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## **Canadian Water Resources Association SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

Approved by Board of Directors May 27, 2018

Version 1.0

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The development of CWRA's *Social Media Policy* is being led by the CWRA Communications Committee (Committee) to guide the Association in its use of social media. The policy applies to CWRA's:

- Employees;
- National Executive and Board of Directors;
- Branch and Affiliate Executive and Boards of Directors;
- Members, including Student and Young Professionals, when they are communicating with the intention of representing CWRA.
- Volunteers who are not members but are actively engaged at CWRA activities and are communicating with the intention of representing CWRA.

The policy is a requested code of conduct, outlining that care must be taken when using social media on behalf of CWRA, or if you could be construed as representing CWRA. The purpose of the policy is to convey expectations that CWRA holds for achieving professional social media communication on matters supporting CWRA's mandate of effective water management. The policy guides us to ask the question "What would my peers at CWRA think of this social media post, and how does my post advance CWRA's mission and purpose?"

This document augments and is meant to align with other policies and guidelines established by CWRA, such as CWRA's Bylaws, Code of Ethics, Advocacy Policy, *Communication Plan* and Media Guide, etc. These other documents are posted on CWRA's Google Drive and can also be accessed through the CWRA website at <https://www.cwra.org>.

In summary, CWRA's Social Media Policy guides us to be:

- Transparent;
- Clear, Concise, and Consistent;
- Truthful and Accurate;
- Ethical and Fair; and
- Science-based

The first four points above are standard to many organizations' social media policies, with the last one being more CWRA-focussed. All points are expanded upon in detail in Section G.

Social media is a relatively new form of communication, with conversation-like qualities. Posts made on behalf of CWRA, or ones that make reference to it, need to be consistent with CWRA's communication goals as expressed in the most recent *Communication Plan*. Individual posts not meant to be construed as representing CWRA should make that clear. Individuals must also be cognizant that any offensive posts, i.e., ones that clearly and grossly violate the spirit of principles outlined above, may result in further action by CWRA as described in later portions of this policy document.

This Policy document has been developed as a stable, long term, first principle document, while the social media content strategies and implementation plans may be more operational and change over time, assisting the CWRA to respond to new social media platforms.

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## A. CWRA SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY STATEMENT & OBJECTIVES

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This Social Media Policy has been created for the Canadian Water Resources Association (CWRA) to:

- guide social media posts for promoting events, making announcements, and communicating information, issues, and statements about water;
- illustrate best practices and considerations when using social media to represent CWRA and when conveying CWRA messages/viewpoints; and
- provide guidance for presenting the interests of the CWRA in a professional manner when using social media to connect with members and the larger public.

CWRA's Social Media policy applies collectively to its:

- Employees;
- National Executive and Board of Directors;
- Branch and Affiliate Executive and Boards of Directors;
- Members, including Student and Young Professionals, when they are communicating with the intention of representing CWRA; and
- Volunteers who are not members but are actively engaged at CWRA activities and are communicating with the intention of representing CWRA.

In this document, all such persons who are affiliated with CWRA will be collectively referenced as **CWRA representatives** in this document (also see Section C – Definitions).

CWRA recognizes that existing and emerging online collaboration platforms are fundamentally changing the way individuals and organizations communicate. Engagement with social media creates the opportunity to affect CWRA (and CWRA representatives) in a very positive sense, potentially increasing the organization's reach and pursuit of its goals and mandate. This policy offers practical guidance for responsible and constructive communications. It is also outlines some practices and pitfalls of social media that we should collectively avoid.

CWRA's objectives in establishing this Social Media Policy are to:

- a. Establish practical, reasonable and enforceable guidelines by which CWRA can conduct responsible and constructive social media engagement.
- b. Facilitate CWRA representatives utilizing social media channels, thereby helping to promote CWRA activities and the exchange of information regarding effective water management between government, policy makers and the general public.
- c. Guide CWRA representatives towards current best practices for social media interaction.

