

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

Thursday, November 26, 2015
Sarnia-Lambton Environmental Association (SLEA)
1489 London Road, Sarnia, Ontario

Participants:

Brian McDougall	Dean Edwardson	Ted Briggs
Donna Strang	April White	Naomi Williams
Jake Lozon	Kris Lee	

Regrets:

Phil Vallance	Kristen Diemer	Jenn Richards
Christine Rogers	Courtney Jackson	Darrell Randell
Paul Buttery	Cindy Scholten	

Guests:

Steve Clark – St. Clair Region Conservation Authority
Girish Sankar – St. Clair Region Conservation Authority
Clint Jacobs – Walpole Island Heritage Centre
Ron Sands – Walpole Island Heritage Centre

ITEMS:

Welcome and Introductions:

April White chaired the meeting and welcomed committee members. She welcomed and introduced guests Clint Jacobs and Ron Sands from the Walpole Island Heritage Centre and Girish Sankar and Steve Clark of the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority.

Review and Acceptance of the Agenda and Minutes:

The draft agenda and minutes from the September 24, 2015 meeting were accepted as prepared.

Action Items from the Meeting of September 24, 2015:

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

1. **Action:** Ted Briggs and Sandra Kok will draft a letter to WATCH on behalf of CRIC, acknowledging the receipt of their proposal and advising the group on next steps with the “Restrictions on Drinking Water Consumption or Taste and Odour Problems” draft discussion paper.
Carried Over – April White and Ted Briggs will draft a response letter acknowledging the recommendations provided by WATCH on the “Restrictions on Drinking Water Consumption or Taste and Odour Problems” draft discussion paper.
2. **Action:** CRIC members will push for a meeting between Huron County representatives and those from Lambton County. The purpose of the meeting would be to discuss the program currently in place to help fund stewardship projects in Huron County and whether a similar one could be implemented in Lambton County.

On-Going – Ted Briggs and Brian McDougall will take the lead in facilitating the meeting between Huron and Lambton County representatives regarding the implementation of funding programs for stewardship projects.

3. **Action:** Donna will re-send the Lake St. Clair Conference Save-the-Date to CRIC members.

Completed – *The conference was held in October 2015.*

4. **Action:** Brian McDougall and Melanie Foose will work together to calculate the total length of shoreline on both sides of the St. Clair River that have been restored.

Completed – A chart has been prepared that summarizes the shoreline restoration projects completed on both the American and Canadian sides of the St. Clair River.

ACTION – Donna will circulate the shoreline restoration chart to CRIC members.

5. **Action:** CRIC members will provide any further comments on the “Restrictions on Drinking Water or Taste and Odour Problems” discussion paper to Donna Strang by October 15, 2015 after which she will incorporate into the document.

On-Going – CRIC comments were received and next steps with regards to the draft discussion document will be discussed later during the CRIC meeting.

6. **Action:** Donna Strang to confirm dollar amount with the City of Sarnia [for Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) reduction work to date].

Donna Strang contacted the City of Sarnia but has not received confirmation on the dollar amount.

ACTION – April White will follow up with the City of Sarnia for confirmation on the dollar amount invested for CSO reduction projects.

7. **Action:** April White will prepare an article on successful Great Lakes Sustainability Fund (GLSF) projects for the St. Clair River AOC and send to Darrell Randell [for next FOSCR E-Newsletter].

Carried Over

8. **Action:** Donna will send the OMOECC report on sediment quality in Talfourd Creek to Ken Hall of FOSCR to have posted on the FOSCR website.

Completed – The report was sent to Ken Hall but has not yet been posted on the FOSCR website. Donna Strang will follow-up.

9. **Action:** Donna Strang will circulate the information for the Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund with the CRIC meeting minutes.

Completed

Swan Lake Habitat Restoration Project – Clint Jacobs:

Clint Jacobs provided CRIC members with an overview of the on-going Swan Lake Marsh restoration project currently being conducted at Anne Island on Walpole Island First Nation. The restoration project began in 2009 with the vision of rehabilitating the 70 hectare (171 acre) degraded wetland area to restore biological function, manage and control the invasion of Phragmites, bring together hunters, elders and youth and teach ethical hunting practices.

