

**Public Advisory Group (PAG)
Meeting notes**

Date: May 10, 2019 from 10:00 am to 3:30 pm.

Location: Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge classroom, 29 Tabor Rd, Swanton, VT 05488

Attendees:

Public Advisory Group members: Madeleine Papineau, Kris Stepenuck, Eric Howe, Philip Von Bargen, Lori Fisher, Marla Emery, Teresa Gagnon, Ann Ruzow Holland, Renée Rouleau and Jérémie Letellier

Guests: Ken Sturm (Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge), Joane Saulnier and Michelle Chabot

Study Personnel: Keith Robinson (Study Co-Lead), Rob Flynn (Study Co-Manager), Pete LaFlamme (Study Board member), André Champoux (Canadian Outreach Coordinator), John Brodt (U.S. Outreach Team), Bill Richmond (U.S. Outreach Team), Curt Gervich (Social, Political, Economic Analysis Group - SPE), Shannon Thayer (SPE), Emma Spett (SPE) and Ellen Kujawa (Secretariat)

International Joint Commission Staff: Pierre-Yves Caux

At 10 am there was an optional presentation by Ken Sturm, The Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge: Understanding impacts of flooding on the refuge and its wildlife. The PAG meeting started at 11:30 am.

1. Welcome, introductions, minutes and action items from the last meeting (Public Advisory Group Co-Chairs - Files: 1, 2)

PAG Co-Chairs welcomed participants and began the meeting with a round of introductions. The minutes of the last Public Advisory Group meeting were approved. An overview of action items from the last meeting, as well as an update on their progress and completion were also provided. The one notable incomplete action item is a calendar of study activities. It has been difficult to get study participants to add dates of meetings to the SharePoint site; it is hoped this will improve. A draft a calendar with the information from Rob Flynn will be produced and shared with the PAG.

Next, the memo with the summary and findings of the 2018 public meetings sent to the Study Board last winter by the Special Planning Committee was discussed.

- Certain PAG members did not agree with two items in the summary about feedback from United States meetings. For example there was concern with: “Lake flooding was less interesting than tributary flooding.” This seems to be a sweeping, and possibly incorrect generalization.
- In the future, feedback should be attributed to study member that produced it.
- PAG members requested that the original secretariat minutes and comment cards from the 2018 meetings be provided to Public Advisory Group members. PAG members will have several weeks to submit feedback on the summary of the public meetings. The results of this feedback will be presented by PAG Co-Chairs to the Study Board during a call in July.

- It was noted that while next year's public meetings will need to be formal; this year there is more flexibility in format.

Action Item

- **Public Advisory Group members will be provided with secretariat minutes and comment cards from the fall 2018 public meetings, and will submit feedback to PAG Co-Chairs by June 28th. They will summarize this feedback and present it to the Study Board in their July call.**

2. Meet new US Outreach coordinators and learn about their outreach plan (Bill Richmond and John Brodt, Behan Communications; File 3)

The U.S. Outreach Coordination team's initial communications plan was presented. They received the following comments:

- stamped comment cards with Behan Communications return address would be useful to hand out at outreach events.
- the Essex County Board of Supervisors and Clinton County Legislature are essential audiences and should be presented to regarding this study. This is particularly important because of the NY Governor's response to flooding on Lake Ontario. Including the press office at the Governor's office will also be a useful thing to preempt any difficult relationship.
- seasonal residents may be gone by the time much of this outreach takes place.
- the selection of Plattsburgh and Ticonderoga may not be ideal locations; Westport or nearby might be a better location than Ticonderoga. Port Henry was also suggested. The important thing to consider is the major lakeshore property owners of a town; most of the Ticonderoga shoreline is publicly owned.
- consider having a table at Old Time Folkcraft Fair in Willsboro, and the two county fairs. However at the Lake Champlain Maritime Festival, traffic to informational tables tends to be low, so this event may not be worth their time.
- US Public Advisory Group members have been asked to help facilitate outreach activities; they will be available to help staff outreach events.
- consider contacting Thom Hallock at the Mountain Lake Public Television network for media outreach and Joe LoTempio at the Plattsburgh Press Republican.
- consider contacting Across the Fence in Vermont, and using Front Porch Forum when possible (though this may not be as useful in New York, where usage is less prevalent). The example of an interview the US PAG Co-Chair gave on Across the Fence recently was mentioned, though there may be further opportunities for engagement. Paying for advertisement on Front Porch Forum may be a possibility as well. Essex has a similar platform to Front Porch Forum, and Willsboro has a municipal website that can be used for public communication.
- The SPE Co-lead recommended farmers' markets as a great opportunity, particularly as many of them invite particular groups to table at certain days. He agreed with that the idea about presenting to the Essex County Board of Supervisors and Clinton County Legislature is a great one. He suggested timing these presentations to slightly before Social, Political,

