Online Social Media Policy

Approved by
Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) Board of Directors

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Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) Online Social Media Policy –December 2010

1. BACKGROUND

People make Ausable Bayfield watersheds healthier through their positive actions.

The Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) directors and staff work with municipalities and other partners – such as governments, agencies, organizations, volunteers, and funding partners – to encourage people's positive environmental actions with education, practical expertise, and (in some cases) financial assistance. ABCA must use professional and positive personal contact, and the most effective modes of communication, to support and enhance individual actions to build healthier watersheds. The Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority sees effective communication as a vital tool in achieving a healthier watershed, as envisioned by the *Conservation Strategy*[1] *(1993)*, the *Strategic Communications Plan (2006)*, and the *Ten-Year Business Plan 2010 – 2020: Towards a Healthier Watershed* (2010).

Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority strategically speaks with individuals through many ways, such as direct contact with landowners, public meetings, events, displays, conservation education to the watershed stewards of tomorrow, site visits, telephone calls and teleconferences, direct mail, internal and external web sites and web conferences, annual reports and newsletters, signs, publications, advertising (within budgetary limitations), e-mail, surveys, and through positive media relations with print, broadcast and web-based media.

The ABCA Board of Directors adopted a new communications plan in 2006. There have been profound changes since that time, in the watershed and the country, in the way people interact using new technology. Watershed residents and other partners increasingly use online social networking tools such as *Facebook* and other social media such as *You Tube* or *Twitter*. Online social networking sites such as *Facebook* have changed how many watershed residents get information and talk to each other – and with us. We need to use the tools our clients and partners use so we can most effectively communicate – both providing information and listening. Online social media will allow ABCA to foster closer personal relationships with volunteers, clients, and partners, and to listen better to the people who can improve the watershed. These tools will help the local agency to hear their concerns, their questions, and the things they like, or don't like, about what ABCA is doing. This two-way communication can show how program and service delivery can be changed to increase benefits and reduce barriers to adoption.

Anecdotal evidence suggests fewer people are likely to attend meetings and open houses than in the past. Online social media provides the opportunity to reach more partners and those who have not been engaged in the past. Young people who might not attend an open house might join an online social media group. Farmers and landowners who cannot travel to a meeting during a busy time of year may still be able to find out about programs or ask questions through online social media without travelling across the watershed. Seasonal residents who might not be in the area during a public consultation process might want to use social media to get involved or find out more. Donors and volunteers can find out how to support our work.

Creation of a strategic online social media policy is needed. We must effectively use the most current tools of communication. We must also manage those tools appropriately to limit risks and costs, while increasing the benefits to the watershed community. ABCA has already started to integrate new technological tools into its communication tool box. Examples include use of online web conferencing and, through the drinking water source protection project, online stewardship videos and an online discussion board. ABCA should create a policy to strategically guide the further integration of new media such as *Facebook, YouTube, Wiki* and *Twitter* into our communications model.

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[1] Ausable-Bayfield Conservation Authority, *Conservation Strategy*, 1993: "Educate watershed residents and users about conservation and the environment," page 14. "Communicate existing programs and services to watershed residents, interest groups and agencies through displays, advertising, brochures, news releases and speaking engagements," Environmental Issue 2, Goal 2, Action Plan 7, p. 15. "Communication with all stakeholder groups will be the key to the success of the *Strategy*," Summary, p. 26.

2. GOALS OF ONLINE SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) has, among its goals, protection of life and property and the building of environmental conscience and positive actions that create a healthier watershed. The ABCA's online social media goals would be to use online social media tools in an effective, responsible, and cost-effective manner to:

- Engage landowners, watershed residents, municipalities, clients, volunteers, donors, youth and other partners in the local agency's work supporting the public in the creation of a healthier watershed.
- Use online social media to help receive community feedback on the development of the *Conservation Strategy*.
- Learn more about what people – individuals and partners – are thinking and saying in order to adapt delivery of services with the benefit of that feedback.
- Enhance relationships with existing users of programs and services and build new relationships with others individuals and partners.
- Increase engagement of young people in watershed programs, services, direction.
- Create increased awareness of the Ausable Bayfield Conservation name, logo, mandate, vision, mission, programs and services.
- Increase our knowledge of the needs of different watershed communities – by geographic location, economic sector, etc.
- Inform the public about relevant programs and services, and news events related to the ABCA's work.

3. PROPOSED POLICY

Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority needs the support and awareness of many partners, landowners, residents, and volunteers, to successfully build environmental conscience and create healthier watersheds. Individuals and partners increasingly use online social media and networking tools such as *Facebook, You Tube* and *Twitter*.

