

International Rainy-Lake of the Woods Watershed Board

Summary of Discussion

Friday, February 5, 2021

1 – 3 pm CT (2 – 4 pm ET)

Virtual Meeting

Chair: Mike Goffin

1. Welcome and Introductions

U.S. Member Participants

COL Karl Jansen (Board Co-Chair)
Nicole Blasing
Mike Hirst
Kelly Sjerven
Jim Stark
Patty Thielen
Doug Franchot
Matt Gouin
Pam Tomevi
Scott Jutila (Secretary; Engineering Advisor)

Canadian Member Participants

Michael Goffin (Board Co-Chair)
Erika Klyszejko
Todd Sellers
Kiley Shebagegit
Trina Rawn
Greg Chapman
Karen Cederwall
Matt Myers
Andrew Liddiard (Interim Engineering Advisor)
Wellsley Hamilton (Secretary)

International Joint Commission

Commissioner Lance Yohe
Mark Gabriel, US Engineering Advisor
Wayne Jenkinson, Canadian Engineering Advisor
Glenn Miller, Health Professional Advisory Board
Norman Barth, Washington Section

Additional Participants

Kelli Saunders, International Watershed Coordinator
Abby Moore, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Megan Garner, Environment and Climate Change Canada
Amy Adrihan, Minnesota Pollution Control
Lucas King, alternate for Chief Perrault
Jim Zeigler, Red River Board Co-chair
Nicole Armstrong, Red River Board Co-chair, alternate for Mark Lee
Ryan Maki, AMC Co-chair
Daniel Rokitnicki-Wojcik, Environment and Climate Change Canada
Carla Torchia, Environment and Climate Change Canada

2. Review of Meeting Materials

The agenda, meeting summary from September 17, 2020 and What We Heard document from the October 2, 2020 public meeting were approved.

The Action Items from September 17th below are ongoing or in progress. All other action items were completed or updates were provided under specific agenda items during this meeting.

LEAD	ACTION	STATUS
Board	Provide CAG co-chairs with recommendations for additional CAG members (2 Canadian, 1 US).	Ongoing. Recommendations should be provided to the Secretariat and CAG Co-chairs.
CAG Co-Chairs and Secretariat	Extend membership term of 4 CAG members.	In progress. Letter drafted. Letters to be signed and delivered prior to March Forum.
IJC and Secretariat	Coordinate setup of SharePoint site for the Board.	In progress. Secretariat completed the IJC IT intake form. Secretariat and various Board members also participated in the IJC's broader review of organizational IT requirements.

- **ACTION:** Secretariat to post approved meeting minutes and 'What We Heard' document on IRLWWB website.
- **ACTION:** Secretariat to send a copy of the 'What We Heard' document to the IJC.

3. Board Business

- Review and Approval of 2020-21 Board Work Plan

The current work plan is reviewed by the Board regularly. The 2020-21 Board Work Plan is in place until the end of March. The Board is expected to report out on the actions in this work plan in the annual report that will be submitted to the IJC in April.

- Future Board Meetings

Board member, Todd Sellers, informed the Board that the 2021 International Rainy- Lake of the Woods Watershed Forum will take place on March 10th and 11th. The event is virtual this year using Zoom. As such, there is a reduced registration fee. Board members are encouraged to register on the Lake of the Woods Water Sustainability website. The IJC will support CAG participation this year again and a coupon code for the website will be provided. Presenters are pre-recording presentations and the will be made available the week before the Forum and continue to be available for a week after the forum. The Q&A are live and is not likely to be recorded.

The Secretariat will plan for all 2021 meetings to be virtual. Should the public health environment and travel restrictions change, the Secretariat will adapt to coordinate in-person meetings. The public meeting, Board meeting and CAG-Board meeting that are typically held in August will be moved to September based on recent experience.

- Review timeline and next steps Forum Presentation

Colonel Jansen will be presenting an update on behalf of the Board at the March Watershed Forum. The Secretariat will use the presentation from the public meeting in October 2020 and the updates included in the meeting summaries provided by the Committee and Advisory Group Co-chairs and the International Watershed Coordinator as the basis for the content of Forum presentation. Board member Todd Sellers, noted that the abstract for the Forum program also needs updating.

- Review timeline and next steps for 2020-21 Annual Board Report

IJC Advisor, Wayne Jenkinson, informed the Board that the IJC Annual meetings are scheduled for the week of April 19-23rd. The IJC typically expects Annual reports and Board presentations two weeks in advance. As a result, the end of the 2020-21 reporting year and due date for the Board's Annual report is March 31, 2021.