Economic (SPE) focus group meetings, so that participants can receive initial information from these outreach presentations and then attend SPE meetings for data collection. Regarding gathering addresses for mailings, SPE has begun this effort for their survey that will be launched in the coming weeks; the major challenge here is the restriction of confidentiality on names and addresses. This may not be an issue if just using addresses. Coordinating the timing of mailings from SPE and outreach will be essential. A PAG member recommended adding names if possible; mailings that are unstamped or do not include a name are much less likely to be read.

Action Item:

- **Public Advisory Group members should provide any additional feedback on the initial communications plan to John Brodt and Bill Richmond by May 15th.** (Note: Bill will send out a Word version so people can add comments to the document).

3. Planning and update on communications products – (André Champoux: files: 4, 5, 6, 7)
The update was given on Lake Champlain – Richelieu River (LCRR) communications work. It was noted that the 2019 public meeting dates in the document were incorrect and should be adjusted.

Factsheets (spring flooding and US dams and reservoirs)

- There was a request that if any Public Advisory Group members have photos of flooding, that they share them with PAG Co-Chairs. One person shared a series of printed photos from the 2011 flood and they will be posted on the LCRR Sharepoint.
- Translation of the factsheets will happen after the English version is finalized. A PAG member asked whether these factsheets have been tested by individuals who have less familiarity with flooding issues. A PAG member agreed to provide feedback with this perspective.
- **Spring Flood factsheet:** the US Study Co-Chair requested that this factsheet be made a two-page factsheet, with a screenshot of the Rouses Point flood forecasting website and information for how to get there.
- The URLs in the spring flooding product should be very visible and this type of information should be communicated quickly. It was noted that the URLs are at least posted on the LCRR website.
- **US Dams and reservoirs:** there was a request that an estimate of cubic feet of water affected by dams in the watershed be added. Another participant stated that while this is possible, it will not be a helpful piece of information without context on timing, and may be misleading to the public but if there's a way to communicate this technical information in laymen's terms, it would be useful to quelling rumors that water releases from damming waterways in the U.S. is the cause of flooding in Quebec.

Web posting: a question was asked where the static maps on the website are sourced. The maps already on the website are those that we were developed from the 2015 study and do not include wind as a variable. Updates with information on the New York side of the lake and these maps should be available soon (USGS site and later LCRR site).

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs): a PAG member indicated that they were not really in a language the public would use (both the questions and answers). He was asked to share his suggestions.

Action Item

- **Public Advisory Group members will provide comments on any of the four outreach documents to Randi Morry by May 15th.**

4. Check-in with all (PAG members)

Public Advisory Group members provided roundtable updates on several questions: how is PAG work going for you? Are there things you would like to change about how the PAG is working/working for you? Thoughts on having photos on the International Joint Commission (IJC) website? For those with expiring terms, are they open to continuing to serve? Here are the answers:

