

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

**Thursday, September 24, 2015  
St. Clair Region Conservation Authority  
205 Millpond Crescent, Strathroy, Ontario**

**Participants:**

Christine Rogers	Courtney Jackson	Darrell Randell
April White	Donna Strang	Ted Briggs
Brian McDougall	Sharilyn Johnston	Jake Lozon
Danalynn Williams	Kris Lee	Naomi Williams
Dean Edwardson		

**Regrets:**

Jenn Richards	Phil Vallance	Dave Richards
Kristen Diemer	Paul Buttery	

**Guests:**

Melanie Foose – Michigan Department of Environmental Quality

**ITEMS:**

**Welcome and Introductions:**

Ted Briggs chaired the meeting and welcomed committee members. He welcomed and introduced Melanie Foose, the Area of Concern (AOC) Coordinator for the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ). She would be providing the committee with an update on activities along the American side of the St. Clair River

**Review and Acceptance of the Agenda and Minutes:**

The draft agenda and minutes from the July 22, 2015 meeting were accepted as prepared.

**Action Items from the Meeting of July 22, 2015:**

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

1. **Action:** Donna Strang will re-circulate the current draft of the “Restrictions on Drinking Water or Taste and Odour Problems” discussion paper to CRIC members with the meeting minutes.  
**Completed**
2. **Action:** CRIC members will review the “Restrictions on Drinking Water Consumption or Taste and Odour Problems” document and provide comments to Donna Strang ([dstrang@scrca.on.ca](mailto:dstrang@scrca.on.ca)) by September 1, 2015.  
**Completed** – There were limited comments received from CRIC members. This item will be discussed in more detail later in the meeting
3. **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 or Taste and Odour Problems” draft discussion paper.

***Carried Over***

4. **Action:** In future work plan updates, Donna Strang will include for each BUI the number of actions listed in the 2012-2017 Work Plan along with how many have been completed.

***Completed***

5. **Action:** In future work plan activity updates, milestones and anticipated completion dates will be provided (when possible) for the individual actions.

***Completed***

6. **Action:** Ted Briggs will follow up with the OMOECC as to whether the re-designation recommendation for the “Degradation of Aesthetics” BUI has been approved.

***Completed*** – The “Degradation of Aesthetics” BUI for the St. Clair River AOC is still waiting for final approval. COA Annex 1 Leads have sent a letter to the Assistant Deputy Minister of the OMOECC to solicit concurrence with the re-designation.

7. **Action:** Sandra Kok will clarify the BUI re-designation process at the federal level at the next CRIC meeting.

***Completed*** – April White reported for Sandra Kok. A new re-designation approach has been developed by the COA Areas of Concern Annex Leads with the purpose to optimize BUI re-designation efficiency.

8. **Action:** Brian McDougall will speak with SCRCA staff regarding whether Best Management Practice implementation funding is identified in the Lambton County Natural Heritage Study.

***Completed*** – Brian McDougall reported that the draft Lambton County Natural Heritage Study promotes stewardship and the protection and/or enhancement of significant habitat, however he is unsure whether funding is or will be identified for the implementation of stewardship projects under this strategy, like in other areas such as Huron County.

**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.

9. **Action:** Ted Briggs will send Donna Strang the SCDRSI list of objectives. Donna will circulate the objectives to CRIC members.

***Completed***

10. **Action:** Ted Briggs will send Donna Strang the Lake St. Clair Conference Save-the-Date. Donna will circulate to CRIC members.

***Completed***

**ACTION** – Donna Strang will re-send the Lake St. Clair Conference Save-the-Date to CRIC members.

11. **Action:** Annette Verhagen will send Donna Strang a copy of the report [OMOECC report on sediment quality in Talfourd Creek]. Donna will circulate to CRIC members.

***Completed***

**St. Clair River AOC American Activities Update – Melanie Foose:**

Melanie Foose, the AOC Coordinator for the St. Clair River AOC at the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality attended the meeting and provided CRIC members with an overview and update on progress and activities on the American side of the St. Clair River. Compared to the Canadian program, the American AOC program is driven by management actions. She provided a brief overview of “Impaired” BUIs and work being conducted to achieve their re-designation and eventual delisting of the American side of the St. Clair River AOC. Highlights included:

*American Beneficial Use Impairments:*

- There are currently five BUIs on the American side of the St. Clair River AOC.

