

International Rainy-Lake of the Woods Watershed Board
Community Advisory Group
Teleconference
December 5, 2016; 10:00-12:00 CST
Meeting Notes

Attendance:

CAG members: Kiley Shebagegit (Canadian Co-chair and facilitator); Charlene Mason (U.S. Co-chair and recorder); Jerry Caple, Reid Carron, Stephen Blair, John Carlson, Jim Yount, Matthew Gouin, Holly House, Paul Anderson, Wayne Bruce, Todd Sellers, Tom Mosindy

From the IRLWVB: Lori Dowling-Hanson, Gail Faveri, Scott Jutila

From the International Watershed Coordination Program: Kelli Saunders

Regrets: Karen Cederwall, Teika Newton

Welcome/Roll Call (Kiley, Charlene)

See above. Some agenda items had changes in time to accommodate schedules.

International Watershed Coordinator

Kelli is trying to focus on the civic engagement portion of her program by coordinating outreach and stewardship programs with the goal of creating good water stewards. A watershed-wide newsletter is published four times a year with good stories of stewardship and citizen science from around the watershed. CAG members were encouraged to pass along to Kelli stories that they knew about.

In addition, Kelli is almost ready to launch the watershed web, which will be like an expanded version of the newsletter. She also has produced a calendar for distribution with pictures from around the watershed and notepads with the new logo on them.

Upcoming planned events: At the March Watershed Forum a gathering of Soil and Conservation Districts to highlight civic engagement activities and a second lake association meeting for next summer perhaps. In addition, Kelli is working with people in the International Falls area on a drain-stenciling project (only rain goes down the drain). They will use students to stencil the drains in the spring, 2017.

As part of her coordination activities, Kelli has been working to pass along to Canadian federal and provincial agencies the information gathered as part of the Lake of the Woods Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) project.

International Rainy and Namakan Lakes Rule Curves Review (Kelli Saunders)

Kelli also reported on the progress for the Rule Curves Review. Since last August, a new Weight of Evidence matrix with an interactive PDF file has been developed. The matrix has an explanation of results and links to supporting studies. So far, the findings are that the 2000 Rule Curves did mostly as expected, except in the case of flooding, where there was 2-3 inches more flooding in extreme events on Rainy Lake.

The question is how to mitigate the effects of flooding. The Study Team has created an Adaptive Management Committee to look at options. One is to draw down more water in the spring if the weather conditions indicate, perhaps looking at El Nino and El Nina as predictors.

There has been an emphasis on providing accurate and helpful information to the public through newsletters, fact sheets and videos explaining the outflow of water from the Rainy River and Rainy Lake. There have been meetings with First Nations, Grand Council Treaty #3, and Métis representatives. A practice decision workshop for modeling was held the first week in November.

There will be a webinar for the Public Advisory Group and the Resource Advisory Group within the next few weeks to be followed by a face-to-face meeting in February with the Study Board. They are still working out what will happen at the Watershed Forum in March. The end of May is the scheduled completion date, but the Study Team is in the process of requesting an additional month to the end of June for the completion of their work.

IRLWWB Aquatic Ecosystem Health Committee (Todd Sellers)

The Aquatic Ecosystem Health Committee (AEHC) is in the process of working with the various agencies to formalize the format for the annual report. The structure has been settled and they will shortly be requesting data and existing reports for the 2015 year. The Committee has decided to change the format to repackage existing data rather than to request raw data. The focus of the annual report will be transboundary waters with comments more broadly across the entire watershed. In the future, they want reports to be ready for the IJC fall semi-annual meetings (2016 data in fall of 2017).

With regards to transboundary emergency response to spills and other incidents, the AEHC is doing a survey of agencies and their role in coordination of responses. A question was raised if sewer issues were being considered in this research.

The AEHC has also been working with the IJC's Health Professionals Advisory Board regarding a possible joint International Watersheds Initiative proposal. They met with the health professionals and the IJC staff to understand the process of joint proposals, finding that they need more involvement of the Watershed Board and a leader or champion from each Board to smooth out the process and align with each Board's priorities. The AEHC will be reviewing the current proposal, which deals with health impacts from spills, to clarify the proposal and ascertain if it is cost beneficial.

Updates from the IJC Semi-Annual In Ottawa, October 2016 (Charlene Mason)

The major focus of the meeting of the Watershed Board with the IJC Commissioners was the binational science plan proposed by Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC). Among the items discussed were

- the lack of binational coordination in development of the plan;
- a needed identification of priority outcomes and timelines;
- an understanding of the role of the International Joint Commission and the Watershed Board;
- how the public, indigenous people, local scientists and other stakeholders will be involved; and
- what happens to the Water Quality Plan of Study.

There is a concern that the ECCC plan only focuses on Lake of the Woods and essentially only on the nutrient enrichment portion of the Water Quality Plan of Study instead of the entire basin and all of the other concerns in the Plan of Study. A virtual meeting has been set up on December 13 for both Minnesota and Canadian researchers and agency staff working in or who have worked in the basin to ensure the best outcome for Lake of the Woods.

