



**International Lake Champlain -
Richelieu River Study Board**

**Groupe d'étude international
du lac Champlain et de la rivière Richelieu**

Public Advisory Group (PAG)

Meeting notes

Date: March 16th from 1 to 2:30 pm (by phone and WebEx)

Participants : Lori Fisher, Philip von Bargaen, Teresa Gagnon, Eric Howe, Julie Robert (for Jérémie Lettelier), Kristine Stepenuck, Madeleine Papineau, Ann Ruzow Holland, Debbie Lee, Bill Richmond, André Champoux, Pierre-Yves Caux, Michele D'Amours, Marion Melloul, Mae Kate Campbell, Curt Gervich, Emma Spett, Serge Villeneuve and Rob Flynn.

- Note: The meeting was changed to a call because of the situation with COVID -19. There were some difficulties on the call; some participants were unable to join (we believe due to the USGS server being above capacity due to excessive telecommuters) and some were unable to join after we switched lines, as the new line did not offer a toll-free option for Canadian participants. Others had to step off or had given up trying to join by the time we switched lines (about 30 minutes into the call). Presenter, Shannon Thayer, was not able to join the call due to cell system failure in her area. To remedy this situation in the future (as it was not the first time connections could not be made during an IJC LCRR meeting), a recommendation of the PAG co-chairs is that the IJC maintain a webinar service and call-in line(s) that can be used for all IJC reference study meetings. This service should offer toll-free call-in options for both Canadian and US-based participants. This would avoid reliance upon other agencies' or organizations' systems and provide more consistent meeting access (e.g., the same call-in information can be used for all Study meetings, simplifying access for all over time).

Action: PAG co-chairs will relay the recommendation to IJC liaisons for the LCRR Study

1. Welcome, roll call and minutes from the last meeting (PAG co-chairs)

The October 9th, 2019 minutes were approved with no changes.

2. Updates on the Risk perception survey, the First responder survey (US) and the literature review on Early Warning Systems (Emma Spett)

- Emma shared a PowerPoint with some initial results from the Public Risk Perception Survey, First Responder Survey, and her literature review on early warning systems. She will send participants a copy.

Risk perception survey

- The risk perception survey aimed to gauge public perceptions of flood risk and provide feedback on public perception of potential management strategies. In the first iteration of the survey, a postcard with a link to the survey was sent out in August of 2019 and did not generate many responses. In an effort to gain more responses, a second mailing was sent out that contained the full printed survey, and the response rate to this mailing was better. Between the 2 mailings, 150 responses have been received (~5% response rate). This response rate has been compared to other published studies, and the researchers feel results can be used to understand public risk perceptions in the LCRR basin.
- A Canadian version of the survey could be going out within the next couple of weeks, depending upon the COVID-19 situation. Ways to increase the response rate in Canada have been discussed, including hiring a contracted survey group to conduct the survey via phone.
- The data analysis from the risk perception survey is in process. The initial results were supposed to be presented at the Theme 3 Workshop on March 17, 2020 but it was canceled. Emma will send write-ups of results when they are complete. Initial results: Lots of people perceived their communities were at risk but did not perceive their individual homes were at risk. There was not a large difference in responses about priorities to address flooding between people who have experienced flooding and people who have not.
- Future analyses to come from these survey data include regressions exploring correlations between the steps people take to prepare their households and their income level, education level, and other demographic info.

First responder survey

- The first responder survey aims to assess where experts stand on certain issues, their experience on dealing with floods and to assess their perception of existing government tools.
- The first responder survey followed the same format as the risk perception survey, which will allow the results from these 2 surveys to be compared. The first responder survey was sent to police and fire chiefs, planners, zoning officials, DPW, water/wastewater departments who were asked to fill out a community profile and answer questions about their perceptions of flood risk in their community. They were also asked where they get their information about flooding and their level of satisfaction with that information, as well as what their level of engagement is with flood mitigation strategies.
- The survey is still open and efforts are being made to get a few more responses. Of the 44 people emergency managers in Vermont and New York State, 26 responded. There is a good representation of the most impacted community.

