



**Lakes Festival Expansion:**

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## Lakes Festival Expansion

### Introduction

#### **Purpose of event:**

The purpose of the Northern Indiana Lakes Festival is to celebrate our region's most popular attractions, our lakes. This is accomplished by a unique combination of water-related education and lots of fun for all ages. At the Lakes Festival, children are engaged by games, hands-on activities, entertainment, and recreation opportunities. Adults enjoy the ski show, local food vendors, water-related business exhibitors, and the boat show. Those who attend the Lakes Festival not only enjoy a fun-filled family day at the lake, but they are taught ways that they can make a positive impact on the future of our lakes. They learn why it is so important to preserve our lakes and how their simple actions can help protect them. As this culture of stewardship spreads, it creates a support system for our lakes that is focused on keeping them healthy so that they can continue to be enjoyed both now and by future generations. The Lakes Festival not only provides a fun diversion for residents and visitors to our region, but it provides a means by which our lakes – one of our greatest tourist attractions – are protected for the future.

The Lakes Festival is also unique because it has potential to draw people to our county beyond the weekend of the festival. Our many beautiful lakes are a significant source of tourism to Kosciusko County, and the Lakes Festival celebrates this fact and encourages more people to come enjoy our lakes and streams. Many of our repeat lake users are from the Fort Wayne, South Bend, Indianapolis and Chicago areas. The Lakes Festival will not only draw visitors for this day-long event, but it will also encourage more of these out-of-town lake users to spend more time enjoying our lakes, caring for our lakes and visiting us here in Kosciusko County. The anticipated end result of these out-of-town lake users attending the Lakes Festival is an increase in their use of our lakes and time spent visiting Kosciusko County, which would have a positive long-term impact to Kosciusko County tourism.

#### **History:**

The Northern Indiana Lakes Festival began in 2009 as an annual event taking place on the shores of Center Lake in Warsaw, IN. The 2009 and 2010 festivals were overwhelming successes with over 1000 people each year attending. Highlights of the 2009 festival included performances by the Lake City Skiers and Billy B, over 45 business and nonprofit booths, the boat show, and 30 door prizes given away. The 2010 festival was highlighted again by the Lake City Skiers performance, entertainment by Foster Brown, over 600 aluminum water bottles given away, cash and in-kind donations from 55 supporters, and surveys showing attendees overwhelmingly thought the festival was excellent.

These participant surveys were completed for both the 2009 and 2010 festivals and represented 675 and 745 attendees, respectively. Surveys indicated overall that festival attendees felt they effectively



learned about local water resources and the need to protect them. The attendees enjoyed the fun activities and entertainment and desired even more of it. The exhibitors wanted better promotion of the event to get larger crowds.

**Purpose of white paper:**

Given the survey results from the previous two years of the Lakes Festival summarized above, our whitepaper team set out to develop strategies to expand the activities and fun as well as increase the attendance at the event. We propose additional activities during the event geared towards children to heighten the festival atmosphere. We also propose new ideas for increasing funding and support of the event through partnerships with local businesses and organizations. A better promotional plan is also explored as well as more effective coordination with other local events.

**Areas of Expansion**

**Support/Funding:**

In order to increase fundraising success, our team recognized that these efforts would be bolstered if we could tie abundant, clean local water resources to the area's economy. With this in mind, Grace College has commenced an economic impact study on the lakes of Kosciusko County. As a preliminary example of this analysis, we looked at one portion of the lake's total economic impact – sport fishing. Using data collected by Purdue University, Kosciusko County contains 15,740 acres of standing surface water (lakes and ponds). According to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, each acre of surface water is fished for 100 hours on average, and the average fishing trip lasts 3 hours. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service fishing surveys report that an average of \$53 is spent per fishing trip. Using this data, we estimate that sports-fishing in Kosciusko County is a \$27.8M annual industry.

We also want to increase the sponsorship levels by adding additional promotions for businesses to get more exposure for their contributions. A recommendation would be to add billboards, t-shirts, radio ads, water bottles, and more to further incentivize sponsorship dollars. Here is an example how sponsorship levels might be organized:

Title Sponsor - \$3000 (Limit this to one) Example: 2012 Northern Indiana Lakes Festival sponsored by the XYZ Company

Event Sponsors - \$1500 (Limit to 4-5)

Lakes Promoters - \$1000 (No limit)

Lakes Savers - \$500 (No limit)

Lakes Friends - \$250 (No limit)

We cannot make this change for our 2011 festival, but we plan to contact local businesses in late summer to get into their sponsorship budget for the following year's festival.

