



Detroit River Canadian Cleanup  
Suite 311 - 360 Fairview Avenue West  
Essex, ON N8M 1Y6 - 519-982-3722  
postmaster@detroitriver.ca

## **Meeting Record DRCC Steering & Implementation Committee Meeting**

June 14, 2023, 9:30 am to 12:00 pm

Windsor Yacht Club, 9000 Riverside Drive East, Windsor ON N8S 1H1

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### **Welcome, introductions, approval of agenda**

#### **Review of Action Items (see page 2); Approval of Meeting Record from Sept. 14, 2022**

Sara began the meeting at 9:42am. She welcomed everyone and began with introductions, included in Appendix I. The meeting record from September 14 2022 was approved, with all actions completed.

### **Canada Ontario Agreement (COA) update and Updates from COA Executive / GLWQA or Great Lakes Protection Initiative (GLPI); Four Agency Management Committee**

#### COA (Canada-Ontario Agreement)

Carolyn shared they are in the process of launching the Wetland Conservation Strategy, which will guide partnerships and projects in the province until 2030. This new program is overseen by staff who are already involved in the Great Lakes program, and that synergy is going to work well. The province also reported on its progress within the Ontario Great Lakes Strategy which was introduced in 2012. The second progress report shares actions that have been taken, investments and progress. More information: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontarios-great-lakes-strategy-second-progress-report>

Ted mentioned that there is limited COA funding available right now, and the Detroit River AOC coordination funding is in place until March 31 2024. MECP and ERCA will begin planning the next round into the future soon.

#### FAMC (Four Agency Management Committee)

April shared that this is the Canada and United States management collaboration to oversee the Detroit River AOCs. They will be meeting at the end of August, and another meeting will be held in the wintertime.

#### ECCC (Environment and Climate Change Canada)

Sara shared there will be some changes coming, with the launch of the new Canada Water Agency and the Freshwater Action Plan. Environment and Climate Change Canada staff will be shifting their focus, and welcoming new staff to lead these programs. The changes are expected over the next six months as legislation will be in place. Recently, \$420 million in Great Lakes funding was announced over the next ten years, which will support AOC program goals to complete all remediation by 2030.

#### GLPI (Great Lakes Protection Initiative)

There are a few applications submitted for the Detroit River AOC, and are being reviewed. Updates to follow in the fall.

## **BUI Status Updates**

April shared a slide show outlining the status of the remaining four BUIs. This is Appendix II. Since the last SIC meeting we have not re-designated any BUIs however we have completed 2 status assessments including fish populations (BUI 3) and Bird or Animal Deformities or other Reproduction Problems and these assessments are on our meeting agenda for today.

### BUI #1 (Restrictions on Fish Consumption)

Ted said that only fish are identified as impaired for this BUI. We have been working with Dr. Ken Drouillard from GLIER to undertake a variety of monitoring, research and assessments. Partners have worked together to put together a framework to assess this BUI. Ken has provided a report previously to this group, with updates and rework. He just presented the most recent assessment update to the Monitoring and Research Work Group, representing a four-tiered framework that includes fish consumption advice, Detroit River restrictions comparing to non-AOC reference sites, other lines of evidence and evaluating how contaminants influence constrictions and other possible remediation actions. The indicator species for this BUI include brown bullhead, largemouth bass (switched from small mouth bass) and walleye. After his evaluations, his assessment showed that walleye did not pass the last tier in the framework. Also, there are no further actions left for us to take on the Canadian side to reduce advisories. Based on the results, he provided a recommendation to redesignate the BUI. This report is being reviewed and will be presented to the SIC eventually. He also mentioned the DRCC fish consumption survey that has been undertaken, with over 350 responses that will be included in the BUI assessment.

### BUI #3 (Degradation of Fish and Wildlife Populations)

April shared that both working groups have created metrics/sub-criteria/delisting criteria to evaluate this BUI. MNRF have been working towards addressing the fish populations. They are presenting their findings today, with all five sub-criteria met. All the metrics have been met and a NI status for fish populations is recommended.

