

222nd Water Quality Board Meeting Notes

October 17, 2023

Ottawa, Ontario (Canada)

Special guest for opening remarks– Verna McGregor, president of Algonquin Cultural Institute

U.S. Member Participants

Jon Allan (Co-Chair)
George Elmaraghy
Frank Ettawageshik
Sara Hudson
Elizabeth Kirkwood
Joe Tomandi III
Brandon Hofmeister (remote)
Kelsey Leonard (remote)
Shaili Pfeiffer (remote)

Canadian Member Participants

Chris McLaughlin (Co-Chair)
Fe de Leon
Carolyn Johns
Jamie Lavigne (remote)
Chloe Stuart
Carolyn DuBois
Michael Goffin
Bonnie Fox
Mark Fisher
Meredith Brown

U.S. Member Regrets

Chris Korleski
Molly Flannagan
Monica Lewis-Patrick
Eileen Murphy

Canadian Member Regrets

Niharika Bandaru
Francois Houde
Brian Tucker
Mark Reusser

Observers

Ash Kumar - Environment and Climate Change Canada (remote)
Carla Torchia - Environment and Climate Change Canada
Alyssa Offutt – UN Institute for Water Education IHE (remote)
Maggie Neff – Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (remote)
Rochelle Ettawageshik

Invited Guest for Storytelling II J. Carl Ganter – Circle of Blue (remote)

GLRO Staff

Heather Stirratt – Great Lakes Regional Office
Mark Burrows - Great Lakes Regional Office (remote)
Antonette Arvai - Great Lakes Regional Office (remote)
John Wilson – Great Lakes Regional Office (remote)
Rachel Wyatt - Great Lakes Regional Office

IJC Liaisons

Oliver Dumville –Section Office (Canada) Kathey-Lee Galvin – Section Office (U.S.)

Secretary - Rajendra Poudel – Great Lakes Regional Office

1. Welcome & Introduction

Co-chairs welcomed all members and guests to the hybrid WQB meeting and made introductions. The Co-Chairs also had the distinct pleasure of welcoming Indigenous scholar Verna McGregor of the Algonquin Cultural Institute.

2. Opening Remarks in Indigenous Way by an Indigenous Scholar

The meeting began with an Indigenous opening. Elder McGregor provided a brief history of Turtle Island, now known as North America; sharing of resources; and conserving Mother Nature. She highlighted that how we weave conflicting ideologies without destroying each other is based on the harmonious relationship that we share. In Indigenous culture women are water keepers and men are fire keepers, which keeps balance in human life. Combining traditional knowledge with western science knowledge is important but care needs to be taken to safeguard the Indigenous culture and ideologies. Elder McGregor led participants in an Indigenous song, with participants standing and moving from north to east to west and south. Elder McGregor shared the importance of four different colors (red, blue, yellow, and white) and directions of that cloth knitted ring.

3. Co-chairs Updates

Co-chairs briefly reviewed their September update. Co-chairs expressed their appreciation of board members' leadership and participation on WQB and cross board projects. Climate Change Adaptation, Social Dimensions, and Great Lakes Horizons are projects being led by the WQB. The Manure Nutrient Management Collaborative (also known as the Collaborative) was led by Mark Wales, Sandy Bihn, Joe Tomandl III, Mark Reusser, Gayle Wood and Jon Allan. Co-chair Allan shared that the Collaborative was a pilot project and was in the process of learn & relearn. The WQB is continuing to seek an entity to transition the Collaborative so that it may continue its operation independent of the IJC/WQB

4. Storytelling I – Meredith Brown

WQB Member Meredith Brown described the Biinaagami project of Canadian Geographic, which is a multimedia, change-provoking initiative rooted in Indigenous knowledge. The project is intended to engage and activate national and international audiences in understanding the history of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence ecosystems and to inspire action for a hopeful future.

The goal of the Biinaagami project is to reframe Canadians' perceptions of water to align with the Indigenous worldview more closely by shifting from water as a resource to being in a relationship with water. The Biinaagami project aims to increase awareness and understanding of water and connection with the sovereign First Nations and Tribes within the watershed. The project showcases the Indigenous names of major lakes and rivers and First Nation reserves. Another area of focus amplifying the important work being carried

out by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scientists, water protectors and innovators. This project ignites curiosity and inspire actions for clean and healthy waters by restoring just and healthy connections among wildlife, people, water and place. The health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence ecosystems should be central to everyone's decision-making.

