

2012

Maven
PERSPECTIVES^{LLC}



Marketing Report

Phase I

August 14, 2012

Submitted By

Maven Perspectives LLC

LONG LAKE CONSERVATION CENTER

Executive Summary

In 1963, Aitkin County accepted the donation of 200 acres of land from the St. Louis Park Kiwanis Club for the purpose of creating a residential environmental learning center for area students, the Long Lake Conservation Center (LLCC). This pristine location and facility is located on Long Lake and is center stage for wildlife observation, collection of microscopic specimens, canoeing, and outdoor learning. Long Lake Conservation Foundation (LLCF) was established in 1981 to support environmental education and the mission of LLCC.

2012 will celebrate the Long Lake Conservation Center's (LLCC) 49th anniversary with nearly 200,000 youth, teachers, and adults having enjoyed a variety of memorable learning opportunities. The memories of their time spent at LLCC have a lasting impression that brings smiles and excitement to their recollection even after 20 years.

All environmental education experiences are valuable; few have as much impact as a several-day visit to one of Minnesota's Residential Environmental Learning Centers (RELC). This immersion in nature is considered by students to be the highlight of their entire primary educational experience. Parents and teachers alike agree that spending several days of environmental learning about natural systems and cooperative behavior adds a depth of understanding and a measure of maturity that simply cannot be achieved in the traditional classroom setting.

Maven Perspectives LLC was retained by Aitkin County in May 2012 to conduct a market research study about how the facility is viewed internally and externally, privately and publicly, and by funders, County Commissioners, former clients and community members, LLCC staff and management team, educational representatives, city mayors, and Chambers of Commerce.

The purpose of this report is to identify the current perception and market position of the facility, identify new market possibilities, and re-evaluate programs, age groups serviced, and activities. Marketing materials, website design, destination signage, social media presence and promotional strategies were also reviewed and recommendations are presented herein.

Research methodology was comprised of gathering relevant data from specific documents, computer databases, online surveys, face-to-face interviews with County Commissioners, community members, business owners, former clients, major funders, teachers, LLCC staff, and the former Director of LLCC.

To ascertain a more complete understanding of the history, current situation, internal and external climate and the possibilities for LLCC, data was collected and analyzed to fully understand the following:

- Level of LLCC's awareness in and outside the community
- Cognitive relationship with County and the community
- Positive/negative personification
- Suggestions
- Direction/mission

LLCC is a facility that is enjoyed and praised by current and past clients, schools, teachers, and staff. Interviews have revealed that there is a serious awareness problem. Most people interviewed had either

never heard of LLCC or had heard of it but were unaware of what went on there. The perception among most is that it is a private, invitation only, stuffy “state facility,” and has been losing money since 2000. There seems to be a disconnection between the founding agreement, LLCC, the County, the constituents, and the public. Currently, LLCC is considered to be a sub-department of the Aitkin County Land Department however it is not supported up front by the County. Originally, LLCC was not intended to be a profit making entity but rather a service to the community. Also identified is that LLCC is considered a part of the County park system but the public does not feel welcome. The lack of directional and destination signage, link to the Aitkin County website, and the name of the facility do not encourage people to use it.

LLCC was the first and now the oldest RELC, yet it is far behind in progressiveness, activities offered, website management, social media, brochure design, promotion, community involvement, and public image.

Also in need of bolstering are future sustainability, securing additional and continual funding, support for the faculty and developing a stronger more active Long Lake Conservation Foundation to support the mission, goals and purpose of the LLCC. Foundation volunteers are continually working to provide family activities at LLCC throughout the year. Contributions fund some of these activities as well as maintaining and providing quality environmental education for students from Minnesota that visit. The Long Lake Conservation Foundation is designated as a 501(c)3 nonprofit and contributions are tax-deductible.

Maven Perspectives offers the following recommendations intended to increase the awareness and use of the LLCC thereby affecting future sustainability of the facility. For details, see full report.

1. Redefine the mission of LLCC to more clearly reflect the activities, programming, and purpose

2. Secure alternative programming and client markets

There exists a wealth of alternative market opportunities and interests available to LLCC in the areas of:

- School Programming
- Summer Camp Programming
- Adult/Family Programming
- County Park Functions
- Community Programming

Further exploration into these new programming opportunities should be completed to determine feasibility, develop contact information, secure training, assist in the implementation of new legislation, and identify key partnerships that need to be cultivated and nourished for the good of LLCC now and in the future. (Phase II)

3. Employ bold marketing strategies

Several marketing strategies were identified which will enhance the image of LLCC, will assist in reinventing current programming and enhance future programming, and will ensure future sustainability and profitability.

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Aitkin County Commissioners

Long Lake Conservation Foundation Members

Staff of Long Lake Conservation Center

Long Lake Conservation Center Management Team

Local business owners

School staff

On-line survey respondents

Todd Roggenkamp, former LLCC Director

Paul Oberg, Jeffers Foundation- Major contributor

...and many others who shared their time and concern to contribute to this study

Forward

In 1963, Aitkin County accepted the donation of 200 acres of land from the St. Louis Park Kiwanis Club for the purposes of creating a residential environmental learning center for area students, the Long Lake Conservation Center (LLCC). This pristine location and facility is located on Long Lake and is center stage for wildlife observation, collection of microscopic specimens, canoeing, and outdoor learning. Long Lake Conservation Foundation (LLCF) was established in 1981 to support environmental education and the mission of LLCC.

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Internal/External Analysis

Maven Perspectives conducted an extensive review of internal and external factors, influences, and possible threats that currently and/or potentially could affect the short and long term viability of the Long Lake Conservation Center.

