

Action Planning Discussion Summary

Friends of Bass Lake, Winter 2018-2019

Prepared by

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INTRODUCTION

In 2016, Friends of Bass Lake (FOBL) worked with Freshwater to develop a two-year action plan designed to help guide the work of the organization. Three years later, many of the strategies identified in that first plan have been put into use, and a number of projects have been completed. With momentum built and successes noted, FOBL invited Freshwater to come back and facilitate another action-planning process, consisting of a series of workshops and meetings described below.

The first workshop was held on December 10, 2018 in the place of the standard monthly meeting. Freshwater began the workshop with an introductory question about what hope each person had for the future of Bass Lake. The answers to this question varied but revolved around restoring the health of the lake, using the lake recreationally, partnering successfully with other groups and government entities, and having a high functioning lake association organization. This question pointed out that although the hopes in the room varied, the ultimate goal of serving the lake and community was common ground. With that grounding understanding, Freshwater then led the participants through an interactive exercise consisting of three questions discussed in small groups:

- In two years, what does success look like?
- What challenges or barriers do you anticipate running into?
- What actions can we take to address these barriers and work towards success?

By using open-ended questions, a wide range of comments could be received. Before moving on to the next question, participants categorized the comments they had recorded in their small groups. Comments included in the analysis for this report were written by participants themselves, and maintained verbatim throughout the analysis.

On January 14, Freshwater hosted the FOBL second meeting as a follow up meeting that would turn the group's strategies into action items. Freshwater created a blank timeline and asked the group to review the strategies laid out from the last meeting and write action steps needed to implement those strategies. After all of the actions were written down, the group placed the actions along the timeline for all to see and describe the intent of the action.

This report summarizes the outcome from of both meetings, and was expanded upon by a smaller task force group of FOBL volunteers on January 29, 2019. Verbatim transcriptions of the meetings are available separate from the report.

DEFINING SHORT-TERM SUCCESS

It's easy to dream big and think about what the ultimate goal looks like, but that desired future condition doesn't often provide realistic expectations of what can be achieved in the near future. For that reason, the first conversation focused on what participants felt success could look like in two years' time.

In general, two categories of comments emerged through the discussion: those pertaining to Bass Lake as a resource, and those pertaining to FOBL as an organization. As a whole, participants focused considerably more attention on internal and interpersonal goals than on environmental resource goals, but it is important to note that prevalence of response does not necessarily signify higher importance. After all, it is clear that a stronger organization with increased visibility and capacity is desired in order to better care for the lake.

Sustainable, healthy, and enjoyable Bass Lake

As has been a central focus of the group for years, restoring the natural systems and improving water quality in and around Bass Lake is again a priority. Within the lake, cattail removal and water quantity management are specifically mentioned as goals. Around the lake, woodland management is identified as a priority for continued work. Both of these restoration efforts have as an outcome an increase in usable space for recreation, though there is also recognition of the importance of making sure that sustainable ecosystems and increased recreation do not undermine each other.

“Stem loss of biodiversity and restore habitat to a more hospitable state”

Specific targets for buckthorn removal and planting efforts were mentioned in addition to the broader ecological goals above. In addition to FOBL-led projects, participants noted that the organization needs to be strengthened and maintain a healthy level of activity in order to accomplish work in this category.

Strong and effective Friends of Bass Lake

Internally, participants highlighted a desire to increase board and organization membership and capacity. Doing so would further stabilize the budget and allow for new projects to begin and existing projects to be redistributed. Together, this could provide reduced workload for long-time members and opportunities to empower new members to initiate or lead projects. Additionally, success would be marked by buy-in into a shared vision while maintaining the ability to respect diverse opinions. Being thoughtful about what projects to take on, diversifying funding sources through grants and partnerships, as well as establishing a board with diverse backgrounds and skillsets are identified as important ways to work on much of this.

Externally, participants want to enhance existing and build new partnerships with other organizations and the local government, as well as increase the visibility of Bass Lake and FOBL. Both would require time and a focus on messaging and communications, but could result in aligned visions for the site that leverage funding sources, increased use of the trail, increased fundraising and membership, and the opportunity to be proactive with new developments in the region.

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS, AND STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME THEM

Even while discussing the possible successes from the previous page, it can be hard to not begin thinking about all the things that make reaching that success difficult. As a natural next step, then, participants were asked to consider the barriers or challenges they anticipate running into. The idea is not to fixate on these barriers, but to name them so that they may be included in responding to the third question on developing strategies to work towards success.

Internal Challenges and Opportunities

As an organization, internal challenges that participants identified are not unique to FOBL itself. In fact, recruiting and retaining board members, building organizational capacity, prioritizing goals and managing tradeoffs, and raising sufficient funds are at the core of many organizational struggles. In discussing how to move forward, participants offered the following broad strategies:

Clarify shared messaging. FOBL should look to establish a shared vision and use that to both review the mission statement and draft an elevator speech for the organization. This will help in communicating about the group and its purpose both internally and externally.