5. Engagement With Tribes & First Nations: Towards Defining the Role of WQB – *Jamie Lavigne*

This session was brought to explore the need of some robust engagements with the Indigenous people residing in the Great Lakes basin and the relevance of Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. WQB member Jamie Lavigne, started by expressing appreciation for the WQB developing a “Great Lakes Water Quality Board Indigenous Peoples Engagement Principles and Practices” in 2017. The WQB mandate is helping to create awareness among the public about water quality for our daily life, recreational, agricultural, and aquatic habitat. Under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, the Water Quality Board has responsibilities to assist the Commission by reviewing and assessing the progress of the governments of Canada and the United States in implementing the Agreement, identifying emerging issues, recommending strategies and approaches for preventing and resolving complex challenges facing the Great Lakes, and providing advice on the role of relevant jurisdictions to implement these strategies and approaches. The mandate has allowed the WQB to identify solutions, provide advice, recommend plans, policies and programs.

The WQB is closely working with feedback groups to learn more on experiences, challenges, and issues faced within the IJC. The journal paper by Ettawageshik and Norman (2020), provides recommendations for improving engagement with Indigenous governments and peoples, including restructuring from binational to multinational body whose leadership is drawn equally from Canada, the United States, and Indigenous nations. Granted, this may require the federal governments amending the Boundary Waters Treaty. The paper also provides recommendation on regularly reviewing policies/practices to ensure they are up-to-date and relevant with special emphasis on rights-holders, not stakeholders as early as possible [1]. The WQB is cognizant and recognizes there are multiple knowledge systems, diversity of gender (gender-based analysis), Indigenous governance systems, share lessons learned, and seek out Indigenous representation (recognize they can't speak for all Nations).

After the presentation, Jamie opened the floor for discussion on two main themes - How can we grow as a Board and set as Indigenous advisory experts in the IJC? and what do the board members see as appropriate next steps that fulfills the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement?

The board often discusses partnerships focused outcomes tied to conservation, ecological restoration, and environmental protection in the region. Based on an analysis done by Whyte et al. (2017) on focus groups with Indigenous practitioners and their close

partners, the chapter develops seven key principles to help cooperative institutions create robust & lasting partnerships. They are: principle of self-determination; principle of early involvement; principle of intergenerational involvement; principle of continuous cross-cultural education; principle of balance of power & decision-making; principle of respect for Indigenous knowledge; and principle of control of knowledge mobilization [2].

6. Project Updates

Board members received written project updates in advance of the meeting, including the WQB's Climate Change Adaptation & Community Resilience, Social Dimensions, Great Lakes Horizons, and the SAB's Microplastic project. A short update on in-progress WQB projects was provided. The climate change adaptation project team successfully held engagement sessions with the United Tribes of Michigan in Manistee, MI in May 2023, and the Partners in Action conference in St. Paul, MN the week of Aug 8-10, 2023. These sessions helped identify resources and approaches that are more appropriate for Tribes and First Nations as the actions are more relatable in climate change initiative. The Great Lakes St. Lawrence Cities Initiative is interested in helping the work group and contractor team organize focus groups to help ground truth and identify formats/options that appeal to municipalities. The climate change project is unique, as it is aimed at educating communities to use the tools as needed.

WQB's Social Dimensions project strengthening of communities reinforces the will and commitment for additional support and stewardship of the environment and contributes to improvements in engagement and water quality outcomes. The goal is to support the municipalities for their needed tools and capacities to take appropriate actions, such as, These local decisions and actions may be things like zoning or land use, infrastructure choices, the placement of parks or park-like amenities. They may also take the form of arts or events (festivals for example) that a community would initiate to link people to waterways and waterfronts, for instance. Alternative, they could inform aspects of how a community decides to issue bonds to support community investments.

