

DOG RIVER CLEARWATER REVIVAL

Regina Kirkland, Department of Geography, University of South Alabama, Mobile, AL 36688, E-mail: rsk903@jagmail.southalabama.edu.

Dog River Clearwater Revival (DRCR) is a grass roots organization that monitors the quality of Dog River and its watershed. I studied their mission statement and tested to see if, and how, they had followed that statement. I read boxes of archived materials to see how well they had documented what had been done. I examined how they attempt to educate and involve the public. I wanted to know if this is just a club for people who needed an outlet for their spare time or if the interest in the watershed is genuine. I found the organization has in the past fulfilled, and still is fulfilling the mission statement. It is also not a club for socialites with extra time on their hands. I spoke with people who lead busy lives but have a genuine passion for the quality of the Dog River Watershed. DRCR plans and carries out activities that support its mission statement. My goal for this paper is that present members will see how well they fulfill what they have said they wanted to do, and future members will use this as a guide to the way to do things in an excellent way.

Introduction

The Dog River Clearwater Revival (DRCR) is a volunteer organization that monitors the environmental quality of the Dog River Watershed. The history of the organization is sitting in boxes and people's brains. DRCR has come a long way since its beginnings. Much hard work has been done, many people have been involved, changes have been made, and the watershed is a much better area because of all of this. The future members of DRCR need to know their heritage, and founding members need their work and efforts recognized.

The DRCR began in 1996 and were right on target with the rest of the country. According to Chaffin 'The *watershed movement*, which began in the early 1990s, is recognized as the formation of collaborative stake holder groups to facilitate equitable, local management of water resources and associated amenities within a hydrologic watershed boundary' (B.C.Chaffin 2012). As common sense would tell us no area such

as a watershed can take care of itself so people must step up and do the job. People will continue to litter and dump trash in places that may be convenient for them but wrong, such as a river or stream. Trash will be transported to wrong areas by heavy rains. Some contractors and individuals will continually try to get around laws designed to protect our waterways. This is where DRCR, and its mission statement, comes in. They developed quite an ambitious mission statement. Why would they even develop a mission statement? According to the authors of a mission statement website ‘Any entity that attempts to operate without a mission statement runs the risk of wandering through the world without having the ability to verify that it is on its intended course’ (mission statements .com 2013). Their statement gives them direction and a road map.

The Bylaws of DRCR state its mission. ‘The purpose of this organization is to improve water quality in the streams, creeks, rivers, and wetlands of the Dog River Watershed, and to restore and maintain the quality of life and best possible environment for fish and wild life, public recreation, enforcement of environmental protection laws, the best use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) and Best Available Technologies (BATs) in storm water and flood plain management, and general public education and outreach regarding responsible land use practices with the watershed’ (Dogriver.org 2013). This is an ambitious purpose for people who come together from all walks of life and volunteer their time and expertise. I explored the history of DRCR to see how they have fulfilled their purpose. It is important for future members and leaders to know what the early members did so they can follow good paths that have been laid, and maybe avoid some of the things that created an issue or that may have needed to be handled in a

different way. It is also important to be reminded where we are headed, and why we are headed there, because sometimes that can be lost over time.

Research Question

What does DRCCR do to fulfill its mission statement?

Methods

I began my research at the website of DRCCR itself and I found it to be very educational. I talked with several long time members of DRCCR, one a past president. I also talked with the DRCCR current president. I read through several boxes of archived records of DRCCR that included minutes of meetings and letters written to protest some government decision that would not be in the best interest of the Dog River Watershed. I read letters written to thank speakers who had spoken at meetings to educate the members concerning some aspect of the waterways. I read newsletters sent to members and members of the community. I read through numerous newspaper articles concerning activities of DRCCR. I participated in a class excursion through parts of the Dog River Watershed, and I explored parts of the watershed on my own and found evidence of the work of the DRCCR. I interviewed for a part-time position as a project manager for a new project that DRCCR is involved in.

Results

My research found DRCCR to be a good steward of the watershed. The organization divides its activities and goal into four sections. Each division has its own mission statement and areas of concentrations.