The information in the meeting summaries provided for this meeting will form the basis of the draft annual report that will be circulated by the Secretariat to Committee and Advisory Group Co-chairs, as well as the International Watershed Coordinator for comment. A draft annual report for full Board review should be made available at the March 17th Board meeting.

- **ACTION:** Committee and Advisory Group Co-chairs to review and make any necessary updates to 2020-21 Annual Work Plan as soon as possible.
- **ACTION:** Todd Sellers to provide Coupon Code for CAG members to receive free Forum registration.
- **ACTION:** Board members to review the meeting schedule included in the meeting package and inform the Secretariat of any serious conflicts as soon as possible.
ACTION: Secretariat to circulate a doodle poll for fall meetings.
- **ACTION:** Secretariat to review abstract for Board presentation at Forum and send to Todd Sellers.
- **ACTION:** Secretariat to draft presentation for March Forum and circulate to Board members by mid-February.
- **ACTION:** Secretariat to draft 2020-21 Annual Report and circulate to Committee, Advisory Group Co-chairs and the International Watershed Coordinator.
- **ACTION:** Board to review draft 2020-21 Annual report at next meeting.

4. Red River Nutrient Plan Presentation

A copy of the Red River Nutrient Management Strategy was included in the meeting package and circulated to Board members in December. International Red River Board (IRRB) Co-chairs Jim Zeigler and Nicole Armstrong provided a presentation.

Water quality has deteriorated over the past few decades across the International Red River watershed and downstream in Lake Winnipeg. Nutrients, both phosphorus and nitrogen, come from both US and Canadian Sources. The approach to estimate yield and load of nutrients in the Red River used USGS SPARROW (SPATIally Referenced Regressions On Watershed attributes) modelling.

Given algal blooms, especially harmful algal blooms, are increasing throughout the basin the solution was for all parties to work together collaboratively. The goal is to reduce nutrient loading and improve water quality for the Red River. Mechanisms for collaboration include the International Joint Commission's IRBB and the Red River Basin Commission. To address the issue, it was important to recognize that all jurisdictions have various regulatory frameworks, plans and approaches in place.

Identification of guiding principles upfront was a key success factor. The principle of scientific defensibility was noted as important. In addition, the six components to develop a Nutrient Management Strategy provide a clear road map to reach the intended goal: 1. endorsement by the International Red River Board; 2. Develop a Shared Understanding of Jurisdictions' Nutrient Regulatory Frameworks and Identify Current Nutrient Reduction Actions, Activities and Plans for the Red River Watershed; 3. Recommend Nutrient Targets; 4. Monitor and Report on Progress; 5. Facilitate ongoing technical,

scientific and methodological dialogue and information sharing; and 6. Adapt the nutrient management strategy.

The presentation provided additional detail about the steps taken under Component 3. to develop and recommend nutrient targets. The IRRB used RESPEC Consulting and Services to conduct a literature and methodology review with IWI funding to determine the approach. Subsequently, RESPEC developed a stressor-response model to develop the nutrient concentration objectives. Nutrient load targets for the Red River were then developed and the last step was to reconcile the nutrient concentration objectives with the nutrient load targets and make a recommendation.

The approval process began in 2018 and involved public engagement. The IRRB recommended targets to the IJC in 2019 and the IJC recommended the targets to the two federal governments in 2020. The International Red River Board worked hard to bring governments along and keep them engaged in each step. IRRB asked for and received letters of support from the Provincial and State governments that were provided to the IJC. It was very important to have these letters of support from various government agencies. Given the size of the federal governments it was important to make sure the right people are at the table and being appropriately briefed.

The presentation highlighted the following lessons learned: Collaboration is key; Make sure you have the right people at the table; Document and agree to process and goals in advance – helpful for a long term project when players are coming and going; you cannot predict everything in advance; and be prepared to commit for the long haul. The new water quality objectives do not change the work of the IRRB very much. The work of the nutrient management strategy does not end at these efforts. There are ongoing efforts for best management practices, recording, etc.

IRLWWB members inquired as to whether there was ever any concern over existing objectives not being met and whether the recommended objectives were realistic. The current objectives for the Red River are reflective of long-term goals and make steps towards those targets knowing it may take a while to get there.