- The study and the Public Advisory Group's activities are progressing in a positive way. Communication can be a part of the issue of preparing for flooding. Everything is going well, the videos have been useful. It is important to keep people informed. Not many people use the website, so it would be good to find other ways on social media.
- I am particularly encouraged and happy about the work with indigenous peoples on both sides of the border and delighted to have been a part of that, and look forward to being a part of this work going forward. There was appreciation for the open and collaborative exchange with the Technical Working Groups (TWG), particularly recent communications with SPE; the SPE Co-lead and the US PAG Co-Chair have been doing a great job facilitating work on the US side.
- It was noted that McGill University has flood experts and there was a question whether study personnel had contacted them to find out what they can bring to the table. Once again there was appreciation for the work on the social media and videos. Study personnel need to remember that there are residents in the study area who also are not as computer-literate.
- This work is very important, and is becoming important for flood-prevention conversations. Study personnel needs to find ways to help people stay in their homes and weather future floods, such as elevating their houses.
- There was appreciation for the collaboration that is happening, and the hard work happening across the study. The scheduling of meetings is difficult, so it would be helpful to allow proxies to attend and participate on behalf of the designated members. That can be done and to do so send a name and CV for an alternate to a PAG Co-Chair.
- Although on the Public Advisory Group for 8 months, there was a feeling of being very isolated from the rest of the work happening in the project and of being very much out of the loop because there is no access to a lot of what is happening in the project, and consequently there is quite a bit of disconnect between the people doing the work in the Technical Working Groups (TWG) and the Public Advisory Group which is supposed to be the public-facing portion of the project. The US Study Co-Chair responded that this is a

systemic problem that has occurred throughout the life of this study and the study needs to work on this.

- Another member stated that it can be overwhelming to try to follow all of the study's bits and pieces, especially for the Public Advisory Group members who are not as engaged as the TWG members. He strongly recommended that Public Advisory Group members participate in the technical workshops and connect with TWG members directly. This has helped him assimilate information on the study over time.
- The study should lean on the Public Advisory Group more, especially as the study is finally getting to the point where personnel can respond to questions, such as the recent email exchange about dams in the US and their ability to withhold water.
- It was recommended that study organizers schedule meetings of the Public Advisory Group, TWGs, and Study Board out through the rest of the study, as last-minute meeting scheduling is difficult.
- Study personnel should be encouraged to be careful of the "voice" in which the outreach materials are developed in; they should be developed with a voice that is accessible to the public audience.
- It was noted that it has been difficult to receive study information in a consistent manner. Public Advisory Group members are busy and all are volunteers, so it is difficult to keep up with the flow and email threads.
- It is not always clear how the Public Advisory Group's input and public input and documents gets translated relayed to the Study Board. For example, the study held a public meeting on a Friday night in November despite our advice. This is an example of a lack of communication across the different elements of this project. In the public meetings, the public should be the majority, not the minority.
- Study personnel should ensure that we not editorialize feedback from the public. Responses from the public should be in 1st person narrative, not summarized; it was disconcerting to see how some of the feedback from the public was extrapolated and interpreted in the summary of the public meetings last fall. There are people in the SPE Group who are specialists in this type of analysis; their expertise should be used if any summaries need to be developed, as it's critical that public feedback is interpreted and conveyed correctly.
- PAG Co-Chairs indicated they receive little feedback from the Public Advisory Group when asked for feedback; for example only a few members provided written feedback on the 2018 public meetings. The US PAG Co-Chair suggested scheduling regular phone meetings to help Public Advisory Group members focus on this work and to be able to provide the Public Advisory Group members with regular updates about Study activities.

5. Updates from Social, Political, Economic Analysis Group (SPE) – Risk perception survey update – Curt Gervich, Emma Spett, Shannon Thayer

The update on progress was presented. First, Shannon presented her work on investigating hazard mitigation plans in the U.S. portion of the basin and then Emma discussed SPE's upcoming risk perception survey.