Internal Analysis: Utilizing a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis approach, a more comprehensive understanding of LLCC’s historical and current situation, internal and external climate and the possibilities for the LLCC was ascertained. Data was collected and analyzed to fully understand the following :

- Level of LLCC’s awareness inside and outside the community
- Cognitive relationship with county/community
- Positive/negative personification
- Market opportunities
- Direction/mission

An on-line survey together with face-to-face and hard copy interviews with targeted questions regarding name recognition, awareness, function, demographics, and perceptions were conducted. Including the on-line survey, personal, and telephone interviews with previous clients, teachers, school superintendents, County Commissioners, LLCC staff and management team, funders and County residents, a total of 697 individuals were interviewed for this study. See Appendix A and B.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Great food	Very remote
Long term dedicated staff	Bunk bed situation
Beautiful location, nice buildings	Not open to the public
Economic development	Awareness Issues within the local communities
Supports the community	Can’t compete with county businesses
Dark Sky site	Rising cost of operations (food, etc.)
Wildlife	Operates from May to September for kids only
Cookies	Seen as a losing proposition by tax payers
Great staff	Without funding, we couldn’t afford to come
Staff easy to work with and very accommodating	Would like to see some new programs
Staff very thorough	Security Issues when kids are there
Love the MN Zoo	No air conditioning
Traditions	No cell phones
Great staff and programs – all good!	Lack of awareness
Educational	Lack of promotion
Wonderful, life changing experience for kids	No internet service
LLCC reinvests in the community	Too far away
Creates jobs	No zip line, rock climbing wall, or skeet shoot
	Poor website
	Lack of promotion

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
All ages like nature Don't limit to 5 – 6 th graders Get involved in the community Capture professional associations Capture state agencies Expand market More K – 12 More adult and seniors programs More family/community events	Local opposition to competition Misconception about LLCC impact in the area Offer more local citizens events Cost prohibitive for many Food and gas prices Current economy Being shut down due to funding cuts Losing local citizen's support Losing county government support Negative perception Not profitable County Board Public pressure Limited Staff

External Analysis: A political, economical, social and technological Influences (PEST) analysis was completed to identify external constraints and concerns.

Political:

The relationship between the LLCC and the County is unclear and indecisive. There exists confusion around the LLCC being a sub-department of the Aitkin County Land Department and making a profit. (Service vs. Profit Center)

Economical:

The marketing budget for LLCC is \$0.00 with no up-front support from the County and designated funding is limited for improving programming and activities.

Social:

There exists little support from the community, County and business owners. However, if approached, businesses and are willing to do so. The facility is viewed as non-community friendly and an uninviting facility. The name does not accurately describe what happens at LLCC.

Technological:

Currently, the website and online presence is limited. Internal processes need to be automated. Technology needs to be enhanced and staff training is needed.

Survey Results *(see Appendix A for raw data)*

Maven Perspectives conducted an online survey, random face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews to establish the current level of LLCC's awareness inside and outside of the Aitkin County community, the facility's cognitive relationship with the county and community members, and it's positive or negative personification. It also assisted Maven Perspectives in gathering insight on what or if changes could be made at the facility as well as how important and what affect a new mission statement and direction would have on the profitability of LLCC and the impact on the community.

It is important to note that there was a wide split in recommendations and attitudes between those who had attended the facilities and those who had not. Maven Perspectives intentionally diversified those interviewed to achieve a full, unbiased response to our questions. Those who had attended were nearly 100% for the continuation and improvement of the facility. Those who had not heard of it did not have an idea of what LLCC represents. Ironically, some of the school superintendents did not fully understand the significance of LLCC because teachers were assigned to the task of taking the children to the facility.

Another revealing and notable aspect of the survey results was the overwhelming consensus that LLCC has an incredible, knowledgeable, dedicated staff who, if given the time and resources, is committed to continuing the most revered and established "service" that it provides to the children, adults, teachers, and the community of Aitkin County. One final and very important mention, the food, kitchen staff, and the Long Lake Conservation Center cookies are AAA+.

Survey highlights include:

- There were 239 respondents to the online survey
- 82% of respondents claimed that LLCC was very important to the Aitkin county area
- The highest response age group was 35-50 years old
- The vast majority of respondents who have been to LLCC love it and want to see it continue to operate

Face-to-Face interviews and telephone Interviews:

Maven Perspectives conducted personal impromptu interviews with individuals and business owners in order to get a sense of how the general public viewed the facility and what if any value LLCC had to Aitkin County.

Of those interviewed, 90% had never heard of LLCC; 4% have heard of LLCC but had never been there and didn't know what they do; 6% had heard of it because a friend or relative had been there. Once the function of LLCC was explained to the businesses, they were very impressed and willing to put LLCC brochures in their places of business. Of importance to note is that all businesses solicited did not view LLCC as a competitor.

Challenges

As a result of the research conducted both internally and externally, it was revealed that the Long Lake Conservation Center is facing a variety of challenges from internal operational and staffing challenges to how the facility is viewed by the public and by Aitkin County. Each of these challenges must be investigated and a comprehensive action plan to overcome them should be developed.

Internal Challenges:

- Short staffed
- No time or money to develop new programs/activities
- Low morale
- High overhead costs (*the largest portion is paid into the County's employee retirement fund*)
- Recognized as a sub-department of the Aitkin County Land Department but not financially supported as such upfront
- Limited resources such as funding for a marketing budget, ability to offer new recreational and educational opportunities and the time to explore and develop this new programming

External Challenges:

- Awareness
- Community support/ownership
- Public park status questioned
- County support
- Limited updated programming meeting interests and enthusiasm of a new generation of youth
- Constraints and lack of clarity surrounding the original transfer and donation of the LLCC property and use of the property
- Name recognition/connotations
- In its beginning, LLCC was not rolled out as a community asset. For example, the library is a department of the County and is supported as such. LLCC is an "educational service" on behalf of/for Aitkin County. LLCC is not designated as a for-profit entity.

Competitive Analysis

Currently there are five Residential Environmental Learning Centers (RELC'S) in Minnesota. Created in 1963, LLCC was the first RELC in Minnesota. The other residential learning centers include Laurentian, Wolf Ridge, Audubon and Deep Portage. Each center provides the opportunity for young students to immerse themselves in outdoor, environmental learning that stresses the importance of stewardship and the bountiful knowledge we can learn from nature.

A comprehensive competitive analysis proved to be a challenge because of different age groups serviced, programming offered, public and school clientele served, length of stay and public/private programs offered and accommodations available at each of the RELC's that were investigated.

Basic provisions of the RELC's were compared with no serious deviations in services or cost. Overwhelmingly, however, the lack of cell phone, internet and air conditioning services was the same. There was an identified gap in the recreational offerings between the facilities. Observation towers, zip lines, climbing walls, skeet shooting, to name a few, set LLCC apart from the rest and at a disadvantage.

