

St. Marys River AOC BPAC Meeting Agenda

Place: Webex Meeting
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario & Michigan

When: Wednesday October 28, 2020
6:30 pm – 8:30 pm

Call to order/introductions

Members: Peter Greve, Aubrey Maccoux-LeDuc, Ron Prickett, Mike Ripley, Jessica Wesolek, Brian Wesolek, Al Wright, Don Marles

Agency Reps: Catherine Taddo (City), Ron Dorscht (MECP), John Riley (EGLE), Gurpreet Mangat (ECCC), Lisa Derickx (AU)

Guests: Fred Post (Algoma Steel), Joanie McGuffin

Approval of Minutes

- March 2, 2020 – Approved as presented
- August 6, 2020 – Approved with the addition of the up-to-date feedback provided by BPAC regarding the proposed updated *Degradation of Benthos* BUI Delisting Criteria.

Business Arising from Previous Minutes

- Ferrochrome plant discussion – BPAC would like this to remain as a standing action item.
 - Noront has not made contact with the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) as of yet.
 - BPAC would like to be kept informed and contacted with new information as it arises.
 - BPAC sent a letter to the City on November 26, 2019, but a response was never received.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** BPAC to decide if the letter should be re-sent with the request of a response. The letter is attached to these minutes.

Presentations

- Status Report on the *Degradation of Fish and Wildlife Populations* BUI for the Canadian side of the SMR AOC - Lisa Derickx (Algoma U)
 - The Status Report serves as an official record to account and recommend a change in status, on the Canadian side of the St. Marys River AOC, of the *Degradation of Fish and Wildlife Populations* BUI to “Not Impaired”. The re-designation is supported by studies that address the Stage 2 RAP recommended actions on fish and wildlife and that showcase how the delisting criteria have been met.
 - Assessment of Fish Populations using Index of Biotic Integrity - In 2009 and 2014, DFO initiated surveys that used an *Index of Biotic Integrity* approach called for in the BUI delisting criteria. Together, these studies directly answer the BUI delisting criteria and present a case for not impaired status, because: fish community health was assessed using an index of biotic integrity approach and in these two consecutive studies the health of the AOC fish community was found to be comparable to suitable reference sites.

- Supplemental Assessments for Fish Populations - In order to quantify the sport fisheries, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR) undertook an open water access creel survey of sport anglers. This was accompanied by a fish community gillnet survey of the river by the St. Marys River Fisheries Task Group (SMRFTG) and its member agencies. The general conclusion is that the St. Marys River is home to a relatively healthy fish community that is complex, diverse and dominated by native species, and has managed fish populations that are stable or increasing.
- The wildlife component of the *Degradation of Fish and Wildlife Populations BUI* was designated as “Requires Further Assessment” in the Stage 2 RAP report. Wildlife populations have since been assessed through the completion of Actions FFM-2 (An assessment of wildlife habitat conditions), FFM-5 (An assessment of Common Tern and Black Tern populations for the entire St. Marys River), FFM-6 (A full analysis of contaminant levels in the eggs of Herring Gulls and Black and Common Terns within the AOC), and FFM-8 (A reproductive assessment of Herring Gulls and Black and Common Terns) which reveal that wildlife populations are found to be in good condition.
- **ACTION ITEM:** BPAC to review the status report and provide feedback to the RAP Coordinator in one month.

Agency Updates

Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)

Degradation of Fish and Wildlife Populations BUI

- BUI assessment report has been drafted based on technical reports from ECCC- Canadian Wildlife Service, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and SMR Fisheries Task Group. Results suggest delisting criteria has been met; that fish and wildlife populations are not impaired. Review/feedback now sought from BPAC, Indigenous communities, RAPIC and public.

Loss of Fish & Wildlife Habitat BUI

- Whitefish Island habitat project: Draft design plans and concept drawings have been developed for naturalizing the channel bed and bank areas of the Whitefish Channel and constructing shoals east of Whitefish Island to benefit native fish populations (as presented to BPAC in March 2019). The process to finalize designs and details on project implementation were to have been worked through with the Batchewana First Nation (the landowner) and others in 2020, but this has been delayed due to COVID. When it starts, ECCC and Batchewana will make joint presentation to BPAC on what will be involved.

Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP)

Restrictions on Fish Consumption BUI

- In March 2020, a journal article by MECP and the University of Toronto was released that speaks to reduced fish contaminant levels in the St. Marys River, with positive commentary that the BUI could be deemed “not impaired”. The RAP Team will be discussing AOC program needs in terms of an actual assessment report and the article’s recommendation on having a community fish consumption survey as part of the BUI assessment. Plans will be presented and discussed with BPAC in the coming months, along with engaging Indigenous communities and the public.

The ministry is currently finalizing the Great Lakes funding agreement with Algoma University to continue support of the RAP coordinator position. This funding agreement will run until March 2022.

Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE)

The Statewide Public Advisory Council (SPAC) met virtually on October 14. The newly elected chair is Horst Schmidt, from the Torch Lake AOC, and the new vice-chair is Patty Troy, from the St. Clair River AOC. Terms for those positions are one year. The next virtual meeting will be scheduled soon using a Doodle poll, and is anticipated to be in late February or early March 2021.

In September, EGLE staff collected fish from Munuscong Bay for tissue analysis to evaluate the status of the Fish Consumption BUI. The state's lab is backed up due to Covid and other issues. Analytical results are not anticipated for at least 6 months.

New Business

- Algoma Steel waste water incident
 - On August 10, 2020, there was a significant rainfall event. Surface water runoff is collected and goes to the main water treatment facility. On this date, excess water influx was forced to bypass the facility. Water samples were collected during the bypass and no exceedances were reported and there was no observed mortality in the toxicity tests.
 - It is abnormal to have a bypass as the water treatment facility has the capacity to hold a large volume of water.
 - MECP is notified whenever a bypass event occurs. Water quality data is electronically reported by a third party laboratory to the MECP.

- **ACTION ITEM:** BPAC to draft a Letter to support Sault Ste Marie as the new location for the Canada Water Agency

- **ACTION ITEM:** BPAC to draft a Letter supporting the City's involvement in the Clean Marinas program

- Peninsula Harbour AOC Update – A status report has been drafted that will make a case for re-designating 3 of the remaining 4 BUIs in that AOC. Engagement sessions will be held and information will be posted on the Info Superior website (<https://infosuperior.com/peninsula-harbour/>).

Memberships

- No new memberships

Public Comments

- No public comments

Next Meeting

- Late November – early December