The project has been supported by numerous government agencies, private corporations and local community groups. Consultation and engagement of the Walpole Island First Nation community has been an important priority throughout the duration of the project and has included newsletters, open houses and attendance at Ecosystem Circles and other community events. Project highlights to date include:

- Wildlife (e.g., bats, waterfowl, reptiles) and fish monitoring, wetland assessments and sediment quality testing, some of which will continue throughout the completion of the project,
- Preparation of a Restoration and Management Plan for the marsh,

- Management of Phragmites (e.g., prescribed burns),
- Dyke restorations and installation of pump,
- Construction of docks, bridges, etc. with assistance from Centennial Colleges Healthy Hands program,
- Installation of habitat features such as bird nesting boxes,
- Completion of fish habitat assessment in collaboration with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and
- The excavation of 25 acres of ponds and connecting channels (equivalent to 1/3 of the proposed restoration work).

Next steps in the Swan Lake Marsh project include:

1. The excavation of additional ponds and connecting channels,
2. Continued monitoring of fish and wildlife, water quality, etc.,
3. Continued eradication of invasive species, particularly Phragmites
4. Construction of infrastructure (e.g., observation tower, pavilion) that will support community education programs, and
5. Exploring the possibility of utilizing alternative sources for energy needs.

Drinking Water Discussion Paper – Next Steps – Ted Briggs:

At the last CRIC meeting, members were asked to review the draft “Restrictions on Drinking Water Consumption or Taste and Odour Problems” discussion paper and provide comments to Donna Strang. It was anticipated that the comments would be incorporated as appropriate and the document would undergo public consultation in early 2016.

Ted advised CRIC members that since the last meeting, Claude Lafrance, who retired from the RAP Coordinator position in December 2014 expressed his interest in doing some work in support of the RAP including tasks related to the “Restrictions on Drinking Water Consumption or Taste and Odour Problems” discussion paper. Due to his personal schedule, however, he would not be able to undertake the public consultations until April or May, 2016. CRIC members did not have a problem pushing the consultations back in order to accommodate Claude’s schedule and welcomed the idea of his involvement.

ACTION – Donna Strang will arrange a December teleconference with a smaller group of CRIC members to discuss next steps in addressing the WATCH recommendations/questions and whether this activity will be included in the contract prepared for Claude Lafrance.

ACTION – Donna Strang will consolidate all comments received for the “Restriction on Drinking Water Consumption or Taste and Odour Problems” draft discussion paper and circulate to CRIC members.

Source Water Protection Plan – Girish Sankar and Steve Clark:

Girish Sankar and Steve Clark of the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority attended the meeting to provide CRIC members with a brief overview of the recently approved Source Water Protection Plan for the Thames, Sydenham and Region which includes the St. Clair River Area of Concern (AOC).

The concept of source water protection was a result of Walkerton tragedy in 2000 which saw the contamination of drinking water by *E. coli* that led to the death of nine people. It was recommended that a multi-barrier approach be implemented to protect drinking water, one of which was Source

Water Protection. In 2006, a committee was formed with the responsibility of developing a plan to protect drinking water in the Thames and Sydenham River watersheds.

The plan requires identification of areas and activities that could contaminate sources of drinking water and the development of plans to reduce risks, eliminate significant risks and ensure no new significant risks develop. The local Source Water Protection plan covers areas under the jurisdiction of the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority, the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority and the Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority and was approved by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (OMOECC) in 2015. The plan will be updated every 2 to 5 years. Implementation of the local Source Water Protection Plan will commence in January 2016.

