

INFORMING AND INVOLVING THE PUBLIC

GOAL

To promote a better understanding and appreciation of the Lake Champlain Basin and its resources in order to encourage greater public participation, individual responsibility, and action for protecting these resources.



Children learn about water pollution with the LCBP's watershed model at a Boy Scout field day.

The future of the Lake Champlain Basin rests in the hands of its citizens and leaders. Public information and involvement efforts must continue and expand to involve people actively in protecting and appreciating the resources of the entire Basin. Ultimately, a public that understands the water quality and related resource management problems of the Basin, as well as possible solutions to those problems, can make informed choices about its long-term protection and restoration.

Informing the public and direct citizen involvement can achieve many of the priority actions discussed in this Plan. Each priority action in this Plan recognizes the need for strong public support and individual action. For example, an effective way to help reduce the spread of zebra mussels is to inform boaters to inspect and clean their boats if they have been in infested waters. This can be achieved through interpretive signs or displays, literature, presentations, and/or citizen taskforces. This has been accomplished successfully in Minnesota, where boater survey results indicate that boater education programs have been effective in changing boater behavior and reducing the spread of harmful exotic species.

The cumulative results of many individual actions make a difference in the complex issues facing the Lake Champlain Basin. Individual responsibility in protecting a shared resource is very important; people must become aware of how they contribute to pollution before they can take responsible actions to reduce and prevent it. When people are given the opportunity to develop awareness, knowledge, skills, and commitment towards a Basin issue, they can make informed decisions and take constructive actions. When people know how they can make a difference, they will.

ISSUES

The Need for Increased Public Awareness and Understanding of Basin Issues

Public awareness and understanding of Lake Champlain Basin issues and the priority actions needed to address them is limited. This is especially true of communities located further from the Lake whose residents may be unaware that they are within the Lake Champlain drainage basin and therefore connected to the quality of Lake resources. People need to become aware of a problem before they can understand how they contribute to it and assume responsibility for solving it.

The Need for Local Community Involvement

The real power in public involvement comes from the local or community level. Programs that bring together students, professionals, and community members are powerful and cost-effective tools. Community involvement is especially important for addressing issues that occur in only specific areas of the Basin. People most affected by an issue are best able to address that issue. At a community or watershed level, partnerships can be created and local action taken.

The Need for More Individual Action

Public awareness of the problems within the Basin is growing, but there is a definite lack of information about how each of us can help to solve these issues. People must understand their responsibility as stewards of the Basin, and must speak out for its protection. Using the public's skills, energy, and enthusiasm is important when addressing priority Basin issues. Additional opportunities that allow individuals to become involved and take action need to be created. Programs that emphasize how each person can make a difference need to be implemented.



Launching the *Red Wing*, a long boat built by Addison County students at the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum.

OBJECTIVES

(not listed in priority order)

- 1) Promote public and governmental awareness and understanding of issues in the Lake Champlain Basin and the priority actions needed to address them.
- 2) Facilitate public participation in the development of public policy for the Lake Champlain Basin and in activities relating to its cleanup and protection.
- 3) Build community awareness and stewardship of the Lake Champlain Basin ecosystem and its value to the region.
- 4) Increase individual responsibility for Basin issues by developing programs that allow individuals to become involved and take action.
- 5) Increase communication and cooperation among the diverse groups involved in Lake Champlain Basin education and outreach.
- 6) Develop a flexible, sustainable, community-based organizational framework supported by public and private funds for public involvement and education in all aspects of Basin management.
- 7) Develop long-term environmental stewardship and understanding of the Lake Champlain Basin by enhancing educational opportunities at all educational levels.

ACTIONS

(not listed in priority order)

1) Build Awareness and Understanding of Basin Resources

Work with the general public, interest groups, and decision makers to build awareness and understanding of the key natural resource issues in the Basin and the priority actions needed to address them. This should include information on how these priority issues and actions contribute to and interact with social and economic values. Specific components of this action include:

a) Develop printed and other educational materials such as citizen action guides, slide shows, internet materials, videos, public service announcements, press releases, mobile displays, and computer models for specific audiences.

b) Conduct presentations to special interest groups, communities, and local government decision makers.

c) Display exhibits at conferences, fairs, and expositions.

d) Hold public forums and field trips on priority Basin issues and actions, and serve as a vehicle for translating local Basin issues and priority actions.

e) Hold a State of the Lake conference periodically to bring together those interested in the Basin and to share progress, address challenges, and provide public education and involvement.

f) Develop a speakers' bureau on priority Basin issues.

g) Provide comprehensive Resource Rooms where individuals can obtain historic and current information on the Basin.

h) Help coordinate communication between existing education and outreach organizations, and develop partnerships.

i) Evaluate the effectiveness of education and outreach activities to determine their impact on local citizens, municipalities, and non-governmental organizations.

j) Foster partnerships with local media, including television, radio, and print media to cover Basin issues regularly.

k) Maintain the volunteer Education Advisory Committee to help coordinate Basin-wide educational efforts.

