



## Chapter 1 - Engagement and education

Many potentially effective improvements in sustainability may be possible through changes in employee behavior. These are less costly and may be more immediate than capital improvements. Sensible savings in energy, water, and waste reduction often results when employees are empowered, encouraged to make changes and get to provide feedback about how things could be done better.

Metro Parks Tacoma also has the opportunity to use its inspirational role. While shining a light on local and global environmental issues, the District can celebrate its sustainability efforts and show others how to conserve resources.

For that to happen, we first need to make sure staff members know they have a role in helping MPT become a more sustainable organization. That requires training and tools. As we become more efficient, we can share our success and help others follow our lead.



## Part One: Employee engagement and education

From surveys and interviews conducted throughout 2015, it is clear that employees at MPT believe that environmental sustainability is integral to the District's identity. It is important to educate employees not only about the value of sustainability but also to show how they can make it happen. We also need to provide better opportunities for feedback to fully benefit from employee expertise.

### 1.1. *Employee sustainability training, engagement and opportunities at work*

Current practices: Sustainability training for staff is up to supervisors; there is currently no district-wide training specifically about sustainability practices. Some confusion exists. For example, staff members may not correctly differentiate between refuse and recyclable items. Employees are uncertain about whether to shut down computers at night. As it is, sustainability training depends on employee initiative and coordination. One example is the Horticulture Summit organized in spring 2015, which provided pesticide-related education and encouraged employee feedback.

Staff members are encouraged to conserve electricity. Examples are turning off lights, avoiding the use of space heaters and giving up personal printers. Most MPT workplaces host recycling bins and lots of people use them. However, signs are inconsistent and instructions are lacking. Informal audits of waste bins indicate confusion about which items are recyclable, and that staff could be recycling some items more.

**Targets: Make sustainability a part of all new-hire training. Add sustainability to the annual training routine.**

Recommendations: A Sustainability Coordinator develops training for all new hires. A fact sheet could suffice. It should include the Sustainability Coordinator's contact information, plus key sustainability requirements. This general training could apply to all positions; more specific training could be developed by working with department managers.

Similarly, regular training should be provided at least annually to all employees. This could take the form of emails, online modules, brown bag lunches or tips in the employee newsletter. Training could include topics such as:

#### **Energy conservation**

- Provide clear instruction on whether computers and which appliances should be turned off or unplugged at the end of the work day.
- Discourage the use of space heaters. Staff should be encouraged to dress warmly.
- Whenever possible, unplug appliances overnight, or place them on timers to limit phantom load. That is the energy used while appliances and electronics are on stand-by mode.

#### **Fuel use reduction**

- Offer "green driver" training to MPT employees who drive as part of their daily routine. The training stresses ways to maximize fuel efficiency. Occasionally monitor routes of fleet vehicles to ensure efficiency using Automatic Vehicle Locating (AVL) technology.
- Encourage employees to use pool vehicles rather than seeking reimbursement for personal vehicle use. Less driving to meetings should also be encouraged if alternatives are possible. (See transportation Chapter 4 for more on this).

## Resource conservation and waste reduction

- Limit paper copies. Change the culture of printing copies for everyone at meetings. Require employees to print individual copies if necessary. Encourage use of laptops and tablets whenever possible. Eliminate desktop printers to discourage unnecessary printing and reduce electricity consumption. Managers should set an example by sacrificing personal printers.
- Develop Metro Parks-branded signage for waste, recycling and compost receptacles. This will benefit employees as well as the public. Use color-coded signage with ample graphics. Consider Seattle Public Utilities' graphics.

Voluntary change should be attempted first, and if campaigns to change behavior are not successful, policies should be considered. If voluntary behavior change is not sufficient, policies should be created and enforced. A ban on the purchase of disposable water bottles, or elimination of personal desktop printers, may be appropriate.

MPT could use various methods to encourage employees to live more sustainably by eliminating barriers. For example, to promote fuel conservation by commuters, MPT could eliminate barriers to using alternative transportation modes. (See Chapter 4.) To reduce plastic waste, MPT could install water bottle filling stations. MPT also could encourage eating local, healthy food by hosting a community-supported agriculture collection site.

