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Long-Range Plan for Public Involvement and Education (FINAL VERSION)

February 2001

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1 **I. Introduction**

2 This Long Range Plan (LRP) for the Public Involvement & Education (PIE) Program has
3 been designed to maximize the probability that the development of the Watershed
4 Management Plan will adequately incorporate all meaningful public input in a timely
5 manner, minimize the probability that the Watershed Management Plan will fail to be
6 developed, approved, or implemented due to an inadequate level of public
7 understanding, and reflect the contributions of the community. To achieve these goals,
8 it is important that community members be capable of contributing to their fullest. This
9 requires that:

- 10
- 11 ▪ The community be engaged in the process of developing the Watershed
12 Management Plan
- 13 ▪ The community has an understanding of the issues and the science, including its
14 limitations, that allows them to contribute to the choices and solutions
- 15 ▪ Under the existing structure of representatives of interests, the broader groups
16 represented by Planning Unit members have sufficient knowledge to understand the
17 process and the science, and offer up reasoned solutions to the issues through their
18 representatives
- 19

20 This LRP was developed with the recognition that there are two distinct phases of the
21 public involvement and education process. Phase One will take place during the
22 Watershed Management Plan development and approval process, and thus
23 corresponds with Sections 1 through 5 of the WRIA 1 Watershed Management Project
24 Overall Scope of Work (March 2000). Phase Two will begin after the Watershed
25 Management Plan has been approved and begins to be implemented, and thus
26 corresponds with Section 6 of the March 2000 Overall Scope of Work. It is anticipated
27 that the types and levels of public concern with the Watershed Plan will be markedly
28 different in each Phase. For example, in Phase One, input might most likely come from
29 the more politically and socially active members of the community, and be focused on
30 more general concerns of a philosophical or ideological nature, while in Phase Two, as
31 the Plan is implemented, citizens who are directly impacted by various aspects of the
32 Plan's implementation might be more likely to raise concerns specific to their situation
33 and locale.

34

35 This LRP was developed recognizing that there is a considerable diversity of audiences
36 to which it must be directed, and that these audiences have widely differing levels of
37 information regarding water resource issues, and differing needs for content, delivery
38 form, and timing of information on those issues.

39

40 The intent of the PIE program is to neutrally convey information, without bias or
41 manipulation, between the community and the Watershed Management Project. The
42 PIE program is not intended to be a public relations effort to “sell” the Watershed

1 Management Plan to the community. Great care will be taken to ensure that PIE is not
2 used as a political tool.
3
4

5 **II. Situation Analysis**

6 The WRIA 1 Watershed Management Project encompasses 1,280 square miles, or
7 820,000 acres. Diverse individuals and organizations have a vested interest in managing
8 WRIA 1's water resources for a multitude of beneficial uses.
9

10 There is little to no awareness of the Project among the general citizenry of WRIA 1. As
11 of July 2000, the primary method of public involvement in the WRIA 1 Watershed
12 Management Project has been the caucus structure. Some caucuses have been able to
13 inform most of their potential members of the Project and the future Watershed
14 Management Plan; others have had more difficulty in reaching out to or involving
15 potential constituents.
16

17 As the WRIA 1 Watershed Management Plan will be a comprehensive look at water
18 issues in WRIA 1, it is likely that public involvement and education efforts will be
19 integrated with other water resource programs.
20

21 The current shared decision-making process must be undertaken in a manner that
22 builds its credibility and the comfort level of its participants.
23
24

25 **III. Target Audiences**

26 The audiences for the LRP are diverse. These groups have differing levels of
27 understanding, interest and investment in the WRIA 1 planning process and the WRIA
28 1 Watershed Management Plan, but it is essential to the success of the process and the
29 plan to effectively engage all of them. Audiences identified to date include:
30