With proper funding, the shortcomings of LLCC could become assets and strengths to draw the new generation of students, parents, teachers, as well as meeting planners, special occasion planners that will set LLCC apart from the others.

	Age Groups	Open to Public	# of Beds	Length of Stay	Cost of Summer Program	Climbing Wall	Programs	
LLCC	11-15	No/Yes?	230	1-5 Days	\$150	No	25 Min.	
Laurentian	K-12		160	3-4 Days	\$147	Yes	25 Min.	
Wolf Ridge	K-12	Yes	350	3-4 Days	\$126	Yes	25 Min	
Audubon	K-12	No	150	3-4 Days	\$147	Yes	25 Min	
Deep Portage	K-12	No	175	3-4 Days	\$147	Yes	25 Min	
	On a Lake	Open Yr. Round	Internet	Cell Phone Reception	Air Conditioned	Day Camp	Winter Activities	Adult & Family
LLCC	Yes	Yes	Limited	Limited	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Laurentian	Yes	Yes	Great	Limited	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Wolf Ridge	Yes	Yes	Great	Limited	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Audubon	Yes	Yes	Great	Good	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Deep Portage	Yes	Yes	Great	Good with AT&T	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Market Strategy and Recommendations

Although the Long Lake Conservation Center has been under scrutiny since 2000 due to the bottom line performance, Maven Perspectives is convinced that this perception can be changed and public opinion reversed through sharing of information and a proactive redistribution of County funds and LLCC administrative responsibilities.

Markets, attitudes, economies and marketing methods are constantly changing and will require LLCC to revisit, review, revise and revitalize its mission statement to reflect and protect the current marketplace position and the direction they wish to take. This will require altering the marketing plan to increase awareness, name recognition, brand recognition and reputation in and out of the community.

Maven Perspective recommends an overall goal of retaining the integrity of the basic premise of LLCC and its mission and goals as well as employing new age technology and techniques to disseminate this information and support increased attendance, support and funding opportunities.

Although the Long Lake Conservation Center is facing several challenges such as growth pains, funding problems, lack of respect, awareness, identification, and acceptance issues, they are the first and most long standing Residential Environmental Learning Center (RELC) in Minnesota. Maven Perspectives has made far-reaching recommendations that will positively affect the public persona, acceptability and financial wellbeing of the LLCC as well as cultivating favorable relationships with Aitkin County, supporters, funders and constituents of Aitkin County.

General recommendations:

Revisit, Review, Revise, and Revitalize the Mission Statement

The current mission statement is long, cumbersome and does not encompass the true mission of the LLCC. Once a new mission and direction are established, all paper, electronic, billboard advertising and programming should stem from this basic foundation. The mission statement carries the responsibility of framing up the core essence of why an organization exists and what they are trying to accomplish.

Over time, well established facilities such as LLCC, need to reflect and revisit their mission to better reflect the changing attitudes in the area of political, economical, social, technological advances without changes to basic founding principles.

Name Change

The current name does not adequately convey what the LLCC does and a name change should be considered. The name should incorporate words like “environmental” and/or “outdoor or learning”. The new name should also reflect a sense of “community” and “stewardship” to help engage supporters and Aitkin County citizens.

New Logo

A logo change should be considered. The current logo is of the wolf and forest scenery background. The current logo lacks color and the background behind the wolf gives an out-of-date feeling. The symbol of the wolf lacks clear direction. When visiting LLCC, the wolf is not a strong symbol of what the LLCC is about.



Awareness /Public Relations Campaign

There exists a name recognition problem and a misunderstanding of what the function of the LLCC is. There is also confusion as to whether it is a public park or not. If indeed it is designated as a public park, Maven Perspectives recommends that it be listed on the Aitkin County park website and on the Aitkin County website under “things to do”. LLCC appears to have an identity crisis that does not lean toward achieving a status of being a respected, fully utilized and profitable service provider in Aitkin County. A fully developed campaign that involves staff, Aitkin County officials, Long Lake Conservation Foundation members and volunteers, past visitors and clients, and funders should be conducted.

Community Involvement, Ownership, and Outreach

LLCC needs to cultivate a better relationship with the surrounding communities to show a connection and willingness to get involved and in turn creating a need for the community to take ownership and pride in the facility. LLCC management team, staff and supporters are lacking the respect and appreciation deserved to fully realize its potential. An immersion of staff and supporters as LLCC representatives within the community will cultivate pride and ownership by increasing LLCC visibility. Speaking at civic organizations, town hall meetings, city meetings, county meetings, Chambers of Commerce functions, mayoral meetings, and community gatherings is essential.

Signage

Whether it is a school bus driver, parent drivers or the general public, signage is a key factor in getting the LLCC name in front of potential users while allowing them clear access to the facility. A lack of destination signage to LLCC exists from all directions. Directional signage should be placed on main trunk thoroughfares with added signage marking turning spots. The lack of destination signage could be a contributing factor to the idea that LLCC is an “invitation only” facility.

Billboards

Getting people to LLCC is paramount in creating a solid supporter and client base. Once seen, the land and the facility will speak for itself. Maven Perspectives recommends that private billboards be strategically placed in areas with dense traffic both within Aitkin County and along

routes that lead to Aitkin County. The billboards should elicit an inviting, fun, and environmental learning atmosphere as well as emphasizing and inviting public use.

Printed materials

Consistently branding LLCC includes every item that is sent out into the community from LLCC. Items that are sent into a community reflect the organization. Maven Perspectives recommends that brochures, rack cards, employee business cards and other printed materials be updated with added color, crisp photographs, and include a clearly stated mission and logo. Brochures and/or rack cards should be strategically placed at wayside rests, in businesses, in grocery and convenience stores, hotels, professional offices, Chambers of Commerce, city and county offices, hospitals and clinics, and visitor destination sites throughout Aitkin County. Additionally, utilizing supporters and LLCF members to assist with distribution is encouraged.