IRLWWB members also wanted to know more about the importance of the two modeling efforts (SPARROW, etc.). The SPARROW model was a good tool for the IRRB to develop a better understanding of nutrient contributions and sources. Stress-response models were a separate effort.

It was noted that in the Lake of the Woods more aggressive concentration/load targets are likely needed to meet what Manitoba would want for Lake Winnipeg.

- **ACTION:** Secretariat to circulate copy of Red River Board presentation to Board members.
- **ACTION:** Secretariat to coordinate timing for a presentation on the Lake Winnipeg target setting work.

5. Water Levels Committee

Col Jansen indicated that the Rainy and Namakan lakes have been within the normal bands of the rule curve with low outflows. Conditions have been dry so far and the basin has experienced a mild winter in comparison to last year and the historic record. Snow depth remain below the median in Minnesota. Flood risk this year therefore looks low, with drought a potential concern, but it is still too early in season to tell.

Erika Klyszejko informed the Board that she is stepping down as Canadian Water Levels Committee Co-chair and the Megan Garner, from Environment and Climate Change Canada will be the interim Co-chair. The Board thanked Erika for her dedicated service and wished her well in her new endeavours. The Board was also informed that Andrew Liddiard, from Environment and Climate Change Canada, is serving as the interim Canadian Engineering Advisor for the Water Levels Committee, while Matt DeWolfe is on a special assignment.

- **ACTION:** IJC to formalize the Canadian Co-chair for the Water Levels Committee.

6. Aquatic Ecosystem Health Committee

As noted in the meeting package, Active IWI Projects include:

- The AIS Coarse Scale Risk Assessment (started Sept 2020; completion anticipated in Apr 2021);
- Phase II of the Objectives and Alerts Project (P II planning underway). Once Phase 2 of the Objectives and Alert Phase II project underway (anticipated spring 2021) Board engagement / input will be required at several stages; and
- Updated State of the Basin Report (in contracting; start-up early Feb).

Board member, Jim Stark, and Glenn Miller, from the IJC's Health Professional Advisory Board provided an update on the IWI proposal regarding Vulnerability of Mining Activities in the Basin. Since work began on the proposal, the USGS and University of Minnesota have completed an additional study focusing on smaller watersheds in area of proposed sulfur mines in MN. The study found that watersheds will likely be most vulnerable where bedrock is mineralized. This study is most dense and detailed study within Lake of the Woods watershed. There is also more information available now from the MPCA.

At the last AEHC meeting, the Committee indicated support for moving forward with the Vulnerability of Mining Activities in the Basin proposal, however there is no Canadian lead and as of this meeting a US lead for this project is also required. The IWI Spring intake timelines are unknown at this time, however Board of the IWI proposal. The Mining project was also discussed at the last IAG meeting. The CAG also remains interested in the project. If leads are identified to advance this proposal it is recommended that the proposal be re-submitted for Board consideration at the next IRLWWB meeting in anticipation of the IWI Spring call for proposals.

- **ACTION:** Board members to Consider and advise the Secretariat and the AEHC if they will take on the lead for the vulnerability of mining activities in the Basin proposal (with the intention to bring the proposal forward for Board approval in March).

7. Adaptive Management Committee

The IJC and ECCC worked collaboratively to enhance modeling capacity. The IJC hopes that the new modeller will have the Integrated Ecosystem Response Models for Rainy Lake / Namakan Reservoir and for Rainy River running again in March.

Co-chair Teika Newton drafted a report titled, "Update Report on Climate Change Assessment Activities for the International Rainy - Lake of the Woods Watershed Board." A final version will be submitted to the IRLWWB this spring.

The AMC's formal work plan is presently being reviewed by the Committee and is due at the end of March. The AMC should clearly prioritize its proposed projects given the separate pot of funding available for adaptive management work.

8. Engagement Committee

Karen Cederwall put her name forward and was endorsed by the Board as the new Canadian Co-chair for Engagement Committee. Over the next year the Committee intends to enhance communication pathway across committees. The Engagement Committee will be reviewing and updating the Committee work plan before the next Board meeting.

IJC provided funds for Project Wet to be rolled out in Minnesota School districts. This began before the current Engagement Committee Co-chairs were in place. Due to COVID-19 and the development of curriculum standards there were some interruptions in the delivery of Project WET. Janine Kohn the Project WET Coordinator with the MNDNR the Secretariat and the IJC to note that there has been an upsurge of teachers wanting good resources for outdoor activities and there is a desire to reinvigorate Project WET. Given the timelines and funding initially slated for Project WET a new proposal will be required. Mark Gabriel will continue to engage with Janine Kohn and bring the Engagement Committee up to date.

