

CHAPTER 11. EDUCATION/OUTREACH

SUMMARY

Education and outreach has been an important part of the Seneca Lake Watershed Project. The education and outreach effort has resulted in the creation of a variety of tools including brochures, displays, presentations, and the municipal “Call to Cooperation.” Sound information used by residents, visitors, municipal officials and others can lead to action to improve and protect Seneca Lake. The next major step will be to take the Seneca Lake State of the Watershed report to the public and municipalities as a basis for planning and future action.

BACKGROUND

A watershed protection program leading to a watershed management plan necessarily contains a large educational component. Some of the most basic terms, such as watershed, require explanation, exercise and connection to readily observed phenomena in peoples’ lives.

Educational process must, however, be distinguished from research, technical procedures and information-sharing. Education process is often slow and difficult to quantify. It requires materials to be learned, facilitators or teachers, and willing, properly prepared learners. Attempts have been made to quantify learning by studying behavioral change.

Though the terms “learning curve” and the “teachable moment” have been incorporated into our common everyday speech, they also describe actual processes that can be observed in a watershed protection educational program. The progressive engagement of a learner, from one who scarcely knows the term “watershed” to one comfortable with more detailed concepts and models such as nutrient cycles is a good definition of the learning curve. In some ways, the learning curve is also a matter of remembering, and applying, what we probably have already learned. It emphasizes learning as a process with its own dynamic.

The “teachable moment” concept emphasizes that we are not always in a position to learn. When some thing or condition is missing, the learner cannot fully integrate the lesson into his/her life. Often, in school, proper contexts for lessons are missing. A watershed protection educational program, on the other hand, offers a magnificent context. It’s never too late to apply those earth science, geology, biology, chemistry and physics concepts to actual places in the watershed. Indeed, place-based learning is an important modern educational concept.

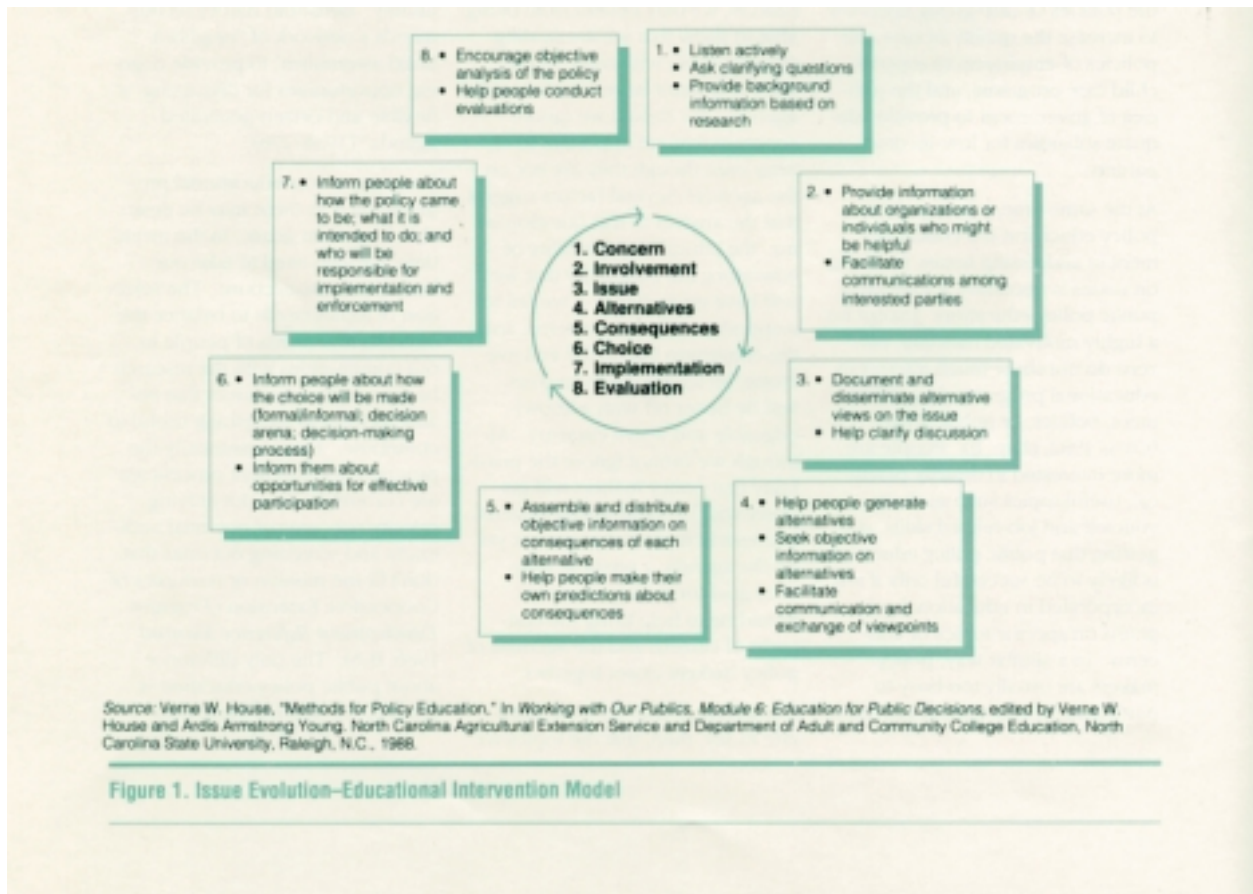
An educational program to promote watershed protection will need to produce the proper materials and experiences to educate a variety of audiences. If the materials are not proper audience will lose interest. Some of the audiences which must be reached include organized and unorganized interest-groups, children (at three scholastic levels), local

government, farmers, cottage-owners, developers, businesses, municipal water drinkers, industries, highway superintendents, anglers and boaters.

