



## ST. LAWRENCE RIVER RESTORATION COUNCIL MEETING

Wednesday, September 30, 2020

10:00am to 12:00pm

### MINUTES

#### **Attendance:**

Abraham Francis (MCA); Aimee Benedict (SRMT); Andrew Morley (MECP); Brendan Jacobs (RRCA); Candice McKay (MECP); Dale Phippen (Citizen); Dorothy Hamilton (SDG-OWA); Elaine Kennedy (Citizen); Emma Tahirali (MECP); Idalia Milan (EOHU); Jake La Rose (MNRF); Jeff Ridal (RI); John Towndrow (Transition Cornwall +); Kristin Geater (ECCC); Marco Vincelli (Citizen); Mark Kaddie (Citizen); Mike Fawthrop (City of Cornwall); Nick Cox (Citizen); Patricia O'Hara (GRN); Richard Pilon (RRCA); Sara Varty (ECCC); Stephanie Jaworski (South Glengarry); Will Robertson (Citizen)

#### **Regrets:**

Chris Moran (Citizen); Leigh McGaughey (RI)

#### **1. Call to Order and Introductions**

#### **2. Approval of the Agenda**

**Motion:** Be it resolved that the Agenda of the September 30, 2020 meeting be approved as amended.

**Moved:** Dorothy Hamilton

**Seconded by:** Richard Pilon

**Result:** Carried

#### **3. Approval of the Minutes from the meeting on July 16, 2020**

**Motion:** Be it resolved that the Minutes from the meeting on July 16, 2020 be approved as amended.

**Moved:** Jeff Ridal

**Seconded by:** Marco Vincelli

**Result:** Carried

**Action:** **Kristin Geater** to revise and distribute corrected minutes.

#### **4. Business Arising**

Reminder: the Water Quality Work Group was going to contact Aventis regarding recent testing for PCB releases.

**5. Selection of the new St. Lawrence River Restoration Council Chair**

Nominations: Proxy nomination from Chris Moran nominating Marco Vincelli to be the Chair. Dale Phippen seconded the nomination. No other nominations were received.

Marco Vincelli was elected to be the new Chair of the St. Lawrence River Restoration Council.

**6. 2020-2021 Project Funding – Kristin Geater, Environment and Climate Change Canada**

A document outlining the current funding for St. Lawrence AOC projects funded by ECCC and MECP was circulated prior to the meeting.

MECP projects identified as funded are multi-year projects originally approved during the 2019-2020 funding cycle. Funding for new projects will not be known for another few weeks.

**7. Water Quality Working Group Update – Brendan Jacobs, Raisin Region Conservation Authority**

The last Water Quality Working Group meeting was held on September 29, 2020. The following is a summary of the discussion:

Snapping turtle egg assessment: RRCA will request information from Aevitas regarding the PCB monitoring program and results, because one turtle egg sampled from Gray's watershed contained high levels of PCBs. A follow up meeting will be held to explore additional sampling on Akwesasne land.

Restrictions on Fish and Wildlife Consumption: The MCA Environment Program has expressed interest in leading the working group.

Fish Tumors or other Deformities: There is still a significant amount of public misunderstanding about what fish tumours are – not the external ones that people see, or parasites or injuries. This is a communication issue that needs to be addressed.

Eutrophication or Undesirable Algae: An update on the status of the development of the Eutrophication Strategy was provided to the WQWG.

Beach Closings: A presentation to the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne on the status of this BUI is pending.

Fish and Wildlife Habitat and Populations: The RRCA project to evaluate the form and function of the three AOC coastally significant wetlands, develop restoration strategies for each of those wetlands, and develop a management framework that can be applied to all coastal wetlands in the AOC, is on-track. A project selection tool is being developed to determine which projects will be the most beneficial in which areas. A geoportal will be established to house AOC-related environmental data.

Degradation of Phytoplankton and Zooplankton: Discussions are in progress to determine a consistent approach to assessing this BUI.

Grasse River: A mechanism is now in place to determine if PCBs are entering the drinking water system.