In other news, the IJC Commissioners were apprised of the significant algal blooms on Lake of the Woods over the summer of 2016 and the AEHC presented its plan for the 2nd Aquatic Ecosystem Health

Report using the 2015 data and for collecting data from federal, state and provincial agencies about transboundary coordination of response to spills and other emergencies. The Commission also said goodbye to Dereath Glance who left to accept another position. [Commissioner Glance was the Commissioner who welcomed the CAG at its first meeting.]

The United States IJC Commissioners serve at the pleasure of the President; when they are appointed, they provide resignation letters effective at the end of the appointing President's term (January 20, 2017 for the current Commissioners). The resignation letters may not be accepted at this point, depending upon the President and also the timeline for obtaining replacements. However, at least one U.S. Commissioner must remain in office in order to have a quorum to conduct business. At this point there is no information about their status after January 20.

Engagement Committee (Teika Newton, Charlene Mason)

The Engagement Committee (EC) is reworking the IRLWWB web site to include a set of Frequently Asked Questions as well as short bios of Board members. There is a CAG page that needs to be fleshed out more completely. In addition, as new members are appointed to the Watershed Board, press releases are prepared and provided to local media; they are also given an orientation to the Board using EC developed materials.

Microsoft PowerPoint presentations have been developed for use by anyone who is called up or wants to provide an overview of the Watershed Board and its activities to a group. These are available for use by CAG members. Planning is also underway for engagement with First Nations (Grand Council Treaty #3), Métis, and Tribes. And the EC is considering ways to engage K-12 students about stewardship around water resources.

A question was raised about how the Engagement Committee could provide current news about algal blooms, especially early warnings. The FAQ's on the web site do cover many issues about algal blooms, but not up-dated information about when and where they are occurring. It was suggested that a link to NASA or Canadian satellite feeds, at least through open water season, might be one way of providing such information.

ECCC Binational Science Plan (Todd Sellers)

ECC has been budgeted \$5.5 million over four years to develop a binational science plan for Lake of the Woods. It is anticipated that the ECCC scientists will be incorporating extensive work done by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and engaging scientists in the basin working on pertinent research. The International Multi-Agency Arrangement (IMA) Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) met with the ECCC and provided preliminary feedback on the ECCC plan and pointed out the need to avoid duplication of work. One recommendation from the TAC—that ECCC have a representative on the Lake of the Woods TDML Technical Review Committee, as Ontario already has—was accepted. The ECCC also meet with the IMA to explore ways for the ECCC plan to morph from a domestic to an international plan. All of these provide good steps recognizing engagement needs as well as improvement of projects underway.

Global Affairs Canada is working with the U.S. Department of State to articulate what the role of the IJC and the Watershed Board might or could be in a binational science plan. They hope to address some of the criticisms in the Watershed Board's letter responding to the initial August proposal. In particular, the role of ongoing assessment and accountability to the Water Quality Plan of Study objectives is under discussion.

The ECCC science program is to address three issues:

- 1) Enhance monitoring. ECCC started in September with their monitoring program, targeted at 15 existing stations. The IMA TAC would like ECCC to cover all of the Tier 1 monitoring sites, as outlined in the Water Quality Plan of Study, that are not completely covered now by the ECCC plan. They have also suggested some Tier 2 monitoring sites should be added to look at sub-basin loading outputs in order to consider where reductions can be made.
- 2) Nutrients and algae. There will be a modeling effort refinement to run scenarios to look at targets and allocations in Lake of the Woods. This needs to incorporate all information available and to complement what is being done in Minnesota. The ECCC plan will address some information gaps, especially the risk of toxic blooms and oxygen depletion in the north end of the lake to complement information on the U.S. side. ECCC will also use remote sensing to do risk assessment of potential health risks.
- 3) Aquatic invasive species (AIS). The ECCC plan is not addressing the AIS component of the Water Quality Plan of Study. However, ECCC monitoring will include water chemistry that may help others determine the sensitivity of Lake of the Woods to zebra mussels and other AIS and to develop a pre-impact baseline of chemistry and algal data.

The ECCC plan will be focused on nutrient and algae studies on the Canadian side of Lake of the Woods and nutrient monitoring within the Canadian side of Rainy River. However, the IMA TAC has questioned whether the ECCC can set meaningful allocations if they don't monitor sub-basin tributary input loads to Rainy River and are not planning to monitor upstream past Fort Frances/International Falls.

In response to a question about the status of the original Water Quality Plan of Study (WQPOS), the response was "don't know—but it's not dead; still pressing to move ahead." What about pieces missed from the WQPOS? Right now, there is no plan beyond the aspiration for partners to move other portions of the WQPOS forward. The ECCC science plan will provide answers to some of the research needed. There are some ongoing efforts on the Canadian side to keep the WQPOS alive. More information may be available in January before the Watershed Board meeting on January 25.

Round Table

- The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is working with the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency to update/modernize the Koochiching and Lake of the Woods Counties flood plain map. It will set 100-year flood areas based upon the 1950 flood. The updating will include digitization of the flood plain maps including a LIDAR overlay.
- The City of Ely is reporting a possible major water bill increase for customers, estimated at \$40-\$100, to meet the proposed standard for sulfate in wild rice waters. The City Council has passed a resolution against the proposed standard.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held as part of the Watershed Forum in March; it will be a face-to-face meeting with teleconferencing. Possible topics are:

- Management of development in unorganized territories in Ontario
- Update on the binational science plan