

Meeting Record
DRCC Public Advisory Council & EPI Work Group
February 28, 2024 – 4:30 to 6:30pm
Riverside Public Library, 6305 Wyandotte St E, Windsor, ON
In Person & Virtual via Microsoft Teams

Welcome, Introductions, Approval of Agenda, Land Acknowledgement

Jackie Serran began the meeting at 4:35pm with a land acknowledgement (Appendix I) and followed with a round table of introductions. Meeting attendance is included as Appendix II. The meeting agenda was approved as presented. Tom Henderson welcomed Jackie Serran as she returns to her RAP Coordinator position following maternity leave. Tom also introduced Laura Neufeld, Community Outreach Coordinator for ERCA, who is covering the interim assistant role while Gina Pannunzio completes her maternity leave. Tom welcomed Mike Fisher, the official spokesperson for the Friends of Ojibway Prairie, which are the core non-governmental organization advocating for the Ojibway National Urban Park. Mike was invited to this meeting by Tom to speak about the progress of the National Urban Park.

Review of September 6, 2023 Meeting Record and Action Items

The September 6, 2023 meeting record was approved by consensus with no changes. There were no action items recorded from that meeting.

Guest Speaker – Update on Ojibway National Urban Park

Mike Fisher, spokesperson for the Ojibway National Urban Park for Friends of Ojibway Prairie (FOOP) presented an update on the National Urban Park. His presentation is included as Appendix III. Parks Canada has identified they are planning to expand their urban parks program following the completion of the Rouge National Urban Park in the Greater Toronto Area, which was the first National Urban Park introduced in Canada.

Since winter 2023, the City of Windsor and the Town of LaSalle announced that they are both offering land for the National Urban Park, whose boundary is still to be determined. Mike confirmed that Ojibway Shores was recently transferred to Parks Canada, who is stewarding the property and moving forward with environmental assessments.

Mike informed the group that [Bill C-248](#) is currently in the Senate, brought forward by MP Brian Masse, looking to legislate the national park into federal law. It passed the House of Commons in April of last year and it has been in the Senate since then. There are trade-offs to both options and how parks are managed (policy versus legislation) depending on what the outcome will be. Under legislation, Parks Canada would come in and take over management of the lands and protect them. Under policy, current owners of

properties would maintain ownership and Parks Canada would provide their stamp of approval saying that these lands qualify as a National Urban Park.

Mike mentioned that there has been progress on exploring a wildlife overpass over Ojibway Parkway. The first design had the overpass ending before the railway tracks and based on public comments, they have released the most recent design, where the wildlife overpass extends beyond the railway tracks. There is a question about where the funding will come from as cost estimates are about \$30 million. Many following this environmental assessment questioned the challenges different species would have based on the design selection options.

Mike also mentioned that Gordie Howe International Bridge Multiuse Path was announced. The path will connect to the trans-Canada trail system. FOOP's stance is that while it is good for pedestrians coming over the bridge, but there may need to be connections made to other areas (i.e., the Ojibway Nature Centre) for ease of access.

Mike provided an update on the Matchette Road and raceway lands. The City of Windsor passed traffic calming measures on Matchette including radar speed signs and installing bars on the roads slow traffic. A cross walk will also be installed between Titcombe and the Ojibway Nature Centre Parking lot. Mike mentioned that these measures will improve safety for pedestrians and hopefully reduce wildlife road mortality. He mentioned that the Town of LaSalle is currently exploring the potential of a roundabout at Sprucewood and Matchette.

In response to the provincial housing crisis, the City of Windsor is looking to open their official plan. While zoning has not changed, locations that are commercial can also be developed for high-density residential. There are a few properties near the Raceway that meet this criterion. There would have to be re-zoning and public consultation.

Mike ended by suggesting continuing to advocate for the Ojibway National Urban Park, communicate to elected officials, attend community events put on by elected officials, submit support to Senate when C-248 goes to Committee, attend Ojibway and other Nature/Environment events, and attend community consultation.

Tom thanked Mike for giving the presentation. Mike thanked the group for their environmental stewardship.

PAC Update since September 6, 2023

Tom informed the group of progress made by the PAC since the last meeting.

