

**St. Clair River Remedial Action Plan (RAP) Implementation Committee (CRIC)
Draft Meeting Minutes**

Tuesday, March 10, 2015

**Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change Sarnia District Office Boardroom
1094 London Road, Sarnia, Ontario**

Participants:

Paul Buttery	April White	Ted Briggs
Darrell Randell	Dean Edwardson	Naomi Williams
Donna Strang	Jake Lozon	Christine Rogers
Dave Richards	Kris Lee	Sharilyn Johnston
Bonnie Plain		

Guests:

Kelli Smith – St. Clair Region Conservation Authority

Regrets:

Kristen Diemer	Trevor Robak	Phil Vallance
Sandra Kok	Brian McDougall	

ITEMS:

Welcome and Introductions:

April White chaired the meeting and welcomed committee members. Kelli Smith, Biological Technician at the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority (SCRCA) attended the meeting and would be providing an overview of habitat restoration projects led by the SCRCA along the W. Darcy McKeough floodway.

Review and Acceptance of the Agenda and Minutes:

The draft agenda and minutes from the December 9, 2014 meeting were accepted as prepared.

Action Items from the Meeting of December 9, 2014:

The minutes from the previous meeting were provided and action items discussed.

1. **Action:** Donna Strang will re-circulate the login information for the CRIC Sharepoint Site with the meeting minutes.

Some committee members had problems using the Sharepoint Site or did not receive the website address and login information.

ACTION – Donna Strang will re-circulate the CRIC Sharepoint Site information with the March 10, 2015 draft CRIC meeting minutes.

SCRCA McKeough Floodway Habitat Restoration Projects – Kelli Smith:

Kelli Smith of the SCRCA provided committee members with an overview of habitat restoration projects conducted along the W. Darcy McKeough Floodway, located in Area 1-B of the St. Clair River Area of Concern (AOC). Properties were purchased as part of the Floodway Dam and Diversion project constructed to alleviate flooding in the town of Wallaceburg. Many of the properties are leased for agricultural purposes. Property Management Plans were developed for each property with the purpose

of implementing environmentally sustainable farming practices and resources. In addition, 24 acres have been converted to wetlands (10 acres), riparian buffers and upland habitat (14 acres). These projects help improve St. Clair River tributary water quality, contribute to the target set for riparian buffers in the AOC and improve biological connectivity.

Committee members were interested in knowing whether the implementation of cover crops and 30 meter buffers could be incorporated into the lease agreement between the SCRCA and the farmers.

Lambton Public Health Beach Monitoring Results – P. Buttery:

The 2014 Lambton Public Health department beach monitoring program report has been completed and Paul Buttery provided a brief overview to CRIC. The three year St. Clair River beach sampling concluded in 2013, however, reference beaches (Grand Bend North, Grand Bend South, Pinery, Ipperwash, Highland Glen and Bright’s Grove) used in the status assessment along Lake Huron continue to be sampled under the program along with Canatara Park and Centennial Park.

The “Beach Closings” Beneficial Use Impairment (BUI) delisting criteria developed for the St. Clair River AOC is equivalent to the Blue Flag water chemistry target that requires at a minimum that 80% of sample results meet the Provincial Water Quality Objective (PWQO) for *E. coli*. Three of the reference beaches did not meet this criteria: Grand Bend North, Grand Bend South and Ipperwash. Eighty-eight percent of samples collected at Canatara Park had *E. coli* levels lower than the PWQO while Centennial Park continues to see elevated levels that exceed the provincial guideline. Despite the continued exceedances, *E. coli* concentrations observed at Centennial Park in 2014 were lower than in previous years.

E. coli results for 2014 from Mitchell’s Bay were not included in Paul’s presentation as this location is monitored by the Municipality of Chatham-Kent.

Areas of Concern in Recovery – Overview and Comments – T. Briggs and A. White:

April White and Ted Briggs introduced to the committee the concept of Areas of Concern in Recovery (AiR). The AiR designation is a temporary status prior to delisting an AOC where all restoration activities are completed, but the chemical, biological or physical conditions of the ecosystem require additional time to recover. A draft guidance document was prepared by a Task Team formed under the auspices of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement consisting of federal, provincial and state representatives to help determine what conditions must be met to designate an AOC as an AiR along with challenges and other considerations. A copy of the draft guidance document was circulated to CRIC members prior to the meeting.

