

The opportunity to review and improve a regulation plan occurs rarely. The International Joint Commission (IJC) has given the Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Study Board (the Study Board, the Study) the opportunity to do just that by reviewing the regulation of outflows from Lake Ontario through the St. Lawrence River. The Study Board and Public Interest Advisory Group (PIAG) are committed to making their recommendations to the International Joint Commission with full involvement from the impacted public. A bi-national team of experts has been assembled to evaluate the impacts of the current Order of Approval.

This Communication Plan is developed to serve as a guide for public involvement for the last two years of this five-year Study. The Public Interest Advisory Group has worked during the first three years of this Study to create public awareness of the Study. They have also worked to educate the public as to what regulation of outflows can and cannot do. During the last two years of the Study, the public will be engaged to provide feedback on the results of the Study and the Study recommendations. Because of the complexity of the Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River System, it is likely that some compromises will need to be made. The public needs to let the Study know what compromises they are willing to accept.

*Below is a chart illustrating the timing of the Study Board/PIAG efforts. Further detailed explanation is within this document*

PIAG/Study Board Activity	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Awareness	X	X	X	X	
Education	X	X	X	X	X
Engagement	X	X	X	X	X
Criteria Formulation			X	X	
Options and Evaluations				X	X
Recommendations					X

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## **Introduction**

The Public Interest Advisory Group is the channel for communication with the public. This communication plan is developed for the fourth and fifth years of the International Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Study. For the purposes of this plan, the Communication Team consists of the Public Interest Advisory Group and the Study Board combined. Outreach assistance is provided by the Support Staff.

## **Communication Goals**

The goals of the Communication Team for the last two years of the Study are to:

- Make sure that the inputs received from all interests are considered in the development of recommendations for alternative regulation plans for outflows from Lake Ontario through the St. Lawrence River;
- Do our best, considering the PIAG is a group of volunteers, to achieve a high level of public understanding of and trust in the recommendations of the Study Board and the analyses used to support them;
- Develop an awareness of the facts that the interests of different parts of the public are in conflict, and that compromise may be necessary to develop a recommendation that will receive widespread acceptance; and
- Develop a basis of communication that could then be adapted by the Control Board for use in operation decision-making.

### **Communication Objectives**

The objectives of this communication plan are to:

- Continue to create an awareness of the causes of water-level problems and promote the understanding that most proposed solutions could have consequences;
- Ensure that the Study process is open and inclusive;
- Provide opportunities for the public to participate;
- Explain the decision-making process of the Study;
- Fully engage the public to identify and consider the public's priorities and preferences;
- Identify and utilize local expertise and information;
- Broadly disseminate Study findings as they become available;
- Encourage the public to assist in disseminating Study findings; and
- Compile an ever-broader database in order to reach as many of the target audiences around the Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River basin as possible.

### **Key Messages**

- This Study was initiated because of concerns expressed by the public.
- The opportunity to review and possibly improve a regulation plan is a rare opportunity. The Study Team takes this task very seriously and is committed to performing to the best of its ability using the most recent technologies available.
- Public consultation is critical to the fair assessment and development of plan criteria.
- The Study will review the needs and preferences of all users or interest groups affected by water level and flow fluctuation in the Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River System.
- The system is very complex.
- Better science is behind the decisions to change or enhance the present criteria for the Order of Approval.

### **Strategic Communication Considerations**

- The Communication Team will demonstrate a proactive approach, using a low-profile strategy targeted at the regional level.
- Publicity activities will be coordinated with the IJC, the St. Lawrence River Board of Control, and elected officials.
- Linking with existing lines of communication throughout the system will be given priority.

- The challenge will be in clearly differentiating between other on-going studies, such as the Great Lakes Navigation Study, and IJC/St. Lawrence River Board of Control activities. It is also important to create an understanding of what a regulation plan can and cannot do.
- Those that live outside the Study area but have a seasonal interest in the area will also be included in this communication strategy.
- The interests of the general public need to be considered along with the interests of those who are directly impacted.

## **Background**

The International Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Study Board was formed in December 2000 by the International Joint Commission (IJC) to assess and evaluate the Commission's Order of Approval used to regulate outflows from Lake Ontario through the St. Lawrence River. The IJC also appointed a volunteer bi-national Public Interest Advisory Group (PIAG) to ensure effective communication between the public and the International Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Study team for the duration of the Study. At the conclusion of the 5-year Study, the Board will, based upon the results of the Study and consultations with the public, deliver recommendations to the IJC for possible amendments or additions to the present criteria and to the recommended regulation plan that will best satisfy these criteria.

