



## President's Message

Randy Thater  
Waukesha, Wisconsin  
April 2012



### Slushy Snow, Sludge and Sandhill Cranes

The old saying is March goes in like a lion and out like a lamb. I sit here writing this missive one week into the month. Here in the southeastern part of the state, we have already had four inches of heavy wet snow, bending over branches and taking down power lines. We had three lift stations without utility power from Friday evening into the wee hours of Saturday morning. One has an on-site generator, the second overflows to another station by gravity (Why do we run it then? Don't ask!), but the third needed a crew with portable generator on-site for the duration. Then yesterday the high was 62, ridding us of whatever snow cover we had left. And just now I checked the National Weather Service web site to verify that high temperature reading, and see that we have a wind advisory. Just part of the job for all of us.

As I alluded to in my last message, one of the real joys of my year as president is that I am expected to attend at least one meeting in each region. For February I attended my home region meeting just up the road (and river) in Brookfield. Then I trekked up the I-roads to Plover for the North Central meeting. I knew in February I'd be chancing having to make the trip in winter weather. This was my third winter meeting in the greater Point area since becoming a member of the board, and I haven't had one of those crisp, clear, gloriously sunny winter days yet. Dire storm warnings had me worried, to the point that I was considering going up the night before. But as the time got closer, the storm seemed to be tracking further north. So while they had about 20 no-shows from the northern reaches of the region, I had mostly just a damp drive up.

I won't get too involved detailing the proceedings, the regions publish their meeting minutes for that purpose. But I did want to make a few personal observations. Firstly, I want to acknowledge the vendors who attended. Their presence, and the fees they pay to display, helps keep the costs to the membership at such a low level. And the information they provide just adds to the educational experience, which is after all the *raison d'être*

for these meetings and our organization. And when you look at the typical agenda, the Manufacturer and Consultant segment provides a good portion of the speakers as well.

We may take the vendor displays at regional meetings for granted now, but it wasn't that long ago that it was rare. In fact, it was at a regional meeting hosted in Waukesha while I was a regional officer that we decided to give it a try because the meeting fees were otherwise going to be higher than desirable. Prior to that it wasn't the norm, at least in the Southeast region, but it has become the standard practice now.

I was especially delighted to see Tom Kruzick, who was WWOA president for my first year on the board. Also Pete Albers, one of our honorary members, who continues to attend and contribute to our group long after he 'retired' as an operator and plant supervisor. Then again, the plant I work at is in between facilities planning and the preliminary design stage for a fairly significant upgrade, so we are pretty popular with that whole segment at present.

Talks at the meetings certainly reflected the hot issues with our industry. Both had speakers addressing energy topics; renewable initiatives at one, energy saving features and Focus on Energy projects at the other. Anything related to upcoming regulatory issues are always hot topics and phosphorus implementation and the new impaired waters list were in the mix. I&I programs and blower technology were presented. And a presentation on the Wastewater Apprenticeship Program addressed just one of the developments in the pipeline to help alleviate the serious succession planning issues many of us face.

Planning for the spring and summer rounds of meetings continue at the regional level as usual. Pretty much all the host communities are signed on. A few of the specific dates remain to be arranged. As of now my tentative plan is to attend the Lake Michigan region meeting in Winneconne May 10, and the West Central meeting in Black River Falls May 16. Then for the summer round, I'm looking forward to a trip up to visit our hearty brethren in the wilds of Northwestern Wisconsin at Luck on July 20. This one is definitely not a day trip, so I hope to bring along my better half and make a busman's holiday out of it. That would leave Southern region to finish my grand tour. No date set as yet, but Janesville is the location and that is a short hop down I-43 sometime in August.

With all my other commitments, one day trip I was not able to fit in was the Government Affairs Seminar. This was the first one I've missed in quite a while, since I served on the planning committee from my first year on the board until last year, and was a fairly regular attendee for many years prior. I really liked the agenda and would have liked to have made it, but it was just not in the cards. I understand the day went extremely well and that the attendance was, if not a record, at least the best in many years. Again that February date makes potential weather a factor, but the day I was looking for the following week settled here. Kudos to Kevin Freber, Jim Bergles and the rest of the committee for putting on another excellent program. And I am given to understand that

rat roast was not on the bill of fair. Pencil February 28, 2013 onto your calendar. That is the date for next year's seminar.

As I noted last time, my other February trip was to Wisconsin Dells (well Lake Delton technically) for the Technical Committee meeting. Bumpy start due to the WWOA projector not working, but the Kalahari A/V guy, who has taken care of us so well at all our conferences there, came up with a loaner to get us through. Again, it is not my place to go into all the details, but I think the committee did an excellent job picking a slate of talks for the technical sessions at the October conference. As usual, the problem wasn't finding enough good presentations, it was culling down to the thirty-something slots from about seventy submissions, and not a clinker in the bunch. Usually it came down to too many talks on the same or similar topics and we just had to choose which ones to go with.

One thing we did was restore the third technical session on Thursday afternoon. That session was dropped a number of years ago due to lower attendance at that time slot due to the concurrent plant tours and some people leaving early if they weren't staying through to Friday. There is some limitation on the number that can be accommodated on the tours this year so we hope that the attendance will support our decision. This allowed us to add three more talks to the offerings. Otherwise the set-up for the conference is pretty much the same as previous years. Once you have a successful formula, you don't want to mess with it too much. That is with one glaring exception...

...and that is the Operators Competition. I wrote last time explaining that situation, none last year and this year possibly our last chance to salvage it – at least in its current format. So one last time, I promise (but with my fingers crossed!), if anyone has an interest in participating please contact one of your regional officers. You won't be sorry, that I do promise without fingers crossed. Due to the timing needed in planning, we need a commitment from at least the minimum three teams by the end of April or shortly after or we will just have to bite the bullet.

I have one more trip for WWOA prior to the spring meetings. On the last Thursday and Friday in April, the board of directors will have a meeting at the Kalahari. This is where we firm up the room assignments and lock in the program details for the state conference. About a month after that the meeting brochure is printer ready. Even before the general membership registration, we start the registration process for the exhibitors. One other element of this board meeting is that all the regions are encouraged to send at least one of their officers for the Thursday portion (any and all of them are welcome). This allows us to get their input and for them to experience the workings of the organization from the state-wide level. Certainly one of the subjects for discussion will be that thorny operators competition issue.

I've seen robins already, and my co-worker Jeff Harenda (he's my official photographer for the accompanying pix) says he saw a couple sandhill cranes go over a couple days ago. It seems like just a couple weeks ago we were worrying over the fall sludge

application (like Greg Kester, I'm an old dog on the subject of sludge vs. biosolids), and now the spring spreading season is not that far off.

'Nuff said. Once again, I started this message wondering what I was going to write about. And once again I've managed to fill about three pages. So to those of you with the intestinal fortitude to make it this far, I thank you and hope you found it worth your time.

Sincerely,

Randy Thater  
President, WWOA