

MINUTES FROM THE JULY 2024 EXECUTIVE MEETING

INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION

July 2024 Executive Meeting Minutes – July 8, 2024

The International Joint Commission (IJC) met in Executive Session with Merrell-Ann Phare in the Chair, on Monday July 8, 2024, from 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM EST in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.

COMMISSIONERS

Pierre Baril, Chair, Canadian Section
Gerald Acker, Chair, U.S. Section
Susan Chiblow, Canadian Section
Robert Gioia, U.S. Section
Merrell-Ann Phare, Canadian Section
Lance Yohe, U.S. Section

SECTION OFFICES

Christopher Wilkie, Secretary, Canadian Section
Susan Daniel, Secretary, U.S. Section
Paul Allen, Manager, Policy, Programs and Communications
Glenn Benoy, Director, Sciences and Engineering, Canadian Section
Mark Colosimo, Director Science and Engineering, U.S. Section
John Allis, Engineering Advisor, U.S. Section
Rob Caldwell, Senior Engineering Advisor, Canadian Section
Kevin Bunch, Writer-Communications Specialist, U.S. Section (contractor)
Christina Chiasson, Policy Advisor, Canadian Section
Celine Desjardins, Project Officer, Canadian Section
Oliver Dumville, Senior Policy Advisor, Canadian Section
Antionette Dunston, Special Assistant, U.S. Section
David Fay, Senior Engineering Advisor, Canadian Section
Mark Gabriel, Engineering Advisor, U.S. Section
Adam Greeley, Science Advisor, U.S. Section
Shenice Gross, Network Administrator, U.S. Section (contractor)
Matlock Grossman, Analyst, U.S. Section (intern)
David Hermann, Senior Policy Advisor, U.S. Section (contractor)
Julien Houle, Communications Advisor, Canadian Section
Jeff Kart, Executive Editor, IJC Newsletters, U.S. Section (contractor)
Erika Klyszejko, Engineering Advisor, Canadian Section
Jeff Laberge, Information Management Analyst, Canadian Section
Michael Laitta, Senior Physical Science Advisor/GIS Coordinator, U.S. Section

Catherine Lee-Johnston, Environmental Advisor, Canadian Section
Sarah Lobrichon, Public Affairs Manager, Canadian Section
Brian Maloney, Special Assistant, U.S. Section
Reginald McClendon, Executive Administrative Assistant, U.S. Section (contractor)
Semra Mesulam, Legal Advisor, U.S. Section
Diana Moczula, Policy and Communications Advisor, Canadian Section
Christian Moreau, IT Support Analyst, Canadian Section
Isabelle Reid, Executive Assistant, Canadian Section
Lyne Sabourin, Senior Water Quality and Ecosystem Advisor, Canadian Section
Mounir Salmi, Accounting Specialist, U.S. Section (contractor)
Avni Solanki, U.S. Section Engineering Advisor
Derek Spelay, Administrative Assistant, Canadian Section
Yon Trimble, Public Affairs Specialist, U.S. Section
Ed Virden, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Section
Jo Werba, AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellow, U.S. Section
John Yee, Chief, IM and IT Services, Canadian Section
Shane Zurbrigg, Legal Advisor, Canadian Section

GREAT LAKES REGIONAL OFFICE STAFF

Heather Stirratt, Director
Antonette Arvai, Physical Scientist
Raj Bejankiwar, Physical Scientist
Mark Burrows, Physical Scientist
Matthew Child, Physical Scientist
Kenneth Getty, Administrative Officer
Monique Myre, Administrative Officer
Rajendra Poudel, Economist
Laura Sabra, Administrative Officer
Diane Varosky, Administrative Coordinator
Allison Voglesong Zejnati, Public Affairs Specialist
Lizhu Wang, Biological Scientist
John Wilson, Physical Scientist
Rachel Wyatt, Communications Officer

1. CEREMONIAL OPENING TO THE MEETING

Invited guest, Elder Keith Boissoneau, provided a ceremonial opening to the executive session and Commissioner Sue Chiblow provided the opportunity for meeting attendees to participate in a smudge.

2. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Commissioners approved the agenda as presented.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Commissioners reviewed and approved the minutes of the April 5-9 Executive Meeting and Board Appearances as drafted.

4. COORDINATED CALENDAR

Commissioners reviewed and discussed the Coordinated Calendar for the remainder of 2024 and into 2025. Commissioners approved the dates for the Spring Semi-Annual meeting in April 2025 in Washington, DC. Commissioners confirmed their plans to attend in-person conferences, meetings, and events for the upcoming year. Commissioners agreed to hold a one-day virtual executive meeting the second week of September 2024. Commissioners agreed to meet virtually for an executive session the week before the October semi-annual appearances. Commissioners discussed the schedule for the semi-annual weeks of meetings and appearances noting the need to provide opportunities for board members to discuss and share ideas at semi-annual gatherings.

5. COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITIES

Commissioners were updated on ongoing communications activities including Phase I of the IJC website redesign project. Phase I involved conducting a “needs assessment” of the current website and was completed in June 2024. Currently, staff are reviewing the results of the needs assessment before developing a plan and budget for Phase II of the project which would be to implement the website redesign. The intent of the website redesign is both to expand the IJC’s audience and to make the interface more accessible and user-friendly. Some changes that are being considered are enhancing the website’s search function and navigability, increasing capacity for website maintenance, a branding initiative, and enhancing our boards’ abilities to effectively use and modify their microsites.

Staff and Commissioners also discussed upcoming speaking engagements, website and social media analytics, news releases issued, the development of key messages around the IJC’s climate resiliency work, publications and video products for the IJC. Commissioners indicated interest in receiving weekly summaries of potential IJC-related social media content to use on their social media platforms.

Commissioners requested a status update at the September 2024 executive meeting on the IJC’s data management practices and IT security infrastructure.

6. ELK-KOOTENAI/Y REFERENCE

Staff provided an update to Commissioners on ongoing activities relating to the reference received from Governments in March 2024 to examine water pollution in the Elk-Kootenai/y watershed. Staff discussed the organization of a Study Board by September 2024 to undertake the work outlined in the reference. As part of standing up the Study Board, the IJC will conduct a public consultation period and virtual engagement session in August on the Study Board structure and scope.

The IJC is independently developing a directive for the Study Board. The first five months of the Study Board's work will be to develop a Plan of Study. Commissioners emphasized the importance of keeping the work of the Study Board independent of the Governance Body. Staff and Commissioners also discussed potential structure and membership of the Study Board, acknowledging the need to appoint non-government members to the board, knowing that the Study Board's technical working groups will have government representatives. Candidates for Board Members who have experience working with both western science and Indigenous Knowledge should be a key consideration. Given the breadth of expertise required on the Study, Commissioners advised staff to move forward with a nine-member Study Board. Commissioners asked staff to develop a matrix of potential Study Board members connecting back to the needs outlined in the reference for Commissioner consideration.

Staff and Commissioners also discussed how and when the Study Board will engage with industry groups in the basin on the Plan of Study as outlined in the reference letter from governments.

7. GREAT LAKES – ST. LAWRENCE RIVER ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE / INTERNATIONAL LAKE ONTARIO – ST. LAWRENCE RIVER BOARD

Staff provided an update on ongoing activities of the Expedited Review of Plan 2014. The International Lake Ontario – St. Lawrence River Board (ILOSLRB) is planning on delivering its final report on the Expedited Review to the Commission in March 2025. Prior to delivering the final report the Commission recommends that ILOSLRB hold a public consultation period on the draft report findings and recommendations. Commissioners directed staff to draft a letter to ILOSLRB indicating the Commission's intent for ILOSLRB to plan for a public comment period on the draft findings and recommendations this fall. ILOSLRB's final report will include an analysis of how public feedback was considered in the report recommendations.

Staff also provided an update to Commissioners on how the ILOSLRB will respond to the Commission's direction to establish a permanent advisory group to the board. The Commission is expecting to receive a letter response from the board in advance of the September Executive Meeting.

8. INTERNATIONAL WATERSHEDS INITIATIVE

Staff provided an update on International Watersheds Initiative (IWI) activities. Staff presented plans for a feasibility study to transform the International Lake Osoyoos Board of Control into a watershed board. Commissioners and staff discussed funding of the feasibility study and composition of the team to carry out this work in the basin including local and Indigenous participants as well as IOLBC members and IJC staff. The feasibility study will involve engaging in informal discussions with several organizations in the Osoyoos basin around a potential role for a watershed board. The feasibility study is needed to garner support from organizations in the area for the formation of a watershed board before we seek approval to set up the board from governments. A key component of the feasibility study will also be to determine the level of

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Woods, Rainy and Namakan Lakes. Following heavy rainfall across the region, all three lakes are above their rule curves, and the International Lake of the Woods Control Board has been activated. Commissioners will advise staff in the coming weeks regarding the request of the IRLWWB Water Levels Committee (WLC) for advice on expanding its membership. Commissioners asked for an update on the anticipated timeline of the exceedances report being put together by the Aquatic Ecosystem Health Committee (AEHC). The AEHC is facing capacity issues, affecting the finalization of this report. Staff indicated that they expect the report to be completed and delivered in advance of the September 2024 executive meeting. During the upcoming August basin week, the IRLWWB and committees will be discussing what they need to address capacity issues to complete their work and will make recommendations to address the issues.

11. GREAT LAKES WATER QUALITY AGREEMENT 2026 TRIENNIAL ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS REPORT

Staff provided a proposal for the 2026 Triennial Assessment of Progress Report (TAP) approach and timeline. Staff and Commissioners also discussed the accompanying 2025 Progress Report of the Parties (PROP) engagement approach. The proposed approach is consistent with feedback received from Commissioners during the 2020 and 2023 TAP process. Staff recommend developing a core team to write the TAP with support from the working group comprised of Great Lakes Water Quality Advisory Board members. Staff will undergo a process to select a small number of themes for the 2026 report in consultation with the working groups and staff who advise on the PROP Annexes. Staff will present a TAP Roadmap in September 2024 for Commissioner consideration as well as an analysis of the feedback received from the Parties on the IJC's 2023 TAP report. IJC received positive, constructive feedback from the Parties on its 2023 TAP report, and will continue to refine its recommendations to be implementable. Commissioners indicated interest in the 2026 TAP report examining how the Parties are tracking their own progress and a section to track how governments are responding to IJC recommendations.