For wildlife, the metric has not been met, indices of diversity and abundance are low but consistent and to help understand possible limiting factors, ECCC collaborated with Birds Canada to explore landscape impacts and provide the DRCC a report of the findings for consideration. The report has been drafted and is sitting with the Monitoring and Research Work Group to review. The report also addresses some potential actions the DRCC can take to try to increase the marsh bird IBI score. Some ideas include improving existing habitat through *Phragmites* control, enhancing what remains as well as continuing to create wetlands. ECCC continues to monitor the marsh bird community annually, with a new lens to include both quality and quantity. She hopes to have a better sense at the end of this monitoring season where we are at and determine next steps.

### BUI #5 (Bird or Animal Deformities or other Reproductive Problems)

There is a fulsome update from Kim on the agenda. Briefly, an abundance of resources have been invested to monitor and assess quite a few indicator species including snapping turtles, northern leopard frogs, colonial water birds and tree swallows. The report Kim will present was provided to the Monitoring and Research Work Group and there was support from them to bring to the SIC today. The status should be considered not impaired.

#### BUI #14 (Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat)

There are four sub-criteria elements for this BUI representing the different habitat types including wetlands, riparia, terrestrial and shoreline. Of the 4 delisting criteria, the Habitat Work Group has established metrics for two which will facilitate assessment and work planning. The shoreline criteria has been met. ERCA conducted a GIS analysis to look at corridors/terrestrial, with future work investigating what the function of these sites is, such as whether species at risk are present. CWS is looking at landscape limiting factors on the marsh bird communities and DFO has been leading the riparian/aquatic work.

There are two DRCC supported habitat projects that have been completed including Peche Island and Collavino. The Habitat WG is also working on the planning of another two projects on the candidate list. The first one involves repairing the finger dyke that protects the wetland complex at the mouth of the River Canard. The second one addresses re-establishing an open water wetland at the south end of Fighting Island. This project is very similar to Peche Island. Descriptions of both projects were submitted to DFO for review and advice on permits. We are waiting for that advice but fully expect both to require SARA compliant FA Authorizations as fish habitat is being lost and/or altered at both sites.

#### **BUI Status Report: Bird or animal deformities or other reproductive problems (BUI 5)**

Kim provided an overview of the delisting criteria, objectives and results of the monitoring and research, as well as five sentinel indicator species who all feed from the aquatic environment, their different attributes and years of study. This presentation is Appendix III of the meeting record. The species include northern leopard frogs, black-crowned night herons, snapping turtles, colonial waterbirds and tree swallows. Overall, their assessment when compared against delisting criteria 1 and 2, they found there is little evidence for impairment on reproduction associated with contaminant induced effects within the AOC, therefore they recommend changing the status to 'not impaired'.

Carolyn asked if there is an area, we need to look at to avoid going backwards with this BUI regarding contaminants and reproduction issues. Kim said there are other newer contaminants of concern/air quality issues that are not legacy pollutants that could be monitored at these sites on the Detroit River.

April pitched to the SIC what they would like to do with the results of the report for BUI 5. She encouraged them to share feedback before we ask for consensus to begin the redesignation process. Needing no additional time to review the report, all SIC members agreed to move the redesignation process forward with the DRCC and begin the community engagement and consultation actions.

#### **BUI Status Report: Fish populations (BUI 3)**

Stephen presented the work MNRF has undertaken and completed to create the assessment report on fish populations, with the accompanying report shared with the work group in advance of the meeting. The presentation is Appendix IV. Stephen shared a fish population history for the Detroit River citing overfishing, channelization and urban development as major drivers for this impairment as well as a BUI

status history from 1991, 1996, 1999, 2006, 2010 and 2022 listings. There are five sub-criteria for BUI#3 addressing self-sustaining and healthy communities of indicator fish including walleye, bass, lake sturgeon and brown bullhead. Overall, the assessment has found that all five sub-criteria has been met, the river does in fact support healthy, self-sustaining communities.

Zack asked how Lake Sturgeon are monitored in the Detroit River. Caldwell First Nation has a cultural and historical interest in this species and he would like to relay information back to members. Stephen shared there are a few methods including telemetry tagging and monitoring the spawning reefs. He also offered to share Rich's contact with Zack.

Kevin asked if there is a need to continue reintroducing Lake Sturgeon to the river. Stephen answered by explaining yes there is for now, as ls take a very long time to mature, so any efforts we are undertaking now will support population increase/growth over the next two decades.