Media, Newspaper, Radio

Also recommended is a consistent presence of an identified list of activities and happenings at LLCC. These should be placed in all Aitkin County papers, on community calendars, and dispersed to radio and television stations along with website and social media outlets. LLCC staff interviews both on radio and television stations citing events at the facility is encouraged. Maintaining monthly contact with media outlets will build relationships, hence goodwill and increased users from both within and outside the greater Aitkin County Area. Press releases should be submitted describing the recaps of events and activities. Engaging readers with an interesting, thought provoking question is a good way to encourage return readership and response.

Social Media Recommendations

The world of marketing has drastically changed over the last five to ten years. With the creation of social media sites, blogs, and flourish of the internet in general, technology is driving the world. More than half of all people in the United States over the age of 12 have set up a social media profile, Facebook has over 845 million users, and Twitter now has 110 million users and is adding 300,000 members a day. ~*Fortune 500 Social media Statistics*

Social media is user-generated content on the internet. It's created with free or inexpensive technology, is easy to update, and can reach a niche audience or millions. It can be mere words in a blog, but also user-generated videos, photos, and audio. It can be interactive with unfiltered comments from visitors. Social media reaches the masses while remaining inexpensive yet effective.

It is Maven Perspectives recommendation to use social media outlets available to them to:

- Build awareness
- Strengthen relationships with clients, prospects, and influencers
- Better understand your customers
- Improve customer service
- Identify new product ideas
- Increase web site traffic
- Improve search engine rankings
- Generate growth

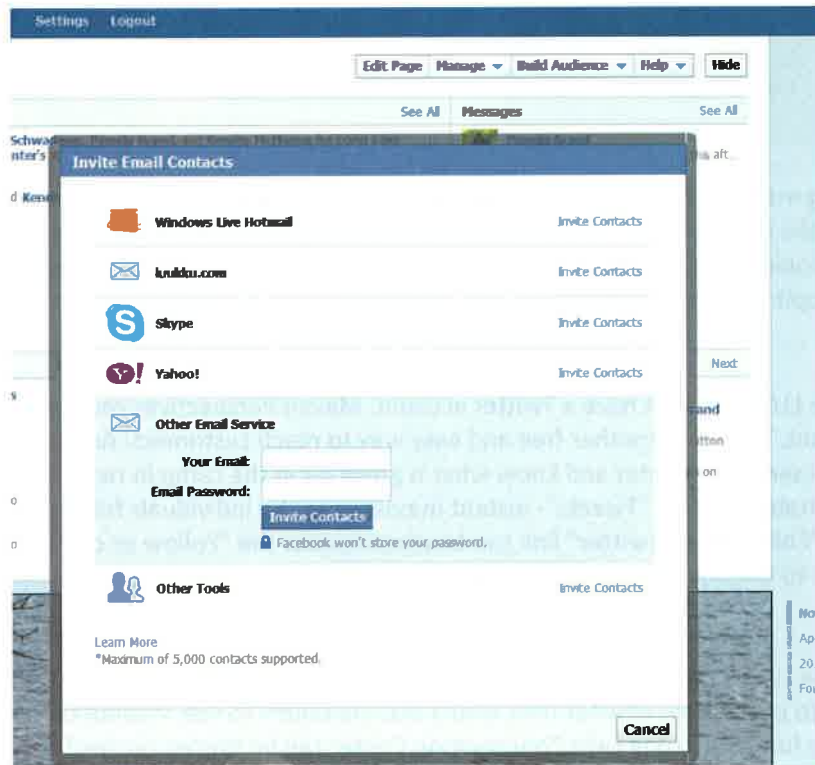
Some ways Maven Perspectives recommends the Long Lake Conservation Center does this are the following.



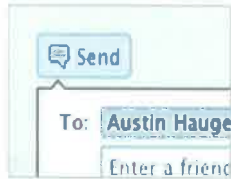
Facebook

Perhaps the LLCC's most useful social media tool is Facebook. It is free and reaches the masses. The LLCC currently has a Facebook page. As of May 24, 2012 the page has forty-six individuals that "Like" the page, simply stating they show support for the center. The LLCC's page contains pictures of the facility and is good about listing the upcoming events happening at LLCC. Maven Perspectives recommends the continuation of listing events and posting pictures. It is important to post information about the events after they happen and post pictures of them taking place.

The Long Lake Conservations Center's page started in July of 2011 and today only has forty-six people that like the page. The most important thing to the growth of marketing through Facebook is increased support. The LLCC page must generate new individuals that like the page. To do so: first, an email contact list needs to be created, which is found under the 'Build Audience' tab in the administrators resources. LLCC should be inviting teachers, parents, staff, etc. to 'like' them on Facebook. It is important to note that individuals under the age of thirteen cannot currently have a Facebook page.



The second resource to build audience is the 'Send' button. This allows current LLCC Facebook users to invite their friends to also 'Like' the LLCC page. Encourage your users to invite their friend to 'Like' the page.



Send Button

The Send button allows your users to easily send your content to their friends.

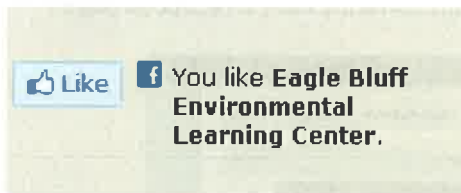
Another recommendation is to utilize the "Like" button directly on the Long Lake Conservation Center website. This allows website users to "Like" the LLCC Facebook page without needing to look up the Center on Facebook. With one click of a button a user "Likes" your page.

Social plugins let you see what your friends have liked, commented on or shared on sites across the web.



Like Button

The Like button lets users share pages from your site back to their Facebook profile with one click.



All of the plug-ins are easy to start using by logging in as the administrator of the LLCC Facebook page and going to the social plug-in area. It is critical that the Long Lake Conservation Center expand the number of people supporting their Facebook page. Updating the page with events and photos does nothing if people are not seeing it.

Twitter:

Currently, the LLCC does not have a Twitter account. Maven Perspectives recommends creating a Twitter account. Twitter is another free and easy way to reach customers. An individual can follow the Long Lake Conservation Center and know what is going on at the camp in real time. This is done by a LLCC administrator sending "Tweets"- instant messages to the individuals following. It is fun and engaging. A "Follow us on Twitter" link can be placed under the "Follow us on Facebook" link and users can subscribe to both quickly with two clicks of the mouse.