Early warning systems

- The literature review examined early warning systems used to warn of flooding in other places. The importance of considering the needs of end users and how to tailor response plans to the communities that they are trying to assist was emphasized. The presentation detailed existing response plans in Europe that have been effective.
 - The Global flood awareness system (GloFAS), developed by the European Commission was presented. The website indicated that the most popular ways people get information were by radio or social media.
 - An interesting aspect is that community workshops are being held to test learning system on whether or not the public understand the output of the forecasts.
 - A graph of locations using a flood awareness education system was displayed, and it was noted that there are locations in Quebec that have used this system, but not places in New York or Vermont.

Action: Emma Spett will look into who in Quebec has employed this learning system and share information on GloFAS by email.

Reports on the public risk perception survey, first responder survey, and literature review will come out in April. As Shannon was unable to join the call, Emma shared an overview of Shannon's work to date. Emma reported that Shannon did a systematic review of hazard mitigation plans in the LCRR basin and has results from that. She also replicated a social vulnerability mapping of difference vulnerability factors (a replica of Isabelle Thomas' method) and was going to display these maps. As an action item, Emma will ask Shannon to send us her presentation.

Actions: Emma Spett will send copies of the presentations to participants, and request that Shannon Thayer do so as well. (Note: The PAG co-chairs may also invite Shannon to present at a future PAG meeting.)

A PAG member mentioned a good tool. The National Weather Service, Burlington office uploads information during the winter/spring flood period on 2 weeks basis and the tracking in real time seems excellent. He want to know if Emma was asking if first responders were accessing the data and if she is evaluating if the data is useful for their work.

3. **Public meetings** (PAG co-chairs)

It was noted that the public meetings will likely be postponed (possibly until the Fall), the Study Board will be discussing this possibility next week. Alternatives to holding public meetings in a different format and/or at a later date were discussed.

- It was suggested that a piece could be developed for the Across the Fence programming on local Vermont TV station and that Mountain Lake Public Broadcasting has a similar program that could reach audiences in New York.
- It was also suggested that the videos already being developed could be used for television programming.
- Another suggestion was to hold a virtual town hall through Facebook or another form of media consisting of a livestream that viewers can comment on and have their comments addressed in real time.
- Many voices noted the unpredictability of the current time, emphasizing that people are overwhelmed and unlikely to engage with a public meeting right now (including that some might feel distress in a social gathering).
 - It was noted that even if the meetings are postponed, the public meetings still might need to be held virtually several months into the future.
 - Media attention is on COVID-19.
 - People's inboxes may already be overwhelmed.

If flooding is a problem this spring, a suggestion was made to focus our communications on this and share with the public the information we have on flood preparedness and responses instead of longer term mitigation strategies. So this would take priority over completing and posting on the web platforms the videos and fact sheet.

It was noted that after an official decision is made on the public meetings, the website will need to be updated to let the public know about any potential changes. The meetings have already been advertised in the Current (at least that they would occur in the spring). The Current will need to be updated as well.

Action: PAG co-chairs will inform the PAG of the Study Board decision about public meetings.

4. **Communication Products (videos and Chambly Canal factsheet)**

A question was raised about whether or not PAG needs to review the videos and fact sheet or if the professionals working on those materials can continue without PAG review. There was not overall agreement on this topic.

- A suggestion was made to discuss this issue during the Study Board meeting (move forward as we can but not move quickly on any items directly related to the public like a news release).
- Some PAG members felt that public communication products around this study can move forward if contractors are available and that products could be posted on the website, others felt the need to wait on this decision as worldviews might change in the coming months and could affect content.
- It was noted that once videos are developed, they might be difficult to change.
- It was also noted that it may take longer for videos to be developed since people are working at home, so continuing work on them now would ensure they are ready whenever the public meetings are held.
- It was also noted that the contents of the fact sheet and videos will not change regardless of the pandemic outcomes, however the ways in which we share news releases and communications with the public could.

The US PAG co-chair thanked people for taking the time and being on the call under the current circumstances.

Summary of action Items:

- PAG co-chairs will relay the recommendation (that the IJC maintain a webinar service and call-in line(s) that can be used for all IJC reference study meetings) to IJC liaisons for the LCRR Study.
- Emma Spett will look into who in Quebec has employed this learning system and share information on GloFAS by email.
- Emma Spett will send copies of the presentations to participants, and request that Shannon Thayer do so as well.
- PAG co-chairs will inform the PAG of the Study Board decision about public meetings.

Approved by PAG members August 26 2020