

St. Marys River AOC BPAC Meeting Minutes

Place: Cisler Centre, Lake Superior State University, Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan

Date: November 15, 2018
6:30 – 8:30 pm

1. Call to Order / Introductions

Members: Mike Ripley, Paula Antunes, Aubrey Maccoux-LeDuc, Ron Prickett

Agency Reps: John Riley (Michigan Department of Natural Resources)

Guests: John Paskus (guest presenter/biodiversity atlas).

Regrets: Klaas Oswald, Don Marles, Kristen Sherlock

2. Approval of last meeting minutes

- Approved as presented

3. Business arising from previous minutes

- Membership list – update still needed
- Follow-up with Ross Romano needed to see if he is still able to attend a future BPAC meeting to discuss the chromite smelter development.

4. Presentation from John Paskus – Biodiversity Atlas

John Paskus from Michigan Natural Features Inventory made a presentation on the biodiversity atlas for the St. Marys River. Last updates were provided back in January and June/July. Focus on atlas development since then was on 4 major components based on BPAC feedback: 1) Progress on web-mapping application using data layers, 2) Searchable catalogue of documents included in the atlas (journal articles, grey literature, documents, etc.). The idea is to make it easier to find contents using the search option, 3) Biodiversity content for the St. Marys River system, added using 'Story Maps', and 4) Portal through Michigan Department of Natural Resources server which will permit access to the St. Marys River biodiversity atlas.

AOC boundary will be included. Water trails will be integrated into the recreational tab. Islands will also be added in (e.g., projects by the Nature Conservancy). Priority sites identified as being important and having areas with ground access. Some of these were visited to get ground data / biological information. High quality natural communities known to exist in the region including mesic forests, Boreal Forest, Great Lakes marsh, some species data provided by the Heritage Information Centre but they didn't have any community data to share. 'Biorarity index' created from Michigan and Canadian data centres – shows how rare a species is based on relative ranking and shows existing habitat – shows where those important habitat areas are and how rare the species are globally, when the species was last observed, etc.. Includes fish, birds, some plants, and natural communities. Invertebrates not included only because of no known occurrences. A list of BUIs, descriptions of each of the BUIs, available associated reports etc. are all provided as Story Maps. Geology/hydrology will be added. BPAC members suggested that the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines would have geological

information for the Canadian side. Water level data specific to the St. Marys River has been difficult to find for the connecting channels. BPAC members provided a contact name at the USGS who may be helpful. Information on human history and the connection with nature has also been included. John is looking for more information and will look to see what the museum may have available.

John is working on paragraph-form text which summarizes the information in the atlas. Great Lakes Coastal Wetlands Data (created by the Great Lakes Wetlands Consortium ~ 10 yrs ago). State and federal, county & township lands as well as land conservancy areas included (e.g., University of Michigan). Canadian information not available at the moment. John asked BPAC members to share any known information we have or may hear about. C-CAP Land cover data provided by NOAA included, extends into Canada a few miles, depending on how close the area of interest was to the international border. Shows different levels of developed land, natural land, and agricultural land with an emphasis on wetlands. Michigan Tech provided data which allowed for different zones to be included in the biodiversity atlas within the Great Lakes Marsh systems (i.e., submergent zone, emergent zone, wet meadow, shrub scrub, lowland forest). Links to things like fishing guides, safe eating guides, boat launches etc. also provided. Key threats will also be included, as well as maps specific to weed management and on invasive species currently being tracked. Links to all organizations that are active in any way regarding biodiversity and/or relevant natural resources are provided.

Bibliography for the SMR has 128 entries; organized by item type including grey literature, journal articles, newspaper articles. Can sort by publication year, subject matter, etc. Correlation analysis cannot be done with the atlas (e.g., relationships between types of vegetation and bird species present) – such a feature would need to be done using ESRI ArcGIS software. John asked BPAC members to provide feedback on what spatially-based questions would be useful for the end-user to be able to find the answers to in the atlas (e.g., in the Story Maps). All layers in the atlas are downloadable.