- 31 ▪ **WRIA 1 caucuses.** The membership size, methods of communication, levels of
32 knowledge and involvement, and needs for information vary widely from caucus to
33 caucus, and fluctuate over time. These conditions pose a special challenge for the
34 PIE process. Caucus members will most likely need information about how the
35 Project and Project findings will affect them personally. Potential members who are
36 not yet affiliated with an appropriate caucus will also need caucus contact
37 information.
- 38 ▪ **Residents of priority sub-basins.** The technical teams will be focusing their initial
39 work on 14-20 drainages that represent a cross-section of WRIA 1 water resources.
40 These priority drainages also include a variety of land use activities. The presence of
41 field crews will likely provide some local visibility for the Project and could also be a

1 good opportunity to provide “in my backyard” education, although passersby with
2 extensive questions will be politely directed to office personnel. Targeting outreach
3 and educational activities to residents in these drainages will also alert the Project to
4 potential citizen concerns early on and will help the PIE technical team refine its
5 methods.

- 6 ■ **Elected officials and decision makers.** Elected officials face many competing
7 priorities for limited resources. Given their crucial role in approving and funding
8 the Watershed Management Plan, all reasonable efforts should be made to ensure
9 that their awareness of the WRIA 1 Watershed Management Project is sufficient for
10 informed decision-making.
- 11 ■ **Media.** Many citizens rely on the media for information about local issues. In 1999,
12 the WRIA 1 Interim PIE Coordinators conducted an information needs assessment
13 of the media in Whatcom County. The assessment indicated that awareness about
14 the Project varied from reporter to reporter. However, there seems to be general
15 agreement that the water issues being dealt with by the Project are a high priority to
16 their audiences, and reporters are interested in staying informed. To facilitate
17 balanced, accurate, and timely coverage, reporters will probably need in-depth
18 information on the issues and the Project findings.
- 19 ■ **General public.** Although little is known about public perceptions, there does not
20 seem to be a high level of awareness about the WRIA 1 Watershed Management
21 Project among the general citizenry. Efforts will be made to explain the relevance of
22 the Project to currently uninvolved citizens and to raise their interest in the Project to
23 the point where they wish to join a water resource interest caucus (or take advantage
24 of representative democracy through the governmental caucuses) and become
25 actively engaged in the planning process.

26 27 **IV. Purpose and Objectives**

28 The purpose of the public involvement and education effort is to provide neutral and
29 comprehensive information to citizens in WRIA 1 regarding Project issues; to seek,
30 collect and characterize input; and to assist in the incorporation of public input into the
31 planning process.

32
33 As provided for by Section 2.6 of the March 2000 Overall Scope of Work, the following
34 items will be pursued:

- 35 ■ Provide numerous opportunities for constructive public participation in the
36 Watershed Management Project
- 37 ■ Assist and support the public involvement process under NEPA and SEPA
- 38 ■ Build incremental understanding of issues throughout each of the phases of the
39 planning process and, through this understanding, foster widespread community
40 understanding of the final watershed management plan

1 The PIE program will strive to equip participants with the knowledge and skills to
2 make informed decisions, and to provide opportunities to develop and express
3 attitudes and aspirations about the process. The program objectives, by which success
4 will be evaluated, are:

- 5
- 6 ▪ Members of the community will acquire a sufficient understanding of the technical,
7 financial, and economic issues surrounding water quantity, water quality, instream
8 flow, and fish habitat to foster their productive contributions to practical and
9 acceptable solutions to identified issues.
- 10 ▪ Members of the community will have adequate access to information about the
11 WRIA 1 planning process.
- 12 ▪ Members of the community will exhibit their belief in the credibility of the shared
13 decision-making process by joining water resource interest caucuses (or taking
14 advantage of representative democracy through the governmental caucuses).
- 15 ▪ Members of the community will have numerous opportunities for constructive
16 public participation.
- 17 ▪ Members of the community will have opportunities for learning how their
18 comments have been incorporated into the planning process
- 19
- 20

21 V. Educational Strategies

22 *Strategy 1: Convey a clear vision of what the Watershed Management Project will do*

23 In order to generate community interest and engagement, the WRIA 1
24 planning process must be seen as a potentially significant and compelling
25 improvement over the current situation. Conveying a clear vision will be a
26 challenge because of the Project’s inherent complexity and relatively low
27 public profile.