**Promotion:**

In order to increase attendance at our event, broaden the demographic of those who attend, and draw attendees from a further distance we must develop different strategies for promotion. These strategies include developing a marketing/branding plan, branding, advertising, public relations and social media promotion.

A comprehensive marketing plan includes: identifying planning and event activities, developing a budget, identifying current and future demographics, reviewing the competition, conducting analysis that includes strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT), branding and advertising, and defining measurable goals should be developed by the various stakeholder groups. Those include Kosciusko Lakes and Streams, local businesses, local marketing representatives, and other organizations. Coordination of marketers is essential from a logistical standpoint as resources are shared among stakeholders and can also greatly increase visibility and attendance. Any marketing plan needs to take into account each participant's needs and resources to be comprehensive. Our research indicates that a marketing plan should be 10% of the total event budget.

While the Lakes Festival already has a strong branding component, ideally, the branding for the next festival should already be well-established while the current one is going on so that next year's event can be marketed intentionally and effectively. All print and online material should be reviewed to see that branding is consistent. A marketing strategy for the online presence is to consider conducting "affiliate marketing." Other similar organizations and vendors can post links to their sites on the Lakes Festival site. When users click on these affiliate links, the Lakes Festival organization can earn revenue. This allows for cross promotion of events and products with a similar consumer base.

To reach additional consumers and attendees, strong partnerships are in place with local media outlets including radio and newspaper for advertising of the festival. Once the festival is more established, advertising can be further expanded to media outlets in the surrounding community and tri-state markets including Chicago, Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, and South Bend. Kosciusko Lakes and Streams, local businesses, local marketing representatives, and other organizations all will benefit from a more diverse market of attendees.

Additionally, stakeholders should consider taking advantage of free advertising by publicizing the event at local organization meetings like Optimists, Kiwanis and the Chamber of Commerce. Other advertising includes allowing attendees the option to sign up for email alerts of future events. Email marketing throughout the year should highlight related events, artists, and performances to keep attendees interested in coming back.

Attendees may be inclined to "save the date" if publicity for the next festival begins during the current festival. Additional media outlets should be invited to the current event. More photos should be taken of the venue, artwork, performances, and crowd for use in future publicity.

Another area closely related to advertising and branding is public relations. Public relations efforts for the festival have traditionally started months before the event. We strongly recommend beginning one year or fifteen months ahead of the festival. Stakeholders should determine when to approach local sponsors to seek financial commitments. Several organizations budget their donations several months in advance to coordinate with their organization's fiscal year. The stakeholders need to seek donations earlier to ensure donations can be granted in a timelier manner. This will improve the budget conditions.

Finally, communication can be improved by leveraging social media channels like Facebook and Twitter. These outlets can promote and keep the festival at the forefront of attendees' minds because they are so popular. Social media updates from key staffers and participants during the festival create personal connections and can be a valuable source of publicity. Keeping in touch with attendees, sponsors, and exhibitors through social media will improve the festival's visibility.

### **Activities:**

There are several activities that we recommend to further improve the festival. Many of these activities are aimed at providing more opportunities and activities for families and children. These include: a children's "fun run," an inflatable "bounce house," and water-themed prizes.

With an increased emphasis on developing programs that draw people towards the educational aspects of the Lakes Festival, we have decided to host a "Kids One Mile Fun Run" at the 2011 Lakes Festival. Running has shown to be a very popular trend in our community and also through the region. We hope to bring in families that would not regularly visit the Lakes Festival's educational booths with the fun run and also with other recreational activities. The fun run will be held after our local "Warsaw Breakfast Optimist Winona Lake Triathlon" in hopes to draw local athletes, who depend on the lakes as a means of training for the triathlon, and their families to learn more about how important it is for each and every one of us to keep our water sources safe. The race will be held at Center Lake (the same location as the rest of the festival events and activities) in the afternoon. Our hopes are to have 60 or more children participate. We will take early registration for the race, which will ensure each child receives a t-shirt. Day of registration will also take place, but participants will not be ensured a t-shirt. Medals will award to all participants that finish the fun run. The top ten finishers will receive a special prize, to be announced.