The Keep it Clean (KiC) mission is to monitor water quality, report offenses, initiate and manage cleanup, educate public at large on storm drain water runoff, deliver

measurable results of watershed improvement, facilitate progressive solutions to issues, and measure effectiveness of BMPs and BATs for recommendations (Dogriver.org 2013). Participating in Alabama Coastal Cleanup is one way they carry out this mission. In 2012 the Coastal Cleanup held its 25th Annual event. Figure 1 shows the canoes heading out in the early morning and Figure 2 shows just a portion of the trash deposited at Dog River Park at the end of the day. DRCR, other organizations in Mobile, and volunteers from all over the city participate. People cover the waterways of Mobile, not just the Dog River Watershed, and collect trash left behind by people, or washed in from other areas by rain.



Figure 1 (Dogriver.org 2013)



Figure 2 (Courtesy of Dr. Fearn 2013)

Another way the KiC mission is carried out is in the Water Quality Monitoring. The Alabama Water Watch (AWW) program, administered through Auburn University, trains volunteers to test the water quality throughout the watershed. Volunteers test the water quality at their area once a month and submit their data to the AWW.

The second project group is the Rivers and Trails (R and T) division. Its mission is to create a network of water and land trails within the watershed for responsible public use, environmental stewardship, historical significance, ecosystem preservation and to

facilitate responsible commerce to benefit this urban watershed (Dogriver.org 2013). The Dog River Scenic Blueway is a part of this. The Dog River Scenic Blueway is in partnership with the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program with the National Park System (NPS). The RTCA Program is the community assistance arm of the NPS. RTCA staff provides technical assistance to community groups and local, state, and federal government agencies working to protect natural areas and water resources and enhance close-to-home outdoor recreation opportunities. They help communities plan, organize partnerships, and achieve on-the-ground success in projects they initiate (Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program 2013). Why develop a blueway? A blueway is a water trail that is developed with launch points, camping locations and points of interest for canoeists and kayakers. Blueways are typically developed to encourage family recreation, ecological education and preservation of wildlife resources. Launches for these types of boats are less expensive and less invasive to the landscape (Dogriver.org 2013).

The Education and Outreach (E and O) is the third arm of the DRCR. Its mission is to rehabilitate wetlands, restore native habitats, protect aquatic life, and facilitate partnerships that promote lasting and effective stewardship of local natural resources within the watershed and beyond by implementing time/results driven projects utilizing outdoor classrooms, provide funding to facilitate restoration based science education, marketing based toolkit development, provide locations within the watershed for scientific study and teach all citizens the value of the watershed utilizing a multi-tiered approach to unique heritage based education, alongside awareness of endangered species as well as awareness/protection of our rich species diversity within the watershed especially

focusing on indigenous species only found within this region. This covers many facets of the watershed. (dogriver.org 2013).

The Storm Drain Marker Challenge began in 2006 (The Storm Drain Marker Challenge Fall 2011). It is an educational project. Many people are not aware that water, trash, litter, pollutants, and everything emptying into a storm drain drains into a stream somewhere. DRCR decided a good way to help raise awareness of this is by installing markers on the lids of all the drains that drain directly into Dog River. They hope that just seeing the markers will remind and educate the public about where the contents of the drain go. Even though 10,000 drains have been marked since the program's inception (Dogriver.org 2013) not all drains have been marked. They will continue to recruit volunteers to mark the drains until all are marked. Figure 3 shows a drainmarker on a drain.

Figure 4 shows a marker on the side of the road informing drivers they are entering the Dog River Watershed. DRCR was involved in getting these installed also. This raises awareness that even though far from the water this area is still part of the watershed.



Figure 3 Storm Drain Marker



Figure 4 Watershed roadway marker

A new project falling under Restore, Renew, Reshore in the E and O project group is a 5 star Restoration project (Sweet 2013). This project will entail restoring the habitat of two endangered species found in Dog River – the Alabama Red-Bellied Turtle and the West Indian Manatee. The project will involve removing invasive plants and replanting native grasses, as well as building a site for canoes and kayaks to put in the river. It will also involve creating an education program to help educate the public and nearby landowners as to the seriousness of restoring these habitats. It is hoped many volunteers from the community will consider this a cause to rally behind and come out in support when the work is to be done (Sweet 2013).

