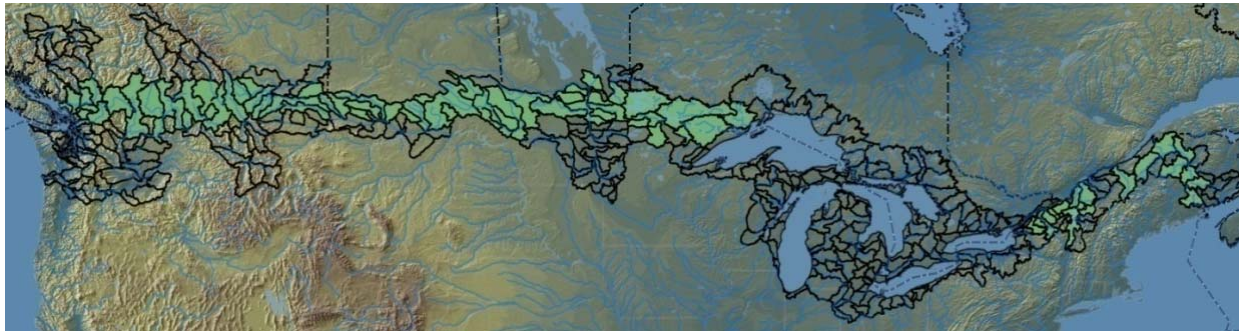


**INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION
REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL WATERSHEDS INITIATIVE WORKSHOP**

**MARCH 31, 2009
WASHINGTON, D.C.**



To illustrate the data harmonization effort supported by the International Watersheds Initiative (IWI), here is a representation of transboundary watersheds showing basins at the US8-CAN4 level. Highlighted in green are those basins at the border for which agreed delineations are being developed under the auspices of the IJC's Transboundary Hydrographic Data Harmonization Task Force. Details on page 5.

Summary

Members of five IJC boards and one task force met with IJC Commissioners and staff and representatives of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the State Department on the afternoon of March 31, 2009, to exchange information and ideas regarding implementation of the International Watersheds Initiative (IWI). The session was held in follow-up to similar meetings in Vancouver (March 2008) and Ottawa (October 2008) to foster dialogue about the IWI, the Commission's effort for an integrated, participatory approach to transboundary basin issues. Participants were briefed on the public release on March 26 of the IJC's Third Report to Governments on the IWI. They were informed that substantial funding is available for new projects (CND\$ 794,000 for Canadian FY 2009-10 and US\$450,000 for U.S. FY 2009). Boards presented the results of their 2008-09 IWI projects, reviewing benefits and challenges and discussing lessons learned, and outlined plans for future activities. They were also briefed on the IJC's role in promoting the harmonization of geospatial data for transboundary basins, and the implications of this work for boards. Participants were broadly supportive of the IWI's objectives and appreciative of IJC efforts to strengthen the Initiative, while recognizing that this was still an evolutionary process.

Introduction

The IWI Workshop was held in Washington, DC, on March 31, 2009, immediately following the IJC Executive Meeting, during the week of the Commission's Spring Semi-Annual Meeting. IWI Coordinators Willem Brakel and Ted Yuzyk welcomed the participation of the International Rainy Lake Board of Control, the International Rainy River Water Pollution Board, the International Red River Board, the

International Souris River Board, the International St. Croix River Watershed Board, the Health Professionals Task Force, all five Commissioners, and IJC advisers and staff. Also noted was the presence of representatives of the governments of Canada and the United States.

Third IWI Report to Governments

It was announced that the Third IWI Report to Governments – which had been developed with the active participation of the boards, including through discussions at the two previous IWI workshops – had been formally released in English and French on March 26. Key recommendations of the report were highlighted.

Communications advisers Bernard Beckhoff and Frank Bevacqua had drawn up a comprehensive strategy for launching the report. This included a series of in-person or webinar briefings by Chairs Brooks and Gray, Secretary Lawson and/or the IWI Coordinators. Targeted audiences included: Canadian Senators, Members of Parliament and staff; U.S. Congressional staff; journalists; and IWI partners (stakeholder groups and federal technical agencies). The report has been posted on the IJC web site, and printed copies have been mailed broadly to federal officials, legislators, governors, premiers and various local governmental and nongovernmental entities in the national capitals and border jurisdictions.

It was suggested that copies of the 3rd IWI Report be distributed at events commemorating the centennial of the IJC and the Boundary Waters Treaty.

IWI Budget

The IWI Coordinators reported that both governments had provided funding for IWI activities this year.

The Canadian government has allocated CND\$574,000 for FY2009-10 (which began April 1, 2009). And an additional CND\$220,000 was carried over from the previous fiscal year.

The United States government provided US\$450,000 for FY2009 (which began on October 1, 2008).

Since the inception of the IWI, the governments have committed approximately \$2 million each to the Initiative, in their respective currencies. This year is the first time that substantial funding has been available concurrently from both governments, providing added flexibility for projects on either side of the border. Ideally, it is helpful to have long-term funding commitment (e.g., Canada for five years), but that may not be possible in the U.S.

Projects for the Current Fiscal Year

A detailed spreadsheet covering current-year projects was distributed. Nine projects, implemented under the auspices of four boards, are nearing completion:

- Transboundary Water Quality Health Issues in the Rainy
- Lower Pembina River Modelling
- Statistical Analysis of Trends in the Red River
- How Are We Living with the Red? (assessment of flood mitigation measures)

Literature Review of Apportionment Procedures for the Red River
Devils Lake Fish Pathogens and Parasite Survey
Watershed Backgrounder for the Souris River
Modelling Impervious Surfaces in the St. Croix Basin
Transboundary Harmonization Mapping Initiative

Reports from the Boards

Board representatives provided an update on the status of their projects. The boards and other participants offered a number of ideas, suggestions and comments. Key points that emerged from the discussion are summarized below.