YouTube

Customers like to see the facility they may be attending or have interest in. YouTube allows an organization to post videos of what they would like customers to see. Promotional videos or footage of people having fun at the Long Lake Conservation Center can be posted on YouTube to draw people in. If the Long Lake Conservation Center decides to utilize this resource it is important to list the LLCC YouTube link on their website. This is free and again, easy to do.

Flickr

Maven Perspectives recommends the Long Lake Conservation Center start to use Flickr. Flickr is an easy way to post pictures online and then utilize throughout all your social media devices- Your blog, Twitter, and Facebook. It puts your photos in one place for you to use. The LLCC can use its Facebook account to sign up for Flickr and they will easily be intertwined.

Upload

More ways to get your photos online.

Multiple ways to upload your photos to Flickr—through the web, your mobile device, email or your favorite photo applications.

Discover

See what's going on in your world.

Keep up with your friends and share your stories with comments & notes. Add rich information like tags, locations & people.

Share

Your photos are everywhere you are.

Upload your photos once to Flickr, then easily and safely share them through Facebook, Twitter, email, blogs and more.

Long Lake Conservation Center has so many beautiful scenes that should be easily shared with people; Flickr is an easy way to do this. A Flickr Link should be placed on the LLCC website right by the Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube links.

Website Development

The Long Lake Conservation Center's website can be considered busy and overwhelming to the customer. There are several heading tabs that lead to little information. For example, the "Retreat" tab leads a person to the same page as the "Overview" tab and this particular page gives little information about the facility or the retreats. More information and pictures need to be provided.

When an individual goes to the website there is little information on the homepage that tells a person what the center does. The first page needs to draw people in and inform them on the purpose of the center.

A major addition to the LLCC's website needs to be online enrollment. The site needs to be current on all events, provide valid and up-to-date information and allow an individual to register online via the website.

The website in general has an out-of-date feeling to it. The photos are blurry in general and do not have a focal point. The text, pictures, and colors need to be updated. Vibrant colors and exciting pictures that tell the LLCC's story need to be integrated to catch people's attention.



The Long Lake Conservation Center's website provides little information about what the purpose of the center is and how a person can attend events and retreats.

Online Newsletter/Blog

The Long Lake Conservation Center at one time put out a monthly newsletter. The last one written is from 2009 and yet still appears on the LLCC website. The newsletter provided information about upcoming events, new news from the center, and educational information from staff members. Removing the old newsletter from the website is recommended.

It is important to continue to inform people of the happenings and news from Long Lake Conservation Center. Maven Perspectives recommends the creation of a Long Lake Conservation Center blog. When writing a blog it is important to have a passionate subject to talk about. The Long Lake Conservation Center's mission is to promote wise use of our vital natural resources. That is a passionate subject to talk about. Student retreats and other events at the LLCC are not meaningful if we do not remember why we are doing them. It is Maven Perspectives recommendation to start an LLCC blog and relate events to forest conservation. Talk about how a retreat or community event relates to forest conservation. It is also important to make a blog interesting and engaging to the individual reading it. Having personal stories about the students/staff or individual community members experiences is interesting and fun. Wordpress is the easiest application to use when starting a blog. The link to the blog should be clear on the LLCC website as well as linked to the LLCC Facebook page.

Educational Programming Recommendations

The Long Lake Conservation Center has a strong and lasting tradition of providing fun, interactive and educational programming which former attendees talk about years later. The programs however, run the risk of becoming stale and not as well received by current student's attention capacity. These programs are tried and true and should be maintained with an updated twist that includes excitement and challenge.

Maven Perspectives also recommends that new programs be designed and implemented continuing to focus on meeting educational standards set forth by law. Focusing on curricular areas such as math, science, engineering, and technology or (STEM) yields greater potential for funding possibilities.

Short Term Programming Recommendations

To jump start and enhance interest and attendance in LLCC, Maven Perspectives recommends that certain opportunities be explored immediately. These include:

School Programming (K-9, 12?)

- Add new recreational activities to the current programming menu
- Encourage Community Education programs
- Include adult programming
- Entice family activities
- Promote LLCC as a County Park
- Review the mission statement
- Consider a name and logo change (recreation, learning, community, "fun")
- Reinforce county and community support
- Seek to have both the community and Aitkin County embrace to take ownership of the facility and support it
- Contact state agencies for meetings, licensures, certifications, training, etc.
- Establish cross-departmental County support
 - Advertising in tax statements
 - Links on the County website
 - Provide website design services
 - Training in social media

Training opportunities

- Diversity training
- Facebook and social media training
- Blogging
- Internet security

Long Term Programming Recommendations

LLCC should prepare for the future sustainability of the facility by creating a solid foundation for growth and continued success. Maven Perspectives recommends that in order to obtain this status the following will need to happen:

- Explore new markets
- Cultivate a more active Long Lake Conservation Foundation to establish a sustainable base
- Research grant/scholarship opportunities for new and existing clients
- Market to more schools
- Develop a strategic plan for the future
- Hire additional staff to accommodate new programming
- Provide staff training in outreach/communications, social media, writing blogs, etc.

Explore and Prioritize Alternative Markets including:

School Programming

- K-grades 9 or 12
- Home school organizations
- College programs
- Offer continuing education units (CEU's) for teacher re-licensure

Adult Programming

- Outdoor fitness programs
- Art classes
- Workshops
- Saddle clubs
- 55 Alive classes
- Date Night

Children's Programming

- Day camps
- Girl Scouts/Boy Scouts
- Youth for Christ
- Space Camp
- Fishing Camp – summer and winter
- Junior Leadership Program
- 4-H Clubs

Senior Programming

- Day camps
- Bingo
- Senior fishing programs
- AARP courses

Family/Community Events

- Antique snowmobile show
- Dog obedience and agility course
- Movie night (indoors and out)
- Skating parties
- Geo-caching
- Winter camping
- Church functions/picnics
- Family hikes
- School dances/Proms
- Father/daughter dances
- Community picnics
- Sleigh rides and hay rides
- Super Bowl Party – outside
- Farmer’s market - local producers only
- “Made in Aitkin County” Fair
- Holiday carnival – Santa
- Winter carnival
- Winter bonfires
- 4th of July celebration with fireworks
- Iron man challenge course
- Alumni weekends
- Disk golf
- Volleyball
- Mini golf
- Holiday crafting and shows
- Upward Bound Program
- Start a memorial forest
- October pumpkin patch/carving and maze
- Early Childhood and Family Education
- Create a community library with donated books
- Community Education “Fabulous Field Trips”
- “Terrific Tuesday” trips
- Church services
- Local choir/musical/performing arts performances
- Special Olympics
- Quilting and scrapbooking groups