28

29 *Strategy 2: Provide clear and readily understandable information*

30 The Watershed Management Project is highly technical in nature. Project
31 information must be readily understandable without being oversimplified.

32

33 *Strategy 3: Create a sense of personal connection between the region’s residents and the*
34 *Watershed Management Project*

35 Communications about the Project should answer the question, “What does
36 the Watershed Management Project have to do with me?” Unless that
37 connection is made, it will be difficult to get people to care about the
38 outcome of the planning process.

1 **VI. Involvement Strategies**

2 *Strategy 1: Solicit direct input*

3 The most straightforward way of learning what citizens think about the
4 Project is to ask them.

5
6 *Strategy 2: Stay attuned through “temperature taking”*

7 Not all citizens will participate in public meetings, respond to
8 questionnaires, or otherwise provide feedback through formal input
9 methods. The Project can stay aware of public perceptions and
10 understanding “through the grapevine.” The PIE effort will not use this as a
11 method to circulate information.

12
13 *Strategy 3: Close the loop*

14 The public’s trust of the Project will increase if citizens know and see how
15 their feedback is being used to shape the management plan. Public input
16 mechanisms should also be designed so that the information is easily used
17 in the planning process.
18

19 **VII. Key Messages**

20 All communications materials related to the WRIA 1 Watershed Management Project
21 should consistently reinforce simple and memorable messages about the Project.
22 Together these messages communicate the purpose of and need for the Project. The
23 following messages have been identified:

- 24
- 25 ■ The WRIA 1 Watershed Management Project is a shared decision-making process
26 intended to bring together citizens, local governments, tribes, and state and federal
27 agencies to develop plans for allocating water, protecting water quality, and
28 restoring fish habitat.
 - 29 ■ The Project aims to facilitate effective local solutions for our many water resource
30 challenges, such as endangered species recovery.
 - 31 ■ The WRIA 1 Watershed Management Project will base decisions on knowledge
32 acquired through the best available science.
 - 33 ■ Joining a caucus or communicating with your elected officials or caucus
34 representatives are the most effective ways to get actively involved in the planning
35 process.
 - 36 ■ The management plan will be flexible and goal-oriented.
- 37

38 **VIII. Methods and Activities**

39 The following activities have been identified as potential educational and involvement
40 methods. They are presented as recommendations to the Initiating Governments and

1 the Planning Unit. They are a menu of options, and will not necessarily be
2 implemented. A total budget will be determined when activities have been prioritized
3 and scheduled for implementation.

4
5 The following educational and involvement methods are organized according to target
6 audience. Some methods will apply to multiple audiences.

7
8 Objective 1

9 Members of the community will acquire a sufficient understanding of the technical,
10 financial, and economic issues surrounding water quantity, water quality, instream
11 flow, and fish habitat to foster their productive contributions to practical and acceptable
12 solutions to identified issues.

13
14 *Methods*

- 15 ▪ **Television, newspaper, and radio.** The use of television, radio and newspaper by
16 the WRIA 1 Watershed Management Project will be evaluated for effectiveness and
17 appropriateness.
- 18 ▪ **Identify local issues as “hooks.”** Associating the Project with local concerns, such as
19 financial issues, will help citizens to recognize the relevance of the Project to their
20 concerns.
- 21 ▪ **Use the drainage delineation map as an initial introduction, perhaps as version 2**
22 **is developed.** The drainage delineation map could be a useful tool in explaining the
23 project to individuals and showing them the context of the Project.

