

**Great Lakes Water Quality Board
211th Meeting**

Summary of Discussion

January 27, 2021

Virtual

U.S. Member Participants

Jon Allan (Co-Chair)
Sandy Bihn
George Elmaraghy
Frank Ettawageshik
Stephen Galarneau
George Heartwell
Brandon Hofmeister
Sara Hudson
Elizabeth Kirkwood
Chris Korleski
Kelsey Leonard
Monica Lewis-Partick
Joe Tomandl III

Canadian Member Participants

Gayle Wood (Co-Chair)
Mark Fisher
Michael Goffin
François Houde
John Jackson
Carolyn Johns
Irving Leblanc
Mark Mattson
Chris McLaughlin
Mark Wales

Canadian Member Regrets

Chris Paci

Observers

Jessica Gordon – Swim Drink Fish
Ash Kumar - Environment and Climate Change Canada
Carolyn O’Neill - Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks
Emily Santoro – Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks

Invited Guests

Joanna Grand – National Audubon Society
Sarah Saunders – National Audubon Society
Elizabeth Berg – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Great Lakes Coastal Assembly Coordinator
Cherie Hagen – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Great Lakes Coastal Assembly Co-Chair

Commission Staff

David Burden – Director, Great Lakes Regional Office
Raj Bejankiwar – Great Lakes Regional Office
Jennifer Boehme – Great Lakes Regional Office
Mark Burrows – Great Lakes Regional Office
Matthew Child – Great Lakes Regional Office
John Wilson – Great Lakes Regional Office

Commission Liaisons

Paul Allen – Canadian Section Office
Victor Serveiss – U.S. Section Office

Secretariat

Antonette Arvai – Great Lakes Regional Office

1. **Welcome, Introduction and Indigenous Acknowledgement (Co-Chairs)**

The Co-Chairs welcomed everyone to the 211th meeting of the board. The co-chairs acknowledged the traditional First Nations, Tribal and Métis territories on which the meeting was conducted that day, given the virtual gathering of participants from various locations. It was recognized that board member Ling Mark's term with the board ended in October 2020. She was recognized for her contributions to the board over her three-year term. Members and other participants identified themselves.

2. **Co-Chairs' Update (Co-Chairs)**

The co-chairs have been providing monthly written updates to members to ensure timely communication of co-chair activities relevant to board operations. An update of activities that occurred in December was provided:

- Notice that 2021 work plans were approved by the WQB, which includes projects for follow-up work on the board's binational Great Lakes poll, 50th anniversary review of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement and manure management.
- Co-chairs' attendance on a December 2020 public webinar on the release of the IJC's Triennial Assessment of Progress (TAP) 2020 report
- Co-chairs continue to participate in calls with the other IJC Advisory Board Co-Chairs to keep abreast of board projects; seek areas of collaboration and to identify key issues to discuss jointly with Commissioners.
- Co-Chairs continue to participate in calls with WQB lead Commissioners to inform on WQB activities and raise issues of interest. Recent topics included proposed WQB projects for 2021, a potential multi-board monitoring work plan, and approaches for a TAP 2023 process

Members inquired about the impact of the recent U.S. federal election results on Commission and board operations. At this time, there has been no impact to the Commission or its boards, which continue to operate business as usual.

3. **Board Project Updates (G. Wood)**

WQB members provided brief updates on board projects and activities.

Great Lakes Horizons (C. Johns and J. Allan)

The goal of the project is to understand the forces that will have a material effect on the Great Lakes (ecologically, economically, socially and culturally) over the next 30+ years. The contractor team is currently developing a literature review that will be used to support a future symposium that will explore future water quality scenarios. The literature review is expected to be completed by the end of February 2021.

Third Great Lakes Binational Poll (C. Johns and Kelsey L.)

The contractor is currently conducting the poll survey. The draft results of the poll are expected in early March 2021. The work group continues to develop a communications and outreach strategy for the release of the poll results. The work group has also developed a project work plan for the upcoming 2021 work cycle that includes conducting an on-line version of the poll; holding focus groups; and geographic and demographic analysis of the poll (pending Commission approval). Members also provided, for the work group's consideration, additional question areas/topics for potential inclusion in the planned on-line survey. These included questions that could help support funding for Great Lakes programs and questions to solicit perceptions on how the proposed actions of a new federal government may impact the lakes. Members were encouraged to follow-up further with the work group.

Manure Management (S. Bihn and M. Wales)

The outcomes from webinars held between April and June 2020 was summarized in a report and posted to the WQB's webpage in October 2020. The report includes proposed next steps for the WQB to undertake a

process that begins with determining an umbrella Great Lakes organization to create a diverse steering committee with key stakeholders to establish and advance a manure management framework, based on the WQB's 2019 report. These next steps have been incorporated into a project work plan for the upcoming 2021 work cycle (pending Commission approval).

Nuclear Decommissioning (J. Jackson)

An experts virtual workshop was held on November 12-13, 2020 that focused on select, key topics for in-depth discussions to help refine the development of recommendations. Some of these topics included transportation of radioactive waste and long-term monitoring of on-site residual radioactive wastes after decommissioning. The work group is currently writing its report, which is expected to be ready for board review in March 2021.

Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement 50th Anniversary Review (G. Heartwell and Mark F.)

A key focus of the project is to assess the impacts of Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA) over the years and identify opportunities for improvement. A secondary component of the project will be to recommend to the Commission ways to memorialize and celebrate the Agreement's successes. The work group is completing a literature review and compiling responses from a survey distributed in September 2020. The survey was distributed to select experts to solicit insights on the Agreement over time. The work group also developed a work plan for the upcoming 2021 work cycle to request funds to support continued work on the review of the Agreement and its implementation (pending Commission approval).

Fossil Fuel Development and Transportation Watching Brief (L. Kirkwood)

Recent developments were highlighted that included, the new U.S. Administration's commitment of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050; the cancellation of the Keystone pipeline; and the state of Michigan's issuance of a notice to terminate an easement and filing of a lawsuit to permanently shut-down Line 5. It was noted that the cancellation of the Keystone pipeline could increase the pressure to continue operating aging pipelines, such as Line 5. It was suggested that the watching brief include an aspect of how fossil fuel development and transport supports energy infrastructure.

Great Lakes Nuclear Watching Brief (B. Hofmeister)

Recent developments relevant to the watching brief were highlighted including, an application to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission to transfer the licenses for the Palisades Nuclear Plant (Michigan) to Holtec, following the plant's shutdown in the spring of 2022; and the launch of the Government of Canada's public engagement process to modernize their radioactive waste policy framework.

Microplastics Watching Brief (F. Houde)

The watching brief co-leads participated on a December 16th, 2020 meeting of the IJC's Health Professionals advisory Board (HPAB) to seek their insights on the state of human health impacts from micro and nanoplastics and their relevance in the Great Lakes and whether the WQB should take further action, beyond the watching brief. The HPAB expressed interest on the topic and exploring more formally. The HPAB co-chairs will follow-up with watching brief co-leads

As part of the watching brief discussion, the issue of accessibility to and affordability of safe water, in the context of the spread of COVID-19, was raised for the consideration of the board as a potential issue to monitor via a watching brief.

4. Cross-board Project Updates (J. Allan)

WQB members serve on several cross-board projects including, the SAB's Great Lakes Early Warning

System Phase 2, SAB/WQB Nutrients Synthesis, SAB's Science Plan and SAB-RCC Hydrological Model. Due to time constraints during the meeting, there was not an opportunity for verbal updates. Additional time during the next WQB meeting will be provided to cover this item.

5. Presentation: Prioritizing Coastal Wetlands for Marsh Bird Conservation in the U.S. Great Lakes

Dr. Joanna Grand of the National Audubon Society (NAS) gave a presentation on NAS's recent research to identify the most important U.S. Great Lakes coastal wetlands for a variety of marsh bird species. Coastal wetlands provide a variety of ecosystem services such as, shoreline stabilization, groundwater recharge and flood storage. Wetlands continue to be threatened by ongoing degradation from urbanization, climate change, invasive species and fragmentation.

Marsh birds serve as a good indicator of wetland health due to their sensitivity to pollutants, invasive species and flooding. The study used a combination of survey results of marsh bird abundance at select coastal wetlands and remotely sensed environmental predictors (e.g., proportion of open water, proportion of agriculture, etc.) to create a multispecies prioritization of wetlands.

The study identified the wetlands that are the highest priority for protection. The results found that the largest proportion of high-priority wetlands were located along Lakes Erie, Huron and Ontario, with the lowest proportion in Lake Superior. Furthermore, of the total 240 hectares of high-priority wetlands identified, less than half are protected. In Lake Ontario, which had the highest proportion of high-priority wetlands, these are the least protected. The goals of the project are to maximize conservation dollars, mitigate marsh bird population declines and prevent the loss of ecosystem services.

6. Equity and Diversity (Sara H.)

During the July 29th, 2020 WQB meeting, the board agreed to create a committee to explore the role that equity and diversity plays in the operations of the WQB. The WQB's committee has been examining how the board operationalizes and supports the IJC's Guiding Principles to identify areas where board operational improvements may be made. Most recently the committee has examined the IJC's Guiding Principles under which the board operates within the IJC. Suggested revisions to strengthen the principles related to equity and diversity have been identified. This exercise will help the board to continue thinking about how the board operates and carries out its work (e.g., public events/engagement) as well as to continue conversations with the Commission as opportunities arise.

7. Next WQB Meetings (G. Wood)

The schedule for WQB meetings for the 2021 year was reviewed, as below.

- **April 15, 2021 (full day Virtual)**
This meeting has been re-scheduled from the original date of April 16th to avoid a scheduling conflict
- **July 21, 2021 @ 10:00-11:30 AM ET**
- **September 22-23, 2021, Niagara Falls, ON [Tentative]**
Holding this meeting in-person is pending the COVID-19 situation and ability to travel and meet in-person.

ACTION ITEM: Board Secretary will send an updated calendar meeting notice for the April WQB meeting.

8. Public Comments and Closing Remarks (Co-Chairs)

No members of the public were present. The co-chairs thanked members and others for their participation.