Ambassador Bridge hazardous materials

The Ambassador Bridge applied to the Michigan Department of Transportation to transport corrosive and flammable material across the bridge. Up until now, it was illegal for them to do so. The previous barge that was taking these materials across went out of business. The City of Windsor passed a motion in council objecting this. The new Gordie Howe Bridge will be equipped to carry these materials across. A letter was sent to the Michigan Department of Transportation in support of the City of Windsor's efforts to prevent the bridge from getting a permit to move these corrosive and flammable materials across the river. There are no updates on where this application stands.

Greenlink+

Tom mentioned partners are trying to establish a greenbelt like the one in Toronto called ' Greenlink+. He highlighted that there are a lot of properties under municipal control that could be included. There is an emphasis on low maintenance parkland acquisition.

Levy Company of Dearborn cement crushing plant (U.S.)

Tom informed the group that the Levy Company is a big corporation out of Dearborn MI, wanting to build a cement crushing plant just west of the Ambassador Bridge. The Michigan Dept of Environmental Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) is the permitting authority for the proposed cement crushing plant. Several groups in Detroit and the Great Lakes Environmental Law Centre placed opposition to this. The PAC wrote a supporting letter to EGLE in support of the opposition.

Oil spill into the Little River on December 29 2023

A spill in Little River flowed northward towards the Detroit River. It was reported quickly. The origin of the spill is unknown. The City of Windsor ordered an emergency vacuum truck to clean up the substance. Water booms were installed to contain the spill and the cleanup was completed. Pearl wondered where the spill contents came from, and Tom mentioned that he is unaware.

Illegal dumping at Dragonfly Park

Dave Munro reported a dumping incident to Ian Naisbitt that consisted of dirt, bricks, and rocks, confirmed to be located on City of Windsor property. A report was filed and provided to the city. Work is scheduled by the end of spring 2024 to rectify this. Lil'REG will be monitoring the progress of the cleanup. Pearl asked if there were any signs about illegal dumping. Tom mentioned there are all sorts of signs re: illegal dumping.

Rep. Tlaib, Line 5

Tom mentioned that Rep. Tlaib is an American congresswoman co-sponsoring a Bill for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. Estimated to be around \$420 million per year, if the Bill became legislation, the funding would be accessed for remediation work on the US side. In addition, the Line 5 Enbridge pipeline was declared to be shut down by Governor Whitmer. This line is significant, carrying 22 million gallons of natural gas and crude oil daily from Wisconsin to Sarnia. Enbridge is proposing a new line to be built, as the current one is breaking down and poses a significant threat to drinking water and shoreline habitat. Tom will inform the PAC as this develops.

Tribute to Gord Harding, former PAC Vice Chair

Gord Harding was a very valuable member of the PAC team and was the first Vice-Chair. He was the commissioner of public works for the City of Windsor, a lifelong civil servant and was instrumental in saving Ojibway Shores.

DRCC Updates

Update on DRCC plans for 2024

Jackie provided an overview of the BUIs and their status on the Canadian side of the Detroit River Area of Concern. She confirmed that four BUIs remain impaired, and they will be the focus over the next few years to complete the AOC project. These include:

1. **BUI # 1 - Restrictions on Fish Consumption:** this proposed redesignation report is expected to be presented to our Steering and Implementation Committee in June of 2024. Once this is completed,

we will begin the process of public consultation, Indigenous engagement, and review from our US partners.

2. **BUI # 5 (Under Review) - Bird or Animal Deformities or Reproduction Problems:** the public review of the proposed redesignation is complete we are currently engaging Indigenous communities for input. Comments will be incorporated, and the report will be sent to our American partners for review.
3. **BUI # 3 (fish component Under Review) – Degraded Fish & Wildlife Populations:** wildlife populations are still impaired but the public review of the fish populations report is complete we are currently engaging Indigenous communities for input. Comments will be incorporated, and the report will then be sent to our American partners for review.

Once this work is completed and the proposed redesignations are cleared through the public commenting and engagement processes, they will be sent to the Ministry of Environment and Environment and Climate Change Canada.

4. **BUI # 14 – Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat: Jackie outlined the habitat:** creation, restoration and enhancement were completed on Peche Island, Collavino Wetland, Private Canard River Wetland Restoration and the remaining two projects that are in progress on Fighting Island and Canard River Wetland Complex Dyke Repair.