In addition to eliminating barriers, finding things that motivate employees to change is important as well. Campaigns to make changes could include feature promotional materials or prizes to encourage this change. For example, provide MPT-branded water bottles when bottle-filling stations are added. Other engaging and educational opportunities for staff should be planned several times a year, such as summits and presentations from outside educators coming in.

### 1.2. *Internal communication and feedback*

Current practices: There are currently a few ways employees are informed about sustainability and their roles. Regular emails promote commute trip reduction opportunities through Pierce Trips. Occasionally, sustainability is a topic in "The Park Bench," employee newsletter. There is an intranet website from which staff can access information, which is not updated regularly but is currently being re-developed with plans to be more engaging and easy to use for employees. As far as feedback, there is not a permanent staff member focused on sustainability for staff to reach out to, so they are limited to co-workers and supervisors when they have ideas about how to reduce environmental impacts at MPT.

Baseline: Baseline statistics are from the sustainability survey conducted in March 2015 (see Appendix A).

- When asked how familiar they are with the term sustainability, 74 percent of staff said very familiar: they could explain it to others. Twenty-five percent said somewhat: that they had heard it before but couldn't explain it well. Only 1 percent said they were not familiar.
- Fifty-two percent of staff members said they were somewhat familiar with the MPT Stewardship and Sustainability Policy. Thirty-nine percent had not read the policy, while 9 percent said they were "very familiar" with it.
- Eighty-eight percent of respondents stated they consider sustainability in their daily practices and decision-making at work.
- Seventy percent said that Metro Parks has provided employees with a clear direction on its environmental commitment, but only 50 percent said expectations of employee responsibilities relating to sustainability have been clearly communicated.

## **Targets:**

- **Increase the number of employees who say they are very familiar with the term sustainability from 74 percent to at least 90 percent by summer 2018.**
- **Increase the number of staff familiar with MPT sustainability efforts. Measure this by asking about familiarity with the 2015 Environmental Sustainability Plan. At least 90 percent of staff members should be somewhat or very familiar with the sustainability plan by summer 2018.**
- **Increase the percentage of employees who say they consider sustainability during their daily work from 88 percent to 95 percent by summer 2018.**
- **Increase employees' understanding MPT's environmental commitment and their personal role in that. Reach at least 90 percent for both by summer 2018.**

Recommendations: The Executive Cabinet should identify and adopt sustainability priorities for each budget cycle. This affects work on employee-engagement campaigns that demand staff time, particularly that of the Internal Communications Manager and Sustainability Coordinator. Priorities should be identified at the beginning of each year, with a timeline to ensure completion.

The Sustainability Coordinator must work with the Internal Communications Manager to develop an annual report that informs staff about MPT sustainability efforts and the employee role. Additional regular communication is possible through quarterly emails, the employee newsletter, the intranet, or a monthly or quarterly sustainability newsletter written by the Sustainability Coordinator.

Improved opportunities for feedback also are needed. Employees should have the option to voice comments and concerns about sustainability directly to a designated staff member, rather than direct supervisors, if necessary. Employee surveys also can provide staff an opportunity for feedback.

At least annual reports of progress should be provided to employees. This should include reminders about sustainability targets and progress toward those. (See Chapter 6.)

## **Sustainable purchasing**

Current practices: Product purchasing should make the selection of eco-friendly options a priority, as long as the budget allows a slight price premium. Right now, MPT custodial supplies are eco-friendly when possible.

**Targets: Reduce money spent on printer and copier paper (estimated). Increase the percent of office products purchased with recycled content.**

Recommendations:

- Adopt a policy for sustainable purchasing (see the Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium's green purchasing guidelines in Appendix B).
- Ban the purchase of plastic water bottles for meetings and events.
- Include a question about buying recycled or local products in employee surveys in an attempt to measure employee's purchasing practices.
- If park maintenance staff move to a central shop location, this could include centrally located storage for custodial supplies which could streamline sustainable purchasing.

## Part Two: Public engagement and education

Metro Parks aims to be the top champion of sustainability for Pierce County by modeling best practices, offering sustainability providing education through in-house expertise and a speaker's bureau, on-site demonstrations and participating in partnerships with organizations that share like values. With the adoption of this plan, MPT will be frequently reporting to the community about progress.