- There was a question on whether race and ethnicity were excluded as variables on purpose. The reply was that in the literature, these factors were not significant. It was suggested that there could be an opportunity to identify indigenous responses however another member cautioned against collecting these sensitive data in this way.
- A member asked whether he (or other Public Advisory Group members) should answer the survey if he receives it. The answer was yes, as residents of the watershed, study personnel should respond to the survey.
- It was noted that the question about year born may present some strange results (analysis of these data can be challenging). It was suggested to add a question on seasonality, which is a critical issue.
- The US study Co-Chair asked whether there will be any questions to Quebec residents on new floodplain planning standards. There will be a meeting with Isabel Thomas in the coming weeks to adjust the Quebec survey; this will likely be a topic of discussion.
- It is good that the location of respondents will be collected but a member wondered whether opinions of tributary flooding can be separated out.
- There was a question on how the survey will be provided. It will be sent by mail, with a link to an online survey. It was suggested that a phone number be included as well to allow for responses from people who do not use computers.
- There was a question on when the results of the survey will be available. The survey will be circulated in June, so data analysis will likely take place in late summer and early fall. Some results may be available for the fall 2019 public meetings.
- Another round of focus groups will be held in the next six weeks.

6. Clarifying roles of outreach coordinators, Social, Political, Economic Analysis Group (SPE), and Public Advisory Group – led by Public Advisory Group Co-Chairs with participation by all listed parties

Social, Political, Economic Analysis Group (SPE)

- The US Co-lead noted that there are strengths in collaborating between Outreach, Public Advisory Group, and SPE, but that boundaries will be necessary to preserve data objectivity. He suggested that timing of outreach and SPE activities be coordinated: outreach efforts to the public can be used to drum up interest in SPE research activities.
- The US Study manager wondered whether it might be possible to get opinions on the acceptability of structural flood mitigation measures. Curt clarified that data will be collected on all four themes; once the Flood Management and Mitigation Measures (FMMM) Technical Working Group provides information on likely structural measures, SPE can create likely outcomes from these measures that can be presented in the survey. The IJC liaison asked whether it would be possible to get at objectives of mitigation measures, even if the mitigation measures themselves are not available. The Co-lead clarified that this is somewhat possible by using the acceptability criteria discussed at the last Study Board meeting.
- The US study Co-Chair wondered about political acceptability. Members replied that the most important question for any politician deciding on an opinion is public acceptability;

money is less of an object when public approval is clear. It was added that the cost is important to small towns along the Richelieu River: if they are forced to pay for flood mitigation, their acceptable solutions will need to be on a smaller scale. If rebuilding is not paid for after a flood, towns may be ruined by a lack of tax income.

- A member asked whether cost-benefit analyses typically look at the distributional aspects of costs and benefits. The Co-lead noted that this is a question for SPE's economist. According to the US study Co-Chair, the study is looking at this topic.

Public Advisory Group

- To return to the topic at hand: the relationship between the Public Advisory Group, SPE, and outreach the US PAG Co-Chair explained that her understanding of the Public Advisory Group is that of a sounding board, of individuals who represent their communities (not lobbyists).
- The SPE Co-lead noted that the qualitative information that can come before the Public Advisory Group and outreach coordinator or during public meetings can inform SPE's quantitative work: e.g., a story from an individual can be presented to focus groups, who can be asked whether they have experienced similar issues.
- The US study Co-Chair stated that the Study Board needs to listen to the Public Advisory Group's opinions and that PAG members should contact him directly if necessary. He noted that Technical Working Groups are meeting with the public individually, and the PAG should likely be aware of these activities.
- The US PAG Co-Chair suggested that the Public Advisory Group meet more often; a PAG member suggested that at each meeting, a Technical Working Group present to the Public Advisory Group on their recent activities.

Public meetings and communication between the groups

- Pierre-Yves Caux was asked whether past International Joint Commission (IJC) studies have had mechanisms for sharing information and communication between similar groups like SPE, Public Advisory Group, and the outreach coordinator. He noted that this study is the first with an SPE group, as the IJC is trying to include more social, political, and economic acceptability. He suggested that the group is doing the right thing by discussing collaboration and boundaries and that there is flexibility in developing this kind of system.
- The Canadian PAG Co-Chair asked whether SPE will be a consultant for the format of the upcoming public meetings (including helping with study bias in the meeting summary). The SPE Co-lead noted that SPE was involved in the format of the development of public meetings and that they will plan to be in the future.
 - One suggestion was to develop a transcription of public meetings instead of meeting summaries. The role of the secretariat is to record objective minutes of meetings; perhaps the study should use these records rather than developing summaries that contain biased statements.
 - It was suggested that inclusion of QR codes may allow public meeting participants to submit feedback easily online.