24
25
26 Objective 2

27 Members of the community will have adequate access to information about the WRIA 1
28 planning process.

29
30 *Methods*

- 31 ▪ **Web site.** Some citizens will want to know every detail about the WRIA 1
32 Watershed Management Project, others will want only the “bare bones” version. A
33 web site that serves as a repository for project information will help visitors access
34 as much or as little information as they like.
- 35 ▪ **Bi-weekly/monthly fresh sheet.** A one- or two-page brief will be issued on a regular
36 basis, via e-mail, fax, and/or the web site, to inform interested parties of project
37 happenings.
- 38 ▪ **Project newsletter.** A one-time insert in the Bellingham Herald, the Lynden Tribune,
39 and the Ferndale Record-Journal is proposed to report on the WRIA 1 project and its
40 progress, and to encourage readers to join a water resource interest caucus (or take
41 advantage of representative democracy through a governmental caucus). After
42 assessing the usefulness of the insert, as indicated by a significant increase in web

- 1 site visits or contacts with caucuses or Initiating Government staff, a determination
2 as to whether to continue the newsletter as a regular outreach activity will be made.
- 3 ▪ **Other newsletters.** Providing information on the WRIA 1 Watershed Management
4 Project in existing publications, such as city, water districts, and neighborhood
5 newsletters, PTA bulletins, Whatcom Watch, and WaterWhys, would save on costs
6 as well as assist editors in assembling newsletters about timely issues.
 - 7 ▪ **Hitchhike onto other water-related programs.** Where appropriate, information on
8 the Project will be included in related programs, such as the county health
9 department's outreach to private well owners.
 - 10 ▪ **Identify "social stars"/community leaders.** In some drainages, particularly in the
11 more rural parts of the county, there may not be many established community
12 groups. Citizens who are informal community leaders will be identified and
13 contacted to see if they would be interested in helping to get the word out about the
14 Project and to convey feedback, in conjunction with the caucuses. Ideally, these will
15 be cultivated into long-term relationships.
 - 16 ▪ **Piggyback on local events.** When possible, there should be an informational table
17 on the WRIA 1 Watershed Management Project at local festivals and events.
 - 18 ▪ **Encourage neighbors to share information.** Word-of-mouth is a powerful tool for
19 distributing information.
 - 20 ▪ **News media.** Listening, reading, or watching the news are some of the major ways
21 that people receive information. Timely, objective and accurate information will be
22 provided to reporters. Following are some media relations activities:
 - 23 → **Meetings with editors/editorial boards.** Because the WRIA 1 Watershed
24 Management Project is so complex, it could be helpful to meet with editors (or
25 editorial boards, as appropriate) to explain and discuss the project in depth at
26 important milestones.
 - 27 → **Media kit for each issue area.** A kit with balanced and comprehensive
28 information will be developed for each issue area, similar to the instream flow
29 resource kit that was produced in February 2000.
 - 30 → **Background information packets and summaries of issue area work.** Executive
31 summaries and similar briefing materials will help reporters track project work.
 - 32 → **Regular reporting.** On occasion, media outlets do series of stories on community
33 issues. The local media should be encouraged to provide regular coverage of the
34 Project.
 - 35 ▪ **Planning Unit binders.** In late 1999, Planning Unit members requested a binder
36 system to help them track the substantial amount of information generated by the
37 project in order to facilitate informed decision-making. Updating and expanding the
38 binder system will continue to be an activity administered by the county Water
39 Resources Division staff and overseen by the Planning Unit co-facilitators and the
40 PIE technical team.

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Objective 3

Members of the community will exhibit their belief in the credibility of the shared decision-making process by joining caucuses.

Methods

- **Track media coverage.** Media clips will be collected to track the amount and depth of coverage as the Project progresses. As noted above, op-ed pieces and letters to the editor will also be tracked.
- **Questionnaire.** Questionnaires and comment forms will be distributed to the caucuses, meeting attendees, web site visitors, and others on a regular basis. Information from the questionnaires will be used to reassess PIE activities and better tailor them to the community’s information needs.

Objective 4

Members of the community will have numerous opportunities for constructive public participation.

Methods

- **Quarterly public meetings.** To keep community members regularly apprised of project findings, there will be regular meetings, probably on a quarterly basis, to discuss technical progress. Participants will have ample opportunities to ask questions and discuss their interests at these sessions.
- **Speakers bureau.** A speakers bureau can be an effective way to reach citizens through existing organizations. A standard presentation and other materials such as comment forms and sign-in sheets will be assembled into a kit that Project representatives can use when speaking to community organizations such as neighborhood groups, service clubs, industry associations, and so on. Speakers will allot time for questions after their presentation.
- **Coffee shops, laundromats, and other local gathering places.** Places where people gather outside the home or the workplace could be good places to both disseminate and collect information about the Project.

