

Southwest Florida Water Management District 2010 “Get Outside!” Campaign

“Get Outside!” Campaign Summary

Background

The Southwest Florida Water Management District purchases and manages land to protect the water resources in a 16-county region of west-central Florida. More than 343,000 acres of those lands are available to the public for recreational use such as hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, fishing, camping, nature study and picnicking. However, many residents are unaware that these conservation lands exist. Prior to the launch of the campaign, the District conducted a random telephone survey of 600 people in 12 counties to determine their knowledge of and attitudes about publicly owned lands, District lands and recreation. The key research findings showed that only 43% said they are aware of District lands and 98% said they do not get outside enough. Nineteen percent said they want to walk or hike, and they prefer to do these activities with their friends and family. In addition, the research also showed that 39% of people’s highest priorities when enjoying the outdoors are location and access, while 24% indicated the largest barrier is lack of time. Forty-six percent of survey respondents enjoyed just being outside and 63% wanted to be able to easily enjoy the outdoors with little planning.

Purpose

A misconception that these lands are “locked up” persists and negatively affects legislative support for District land acquisitions for water conservation and protection. The District recognized a need to develop an outreach campaign targeted to residents and visitors in the District to promote the recreational opportunities available on District lands.

Objectives

The four objectives of the “Get Outside!” campaign are to: (1) increase distribution of the Recreation Guide to Southwest Florida Water Management District Lands by 100%; (2) garner 20 print, radio and TV placements and reach one million in circulation; (3) increase recreation web site activity by 25% and; (4) hold three targeted “Get Outside!” events and attract a total of more than 500 attendants from surrounding communities.

Methods

In preparation for the “Get Outside!” campaign launch, the Recreation Guide to Southwest Florida Water Management District Lands and Recreation At A Glance brochure were revised to provide updated information about more than 50 District-owned properties. The recreation web site, WaterMatters.org/recreation, was also completely redesigned for the launch of the campaign. The new design focuses on District lands and their recreational opportunities, providing a more user-friendly approach in searching for District properties and their amenities. The District’s newsletter, WaterMatters Magazine, also featured a special District land issue with information about the campaign, recreation guide and upcoming events. In addition, the District’s online newsletter, WaterMatters.org Newsletter, featured the “Get Outside!” campaign with links to the new recreation web site, revised recreation guide, WaterMatters Magazine special land issue and information on National Public Lands Day. A “Get Outside!” presentation was also created for the District’s Speakers Bureau, which is made up of professional staff members who make presentations to interested community groups and organizations throughout the region.

The “Get Outside!” campaign was launched on Sept. 26, 2009, in conjunction with National Public Lands Day and the beginning of fall. A press kit including a news release, fact sheets, photo CD and copies of the new recreation guide and brochure was mailed to more than 100 reporters throughout the District and

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hand-delivered to reporters at The Tampa Tribune, St. Petersburg Times and the five major Tampa television stations. The District provided more than 450 hotels and motels participating in its Water Conservation Hotel and Motel Program with a concierge packet containing one guide and 25 brochures for their lobby guests. Staff also sent letters and guides to nearly 200 bicycle, kayak and running shops and clubs. In addition, unsold advertisement space was provided for free from mid-March through May on 30 buses in Hillsborough County to promote the “Get Outside!” campaign.

Three community events were scheduled on various District properties to showcase District lands and encourage those attending to come back with family and friends to enjoy on their own. In keeping with the research findings that people wanted to be able to enjoy the outdoors close to home with very little planning, District staff invited homeowners, church members and school students and their families within a 10- to 15-mile radius of the event site.

Results

Since the launch of the “Get Outside!” campaign, more than 24,000 copies of the recreation guide have been distributed, which is a 284% increase over the previous year. The “Get Outside!” campaign media coverage through April 2010 includes 42 print and/or online articles with a total circulation of 2.6 million, and 11 radio and television interviews that total one million in viewership. In addition, the new recreation web site was viewed 195,426 times during Sept. 1, 2009–May 3, 2010, resulting in a 54% increase over the same time span last year. The “Get Outside!” Day events welcomed a total of more than 650 visitors, and 80% of those surveyed at the events were first-time visitors. With more than half the attendees at each event signing pledges to return to the property with family and friends, the District was successful in encouraging future recreation on conservation lands.