This policy applies to all CWRA's organization-branded Social Media accounts (e.g. Twitter account, Facebook account, blog, and LinkedIn discussion group).

Failure to adhere to CWRA's Social Media Policy as set out in this document will be taken seriously by CWRA, with actions potentially taken by the Executive Director and/or Executive Committee on behalf of CWRA's Board of Directors. Potential actions will include those stated in CWRA's by-laws.

## B. USING THIS DOCUMENT

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This document is intended to provide guidance and protection to CWRA and CWRA representatives as described in Section A above. Concerns about content should be directed to either the Chair of the CWRA Communications Committee or to CWRA's Executive Director.

Due to the changing nature of social media and technology, this document may be updated on a more frequent basis than CWRA's *Communication Plan* which is updated every five years (last update 2014). But at minimum, this *Social Media Policy* will be updated when the 2014 Communication Plan is reviewed. Following which, this Social Media Policy will be reviewed every two years and/or updated as necessary at the same time as the *Communication Plan*. As the Social Media Policy can be accessed via the CWRA's website, an announcement will be posted on CWRA's website to indicate any updates made to it. It remains the responsibility of CWRA representatives to be aware of CWRA's most current policies.

Within this document, notes may reference other sections of the document in order that information is not unnecessarily repeated. References also appear where there is another section having similar or relevant information pertaining to a particular item.

## C. DEFINITIONS

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### C.1 Social Media

Social Media in this document refers to:

**Social Media Channels** - Blogs, micro-blogs, wikis, social networks, social bookmarking services, user rating services and any other online collaboration, sharing or publishing platform, whether accessed through the web, a mobile device, text messaging, email or any other existing or emerging communications platform.

**Social Media Account** – A personalized presence inside a social networking channel, initiated at will by an individual. Social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram allow users to sign-up for their own social media account, which they can use to collaborate, interact, and share content and status updates. When a user communicates through a social media account, their disclosures are identified as coming from the user ID they specify when they sign up for a social media account.

**Social Media Disclosures** - Blog posts, blog comments, press releases, status updates, text messages, posts via email, images, audio recordings, video recordings or any other information made available through a social media channel. Social media disclosures are the actual communications a user distributes through a social media channel, usually by means of their social media account.

**Profile Pages** – Social media account holders can customize the information about themselves which is available to others on their profile page.

### C.2 Controversial Issues

Controversial issues are those that may form the basis of heated debate, are often identified in political campaigns, sometimes as 'wedge' issues, and issues that can provoke a strong emotional response. Issues will be determined as being 'controversial' by the Executive Director and/or the Chair of the CWRA's Communications Committee. If necessary, further consideration of what might or might not be

deemed controversial issues will be undertaken by the National Executive or ultimately the Board of Directors.

### C.3 Typical Topics

In contrast to *Controversial Issues* described in the above section, more typical topics for CWRA would include:

- Activities and projects funded or sponsored by the CWRA (e.g. Project Wet, conferences, workshops, scholarships, awards, etc.);
- CWRA publications (e.g. newsletter, Journal) and statements (e.g. position papers);
- Partnership and activities that involve other organizations;
- CWRA activities that are external and/or publicly funded; and
- Issue specific topics (e.g. flood/drought management, water quality, hydrology, etc.)
- Day-to-day operations and governance of CWRA

### C.4 CWRA Representative(s)

CWRA, as an organization, has many different relationships with the various people that comprise it. Relationships include employee-employer, members, elected executive, directors of boards (representing the various national, branch and affiliate levels), student and young professionals (SYP's), and volunteers who are not members but are actively engaged in CWRA activities. The term *CWRA representative* references an individual who has such a relationship with CWRA.

