was analyzed by Danie Watson, research lead, for themes, key messages, trusted messengers, and other factors influencing decisions around water quality management and resource allocation. The findings for Phase 2 are summarized in this report.

Research Questions: Phase 1, Municipal Leaders

Actionable intelligence is needed for CCWD to advance engagement efforts with municipal leaders, and persuade them to support water quality funding to meet

TMDL goals. The research questions are the “need to know” questions that will inform CCWD and its stakeholders as they ready their outreach and engagement efforts to municipal leaders.

Note: The ***research questions, used for research planning***, are different from the ***interview and survey questions, which are used for data collection***.

In Phase 1, we gathered the following information from **municipal leaders and staff** of the seven municipalities of the CCWD:

1. What knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, policies, and other factors appear to *increase* willingness among **municipal leaders** to support tax increases and resource allocation for improving and protecting water quality in the CCWD?
2. What factors appear to *decrease* willingness for this target audience?
3. Under what circumstances do they perceive water quality improvement expenditures to be justified?
4. Are there meaningful differences between those who are receptive to TMDL compliance expenditures and those who are not?
5. What messages and messengers resonate with and motivate these audiences? Is there wording they find off-putting or confusing?
6. Who/what are the trusted sources for information and assistance around TMDL compliance and water quality improvement?
7. What resources, such as current or potential partner organizations, are available to help reach the target audiences?

Research Questions: Phase 2, Residents

Actionable intelligence is needed for CCWD to advance engagement efforts with **CCWD residents**, and persuade them to support water quality funding to meet TMDL goals. The research questions are the “need to know” questions that will inform CCWD and its stakeholders as they ready their outreach and engagement efforts.

Note: The *research questions*, used for research planning, are different from the *interview and survey questions*, which are used for data collection.

In Phase 2, we gathered the following information from **residents** of the seven municipalities of the CCWD:

1. What knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, policies, and other factors appear to *increase* willingness among **members of the public** to support tax increases for water quality programs, and to value water quality in the CCWD?
2. What factors appear to *decrease* willingness for this target audience?
3. Under what circumstances do they perceive water quality improvement expenditures to be justified?
4. Can we gain some insight into the amount of tax increase the audience may find acceptable?
5. Are there meaningful differences between those who are receptive to tax increases for water quality and those who are not?
6. What messages and messengers resonate with and motivate these audiences? Is there wording they find off-putting or confusing?
7. What communications resources may be helpful for reaching these target audiences?

Ethical Research

Participation in the interviews and surveys was voluntary, and confidential, however confidentiality was limited since the names of people who were invited to participate are known to staff at CCWD.

Interview participants were given a verbal disclosure (including who is conducting the research and why, why they are being asked to participate, what the potential risks are of participating, how their confidentiality will be protected, and what will be done with the information they provide), and asked to give verbal permission to proceed. Researchers listened openly, and welcomed a diversity of opinions and experiences. Survey participants were similarly be provided with a written disclosure. Completing the survey implies consent.

Risks and Benefits

No potential risks to participants were identified, aside from limited confidentiality. Interview participants were asked to volunteer 45 minutes of their time. Survey participants were asked to volunteer 5-10 minutes.

In Phase 1, as a token of our appreciation, residents who chose to participate in an interview received a rain gauge and a native seed packet. Some participants may also see a benefit in helping to shape CCWD water quality improvement efforts and TMDL compliance programs.

In Phase 2, survey participants were compensated by Dynata for completing the survey. No other tangible benefit for participants was identified, though some participants may see a benefit in helping to shape CCWD water quality improvement efforts and TMDL compliance programs.

Findings: Phase 1, Municipal Leaders



Photo Credit: Coon Creek Watershed District

The research findings expand our understanding of the influences and choices about water quality funding made by this target audience, and the ways we may be able to measurably influence those decisions through tailored communications.