- The US study Co-Chair thinks that the public meetings are less to collect data and more to inform the public of the study's activities and solicit immediate feedback.
- A PAG member suggested that the Public Advisory Group revisit the topic of how to capture and synthesize information from public meetings.
- The Canadian Outreach coordinator suggested that the challenge in this situation is not actually the development of biased meeting summaries, but rather challenges in communication between similar groups. The SPE Co-lead agreed and suggested that the upcoming calls between SPE and outreach will be helpful; he also suggested that at some point, the outreach coordinators' roles will be to convince people of the study's validity and value.

Action Items:

- **Public Advisory Group will discuss how best to capture and synthesize information from public meetings and other activities** (possibly at their remote meeting next month).
- **Public Advisory Group will discuss meeting more frequently than twice per year.**

7. Public meetings – led by Public Advisory Group Co-Chairs

Dates:

The new dates for the public meetings are November 19-21, 2019. A PAG member wondered about the point of the November public meetings if mitigation measures will not be available. The US PAG Co-Chair explained that the causes and impacts report and several mitigation measures will be available by November, and this is why public meetings were postponed from August.

Which Performance Indicators (PIs) should we highlight at the public meetings (file 08)

The potential Performance Indicators: Spiny softshell turtle, residential damage, population vulnerability, agriculture, wild rice, water intake, muskrat, and several others have been deemed important but these seven will be ready for the November meetings. More indicators are being developed but will only be ready after November. It was noted that the intention of these performance indicators is simply to weigh the outcome of any mitigation measures against several metrics.

- A PAG member cautioned the Public Advisory Group about presenting several ecological indicators and few human impacts.
- A member asked whether the study will have any impact on current policy. The value of this study is to protect people; the laws to protect the environment can be damaging to human life. The Canadian PAG Co-Chair added that a workshop on this theme, flood plain management (Theme 4), will be held in the fall and that this would be a helpful meeting for Public Advisory Group members to attend.
- The Public Advisory Group was reminded that there is no one "public"; there are many "publics". A useful exercise may be to look at this list of performance indicators and determine which are interesting to which publics. A matrix might be helpful here. Identifying the stakeholder groups who will be interested in each indicator may allow for a

depth of personalization for public meetings. Another member added that each topic on this list has a host of stakeholders.

- The US PAG Co-Chair reminded the group that not only humans are impacted by flooding. Perhaps a useful exercise would be to highly three indicators that are good examples of a broad suite of metrics to determine the usefulness of indicators.
- The US study manager explained to the group that presenting the full suite of 30+ indicators is probably not a possibility; having the public weigh in is not an option.
- There was a suggestion to develop fact sheets for PIs, beyond the basic “[what is a performance indicator](#)” topic. It was then suggested that the translation process of determining the implications of PIs and their potential value to stakeholder groups is the next step in the process. Drawing a line from each indicator to each audience essential to convincing the public of the value of this exercise.
- The US Study Co-Chair suggested the development of a factsheet of how information flows between study groups; a member agreed that this would be useful for the Public Advisory Group to see. Eventually, the public will need to see this too.
- The US PAG Co-Chair recommended that the Public Advisory Group complete an online survey to select the top three performance indicators to use to demonstrate how the Study Board will make decisions once recommendations from Study members are made. (see results in the Appendix).

Action Item

- **The US PAG Co-Chair will develop an online survey of the performance indicators presented today; the Public Advisory Group will vote on their top three by May 22 2019.**

8. Mini practice decision (to allow Public Advisory Group members to understand process Study Board will follow) – Keith Robinson (File: 09)

The US study Co-Chair presented an abridged version of the practice decision making exercise the Study Board completed in April. A PAG member wondered whether key interests are defined with enough accuracy in the initial planning objectives goal (#4); is ecology included in the “key interests” term? Another PAG member asks whether it would be possible to reduce “flooding” rather than “flood damage.” The Study Board discussed this and “flood damage” is the preferred term. There was also a question about the “sustainable” criterion. Does this include economic and community sustainability? The answer is that it does.