## D. GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THIS DOCUMENT

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- a. CWRA recognizes that social media is an important vehicle for reaching and interfacing with members and potential members, water resources professionals, external stakeholders, and all people interested in the activities of the CWRA.
- b. CWRA must act to protect its reputation of being a non-partisan, equal opportunity organization, and maintain the goodwill of the water resources community and society at large. This policy is meant to address those needs.
- c. CWRA respects the rights of all to engage in social media and does not seek to limit any one's ability to do so.
- d. CWRA expects that its members, board members, employees, SYP's and volunteers (i.e. all CWRA representatives) ensure that their social media engagement and activities abide by the principles outlined in this document.
- e. Any issues regarding the intent of statements in this Social Media Policy should be brought to the attention of CWRA's Executive Director or the Chairperson of the Communications Committee.

## E. SOCIAL MEDIA DISCLOSURES AND CWRA INTERESTS

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CWRA recognizes that social media is a relatively new form of communication, with conversation-like qualities. However, the written, highly accessible and highly searchable nature of social media makes posts and other disclosures unlike regular verbal conversation. With the added factor of mobile communication, the lines between people's personal and professional time and space have been blurred.

All social media disclosures by CWRA representatives can potentially contribute to the promotion of CWRA objectives. However, with few exceptions, it is only when CWRA representatives are using social media to represent the organization (or when they could be reasonably construed as being representative of CWRA) that this *Social Media Policy* will apply. Exceptions may occur when a CWRA representative is breaking a federal or provincial law (see also Section F.4) or otherwise engaged in making offensive posts (i.e., posts that clearly and grossly violate the spirit of principles outlined in this document, see Section F). CWRA has other policies outside of this *Social Media Policy* which will address these rare circumstances.

Although no clear guideline exists, CWRA representatives have a duty and responsibility to CWRA to effectively and reasonably make clear that when certain posts (or a continuing series of posts) are not to be construed as ones representing CWRA.

## F. CWRA SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

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### F.1 General

**Intention to Post** - CWRA will use Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, group emails, blogs and other forms of social media to reach interested parties in an effort to inform them of CWRA activities and Canadian water resources management issues.

**Photos and Media** - CWRA from time to time will post photos, images, videos and recordings from CWRA projects or events.

- a. Photos, images, videos and recordings generated from hired photographer, videographers, technicians or CWRA employees on CWRA owned equipment are the property of CWRA and can be used for public relations purposes including promotion through official social media channels. Adequate consent must be obtained from and/or proper credit given to content generators and participants, including consent for others portrayed in images as applicable.
- b. Photos, images, videos and recordings supplied by clients, participants or collaborators are the property of CWRA and can be used for public relations purposes including promotion through official social media channels. Adequate consent must be obtained from and/or proper credit given to content generators and participants, including consent for others portrayed in images as applicable.
- c. CWRA will allow the public to apply reasonable tags and comments on photos, images, videos and recordings on social media accounts it controls. Tags and comments will be managed for content by CWRA.

**Review** - Any official content being posted on social media must be reviewed (before posting) by the social media user to ensure that its nature and content meets the requirements of this policy.



**Controversial Issues** - CWRA will not comment on controversial issues through social media channels and will maintain a more scientific or factual approach when conveying information, confirming its positions, or comments. See Section C.2 for definition of controversial.

**CWRA-Branded Accounts** - Only those officially designated by the Executive Director (or their designate) are permitted use CWRA-branded or CWRA self-identified social media accounts and this will also apply to media channels that CWRA controls. Furthermore:

- a. The Executive Director oversees and directs the use of social media on behalf of CWRA.
- b. Updates to social media on behalf of CWRA will be based on instructions and/or guidance from Executive Director (or their designate including the Chairperson of the Communications Committee).
- c. CWRA representatives designated to use social media on behalf of CWRA must be approved by the Executive Director or their designate. The CWRA Communications Committee may from time to time make recommendations to the Executive Director regarding accessibility and authority.
- d. When a person is designated to use social media on behalf of CWRA, they need to familiarize themselves with the CWRA *Social Media Policy* in addition to other relevant policies and guidelines that will apply. This includes CWRA's *Communication Plan* and *Code of Ethics*.
- e. Request for updates and/or changes to CWRA-controlled social media accounts should be submitted to CWRA's Communications Manager or Executive Director (or directly to the assigned CWRA representative handling the account).
- f. The Executive Director and National Executive has complete discretion to make immediate changes to the authority and access of individual(s) responsible for any CWRA-branded or CWRA-controlled social media accounts or media channels.