Potential key LCBP partners: Federal agencies, state agencies, provincial agencies, municipalities, schools, universities/colleges, and private/nonprofit organizations

Cost estimate: \$175,000 per year

Potential funding sources: Federal grants, state funds, in-kind matches (private and nonprofit)

Timeframe: Annually

Benchmarks: Development and distribution of products listed in a, d, and e; completion of b, c, and f through k

2) Produce Coordinated Education Programs for Students

Work with state and local educators to organize educational materials about the Basin and produce coordinated education programs for students based on priority issues and actions.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Local connections and lake stewardship are fostered through many LCBP-supported information and outreach programs. Ongoing programs include community education grants, citizen involvement opportunities, and providing about 100 school and community outreach programs annually. Some highlights include:

CHAMPLAIN BASIN EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Through CBEI, the LCBP partners with six local education organizations, including the Adirondack Visitor Interpretive Center and Shelburne Farms, to help educators teach about the Lake. Since 1992, 474 educators have participated.

SPECIAL MEDIA PROJECTS

The LCBP issues news releases about the Lake and progress towards implementing *Opportunities for Action*. In May 1999, the LCBP began a new partnership with WPTZ News Channel 5 and KeyBank, called *Champlain 2000*, which highlights Lake issues. More than 100 topics, such as pulling water chestnuts, "adopt-a-salmon," and reducing pesticides have aired. The series has won several environmental and media awards. The LCBP has also participated in a news series on Vermont Public Radio and has been a guest on local call-in programs.

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ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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WEBSITES & PUBLICATIONS

In 1999, the LCBP significantly upgraded its website, www.lcbp.org, which provides online access to *Opportunities for Action*, the *Casin' the Basin* newsletter, the *Lake Champlain Basin Atlas*, fact sheets, volunteer opportunities, and webpages for local watershed groups. LCBP-supported publications include the curriculum guide, *This Lake Alive!*, and the *Lake Champlain Basin Atlas*.

THE LEAHY CENTER FOR LAKE CHAMPLAIN

Since 1995, the LCBP has supported the Center's student and family educational programs, hands-on learning, and resource room. The LCBP will continue its support during the development of their new multimillion dollar facility and when the facility opens in 2003.

Ensure coordination with existing education and outreach organizations. Components of this approach include:

- a) Conduct teacher training workshops.*
- b) Complete comprehensive teacher training institutes.*

c) Develop a comprehensive Basin Resource Guide for educators to use in developing units on Lake Champlain (the Resource Guide should be based on protecting and enhancing the environmental integrity of the Lake Champlain Basin, taking into consideration social and economic benefits).

d) Work with state education departments to integrate Basin education into classrooms.

e) Provide opportunities for teachers and students to participate in Basin-related field trips and restoration projects.

f) Provide Basin-related presentations to schools.

g) Evaluate the success of education initiatives.

h) Use the Internet and other media to share Lake Champlain data with students and teachers.

Potential key LCBP partners: Federal agencies, state agencies, provincial agencies, municipalities, schools, universities/colleges, and private/nonprofit organizations

Cost estimate: \$100,000 per year

Potential funding sources: Federal grants, in-kind matches (private and no-profit)

Timeframe: Annually

Benchmark: Completion of components a through h above, including the distribution of Lake Champlain Resource Guide to Basin educators

3) Provide Opportunities for Hands-on Citizen Action and Implementation of the Plan

Provide and encourage opportunities for citizen involvement in Basin issues and priority actions to aid in the implementation of the

Plan. Examples of possible programs include:

a) Increase opportunities to prevent pollution, such as toxic reduction programs, recycling programs, and citizen action guides.

b) Coordinate nutrient management and toxics reduction outreach to farmers.

c) Develop opportunities for citizens to become more aware of and help monitor the spread of nuisance nonnative aquatic species.

d) Organize river and lake cleanups.

e) Coordinate and support partnership opportunities through local implementation and education grants to increase public involvement.

f) Develop and organize a Lake Champlain Basin Conservation Corps using existing programs, such as the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC).

g) Strengthen the links among the public, local groups, and volunteers.

Potential key LCBP partners: Federal agencies, state agencies, municipalities, schools, universities/colleges, and private and nonprofit organizations

Cost estimate: \$125,000 per year

Potential funding sources: Federal grants, state funding, in-kind matches (private and nonprofit)

Timeframe: Annually

Benchmark: Development and implementation of hands-on activities, such as river and lake cleanups