The fourth arm of the DRCCR is the Partnership Memberships Planning (PMP) group. Its mission is to promote the DRCCR's efforts and cooperate with organization, government agencies, volunteers, other non-profits, foundations, businesses, members, and residents for a more effective and inclusive scope of work in order to facilitate the DRCCR's mission for a clean and healthy waterway for today and future generations. DRCCR partners with many organizations to get the job done. It partners with the City of Mobile, Mobile County, State of Alabama, the National Park Service, Mobile County Health Department, Mobile Area Water and Sewer Service, Mobile Bay Canoe and Kayak Club Members, and the Port City Pacers. No one group can get it all done alone.

One of the fun ways the DRCCR involves the public in the watershed is with the Great Drift. This involves canoe, kayak, and rowboat races. If a person does not own one of these but wants to participate there are canoes and kayaks for rent. There are games for the children and you can bring a picnic lunch. This is a free annual Spring event that

begins at the Rabbit Creek bridge. Members are available for help and to answer questions.

In Fall 2010 DRCR sponsored its first fishing tournament. Adults and children are encouraged to participate and compete for prizes. This is a fundraiser for DRCR as well as creating awareness of the group.

For the past four years DRCR has sponsored a 5K run in the city. The first year it was at Montlimar Blvd but in 2010 the run moved to the Dog River bridge area. This is another fundraiser and public awareness event.

When the BP oilspill occurred DRCR had members ready to go to work immediately to help keep Dog River as clean as possible. Members installed boom at the mouth of the river, but it ended up not being necessary. However, the members took precautions and were ready to do all they could.

I spoke with David Delany (Delany 2013) while on a boat excursion trip. Mr Delany is a local business owner and long time member of DRCR, and in fact does not remember when he joined the organization. He has never been interested in being an officer but is always ready to be an active member. Mr. Delany was one of the members involved in helping to install the boom when the oilspill happened. He owns property on the river and raised his three sons on the river so he definitely knows the importance of the quality of the water in all parts of the watershed. He also lends his boat, and himself as captain of that boat, to Dr. Fearn's class excursion into the Dog River Watershed.

Dr. Mimi Fearn, past president and long time member of DRCR, teaches a senior level Geography class at the University of South Alabama. She allowed me to read through all her archived materials and we had several conversations about different

aspects of the DRCR (Fearn 2013). Every student in her class does a research project that is in some way related to the Dog River Watershed. The students take a class from the AWW and are certified to test water quality when finished. They explore different areas of the watershed looking for good sites and sites in need of attention. This is one way DRCR indirectly educates the public. Every student learns about the watershed and in turn in some way helps to educate others.

As I interviewed with Kim Sweet (Sweet 2013) to become the program director for the Red-Bellied Turtle and West Indian Manatee project DRCR is about to undertake I also interviewed her some. Ms. Sweet is the current president of DRCR and a good example of the type of people in this organization. She has a job, a family, and a busy life yet she spends many volunteer hours helping to orchestrate the business of DRCR. We met for an hour for this interview and afterward she had only 10 minutes to get to her next meeting about the DRCR, and this was on her lunch time in the middle of the afternoon.

Conclusions

I found the DRCR led by people serious about the watershed. Dr. Fearn, Mr. Delany, and Ms. Sweet are all professional, active people who are passionate about the Dog River Watershed, and they are just a small sampling of the people involved. They are serious about keeping it clean, and at the same time they are serious about enjoying the watershed. There are many more examples of how DRCR handles the business of keeping the quality of the watershed at a high level. They do fulfill their mission statement well. I did find one issue that seemed to be a reoccurring problem since the beginning of DRCR. The problem involves not having enough members in the

organization. They need members who will get out and help do the work and not just have their names on the membership list. DRCR needs everyone to pay their yearly dues, of course, because that helps get the job done financially. They also want everyone to come out for the fun activities like the Great Drift. The real need of DRCR is members who will come out when the work needs to be done.

Works Cited

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