Research Sample Size

Qualitative data was collected through 13 Zoom or phone interviews with elected officials and city staff members (e.g., city engineers, public works, planning and zoning, and/or city information officers). Quantitative data was collected through a survey sent to approximately 82 municipal officials in the District, of which 25 were returned.

Limitations of the Research

However, the value of the input from this interview and survey research is more descriptive than predictive, qualitative not quantitative, and not directly generalizable to the target audience as a whole.

Note also that some responses may be duplicated, as interviewees were not prohibited from completing the survey (and at least one person did).

Leaders: Factors that Support/Justify Water Management Funding and Programs

Concern for protecting water quality and public health

Among these participants, water quality was the factor mentioned most often for motivating investments in water management. Specifically, concern about “contaminants” or “public health and safety.”

"If there is a contaminant within the creeks, ditches, or streams, E. coli or something similar, that has to be taken care of."

Interview participant

While comments about water management were infrequently mentioned by the public, water quality was the issue residents reportedly mentioned most often to respondents.

Desire to mitigate risks to infrastructure and prevent loss

In the interviews, infrastructure was mentioned by only one participant as a justification for water management expenditures. However, in the survey, when this answer was offered as an option, it was selected by nearly all respondents. Researchers infer that while it may not be top of mind, it is still strongly motivating for this audience.

"[We will know water management efforts are working when] water quality test results improve and infrastructure issues/concerns are reduced."

Survey participant

"Risk management...Education about risks that are very real if you don't manage water properly...Surface water flooding, and impacts to their property or property values, like trees dying."

Interview participant

Seeing a cost-benefit balance

Several respondents were looking for a balance between expenditures and benefit, and seeing the need to justify spending for constituents, their city, and their own sense of responsibility.

"People understand we need to protect water but don't go overboard."

Interview participant

"Finding that balance. Not locking everything down."

Interview participant

Awareness of, and willingness to meet, regulatory levels

Meeting standards, regulations, and policies was frequently given as both a justification of, and a measure of success for, water management investment. No one mentioned any expected consequences if standards were not met.

"Meeting water quality testing standards [is how to know if we are reaching our goals]."

Survey participant

Ongoing engagement with city staff and CCWD

Participants that were kept informed by city staff members and the CCWD about water management issues, and particularly about the 2045 TMDL requirements, appeared more ready to meet those goals.

"Coon Creek has kind of taken the lead on this. And so I'm kind of letting them run [it] with us for right now."

Interview participant

CCWD progress reports

Many participants said that regular progress reports from the District would/do encourage support for water management funding and programs.

"An annual report is helpful."

Survey participant

"Data showing the effectiveness of pollutant reductions for storm water best management practices, as well as effectiveness of certain maintenance protocols."

Survey participant

Leaders: Factors that Discourage Support for Water Management Funding and Programs

Lack of confidence in federal and state entities that set contaminant levels

Several respondents expressed the opinion that federal and state agencies that regulate water quality are capriciously setting accepted levels of contaminants.

When levels change over time, they see it as evidence that levels are set without reasoning.

*"How are you picking this number out of the air?
Do you have some research behind it?
What happens if we don't make that number?"*
Interview participant

*"We can all question the federal government standards –
unfunded mandates."*
Interview participant

Not feeling that expenditures are worthwhile

Some respondents were not persuaded that spending millions of dollars on water management projects was justified.

"It is on our radar but not a priority."
Interview participant

Belief that water management is a problem for others, but not us

Some respondents said that more problems are happening in "upstream" locations than in theirs; others expressed the view that their municipality is not affected. One person stated a willingness to push off the problem to future elected leaders.

"One size fits all, but doesn't work that way. Setting policy for everybody and [we] cannot meet these standards. We deal with pollutants we don't have."
Interview participant

"A waste of money to a community that doesn't have issues."
Interview participant

Perception that water quality problems are caused by something we can't control

For one respondent, the ongoing challenge of goose poop contaminating water with E. coli bacteria had created a belief that water quality problems were not something that municipalities could control. As mentioned above, several others said that upstream communities were creating the problem.