The second activity aimed toward children is to rent an inflatable bounce house. Bounce houses provide a draw to children from toddlers to pre-teens as they are a fun activity for these age groups. The bounce houses can be rented from a local party rental merchant. To promote water education, children could participate in a water educational activity in order to play in the bounce house. Furthermore, promotional advertising can be displayed that can include the Lakes Festival logo or sponsor logos.

Finally, water-themed prizes could be included with the educational activities taking place at the festival. Young children enjoy receiving toys and prizes and will be encouraged to visit multiple booths or

activities if they know they will receive prizes. Their parents will accompany them and be more willing to participate for a longer period of time if their children are engaged.

### **Coordination:**

During the weekend of the Northern Indiana Lakes Festival, we would like to coordinate other events to bring in more people to our community for the various events. One of the first possibilities is to incorporate a bike race and/or an adventure race to be part of the Lakes Festival. We have spoke to Matt Metzger of Metzger Outdoors about organizing an adventure race. The adventure race would incorporate biking, navigation and water and will likely be planned for future festivals. Matt also mentioned that a kid's adventure race could be an option in the future. We also spoke with Greg Demopolous, a representative of the local community cycling club, and he was excited about promoting the festival during their annual Fat & Skinny Tire Fest, detailing the events we would have during the Lakes Festival (Fat & Skinny race will be 05/13-05/15). The Warsaw and Winona Lake communities have an extensive bike trail system and people come from all over to use these trails. Cross promoting with the biking events could help market the festival to a greater number of people that enjoy outdoor recreation. We could link the festival to the Optimist Triathlon that is held the morning of the same day as the Lakes Festival. We are in contact with board members of the Hire Park BMX Midwest Nationals that are being held 06/25-06/26/2011 as well. There are approximately 2,000 BMX racers for this event. The Lakes Festival could be an activity for the family when they have down time in between races. We will request to be included in their emails, mailings and have a link on their website to cross promote the festival.

Food tends to be the focal point of most gatherings. Music goes along with food. The festival will have several food vendors set up for the event. We have thought about having a "Taste of the Lakes" during the festival as well. This would entail getting a good number of food establishments from the area to participate. The public would get a chance to "taste" local cuisine. There is a concert in the park the Friday of the festival weekend. We will have information about the festival shared at the concert. Families could enjoy the music of Blues artist Keith Scott that Friday and then come to the festival the next day. We could incorporate the concert with the "Taste of the Lakes" in upcoming festivals.

In the same way weekend events coinciding with the Lakes Festival weekend will help create synergy with event promotion and attendance, we also have explored areas of coordination for events occurring during the week between the Lakes Festival and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend. This week has been designated as Lakes Appreciation Week by the Kosciusko County Commissioners. One area of coordination are the many fishing tournaments that take place on several well-known lakes in the region. The most common tournaments are for Largemouth Bass and Muskelunge and each has an association which organizes the tournaments. Another potential area of coordination is the lake associations in Kosciusko County. We have collected contact information for at least 15 of these associations and have made initial contact with many of these groups. They can be encouraged to plan their own events such as a fish fry, lake tour, lake cleanup, or educational workshop during Lakes Appreciation Week. Another area for coordination is the area's fireworks displays. Incorporating these into Lakes Appreciation Week and

having the displays be the final celebration of the lakes would be a fitting finale for a great week of fun and education.

### **Conclusion**

#### **Goals:**

Once fully implemented, we anticipate our proposed expansion of the Northern Indiana Lakes Festival will increase its attendance to 3,000 people over the course of the weekend. We anticipate that many more will participate in the events of Lake Appreciation Week which will serve to reinforce the purposes of the Lakes Festival. If we are chosen for the Jean Northenor Project Proud Award, we will put the funds towards promotion of the festival according to the ideas we have presented in this paper.

#### **Summary:**

The Northern Indiana Lakes Festival is a successful community event that celebrates our local lakes as vital to our region's economy, recreation, health, and natural environment. The proposed changes to the festival included in this whitepaper promise to expand the festival to reach even more people with an even more effective experience to foster an ethic of stewardship and appreciation for our wonderful local waters resources.