

## St. Marys River AOC BPAC Meeting Minutes

**Place:** Algoma University, CC202  
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

**When:** December 6th, 2016  
6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

### 1. Call to order/introductions

**Members:** Paula Antunes, Brian Wesolek, Jessica Wesolek, Don Marles

**Agency Reps:** Catherine Taddo (City), Corrina Barrett (City), Ron Dorscht (MOECC), Aubrey Maccoux-LeDuc (Bay Mills, SPAC Rep), Mark Chambers (ECCC), Rick Kiriluk (ECCC), Angela Darwin (ECCC)

**Guests:** N/A

### 2. Approval of Last Meetings Minutes

- September 22, 2016 – Approved as presented (motioned by Don, seconded by Brian)
- October 27, 2016 – Approved as presented (motioned by Jessica, seconded by Brian)

### 3. Business arising from previous minutes

- Re-designating the Eutrophication and Undesirable Algae BUI and the Degradation of Aesthetics BUI on the Canadian side of the St. Marys River – Endorsement letter
  - Paula presents draft letter to attending BPAC members. Mention of the Echo Bay site was included due to exceedances for many of the parameters. Paula will circulate the draft letter to the rest of the BPAC members for their input as well. No members in attendance had any objection. The letter will be voted on by email once everyone has a chance to provide input.
  - Action Item: Draft Degradation of Aesthetics BUI letter for next meeting.

### 4. Presentations

- Multi-year study of coastal wetlands and wildlife populations on the Canadian side of the AOC – Angela Darwin, Canadian Wildlife Service.
  - Surveys were conducted from 2012-2015. Comparisons were made between AOC and non-AOC wetlands using an Index of Biological Integrity (IBI) and a Water Quality Index (WQI).
  - Using the Water Quality Index (WQI), water quality within St. Marys River coastal wetlands ranged from moderately degraded to very good, and indicated that water quality in AOC versus non-AOC wetlands was similar.
  - An IBI was developed for the submerged aquatic vegetation community, but IBIs could not be developed for marsh bird, aquatic macroinvertebrate, and amphibian communities in the St. Marys River. Small sampling sizes combined with the lack of a clear gradient of disturbance likely contribute to the difficulty in developing appropriate IBIs.
  - The narrow range of WQI values and overall high water quality in the area, combined with the fact that IBIs cannot be developed for several biotic communities, suggest that the range of disturbance in the St. Marys River is no longer strong enough to warrant a corresponding response in the biota. Therefore, with sites condition inside and outside the AOC being comparable, it is recommended that the St. Marys River be considered no longer impaired for criterion (i) of BUI #14: *Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat* as well as

coastal wetland bird and amphibian (frogs and toads) populations in BUI #3: *Loss of Fish and Wildlife Populations*.

- Here is a link to the final report: <http://bpac.algomau.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/CWS-SMR-Coastal-Wetland-Assessment-Final-Report-Aug-20161.pdf>.
- The other component is for fish habitat (i.e., *enhance rapids/aquatic habitat conditions through feasible conservation and restoration measures identified in the Stage 2 RAP*). In 2014-2015, ECCC commissioned a study to determine the feasibility of undertaking several options. Rick Kiriluk, a fish habitat biologist, has joined ECCC from DFO, and has been in discussions with the Batchewana First Nation regarding possible next steps for an aquatic habitat restoration project on Whitefish Island, which is adjacent to the “Big Rapids” of the St. Marys River, to increase fish spawning and nursery habitat. They are looking at restoration of the channel itself which will open it up to allow migration of salmonid species (spawning & nursery habitat). Also looking at the opportunity to create features that could be used as juvenile habitat (edge habitat) on a bedrock shelf located in an area east of the island. Rock structures can be used as habitat for both minnows and juvenile fish. Discussions with BFN are ongoing.

## 5. Office Reports

- Recap of SPAC meeting in Kalamazoo (Kalamazoo River clean-up tour, Michigan Water Strategy, life after delisting) - Aubrey
  - State of Michigan Water Strategy was reviewed by the PACs. Some of the suggestions and comments included the following: drain commissions should be regionalized, regulate water softening/ groundwater impacts, life after delisting discussion and brainstorming. The strategy is available online: [http://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,4561,7-135-3313\\_3677\\_76614---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,4561,7-135-3313_3677_76614---,00.html)
  - There was a tour of the Kalamazoo River clean-up
  - Updates from other partners: The Great Lakes Commission continues to advocate for more funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. They are organizing a legislative briefing for new legislators and are requesting an AOC representative plus an additional advocate to attend. If the BPAC has any suggestions they can contact Aubrey. The briefing will take place in Lansing with dates to be determined.
  - Upcoming AOC conference in March
  - Great Lakes Research Conference in May in Detroit
- Lake Huron LAMP’s mention of the St. Mary’s River.
  - Requesting comments from BPAC on tables relating to beach health,
    - Bird and Animal Deformities has been listed as unimpaired on the Canadian side
  - There are inaccuracies with descriptions relating to:
    - Beach health – suggested wording could be “*E. coli* levels found to be ubiquitous in the AOC from non-AOC sites”
    - Habitat and species related issues – uneven representation between Canadian and American side of the river.
    - Nutrient related issues - Eutrophication and Algae has been assessed by Carrie Ginou’s 3 year water quality study and report. Change required “Canada has no combined sewers”. No nutrient loading issues and the presence of *Didymo* blooms shows that nutrient levels are low.
    - Invasive species - *Didymo* should not be included in the invasive species related issues. Wording for sea lamprey issue needs to be updated.
    - Groundwater issues can be left as *Not Applicable*.
    - Additional comments can be emailed to Aubrey.
- Photos and video Little Rapids Restoration –Aubrey presents some photos and videos showing the rocks and water flowing under the bridge.

## 6. Agency Updates

### ECCC & MOECC:

- Results for the fish tumour study are expected this month. The BPAC can expect a presentation from the lead scientist, Mark McMaster, in an upcoming meeting.
- A new Great Lakes Advisor has been hired (Curniss McGoldrick) who will start the position on December 19<sup>th</sup>. She is planning on attending a BPAC meeting in earlier 2017 so that she can meet everyone.

### USEPA & MDEQ:

- The little rapids bridge is complete and the Eutrophication and Undesirable Algae BUI is about to be removed.

## 7. Memberships

- For new members, applications must be received & prospective members present for confirmation – standard procedure.

## 8. New Business

- Discussion Items:
  - Benzene at Pointe des Chenes park (<https://www.sootoday.com/local-news/cancer-causing-benzene-still-flowing-into-wells-at-pointe-des-chenes-park-477904>)
    - Ron Dorscht: There is a “do not drink” advisory enforced by Algoma Public Health at Pointe des Chenes park. Fuel was used for firefighter training on the airport property which was a source of benzene contamination. Transport Canada is taking the lead and commissioning studies. Last year, activated carbon was put at the well supply to help remove the benzene which has been quite effective. Further studies are needed to help come up with a remediation plan. Ron will keep the BPAC updated on this issue.
  - Strategy recommended to reduce fire retardant chemicals in Great Lakes (<https://www.sootoday.com/local-news/strategy-recommended-to-reduce-fire-retardant-chemicals-in-great-lakes-477867>)

## 9. Public Comments

- NA

## 10. Next Meeting

- Doodle Poll will be set-up in late January.