"The local goose population that happens to be flying past is depositing some material inside the streams – there ain't a whole lot I could do about that...It's been getting in the stream for the last thousands of years."

Interview participant

Leaders: Meaningful Differences

There were observable differences between those who appear to support water management investments and those who do not.

Key difference: Long-term planning

The communities that appeared to be most ready to meet the 2045 goals were those that were furthest along in the planning process. Some are not planning for it even though they are aware of the deadline.

"[We have done planning for 2045.] We put together our own capital planning process related to stormwater...and doing a stormwater rate study analysis this year, and meeting to understand what increases would be necessary to build up the capital long-term to pay for those projects."

Interview participant

"For us to take on a \$1 million project is not in our plan. Not in the capital improvement plans."

Interview participant

Key difference: Ownership and shared responsibility for the problem

Participants who viewed the problem as something to be addressed by other communities or people in the future, or who did not perceive that water quality was a problem needing attention, were less ready to invest in water management than participants who conveyed a sense of ownership or shared responsibility for the problem.

"I think almost everyone involved can acknowledge needing to do it. It's just not having the confidence in other cities to also do their part."

Interview participant

"[Our city] is trying. We have a healthy stormwater budget, but not near enough - need to double it. Had meetings to know what needs to happen, but getting support for that large of increase [will be hard]."

Interview participant

Key difference: Trust in standards-setting agencies

A few respondents expressed the opinion that the regulatory agencies that set standards, TMDL/contaminant levels, regulations, and/or policies were doing so without good reasons. These respondents were less ready to support investment in water management.

"Half the time I think that there's bureaucrats that are making the number up and not actual science behind it."

Interview participant

For most others, meeting regulatory benchmarks was a key way to measure progress towards, and success of, water management efforts.

"We need to do better, and do better documenting as to where we are at with our goals."

Interview participant

"Meets testing standards, cleaner streams and creeks, decreased flooding and erosion. Improved native species, health and numbers in watershed."

Survey participant

Leaders: Trusted Sources of Information

These participants said when they had questions about water management they most often turned to:

- City staff
- CCWD

Also mentioned were:

- Other watershed districts and WMOs (where overlapping)
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Outside consultants/firms
- City leadership
- The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources
- The Minnesota Department of Health

No topical journals, professional associations, or membership organizations were mentioned.

Only a few people mentioned sources of information they did not trust, but among those who did, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and the Metropolitan Council were named.

"...a state agency or something like that, I don't have confidence in."

Interview participant

Leaders: Perceptions about CCWD and Staff

When asked if they had thoughts to add, many of these respondents praised Coon Creek Watershed District and its staff members.

"Keep up the good work and open communication channels."

Survey participant

"Very pleased with the CCWD staff and [the] support/assistance that our city receives."

Survey participant

Leaders: Other Findings

Some asking for greater participation in decision-making

Several participants from different cities said they felt their municipality was not adequately represented in the process – for example, by not having anyone from their city on the CCWD board, not feeling the tax burden was fairly distributed, or not having a liaison to CCWD – and wanted more involvement or power.

"As Coon Rapids is at the bottom of the watershed, what is done upstream has a larger impact on us than what we do ourselves. Therefore, we should have more say in what happens upstream and the brunt of the cost should not be borne on our taxpayers."

Survey participant

"How watershed district is set up – no elected officials, everyone is appointed. Taxation without representation."

Interview participant

Words to avoid

During one conversation, one participant (only) reacted unfavorably to the word "misinformation"; it may be best to avoid the word in future communications.

Leaders: Implications of this Data

Working with municipal partners should:

- Bring partners together to build a sense of shared responsibility
- Offer community briefings and/or work sessions quarterly, or as frequently as each municipality will embrace them (such as at planning commission meetings, council meetings, site tours, or public workshops)
- Provide municipalities and other partners with content for resident communications, such as a monthly column on water management issues and approaches. This content should follow communications recommendations (e.g., teach water science in plain language, explain why standards change over time, describe dangers of not acting to protect water resources, etc.).