**External Contractors** - Generally, there is no need for external contractors, vendors or other agencies to have access to CWRA's social media accounts. However, situations may arise, such as planning national conferences, whereby an external contractor could be retained (e.g. conference planner). CWRA may wish to grant access to this third party under certain conditions or pre-set parameters agreed to by both parties. In this case, a protocol for keeping passwords for CWRA-official social media channels and accounts confidential needs to be implemented. If third parties are engaged in using social media on behalf of CWRA, the Executive Director will be responsible for ensuring that all contractors, vendors and agencies have received and agreed to abide by CWRA's *Social Media Policy*.

**Updates and Comments** - CWRA, and specifically the persons charged with managing CWRA-based or CWRA-controlled accounts, will attempt to respond to all comments, posts and questions posed through social media in a timely manner. Furthermore:

- a. Negative comments made by the general public on official CWRA social media channels that have been identified by the person(s) charged with managing the account will be reported to and addressed by CWRA's Communications Manager in consultation with the Executive Director. Generally, CWRA will not respond to negative comments made about CWRA or CWRA projects.
- b. CWRA will delete negative comments posted on official social media.
- c. CWRA, through the Executive Director, reserves the right to disable any comment sections associated with its social media accounts and will do so in its complete discretion to limit content it deems unsuitable. When comment section is disabled, an explanation for its closure will be posted in its place.



- d. CWRA reserves the right to delete comments that would be reasonably considered racist, threatening, discriminatory, harassing, or that contains inappropriate language, or comments which CWRA deems to be false.

**Misrepresentation** - If a misrepresentation of CWRA is discovered by CWRA representatives, media, analyst, bloggers or other social media users, such an incident will be reported to CWRA’s Communications Manager who will determine an appropriate response in consultation with the Executive Director.

## F.2 Culture

**Post Content** - Posts made to CWRA social media accounts will generally be limited to the CWRA typical topics (see definition in Section C.3), including activities and projects directly produced or supported by CWRA or to CWRA-related topics.

**Content Submission** – CWRA representatives are encouraged to submit news and events information to the CWRA Communications Manager or Executive Director to potentially be promoted on the CWRA website, Facebook page, Twitter, LinkedIn, and/or other CWRA-based social media accounts.

**Social Media Cross-Promotion** - Whenever possible, tweets sent out by the CWRA account should include a mention of @CWRA\_Flows, and CWRA representatives are encouraged to include this mention when promoting CWRA. Specific hashtags are also encouraged to be included (e.g. #CWRA2017) in their tweets. A list of other hashtags may be made available for events and generally by CWRA’s Communications Manager.

**Tone of Updates** - CWRA social media interaction should generally be timely, relevant, upbeat and positive.

**Social Media Content Strategy** - It should be noted that this Policy document differs in purpose from CWRA’s related *Social Media Content Strategy* document, which outlines and defines objectives for items and themes to be communicated, along with the various social media platforms that will be utilized. Reference should be made to the content strategy document accordingly.

## F.3 Best Practices for Engagement

**Transparency** - We must self-identify when speaking as an individual or as a member of the executive on behalf of CWRA. The intention of the communication should be evident. Posts are to have clear context, leaving minimal doubt as to why they were made.

**Be Clear, Concise, and Consistent** - We have a responsibility for what, when and how we post. Posts should have clear meaning and be unambiguous. Good consistency means posts that help CWRA build a stronger relationship with its internal and external audiences.

