

St. Marys River AOC BPAC Meeting Agenda

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

When: Monday December 7, 2020
6:30 pm – 8:30 pm

Call to order/introductions

Members: Mike Ripley, Al Wright, Brian Wesolek, Jessica Wesolek, Aubrey Maccoux-Leduc, Paula Antunes, Klaas Oswald, Crystal Falk, Peter Greve

Agency Reps: John Riley (EGLE), Mark Chambers (ECCC), Ted Briggs (MECP), Meagan Sutherland (AU), John Rankin (AU), Lisa Derickx (AU)

Guests: NA

Approval of Minutes

- October 28, 2020 – Approved as presented

Business Arising from Previous Minutes

- Status Report on the *Degradation of Fish and Wildlife Populations* BUI for the Canadian side of the SMR AOC – BPAC would like to more time to further discuss the issues.
 - Some concern surrounding the separateness of the *Degradation of Fish and Wildlife Populations* BUI from other fish related BUIs (*Restrictions on Fish and Wildlife Consumption* BUI, *Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat* BUI & *Fish Tumors and Other Deformities* BUI). A suggestion was made to combine the BUIs as they are related to one another and therefore, difficult to separate.
 - Concern was expressed for the newly proposed provincial legislation relating to private development on wetlands. This would be considered as a set back for delisting the BUI as habitat is an important component of a healthy wildlife population.
 - A suggestion was made to add a stipulation to the letter that would ensure Whitefish Island Project will still proceed as intended after delisting.
 - A suggestion was made to separate the wildlife portion of the *Degradation of Fish & Wildlife Populations* BUI due to potential loss of wetland habitat which is closely tied to healthy wildlife populations.
 - Concern was expressed regarding the results from the IBI survey. More specifically, if the results from the survey were robust enough and contained sufficient evidence to conclude that fish populations were more resilient and stable than before.
 - Some concern regarding the increase of invasive species and their impact on fish populations. In addition, how stocking fish may further impact fish populations.
 - The SMR is a multi-variant system with some areas more vulnerable than others. Climate warming, newly proposed legislation, and bigger ships on the water that resuspend contaminated sediments are a cause for concern. Therefore, a caveat should be included in the delisting that states that this is subject to the conditions in the river remaining the same.

- A suggestion was made to not delist the *Degradation of Fish and Wildlife Populations* BUI without also delisting the *Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat* BUI and instead, deal with them as paired BUIs as opposed to individual BUIs.
- **ACTION ITEM:** BPAC to submit feedback on the letter by mid-January and review the returned document containing the compilation of feedback before the next meeting in late-January.
- Draft Letter of Support for the newly proposed Canada Water Agency to be located in SSM
 - Moving this item to the next meeting. The letter will be sent to the group.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** BPAC to review the draft letter for edits and concerns.
- Draft letter supporting City's involvement in the Clean Marina project for capturing plastics.
 - Moving this item to the next meeting. The letter will be sent to the group.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** BPAC to review the draft letter for edits and concerns.

Presentations

- An update on the *Restriction on Fish Consumption* BUI – Meagan Sutherland (Algoma U)
 - The *Restriction on Fish and Wildlife Consumption* BUI is split into two categories: Fish Consumption and Wildlife Consumption. While the wildlife component of this BUI was listed as not impaired in the Stage 1 RAP Report, the fish component was and still is considered to be impaired
 - The Stage 1 RAP Report identified Mercury and PCBs to be contaminants of concern in both Ontario and Michigan for a variety of fish species. A Point Source Task Team was created to prioritize and identify sources of pollutants. Findings from the Stage 2 RAP report concluded that both industrial and municipal sources contributed significant loadings of contaminants.
 - The proposed delisting criteria in 1992 was revised in 2015 to account for the new science surrounding toxicity and persistence of PCBs which has resulted in revisions to many fish advisory benchmarks as well as other AOC delisting criteria.
 - The Stage 2 RAP report identifies the actions and monitoring initiatives necessary to restore the BUI. The one currently being focused on is the Fish Consumption Survey which addresses the Fish Contaminant Monitoring Programs conducted by the MECP. This monitoring program collected fish between 2014-2016 to provide an update on contaminant levels. A Fish Consumption Survey was recommended to confirm the status of the BUI.
 - In April 2020, a study was published by the University of Toronto which assessed the status of contaminant levels in fish from the SMR to determine if the BUI could be considered no longer impaired. The goal was to determine if there was a non-restrictive consumption of fish using a benchmark of 8+ meals per month. Using a three-tiered approach, it was determined that contaminant levels in fish from the SMR have declined to the extent that the BUI should no longer be considered impaired. However, it was advised that a Fish Consumption Survey be conducted to confirm the assumption that 8+ meals per month can be considered non-restrictive.
 - The objective of the Fish Consumption Survey is to form a better understanding of fish consumption habits and patterns within the SMR. The survey will help inform the decisions regarding the evaluation and redesignation of the *Restriction on Fish Consumption* BUI and to bring awareness to the public through educational outreach efforts.
 - The survey will target shoreline and offshore fishers using in-person/online communication. First Nations and Metis communities will be able to adapt and implement the survey in their respective communities. A Fish Consumption Survey has been utilized by other AOCs as part of their delisting process.

