

**Stakeholder Research
Conducted for Metro Wastewater Reclamation District
Denver, Colorado
April 2006**

**Conducted By Sigler Communications, Inc.
Denver, Colorado**



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Executive Summary/Implications of the Research

Project Background

Metro Wastewater Reclamation District (Metro) commissioned public opinion research in early 2006 with stakeholders in the Deer Trail/Agate, Colorado, area to assess the organization's performance and communications efforts regarding its METROGRO Farm. This is the third stakeholder survey conducted since the Farm began operating in 1994. Metro also conducted surveys in 2000 and 2003, and will compare findings from this survey to evaluate changes in stakeholders' attitudes and opinions over the years.

Fence-line neighbors, neighboring ranchers and farmers, Deer Trail/Agate residents, Deer Trail community leaders, Arapahoe County and Elbert County elected officials, and other government representatives participated in the interviews, which were conducted in the first quarter of 2006. Many of the same questions from the two previous surveys were asked in order to track opinions and trends from previous years.

Common Themes

As in past surveys, the majority of people interviewed were farmers and ranchers who own land near the METROGRO Farm. Since many of these individuals share a fence-line with the Farm, they monitor farm activities closer than non-farming or ranching neighbors. While opinions from the majority of these stakeholders were positive, a number of negative comments were made regarding the use of biosolids as a fertilizer, soil conservation efforts (particularly wind erosion) and the current lease with the tenant farmer. Elected officials within Deer Trail, Elbert and Arapahoe Counties had varying degrees of understanding and opinions about the Farm.

Improved community perception and opinions of the METROGRO Farm were echoed by neighboring farmers, ranchers and townspeople, and government officials. However, three stakeholders expressed a negative overall opinion of the Farm and three fence-line neighbors are concerned about the current lease with the tenant farmer and their ability to graze bulls on the Farm.

Three major themes emerged from the stakeholder surveys:

- 1) Metro is a good neighbor and its conservation efforts have improved.
- 2) The stakeholder minority who never trusted Metro and the Farm hold the same opinion today.
- 3) Metro is doing a good job in communicating with the community and Metro is more transparent now than it has been in the past, particularly since the Farm first began operations.

Perceptions of Elected Officials

County commissioners interviewed who had been in office since 2003 had a better understanding of the history and operations of the METROGRO Farm than those officials more recently appointed or elected. Current commissioners felt Metro had improved its conservation efforts and was more responsive to addressing issues than when it first began operations. Newly elected officials had not seen the operation firsthand, but were

interested in touring the Farm. In general, their impression was the Farm has made operational and conservation improvements since it began operations in the mid-1990s. All Deer Trail officials acknowledged limited firsthand knowledge of the Farm's operations and conservation efforts and agreed that community perception of the Farm had improved over the years.

Perceptions about Farm Operations

When asked their opinion of the METROGRO Farm's operation, most stakeholders began talking about conservation efforts. Few felt they understood Metro's operations well enough to comment. Most respondents believe Metro has made, and continues to make, improvements in its soil conservation efforts. A few were resigned to the fact that "the biosolids have to be dumped somewhere and Metro is not going anywhere."

When asked to comment on the Metro trucks, no comments were made about drivers driving too fast. Many noted the drivers are courteous and strive to be careful. This seems to be a significant improvement over the comments in the 2000 and 2003 surveys. Truck traffic was not a contentious issue, although a handful of respondents did comment that the trucks sometimes emitted a foul odor.

Perceptions about Communications

Most people interviewed believed Metro excels in communicating with neighbors. During the process of arranging and conducting the community interviews, participants were pleased to have their opinions solicited. All but one of the stakeholders interviewed three years ago were appreciative of the follow-up survey and cooperatively participated again. The one who denied participation was concerned that comments would be traced back to him/her.

Perceptions about Using Biosolids/Environmental Issues

The majority of stakeholders interviewed either had no issues with or had no opinion of the use of biosolids as a fertilizer or soil conditioner; however, five stakeholders opposed biosolids use as they have from the start. A dominant theme from survey respondents, both pro- and anti-biosolids, was concern over the long-term effect biosolids could have on local water and soil quality. Approximately one-quarter of those surveyed raised this concern.

Metro's processing of pretreated groundwater from the Lowry Superfund site is no longer an issue for almost all stakeholders. Only two people discussed the Lowry issue after they were prompted on the subject. The key concern among the Deer Trail community as it relates to the METROGRO Farm is the long-term impact extended biosolids use may have on water and soil quality.

Perceptions about Environmental Monitoring

Awareness of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) monitoring program and the Environmental Management System (EMS) was highest among neighboring farmers and ranchers, soil conservation district members, Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) liaisons and previously surveyed elected officials. USGS continues to have

strong third-party credibility with residents familiar with its monitoring program, and stakeholders commented that Metro and USGS do a good job sharing this information with interested stakeholders. A few mentioned the information as credible but felt it was presented in too technical a manner for a lay audience.