April asked the SIC if they approve of the DRCC initiating the public consultation and engagement process for the fish populations portion of BUI #3. We could solicit feedback and follow up again with the wildlife component once met, rather than sitting on these findings for one to two years. Feedback from the public can help to improve the data and the final report. The report would not go to COA annex leads until wildlife side is ready. Stephen mentioned the connecting channels program. They will be back to the Detroit River every 3-5 years to reassess populations again. There will be additional information to share changes before the final stamp is put on this BUI assessment. All members of the SIC agreed that the DRCC should begin the public consultation and engagement process for the fish populations portion of this BUI.

### **Pathway to Delisting**

Paul provided a presentation launching the 2023 Pathway to Delisting document. This is a living document outlining past, present and future science and monitoring and other activities that collectively are undertaken by partners and agencies to work towards delisting the Detroit River AOC. This document was sent out in advance of the meeting, and is available on the DRCC website under the publications tab. His slide deck is Appendix V of the meeting record.

### **Detroit River Communication & Outreach Update**

Gina provided an update to the SIC on some notable outreach and engagement projects the DRCC led in the last year. Projects include hosting the Family Fishing Day on the river, screening The Erie Situation, hosting a booth at Malden Park for Earth Day, participating in various watershed tree planting efforts with the community and publishing six Canadian Detroit River AOC videos, which can all be accessed via the DRCC's YouTube page, @DetroitRiverCC. Her presentation is Appendix VII of the meeting record.

### **Update on Indigenous Engagement**

Paul shared a presentation highlighting Indigenous engagement opportunities. The DRCC, ECCC, MECP, ERCA and Caldwell First Nation held meetings in the winter of 2023 to discuss the DRCC RAP goals and progress on remaining 4 BUIs.

### **Work Group Updates**

April shared that there are a lot of efforts between agencies and work groups taking place to address the remaining four BUIs. With one and a half approved to move forward, we can continue these efforts. Both Ted and April are pleased with the progress to continue addressing the Detroit River AOC. The DRCC has also engaged Aamjiwnaang, Walpole Island, Chippewas of the Thames and Delaware First Nations through the sharing of reports and annual updates on Detroit River Remedial Action Plan progress. His presentation is included as Appendix VII.

### **Public Advisory Council Report**

The PAC is the public voice of the DRCC, composed of NGOs, local environmental and conservation groups and interested individuals who meet from time to time. There has been many actions and projects taking place in the Detroit River watershed the PAC has been involved in lately. Notably, movement towards saving Ojibway Shores and the Tallgrass Prairie, being ceded to ECCC. On the American side, plans are underway to remove 5.1 million cubic metres of contaminants in the channel. The DRCC PAC has sent letters of encouragement to MI representatives to continue working towards and funding remediation. Also, DRCC PAC has sent letters out to Joe Biden's office to continue funding programs that address AOCs and Great Lakes restoration on the US side.

### **Round Table Updates**

Stephen mentioned that MNRF will be monitoring the Detroit River through their connecting channels program this year, as well as conducting a creel survey. Ken mentioned that the City of Windsor continues to monitor mussels annually, and provided the DRCC the most recent report to share with the SIC. Zack suggested hosting a community engagement opportunity between Caldwell Frist Nation members and the DRCC to share information. Kevin mentioned that ERCA continues to work with partners and agencies on all DRCC RAP related work, and is looking forward to announcing Collavino Conservation Area open to the public in the future.

### **Other items/ Closing Remarks/ Next Meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 12:30pm followed by lunch provided by the Windsor Yacht Club, and a walking tour of Peche Island to see the erosion protection and habitat restoration project, and a visit to Collavino.

### **Appendix I. Meeting Attendance**

Paul Drca	Detroit River Canadian Cleanup
Gina Pannunzio	Detroit River Canadian Cleanup
Ryan Graham	Essex Region Conservation Authority
Tom Henderson	Detroit River Canadian Cleanup Public Advisory Council
Zack Hamm	Caldwell First Nation
Kevin Money	Essex Region Conservation Authority
Ted Briggs	Ministry of Environment Conservation and Parks
April White	Environment and Climate Change Canada
Sara Varty	Environment and Climate Change Canada
Stephen Marklevitz	Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry
Carolyn O'Neil	Ministry of Environment Conservation and Parks
Kim Hughes	Environment and Climate Change Canada
Peter Berry	Windsor Port Authority
Kevin Webb	City of Windsor