BPAC members suggested that links be made to organizations that manage surrounding watersheds that serve as important tributaries to the principal areas shown in the map. Members also suggested that management plans which include key threats be included.

Project completion deadline for the biodiversity atlas is mid-March 2019. John to have a discussion with the Office of Great Lakes to see if there would be some funding available going forward to update the data layers etc. in at least the short-term future. This was a pilot project for the State of Michigan. A final presentation can be made on the project once it's done.

5. Office Reports / Agency Updates

Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)

BUI redesignations/removal

The ECCC-MECP process to officially redesignate Beach Closings, Degradation of Aesthetics, and Eutrophication/Undesirable Algae to Not Impaired status on the Canadian side of the AOC is nearing completion, with a notification letter to be sent to the RAP Coordinator and BPAC very soon.

Degradation of Benthos BUI

ECCC and MECP are furthering the development of a multi-agency contaminated sediment management strategy for the Canadian side of the AOC. BPAC and community consultation will begin in late 2018/early 2019, starting with a presentation on the current situation and a plan with timetable for

seeking input into the management strategy. BPAC and community engagement will continue throughout 2019, with the objective of having a strategy developed by December 2019.

Loss of Fish & Wildlife Habitat BUI

The BUI delisting criteria is to *enhance rapids/aquatic habitat conditions through feasible conservation and restoration measures identified in the Stage 2 RAP*. This summer, ECCC's contractor completed fieldwork (i.e., hydrology and bathymetry) in cooperation with staff from the Batchewana First Nation and Parks Canada. The data is needed to produce engineered designs for naturalizing the channel bed and bank areas of the Whitefish Channel and constructing islands and shoals east of Whitefish Island to benefit native fish populations. The detailed designs are progressing, and a presentation on the work will be delivered to BPAC and the Batchewana community in December 2018.

United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)

New EPA Task Force Lead

Many of you know that John Perrecone retired from EPA this past September. Heather Williams will be the new EPA Task Force Lead for the St. Marys River AOC. Heather has worked at GLNPO since 2009 and has past experience at SMR. She was the acting EPA project lead on the first phase of the Great Lakes Legacy Act St. Marys MGP dredging project in 2010 with Consumers Energy. As part of that project Heather had attended BPAC meetings to provide updates and receive feedback from the PAC members.

A quick message from Heather: Hello SMR BPAC! I am looking forward to working in St. Marys River again with John Riley and all the BPAC members as you address the final BUIs. I hope to attend a BPAC meeting in person soon. If you have any questions, here is my contact information:

Heather Williams
US Environmental Protection Agency
Great Lakes National Program Office
77 West Jackson Boulevard
Chicago, Illinois 60604
Mail Code: G-9J
williams.heather@epa.gov
(312) 886-5993

Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR)

The draft Removal Recommendation for the Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat and Degradation of Fish and Wildlife Populations Beneficial Use Impairments is on track to be shared with the BPAC after the first of the year. Post-construction monitoring results from the Little Rapids are still being compiled. When those data are complete and available, the draft document will be prepared.

John Riley additionally added that the DNR went out and did electrofishing a number of times in 2018. The data acquired from those efforts have been submitted to Ashley Moerke at LSSU, in addition to larval fish data and benthic community data.

John would like to come to the next BPAC meeting in the US to explain the recommendation. Ashley had said she could also do a presentation on the work she's done, possibly at the next BPAC meeting held in the US.

A BPAC member conveyed that at the St. Marys Fisheries Task Group meeting it was noted that larval sturgeon have been found for the first time in the main rapids area.

6. New Business

John Riley informed members that Paul Sealock at the University of Michigan has a new group of students working with him and there may be a possibility for them to return to Sault Ste. Marie to work on BPAC/RAP related studies.

A Water Restoration and Community Vibrancy Forum was held at the Holiday Inn Express in the US (collaboration of MSU, funding by the Office of the Great Lakes (MDNR). Information on how water relates to communities was presented. Was very much focused on sociology.

Bay Mills Indian Community continues to make progress on the Watershed Management Plan for the Whiskey River. A draft should be ready by end of 2019.