Although not as well known as the USGS monitoring program, more people were aware of EMS in this year's survey than in 2003. Those familiar with EMS commented that the program lends credibility to Metro because it provides another means to monitor the use of its biosolids. Two ranchers/farmers expressed interest in participating in the EMS Citizen Participation Group.

The overall community perception is that Metro continues to improve its soil conservation efforts and its standing with local citizens by being a "good neighbor." A few soil conservation district board members and government officials did comment that although Metro has improved soil conservation efforts, there is still room for improvement. The community as a whole, with the exception of immediate neighbors, does not discuss the METROGRO Farm as much today as it did in the past. Conversations about the Farm are focused on improving farming methods, reducing blowing soil and water erosion, and unknown consequences from the long-term use of biosolids.

Research Methodology

Metro was interested in assessing how stakeholders in the Deer Trail/Agate communities viewed the organization's operations and its communications about its METROGRO Farm located in Elbert and Arapahoe counties.

Sigler Communications, Inc., a Denver-based environmental research and communications firm, conducted the initial research and the two subsequent studies. A total of 36 people were contacted, and 28 interviews were conducted in early 2006 (see Appendix A for the list of questions). The majority of the interviews were conducted over the telephone, and two were conducted in person. Metro provided names of neighbors, community leaders and elected officials to Sigler Communications for the research. Lisa Sigler, Chuck Montera and Damaris Cooksey conducted the interviews.

Participants were asked if they were comfortable with the researchers attributing information in the written report or if they would prefer to be interviewed anonymously and reflected those desires in the report. Quotes are attributed to an individual only with approval (See Appendix B for respondent screener). The majority of people interviewed wanted to be granted anonymity; therefore, comments in the report are not linked to individuals' names.

As with all qualitative research techniques, these interviews were used to gain insight into respondents' thoughts on particular subjects. Readers should be cautious when applying the results of this research to larger audiences, in this case, all stakeholders in the Deer Trail/Agate area. The findings presented here are not statistically representative of and cannot be projected to the larger population of stakeholders in these rural communities.

Even though discussion questions were developed and followed, identical questions were not asked of all participants. This is because the researcher determined the appropriateness of each question for the participant based on the direction of the conversation.

Overall Observations

Community Issues

Drought and growth were mentioned as the primary issues of concern for most stakeholders. Other issues included code enforcement in Deer Trail, land use, road maintenance, tax base for schools and a lack of jobs in the community. Metro was not mentioned as a primary concern among most respondents.

Stakeholder Perceptions

The persons most informed and opinionated about Metro are the farmers and ranchers who share a property line with the METROGRO Farm and soil conservation district board members. The NRCS representatives for Elbert and Arapahoe counties are well informed about Metro's operation as were the county commissioners who were in office in 2003. More recently elected officials were less informed about the operation, but expressed interest in learning more.

Most respondents said that perceptions of Metro had improved over the last few years; however, most stakeholders who had a poor perception of Metro in the 2003 survey still hold the same view today. Several stakeholders acknowledged Metro's support of the community, including road improvements and financial support of local organizations. Many believe Metro is more transparent about its operational practices than when it first entered the community, and that concerned stakeholder input influenced operational and conservation practices.

Perceptions of Biosolids

Most respondents either accepted the use of biosolids as a soil conditioner or fertilizer, or had no opinion on its use. Both of the NRCS representatives and several farmers commented that biosolids must be used in the proper amounts and amended correctly to be effective. Two farmers said they are tenant farmers for the Littleton/Englewood Wastewater Treatment Plant and apply biosolids in that aspect of their farming practices.

Five people expressed reservation toward the current use of biosolids, particularly safety of their use, odor and unknown effects on soil, water and the crops raised on biosolids-amended soil. Regardless of their current level of acceptance, about one-fourth of all respondents voiced concern over the long-term effects of using biosolids on soil and water, including the accumulation of metals. Several people commented that although current monitoring does not show a negative impact, they questioned if this trend will continue 20 years from now. Others asked if the extensive monitoring that currently is being performed would continue in the future.

Perceptions of the METROGRO Farm

Most respondents felt the "community buzz" about Metro and METROGRO® biosolids had subsided. Several mentioned they do not hear as much about METROGRO® biosolids as they did three to five years ago. Talk of the METROGRO Farm is primarily among neighbors who share a property line with the operation.

The overall opinion of the Farm was that operation and management have improved. Many people felt that Metro was attempting to be a “good neighbor” and cited fence repair, notification of work being conducted at the Farm, issuing emergency grazing permits, paving County Road 34, and use of truck-weighting scales as examples of goodwill gestures to the community. Residents not associated with agriculture also acknowledged Metro’s community support.

Five of the 28 residents/neighbors interviewed were strongly critical of the METROGRO Farm operations. Their comments included questionable farming practices, improper application of biosolids, continued wind and water soil erosion, not fixing water gaps and the fence, weed growth, not returning enough land to grass, and increased loads of biosolids being trucked out to the Farm.