Some of these audiences are already well-organized and receiving instruction. Children, for example, attend schools, and the watershed educational program for them need only produce curricular items and train the teachers in their use. Some of the audiences seldom meet and require a different strategy. For example, business owners may be initially approached through a Chamber of Commerce, asked to fill out a survey (which may fulfill an educational function in questions asked), and results of that survey can be reported back at a service club meeting. In most cases, the audiences are already organized and probably will readily accept education in the form of a guest speaker or other offers to provide them with watershed-oriented educational materials. In these cases, a teachable moment occurs when the audience realizes that they share a mutual interest with the teacher. A few audiences, such as cottage-owners and boaters, are transitory and difficult to reach with educational programs.

Alan J. Hahn's "Resolving Public Issues and Concerns through Policy Education" (*see Figure 11.1*) offers an excellent summary and Education Intervention Model applicable to environmental problem-solving. Hahn divides the flow of "issue evolution" into eight steps primarily involving Concern, Involvement, Issue, Alternatives, Consequences, Choice, Implementation, and Evaluation. Lyle Raymond's publications offer practical insights drawn from the experience of using educational models and principles in organizing watersheds.

Figure 11.1 Resolving Public Issues and Concerns through Policy Education



EDUCATION/AWARENESS FOR SENECA LAKE

Education / awareness for the Seneca Lake Watershed Project is challenged by the size of the watershed and oftentimes divergent priorities and interests that are more sub-watershed-based than watershed-based. The education/outreach process for the project has benefited from the education/outreach programs utilized in the Keuka and Canandaigua Lake Watershed projects and, to the degree possible, by existing educational materials and programs developed by regional water quality agencies and Seneca Lake Pure Waters Association.

MISSION STATEMENT CENTERED ON EDUCATION

The mission statement for Seneca Lake Area Partners in Five Counties (SLAP-5), developed in 1997 (and updated in August 1999) is premised on meeting educational objectives for the Seneca Lake Watershed Project.

SLAP-5's mission is "...to protect and enhance Seneca Lake and its surrounding watershed through encouragement of sound management practices and cooperation at the

local level to develop a comprehensive approach for improving the quality of life and water in the Seneca Lake Watershed...”

DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING AN EDUCATION AND AWARENESS FOCUS

The preliminary watershed study completed by SLPWA in 1995, entitled “Seneca Lake Watershed: Developing an Understanding of an Important Natural Resource,” and subsequent watershed research funded by 319 and 604B grants provided the basis for developing a matrix of tasks for the Education/Outreach program for the Seneca Lake Watershed project.

Education/Outreach initiatives for the Seneca Lake Watershed Project focus on utilizing data gathered in the scientific and technical aspects of the watershed project to raise awareness of how the watershed works. Education/Outreach is directed toward keeping citizens and municipal governments informed and interested in the planning process by focusing educational initiatives on their particular region or subwatershed and providing a perspective on how it relates to the whole watershed. The emphasis on sub-watersheds is also directed at aiding local officials with future planning efforts. Education/Outreach initiatives utilize already tested programs from other watershed projects, such as those conducted on Canandaigua and Keuka Lakes in formatting activities for the Seneca Lake project.

POSITION OF EDUCATION COORDINATOR

A primary challenge to the Education/Outreach process has been the lack of a permanent full-time Education Coordinator. Therefore, many responsibilities have been assumed by various agencies in the SLAP-5 working group and SLPWA.

From September, 1997 to April 1998, SLPWA’s Executive Director was contracted for 50% time as Education Coordinator. Since her departure, SLPWA’s role in education has continued in the form of educational programs on watershed-based topics, newsletter production, special mailings on the watershed project and participation on the SLAP-5 Education Committee.

An interim Education Coordinator completed education tasks related to work on the Home-A-Syst project as well as some other watershed project education priorities. Most recently, from April - December 1999, a contractual arrangement between SLAP-5 and the Ontario County Soil & Water Conservation District, employed staff as an interim Education Coordinator. Primary tasks outlined for this arrangement were completion of a new brochure for the Seneca Lake Watershed project, expansion and development of the Education Committee to include more citizen participation and framing a municipal approach for 2000 that would emphasize citizen and municipal stakeholder participation in the planning process.