*MDEQ New Statewide Delisting Criteria:*

- The MDEQ prepared new statewide delisting criteria for the “Beach Closings”, “Eutrophication or Undesirable Algae” and “Restrictions on Dredging Activities” BUIs as well as changes to the overall process of delisting AOCs. The drafts are currently being reviewed by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) for concurrence.

*Restrictions on Fish and Wildlife Consumption:*

- A report was issued in 2014 that compared contaminant levels in fish collected from the St. Clair River to reference sites. Some differences were observed.

*Restrictions on Drinking Water Consumption or Taste and Odour Problems:*

- Local delisting criteria was developed in 2014 that focused on the prevention, notification and response by agencies when a spill occurs in the St. Clair River.
- The BUI is currently being assessed by the Binational Public Advisory Council (BPAC) Drinking Water Subcommittee.

*Bird or Animal Deformities or Reproductive Problems:*

- A statewide assessment was completed for this BUI in 2012. Mink livers and forage fish were collected in the St. Clair River in 2013 and a report assessing this BUI is expected in 2015.

*Beach Closings:*

- The Beach Closings BUI status assessment has been drafted, however, concurrence on the new delisting criteria by the USEPA is required prior to moving forward with an official re-designation. The new criteria focuses on the impact to local beaches from *E. coli* originating from human sources.
- Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) were identified as the primary source of human sourced *E. coli* at American beaches along the St. Clair River and since then, substantial progress has been made in cities such as Port Huron and Marysville to separate combined sewers, eliminate CSOs and implement green infrastructure to reduce runoff to the river.
  - E.g., in 1991, there were a total of 49 CSOs in the AOC and by 2015, only one was remaining.

*Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat:*

- Nine habitat projects have been completed or have been started in the AOC.
  - Port Huron – North – 446 m<sup>2</sup> (4800 square feet) of shallow water habitat created
  - Port Huron – South – improvements to shallow water habitat including the placement of logs and planting of natural vegetation along the shoreline
  - Blue Water River Walk – 1.3 km (0.8 miles) of shoreline restoration
  - Marysville Living Shoreline – shoreline softening and native vegetation plantings
  - Cuttle Creek Restoration – over 914 m (3000 feet) of restored fish habitat including development of pools and riffles and improvements to a perched culvert to allow for fish passage
  - Cottreville Township – 130 m (425 feet) of restored shoreline
  - Marine City – installation of boulder and cobble shoreline along with break walls to reduce shoreline erosion and improve fish habitat

- Krispin Drain – located on Harsens Island, this project is currently being conducted and will see the improvement to 4900 m (16 000 feet) of aquatic habitat
- Three fish spawning reefs have been constructed in partnership with the United States Geological Survey, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the University of Michigan.
  - It is expected that all unfinished projects will be completed by December 2015 with monitoring conducted throughout 2016.
  - The BUI Assessment is expected to be prepared in early 2017.

**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.

**Drinking Water BUI Discussion Paper – Ted Briggs:**

After the last CRIC meeting in July, the “Restrictions on Drinking Water or Taste and Odour Problems” discussion paper was re-circulated to CRIC members for review and comment. A few responses were received but additional feedback was provided at the current meeting. These comments were forwarded or recorded by Donna Strang. In addition, a draft consultation strategy was circulated prior to the meeting for review. Comments and discussions surrounding both documents included:

- From a Wallaceburg perspective, community confidence will increase if actions taken by industry to prevent spills is outlined more thoroughly.
- An interview was held with the water treatment plant operator on Walpole Island and information obtained was included in great detail in the discussion paper. It was requested that the operator review to ensure accuracy prior to the paper being released.
- There should be more emphasis on the difference between mandated and precautionary water intake shut downs. In addition the reason the “Restrictions on Drinking Water or Taste and Odour Problems” BUI was identified as “Impaired” should be more clearly stated. The impairment was due to interruptions in the supply of water due to spills and not the quality of the raw water from the St. Clair River.
- Naomi Williams advised that regulations are currently being developed under the *Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act* that was recently passed by the Federal Government.
- Hiring a facilitator may ensure discussions during the consultations are productive and remain focused.

