



RAINY-LAKE OF THE WOODS WATERSHED

How Can We Help Protect Waters Shared by Canada and the U.S.?

One way is to set **water quality objectives and alerts** for the waters that are shared – these are targets that are agreed upon by both countries and, if met, help keep our water clean. But, it's not quite that simple.

In the Rainy-Lake of the Woods watershed, there are several lakes and rivers that are shared and there are many aquatic ecosystem health issues of concern: algae blooms and the addition of nutrients that drive them; contaminants; aquatic invasive species; adaptation to climate change. This makes setting objectives or alerts a complex task.

It is a current priority of the International Joint Commission's (IJC) Rainy-Lake of the Woods Watershed Board to set the groundwork for eventually recommending *objectives* and *alerts* to help protect aquatic ecosystem health.

In November 2018, the board began to collect existing information on how objectives and alerts are being used elsewhere. The project team is setting up workshops and meetings to hear from those who work and live in this watershed about their expectations for water quality and aquatic ecosystem health in the basin. It is important to try to develop a shared understanding of the meanings, expectations and potential metrics for water quality and aquatic ecosystem health to serve as a foundation for developing objectives and alerts.

What Exactly is an "Objective"?

This is usually a water chemistry measurement identifying concentrations that are met to ensure that there is no harm to the environment; in some cases, the objective could simply be a "narrative" rather than a number. *There are some water quality objectives in place, for the Rainy River only, and they haven't been updated since 1965.*

What Exactly is an "Alert"?

Alerts are advisory level triggers that cover substances that are not identified by objectives. These are not necessarily routinely monitored but they trigger the board's attention if they are seen to exceed the guidelines. *There are many alerts in place, for the Rainy River only, and they haven't been examined since the mid-1990s.*

What is "Aquatic Ecosystem Health"?

Although there are few strict definitions, this usually refers to the ability of the ecosystem to support its components. There are many indicators of aquatic ecosystem health.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR ESTABLISHING OBJECTIVES AND ALERTS?

Objectives are established for boundary waters – those waters that make up the boundary, such as Lake of the Woods or the Rainy River or for transboundary waters at the point where the waters flows from one country into the other country.

Once Objectives have been determined, they will be recommended to the Watershed Board's Aquatic Ecosystem Health Committee, which in turn will recommend their approval by the Board. Once the Board has approved Objectives, they will be recommended to the IJC for review. The Commission can, in turn, recommend the new Objectives to the Governments of Canada and the United States. Once the governments have approved the Objectives, the Board will report to the IJC annually on those Objectives that are met or not, and they will contribute to providing a yearly snapshot of the health of the boundary waters.

Alert levels are established for non-boundary waters in the basin that flow into the boundary waters and contribute to their water quality, such as the Seine River in Ontario or the Big Fork River in Minnesota.

The Board can determine what Alert levels are needed in order to identify potential problems for boundary waters where water quality objectives have not been established. The Board can report to the IJC when Alert levels are triggered and this information can also contribute to providing a yearly snapshot of the health of the boundary waters.

Please consider attending one of these summer sessions – we need your input!

MONDAY, JULY 8, 2019 at CLARION LAKESIDE INN, KENORA, ONTARIO

Public Workshop: 2:30 - 4:00 pm

Community Conversation: 6:30 - 8:00 pm



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For information on these events, contact Kelli Saunders, Project Coordinator, at ksaunders@lowwsf.com or call 807-548-8002.