### 1.3. Outreach on MPT sustainability

Current practices: The MPT, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium (PDZA) and Northwest Trek Wildlife Park web sites include information about sustainability efforts, often paired with information about what the public can do. Communication about capital projects and construction also includes messaging about sustainability. However, more public communication is needed to showcase sustainability in MPT operations.

**Targets: Provide monthly public updates in addition to thorough annual reports about MPT sustainability efforts. Include internal measures taken by the District on a sustainability webpage that links MPT actions to what the public can do. (See the following section on environmental outreach.)**

Recommendations:

- Work with marketing and communication staff to identify statistics and facts that illustrate MPT progress toward sustainability. Distribute marketing messages at least monthly, through channels such as Metro Parks Today, email and social media.
- Produce an annual MPT sustainability report.
- Consider providing a showcase for renewable energy demonstration projects to educate and inspire in conjunction with outreach about MPT's sustainability efforts.

### 1.4. Outreach on environmental issues

Current practices: The Zoological and Environmental Education Division promotes environmental awareness through programs and interpretation at the Tacoma Nature Center (TNC), PDZA & Northwest Trek.

Programs at PDZA include the Polar Bear Pal anti-idling campaign, which discourages vehicle idling. PDZA also partners with the City of Tacoma's Sustainable Tacoma Commission to grant the Paw of Approval Award, which honors local businesses that work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Most recently, the zoo has been a leader in asking manufacturers to use sustainable palm oil that does not threaten wildlife habitat, a campaign called Paws for the Cause.

Northwest Trek promotes rain gardens and provides instruction about water pollution using a mobile cart to teach visitors what they can do to keep the local watershed clean. Another instructional cart focuses on locally grown foods and how long-distance food shipments affect climate change.

The Tacoma Nature Center also promotes conservation. Topics derive from the Nature Center's mission of environmental education, specifically related to watersheds and wetlands. Consequently, messages emphasize the importance of water conservation and pollution prevention. The center also hosts an annual Earth Day event, bimonthly work parties to remove invasive plants, and offers a "Water Sleuth" program to teach fifth graders how to protect the watershed.

**Targets: Be considered the most sustainable governmental agency in Pierce County by promoting and educating the public about environmentally sound practices.**



Recommendations: While MPT has already excelled in this area, even more could be done.

- Continue and expand current programs. A possibility includes partnering with the City of Tacoma's Office of Environmental Policy and Sustainability and the Tacoma School District to expand the PDZA anti-idling campaign to include the City, MPT and school buildings.
- Work with marketing and communication staff to provide information and resources on a sustainability web page.
- Add sustainability to the topics on the speaker's bureau list.
- Work sustainability tips and facts into social media and other communications.
- Ensure that sustainability is included development discussions for all new capital projects, including new trails, stormwater management, etc.

### **1.5. Events and Rental Facilities**

Current practices: MPT takes part in the City of Tacoma's Green Event certification program for events we host. Qualifying events take steps to promote sustainability. Examples include providing bicycle racks and recycling bins, using recycled-content paper, reducing waste, and donating excess food. However, nothing is measured to determine success. Also, only events with more than 1,000 expected participants qualify for Green Event certification.

MPT's control over events in rented MPT facilities and parks is limited, but could be done to more to make sure they are sustainably used. For example, offer more recycling bins and explain how and what to recycle.

**Targets: Continue to certify all eligible events for Green Excellence through the City of Tacoma program. Create internal guidelines for smaller events that don't qualify for the city's Green Events program. Improve sustainability education and opportunities for those who rent MPT facilities and parks.**

Recommendations:

- Measure success of recycling at events organized by MPT and others using rented space, such as the Taste of Tacoma or Freedom Fair.
- Promote and showcase sustainability through MPT outreach efforts at MPT-produced events.
- Work with staff members who handle MPT rentals and permits to develop internal sustainability guidelines for small events. Guidelines should parallel the City of Tacoma's Green Events program.
- Recruit volunteers to promote effective recycling at events. A sustainability coordinator could act as a liaison to organizations and help coordinate volunteers.
- Offer more recycling opportunities and training on waste management for rentals. The sustainability coordinator could assist staff members responsible for rentals.
  - » Increase the number of recycling bins and provide rental venues with very clear signage
  - » Follow up with renters after events. Ask whether it was easy to manage waste and make improvements accordingly