**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.

**Habitat Projects Update – April White:**

April White provided CRIC members with an update on the “Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat” BUI which has seven distinct delisting criteria that must be reached in order to re-designate to “Not Impaired”. The criteria range from being qualitative, quantitative, action oriented and/or administrative. Three of the criteria have been reached. April White focused her update on those that had not been achieved and were the focus of the Fish and Wildlife Habitat and Populations Subcommittee.

*Criteria #2 – Wetland coverage within the sub-watershed of Area 1A is 6-10% or is restored to the extent possible, and 155 ha of wetland habitat is rehabilitated, created, or protected within the Chenal Ecarte, Walpole Island First Nation delta or along the eastern shore of Lake St. Clair.*

- Wetland coverage of 6-10% has not yet been achieved in each sub-watershed however an assessment conducted by the SCRCA indicates that there is little opportunity in the St. Clair River AOC for wetland restoration in many of the sub-watersheds.
- The 155 ha target for wetland restoration within the Chenal Ecarte, Walpole Island First Nation delta or the eastern shore of Lake St. Clair has been achieved but work continues to create and/or enhance wetland habitat.
  - April White highlighted the wetland restoration efforts put forth by the Walpole Island Land Trust, Ducks Unlimited and the Rural Lambton Stewardship Network (RLSN) and contributions by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) in assessing fish habitat on Walpole Island.

*Criteria #4 – 50% of the tributary lengths in Area 1A are buffered by a minimum width of 5 m of natural vegetation to improve fish habitat.*

- Currently, of the 1308 km length of tributaries in the St. Clair River AOC, 58% have 5 m buffers in place, while 35% have 30 m buffers installed. The analysis will be re-done however, as the initial calculations included both Areas 1A and 1B, whereas the criteria only applies to tributaries in Area 1A.
- April White also highlighted the Habitat Database put together and maintained by the SCRCA that serves to track projects and helps to facilitate the reporting, planning and prioritizing efforts of the Fish and Wildlife Habitat and Populations subcommittee.

*Criteria #5 – Near shore and shoreline fish habitat has been enhanced at 6-12 priority sites along the St. Clair River to demonstrate the benefits of integrating shoreline protection with fish habitat enhancement.*

- This criteria has been achieved as nine shoreline restoration projects have been completed along the St. Clair River shoreline.
- A Shoreline Restoration Geoportal has been developed that maps and details the condition of the St. Clair River shoreline to help guide future restoration efforts.

*Criteria #6 – Wetland habitat quality achieves an integrated ranking of “Good” or better based on the IBI scores for water quality, submerged aquatic vegetation, aquatic invertebrates, fish and birds or, when the quality of the wetlands in the AOC are shown to be comparable to reference wetlands outside the AOC.*

- Quality indicators for submerged aquatic vegetation, aquatic invertebrates and marsh breeding birds have ranked as “Good”, however turbidity remains as issue.
- The Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) report suggests that the turbidity issues would be expected due to the high amount of agricultural in the surrounding watersheds.

*Criteria #7 – A long term Fish and Wildlife Habitat Management Plan for Ontario is completed to facilitate habitat restoration and protection beyond AOC delisting.*

- Erin Carroll, Manager of Biology at the SCRCA is currently working on a Terms of Reference and initial draft of the Fish and Wildlife Habitat Management Plan for the St. Clair River AOC.

### **Lake Erie LAMP – Phosphorus Targets – Ted Briggs:**

As part of the Lake Erie Lakewide Management Plan (LAMP) and Annex 4 of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (Nutrients), phosphorus targets have been developed to address algae blooms that

develop annually in Lake Erie. The proposed targets for the Western Basin recommends a 20% decrease in phosphorus by 2020 and 40% by 2025.

**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:

Restrictions on Fish and Wildlife Consumption

- Brown Bullheads collected as part of the “Fish Tumours or Other Deformities” BUI had their fillets removed to have contaminant levels assessed for the OMOECC Sportfish Consumption Guide. Analysis has not yet been conducted but a request to expedite the analysis for mercury and PCBs has been submitted.

Degraded Fish and Wildlife Populations

- A draft report has been completed that assesses the wildlife population dynamics component of this BUI. Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge will be incorporated in 2015.
- Fish collected from 2008 and 2015 have been prepared for analysis of legacy contaminant burdens with results expected in winter of 2016.

Fish Tumours and Other Deformities

- The analysis of Brown Bullheads for liver tumours will be carried out in 2015 with results anticipated to be available prior to the end of the calendar year.