Soil erosion from wind and water runoff and the long-term impact of biosolids use on groundwater were the primary concerns related to the METROGRO Farm. A few people commented that some of the land Metro is farming is inferior farmland and that Metro is doing the best they can with what they have.

Most of those familiar with the operation commented that soil-erosion control has improved, but a few felt there was room for improvement. Several people thought the drought has contributed to wind erosion. There is a perception that the METROGRO Farm should be held to a higher standard than neighboring farms because it is owned and operated by a Denver-based government agency and because it uses biosolids.

Independent Monitoring Program

Awareness of the independent monitoring program conducted by the USGS and specifically, USGS staff member Tracy Yager, was very high, especially among neighboring ranchers, farmers and soil conservation district board members. There is a strong perception that the USGS independent monitoring lends third-party credibility to the monitoring process. A few commented that presentations and written reports were, however, very technical in nature and hard for a lay audience to understand.

The individuals unaware of the program were not interested in receiving monitoring results, but believed it was beneficial that USGS was monitoring “the stuff coming off the farm.”

Key Community Issues Related to METROGRO® biosolids (Prompt: Lowry)

Concern for, and negative perception of, pretreated Lowry groundwater has dropped off significantly. Only two of the 28 people interviewed (one government official and one rancher) mentioned Lowry water as a concern after being prompted. Several people mentioned that there is little, if any, talk about Lowry.

Communications

The majority of those interviewed were complimentary of Metro’s communications efforts. Only one of the 28 people interviewed characterized Metro’s communications as

poor. Interviewees cited the newsletter as the primary method of receiving information about the METROGRO Farm. Other outlets included word-of-mouth discussions, direct communications with Metro managers and staff, the USGS newsletter, local newspaper articles, the EMS Citizen Participation Group, and the summer picnic.

Many of the immediate neighbors mentioned that they simply contact Metro, either in person or by phone, with any questions. They felt the staff (Drex, Mitch, or Paul) was easily accessible and friendly. When asked how Metro could enhance communications, comments included doing a better job of communicating soil conservation efforts (through the newsletter and tours), making the newsletter less technical, mentioning the difficulties the METROGRO Farm faces along with its successes, and putting the Farm on the Deer Trail town agenda once a year. Several mentioned they enjoyed the historical articles on the area in the newsletters and would like to see those features continue.

Environmental Management System

Awareness of Metro's Environmental Management System (EMS) has increased significantly. Approximately one-third of those surveyed were at least aware of the program, but not of the findings associated with the routine audits required of an EMS participant. Only a handful of respondents commented that they have attended or currently attend the Citizen Participation Group. Those who did attend found the group useful.

Comparisons of 2003 and 2006 Surveys

Drought, the top concern of those interviewed in 2003, is still at the top of the list today. Most of those interviewed remarked on the long-term economic effects the drought has had on farming and the community as a whole. Other concerns mentioned in both surveys included lack of jobs and the lack of infrastructure for growth in the area, both current and anticipated.

Most of those surveyed recognized that Metro continues to improve its soil conservation efforts, but a handful (government official and fence-line neighbors) also said that more could be done, e.g., continuing to strip-farm, low- and no-till farming, and planting more acreage back to grass.

Acceptance of biosolids use has grown slightly since the 2003 survey. Several factors have contributed to this including continued education in the community, Metro's community outreach, favorable results from USGS monitoring, and a functioning two-way form of communication with stakeholders.

Concern for, and negative perception of, pretreated Lowry groundwater has subsided. Only two of the 28 people interviewed (one government official and one rancher) mentioned Lowry water as a concern after being prompted compared to four unsolicited comments on Lowry in 2003.

The monitoring done by USGS continues to lend credibility to the program and alleviate stakeholder concerns. Most of those surveyed want the monitoring to continue because of water quality concerns. Although not as well known as the USGS monitoring program, more people were aware of EMS in this year's survey than in 2003 (13 versus three in 2003). Those familiar with EMS commented that the program also lends credibility to Metro.

There is less discussion about Metro in 2006 than in 2003. Several people remarked that they know "the Farm is here to stay." Fence-line neighbors and soil conservation district members are the most likely stakeholders to discuss farm operations/soil conservation measures, while little or no talk comes from neighbors outside of agriculture.

Detailed Observations — Deer Trail/Agate Residents

This section highlights the opinions of the neighboring ranchers and farmers, Deer Trail/Agate residents and soil conservation district board members. Five people did not respond to repeated requests for an interview and one person refused to participate because he/she felt their input comments would not remain anonymous. Analysis of past reports revealed no quotes were ever attributed to this individual.

Key Issues of Concern in Deer Trail

Most of the stakeholders believe drought is the key issue facing their community. Since many of the local businesses rely on agriculture, the loss of income goes far beyond the farmers and ranchers. A concern regarding wind erosion, especially in conjunction with the drought, was also raised.