Horizons II project will build communications tools that communities can take benefits from it. The primary objective of this current phase of work is to help translate the outcomes and storylines of the report in an understandable and useful manner via communications products and tools that can be used to facilitate dialogues and support derivative products and reflections that engage a variety of audiences, including relevant jurisdictions to implement these strategies and approaches through their implementation of the GLWQA. These products are to be used as a means to help these varied publics and audiences understand the four future scenarios presented, how small- and large-scale decisions and actions can affect the scenario outcome, and to champion those decisions that keep the Great Lakes region on a desired trajectory.

7. **Storytelling II – J. Carl Ganter (Circle of Blue)**

Carl's works in water management have been impressive at the national and global level. The main goal to bring him in this meeting was to find out the global population's perception about water and the unprecedented challenges associated with water. Also, Carl's expertise in telling stories of water will benefit the board members to think through and work from a different angle in water management. Through his work with the news website CircleofBlue.org, Carl has traveled throughout the world and had countless experiences witnesses water consumption's inherent connection to humans. He has many stories from the Middle East Asia, Southeast Asia, Latin America and other areas from around the world. During his presentation, there were some important highlights on path to system change as below.

Identification of key interdependences and adaptive changes,
Investigation of barriers to systems change and paths to breakthrough solutions,
Inspiration to interdisciplinary knowledge sharing and innovative design thinking,
Initiation of collaboration to bridge divides and accelerate systems change.

He proposed that when we talk about water in the Great Lakes, the following key questions surround the topic:

What are the most important stories in the Great Lakes?

Who is the audience? What do you want them to do?

What's missing? Who's missing? What is the context?

What's working?

What (or who) are the impediments?

How do you listen and course correct?

8. **WQB in Conversation with Heather Stirratt (Director, Great Lakes Regional Office)**

Director Stirratt provided an update on several topics that the WQB and Great Lakes Regional Office (GLRO) are engaged in.

Indigenous engagement - IJC is embarking on a new initiative to explore the creation of an Indigenous circle of experts to serve in an advisory capacity to the Commission.

WQB project contracts – Great Lakes Horizons II project contract was awarded in late September 2023. A statement of work for the Social Dimensions project is in progress and a contract is expected to be awarded by the end of November.

Commissioner transition – Gerald (Jerry) Acker was confirmed as US Section Chair of the IJC in July 2023. A candidate has been nominated to replace US Commissioner Rob Sisson. Canadian Section Chair Commissioner Pierre Beland recently resigned.

Budget – The annual budget for the Great Lakes Regional Office, which includes Great Lakes advisory board projects and operations, has remained roughly the same for the last few decades. WQB co-chairs are cognizant of the budget envelope available and craft projects to fit within that.

9. Cross-board Project Updates

The Great Lakes Atlas scoping exercise is a WQB-SAB joint project, which is expected to start in December. The project will entail convening meetings with stakeholders and rights holders to determine the characteristics and contents of a modern interactive Atlas. The workgroup is working on finding avenues to catalogue dataset sources and confirm operational characteristics of the Atlas project. The preparation of request for proposal is in-progress and will be submitted for bidding competition.

10. Next Meeting & Closing Remarks

The next WQB meeting will be held virtually the last week of January 2024.

Some useful information

1. University of Michigan awarded \$5 million to establish climate change research center [NSF grant to UofM Climate Change](#) *Extracted from Michigan Radio By Lester Graham Published September 18, 2023*
2. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [UNDRIP E web.pdf](#)

References

1. Ettawageshik, F., E.S. Norman, 2020. From “stakeholder to rights-holder”: re-examining the role of Indigenous Peoples in the International Joint Commission. *The First Century of the International Joint Commission* (M. Clamen, D. Macfarlane, editors), Chapter 14: 367-394. University of Calgary Press, Calgary.
2. Whyte, K.P., N.J. Reo, D. McGregor, M.A. Smith, J.F. Jenkins, K.A. Rubio, 2017. Seven Indigenous principles for successful cooperation in Great Lakes conservation initiatives. *Biodiversity, Conservation and Environmental Management in the Great Lakes Basin* (E. Freedman, M. Neuzil, editors), Chapter 15: 182-194. Routledge, London.

Pictures of WQB Meeting (October 17, 2023)



Gallery 1: Opening remarks by Verna McGregor performing on the Indigenous way (October 17, 2023)



Gallery 2: Interaction & presentation sessions in Water Quality Board meeting (October 17, 2023)