Communications should:

- Show why investments are worthwhile. Use visually—and persuasively compelling—graphics to demonstrate the financial and human benefits of investment in water management.
- Clearly explain “why” when standards change (and why they sometimes do change over time)
- Give examples of the financial and environmental consequences of not acting to manage water resources responsibly and meet TMDL targets

Leaders: Needed Resources

Periodic progress reports

Respondents suggested that city-by-city periodic reports showing progress toward benchmarks—shared widely and publicly—will support meeting water management goals. Progress reports should include:

- Previous TMDL levels
- Actions being taken to reduce TMDL levels
- Progress towards goals
- Comparisons to other municipalities in the District

Explainer resources with minimal jargon

A number of respondents said that explaining water management science to others was a challenge. Plain-language tools are needed to teach the “why,” “how,” and “how much” of:

- Improving water quality, both natural water bodies and drinking water
- Preventing flooding and erosion
- Complying with regulations, standards, and policies

- Protecting infrastructure
- Protecting the environment/wildlife/fishing
- Importance of working together as a community

"Being able to communicate that with the residents is always challenging...They want an instant solution. They want clean water. They don't want to change how they're managing their landscape 'because nobody else is.'"

Interview participant

More public outreach and education

Many respondents asked for CCWD to do more of what they are doing well: public outreach and education. Public events should invite and include both residents and municipal leaders. Public presentations, such as site visits, could be used to:

- Demonstrate the value of water stewardship
- Create a sense of shared responsibility
- Explain the need for greater efforts
- Prepare the public for tax increases

"I am a huge fan of in-person presentations and public classes. Tying to things like local breweries who use this water as an opportunity to discuss the multi-faceted benefit of good water management."

Survey participant

Leaders: Good Ways to Know Water Investments are Working

When asked how to know our water management efforts are working, most respondents pointed to meeting water quality standards:

- Show year-over-year metrics
- Give an annual report
- When we delist bodies of water
- Fewer closed beaches
- Data showing effectiveness of pollution reduction and maintenance protocols

Other measures mentioned included:

- No complaints from residents
- Presence of or increased biodiversity
- Decreased flooding and erosion
- Support for increase in stormwater fees

"Reductions in flooding and erosion; delisting water bodies; reductions in algae blooms and closed beaches."

Survey participant

"General support for a raise in stormwater fees."

Survey participant

Leaders: Communications Channels and Messengers

We recommend communicating with municipal decision makers through:

- City staff
- CCWD presentations and work sessions
- Site visits
- Outside engineering and management consultants/firms

We recommend helping municipal decision makers communicate with the public through:

- Explainer resources city staff can use, such as handouts, infographs, and videos
- Content for city newsletters, city websites
- Inserts in utility bills and other mailings
- CCWD presence at public events
- CCWD question on resident surveys (Fridley has one biannually)
- Public awareness campaign

"Here in Fridley, we do a resident telephone survey every other per year, and perhaps opportunities like that, or maybe the watershed district doing some surveys themselves to understand the general public's awareness of their role in water quality and the challenges that are out there."

Interview participant

Findings: Phase 2, Residents



Photo Credit: Coon Creek Watershed District

The research findings expand our understanding of the influences and choices about water quality funding made by **residents**, and the ways we may be able to measurably influence those decisions through tailored communications.

Research Sample Size

Qualitative data was collected through 10 Zoom or phone interviews with CCWD area residents who had contacted CCWD with questions or concerns in the past. Quantitative data was collected through a survey sample of 114 registered voters in the District.

Limitations of the Research

However, the value of the input from this interview and survey research is more descriptive than predictive, qualitative not quantitative, and not directly generalizable to the target audience as a whole.

Note also that some responses may be duplicated, as interviewees were not prohibited from completing the survey.

Residents: Factors that Support/Justify Water Management Funding and Programs

Protecting water quality and public health is most valued

Among these participants, water quality was the factor mentioned most often for motivating investments in water management.

"Water quality is pretty important for swimming and boating and fishing."