The implementation phase of the Source Protection Plan will see the creation of two positions: 1) Risk Management Official (RMO) and 2) Risk Management Inspector (RMI). Responsibilities will include 1) evaluating risk assessments that concluded that an activity was not a significant threat to drinking water (RMO), 2) establish risk management plans and issue orders and notices (RMO) and 3) conduct inspections to ensure compliance and report any drinking water health hazards to the OMOECC (RMI), among others. More detailed information is available on the Thames-Sydenham Source Water Protection Plan at: www.sourcewaterprotection.on.ca.

Areas of Concern in Recovery Guidance Document – April White:

April White provided CRIC members with an overview of the Area of Concern in Recovery (AOCiR) designation that was identified in the most recent Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA) in 2012. The AOCiR 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 guidance document was drafted by a Task Team formed under the auspices of the GLWQA consisting of federal, provincial and state representatives to help determine what conditions must be met to designate an AOC as an AOCiR along with challenges and other considerations. The Task Team is currently soliciting feedback from interested parties on the guidance document.

The guidance document provides limited guidance on how the AOCiR designation should be applied to binational AOCs. With regards to the St. Clair River, the AOCiR designation could foreseeably be applied to the American side of the river as they will complete all management actions and BUI assessments before restoration on the Canadian side of the river is complete.

Status of Work Plan Deliverables – April White, Ted Briggs and Donna Strang:

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

Fish Tumours and Other Deformities

- Histology results from Brown Bullhead livers collected in the Walpole Island Delta are expected by the end of the fiscal year (March 2016)

Restrictions on Dredging Activities

- Consultation with Walpole Island First Nation continues. Most recently, a display was set up and information provided at the Walpole Island Heritage Centre Open House on October 5. In addition, an article providing an overview of the “Restrictions on Dredging Activities” BUI was submitted for the community newsletter.

A Year in Review:

Prior to the meeting, presentations were solicited that provided updates on activities and projects conducted by partners throughout 2015.

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

Donna Strang reported on activities and projects conducted by FOSCR on behalf of Darrell Randell who was unable to attend the meeting.

- FOSCR continued to support and participate in outreach and education activities throughout the AOC in 2015 including:
 - Developing a Phragmites brochure (should be available in early 2016)
 - Supporting education sessions by the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority (SCRCA) and at the Dow Wetlands by Naturesway
 - Continuing the distribution of the FOSCR E-Newsletter (reduced to three issues annually from four)
 - Presenting at local events as requested (e.g., Sarnia Justice Film Festival, Sombra Museum Lecture Series)
- Habitat and Restoration Projects:
 - Thornyhurst Wetland – FOSCR supported work at a small pond (1/4 acre) that included Phragmites management and wetland expansion.
 - Other projects supported through FOSCR included: 1) Enbridge Solar Farm Habitat Project, 2) Bowen’s Creek maintenance, 3) Bear Creek (3 segments required rebuilds to enhance the 40 hectare wetland area) and 4) Swan Lake.

In addition to the above, Darrell Randell wanted to highlight work completed by Ducks Unlimited Canada which included restoration of the Rex 14 wetland (4 hectares (10 acres)) and Sloan Marsh (20 hectares (50 acres)).

Outreach and Education – Donna Strang

Donna Strang presented an overview of some of the Outreach and Education initiatives undertaken over the last year:

- Local events attended and/or presented at included:
 - Aamjiwnaang First Nation Earth Day
 - Sarnia ArtWalk
 - Aamjiwnaang First Nation ENVIROFest
 - Great Lakes – St. Lawrence Cities Initiatives Annual General Meeting
 - Walpole Island Heritage Centre Open House
 - St. Clair Region Conservation Authority Annual General Meeting
 - Sombra Museum Lecture Series
 - State of the Strait Conference
- Articles and advertisements were published in First Monday magazine’s Earth Day issue. First Monday is distributed to all businesses in the Sarnia-Lambton region. In addition, an article and advertisement will be published in the Bluewater Anglers “tabloid” that will have 5000 copies distributed at local events.

The Public Outreach and Education Subcommittee focused the 2015 year on planning for events in 2016 that will reach a broader audience than past activities. Some ideas included: 1) St. Clair River AOC video and Public Service Announcement, 2) Shoreline Clean-up at Canatara Park and 3) Geocaching, among others.

