

CALL FOR NEWSLETTER HELP

To: Board
From: Reg
Date: 1/6/93

Dear board members:

A consistent comment of the board and member strategic planning meetings is the return of the newsletter to the kind of content it had when Bruce was doing it: more and smaller articles of a news item nature. The newsletter took on a more in-depth and policy orientation when I started getting involved and finally took it over last spring. This was more unconscious than planned -- I was more of a (book) editor than an environmentalist when hired (and still, but the gap is narrowing); my experience at GLU has been the more lengthy and policy-oriented Bulletin of Pollution Prevention and our booklet-reports; and our article-writing program staff has been progressively disappearing. With the problems we've had for a long time with timely submissions from all parties, articles that had less of a straight news orientation and therefore more shelf life also became more appealing.

While I think this approach, reporting on fewer subjects but treating them thoroughly, is highly informative and useful for select readers, it is also clear to me that the resulting newsletter does not serve its original (and more activist) purpose of extending interest in GLU and offering a unique, Basin-wide overview of Great Lakes environmental news.

Necessary changes

So I face three necessary but, in combination, somewhat daunting tasks: 1) Securing twice or three times as many articles on breaking issues that current staff will often know little about; 2) Cutting through the timely submission problem and returning to a strict four-times-a-year schedule; and 3) Getting the newsletter to complement our work more consistently. When I was hired we had newsletter meetings in which story ideas were often discussed in the context of what GLU was trying to achieve programmatically and politically. Phil, Bruce and Karen were all involved in a number of Basin projects and as a result they knew a lot about many current issues, and, also important, knew how published articles fit into larger schemes.

How the board can help

I will need help to make all these changes simultaneously, especially absent our former base of staff contacts, knowledge, and writing. For the next few issues I need the board to:

- 1) Help me generate ideas. I ask that you take a half hour sometime this weekend to fill out the accompanying form and return it to me just before you leave town. Afterwards, please also keep thinking about ideas. I'd like to call for more information and more ideas. I'd like to have a fairly complete story list by the beginning of the second week from now (by Tuesday, January 18).
- 2) Most board members are willing to write articles for the newsletter but often they want fairly distant deadline and then may miss them. It would help a lot of board members could operate on shorter deadlines when needed and be very dependable deadline-wise.
- 3) Help me ease into becoming a Great Lakes reporter. To both get more

stories and deliver issues promptly I will have to start doing a lot more writing myself. Often this will require quick access to background information and secondary contacts that would be quite laborious to generate on my own. I would like to be able to call board members when necessary and get generous help in understanding the dimensions of a story, securing documents, and gaining entree to the help of other Basin activists. I'd like to get the same kind of generous response when I fax requests for help to multiple recipients -- it can be hard to know who can be most helpful.

- 4) Think about and participate in the newsletter in an ongoing way. I'd like board members to be unprompted sources of both story ideas and entries in things like "briefly noted" and "new publications" sections. We are on a lot of mailing lists and are already a bit of a Great Lakes news clearinghouse, but getting faxes or notes tossed into the mail from board members will be more timely and make it clear what is a priority to our members.

Newsletter committee?

All this should be carried out individually by all board members interested in helping me. But such help would be much enhanced by the creation and active work of a board newsletter committee. I believe we used to have one and it has long been the periodic subject of comment by board members.

I wish the board would set up such a committee. In addition to whatever purpose the board would like the committee as a whole to serve, I would like all newsletter committee members to 1) Be involved by short conference calls in one story idea meeting per issue (you'd get a memo summarizing a previous staff story idea meeting first); 2) Make a solemn commitment to provide ideas and suggestions on an ongoing basis (send me something every couple weeks at least); and 3) Provide a good written critique after every issue comes out that comments on each individual article and closes with a summary of overall success, failure, omissions, and suggested changes in approach and emphasis.

Recap of requests

- 1) Please spend a good half hour during this weekend thinking up story ideas for the next newsletter and enter those ideas on the accompanying form.
- 2) Be responsive to my requests to write stories and prompt in delivering them.
- 3) Help me become a Great Lakes reporter -- be responsive to my requests for help on story background and contacts.
- 4) Participate in the newsletter on an ongoing basis -- drop me lines frequently with suggestions and news.
- 5) Consider creation of a newsletter committee.