Interview participant

"There needs to be worldwide attention paid to this issue."

Survey participant

Working across communities is key

In the survey, working together across communities to prevent flooding and erosion and to maintain and improve water quality were frequently rated as priorities both for overall water management and as justifications for tax increases. "Long-term planning based on expected water needs" was also highly rated as "making sense," however it was not as well supported as a justification for a tax increase. These constituents want to see communities cooperating to solve regional water management challenges.

"I appreciate the work you are doing to secure viable water sources for our future."

Survey participant

Preventing pollution to preserve the environment was highly rated

Survey participants also gave high ratings to "preventing pollution to preserve the environment, fish and wildlife." Most of the interview participants also agreed that it was important to protect wildlife, habitat, and fishing, as well as seeing this as a valuable justification for public spending on water management.

"The most important is the environmental part – keeping good controls on pesticide use and anything that would negatively impact water quality, especially being on the creek. A lot of wildlife in our yard – protect habitat."

Interview participant

Mitigating flooding/erosion and protecting infrastructure are important

For these participants, it was important to protect against flooding and erosion, and to prevent the damage that floods could cause to roads and bridges.

"I think [paying taxes to prevent flooding] is every bit as important as the quality of the streets on the front of my house."

Interview participant

Residents: Factors that Discourage Support for Water Management Funding and Programs

Government seen as ineffective

While government spending for water management was broadly supported, a few survey respondents expressed distrust of the government's ability to solve water quality problems and manage tax revenue.

"Government seldom has the best interest of the people or the surrounding area. I do not trust them to do anything that isn't a financial win for them."

Survey participant

One interview participant said that people with homes in areas prone to flooding should pay more in water management taxes.

Residents: Meaningful Differences

There were few meaningful differences observed in Phase 2 between those who appear to support water management investments and those who do not. Some differences in perceptions were detected based on age and income.

- **Those 18-39 are more willing to support a tax increase for reasons of public health and safety.**
- Those over 60 and those with incomes over \$100,000 are more likely to be familiar with CCWD.
- There is limited awareness of 2045 deadline for improvements in water quality—especially among those not familiar with CCWD.
- Those over age 60 are more likely than younger residents to accept any of the potential claims describing the activities of CCWD.

Residents: Trusted Sources of Information

Responses varied by age, but overall, these participants said when they had questions about water management they most often turned to:

- CCWD news
- City news
- CCWD staff
- Engineers, professionals

No participants mentioned sources of information they did not trust, but some survey participants responded that they had no trusted source of information about water management.

Residents: Perceptions about CCWD and Staff

When asked about their interactions with CCWD and its staff, many of these respondents were familiar with Coon Creek Watershed District.

Among survey respondents, **nearly four in every ten** consider themselves at least somewhat familiar with CCWD. Older residents and those with higher incomes are far more likely than others to report familiarity with CCWD.

Interview respondents—all of whom had contacted CCWD in the past—very often praised the District and its staff members.

"Watershed [District] is a reliable service with excellent staff."

Survey participant

"I would probably go to the contact at the watershed district...and then they would direct me if I needed to go somewhere else... they've been responsive."

Interview participant

Residents: Good Ways to Know Water Investments are Working

When asked how to know our water management efforts are working, most interview participants pointed to **clean water for drinking and recreation**. Phase 2 survey respondents were not asked this question (due to time limitations).

"The proof is in what's coming out of the tap."

Interview participant

Residents: Other Findings

Residents don't know what they currently pay for CCWD

Interview participants were asked **what additional tax amount would be acceptable to pay** for increased water management efforts. Very few people were able to even guess at an amount, primarily because **none of them knew what they currently pay, nor what added amount might be proposed. Others were unclear whether the tax they currently pay comes out of property taxes or another source.**

"I buy lottery tickets to support you."

Interview participant

Awareness of 2045 deadline for cleaner water is limited

Seven out of the ten interview participants and six out of every ten survey participants were unaware of the 2045 deadline by which CCWD and the seven area municipalities must meet water quality improvement targets/lower TMDL levels.

