So When Did Rainwater, A Resource, Become Stormwater, A Nuisance?
So When Did Rainwater, A Resource, Become Stormwater, A Nuisance?

or

Should we think about how we say something before we say it?
“So When Did Rainwater, A Resource...”

Landscape Architecture
Master Planning
Green Stormwater Infrastructure

BIG MUDDY Workshop

John Royster, PLA ENV SP
A childhood confession…
Society’s thoughts about rain...
Society’s thoughts about rain…

Rain is liquid water in the form of droplets…
Wikipedia
“So When Did Rainwater, A Resource…”

Society’s thoughts about rain…

Pretty soon it darkened up… Directly it begun to rain, and it rained like all fury, too…

It was one of these regular summer storms.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
Mark Twain
Society’s thoughts about rain…

I’m singing in the rain,
Just singing in the rain:
What a wonderful feeling,
I’m happy again.

*Singing in the Rain*, 1952

Arthur Freed, lyricist    Nacio Herb Brown, music
Society’s thoughts about rain...

Rain is grace, rain is the sky descending to the earth; without rain, there would be no life.

John Updike
“So When Did Rainwater, A Resource...”

Society’s thoughts about rain...

I love going to the feed store and drinking coffee, and talking about how much rain we need.

Thomas Haden Church
Society’s thoughts about rain…

The best thing one can do when it’s raining is to let it rain.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
Society’s thoughts about rain...

If you think it’s going to rain, it will.

Clint Eastwood
Society’s thoughts about rain...

- Sustains all meaningful life on Earth
- It falls when it wants, where it wants
- Too much, too little – rarely just right
Society’s thoughts about rain...

Rain is famous for falling on the just and unjust alike...if I had the management of such affairs...and caught one of the unjust out door I would drown him.

Mark Twain
“So When Did Rainwater, A Resource…”

Society’s perception of stormwater…
Society’s perception of stormwater...

“Its water that lurks around the curbs after a long storm”.

 Resident of Calgary, Canada
Society’s perception of stormwater…

“Oh goodness, I don’t know”.

Resident of Calgary, Canada
“So When Did Rainwater, A Resource...”

Society’s perception of stormwater...
Society’s perception of stormwater...

58% of Calgary citizens believe it is treated prior to entering a river.

Few Calgary citizens personally take any steps to protect local water quality.
Society’s perception of stormwater...

Most Calgary citizens are probably no different than most Iowa citizens.
What “voodoo” should we do to change things?
The “voodoo” should we do:

- Consider what we call things
- Carefully choose terms we use in public meetings and communications
- Think like regular people first, and stormwater professionals second
- Instill hope not fear
Voodoo Things – Consider what we call things
Voodoo Things – Consider what we call things

A topo survey from a Omaha stormwater recent project...
Voodoo Things – Consider what we call things

Would you be happy to be told these “SEWERS” daylight in your local neighborhood park?
“So When Did Rainwater, A Resource...”

Voodoo Things – Consider what we call things

Omaha - Storm Sewer
Lincoln – Storm Drain
So When Did Rainwater, A Resource…

Voodoo Things – Consider what we call things

Omaha - Storm Sewer
Lincoln – Storm Drain

DON’T ALL SEWERS RUN TO SEWER PLANTS ???

John Royster, PLA ENV SP
Voodoo Things –
Consider what we call things

“in-situ soil”
vs.
“existing soil”
Voodoo Things – Consider what we call things

What examples can you think of?
“So When Did Rainwater, A Resource...”

Voodoo Things – Terms we use with citizens

John Royster, PLA  ENV SP  BIG MUDDY
“So When Did Rainwater, A Resource...”

Voodoo Things –
Terms we use with citizens

We are not alone in sounding stupid…

“There is tons of lighting in this storm”
Omaha weathercaster – May 2013
Voodoo Things –
Terms we use with citizens

We are not alone in sounding stupid…

“The problem is these numerous QSL cells”

Omaha weathercaster’s next statement
Voodoo Things – Terms we use with citizens

100-year flood
Voodoo Things – Terms we use with citizens

Local resident regarding the possibility of a 100-year flood event occurring on Omaha’s Papillion Creek:

“That’s hogwash!!! I’m 89 and I never seen one here.”
Voodoo Things –
Terms we use with citizens

100-year flood

100 year reoccurrence interval flood
Voodoo Things – Terms we use with citizens

“A flood that has about a 1% chance of occurring in any year”
Voodoo Things – Terms we use with citizens

90 percentile storm
Voodoo Things –
Terms we use with citizens

90 percentile storm
vs.
“Ninety percent of all Omaha storms are less than 1”
Voodoo Things –
Terms we use with citizens

2-year / 24 hour storm event
Voodoo Things – Terms we use with citizens

2-year / 24 hour storm event vs.

“A storm we have a 50% chance of getting every year, with about 3.75 inches of rain within 24 hours”
Voodoo Things – Terms we use with citizens

Ok to say technical term then common definition

Impress your boss - twice
- she’ll know you know your stuff
- citizens will feel like your talking to them – not above them
Voodoo Things – Terms we use with citizens

Any examples that you use?
Voodoo Things – Think like a regular person

Writing:
Read your writing pretending to be your mom.
Have a normal person read & then explain it.

(Yes, elephant lanes exist in Bangladesh).
Voodoo Things –
Think like a regular person

Presentations:
- Tell the important points, not all points.
- Slow down, let it sink in.
- (run spell-check)
Voodoo Things –
Think like a regular person
Use terms Mom would understand…
(and it’s fewer not less…)}
“So When Did Rainwater, A Resource...”

Voodoo Things – Instill Hope not Fear
Voodoo Things – Instill Hope not Fear

Houston we have a problem...
Voodoo Things – Instill Hope not Fear

Help people understand:
- How does this affect me?
- Why is this important to me?
- What can I do to help?
Voodoo Things – Instill Hope not Fear

What if we talked about:
- Lives saved…
- Streams to play in…
- Clean lakes we can swim in…

Would we get some respect?
“So When Did Rainwater, A Resource...”

Voodoo Things – Provide Hope not Fear

- Encourage citizens to help whether you include it into your calculations **or not**...
- It’s important to them
- It benefits water quality (it’ll keep **water clean**)
“So When Did Rainwater, A Resource...”

Voodoo Things – Provide Hope not Fear

- Encourage citizens to help whether you include it into your calculations or not...
- It’s important to them
- It benefits water quality

WE ALL WIN
Voodoo Things – Provide Hope not Fear

Empower fellow citizens to be:
Part of the solution - instead of being part of the problem
Voodoo Things – Provide Hope not Fear

One great resource: waterwordsthatwork.com

Process – lower right corner of website

“So When Did Rainwater, A Resource...”
“Oh you do, that voodoo, that you do so well”

*Hedley Lamarr in Blazing Saddles*

- Consider what we call things
- Carefully choose terms
- Think like regular people
- Instill hope not fear
BIG MUDDY
Workshop