Several people mentioned the growth in their area, both planned and unplanned, as a key issue. The lack of town infrastructure in Deer Trail, lack of jobs, concern over utilization of resources, and water quality also were mentioned.

Quotes:

- *“Staying alive and staying in business with this drought. Prices are looking better for wheat.”*
- *“The loss of population from real farms, water and the drought are real worries.”*
- *“We have more small acreages whose owners are not used to maintaining land and no town base for infrastructure, shopping, etc.”*
- *“More people are moving into our community, but they forget how far away they are from town (Aurora).”*

Opinions about Biosolids as a Fertilizer

Of the 28 people surveyed, 15 people were comfortable with the use of biosolids as a fertilizer, eight had no opinion and five were adamantly opposed to its use. Several stakeholders who were comfortable with biosolids added that proper application was very important.

Some of those who support the use acknowledge the cost savings as opposed to other forms of fertilizer and feel that the use of biosolids is necessary. Two farmers said that they are tenant farmers for the Littleton/Englewood Wastewater Treatment Plant and are familiar with biosolid application/use. Most of those with knowledge of the process expressed frustration with application – it must be done at the right time in proper conditions. The primary concern regarding biosolids continues to include the long-term effect on soil and water, as well as wind erosion, during the prolonged drought. Even with the groundwater monitoring, there is a concern about heavy metals and other contaminants leaching into the ground and surface water over time. The use of biosolids on poor-quality soil at the METROGRO Farm continues to be an issue with fence-line neighbors.

Quotes:

- *“It’s a necessary thing – cheaper fertilizer, but sometimes it’s too strong.”*
- *“Most long-term residents think education efforts have been successful and it can be beneficially used.”*
- *“They’ve got to go somewhere. I just hope it doesn’t affect soil and water for future generations.”*
- *“I don’t agree with it. I don’t believe that it’s been done long enough to test the effects on food, etc. It’s hard to track and shouldn’t be used if it’s going to blow or wash away.”*

Opinions of the Farm and Soil Conservation

The majority who participated in the survey said that METROGRO Farm management has proactively improved the operation. Because many stakeholders were not familiar with the Farm’s operation, most interpreted “operation” as synonymous with soil conservation efforts. Several comments were made regarding the increased use of accepted farming practices, such as low- and no-till farming, terracing and strip-farming, as positive conservation efforts.

Some said that, as they drive to their fields and in their business, they look to see what’s going on at the METROGRO Farm. Many feel that the best farmers would struggle in the kind of growing conditions they have experienced over the last several years. Others said that since they have never been to the Farm, they can only comment on what they hear about the operation.

Across the board, stakeholders familiar with Metro applauded conservation efforts and the METROGRO Farm’s management. Those on the local soil conservation boards, both present and past, indicated willingness on the part of Metro, since the last surveys were conducted, to work with and learn from the boards. There continues to be widespread concern regarding soil erosion and water run-off, and many acknowledged drought has increased dust blow-off for all farmers in the area. Several people mentioned the acres that have been planted back to grass and would like to see more of that accomplished. There is still, in the eyes of the community, more that should be done.

Quotes:

- *“They need to continue the erosion control and work on water quality.”*
- *“Tom is doing a good job spraying and doing a minimum till program.”*
- *“Their techniques are better, they work with the soil conservation board somewhat. They need to address the fragile ground that they farm and put more of it back to grass.”*
- *“The staff is very sharp and open to comments and ideas.”*
- *“The need to plant more spring crops you harvest in the fall. This is an issue many farmers face. A spring crop keeps the bare land covered up. I’ve heard METROGRO would not get any revenue from any spring crop that Tommy grew so maybe that’s why he does not grow spring crops.”*

Perceptions of Metro Wastewater

To the Deer Trail community, METROGRO® biosolids is synonymous with Metro Wastewater. The controversy initially surrounding METROGRO® biosolids has died down, and the community seems to be appreciative of the way Metro Wastewater management now approaches them. Several people said that when Metro began operations, there was “an army of lawyers” at each meeting and “Metro was the most arrogant group I had ever dealt with.”

Views have now softened and the community feels that the door to Metro is open. While several people remarked that Metro tries to be a good neighbor and said the farm manager is good to work with and very approachable, three fence-line neighbors questioned Metro’s lease with the tenant farmer and their lack of ability to graze bulls on Metro’s land.

Quotes:

- *“They’ve learned a lot and come a long way. Management has come a long way. They used to look down on the community but don’t appear to anymore. Maybe they have better PR people than they did in the beginning.”*
- *“There’s been an absolute turnaround.”*
- *“When they first started I’d give them a zero. They were very arrogant, would not listen to input and came armed with an army of lawyers. On a scale of 1-10, now I’d give them a 4.”*
- *“METROGRO has sponsored charity events in the community, which is good because smaller business can’t contribute. They have generated goodwill in the community.”*
- *“There is a difference between bulls and cattle. Drex does not understand the difference between grass for bulls and grass for cattle.”*

Key Issues of Interest Related to METROGRO Farm (Prompt: Lowry)

Those interviewed this year said that the key issues of interest among the Deer Trail/Agate community as they relate to Metro continue to be potential contamination of groundwater and/or surface water from the long-term use of biosolids. While those who reside in town were more concerned about the smell from the trucks traveling to the METROGRO Farm, the neighboring farmers and ranchers are concerned about the soil erosion and the long-term effects.