Working Group Structure: The Water Quality Working Group is currently responsible for all of the remaining BUIs. It is recommended that in order to move forward in a more efficient manner, smaller, more focused work groups will be developed that will assist with writing some of the chapters of the BUI assessment reports, reviewing documents, and reporting back on progress to the SLRRC. It is proposed that the following four work groups be established:

- 1) Fish and Wildlife Consumption: BUI #1
- 2) Water Quality Work Group: BUI #8, #10, #13
- 3) Fish and Wildlife Work Group: BUI #3, #14
- 4) Fish Tumours and other Deformities: BUI #4

A list of participants for each working group is being drafted.

Question: Who undertakes the beach *E-coli* assessment on Akwesasne beaches? The beach assessment is undertaken by the MCA Department of Health.

## **8. BUI Updates**

- **BUI #1 Restrictions on Fish Consumption** - *Abraham Francis, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne*

MCA is partnering with the International Joint Commission to explore approaches to providing guidance on balancing the risks and benefits of fish consumption advice. They are developing a holistic guideline for the whole Akwesasne community. MCA met with MECP to discuss details around sampling, analysis, archiving, and next steps.

MCA has also partnered with ECCC and the River Institute to identify fish species of interest to the Mohawks of Akwesasne community, assist with the collection of fish, and participate in the assessment of the Restrictions on Fish Consumption BUI. Fish collection has been undertaken over the past two weeks and will continue through October. This will also help to fill a data gap because, in the past, the MECP fish sampling program did not collect fish on the south side of Cornwall Island due to logistical problems.

- **BUI #4 - Fish Tumours or Other Deformities** - *Sara Varty, Environment and Climate Change Canada*

ECCC will work with the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe to discuss sharing data and taking a collaborative approach to the development of a BUI redesignation report.

- **BUI #8 - Eutrophication or Undesirable Algae** - *Brendan Jacobs, Raisin Region Conservation Authority*

A Eutrophication Strategy is being developed by RRCA for the 12 AOC watersheds, as well as Hoople Creek and the Rideau River. The strategy will be developed so that it can be used for each watershed, taking into consideration the local issues and goals. It will include a description of the state of the AOC, local challenges/issues, the state of the individual sub-watersheds in a report-card format, recommendations for a long-term monitoring plan, a project selection tool, as well as AOC and watershed-specific objectives and strategies. A project selection tool that will help to determine which projects will be the most beneficial in which areas is now being developed.

The strategy will align with MCA standards, so that it can be applied to the AOC as a whole. Watershed report cards will assign grades to three parameters: forest cover, wetland cover, and surface water quality. The goal is to update the strategy every five years.

Discussion:

- it is important to keep the data layers up-to-date
- a concern is that the DRAPE imagery (which is used) is only updated every 5 years
- addressing loss of forest cover is under municipal jurisdiction, but this strategy can be used to make recommendations for action to the municipalities
- most of the changes to the landscape are human-driven, not climate driven. E.g., clearing and draining of wetlands, installation of tile drainage
- one project being developed is the implementation of a communication strategy for the agricultural community, to bridge the gap between knowledge and available science
- next year, a pilot project will take place to bring experts to meet with farmers to review the state of the health of the farm and recommend agricultural best management practices

- **BUI #10 - Beach Closings** - *Abraham Francis, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne*

A BUI assessment report recommending a 'not impaired' status was developed with data from the Eastern Ontario Health Unit and the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne Department of Health. The BUI assessment report is to be presented to the MCA Council for approval to proceed with community engagement on redesignating the BUI. The general public engagement will be undertaken concurrently with MCA community engagement.

Once the engagement process has concluded, a summary of the engagement activities and comments will be included as an appendix to the BUI assessment report, and the Restoration Council will send the report to MECP and ECCC for redesignation approval.

**Action:** Kristin Geater to present the BUI redesignation process at the next SLRRC meeting.

- **BUI #13 - Degradation of Phytoplankton and Zooplankton Populations** - *Sara Varty, Environment and Climate Change Canada*

This BUI is identified as 'Requires Further Assessment' and, as such, does not require delisting criteria to be developed. As there is no data on zooplankton communities and limited data on phytoplankton communities in the St. Lawrence River AOC (Cornwall) region, ECCC has hired a consultant to develop an approach to assessing this BUI.