Objective 5

Members of the community will have opportunities for learning how their comments have been incorporated into the planning process.

Methods

- 1 ▪ **Questions and answers sheet.** After each quarterly public meeting, a summary of
2 the questions and responses will be distributed on the web site and by e-mail or
3 postal mail to interested parties.
- 4 ▪ **Triplicate comment form.** For questions beyond the simple “when is the next
5 meeting?” type, it could be helpful to have a formal tracking system of queries and
6 responses. Interested citizens could write down their question or concern and take
7 the first copy; a project member could write a response on the middle copy, which
8 would be mailed to the citizen; and the third copy would be kept on file in the
9 Whatcom County Water Resources Division office.

11 IX. Review Protocol

12 There will be two primary types of information disseminated through the WRIA 1
13 Watershed Management Project: materials for the media, other general information
14 directly related to the Project, and technical.

16 *Materials for the Media*

17 With respect to media information except for routine meeting notices, the Planning
18 Unit’s Process and Procedural Agreement specifies that the following procedures will
19 apply:

- 21 “a) When speaking to the media, the Planning Unit members will clearly identify any
22 opinions expressed as their personal opinions and not necessarily those of other
23 Planning Unit members. The Planning Unit members will not attempt to speak for
24 other members of the group or to characterize their positions to the media.
25 Comments to the media will be respectful of other Planning Unit members.
- 27 “b) Following significant accomplishments, staff for the Planning Unit will generate
28 formal news releases or other media briefing materials. All releases and
29 information given to the media will accurately represent the work of the Planning
30 Unit and will be discussed and approved by the Planning Unit.
- 32 “c) When interacting with the media, the Planning Unit members agree to abide by
33 the protocol established by this agreement.”

35 *Other General Project Information*

36 With respect to other general information, the Planning Unit will be given an
37 opportunity to review materials, but they will not necessarily be a discussion topic at a
38 Planning Unit meeting (for example, the Planning Unit would be notified of a quarterly
39 public forum but would not necessarily need to discuss it). A PIE activity or
40 informational piece may be placed on a Planning Unit meeting agenda at the request of
41 a caucus representative or the PIE technical team.

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Examples of general information include:

- Presentations (visual and otherwise)
- Scripts
- Fact sheets about general project activities (e.g. decision-making structure)
- Issue summaries

Technical Information

An editorial board comprised of the PIE technical team, the appropriate technical team lead or their designate, and any others interested in serving, will review the technical information. All members of the editorial board must commit to timely review.

Examples of technical information include:

- Lay explanations of reports from the technical teams, technical products, and deliverables
- Meeting notices

X. Schedule

An overall schedule for the WRIA 1 Watershed Management Project is being developed. A schedule for PIE activities will be developed and approved, in tandem with this overall schedule.

XI. Budget

To facilitate decision-making about which methods to employ, the PIE technical team has estimated labor needs and direct costs for each potential activity in the following table. As noted above, when the methods have been prioritized and scheduled for implementation, a total budget will be determined.

The cost of labor depends on whether existing staff would perform these tasks, or whether an entirely new position would be created. Any labor costs outside of existing positions would be in addition to direct costs.

Method/Activity	Labor	Direct Costs
Identify local issues as hooks	no addtl labor	no addtl cost
Use drainage delineation map as initial introduction	no addtl labor	no addtl cost
Web site	8 hrs/month	minor
Bi-weekly/monthly fresh sheet	8 hrs/sheet	minor