Only two people mentioned the Lowry issue after they were prompted on the subject. Even with USGS monitoring being conducted and the results being shared, there is some concern about the long-term effects biosolids may have on soil, groundwater and drinking water. One person said that, even though the use of biosolids is becoming more accepted in the agriculture community, his level of distrust was higher with Metro than with other Front Range communities that use biosolids on their land. While the residents appear to be more accepting of the METROGRO Farm and biosolids use, there is still a feeling that biosolids use may have a negative impact on the community in the future.

Quotes:

- *“METROGRO has helped our community economically, but the level of trust needs to improve. Is it as safe as they say it is?”*
- *“The key issue as far as METROGRO is that they have good farming practices.”*
- *“Key issues are erosion and the effects of biosolids over a long period of time – does it get into the food chain? Will we have a 50,000-acre toxic waste site here in 60 years?”*
- *“METROGRO has increased land value prices because they’ve bought up about all the land that’s left out here.”*

METRO Trucks

While all of those surveyed were familiar with the way biosolids are delivered to the METROGRO Farm, the smell appears to be the only issue of concern to them. Most people said the drivers are courteous and drive carefully on the country roads. Only one person said the trucks drive too fast and their comment was based on second-hand information. Paving the road appears to have alleviated the previously reported dust and wash-board problems.

Quotes:

- *“Their drivers are courteous and give you the right-of-way.”*
- *“I’m happy about the paved road. It took care of the dust and washboards.”*
- *“The paved road has helped a whole lot.”*
- *“The smell of the trucks is the biggest issue.”*
- *“Occasionally I hear about the trucks going too fast. Everyone has complaints about traffic.”*

Independent USGS Monitoring Program

The majority of people surveyed were aware of the monitoring program conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and felt the program was valuable. Only six stakeholders were unaware of the monitoring program. However, when pressed for information about the results of the monitoring program, only the most vested neighbors, those whose farms and ranches adjoined the METROGRO Farm and soil conservation district board members, were aware of them.

Some people said that they were aware of the program and had received information on the results. The information, however, was written too technically for most lay people to understand. The suggestion was made that the information should be written or explained in terms that most of the public could understand.

Several of those interviewed said they knew Tracy Yager and have great confidence in her role overseeing the program. Several also remarked that having an independent, unbiased third-party involved is critical to the success of the program. That perception in itself has shed a positive light on the METROGRO Farm and the monitoring program.

Quotes:

- *“Yes, I am glad to see they started it and continued it. It makes the data available and they can see changes. I hope they catch stuff. This is the most important thing out there.”*
- *“I like the idea of monitoring because I am concerned with how metals in biosolids may affect our soil and water.”*
- *“It’s been effective – a wonderful idea. This sets the tone for biosolids research. When we show up to stakeholder meetings, we may not participate, but we are interested in listening to Tracy.”*
- *“I am not aware of a survey. I listen to very little of this stuff and pay little attention to reports.”*

Environmental Management System (EMS) for Biosolids

There was a significant increase in the level of awareness of the Environmental Management System (EMS) over the previous survey. As in other areas of the interview, landowners closest to the METROGRO Farm were most familiar with the program and the results of the various audits that have been conducted. Those aware of the EMS felt that certification by a third-party auditor was crucial to the success and acceptance of the program. One person who was unaware of the EMS said that as long as Metro tries to improve, people are happy.

Not everyone offered such positive reinforcement. One person said that he saw the audit but was not confident all the results were included. Another man offered that, while there is value in the program, some may wonder if Metro is at the helm, not the auditor.

Another respondent said that having the conservation district involved is a positive move and he expressed a great deal of trust in Sammie Molinaro. Three of the fence-line neighbors mentioned that they had attended the Citizen Participation Group (CPG) and found these meetings to be valuable. When informed about this group during the survey, two ranchers/farmers expressed interest in attending future CPG meetings.

Quotes:

- *“I have not heard of the program, but I think it’s a good idea and it would be good to let people know that it is going on and what the results from the audit are.”*
- *“Yes, it’s important to monitor biosolids because people need to know they are not affecting the environment.”*
- *“I know about the program but not about the results.”*

Metro Communications/Interaction with Staff

Most of those surveyed (about 95 percent) currently receive the *METROGRO Farm Update* newsletter and indicate it is one of the primary ways they receive news about Metro and the Farm. Other ways of receiving information include stopping and talking to the staff, word-of mouth with neighbors, and newspaper articles.