**9. Cornwall Sediment Strategy** – *Emma Tahirali, Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks*

MECP is providing funding to the River Institute to develop a sediment depositional model as a component of the Cornwall Sediment Strategy (CSS) long-term monitoring program.

In 2020, a floating dock was proposed to be installed within one of the contaminated zones and the application went through the Administrative Controls process. It was approved by all agencies.

The CSS human health risk assessment will be presented to the RRCA Board in October, 2020.

**10. New Business**

- **Hiring a new St. Lawrence AOC RAP Coordinator** – *Jeff Ridal, River Institute*  
Natasha Pozega has left the St. Lawrence RAP and has taken a new position as the St. Clair River RAP Coordinator. Jeff Ridal is working with Abraham Francis to pool financial resources and hire a new coordinator who will work for both the RAP and the MCA.

- **Re-zoning adjacent to Cooper Marsh** – *Elaine Kennedy*  
There is a concern about a proposed change in boundary of Cooper Marsh on the east side to allow a campground to be developed. This specific piece of land has been historically maintained as a strip of mown grass.

The MNRF approved this stretch of land being re-designated from provincially significant wetland (PSW) to floodplain. The next step is for the municipality to consider re-zoning the land to open space. RRCA, the owner of Cooper Marsh, was aware of this request, and is waiting for an environmental impact statement.

Although the SLRRC wasn't notified directly, when MNRF changed the PSW designation and when the owners applied to the municipality for a zoning change, a notice was put into local newspapers and all adjacent property owners and relevant agencies were notified directly. When MNRF receives applications from landowners who want to have the wetland boundary adjusted, MNRF follows a standard process. If the boundary is changed, the mapping layer is updated and provided to local agencies such as RRCA and municipalities.

The SLRRC has done so much work to protect wetlands such as Cooper Marsh, and should be involved through the re-designation and re-zoning processes. Regulatory groups who are

already involved in these processes should insure that the SLRRC is at least informed of such projects.

Brendan Jacobs: When land gets to the point of being re-designated by MNRF, the land under question won't have any wetland characteristics at all, so we aren't really losing wetland habitat.

Brendan Jacobs: RRCA is undertaking a project to reassess the three coastal PSWs in the AOC. When the project is complete, the results will be presented to the SLRRC.

**ACTION: Elaine Kennedy** to follow up with MNRF – Kempsville District to find out the process for informing people of the changes to PSW boundaries, the consultation process, and how the SLRRC can become part of these consultations.

- **Gunn Creek – Elaine Kennedy**

The question arose about whether there is a new Provincially Significant Wetland at the mouth of Gunn Creek. The creek already flows into the Bainsville Bay Marsh, which is a Provincially Significant Wetland.

Jake LaRose: The Ontario Geohub is a publically-accessible on-line website which provides geospatial data.

Dorothy Hamilton: The Ontario Geohub does provide shape files to users, but the main problem is that although web mapping is available, a GIS program is needed to fully access the information which is typically out of date (e.g., the current woodland data is from 2014).

**ACTION: Elaine Kennedy** to follow-up about Gunn Creek.

- **Great Lakes Local Action Fund – Emma Tahirali, Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks**

MECP has a new funding program called the Great Lakes Local Action Fund, investing in local projects that lead to positive environmental outcomes while also providing social and economic benefits for communities.

The program provides funding up to \$50,000 for local small-scale community projects that have a positive environmental impact on the Great Lakes, as well as social or economic benefits for their communities.

The focus is to restore coastal and nearshore areas of great lakes and their tributaries.

A webinar will be held on Thursday October 8<sup>th</sup>; attendees will need to register by October 5<sup>th</sup>.

## **11. Next Meeting**

Proposed: Early December. A Doodle poll will be sent out.

Wednesdays work for most people.

**Action:** Kristin Geater to organize the date for the next meeting.

**12. Adjournment**

**Motion:** To adjourn.

**Moved:** Elaine Kennedy

**Seconded:** Sara Varty

**Result:** Carried