

A Lake Steward Bus Tour is a great way to celebrate successful lake conservation efforts while inspiring others to adopt stewardship practices. It highlights innovative solutions, fosters community, and raises awareness about the importance of protecting our lakes. Additionally, it's an excellent opportunity to build capacity for local lake associations by engaging new supporters and encouraging broader participation in stewardship activities.

How to Plan a Successful Lake Steward Bus Tour

1. Key Parties to Connect With

- **Bus Company:** Secure a reliable bus service. Ensure the bus is large enough for participants and has essential amenities (microphone, air conditioning, etc.).
- **Property Owners:** Choose diverse properties showcasing different lake issues such as erosion, steep slopes, rip-rap, and shoreline restoration. Choose Lake Steward properties that have successfully managed or prevented these issues and are displaying a Lake Steward sign. Ensure that property owners are able to have a large group walk through the property and are willing to speak to their experience of becoming a Lake Steward.
- **Local Business:** Find a location with parking for the bus and attendees, ideally near a bathroom and a restaurant for post-tour gatherings.
- **Speakers & Experts:** Reach out to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), Lake Associations, or Native plant suppliers. You can also contact Minnesota Lakes & Rivers to speak!
- **Volunteers:** Recruit volunteers to help check-in attendees, facilitate the tour, and assist with logistics. You may want a volunteer who knows the area to lead the bus in their car.
- **Media:** Connect with local media outlets (TV, radio, newspapers) to promote the event. Consider social media platforms like Facebook and newsletters.
- **Vendors/Organizations:** Engage local businesses or native landscaping vendors for handouts (e.g., seed packets, flyers) and goodies for participants.

2. Planning Timeline

- **6 Months Ahead:** Start planning and identify key partners and speakers.
- **5 Months Ahead:** Book the bus and sign the contract.
- **3 Months Ahead:** Develop and launch registration (EventBrite or similar platform). Gather participants' contact info to follow up with them after the event.
- **6 Weeks Ahead:** Confirm property locations and secure vendor partnerships.
- **4-6 Weeks Ahead:** Start promoting through lake associations, media, and other channels.
- **3-4 Weeks Ahead:** Post flyers and promote on social media.

- **3 Weeks Ahead:** Finalize handouts and materials, map out route with travel times for bus (include time for loading and unloading).
- **1 Week Ahead:** Confirm participant registrations. Finalize detailed agenda, including speaker timings.
- Visit your homeowners' properties with them there and brief them on your expectations - will they be asked to talk about their property, the plants, history of their preservation/stewardship journey, etc.? Are there any safety hazards to be aware of, e.g. slippery steps, no hand-rails, etc. Provide talking points if desired.
- **1-2 Days Before:** Assemble materials, pack goodie bags, buy snacks, and prepare for the tour.

3. Important Things to Watch Out For

- **Budget:** Determine event expenses, income, and pricing. Identify potential grants or fundraisers to help with costs.
- **Collaboration:** Consider partnering with other groups (real estate agents, county officials, watershed organizations).
- **Publicity:** Develop a publicity plan using community calendars, news releases, phone calls, flyers, social media, and newsletters.
- **Rain Plan:** Always have a backup plan for adverse weather.
- **Refund Policy:** Decide on a cancellation and refund policy for participants.
- **Accessibility:** Ensure the bus has adequate access, and inform participants of any difficult walking areas.
- **Timekeeping:** Assign a timekeeper to stay on schedule.
- **Logistics:** Ensure buses are equipped with microphones, and designate volunteers to guide the bus to each stop. Consider a mobile microphone for speakers to use at properties.
- **Health and Safety:** Consider water, snacks, bug repellent, and the presence of any hazards at stops (e.g., slippery steps, steep slopes).

4. During the Event

- **Registration Table:** Set up a welcome table with name tags and refreshments.
- **Group Photo:** Plan a photo opportunity with a "Lake Steward" sign for participants.
- **On-site Briefing:** Meet with property owners ahead of time to discuss their roles during the tour and any safety concerns.
- **Speaker Briefing:** Provide speakers with an agenda and guidelines for their presentations.
- **Ensure Comfort:** Be sure to provide snacks, water, and prepare for any special needs (e.g., bathroom breaks).

5. Post-Tour Follow-up

- **Survey Feedback:** Consider sending out a survey to gather feedback from attendees about the event.

- **Thank You Notes:** Send follow-up emails to thank volunteers, speakers, property owners, and participants.
- **Share Resources:** Make sure people are aware of available resources and continue engagement after the event.

6. Miscellaneous Considerations

- **Registration Platform:** Use platforms like Google Forms or EventBrite for sign-ups and payment processing.
- **Collaborating with Other Lake Associations:** If you can't fill a bus on your own, consider partnering with nearby associations for a larger turnout.
- **Thank Partners:** Always take opportunities to thank your partners, including vendors, volunteers, and property owners.

Remember: Proper planning is key to a smooth and successful Lake Steward Bus Tour. Organizing each detail, from outreach to logistics, will ensure participants have a meaningful and enjoyable experience!