Residents: Implications of this Data

Working with residents should:

- **Bring all stakeholders, including community representatives, together** to build a sense of shared responsibility and demonstrate cooperation.
- Offer community briefings and/or work sessions quarterly, or as frequently as each municipality will embrace (such as at planning commission meetings, council meetings, site tours, or public workshops). Publicize these opportunities to members of the community.
- Communicate more frequently with residents, such as running a monthly column on water management issues and approaches in municipal newsletters. Consider beginning to publish a quarterly CCWD newsletter or signing up residents (and municipal leaders) for periodic updates on the progress of water quality improvement efforts—similar to the bulletins people receive about road improvements. Publicize the updates and encourage subscriptions. The content should follow the communications recommendations.

Communications with residents should:

- **Emphasize how efforts are preserving and improving public health and keeping water safe for drinking and recreation**—as well as repeating other key messages.
- Position water quality improvement efforts as **community challenges** rather than CCWD/city/government challenges.
- Be clear and specific about current and proposed tax amounts to address water management improvements (to meet TMDL goals). Show why investments are worthwhile. Use visually-compelling graphics to demonstrate the financial and human benefits of investment in water management and **make tangible the costs of not acting**. Again, emphasize key messages.
- Increase awareness of the 2045 water quality deadline, and how it will impact residents (positively, in terms of public health and flood prevention, and negatively, in terms of cost per household). Explain the “exchange” using key messages, e.g., “\$20 per area household per year will protect clean water for drinking and recreation, and help to control pollution.”

Residents: Communications Channels and Messengers

We recommend communicating with residents through:

- CCWD column in city newsletters and websites
- CCWD newsletter or bulletins (new) and website
- CCWD outreach through social media, direct mail, utility bills
- CCWD presentations at city meetings
- CCWD presence at community events

As noted earlier, we recommend helping municipal decision makers communicate with the public through:

- Content for city newsletters, city websites
- Explainer resources city staff can use, such as handouts, infographs, and videos
- Inserts in utility bills and other mailings
- CCWD presence at public events
- CCWD question on resident surveys (Fridley has one biannually)
- Public awareness campaign

Meaningful Differences Between Audiences

The participating municipal leaders and residents were quite similar in the views they expressed, especially that **both groups perceive public health and water quality as the most important reasons to take action on water management**. Yet some differences were observed.

- Infrastructure was not often mentioned by residents to researchers unless they had experienced flooding or damage on their own property. However, municipal leaders did often mention flooding and protecting infrastructure as reasons to pursue water management.
- Residents suggested the best way to prevent flooding and erosion was by working together across communities, while municipal leaders were more likely to talk about working within their own community.
 - In the resident survey, “working together across communities to prevent flooding and erosion” and working together across communities to maintain and improve water quality” were frequently rated as priorities – both for overall water management and as justifications for tax increases.
 - “Long-term planning based on expected water needs” was also highly rated as “making sense,” however, it was not as well supported as a justification for a tax increase. Note that municipalities that have engaged in long-term planning around water management were more likely to be aware of and preparing for the 2045 deadline.
- Several municipal leaders said they are looking for a cost-benefit balance, while residents don't know what they currently pay for water management.
- Members of both groups expressed some distrust in government, yet showed trust in their own city staff/local city and CCWD.
- Leaders are asking for more detailed progress reports as well as “explainer” resources in plain language, while residents are relying on information from their city or CCWD.



Communication Recommendations: All Audiences

All Audiences: Research-driven Key Messages

The top key messages—or talking points—across **all audiences**, based on this research, are:

Coon Creek Watershed District works across communities to:

- 1. Keep water safe for drinking and recreation***
- 2. Help control pollution to keep people, fish, and wildlife safe***
- 3. Prevent damage from flooding and erosion***
- 4. Protect roads and bridges through responsible water management***
- 5. Protect water for future generations***

All Audiences: Communications Channels and Messengers

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