

Land Conservation & Stewardship Board January 11, 2023 Regular Meeting – Excerpt

Urban Lakes Water Quality Management Policy and Guidance

Richard Thorp, Watershed Program Manager explained the Water Quality Management Policy is meant to be a framework for the City's urban lake's water quality operational management decisions and is restricted to City owned lakes within the Fort Collins Growth Management Area (GMA) and specifically excludes private lakes. The Guidance is meant to be a technical resource to support City staff in implementing the policy. Because the Guidance will be available to the general public, it may be useful for private lake management as they face similar water quality issues. Richard clarified the Guidance is not meant to serve as a prescriptive plan across the City's lakes. His brief presentation covered the project background, scope, and timeline milestones. He reported the draft policy was informed by community engagement including subject matter experts, and feedback from advisory boards and commissions. He noted the cross-department team processed the previous feedback from the LCSB gathered during the September 2021 meeting. The policy was drafted during a series of focused meetings and facilitated workshops. Richard Thorp described the types of community outreach conducted at targeted lakes which was used to better understand the community's concerns around water quality and how the community was using the urban lakes. The project team was intentional in gathering diverse perspectives and was guided by demographic vulnerability indicators including housing stability, and income and education levels. Outreach efforts were administered in English and Spanish. The main takeaway for the team was the community truly treasures these resources as opportunities for recreation, to view wildlife and the existence of wildlife habitat. The community's water quality concerns were algal blooms, fish kills and odors. Richard Thorp closed his presentation with a high-level overview of the major elements of the policy. He will be meeting with additional advisory boards and commissions and seeking a formal motion from each to recommend City Council adopt the Policy. The project team anticipates City Council will adopt the Policy during Q1 or Q2 of 2023. After the policy has been adopted, the Policy and Guidance will be finalized.

Discussion

In response to Member Kley, Richard Thorp stated the project team will be presenting to the Natural Resources Advisory Board, Parks and Recreation Board, and the Water Commission. Vice Chair Cunniff noted the policy is focused on water quality, not erosion or other impacts. He asked if the project team had considered using bellwether species as an indicator of water quality. As an example, he stated a decline in amphibian population can be an early indicator of a problem. Richard Thorp responded by pointing to the Best Management Practices (BMPs) included in the Guidance which takes a different approach: monitoring for invasive or problem species as indicators.

Member Culver voiced concern that restoration is not included in the Guidance. She stated she always considers restoration when looking at lakes and ponds, and preventative measures to avoid algal blooms and problem species. She noted, given the community's high value in wildlife and habitat, this seems like a missed opportunity to include restoration goals. Member Culver also spoke about impact of homeless camps in watershed and potential water contamination. She acknowledged the City and non-profit organizations are addressing the homeless issue but

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wanted to recognize the health and safety risks associated with transient camps. Richard Thorp reported the homeless issue did not come up during outreach, although there was concern regarding trash and discarded fishing line. Richard explained the BMPs are focused on mitigation and/or risk reduction of existing impacts like algal blooms. The development of a water quality management plan could address restoration including the buffer zone adjacent to a lake but that falls outside of the scope of this project.

Member Piesman asked what are the BMPs for keeping something like Duck Lake from happening. Richard Thorp pointed out that most of the lakes in Fort Collins are shallow and man-made; and as they age are prone to certain water quality issues like accumulation of nutrient load and sediment build up. Mitigation buffers, controlling nutrient load, and flow-through would help to prevent these kinds of issues occurring at Duck Lake. He restated BMPs are focused on dealing with existing issues.

Member Kramer commented that the Guidance seems to address lakes in isolation. He asked if recommendations could be added to the appendices to communicate with adjacent landowners and to utilize basin analysis mapping to determine pollution/contamination sources. Vice Chair Cunniff supported Member Kramer's comments to add a recommendation to develop relationships with surrounding property owners and use mapping tools to inform future policy. Richard Thorp explained budget limitations prevented the project team from doing a land use or basin analysis to understand risk factors that can contribute to water quality issues. He supports preemptively partnering with landowners to mitigate risk factors but stressed this would be a department management decision.

Member Kley asked for the definition of "one water approach." Richard Thorp explained it is a collaborative planning and implementation approach; an inter-departmental process as well as reaching out to subject matter experts and the general community. Member Kley followed by asking if there are different management recommendations since the lakes may serve different purposes for Parks, Natural Areas, and Utilities. Richard Thorp stated the project team intentionally separated the lakes into different bands to avoid false comparisons and to recognize the different uses.

Chair Elson appreciated information gathered from multiple sources and asked for clarification as to the function of the Guidance. Richard Thorp explained it is meant to serve as a guiding resource for staff and is not a prescriptive tool; it is a resource for starting a management process. Member Kramer suggested the general public or those with less technical knowledge might benefit from a flow chart to correctly apply BMPs. Richard Thorp understood the interest, but the project team decided it would do more harm than good. Member Piesman reminded everyone of the impact of global warming, and the need to consider rising temperatures and declining rainfall when updates are made to the Guidance document.

Several members asked about baseline and/or ongoing monitoring of every lake to understand what is going on. Richard Thorp referred to the Guidance as starting point for City departments to develop a management policy for their respective lakes and ponds. While the project team is supportive of regular sampling, this action would fall under specific management plans adopted by individual departments. Member Culver asked if sampling requirements to establish a

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baseline could be added to the motion. Jill Oropeza explained the policy is not a management plan for any lake; it is a framework to address water quality within the GMA. Monitoring and sampling would be part of management plans developed by individual departments.

Member Lopez asked if PFAS are included in the Water Quality Issues Database (Guidance, Attachment 6). She voiced concern about potential run-off into urban lakes, especially given the recent and extensive fire-fighting activities in Colorado. Richard Thorp answered they were not on the list but agreed to add them.

Vice Chair Cunniff reminded the LCSB their concerns, as recorded in the meeting minutes, would be shared with Council. Chair Elson restated the requested motion is for the Policy only, not the Guidance.

Member Piesman made a motion that the Land Conservation and Stewardship Board advise Council to approve the Water Quality Management Policy for City urban lakes and stormwater basins in the Growth Management Area. Member Kramer seconded the motion.

Vice Chair Cunniff amended the motion to include: the Land Conservation and Stewardship Board recommends that Council fully fund all of the proposed management actions that are recommended in the policy. Member Kramer seconded the amendment. The motion and amendment were approved unanimously, 8-0.