**Truthful and Accurate** - Posts should be accurate, fact-checked, and capable of substantiation. If a mistake is made, a timely correction and reference to the questionable post is required. Referencing of quotes, publications, photographs, or graphics is expected as a writing practice.

**Ethical and Fair** - Always act in a professional, polite and constructive manner. Malicious, misleading, unfair, obscene, defamatory, threatening or discriminatory content is unacceptable. Response to posts that could be considered unfair should always be accurate and professional. We must be authentic, constructive and respectful and make posts to social media as if we were speaking face to face. CWRA representatives should be guided by respectfulness and understand that any communication that could

be construed as offensive in conversation or in written form will have the same effect when posted to social media.

**Science-based** - CWRA as a science-focused organization that influences others, including within matters of politics and policy, will put forward its communications framed and supported by science and facts. CWRA promotes the exchange of information regarding effective water management between government, policy makers and the general public. CWRA does not typically comment or provide direct opinion on the merits of specific policies or political agendas put forward. Instead, discussions can be framed in terms of past experiences, known data, data-supported inconsistencies, questions that would reasonably follow from statements made, and by pointing to positions that CWRA has proactively made on subjects.

**Longevity of Posts** - Social media disclosures are not private nor are they temporary. Social media disclosures live online indefinitely and may continue to be visible to a broad audience.

**Diplomacy** - No one at CWRA is under an obligation to accept friend requests or engage online with another CWRA representative or the public at large. Decisions regarding such requests or interactions are left to that person's complete discretion. As well:

- a. CWRA-controlled social media accounts should not show too much "favouritism" towards specific organizations - by posting about their programming exclusively and/or too frequently.
- b. Promotion of events or projects that are not of direct interest to CWRA or are non-CWRA related should not be facilitated through CWRA-controlled social media.

## F.4 Privacy and Legal Considerations

**Privacy** - The privacy laws governing CWRA also apply to social media, and CWRA expects that no information that is deemed by the party in question to be sensitive or private will be inappropriately shared via social media. All CWRA representatives have a right to reasonable personal privacy, including the right to keep their personal opinions, beliefs, thoughts and emotions from unreasonable public disclosure. Sharing another's private information via social media channels could violate rights to privacy:

Examples of social media disclosures that may compromise a reasonable right to privacy include, but are not limited to, pictures, video or audio recorded and shared through social media channels without permission, the public disclosure of private facts or the disclosure of information gained through unreasonable intrusion.

**Confidentiality** - Effectively managing and protecting CWRA's confidential information is important to the organization. Failure to adequately manage and protect confidential information could in some cases result in legal or regulatory fines, as well as damages to CWRA's reputation. CWRA recognizes that:

- a. Social media channels are not the place to conduct business discussions. If a CWRA person is contacted via a social media channel to discuss potentially sensitive CWRA business or issues, they should be directed to continue the conversation via email or telephone.
- b. Social media channels should not be used for internal organization communications.
- c. CWRA representatives should refrain from expressing grievances or disagreements through social media. (See above Section F.3 - Best Practices).

**Legal** - For the protection of CWRA and its affiliated persons put in charge of social media accounts or media channels, all posts must be made without infringing on the copyrights of others. This will include

not sharing or posting photos, videos, musical content, written content, or other intellectual property which CWRA does not have permission to post. Additionally:

- a. Uploading protected intellectual property accessed through a CWRA-controlled social media account on to a personal social media account without the written consent of CWRA is not permitted.
- b. Social media accounts controlled by CWRA are not to be used to discuss legal matters, litigation or details regarding CWRA's financial performance or situation. Requests for this information is to be forwarded to CWRA's Executive Director.

## **G. DOCUMENT VERSION AND EDITS**

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This document is Version 1.0, approved by the CWRA Communications Committee and subsequently by the National Board of Directors on May 27, 2018.

As the first version of the document, many CWRA representatives have contributed. Any errors, omissions or inconsistencies should be brought to the attention of CWRA's Executive Director.