Those who receive the newsletter had high accolades for it. People feel that it is informative and well written, although a few people commented at times it is too technical. There were several suggestions on topics for future articles, including what crops are being planted and why, a history of the area, and an article on why biosolids will not affect soil and water 20 years from now. One person suggested Metro include information in the Deer Trail newsletter about news from other Metro facilities and how Metro responded to those issues.

The majority of those surveyed felt that Metro was communicating in an effective and balanced way. They said there was a good mix between direct correspondence, meetings/tours, newspaper articles and availability of staff by phone or in person. The 1-800-telephone number was not used by most stakeholders, and several people indicated that when they have a concern, they stop at the METROGRO Farm and speak with the manager or they know who to call at Metro.

Quotes:

- *“Metro is doing an effective job of communicating. The mix is good on communications; they are not out here so much that people wonder what is up their sleeve, but they do get important information out to community and get survey information into hands of key stakeholders. Anyone who has an interest can receive information and Metro does a good job of keeping mailing lists updated.”*
- *“I know how to get a hold of Drex directly.”*
- *“I call Drex or Tom with any questions. I haven’t dealt with anyone who is not a good guy. They have some good hands who know farming and ranching.”*

Detailed Observations – Elected/Government Officials

This section highlights the opinions of the elected officials, NRCS liaisons and the Elbert County Health Department representative. Elected officials surveyed in 2006 included the Deer Trail Mayor, the Mayor Pro-Tem and one of the town's two Trustees, two of three Elbert County Commissioners and one of two Arapahoe County Commissioners. Elbert County Commissioner Steve Stutz and Arapahoe County Commissioner Rod Bockenfeld did not respond to requests to participate in the survey.

Key Issues of Concern in Deer Trail

All of the government officials interviewed listed a combination of drought, impending growth and lack of local jobs as their key areas of concern. The Deer Trail officials mentioned that completing the overwhelming sewer project allowed them to focus on other issues.

The county officials in office in 2003 were the most informed about the METROGRO Farm, while current Deer Trail officials were less knowledgeable about the Farm. A briefing/tour of the Farm may be beneficial to newly elected county commissioners and Deer Trail officials.

Quotes:

- *“Drought and jobs are a real concern out here.”*
- *“Growth – quantity and quality of growth in the coming years is a real worry.”*
- *“I haven't seen the Farm, but would be interested in going.”*

Opinions about Biosolids as a Fertilizer

Of the nine elected officials/government employees who were surveyed this year, six are in favor of biosolids use, one was opposed and two have no opinion. Two of the county commissioners said that they support the use of biosolids only when properly applied and regulated. They said they understand the steps Metro has taken in the last three years to address the public's concern about erosion. Both appreciate the concern of their constituents and feel that public education and communication have been key to Metro winning the community's support.

The respondent who is strongly opposed to biosolids said he doesn't like it at all and is afraid it will eventually contaminate the groundwater. He doesn't like the idea of Metro “dumping crap in our community.” Although he had no suggestions, he felt there should be a better system of getting rid of the biosolids than dumping it in others' backyards.

The two officials who did not have an opinion acknowledged a limited understanding about biosolids and said they were interested in learning more.

Quotes:

- *“I'm not against it as long as it is used correctly.”*

- *“People are concerned about long-term impacts; when they are given all the facts, they can be reasonable and understanding. Don’t underestimate people’s intelligence.”*

Opinion of the Farm Operation and Soil Conservation

Of the nine elected officials and government employees surveyed, six felt Metro had made strides in increasing their conservation efforts. One official offered that what little he had heard has been positive; Metro uses crop rotation and measurements and he’s impressed with Metro’s monitoring results and reporting. Another official indicated that the only complaint he has heard is the occasional smell as it is distributed. Another said that the money put into improving the internal roads helps with erosion.

One official said he was not impressed with Metro’s conservation efforts and two others had no opinion because they were newly elected. One official questioned why Metro does not have a farm plan in place with the Deer Trail Conservation District and Double EL.

Those with knowledge of the METROGRO Farm’s conservation efforts said that continuing to improve farming practices by staying abreast of the latest conservation recommendations was their primary suggestion. One official suggested that more conservation work, more terracing and low-till or no-till work, putting more land back to grass and strip-cropping could be done.

Quotes:

- *“They are still trying to get blowing under control, they are trying no-till and that seems to be helping.”*
- *“They have proven they respond to our (Elbert County) concerns in a positive manner. They should continue to monitor the tenant farmer’s activities closely.”*
- *“Why don’t they have a farm plan with Deer Trail Conservation District and Double EL?”*

Perceptions of Metro Wastewater

All but one of the officials surveyed said their personal perception of Metro Wastewater had changed for the better over the last few years. They also offered that the community perception improved as well. There was only one person who said they were unhappy when Metro purchased the METROGRO Farm and they are still unhappy today. While the perception has improved, people are cautiously accepting of the Farm and Metro’s dealings in the community. One official said that he feels Metro has good rapport with the community and built goodwill when making donations to specific causes.