Comments on the project submission and review process:

- The submission form has the appropriate level of detail.
- The submission process and status feedback seem effective, easy and transparent.
- Processing and prioritization of project submissions by IJC seems timely and fair.
- Earlier dissemination of funding availability is a positive development.

Advice for other boards regarding project management:

- Begin planning and submission process early; ideally have proposals ready in advance so they can be submitted as soon as funds are available.
- Focus on projects that are consistent with board priorities (not just what is doable and low cost).
- Prepare a scope of work with sufficient detail to allow IJC assessment and prioritization, limiting unneeded back-and-forth communications.
- Consider and coordinate with IJC in advance on possible funding and contracting mechanisms.
- Work out in advance the details of operations and management (O&M) support for projects with ongoing annual costs in addition to first costs.
- Strategize how pieces of complex multi-year efforts are most effectively scheduled, funded and accomplished (as opposed to an unorganized piecemeal effort).
- Consider implementing projects in phases, with interim outcomes; learn as you go.
- In developing projects that result in data products, give thought early-on to finding a home for these products (i.e., where and by whom the data are to be stored, maintained and – if required -- updated).
- Recognize that government agencies are people-limited and that the availability of qualified local contractors and consultants also is limited, and therefore prioritize and be selective in project proposals.
- Give attention to the quality of project deliverables; there are various mechanisms to assure quality, but a formal independent peer review process is needed only for very large or potentially controversial projects.
- Weigh the advantages of seeking IWI funds from Canada, the United States, or both, depending on the requirements of the project that is envisioned.

Seizing Opportunities

- Many government agencies already have staff and funds for programs that could be utilized in the IWI context – boards should ask themselves whether they are tapping all relevant available government expertise.
- Where possible, board should try to link up with larger basin initiatives and the resources that come with them (e.g., the Lake Winnipeg Basin Initiative for the Rainy, Red, and Lake of the Woods boards).
- Explore options for collaboration with other IJC boards and task forces. The joint effort between the Health Professionals Task Force and the Rainy boards on health issues is a good example. There may be similar opportunities for synergy on climate change and air quality issues.
- More attention should be paid to using IWI project funds to leverage in-kind contributions from other agencies and partners. Quantifying in-kind contributions in project proposals and in IJC summary reporting on the IWI will help generate continued political support for the Initiative.¹
- IJC should issue semi-annual calls for proposals, in order to better match the Canadian and US fiscal years, which are out of phase by six months.

New Project Proposals

At the time of the workshop, the following project proposals had been submitted.

GIS Data Harmonization Workshop for the Okanogan Basin
Milk River Natural Flow and Apportionment Computation Spreadsheet
ADCP Bathymetry of Upper Rainy River
A Hydrologic/Hydraulic Model for the Souris River
Evaluation of the Water Quality Program for the Souris River

Additional proposals were encouraged. The Review Committee will consider the first group of proposals during the second half of April.

Geospatial Data Harmonization

Geographic Information Systems Coordinator Michael Laitta presented an update on data harmonization and its potential benefits to IWI boards. The Transboundary Hydrographic Data Harmonization Task Force, first convened by the IJC in July 2008, is making significant progress in developing a binational, coordinated approach to geospatial datasets covering watersheds along the international boundary. Five federal agencies are currently participating: Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada, Environment Canada, Natural Resources Canada, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Geological Survey. Coordination has proceeded to an unprecedented degree on two complementary fronts involving distinct data formats and expertise: hydrography (rivers, lakes and streams) and drainage areas (basins or containers where surface waters converge).

¹ Among the IWI project proposals in 2008-09 that included estimates of supplementary or in-kind contributions from other sources, the value of those contributions ranged between 18% and 40% of the funds anticipated or sought from the IWI; the unweighted average across all these projects was about 25%.

The Task Force has set up binational technical groups for hydrography and drainage areas to make sure that the two countries' respective national datasets -- Canada's National Hydrographic Network (NHN) and the U.S. National Hydrographic Dataset (NHD) -- match up more precisely along the international boundary. Hydrographic harmonization focuses on a strip within 100 meters on either side of the international boundary. The drainage area harmonization is being carried out on the transboundary basins using meso scale data at 1:24,000 or 1:50,000 resolution. The relevant containers in the U.S. have 8-digit identification codes and those in Canada have 4-digit codes, hence the basins of interest are referred to as the US8-CAN4 swath (as illustrated on the cover page of this report). Harmonization is proceeding in phases, with binational technical teams creating hybrid datasets that are sent back to the respective national dataset holders for their review and eventual incorporation into national databases. The later-phase, higher-resolution data products will require involvement with provincial and state agencies, and the IWI boards will be well placed to facilitate coordination at this level.

The ultimate goal is to provide water resource managers and planners at the local level with datasets and maps at a useful scale that connect seamlessly across the boundary. Using a common dataset will make it possible to develop detailed hydrological models of transboundary watersheds. These can be powerful tools to, for instance, predict the timing and extent of flooding or to forecast water quality changes caused by modifications in land use or land management practices.

Conclusion

In closing, Chair Brooks noted that the number of participants and their interest and enthusiasm attests to the vitality of the IWI. The initiative started as a pilot exercise covering only four basins, and though this is still an evolutionary process, the IWI is now generating interest all along the border. She thanked the governments for their support, and the boards for their continued hard work, including their contributions to this workshop.