Restrictions on Drinking Water Consumption or Taste and Odour Problems Discussion Paper – Next Steps – T. Briggs:

Ted Briggs discussed the draft discussion paper that has been prepared for the “Restrictions on Drinking Water Consumption or Taste and Odour” BUI for the St. Clair River. The purpose of this document is to collect relevant information regarding this BUI to initiate a discussion on its status. The document is currently being reviewed, but once a draft is completed, it will be available to the public.

Kris Lee provided the committee with recommendations put together by members of the Wallaceburg Advisory Team for a Cleaner Habitat (WATCH) on how to move forward with the “Restrictions on Drinking Water Consumption or Taste and Odour Problems” BUI status assessment. These

recommendations will be voted on by WATCH members at their April 8, 2015 meeting. Discussions surrounding this agenda item included:

- More information surrounding industrial upgrades and initiatives to prevent spills should be solicited. Six questions/recommendations to industry were provided by WATCH. There is a need to build community confidence around the preventative measures put in place to prevent spills to the St. Clair River (i.e., “Are we doing everything we can to prevent spills?”).
- The delisting criteria developed for this BUI has been achieved numerous times (no spill requiring a water intake closure over a two year period).
- Common community concerns and questions revolve around spill notification and response.
- Ted Briggs and April White provided some initial comments on the document.

ACTION – CRIC members will review the WATCH proposal and provide comments to Kris Lee prior to April 8, 2015.

ACTION – Donna Strang will circulate the draft “Restrictions on Drinking Water Consumption or Taste and Odour Problems” BUI discussion paper once it has been reviewed and comments are incorporated.

University of Windsor – Mapping Science and Research in the St. Clair and Detroit River AOCs – A.

White:

April White informed CRIC members on a project being conducted by researchers at the University of Windsor. The production of a map using a Geographic Information System (GIS) is proposed that consolidates all the science and research conducted within the St. Clair River, Detroit River and Lake St. Clair. The tool would allow for easier access and sharing of reports and data among scientists as study locations would be identified, along with methodologies and reports. This map could potentially be provided on the internet in a public-friendly capacity to inform communities of the various activities conducted throughout these locations. The data portal project is a pilot and in the early planning stages. April White will be approaching partners in the future for information to include on the map and will provide another update on the progress of this project at the next CRIC meeting.

Great Lakes Protection Act – T. Briggs:

Ted Briggs provided an update on the Great Lakes Protection Act which has been re-introduced to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. The Act intends to strengthen protection and restoration efforts within the Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Basin. Highlights of the Act include the establishment of the Great Lakes Guardian Council (a group that would facilitate collaborations between Great Lakes partners), the implementation of the Great Lakes Strategy and continued funding.

Status of Work Plan Deliverables – A. White and T. Briggs:

April White, Ted Briggs and Donna Strang provided updates on the status of work plan deliverables. Highlights included:

Restrictions of Fish and Wildlife Consumption

- A request form has been submitted to have sport fish collected from the St. Clair River and analyzed in 2015 for the sport fish monitoring program managed by the OMOECC. Fish have not been collected from the St. Clair River since 2006/2007.
- Discussion are continuing between Environment Canada, the OMOECC and Dow Chemical Canada regarding funding options for the Sediment Management project.
- The assessment of contaminants of concern in sediment from the Walpole Island delta by the Great Lakes Institute for Environmental Research (GLIER) has been completed. Results have been presented to the Walpole Island Heritage Center Committee.

ACTION – Naomi Williams will follow-up with Ken Drouillard of GLIER to organize a community presentation on the sediment assessment.

Degraded Fish and Wildlife Populations

- Environment Canada scientists have collected fish for the body burden component of this BUI. Results are pending.

Bird or Animal Deformities or Reproductive Problems

- The draft assessment report will be prepared this year (2015).

Restrictions on Dredging Activities

- The recommendation to re-designate this BUI to “Not Impaired” has received support from both the Aamjiwnaang First Nation Environment Committee and Chief and Council.
- A consultation strategy has been provided by the Walpole Island Heritage Centre and community consultation will be organized in the near future.

Beach Closings

- Agency review of the draft report is completed and once comments have been incorporated, the draft will undergo expert review.

Degradation of Aesthetics

- The final draft report was provided to the Canada-Ontario Agreement (COA) Annex 1 leads in January 2015.

Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat

- There is an abundance of information surrounding wildlife habitat however, information is lacking for fish habitat.
- A pilot project involving the surveying of fish habitat at Swan Lake on Walpole Island has been completed and will provide base line data to develop appropriate restoration plans for the site. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), EC and Walpole Island First Nation (WIFN) are collaborating on a proposed project to conduct additional fish habitat surveys within the delta pending the outcome of community meetings on the proposed project. Three community meetings have been conducted and comments were conveyed and collected during these sessions that will help finalize the project proposal.
- In 2015, the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) will be re-doing the marsh bird count component of wetland health assessments conducted in 2014.