Other

- Outreach programs
- Energy conferences
- Conservation leadership academy
- Camp session for the disabled
- Veteran’s meetings/support groups
- Camp session for underprivileged/inner city kids

- Leadership programs for forestry, conservation
- Computer classes
- County Chambers of Commerce meetings
- Promote as a County park/open to the public
- University of MN Extension programs

Capacity Building Recommendations

LLCC has a committed and knowledgeable staff and supporter base supplying programming, facility upkeep, educational resources, and food preparation among others. Throughout the research and analysis of writing this report, Maven Perspectives recognized a need to address internal functions that when put in place, will yield the results aspired to. These additional recommendations are offered because they are acutely connected to the overall success of the LLCC and its marketing endeavors.

Internal staffing capacity and skill sets are needed in the areas of:

Executive Director: An Executive Director should be strongly considered to lead the organization and fulfill the goals which Aitkin County has set forth for LLCC. He/She should accept and agree with the basic premise that you need “to work on your business, rather than in your business” *Gerber (1995)* and should possess the following skill set.

- Business management/marketing background
- Leadership skills that include communication, marketing, promotion, accessibility.
- Superior communications skills
- Willing to get involved with the community and small businesses to work together for the benefit of all
- Forward thinking with a “can do” attitude
- Inclusiveness
- Open to suggestions from everyone
- Fundraising experience

Social Media/Website Staff Member: The Long Lake Conservation Center needs to decide the best individual to take on the task of social media for the organization. You want someone who has:

- Deep knowledge of your customers and the organization
- Exemplifies the personality of your organization
- Integrity
- Good people and communication skills
- A quick study on technology
- Very strong work ethic

Current LLCC educational staff (at minimum 1 staff person) should obtain adjunct faculty status with a MN college or university to offer teacher CEU and graduate level credit.

Strengthen the Long Lake Conservation Foundation

Board member recruitment should be accomplished inviting those:

- With strong connections respective to their communities
- From both within Aitkin County and outside of the greater Aitkin County area who have a keen interest in environmental education
- Who represent each community in Aitkin County
- Who are exceptional at “Doing the ASK”
- Who have effective fundraising experience

Periodic board member training should be considered to ensure quality skill development over the long term.

Explore reliable wireless and cell phone service options

Wireless/cell service is considered a basic staple. Most people from metropolitan and most rural areas assume and expect that service is always available and prefer the “choice” to be without it (i.e. they choose to turn off their cell phone as opposed to the choice being made for them by limited or no wireless/cell service). This was also noted as a limiting factor for market niches that require reliable wireless/cell service to visit the facility i.e. those in top leadership positions, parents, teachers, etc.

Begin conversations with wireless and cell phone service providers to create reliable cell/smart phone services at the facility.

Maintain safe, secure, and beautiful buildings and grounds

Explore adult rooming/sleeping options with air conditioning

Create teacher incentives

- Create incentives for teachers to bring students by appealing to the teacher’s self-interests. Some teachers indicated that they do not visit RELC’s due to non-payment of the full number of hours worked over the stay (for instance, teachers get paid for 7.5 hours per day however when at RELC’s, they work 24/7). Create built-in opportunities for them to obtain continuing education units (CEU’s) and graduate level credit during both school and summer student programming.
- Consider creating a teacher’s academy with stipends/scholarships, CEU’s and graduate credit offerings during the summer months.

Identify, solidify and utilize funding sources

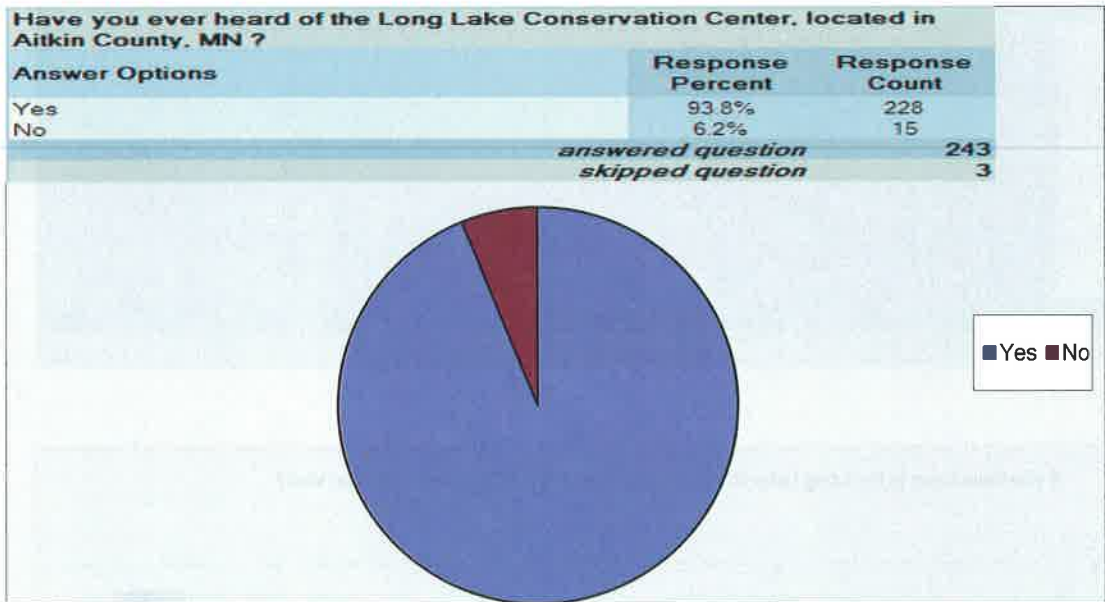
- Ex: The Jeffers Foundation has been a long time supporter of LLCC. They have been providing scholarship monies to schools and individuals to attend the summer and school programs who would otherwise not be able to afford it. They were established in March 2005 for the following purpose: "...to provide for direct primary education and the development of primary education principles, models, and curricula aimed at teaching young people the value of wise stewardship of

natural resources... and insuring the conservation and preservation of natural resources for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations." Jeffers seeks opportunities to work with individuals, both educators and others, who have an interest in environmental education (EE). They work with schools at all levels to develop and share programs aimed at helping students learn sound principles of environmental stewardship. Jeffers seeks to produce programs and products aimed at making the generalist teacher more comfortable in teaching EE stewardship principles. They also seek meaningful partnerships with others of common interests, the synergy of like minds and diverse means. Recommendations include:

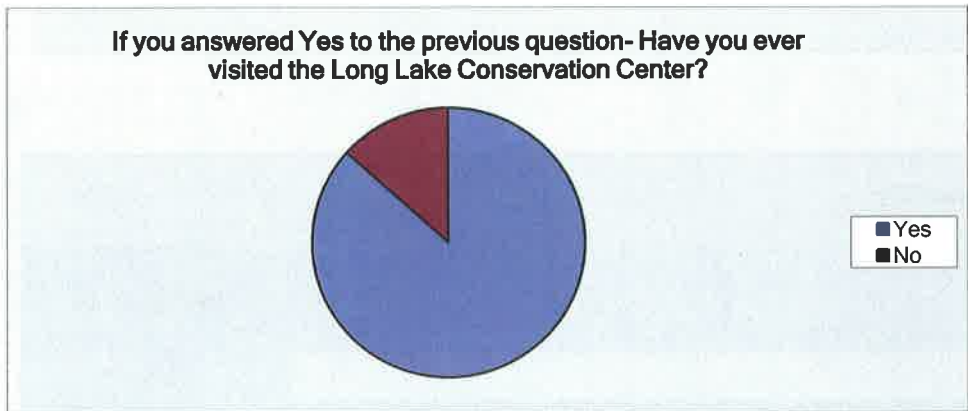
- Build and maintain a stronger relationship with the Jeffers Foundation
- Take full advantage of the free support materials for teachers and schools
- A representative from Jeffers is available to talk about the benefits of outdoor learning to teachers, school boards, civic groups, county boards, parents and superintendents – This is all offered free of charge.
- Become active with www.familiesoutdoors.org – another free service of the Jeffers Foundation that encourages and promotes family togetherness, healthy lifestyle and environmental learning and stewardship.

Appendix A – Online Survey Raw Data

On-line Survey – Question #1



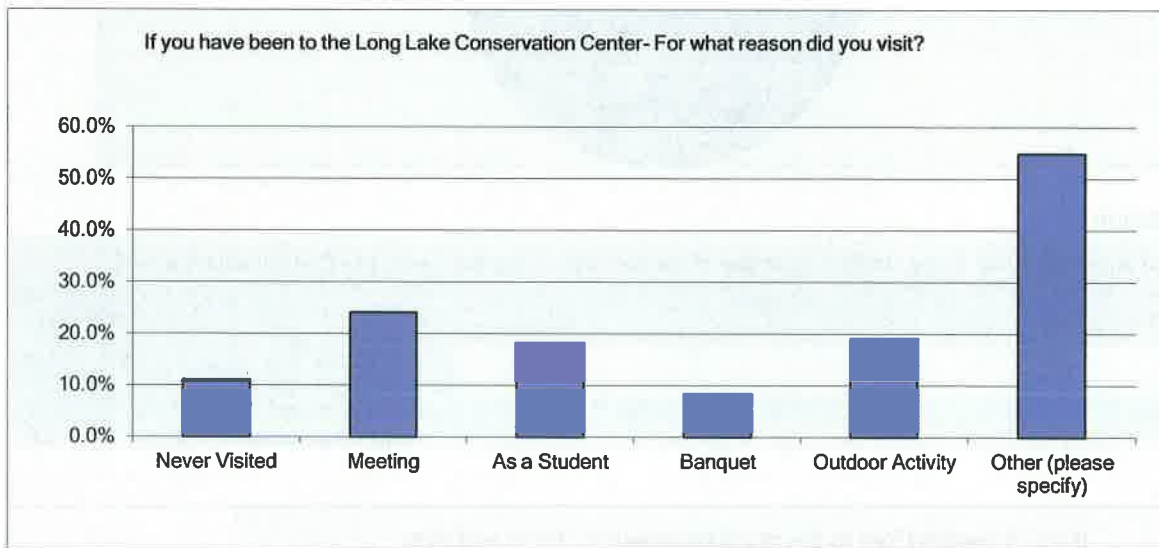
Question #2



Question #3

If you have been to the Long Lake Conservation Center- For what reason did you visit?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Never Visited	11.0%	25
Meeting	24.1%	55
As a Student	18.0%	41
Banquet	8.3%	19
Outdoor Activity	18.9%	43
Other (please specify)	54.8%	125
<i>answered question</i>		228
<i>skipped question</i>		18



Question #4

What community do you reside in?

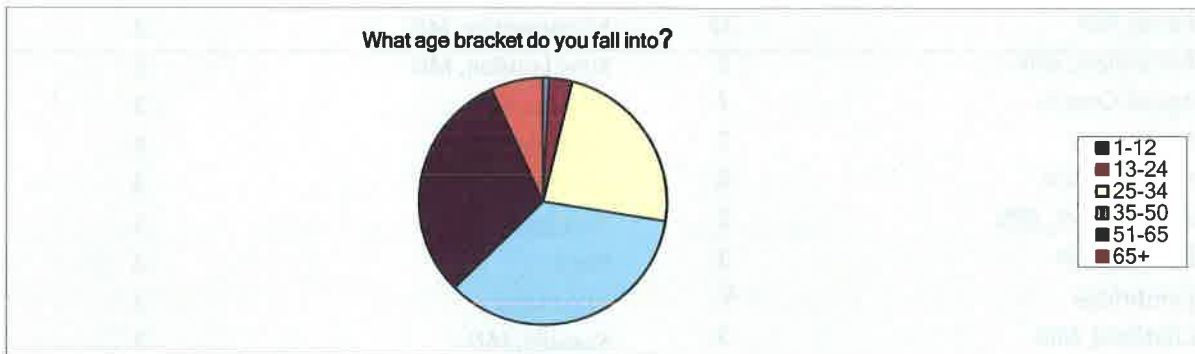
Answer Options	Response Count
	234
<i>answered question</i>	
234	
<i>skipped question</i>	
12	