The Study area is the Lake Ontario basin in the United States and Canada and the St. Lawrence River basin from Lake Ontario to Trois-Rivières, Québec.

Funding for the International Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Study is provided by both the United States and Canada.

## **History**

The International St. Lawrence River Board of Control has been using Plan 1958D since April of 1963 to satisfy the existing set of criteria established by the International Joint Commission to regulate outflows from Lake Ontario through the St. Lawrence River.

Studies that have included public participation and are complete are as follows:

- 1973 - International Great Lakes Levels Study
- 1980 - Update of studies to improve Lake Ontario Regulation
- 1993 - International Great Lakes Levels Reference Study
- 1997 - Updated Regulation Plan Studies

This Study considers the traditional uses of the system such as domestic and sanitary uses, navigation, and hydroelectric power; along with the emerging interests concerned with environmental factors particularly in terms of wetlands, coastal processes such as flooding and erosion, and recreational boating and tourism.

## **Public Awareness and Interest**

The PIAG worked extensively during the first two years to develop an awareness of the Study with various interest groups as well as to bring concerns of the public to the Study. The public is becoming increasingly aware of the constraints of operating the system. During years four and year five, as the interests of all are incorporated into the

development of the plan, it will become necessary to engage the public even further in examining the results of alternative management plans using the Shared Vision Model\* and in identifying areas of willingness to compromise. Proactive and intense engagement will be necessary to enable the Study to make final recommendations to the International Joint Commission that are acceptable to the public. The final recommendations might include methods of continuing public involvement with the International Joint Commission after the Study is over.

Stakeholder and interest group concern-level is medium to high. Those that have become aware of the Study consciously try to stay informed. The publics that have not been reached may not be aware that the International Joint Commission is currently regulating the outflows from Lake Ontario through the St. Lawrence River. The approach by some interests to this Study is guarded. There is a sentiment of concern that this Study will not offer a fair recommendation for new regulation criteria. Unless they do participate in the study and discussion of its findings, it will be harder to achieve the level of representation and fairness the Study Board hopes to obtain.

The scope of the Communication Plan includes those interests within the Study area that are affected by lake and river management.

\* The Shared Vision Model is a computer simulation of the Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence System built by experts, stakeholders and decision-makers to see how new regulation plans will affect their interests.

### **Communication Time Table**

Years 1 and 2

- Introduce the Study to the public to create awareness;
- Receive feedback from the public and provide that information to the Study for consideration.

Year 3

- Introduce the public to the Shared Vision Model and approach, hoping to create an acceptance of the methods used to analyze and evaluate alternative management plans and policies.
- Update the public on progress the Study has made.

Year 4

- Fully engage the public to receive their evaluation and discuss possible trade-offs so that adjustments can be made to the Shared Vision Model and resulting draft recommendations.

Year 5

- Public review of proposed recommendations, receipt of formal comments and responses, and recommendations to the International Joint Commission.

### **Target Audiences**

The *Public Participation Guidance to the Study Board* states that for purposes of the Study, the public will include everyone who is interested in the criteria review, or who could be affected by it, including but not limited to the following groups:

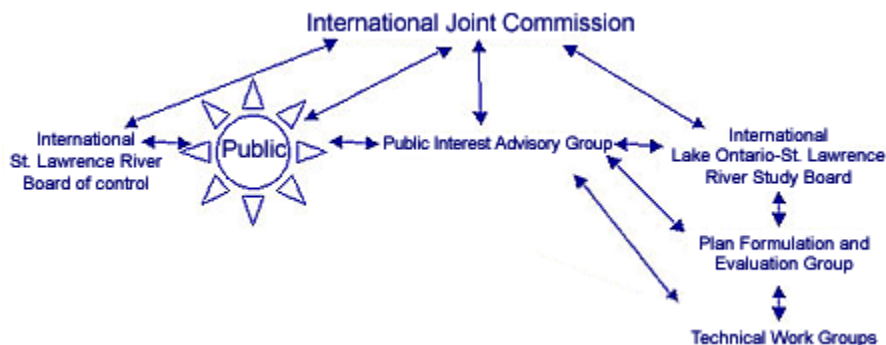
- Governments at all levels
- Native Americans/Aboriginal Peoples
- Commercial navigation
- Environment
- Riparians
- Recreational boating
- General public
- Hydroelectric power
- Domestic water supply and sanitation
- Upstream and downstream

This Communication Plan will give equal emphasis to each interest. Extensive work was done in the first three years of the Study specifically to reach each of the target audiences.

