

**International Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Study
Communication Plan, Final Year
Draft October 20, 2004**

ABSTRACT

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 with options 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 final year of this five-year Study. The Public Interest Advisory Group has worked during the first four 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. Feedback regarding draft performance indicators and draft criteria was sought from the public during the fourth year. During the final year of the Study, the public will be engaged to provide feedback on the Study's recommendations and options for regulation plans and criteria. 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

Introduction

The Public Interest Advisory Group is the channel for communication with the public. This communication plan is developed for the fifth year 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 final year of the Study are to:

- Make sure that the inputs received from all interests are considered in the development of recommendations with options 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 with options 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 affected.

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 with options for regulation plans and criteria 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, Quebec.

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 among 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. The public participation program for the fourth year attempted to develop an awareness throughout the system of the varying, sometimes competing interests' needs. During the final year, as the interests of all are incorporated into the development of alternative plans, 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 report recommendations with options for regulation plans and criteria to the International Joint Commission that are acceptable to the public. The final findings will 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 public that has 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. The public has expressed the need for the information gathered by the Study to be provided to the agencies that govern the shoreline. Unless the public does participate in the Study and the 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

- Engage the public regarding performance indicators and criteria. Create an understanding of the needs of all interests.

Year 5

- 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 findings of options and alternatives.
- Public review of findings, receipt of formal comments and responses and report of findings 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:

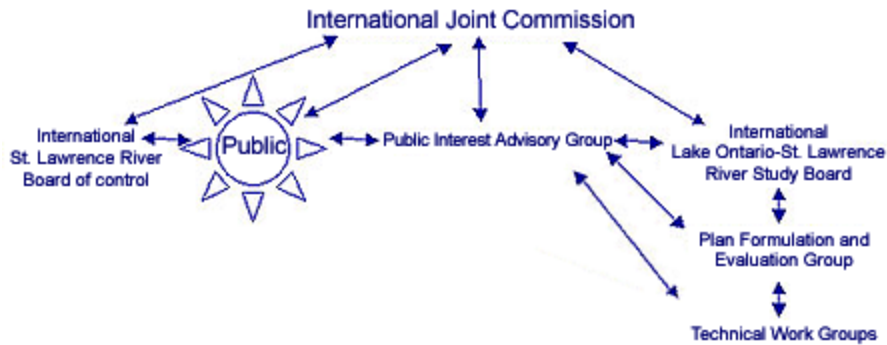
- Governments at all levels
- Native Americans/Aboriginal Peoples
- Commercial navigation
- Environment
- Riparians
- Recreational boating
- General public
- Hydroelectric power
- Domestic water supply and sanitation
- Upstream and downstream

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 with options made by the Outreach Group are brought to the Study Board and the Public Interest Advisory Group for approval.



Outreach Team Activities Year 5

- The newsletter, *Ripple Effects*, will be published three times: January 2005 – deadline November 15, May 2005 – deadline April 15, and November 2005 – deadline September 30. The April edition will include the summer meeting schedule and a mail-back piece to request the Final Reports. The November edition will include a mail-back piece to request addition to the International St. Lawrence River Board of Control mailing list or electronic list service.
- An earned and paid media campaign will be developed to promote the release of the final Reports (Possibly develop a radio ad and public service announcement for television.)
- Those functioning as public spokespersons for the Study or the PIAG will receive formal media and spokesperson training prior to the first public consultation meetings in June 2005.
- Communications staff will identify, pitch and, as appropriate, write for Media outlets interested in stories about the system and the Study. Opportunities to explore may include television shows, magazine articles and op-ed pieces under the name of PIAG or Study Board Leads.
- Alternative media, including web chats, net meetings, simulations, streaming video and on-line surveys will be explored as possible adjuncts and complements to the public meetings and listservs.
- The Public Interest Advisory Group will hold public meetings in 15 locations (some will be held simultaneously). The meetings will:
 - Be held in mid June and July 2005
- The presentation will explain the Shared Vision Model. The presentation will include the proposed findings of alternative options and plans for the consideration of the IJC and show how public comments received the year before and during workshops and mini-conferences were incorporated.
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 - Comments will be fed back to the study for adjustments.
 - Spokespersons will be available to the media prior and following each presentation and media availability sessions will be held prior to each presentation as appropriate.

- The appropriate Technical Work Group Lead will provide assistance to the PIAG in formulating responses to public inquiries in a timely manner. Questions and answers will be placed on the Study website.
- 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. Mini-conferences will be held in areas where there are large groups of stakeholders with the same interests, for elected officials, and regulatory agencies.
- Three workshops will be held to obtain feedback regarding preferred trade-offs.
- The Public Interest Advisory Group will hold four member meetings.
- On May 26 2005, a trial-run presentation of proposed alternate plans will be performed for PIAG members and communications staff.

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.

- 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
- Public chat sessions with Study and PIAG leads
- Brochure/Fact Sheet
- Display advertisements (to be placed in newspapers)
- Frequently Asked Questions Fact Sheet
- Glossary
- Links on partner websites
- Mailings to the key contacts database
- Multi-media presentation

- Newsletter
- News releases
- Newsgroups
- Panel displays
- 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.

International Joint Commission Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Regulation Criteria Review Public Participation Guidance to the Study Board, November 9, 2000.

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

Outreach Committee Meeting Notes, October 6, 2004

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.