Another official said that, when Metro first arrived on the local scene, the locals perceived it as arrogant, but now Metro is more responsive. There continues to be a concern about what is in the biosolids and what may be left in the ground. As with the local residents, Metro and METROGRO® biosolids are synonymous. Elbert County officials strongly rely on environmental department staff to provide them with information and updates about the METROGRO Farm.

Quotes:

- *“The community knows they are trying to do things better. The stakeholder groups and internal audit have been helpful.”*
- *“I’ve become more open minded. The new management there must be forward thinking. What they do is a necessary function.”*
- *“Fugitive dust is a big issue that they’ve done a good job addressing. They are a government entity in the business of farming.”*
- *“I have done a 180 on how I feel about Metro.”*
- *“If Mary Sue flags an issue, I pay attention.”*

Key Issues of Interest Related to METROGRO Farm

Unlike years past, there was not a strong issue related to the METROGRO Farm that resonated with the elected officials. When responding about the key issue of interest, there were three categories of responses. Four respondents said water supply and farming practices were their primary issues. Three others said monitoring of possible hazardous waste and sharing the results were their primary concerns. Two officials were unaware of any current issue as they were newly elected.

Of those who were concerned about water supply, none of them said that water from Lowry is a concern at this time. One county commissioner recognized the effort to keep stakeholders informed about monitoring and any new contaminants being detected. A local elected official said that calls to the city about water are usually about smell or color of water, but this had never been attributed to METROGRO® biosolids. Two of the three people with water as their primary issue further said that current conservation efforts in farming practices should be continued.

Quotes:

- *“People are concerned about possible impact to their water supply.”*
- *“I haven’t heard anything about it for quite a while. Sharing of monitoring data may have helped with this.”*

Metro Trucks

When asked about the Metro trucks, no one was concerned. Several people said that dust and speed were an issue in the past, but paving the road alleviated the dust issue. The drivers are reputed to be more careful, so speed is no longer an issue. One person said that the drivers are courteous and give the right-of-way on the roads.

Quotes:

- *“A year or so ago, I heard some concerns about the road conditions. People wondered if the trucks would cause roads to deteriorate.”*
- *“Not recently; they used to drive very fast but not anymore.”*

Independent USGS Monitoring Program

While most of the elected officials and government employees surveyed were familiar with the USGS monitoring program, only three of nine were aware of the results. There was high praise for the USGS monitoring program and Tracy Yager. Several people said

that Tracy is a good presenter and well respected within the community. One person said that, while there may not be many people who attend the public meetings, they are informative and people are learning. The dust blowing study that Tracy discussed was spoken about with great appreciation.

In 2003, one Elbert County commissioner and the Elbert County Health Department representative were concerned with the program being scaled back, but both said this year that they are comfortable with the program being scaled back. Both felt, however, that some amount of monitoring should continue, due to the concern over the long-term effects of biosolid use on groundwater and soil.

Quotes:

- *“The program seems to be appropriate and provides a level of comfort.”*
- *“I’ve heard about the program but don’t know about the results.”*

Environmental Management System (EMS) for Biosolids

Of the six elected officials surveyed, five were unaware of the existence of the Environmental Management System (EMS) for biosolids and the Citizen Participation Group (CPG). All officials agreed that third-party auditing is important to the process and lends additional credibility. One person said having another opportunity to interact with stakeholders was admirable; it showed Metro’s concern for the community.

The one who was aware of the program said that systems to manage wind erosion and dust blowing demonstrate that Metro’s intent on addressing critical issues. Another person appreciated the outreach component.

Quotes:

- *“This has been very helpful and shows they are open to working on things.”*
- *“I don’t know about the program, but like the idea of third-party monitoring.”*

Metro Communications/Interaction with Staff

All elected officials and government employees interviewed viewed Metro’s communication efforts as good to very good. They receive information on Metro and the METROGRO Farm through the same methods as community members. The newsletter, articles in local newspapers, and direct conversations with Metro employees were the primary sources of information.

All officials except one said they receive the newsletter and have a good opinion of it. There were a few suggestions regarding stories or topics people would like to see addressed in the newsletter. One NRCS liaison suggested Metro could do a better job highlighting current conservation efforts at the METROGRO Farm. Another person suggested articles that appeal to local interest – history of the area or highlighting local families with deep roots in the community. Another official suggested an article on the fugitive dust study being conducted with Kansas State University.

Respondents made two key suggestions to enhance communications: 1) provide more METROGRO Farm tours so that neighbors and other community members could see firsthand the conservation efforts and farming practices in place, and 2) have Metro management provide an annual briefing to Deer Trail town leaders. This would help disseminate the latest information regarding the Farm; however, the briefing would need to be formatted so the public can easily understand the information given.

Most of the elected officials and government employees felt that community “talk” about METROGRO® biosolids had lessened over the years, but is still an important subject for immediate neighbors. Neighbors discuss fugitive dust and farm practices. One of the NRCS employees said members of the soil conservation districts would continue to discuss Metro because of the nature of their relationship. One official said that anything new at the METROGRO Farm brings local discussion.