Public Outreach and Education

- An advertisement providing an overview of the St. Clair River AOC and directing the community to the Friends of the St. Clair River (FOSCR) website was published in three newspapers throughout the first week of March (Sarnia Observer, Petrolia Topic and Sarnia and Lambton County this Week).

Updates:

United States BUI Removals – A. White and T. Briggs:

The Michigan government is hoping to have all BUIs re-designated in the St. Clair River in 2015-16. Most recently two AOCs have been delisted in Michigan: Deer Lake and White Lake.

Friends of the St. Clair River (FOSCR) – D. Randell:

Darrell reported on recent FOSCR activities:

- Final reports are being prepared for the OMOECC grant provided annually to FOSCR.
- FOSCR is looking at supporting the habitat enhancement work being planned for the Enbridge Solar Farm in Sarnia. The work will see 200 acres planted with tall grass prairie

and native trees over 200 acres. An event is being planned by Enbridge for early June 2015.

- FOSCR is providing support for the purchase of a pump for a north Sydenham River wetland.
- The next edition of the FOSCR E-Newsletter will be circulated soon. Any articles should be submitted to Ken Hall by March 15th.

Rural Lambton Stewardship Network (RLSN) – Jake Lozon:

Jake Lozon reported to the committee that RLSN will be preparing a proposal that will naturalize property in Sarnia and Sombra owned by NextEra. RLSN is also meeting with Township of St. Clair Public Works representatives to discuss installing pollinator buffers along roads in place of grass that requires routine maintenance (i.e., mowing). RLSN has also published a brochure highlighting the benefits of riparian and pollinator buffers. Jake Lozon also reported that the restoration and enhancement of 65 acres of coastal wetland along Lake St. Clair will be completed. This habitat project includes the installation of berms and four wetland cells. Lastly, RLSN is looking to provide a \$1000 scholarship that will support a student from Wallaceburg District Secondary School who is enrolling in an environmental program at a post-secondary institution.

Great Lakes Sustainability Fund (GLSF) – A. White:

April White reported that GLSF proposals and recommendations have been submitted for Ministerial approval. Four proposals were submitted (excluding the RAP Governance proposal) with three moving forward at a recommended 100% funding. The total value of the three projects is \$213 K. The RAP Governance proposal was recommended for five years of funding totaling \$280 K. It is hoped that Ministerial approvals will be provided in early April or May.

St. Clair and Detroit River System Initiative (SCDRSI) – T. Briggs:

Ted Briggs introduced CRIC members to the SCDRSI. This initiative serves as the research arm for the entire Huron-Erie Corridor and assesses research and monitoring needs to address management priorities. The SCDRSI looks at the AOCs to determine if there are any research needs that can be supported through this initiative.

Other Business:

Some additional updates were provided by CRIC members including:

1. Lake St. Clair Binational Symposium

The Lake St. Clair Binational Symposium that occurs every two years is being planned for October 2015. Additional details will be provided at a later date.

2. Aamjiwnaang First Nation – S. Johnston

- The Environment Department is working with the SCRC to develop a design for shoreline softening work along the Aamjiwnaang First Nation shoreline on the St. Clair River. This project is supported by Chief and Council and community input is currently being collected through focus groups and community events.
- The Environment Department is working with Shawn McKnight and Larry Cornelius to build a greenhouse for native plant species.
- Chief and Council has expressed interested in having Phragmites eradication work conducted at a local wetland.

3. Walpole Island First Nation – N. Williams

- The Walpole Island Heritage Centre is considering initiating a study that will assess the impact faulty septic systems on the island have on the St. Clair River and other local waterways. In addition, there have been discussion surrounding whether a Water Pollution Control Plant should be built on the island to reduce the community dependence on septic systems.
- Heritage Centre Staff in collaboration with the Walpole Island Health Unit are investigating expanding the beach monitoring program currently in place on the island.
- There is interest to assess farming practices on agricultural lands on Walpole Island as concern has been raised by the community that banned pesticides may be being applied by farmers who lease the property.

ACTION – Naomi Williams will inquire as to whether environmental best management practices can be incorporated into the lease agreements. There is uncertainty whether the lease agreement is between the tenant and Walpole Island First Nation or the tenant and the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs.

Next Meeting Date:

The next meeting will be held on June 10, 2015. Time and Location – TBD.