Project newsletter	30 hrs/newsletter	\$2500 printing (approx. 80,000 copies) \$4000 distribution
Other newsletters	use media materials	minor
Hitchhike onto other water-related programs	no addtl labor	minor
Identify & contact "social stars"/community leaders	initial contact: 140 hrs updates: 28 hrs/month	\$50/month
Piggyback on local events	10 hrs/month	minor
Encourage neighbors to share information	no addtl labor	no addtl cost
Meetings with editors/editorial boards	2 hrs prep 2 hrs/mtg per person	minor
Media kits	24 hrs/kit	\$500/kit
Background packet/summaries	8-12 hrs each	\$50
Regular media coverage	coord: 2 hrs/month	minor
Track media coverage	no addtl labor	minor
Questionnaires & comment forms	design: 2 hrs each analysis: 8 hrs each	minor
Quarterly meetings	16 hrs/mtg	\$500 each
Speakers bureau	kit: 8 hrs presentations: 8 hrs/mo.	minor
Local gathering places	flyers: 10 hrs/qtr mtgs: 10 hrs/month	\$50/month
Questions & answers sheet	8 hrs/sheet	minor

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XII. Evaluation/Adaptive Management

PIE activities will have evaluation measures attached. The plan will include a formal adaptive management mechanism to ensure that either PIE objectives are being met or activities are modified to meet those objectives. Quarterly reports to the Initiating Governments and the Planning Unit will include summaries of PIE activities and will indicate progress towards benchmarks.

The PIE Program will employ a process flow control structure and decision logic similar to that embodied in the WRIA 1 Watershed Management Project Scope of Work Management Process Flow Sequence (Figure 3) and described in Section 2.7.2 of the Scope of Work.

1 Public knowledge of and reaction to the Watershed Management Project and Plan will
2 be assessed regularly throughout the planning process. Based upon that assessment, the
3 PIE technical team will determine if the objectives of the PIE program are being
4 achieved. If so, the PIE program will continue as is. If the efforts toward one or more of
5 the objectives appear to be falling short, the PIE technical team will determine if the
6 reason is failure to implement the PIE program element properly, or if the reason is that
7 the program element itself is failing. If the former, the Program element implementation
8 will be corrected. If the latter, the PIE program development team will re-evaluate and
9 re-design the Program element, and implement the re-designed element.

10
11 Following are the mechanisms that will be used to assess the level of success in
12 achieving the PIE program's objectives.

13
14 Objective 1

15 Members of the community will acquire a sufficient understanding of the technical
16 issues surrounding water quantity, water quality, instream flow, and fish habitat to
17 foster their productive contributions to practical and acceptable solutions to identified
18 issues.

19
20 *Evaluation methods*

- 21 ▪ Conduct a statistically valid "pre-test" survey of awareness, attitudes, and
22 understanding of project and general water issues; repeat survey on annual basis.
- 23 ▪ Distribute, collect, and analyze questionnaires via web site and public meetings.
- 24 ▪ Conduct focus groups, focused interviews, and/or more informal sampling methods
25 with target audiences to determine understanding of issues.

26
27
28 Objective 2

29 Members of the community will have adequate access to information about the WRIA 1
30 planning process.

31
32 *Evaluation methods*

- 33 ▪ Measure number of attendees at Project events.
- 34 ▪ Measure number of web site visits, particularly after media coverage, mailings, and
35 similar outreach efforts.

36
37
38 Objective 3

39 Members of the community will exhibit their belief in the credibility of the shared
40 decision-making process by joining caucuses.

1 *Evaluation methods*

- 2 ▪ Measure increases in caucus membership and levels of active members.
- 3 ▪ Evaluate diverse sources of public sentiment (e.g., letters to the editor, public
- 4 meetings on watershed-related issues, bulletin board notices, caucus feedback) and
- 5 analyze level of understanding of issues, whether comments are focused on process
- 6 or substance, and how strongly the commenter felt about the issue.

7
8
9 Objective 4

10 Members of the community will have numerous opportunities for constructive public

11 participation.

12
13 *Evaluation method*

- 14 ▪ Track numbers of public meetings and community presentations.

15
16
17 Objective 5

18 Members of the community will have opportunities for learning how their comments

19 have been incorporated into the planning process.

20
21 *Evaluation method*

- 22 ▪ Monitor and evaluate timeliness and quality of responses to citizen comments or
- 23 questions.