“Cohesive Vision and consistent message”

Build internal capacity. Whether it is bringing in external help to assist with growth challenges and build expertise, enhancing orientation to the organization for new members, or empowering existing members to step into leadership roles, there are a number of calls to build internal capacity. This will require a balancing of trust and empowerment with group cohesion and shared work. It may also require bringing in others to help provide guidance on board development, grant writing, and other areas of expertise.

Use funding wisely. Of course, increasing revenue is always important, but in addition to raising funds, participants also pointed out a need to prioritize tasks and prepare for potential future impacts.

Consider possible tradeoffs. Especially when it relates to ecological systems and recreation, there is the potential to have to make decisions that require compromise.

External Challenges and Opportunities

Within externally-focused comments on challenges, two major themes emerged: the environmental, and the human. Environmental comments addressed the FOBL-led projects that have taken off in the last few years, noting the challenges of aggressive invasive species and the unpredictability of nature. Human comments largely centered on the difficulty in building community awareness and support, the slow pace of change from governmental bodies, and the potential to have conflicting goals.

While the external challenges had a clear delineation in theme, the strategies did not have so clear a divide, noting an awareness and acceptance of what the group can or cannot influence. Participants identified the following broad strategies:

“Create city education and interest”

Foster interest and support from residents. In addition to existing communication methods, FOBL could look to work with schools, scouts, or other local partners to build educational programming for youth.

Connecting with neighborhood groups or those that share common goals could also help build awareness and support, ultimately helping to build capacity and potentially expand the membership base.

Strengthen and reestablish relationships with key partners. A clearly noted item is that, if it is to be successful, FOBL can’t do this work alone. Establishing partnerships with similar groups can help FOBL grow as an organization and build momentum towards common causes.

Reestablishing and strengthening partnerships with decision-making and funding bodies through dialogue and positive advocacy can help publicly identify FOBL as a partner and support work towards mutual goals. The most cited groups to make those collaborative connections with were the City of St. Louis Park and the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District.

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ACTION PLAN

Based on the discussions summarized in the above pages, the group identified action steps to guide FOBL through implementing the identified broad strategies over the coming couple of years. The timeframe is built inside of a year, at which point the group can assess their accomplishments and move incomplete actions into the upcoming year and build additional steps based on the need at that time. The timeframe is laid out so that the tasks are completed within the timeframe. This means the tasks can be worked toward simultaneously.

Timeframe	Action Step	Who
3 months	<p>Internal organization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review mission, vision and action statement and revise to meet group’s needs. • Create an agreement that states that there will be discussion, collaboration and a balance of interests on all projects and decisions of the group. • Adopt a regular practice for meeting invites (who they go out to and how they are sent) • Set operating principals for agenda creation • Set operating principals for organizational spending • Incorporate a set of meeting conduct criteria into group practices along with rules of order (i.e. Robert’s Rules) • Identify and prioritize areas in the organization that need professional assistance from Freshwater and MN Council of Non-profits (i.e. fundraising strategies, board building, communications, etc.) – May require funding • Develop a budget with all ideas and costs to develop a fundraising and spending strategy • Establish good procedures re: planning and follow accepted plan to avoid conflict with group and with funders <p>Study Loring park pond as an example of how cattails have been managed and the response of existing wildlife to that management</p> <p>Focus whole group’s attention on fostering memberships and creating new members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create committees and assign members to lead • Hold board elections – invite public • Create a survey for the FOBL e-mail list to help guide the group in involving the greater community in the organization’s work. <p>Continue to build on organizational successes such as with</p>	

	<p>projects, annual report, Arbor Day event, etc.</p> <p>Discuss funding strategies as they relate to small or large projects</p> <p>Reach out to DNR for someone to connect about the area and the overlap of recreation and conservation/recreation.</p> <p>Make connection with the city to discuss the preserve and discuss best communication, partnering and projects plan</p>	
6 months	<p>Create an agreed upon set of organizational goals and project goals</p> <p>Share FOBL's cohesive messaging through all communication channels (committee-led)</p> <p>Find volunteers willing to do planting (with knowledge or interest in native plants)</p> <p>Ask representative from Bush Lake association to come talk about their organization's structure and projects.</p> <p>Agree upon or review succession plan for board recruitment</p>	
1 year	<p>Recognize the site's progress from wasteland to nature preserve. Recognize the FOBL group's progress (however slow the process is) in attaining goals.</p> <p>Engage volunteers interested in planting and other projects from various groups or interests (i.e. Scouts, Wild Ones, Master Gardeners)</p> <p>Engage people who are active in Saint Louis Park environmental issues</p> <p>Find out what the neighborhood groups around the preserve are interested in seeing or utilizing at the preserve</p>	

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