There are challenges, pitfalls and risks associated with social media but the benefits are so great ABCA should integrate online social media into its communications approach. The conservation authority should do so in a way that diligently keeps human resource requirements in check, and with rules and monitoring to provide the maximum potential for appropriate use of the technologies.

Based upon review of the pros and cons, and costs and benefits, of online social media (as described in the staff report on online social media), Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority requires an online social media policy to guide board, management and staff in how to strategically introduce these new communications tool in an effective and cost-effective way while providing clear limits to its use and limiting potential risks to the organization.

ABCA's proposed policy is to:

1. Consult with the watershed community's Conservation Strategy Development Team about how, or whether, to use online social media tools.

2. Introduce online social media tools such as *Facebook* group and *Wiki* pages in the work of the Conservation Strategy Development Team, in consultation with that working group.

3. Consult with the Conservation Strategy Development Team about whether to introduce a public *Facebook* community group and/or page for the Conservation Strategy.

4. Consult with the Conservation Strategy Development Team about whether to introduce a *Facebook* community group and/or page for the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA).

5. Consult with the Conservation Strategy Development Team about whether to create a *Wikipedia* page for the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA), editable by the public.

6. Consult with the Conservation Strategy Development Team about whether to create a *You Tube* channel for the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA).

7. Consult with the Conservation Strategy Development Team about whether to create video content for an ABCA *You Tube* channel.

8. Create *Facebook* groups and pages, *You Tube* channels and content, and *Wikipedia* page for ABCA, as needs are identified and as staff time permits, following consultation with the Conservation Strategy Development Team.

9. Create a *Twitter* profile for ABCA to provide information about news and events and programs and services of the conservation authority as a means to inform partners and residents and to find out information from partners.

10. Monitor the benefits of current and new online social media tools and integrate as feasible and directed by management, and following consultation with the public.

11. Track and evaluate, as feasible, the numbers of people using ABCA online social media tools (for example, the number of people who visit ABCA pages/groups, the who view ABCA images and videos, the numbers of people accessing our programs as a result of these tools, and assessing the cost of using the tools with the benefits gained).

12. Limit the number of staff creating social media content and managing social media sites and content, as deemed appropriate by management.

13. Consider social media, on a per-project basis, during the creation of budgets.

14. Train those staff members authorized by management to use online social media tools in effective and responsible use of online social media.

15. Adopt social media as a communications tool while continuing to exclude staff use of social media at work for personal reasons.

16. Introduce new social media tools as needed, as financially feasible, as found useful by the public, and as directed by management.

17. Manage updating of multiple social media sites in a time-effective manner using tools such as a social media dashboard.

18. Train, and dialogue with, staff about their possible appearance in online media content, and obtain appropriate permissions for images and name of individuals who may appear in online media content created and posted by ABCA.

19. Correct incorrect messaging whenever possible, act as moderator of groups and pages, and review and update content in as timely a manner as possible.

20. Balance use of online social media with other effective communications tools as outlined in the *Strategic Communications Plan*.

21. Refrain from public messages likely to give offence, in both professional and personal postings, follow all legal requirements as well as standards of decorum in both work use of social media and personal use.

22. Assign a staff member to create community pages, groups and channels but using a single work e-mail address that remains with ABCA even if the employee leaves the agency.

23. Follow established ABCA visual identity standards in use of the ABCA logo.

24. Create rules of use for groups, pages and channels.

25. Assign a staff person to moderate content on groups, pages and channels.

26. Include a disclaimer, when establishing approved external pages or groups, to let people know the users of the site may not always be representing the ABCA point of view. Examples of disclaimers include: *Views expressed by members of this group are those of the members and do not necessarily reflect the views of Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority.*

27. Ask staff to include disclaimers in personal social media postings if a personal opinion is likely to be confused with an ABCA position. For example, *The Emerald Ash Borer is a menace and people should be doing more to prevent the movement of firewood between locations. This is my personal opinion.*

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are:

1. That the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) Online Social Media Policy be approved as presented.

2. That the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) Online Social Media Policy become effective immediately.

3. That the policies of the online social media policy be integrated with existing policies. Should there be an apparent discrepancy between policies, the policy that establishes the highest standard of protection for ABCA should take precedence. No part of the online social media policy lessens staff requirements to adhere to all other ABCA policies including, but not limited, to Personnel Regulations, Code of Conduct, Technology Use Policies, and Human Resources Planning Framework.