12. GREAT LAKES ADVISORY BOARD OPEN CALL UPDATE

Staff provided an update on prospective advisory board membership interest based on the open call conducted in spring 2024. Staff also provided a forecast of upcoming vacancies on the Great Lakes Advisory Boards (GLABs) and will develop recommendations for appointments to fill these seats. Staff are continuing to review applications and have initially identified a number of high-quality applicants to provide specific expertise to the Boards. This open-call approach will help streamline filling vacancies when they arise on the boards, rather than doing it on an ad hoc basis. Overall, staff indicated that this effort has been a success in establishing a pool of potential candidates for future vacancies. Staff indicated that the open call can be adapted in future to further target areas of expertise that the current round missed (e.g., Indigenous experts). Commissioners asked staff to develop a briefing note for how to continue with these types of open calls in future to identify pools of candidates for the GLABs and the frequency of conducting these open calls in future.

13. GREAT LAKES REGIONAL POLL

Chris McLaughlan, Canadian co-chair of the Great Lakes Water Quality Board (WQB) presented the results of the 2024 Great Lakes Regional Poll to Commissioners. The poll is conducted on a triennial basis, and this is its fourth iteration. The Poll gathers public feedback on what they see as the key threats and challenges affecting the Great Lakes, restoration initiatives and the general importance of maintaining the health of the Great Lakes. The Poll also tracks how public views and interests may change over time on certain issues. The 2024 Poll attempted to target under-represented communities such as island communities, and Indigenous Peoples. Some high-level findings include: general consensus that the Great Lakes are an important resource requiring ongoing protection and funding from governments; a common view that the Great Lakes should be protected for the benefit of the fish and wildlife that depend on them as well as people and future generations. The WQB is preparing a more fulsome analysis and report on the 2024 Poll results and will present this to Commissioners during their appearance during the October Semi-Annual week of meetings. Commissioners expressed particular interest in receiving an update from the WQB on how they intend to use the Poll results in their work.

14. INTERNATIONAL SOURIS RIVER BOARD

Staff presented a summary of the June 2024 International Souris River Board (ISRB) meetings and public meeting in Regina, SK. At the public meeting, there was significant interest in the ISRB's response to Saskatchewan's consideration of approving the construction of small modular reactors (SMRs) along the Souris River in Saskatchewan. Staff and Commissioners also discussed the progress towards an understanding between the IJC and the Souris Water Management Agencies (WMAs) on the IJC's responsibilities under the 1989 Agreement. The WMAs submitted a package which lays out their understanding of their role under the 1989 Agreement including a draft Terms of Reference for the WMAs. IJC staff are currently reviewing the package. IJC staff met with the WMAs on June 25th, which resulted in achieving a common understanding of responsibilities under the 1989 Agreement. The Saskatchewan Water Security Agency (WSA) indicated its intent to return to the ISRB by fall 2024. Staff will submit a response package with a cover letter and proposed edits to the Terms of Reference prepared by the WMAs. If WMA responds favourably to the IJC edits, it will then be shared with the ISRB for their approval. If approved, it will then be shared with Commissioners for approval. The IJC will then make changes to the Board's directive, as necessary and prepare to update Commissioners at the September 2024 executive meeting prior to meeting with the Board in October.

15. POPLAR AND BIG MUDDY BASINS

Staff provided an update on the progress of forming a Poplar River and Big Muddy Creek Task Force to undertake a review of activities in these basins in alignment with the (1948) Reference. As of now, staff have recruited Task Force Co-Chairs from Environment and Climate Change Canada's Transboundary Waters Unit, Freshwater Management Directorate, Canada Water Agency Branch and the United States Geological Survey's Wyoming-Montana Water Science Center, as well as other Task Force members. Staff will share the Task Force Terms of Reference with the new co-chairs and members and are organizing a virtual kickoff meeting with the group

in the coming weeks. Staff are seeking to recruit two more members for the Task Force with the input from current membership over the coming weeks. Staff are also planning initial engagement sessions in the basin, although the timeline is still uncertain. Staff have met with and will continue to work closely with the Poplar River Binational Monitoring Committee in the work of the Task Force. Commissioners asked staff to provide a more detailed budget for the Task Force.

16. ORAL UPDATES

International St. Mary-Milk Rivers Study Board

Staff will prepare a briefing note for the following week on updates on the International St. Mary-Milk Rivers Study Board including its recent meetings in Lethbridge, AB with its advisory groups in June 2024 and progress of the study's Technical Working Groups (TWGs) activities. Staff are also preparing an informational note for the Accredited Officers of the St. Mary and Milk Rivers related to an upcoming public webinar on the siphon failure hosted by the Milk River Joint Board of Control.

17. OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was raised at the meeting.