Communications and Outreach Project: Lawn Watering Wisdom and Landscaping for Clean Water Marketing Campaign



Figure 1. Screenshot of the Landscaping for Clean Water marketing campaign video.

Overview

In 2021, the first of three consecutive years of drought, nearly 10 billion more gallons of water were used in Dakota County than in 2019. Data from local governments found that the amount of water pumped during landscape irrigation months (May-September) was as much as four times that of all other months. Though the County, cities, watershed management organizations (WMOs), and the Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District (DCSWCD) offer conservation programs, public awareness of these tools is lacking. Due to how social media platforms prioritize paid advertisements, the reach of organic (non-paid) messages is limited.

To improve this, Dakota County, DCSWCD, Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization (VRWJPO), Black Dog WMO, Eagan-Inver Grove Heights WMO, and Lower Mississippi River WMO partnered to run a paid multi-platform video marketing campaign, promoting the DCSWCD Landscaping for Clean Water (LCW) program and irrigation water conservation best practices. The VRWJPO received a Clean Water Fund Groundwater Protection Accelerated Implementation Grant from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) to fund part of the campaign. Partners were inspired by a humorous video series from a conservation district in Utah, which led to a 769% increase in participants in that district's programming.

Partners hired a local communications and marketing agency to create paid advertisements targeted to all ZIP codes in Dakota County. The agency worked with a local video production firm to shoot two 2-

minute videos featuring a fictional Dakota County family, leveraging humor to inform residents of ways to conserve water. The videos were edited into shorter versions for Facebook and Instagram advertisements, while the full versions can be seen on YouTube. The Dakota County SWCD social media accounts hosted the ads. Partners shared social media toolkits with Dakota County LGUs to encourage them to post organic campaign content on their respective pages.

Landscaping for Clean Water

The first targeted video ad, focused on LCW, launched in February 2025, coinciding with the start of LCW classes, and ran through the end of May 2025.

- 151,422 people saw the ads.
- 357 people registered for the LCW introductory class during the campaign, up by 80 from 2024.
- Key messages included:
    - Lower cost of native gardens compared to traditional lawns, free LCW class, and opportunity for a grant
    - Environmental benefits of native plant raingardens to water quality, pollinator habitat
    - Lower maintenance requirements for native plants (once established) than non-native ones

Lawn Watering Wisdom

The second targeted ad, focused on LWW, ran from February through August 2025, hitting the highest-irrigation months. Viewers were directed to sign the Dakota County Water Wise Pledge.

- 142,323 people saw the ads.
- 427 people clicked on the link to the Water Wise Pledge. The campaign was optimized for video views rather than link clicks.
- The summer of 2025 received much higher precipitation than the drought years that motivated the campaign. There may have been less interest for that reason.
- Key messages included:
    - Healthy lawns with less water
    - Saving water and money over the summer
    - Don't irrigate if it rains
    - Check sprinklers for leaks and use smart irrigation systems

For a full recap of the campaign, read the consultant's final report.

Campaign timeline: February – October 2025

Partners and Contributions:

- Dakota County: $10,000
- DCSWCD: $7,500
- VRWJPO: $10,000
- Black Dog WMO: $7,500
- Eagan-Inver Grove Heights WMO: $7,500
- Lower Mississippi River WMO: $7,500
- MDH: $50,000 Accelerated Implementation Grant

Benefits:

- Greater participation in LCW will lead to more native plants in the ground, which require less watering than non-natives once the plants are established. They can also reduce stormwater runoff pollution and provide pollinator habitat.
- The VRWJPO's Urban Water Conservation Program (2018-2023) showed many irrigation systems are not properly installed or maintained, leading to significant water waste. Regular irrigation system inspection, maintenance and weather-based technologies can result in significant water and cost savings.

LANDSCAPING FOR CLEAN WATER

Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District

Figure 2. Landscaping for Clean Water logo.



Figure 3. Screenshot from the Lawn Watering Wisdom campaign video.

A grant via the Minnesota Department of Health from the Clean Water Fund, one of four funds established by the Clean Water, Land & Legacy Amendment, supports this project.

CLEAN WATER LAND & LEGACY AMENDMENT

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