Quotes:

- *“They need to do a better job of promoting the things they are doing to promote soil conservation.”*
- *“Nothing comes to mind to enhance communications. They have shown that their door is open.”*
- *“I’ll drive to the farm directly with any questions.”*
- *“If they could put themselves on the Deer Trail town agenda (first Tuesday of each month) once a year, that would be helpful.”*

Appendix A — List of Questions

Stakeholder Interviews Questionnaire

Date of Interview: _____

Hello, I'm _____ with Sigler Communications, a research and communications firm based in Denver. We are conducting interviews with members of the Deer Trail community to assess the Metro Wastewater Reclamation District's operations near Deer Trail, Colorado at the METROGRO Farm.

I understand we have surveyed you previously. — OR — I understand this is the first time you have participated in the survey.

May we use your name in the written report or would you prefer to do the interview anonymously?

Name, Occupation: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Questions:

1. In general, what are the most important issues facing your community today?
2. Can you tell me what you think about using biosolids as a soil conditioner or fertilizer?
3. What is your opinion of the METROGRO Farm operation?¹ What would your top suggestion be on how to improve operations?¹
4. What is your perception of Metro Wastewater today compared to when it first began operations at its METROGRO Farm property near Deer Trail in the mid-1990s? How different are your perceptions from the last time we surveyed you (March 2003)?¹
5. What is your opinion of Metro Wastewater's soil conservation efforts on its property (PROMPT: Has it improved over last few years)?
6. What are the key issues of interest among the Deer Trail community as they relate to the METROGRO Farm and Metro Wastewater Reclamation District? (PROMPT: Lowry)
7. Are you aware of the Metro trucks that transport the biosolids to the farm? Are there any issues with the trucks?
8. Are you aware of the results of the independent monitoring program done by the U.S. Geological Survey? (PROMPT: If so, what are they? — OR — If not, would you like some information?)

Stakeholder Research
Metro Wastewater Reclamation District

9. How do you receive information about METROGRO Farm operations and the activities of the Metro Wastewater Reclamation District (PROMPT: From Metro Wastewater staff, Web site, neighbors, newsletter, the independent monitoring program)?
10. Metro has a certified Environmental Management System (EMS) for Biosolids in place. Are you aware of this EMS Program? Do you think a Program certified by an outside, third-party auditor as meeting industry standards affect the credibility of the Program? ¹
11. As part of the Environmental Management System, Metro Wastewater has started a Citizen Participation Group (CPG) of neighbors and others interested in biosolids use and disposal. Would you be interested in participating in that group? (PROMPT: Tell them Steve Frank will contact them if they are interested. Get phone number.)¹
10. How effectively is Metro Wastewater communicating with the community? (PROMPT: newsletter, public meetings, Web site, newspaper articles, presentations?) Are you aware of the toll-free 1-800 number that allows you to call long distance free of charge? (PROMPT: Anonymous messages can be left. The toll-free number is 1-800-237-6603.)¹
11. Do you receive the METROGRO Farm Update newsletter that's mailed twice a year? (PROMPT: If not, would you like to be added to the mailing list?)
12. Do you read the newsletter? If so, what is your opinion of the newsletter?
13. What stories/topics would you like to see addressed in the newsletter?
14. How could Metro Wastewater enhance communications with the Deer Trail community?
15. Would you like the opportunity to occasionally meet with managers from Metro Wastewater in your community to discuss issues/ask questions? Would you know whom to call with questions, comments or concerns?¹
16. Is Metro talked about in the community?¹
17. Is there anything else you would like to add?

¹Question added or changed in the 2006

Appendix B -- Participant Screener

**METRO WASTEWATER RECLAMATION DISTRICT STAKEHOLDER
INTERVIEWS SCREENING SCRIPT**

Participant Information (obtain from list)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Affiliation: _____

Hello, I'm _____ with Sigler Communications, a research and communications firm based in Denver. We are conducting interviews with members of the Deer Trail community to assess the Metro Wastewater Reclamation District's operations in Deer Trail and communications with neighbors. (PROMPT: They operate the METROGRO Farm east of Deer Trail). This is a follow-up to a survey we conducted for Metro Wastewater in the spring of 2003. (We interviewed you then and would like to follow-up with you now.) Could we schedule a time when we could spend about 30 minutes or so asking you some questions over the phone (or in person)? If you like, we can keep your answers anonymous. The information will be provided to the District's management to assess their communication efforts.

A. Conduct interview.

B. Schedule time for follow-up call or visit. ARRANGE MEETING LOCATION.
Meeting places: Their home (get directions), the Metro shed on southeast corner of Road 245 and County Rd. 35 – Red metal building, or by telephone.

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me and for agreeing to participate in the interview. What phone number should I call you at and what is a good time of the day for me to reach you?

Phone: _____ Time: _____

Could you confirm the spelling of your name and your address?

Again, thank you for your time. I look forward to speaking with you.