Action Item

- **Regarding the goals of the study presented in the practice decision making tool, the US study Co-Chair will discuss the “key interests” term with the Study Board to ensure that it is properly defined.**

Other items:

- A PAG member cautioned the Public Advisory Group on use of acronyms; they can make discussions less accessible.

- The US PAG Co-Chair noted that the Collaborative Decision Support Tool is a phrase that could be confusing to those not involved in the Study day-to-day, and that the Public Advisory Group may wish to discuss this. If Public Advisory Group members have suggestions of how this might be described to stakeholders, they should share them with the PAG Co-Chairs.

ALL ACTION ITEMS

- **Public Advisory Group members will be provided with secretariat minutes and comment cards from the fall 2018 public meetings, and will submit feedback to PAG Co-Chairs by June 28th. They will summarize this feedback and present it to the Study Board in their July call.**
- **Public Advisory Group members will provide any additional feedback on the initial U.S. communications plan to John Brodt and Bill Richmond by May 15th.**
- **Public Advisory Group members will provide comments on any of the four outreach documents to Randi Morry by May 15th.**
- **Public Advisory Group will discuss how best to capture and synthesize information from public meetings and other activities (at their remote meeting next month)**
- **Public Advisory Group will discuss meeting more frequently than twice per year.**
- **The US PAG Co-Chair will develop an online survey of the performance indicators presented today; the Public Advisory Group will vote on their top three by May 22.**
- **Regarding the goals of the study presented in the practice decision making tool, the US Study Co-chair will discuss the “key interests” term with the Study Board to ensure that it is properly defined.**

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 pm.

Approved by PAG Co-Chairs on June 10 2019

Approved by PAG members on October 9 2019

Appendix – Results of the Online Survey on Performance Indicators

In summary, 7 of the 14 Public Advisory Group (PAG) members replied. The top responses for suggested Performance Indicators (PI) to share with the public in November were Residential damage and Population vulnerability. The second most commonly suggested PIs to use a demonstration PIs for the public were Agricultural yield loss and Water intake. There were a few more detailed comments. The results of the survey were sent to the Study Co-chairs.

Number	Field	Choice count	
1	Residential damage (\$) - Dommages résidentiels	33.33%	4
2	Population vulnerabilty (this indicator includes social sensitivity, territorial sensitivity and adaptative capacity, which encompass a vast array of socio-economic indicators) - Vulnérabilité de la population (includ la sensibilité sociale, la sensibilité territoriale et la capacité de s'adapter, qui comprend une vaste gamme d'indicateurs socio-économiques)	33.33%	4
3	Agriculture (yield loss \$) - Perte de rendement (Agriculture)	16.67%	2
4	Wild rice - Riz sauvage	0.00%	0
5	Muskrat - Rat musqué	0.00%	0
6	Spiny softshell turtle - Tortue-molle à épines	0.00%	0
7	Water intake - Prise d'eau	16.67%	2

Comments:

My list is not a ranked prioritization: 1. Population vulnerability 2. Agriculture 3. Wild rice. My selection tries to represent both human and environmental indicators. Agriculture straddles the two in some ways. The wild rice choice arises for me due to comments I listened to from the Missisquoi Refuge Manager as to how important wild rice is to migrating waterfowl and the plant's sensitivity to wet/dry conditions which might also be shared by other environmental plant/animal species.

I did not select muskrat, spiny softshell turtle, or wild rice because I believe that, while these may be important indicators for certain demographics or focus groups, the majority of the stakeholders will be more interested in the monetary and human population outcomes of the flood study. I recognize that the muskrat population may be in decline or may be affected by flood management decisions. However, I cannot stand in front of a crowd of people, some of whom were displaced from their homes for 2+ months, or have family members who lost their lives, and explain to them that we are looking at impacts to muskrats as an indicator of success of this \$13 million study. That would be very irresponsible of us.