**Communication Matrix**

The Study is open to and desires input and involvement from all user groups and interests. The Public Interest Advisory Group is the link between the public and the Study. The PIAG and Study Board have developed a network of liaisons for each of the Technical Work Groups (TWGs). The Plan Formulation and Evaluation Group receives input from the Study Board, the PIAG and the TWGs. The Co-Chairs of the PIAG are also members of the Study Board. The PIAG Co-Chairs directly interface with the International Joint Commission liaisons for the Study. The International St. Lawrence River Board of Control has two representatives on the Study Board and they act as liaisons between the Study and Control Board.

There is an ad hoc Outreach Group that consists of the Study Co-Directors, the PIAG Co-Chairs, the Study General Managers, the IJC Study liaisons, and the Support Staff. The ad hoc Outreach Group exists for the sole purpose of coordination and is not included in this matrix. Any recommendations made by the Outreach Group are brought to the Study Board and the Public Interest Advisory Group for approval.



**Outreach Team Activities Year 4**

- The newsletter, *Ripple Effects*, will continue to be sent quarterly. The spring 2004 edition will include a mail-back piece to request the Year Three Reports.
- A media campaign will be developed to promote the release of the Year Three Reports and introduce the schedule for public participation.
- The Public Interest Advisory Group will hold public meetings in 15 locations (some will be held simultaneously). The meetings will:
  - Be held in late-August and mid-September 2004;
  - Be video and audio conferences.
- The presentation will explain the Shared Vision Model.
- A survey will be prepared that will be coordinated with the presentation so that the audience can fill out the survey as the presentation is given.
- Comments will be fed back to the study for adjustments.
- A live Web chat will be held after the meetings with TWG leads to field questions (early November).
- Using the communications tools on the following page, a concentrated effort will be made to promote these meetings for maximum participation.
- The Public Interest Advisory Group members will continue to meet with stakeholder groups throughout the basin, including responding to opportunities or requests from educational institutions.
- The Public Interest Advisory Group will hold four member meetings.
- In June 2004, a trail-run presentation of proposed alternate plans will be performed for PIAG members and public relations experts.

### **Outreach Team Activities Year 5**

- The Public Interest Advisory Group will again hold public meetings in 15 locations (some will be held simultaneously). The meetings will:
  - Mark the beginning of a formal comment period;
  - Be held in June-July; and
  - Be video and audio conferences.
- The presentation will include the proposed recommendations to the IJC and show how public comments received the year before have been incorporated.
- Comments will be received at the meetings, and in writing to the Study Secretariats or from the website.
- Comments will be fed back to the Study for adjustments and a responsiveness summary will be prepared.
- A concentrated effort will be made to promote these meetings for maximum participation.
- The Public Interest Advisory Group members will continue to meet with stakeholder groups throughout the basin, including responding to opportunities or requests from educational institutions.
- The Public Interest Advisory Group will hold four member meetings.
- The PIAG will hold briefings with elected officials.

### **Outreach Staff Activities**

The following Support Staff activities will assist the PIAG in reaching their objectives with all publics:

- Provide assistance to the Public Interest Advisory Group for their public meetings by:
  - Making location arrangements (reservations, set-up, stenographer);
  - Coordinating representative attendance from the Study Board and TWGs;

- Developing news releases, Web announcements, advertisements, and posters;
  - Assisting with onsite coordination (set-up, sign-in, handouts, media responses, meeting summaries);
  - Compiling and summarizing survey inputs promptly to be reported back to the PIAG in a timely fashion.
  - Entering participants in the database; and
  - Sending thank you letters to attendees with a meeting summary.
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- Provide assistance to the Public Interest Advisory Group in compilation of articles and preparation of their quarterly newsletter for distribution to the people and groups in the Study database.

### **Communication Tools**

The following communication tools will be used to reach the objectives listed above:

- Announcements on community bulletin boards
- Audio/video conferencing
- Brochure/Fact Sheet
- Display advertisements (to be placed in newspapers)
- Frequently Asked Questions Fact Sheet (development of FAQs is being undertaken by the Plan Formulation and Evaluation Group)
- Glossary
- Live Internet chat
- Mailings to the key contacts database
- Multi-media presentation
- Newsletter
- News releases
- Newsgroups
- Promotional materials (magnets, pens, t-shirts)
- Public meetings/Roundtable discussions
- Public Service Announcements
- Reports
- Surveys
- Tabletop display
- Website

### **Bibliography**

International Joint Commission Directive to the International Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Study Board, December 11, 2000.

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International Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Study Board Communications Staff Work Plan 2002.

International Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Study Public Interest Advisory Group Terms of Reference.

Plan of Study for Criteria Review in the Orders of Approval for Regulation of Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Levels and Flows, September 1999.

Public Interest Advisory Group Year Two Work Plan, March 2002.