Restrictions on Dredging Activities

- Consultation activities with Walpole Island First Nation (WIFN) have begun. A pre-consultation meeting was held with the WIFN Heritage Centre Committee and the Joint Dredging Committee on September 18, 2015. Donna Strang is planning to attend the Heritage Centre Open House on October 5<sup>th</sup> to display information on the “Restrictions on Dredging Activities” BUI status assessment and discuss with community members.

Beach Closings

- Overall flows from CSOs have been reduced in the City of Sarnia by 40% at a cost of approximately \$150 million dollars.

**ACTION** – Donna Strang to confirm dollar amount with the City of Sarnia.

**Updates:**

Updates slightly deviated from what was scheduled on the agenda. Updates were conducted in a round-table like format.

**FOSCR Activities – Darrell Randell**

Darrell Randell reported on recent Friends of the St. Clair River (FOSCR) activities:

- The FOSCR are supporting a wetland creation project at a farm in Thornyhurst on the French Line. The project will see the eradication of Phragmites and excavation of a wetland.
- Kim Gledhill has received funding to help support her education program at the Dow Wetlands.
- The Chatham-Kent Lambton Children’s Water Festival was cancelled. The funding contribution by FOSCR to support this event will be refunded which will be available to support other projects in the AOC.
- Darrell Randell solicited articles for the E-Newsletter and advised CRIC members that three E-Newsletters will be prepared annually instead of four.

**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.

Rural Lambton Stewardship Network (RLSN) – Jake Lozon

The Rural Lambton Stewardship Network (RLSN) is working on a number of projects including:

1. Continued habitat work at the Corsini and Rex Club properties,
2. Phragmites eradication at the CF Industries property, and
3. Excavation and treatment of Phragmites at Connor Marsh.

RLSN also continues to work with the Township of St. Clair to naturalize right-of-ways along Township roads with pollinator strips.

Aamjiwnaang First Nation – Sharilyn Johnston

Sharilyn Johnston reported that Aamjiwnaang First Nation youth took part in a youth stewardship program sponsored by the Thames River Clear Water Revival. The purpose of the program is to engage First Nation youth and help them learn about and make a connection with the Thames River and local communities.

Other updates included:

- The community has received \$10K to look at source water protection and wetland restoration opportunities.
- The environment department is working with Girish Sankar at the SCRCA on a shoreline softening project along the St. Clair River.
- Phragmites eradication work is being conducted at local wetlands.
- The community has received a two year grant for Species at Risk (SARs) research. The grant will support baseline monitoring of SARs at Aamjiwnaang First Nation.
- The DFO conducted sea lamprey monitoring through electrofishing in Talfourd Creek.

**ACTION** – Donna Strang will send the OMOECC report on sediment quality in Talfourd Creek to Ken Hall of FOSCR to have posted on the FOSCR website.

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

Brian McDougall reported that the SCRCA is working with the City of Sarnia as part of their Centennial Park rehabilitation to implement shoreline softening in Sarnia Bay. The proposed project will see a rock structure replace failing steel sheet pile walls. There are a number of areas along the St. Clair River where retention walls are failing and opportunities are presented to install armour stone and a more naturalized shoreline.

Great Lakes Sustainability Fund (GLSF) – April White

April reported that four GLSF Agreements have been drafted for the St. Clair River AOC totaling approximately \$600K in addition to two First Nation Agreements with Aamjiwnaang and Walpole Island First Nations.

The University of Windsor has initiated work on a science and monitoring mapping initiative that could serve as an effective communications tool in the future.

Binational Public Advisory Council (BPAC) – Kris Lee

Kris Lee reported that the co-chairs are currently conducting a survey of BPAC members to inquire about BPACs responsibilities in outreach and education and the role of BPAC after the St. Clair River is “delisted” as an AOC.

Canada-Ontario Agreement (COA) – Ted Briggs

The Government of Ontario has announced that applications are currently being accepted for the 2015 Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund. A total of \$1.5 million is available for projects that have a direct environmental benefit to the Great Lakes.

**ACTION** – Donna Strang will circulate the information for the Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund with the CRIC meeting minutes.

**Next Meeting:**

The next CRIC meeting will be at 10 am on Thursday, November 26th, 2015 (Location – TBD).