

2023 | REVISED MAY 2025

RESTORING THE RIVER

Official Newsletter of The St. Marys River Remedial Action Plan

Restrictions on Dredging BUI: Not Impaired Major Milestone for St. Marys River

The 2024 Status Report and Strategic Plan highlights a remarkable update on the Restrictions on Dredging BUI. This BUI was officially redesignated to a 'not impaired' status, which marks a significant step towards restoring the health of the St. Marys River. This emphasizes decades of collaborative remediation effort and continuous environmental monitoring of the River.

If it's unfamiliar, the Restrictions on Dredging Activities Beneficial Use Impairment (BUI) was focused on contaminated sediment and was applied to specific cases where commercial-navigational dredging was routinely required. It was considered "impaired" when contaminants went above concentrations that permitted open water disposal (i.e., it exceeded limits under the Provincial Sediment Quality Guidelines).

Contaminants of concern included petroleum hydrocarbons, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, oil, grease, and trace metals. Although studies have shown that the contaminants are covered with layers of clean sediment, it is important to follow best management practices, and obtain appropriate regulatory permits and approvals as needed for any in-water projects, especially if your project could potentially disturb or expose deeper sediments.



This Issue:

Update on Restrictions on
Dredging Activities

PAGE 01



Delisting Criteria

PAGE 01



Sediment Management
Strategy

PAGE 02



In-water Administrative
Controls

PAGE 03



More Information

PAGE 03

What Was The Delisting Criteria?

“This beneficial use will no longer be considered impaired when administrative controls and other regulatory procedures are in place within the Area of Concern that provide guidance and oversight for dredging proponents and permitting agencies in the planning and undertaking of dredging activities, including mitigating measures to reduce negative impacts.

Such guidance will be made clear in a multiagency Dredging Administrative Controls document that will be part of a broader sediment management plan for the Area of Concern”

How The BUI Was Redesignated

All recommended remedial and monitoring actions related to the Restrictions on Dredging Activities BUI were completed. The St. Marys River Dredging and In-water Administrative Controls Guidance Document met the updated delisting criteria, and its provisions were integrated into the broader Sediment Management Strategy. Following community input and agency review, the BUI was officially re-designated to “Not Impaired” in November 2024.

Sediment Management Strategy

The St. Marys River Sediment Management Strategy was drafted in 2021 and finalized in 2024. This strategy provided the scientific foundation for strategic direction for the long-term handling of contaminated sediment across the Area of Concern.

The Sediment Management Strategy identified hotspots within the river where contaminated sediments have historically accumulated and risk assessments were completed for those areas.

This document incorporated an array of management approaches based on site-specific conditions such as:

- Monitored natural recovery for areas with buried contamination
- Dredging or containment in high-risk areas
- Ensuring coordination and communication among local, provincial, and federal stakeholders

Did You Know?

In the past, dredged material was often disposed of in open water under the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) guidelines for open water disposal of dredged spoils.

Open water was a preferred method of managing dredged sediment as the costs were low compared to other disposal options. The dredged material was disposed of within the St. Marys River in a manner that would not affect existing water uses such as navigation.

However, there were inherent environmental impacts from open water disposal on the local aquatic habitat (i.e. smothering habitat and aquatic biota). Given the potential for ecological impacts associated with open water disposal of sediment, viewing this as a “beneficial use” is contrary to the spirit and intent of the Area of Concern program to restore environmental quality and ecosystem health.

What is the St. Marys River Guidance Document for Dredging and In-water Activities?

“The St. Marys River Dredging and In-water Administrative Controls document is a tool that provides guidance to proponents considering projects such as dredging, dock wall/wharf replacement, or other in-water activities that risk disturbing buried sediments.”



Newer options for the management of dredged sediment have been developed. Following MECP guidelines, on-land disposal of dredge materials is a relatively efficient and lowcost approach and has been the effective, local practice for many years. There are no additional costs associated with dredging in the Area of Concern as compared to other locations in the Great Lakes.

Objectives of the St. Marys River Dredging and In-water Administrative Controls

- To outline the administrative approach on in-water activities to minimize the disturbance, exposure or resuspension of contaminated sediment;
- To establish principles that guide decisions;
- To summarize the roles and responsibilities of the proponents and agencies involved;
- To provide guidance for proponents submitting in-water project applications for required permits; and
- To summarize agency mandates and to promote a common review process for regulatory activities that have the potential to disturb contaminated sediment.

Are You Considering In-Water Activities?

The guidance document provides information to proponents considering in-water activities on the Canadian side of the Area of Concern. It outlines the considerations that government agencies will take into account while evaluating in-water activities that could disturb sediment; such as dredging, filling, covering, piling, or scouring. It provides information on the type of activities that require approval, outlines the review process for applications, identifies the authorities/agencies to contact, and articulates the principles of sound decision-making.

Connect With Us



<https://www.facebook.com/StMarysRiverRAP>



https://www.instagram.com/stmarysriver_rap/



<https://www.youtube.com/@stmarysriverrap>



<http://bpac.algomau.ca/>