EDUCATION/OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Introductory public meetings (outlined in Chapter 10) were held in March 1998 at four watershed locations. The meetings provided an overview of the watershed management project for the Seneca Lake watershed and public input was also obtained. It is anticipated that some level of public forums, along with municipal presentations, will be held in 2000. Other public programs on specific watershed topics were held in 1999 through the auspices of SLPWA or other county agencies. A series of programs, entitled "Understanding Seneca Lake: Advocating Water Quality in the Seneca Lake Watershed," was developed to provide an understanding of how the watershed works along with current information on the watershed project and specific topics of concern expressed by watershed residents. Seven speakers provided overviews on such topics as the history of Seneca Lake, underwater archaeology, limnology, exotic species, fisheries, and lake level management. The series was funded by the Great Lakes Aquatic Habitat Fund and a new series is planned in 2000.

A "SLAP-5 News" section was developed for SLPWA's quarterly newsletter, Lakewatch, beginning in June 1998. News items on the progress of the watershed project are provided for Lakewatch by SLAP-5 members. (*see Appendix*). The newsletter is distributed to SLPWA members, as well as an extended mailing list including SLAP-5 participants, water quality agencies, municipal government representatives, media and educational institutions. Additional copies of the newsletter are distributed at various public functions SLPWA and SLAP-5 participate in annually. In addition, press releases are periodically produced about the scientific and technical aspects of the Seneca Lake Watershed Project and distributed to a wide range of regional media outlets.

Educational materials distributed include brochures, watershed maps, a watershed fact sheet, brochures on the Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Project in the Watershed, or information on upcoming watershed-related programs. Two portable exhibit display boards purchased by SLAP-5 and SLPWA display changing exhibits related to the Seneca Lake watershed at public events, private programs for community organizations, or at regional water quality conferences. These displays are accompanied by the above-mentioned educational materials.

Specific programs or updates on the Seneca Lake watershed project are presented at regular meetings of Water Quality Coordinating committees, special events such as SLPWA-sponsored meetings and programs, and at programs presented to other agencies or nonprofit organizations. Two Internet web sites provide regularly updated information on the watershed project. Genesee / Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council (G/FLRPC) has a website at <http://www.gflpc.org/seneca.htm#b> and Seneca Lake Pure Waters Association maintains its website at www.home.eznet.net/~slpwa/SLPWA.

CALLS FOR COOPERATION IN THE SENECA LAKE WATERSHED

The preliminary watershed document "*Seneca Lake Watershed Study: Developing an Understanding of an Important Natural Resource*" emphasized development of cooperation and participation of stakeholders as one of the four major components for planning, fundraising and implementing remedial strategies for the Seneca Lake Watershed Project. The process would build and sustain cooperation and participation of stakeholders by utilizing the technical and scientific data being gathered in the project to inform watershed residents about the current health of the watershed.

As part of this process, it was determined that developing municipal partnerships would be key to conserving Seneca Lake resources as certain protection strategies common to multiple subwatersheds on a regional basis were developed. Preliminary efforts in the beginning stages of the project to gain municipal participation included developing a "Call to Cooperation" between Seneca Lake Area Partners in Five Counties (SLAP-5) and the municipalities within the Seneca Lake Watershed stating that they were willing to cooperate in the development of the Seneca Lake Watershed study. The "Call to Cooperation" would also be supported by each county water quality coordinating committee.

The Seneca Lake watershed encompasses one city, and at least some portion of twenty-eight towns and eleven villages with over 300 municipal representatives. Efforts to involve municipalities in the watershed project began in earnest in 1997 when SLAP-5 called on municipalities in the Seneca Lake Watershed to sign a "Call for Cooperation" and initiated an ongoing process to keep them apprised of the watershed project.

Gaining support from municipalities within the Seneca Lake Watershed began with a formal approach at their regular business meetings to present information on the watershed project and outline the goals of the "Call to Cooperation" they were being requested to sign. To date fifteen municipalities have signed the "Call to Cooperation." All were generally very supportive of SLAP-5 and the watershed project, even if not initially supportive of signing the resolution. In fact, many of the same towns had signed a similar resolution to endorse the Seneca Lake Pure Waters Association in 1990. At the time they were approached, primary concerns expressed included minimal concern about whether monetary support would be sought from municipalities for the watershed project and concerns by a few about what was termed "excess of environmental policy" in their municipality and the potential for adoption of more regulations.

SLAP-5's Education and Oversight Committees are currently framing the next phase of the municipal approach. The remaining municipalities will be requested to sign "Calls to Cooperation" in 2000. Also, at the same time, municipal presentations will provide updates on the current status of the watershed planning process and information stemming from completion of a preliminary draft "State of the Watershed Report". The process will involve teams of agency personnel and citizens making presentations on the watershed project at regularly scheduled municipal meetings. The approach will initially target 15

municipalities with lakeshore frontage, followed by presentations to the remaining municipalities and a follow-up process. The committees are recruiting agency representatives and citizens from the SLAP-5 working group and lake association membership to work together on making these presentations. Training session for teams and municipal presentations will begin in early 2000.

Ongoing contact with the municipalities will be maintained by continued production of educational materials, updates about the watershed study mailed in municipal packets and through SLPWA's quarterly newsletter, Lakewatch, and ongoing programs and public forums on watershed-based topics.