Aitkin, MN	53	Minnewasha, MN	1
Annandale, MN	1	New London, MN	1
Anoka County	2	Omaha, NE	1
Anoka, MN	1	Palisade, MN	8
Brainerd, MN	4	Pensacola, FL	1
Breezy Point, MN	2	Perham, MN	1
Buffalo, MN	1	Pierz	1
Cambridge	5	Prior Lake	1
Chatfield, MN	1	Scandia, MN	1
Crosby	1	Shorewood, MN	1
Crow Wing County	1	St. Michaels	1
Crow Wing, MN	1	Stearns County	1
Deerwood, MN	1	Steven's Point, WI	1
Duluth MN	2	Tamarack	1
Fairfax, VA	1	Waconia, MN	1
Grand Rapids, MN	13	Waseca, MN	1
Isle, MN	3	Wealthwood	1
Koochiching County	1	White Bear Lake	1
Lawler, MN	1	Wisconsin	1
Lino Lakes, MN	1	Worthington, MN	1
Little Falls, MN	1		
Malmo, MN	1		
McGrath, MN	1		
McGregor	2		
Minneapolis	3		

Question #5

What age bracket do you fall into?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
1-12	0.8%	2
13-24	3.0%	7
25-34	23.7%	56
35-50	35.2%	83
51-65	30.5%	72
65+	6.8%	16
<i>answered question</i>		236
<i>skipped question</i>		10



Question #6

How important do you feel the Long Lake Conservation Center is to Aitkin County?

Answer Options	Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very Important	Rating Average	Response Count
Your Rating:	18	4	27	68	119	4.13	236
						<i>answered question</i>	236
						<i>skipped question</i>	11

Question #7

What other activities/events would you like to see at the facility?

Answer Options	Response Count
	142
	<i>answered question</i> 142
	<i>skipped question</i> 104

Retreats, Receptions, Wedding	6
We love it the way it is	72
Great Staff	25
More Adult Programs	15
More Day Camp Opportunities	21
No Suggestions	3

Question #8

Is there anything else you would like us to know about the Long Lake Conservation Center?

Answer Options	Response Count
	118
<i>answered question</i>	118
<i>skipped question</i>	128

No	21
Keep it going!	35
Great Place	37
Where is it?	12
Great staff	13

Appendix B: Aitkin County Demographics

*Collected from the Aitkin county website at www.co.aitkin.mn.us/

Aitkin County, Minnesota

People Quick Facts	Aitkin County	Minnesota
i Population, 2011 estimate	NA	5,344,861
i Population, 2010	16,202	5,303,925
i Population, percent change, 2000 to 2010	5.9%	7.8%
i Population, 2000	15,301	4,919,479
i Persons under 5 years, percent, 2010	4.8%	6.7%
i Persons under 18 years, percent, 2010	18.0%	24.2%
i Persons 65 years and over, percent, 2010	27.2%	12.9%
i Female persons, percent, 2010	49.4%	50.4%
<hr/>		
i White persons, percent, 2010 (a)	95.6%	85.3%
i Black persons, percent, 2010 (a)	0.4%	5.2%
i American Indian and Alaska Native persons, percent, 2010 (a)	2.4%	1.1%
i Asian persons, percent, 2010 (a)	0.2%	4.0%
i Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, percent, 2010 (a)	Z	0.0%
i Persons reporting two or more races, percent, 2010	1.3%	2.4%
i Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, percent, 2010 (b)	0.9%	4.7%
i White persons not Hispanic, percent, 2010	95.0%	83.1%
<hr/>		
i Living in same house 1 year & over, 2006-2010	90.8%	85.5%
i Foreign born persons, percent, 2006-2010	1.1%	7.0%
i Language other than English spoken at home, pct age 5+, 2006-2010	3.2%	10.3%

i High school graduates, percent of persons age 25+, 2006-2010	88.1%	91.3%
i Bachelor's degree or higher, pct of persons age 25+, 2006-2010	14.4%	31.4%
i Veterans, 2006-2010	2,367	395,262
i Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16+, 2006-2010	24.8	22.4
i Housing units, 2010	16,029	2,347,201
i Homeownership rate, 2006-2010	81.1%	74.2%
i Housing units in multi-unit structures, percent, 2006-2010	4.9%	21.5%
i Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2006-2010	\$177,900	\$206,200
i Households, 2006-2010	7,903	2,085,917
i Persons per household, 2006-2010	2.05	2.45
i Per capita money income in past 12 months (2010 dollars) 2006-2010	\$22,966	\$29,582
i Median household income 2006-2010	\$40,226	\$57,243
i Persons below poverty level, percent, 2006-2010	13.5%	10.6%

Business Quick Facts	Aitkin County	Minnesota
i Private nonfarm establishments, 2009	430	146,453 ²
i Private nonfarm employment, 2009	3,128	2,417,174 ²
i Private nonfarm employment, percent change 2000-2009	-2.0%	0.9% ²
i Non-employer establishments, 2009	1,104	362,739

i Manufacturers shipments, 2007 (\$1000)	0 ¹	107,563,060
i Merchant wholesaler sales, 2007 (\$1000)	53,507	82,878,056
i Retail sales, 2007 (\$1000)	147,509	71,384,103
i Retail sales per capita, 2007	\$9,211	\$13,751
i Accommodation and food services sales, 2007 (\$1000)	19,708	10,423,660
i Building permits, 2010	112	9,840
i Federal spending, 2009	176,837	44,338,124 ²

Geography Quick Facts	Aitkin County	Minnesota
i Land area in square miles, 2010	1,821.66	79,626.74
i Persons per square mile, 2010	8.9	66.6
i FIPS Code	001	27
i Metropolitan or Micropolitan Statistical Area	None	

Reference

Gerber, Michael E. (1995), *The E-Myth Revisited*, (2nd Edition) Harper Collins Publications, Inc.