Lastly, Donna provided an overview of advancements in BUI status assessments:

1. *Degradation of Aesthetics*

The recommendation to re-designate to “Not Impaired” was accepted by the Canada-Ontario Agreement Annex 1 Leads and is currently receiving final approvals at the Environment and Climate Change Canada and the OMOECC senior management level.

2. *Restrictions on Dredging Activities*

Consultation with the Walpole Island First Nation community began in 2015 and included a pre-consultation meeting with the Heritage Centre and Joint Dredging Committees and setting up a display at the Heritage Centre Open House.

3. *Beach Closings*

A draft status assessment was prepared and reviewed by Environment and Climate Change Canada, the OMOECC and Lambton Public Health representatives. The report has also undergone expert review with incorporation of comments pending.

4. *Restrictions on Drinking Water Consumption or Taste and Odour Problems*

The draft discussion paper has been reviewed by CRIC.

Rural Lambton Stewardship Network (RLSN) – Jake Lozon

Jake Lozon updated the committee on the numerous projects conducted by RLSN in 2015. Highlights included:

- *Snye River Restoration* – Project involved phragmites management over 3.4 hectares (8.5 acres). Upcoming work will include prescribed burns when conditions are favourable.
- *CF Industries* – Activities this year focused primarily on spraying phragmites to prepare for the planting of tall grass prairie in 2016.
- *Enbridge Solar Farm Habitat Project* – RLSN completed site preparation and wetland excavation as part of this multi-year restoration project.
- *Dow Wetlands* – Phragmites management.
- *Mud Creek Club* – This project saw the management of phragmites along with the excavation of 7 wetlands totaling 5.5 hectares.
- *Rex Club 14* – The Rex Club 14 property spans 24 hectares (60 acres). The property has been degraded as a result of the invasion of phragmites and low water levels. RLSN undertook a habitat enhancement project that included creating snake hibernacula and habitat clusters.
- The walking trail between Mitchell’s Bay Marina and Rex Club 14 continues to be developed. Over 3000 native grasses and flowers were planted along the route in 2015.

St. Clair Region Conservation Authority (SCRCA) – Brian McDougall

Brian McDougall reported that the draft Lambton County Natural Heritage Strategy is expected to be finalized in the next six months.

Walpole Island First Nation – Naomi Williams

Naomi Williams reported that fish habitat offsetting in the Chematogen Channel will be brought to the community shortly. In addition, potential locations for shoreline restoration are being investigated along Walpole Island. Data has been collected and once input, will help determine priority areas for shoreline enhancement projects.

Environment and Climate Change Canada – April White

April White updated CRIC members on 2015 projects and studies supported or undertaken by Environment and Climate Change Canada in the St. Clair River AOC. Highlights included:

- Fish habitat surveys at Walpole Island
- Fish sampling for body burdens
- Frog deformity workshop at Walpole Island First Nation
- Wetland marsh bird monitoring
- Data portal pilot to map research and results in both the St. Clair River and Detroit River AOCs

Lastly, April reported that Environment Canada has a new Minister and has undergone a name change to Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (OMOECC) – Ted Briggs

The OMOECC supported a number of initiatives in 2015 including RAP Governance, shoreline restoration work, mapping, sediment trap monitoring and the on-going sportfish monitoring program. In addition, the Great Lakes Protection Act was passed in October. The Act will add another layer to the protection of the Great Lakes as well as create opportunities for individuals and communities to become more involved in the protection and restoration of these water bodies.

Sarnia-Lambton Environmental Association (SLEA) – Dean Edwardson

Dean Edwardson reported that statistical analysis is currently being conducted on data collected as part of SLEAs triad study which investigates sediment chemistry, benthic invertebrate communities and sediment toxicity.

Next Meeting and Adjournment:

The next CRIC meeting will be at 10 am on Thursday, February 25, 2016 (Location – TBD).