

# St. Marys River AOC BPAC Meeting Minutes

**Place:** Cisler Center, LSSU  
Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan

**When:** Wednesday June 5, 2019  
6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

## Call to order/introductions

**Members:** Paula Antunes, Mike Ripley, Mary Rossiter, Jim Dukes, Ron Prickett, Don Marles, Dave Samp

**Agencies:** John Riley (EGLE), Ashley Moerke (LSSU), Neil Godby (DNR)

## Approval of Last Meetings Minutes

- March 11, 2019 – Approved as presented
- March 27, 2019 – Approved as presented

## Business Arising from Previous Minutes

- Feedback on Conceptual Site Model (CSM) – BPAC will defer making comments on the CSM until a written report is provided for review.

## Presentations

### Little Rapids Monitoring – Ashley Moerke (LSSU)

- Ashley provided a summary of findings regarding ecological monitoring of the Little Rapids Restoration Project.
- The restoration goal for the project was to return flow to the area. The idea was to achieve a target velocity that would help return flow to the area and help support the recovery of aquatic species in this area.
- Data was collected from before, during and after restoration (pre and post construction)
- Although using a reference site was not feasible (velocity in big rapids too strong for nets) they were able to compare both upstream and downstream of the little rapids.
- Focused on current velocity, benthic invertebrates and the fish community.
- Water velocity - Characterized flow data before and after restoration. Results show that the target flow velocity was achieved.
- Water quality – The main concern was turbidity during construction process. Total suspended solids were monitored and results show that water quality was not impacted or of concern during the construction phase.
- Benthic Invertebrates – Distinct changes were observed before and after restoration. A decline in taxa richness was observed. Low invertebrate population could be a result of the invasion by Didymo (invasive algae). There is a recovery of good water quality taxa but less than expected
- Fish - Observed species indicative of clean gravel habitat.
- Recreational Use - Provided fishing access along the Michigan shoreline.

Removal recommendations for the *Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat and Degradation of Fish and Wildlife Populations Beneficial Use Impairments from the US side of the Area of Concern* – John Riley (EGLE)

- In 2008, specific restoration criteria for the two fish and wildlife BUIs and was approved by the State of Michigan. Criteria specified in the restoration plan specifically called for the restoration of two rapids habitat areas located entirely in Michigan waters, the Little Rapids and the Neebish Rock.
- As state and federal agencies began coordinating efforts to undertake the two restoration projects, it was determined that the restoration of the Neebish Rock Cut would not be feasible, due primarily to the extremely high estimated cost of the project. The restoration criteria for the two BUIs were revised as follows: *“The two fish and wildlife BUIs will be considered restored in the Michigan portion of the St. Marys River AOC upon completion of the Little Rapids project at Sugar Island, which would restore approximately 50 to 70 acres of fish and wildlife habitat.”*
- The project has successfully achieved the target of restored habitat area acreage. More than 50 acres were positively impacted by the change in flow regime resulting from the removal of the causeway and construction of the bridge with 600 feet of free-flowing St. Marys River beneath it.
- Several variables were evaluated, both pre- and post-construction. Largely, those results are positive and encouraging. The reality is that it may take several years of ecological monitoring to get a true picture of the impact of the Little Rapids project. Additional biological monitoring is being recommended for at least three-, five- and ten-year intervals following project completion. This is likely to include surveys of fish communities and benthic macroinvertebrates, at a minimum. Only then can we truly be confident of the outcomes of the project.
- Nonetheless, the question at hand is whether the Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat and the Degradation of Fish and Wildlife Populations BUI restoration criteria for the St. Marys River AOC have been met. The Little Rapids project at Sugar Island is complete, restoring a minimum of 50 acres of fish and wildlife habitat, as demonstrated above.
- John made a request for a letter of support from BPAC for the removal of the Fish and Wildlife BUIs.

**ACTION ITEM:** BPAC to review the removal recommendation and determine whether they will provide a letter of support via email.

## **Agency Updates**

Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) & Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP)

In May, ECCC and Algoma University signed a new contribution agreement to continue financial support for the local RAP Coordinator office.

ECCC and MECP continue to work toward an AOC sediment management strategy, and will be working with the local RAP Coordinator to implement opportunities for BPAC and public review and input in the second half of 2019.

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

Michigan's Areas of Concern program is no longer housed within the Office of the Great Lakes (OGL). The program was recently moved into the Surface Water Assessment Section of the Water Resources Division. This is where the program used to reside in 2010, before the move to OGL. With this change and the move from DNR to EGLE, the function and focus of the program remains unchanged. Staff contacts also remain the same.

The Annual Areas of Concern Conference is scheduled for September 11-12, 2019 in Cleveland, OH. Funding support for travel and expenses for a limited number of BPAC members may be available through the Great Lakes Commission. **Requests for travel support must be submitted to the GLC by June 28, 2019. For additional information, contact *Matt Doss, Policy Director, Great Lakes Commission, at [mdoss@glc.org](mailto:mdoss@glc.org)*.** There is a travel request form that must be completed as part of the process.

### **New Business**

- Ferrochrome smelter – Will defer to a future meeting due to time constraints
- U of M Student AOC Report – A number of groups of University of Michigan students who are studying the dynamics of the area of concern program in the State of Michigan. Potentially, a new group of students will be in touch regarding a new project.

### **Memberships**

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

### **Public Comments**

- None

### **BPAC Elections**

- New BPAC Executive:

U.S. Chair – Mike Ripley

CAN Vice Chair – Kristen Sherlock

U.S. Vice Chair – Aubrey Maccoux-Leduc

### **Next Meeting**

- Early Fall