- The Fish Consumption Survey is currently being developed and the survey questions will be presented to the BPAC once a draft is complete.
- **ACTION ITEM:** BPAC to review the survey questions once a draft has been completed and submitted to the group.

Agency Updates

Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)

Whitefish Island fish habitat project (*Loss of Fish & Wildlife Habitat BUI*)

- As presented to BPAC in March 2019, 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.
- The process to refine and finalize the designs and details on project implementation was to have been worked through with the Batchewana First Nation (the landowner) and others in 2020, but this has been delayed due to COVID-19 and other demands on Batchewana staff. But a process to accelerate the work is in place, once Batchewana is ready.
- When it starts, ECCC and Batchewana will make a joint presentation to BPAC on what will be involved.

Fish Tumours

- As presented to BPAC in March 2018 and detailed in a July 2018 report on the BPAC Library webpage, ECCC's fish tumour survey in Fall 2015 showed this beneficial use impairment continues to be impaired; with a tumour prevalence rate of 6% (i.e., 100 White Suckers were collected from the Bellevue Marine Park and Partridge Point areas, and 6 were found to have liver tumours).
- It is getting closer to the delisting criteria of <5% tumour rate, and there has been improvement since the survey in 2009 that produced a fish tumour rate of 10.7%. Also, it is important to note this 6% tumour rate from the most recent survey is based on the conservative decision to include 2 fish exhibiting a tumour type that is not necessarily the result of environmental contaminants, but could be due to natural causes.
- Given that fish tumours are the result of elevated PAHs in sediment, the remedial action linked to this BUI includes dredging the Algoma Steel boat slip, which has been significantly completed in 2017 and 2019.
- ECCC is planning a follow-up fish tumour survey for potentially Fall 2021, but that is not yet confirmed.

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

- The region-wide AOC Conference that was planned for May in Muskegon, Michigan has been pushed back due to Covid-19. The AOC Conference is now scheduled for a tentative date of September 29th and 30th in Muskegon, Michigan.

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

- A funding agreement between MECP and Algoma University was finalized in November to continue supporting ongoing RAP coordination work for the St. Marys River AOC. This agreement will run until March 2022 and will focus on assessing and re-designating beneficial use impairments where possible, which includes undertaking a fish consumption survey,

continued support of BPAC, various outreach and education activities around AOC activities and the development of a sediment management strategy.

- Applications for the ministry's Great Lakes Local Action Fund closed in early November. This fund will provide up to \$50,000 for projects led by groups such as community-based organizations, environmental non-profits, small business, conservation authorities, municipalities and Indigenous communities to protect and restore coastal, shoreline and nearshore areas of the Great Lakes and their tributaries. Decisions on approved local projects will be made in early 2021.

New Business

- Outreach Assistant update – John Rankin (Algoma U)
 - The BPAC website has been updated and given a new look to allow for better navigation across the site and easier access to the information and content found on the site. An Instagram and Twitter account have been created to accompany the already existing Facebook page in hopes to create more access to the public and engage their feedback on the project.

Standing Items

- Ferrochrome plant
 - The Mayor, Minister of Environment for the province and Minister of Environment for the Federal Government have acknowledged receipt of the letter. There has not been much movement on the project and the group is on record for having concerns, therefore, the letter has not been re-sent with the request for a response.
 - A Wawa newspaper stated that the Ferrochrome plant was going ahead with the planning, so the group needs to continue to remain alert.

Memberships

- No new memberships

Public Comments

- No public comments

Next Meeting

- Late January