- **ACTION:** Mark Gabriel to connect with Engagement Committee Co-chairs about renewal of Project WET.

9. Roundtable

Daniel Rokitnicki-Wojcik from ECCC provided an update on Canada's federal engagement process to seek input on phosphorus reduction scenarios in Lake of the Woods to help manage harmful algae blooms. ECCC completed a 4-year nutrient and algae research program on Lake of the Woods in 2020. The next step is to develop a path forward for Lake of the Woods with Ontario and Manitoba, Indigenous Peoples, local authorities, stakeholders and the public. Feedback is being sought to help confirm proposed Lake Ecosystem Objectives and to identify which phosphorus reduction option(s) are supported by the community. The public is encouraged to visit and share their thoughts on the www.placespeak.com/lakeofthewoods webpage, which will be going live shortly. In addition to a number of webinars in March, the engagement process will include a presentation of the scenarios at the upcoming March Forum. Additional engagement is being coordinated with Indigenous communities and peoples. The engagement process ends on April 30th.

Board Co-chair, Mike Goffin, explained that Environment and Climate Change Canada has an implementation plan in place to Update placement of the Wheeler's Point Gauge. A meeting to update the USGS is being scheduled. The Department is evaluating existing gauging and options for the computation of discharge. A temporary installation planned for this spring, leading to a permanent installation, which will involve additional regulatory permitting.

IAG Co-chair Mike Hirst directed the Board to the meeting summary for the Advisory Group. As previously identified, it indicates that the AMC and the WLC could look at the conditions that caused the ice flow conditions to breakup upstream of the dam and investigate ways to avoid this from occurring in the future. In addition, the AMC and the WLC could address the IAG members directly by reaching out and engaging their concerns more and use the advisory group's advice to inform their decision-making.

At the recent IAG meeting, the group learned that Sylvie St. John, from Rainy River Gold Mine, has monitoring data that New Gold is willing to share. There is an interest in public safety and real-time weather and wave gages on Lake of the Woods and would like to know if there are any agencies or interest from the board to assist with such infrastructure. Industry representatives are being engaged through the IAG on the IWI Proposal “Assessing the Vulnerability of Waters to Mining in the Rainy River- Lake of the Woods Watershed.”

CAG Co-Chair, Doug Franchot, outlined that the CAG continues to look for more members. The CAG completed a process that reviewed the current Environmental Emergency Planning, Preparedness and Response document and think it good as it relates to the rail crossing objective. Questions about emergency response more broadly and basin-wide have come up and is being discussed within the group. There is ongoing interest and concern about the potential cumulative effects of mining on the ecosystem and human health. The CAG Co-chairs, Doug Franchot and Matt Myers are going to discuss what is required to take the lead on the proposed IWI project. The CAG has also started to explore the issue of microplastics impacts in the watershed and has reached out to a research group in Kenora. The CAG is also interested in learning more about the various different shoreline regulations through the basin.

IJC Advisor, Wayne Jenkinson requested a meeting with Board members to discuss the need for a water levels study in the basin. A water levels study was identified in 2012. Recent discussions between the IJC Commissioners and members from Shoal Lake #40 First Nation raised interest in this issue.

International Watershed Coordinator, Kelli Saunders, has been working ECCC to help coordinate their phosphorus reduction scenario engagement as well as organizing the upcoming March Forum. A Civic Engagement Workshop is also being planned for spring 2021.

No additional watershed issues of interest or concern were raised by the Board.

- **ACTION:** Secretariat to organize a meeting time for the Board and IJC to discuss the need for a Lake of the Woods Water Levels study.
- **ACTION:** Secretariat to organize a presentation by Daniel Rokitnicki-Wojcik from ECCC on Canada’s phosphorus reduction scenarios.

10. Summary of Meeting Highlights and Adjournment

Mike Goffin asked Wellsley Hamilton to review the significant action items and thanked Nicole Armstrong and Jim Zeigler for their presentation. It was reiterated that Erika Klyszjeko will be missed on the Water Levels Committee and by the Board.

Drafted by: Abigail Moore USACE, Wellsley Hamilton, ECCC, Scott Jutila USACE