Jackie explained that there are many positive outputs reported from the enhancement and management activities completed for the BUIs. Fighting Island will undergo restoration efforts in the southern end of the island like what was done on Peche Island. Six sheltering islands will be constructed with the goal to create a calm water area and restore submerged and immersed native aquatic vegetation previously abundant in the area prior to erosion of the marsh. The Canard River Dyke Repair will take place to restore and stabilize the finger dyke that has eroded away. The wetland cell protected by this feature supports some of the most abundant wild celery beds in the river, which is an important food source for many species of waterfowl. Funding for these projects will be confirmed in the next few months once we receive the result of the funding application(s) submitted to the Environment Climate Change Canada.

Jackie was pleased to share that DRCC received funding from the province for efforts to continue between April 2024 to March 2026. She is hopeful that DRCC we will receive additional funding applied to for this work period from the federal government.

EPI Project Update since October 25, 2023

Fall 2023 and 2024 outreach projects

Laura provided an information update on previous and upcoming stewardship events.

On Friday, September 29, volunteers from KPMG Windsor came together to remove 320 lbs of litter from the Little River Watershed and Ganatchio Trail. On Saturday, October 21, volunteers from the Sandwich community came together to plant 40 new native large stock trees. Funding for this project was provided by the Gordie Howe International Bridge Community Benefits Plan.

On February 20, 2024, the DRCC hosted its 14th annual film screening where we presented two Water Brothers documentaries – Paving over Paradise, a documentary on wetland loss, and The Forever Chemicals, a documentary on a group of chemicals PFAS. The forever chemicals aired first, followed by a short presentation by Abby Hendershott, the Executive Director of the Michigan PFAS Action Response Team. We then invited our PFAS panelists which included Mark Burrows, physical scientist and senior project manager at the International Joint Commission's Great Lakes Regional Office, Dr. Cheryl Murphy, Professor at Michigan State University, and Abby Hendershott. The paving over paradise film followed, and the panel included Dr. John Hartig, Visiting Scholar at the University of Windsor, Kate Arthur, our lead Restoration Biologist at Essex Region Conservation Authority, and Kathy Jones, Volunteer Manager and Biologist at Birds Canada as panellists. Over 100 people attended the event and the audience was very engaged in the panel discussions.

This year's earth day event is April 28 at the green space (known as the Little River Corridor) south of Wyandotte Street east between Florence & Martinique in Windsor.

Laura informed the group that our annual Spring Watershed Cleanup will be taking place on April 13 along the Little River.

The annual Detroit River evening will be taking place on a Wednesday in June. Right now, June 19th our tentative date.

Laura informed the group that we are also planning on hosting the annual Detroit River free family fishing day event on Saturday July 6 from 8am to 1pm at Riverdance Park off Front Road Park in LaSalle.

Roundtable updates from partners, questions, and discussion

Pearl mentioned she liked that the planned events focussed on kids and families. Pearl asked when we host the film screening whether we reach out to local schools. Laura responded yes. This year she reached out to close contact teachers at each school.

Mark spoke about the airport woodlots and mentioned he had a meeting last Friday with Irek Kusmierczyk, MP Windsor-Tecumseh regarding the airport forested areas. Concerns for previously planted areas are removed. Further, he spoke with Deputy Warden of the County of Essex, Joe Bachetti about a tree cutting bylaw for the region.

Derek mentioned that there is a new binational group, the Great Lakes EcoRegion Network which is currently recruiting for its issue teams. If anyone is interested in joining, please contact him. Derek mentioned that Environment and Climate Change Canada's target date for finishing all AOCs is in the 2030s. He mentioned that progress is very slow. Jackie mentioned that the process is slow but a priority for the government and they are investing a large sum of money into the Areas of Concerns. He also shared that in a recent webinar, Windsor was identified as having the lowest urban tree cover. There is not a forestry master plan, and any planting programs in the City are disorganized. Mark mentioned that this has been brought up to Kieran McKenzie and another Windsor councillor.

Frank mentioned that in December CEA hosted a joint meeting of all environmental NGOs in Windsor. They plan to meet every couple of months. He also mentioned that the City's Environment and Climate Change Committee has been established. Their first meeting is on March 19.

Patricia gave an update from the Canada South Land Trust. They are interested in having people share instances of destruction of natural heritage resources (including farmlands). They are trying to protect these areas from urban sprawl.

Giovanni invited the DRCC to participate in his radio show about environmental groups.

Chris mentioned that he posts all the environmental work we do at work. He mentioned that he is hoping to do a restoration project at the Annex plant to restore a big open lot.

Jonathan Choquette from Wildlife Preservation Canada shared this update with Jackie, who shared it with the group:

The goal of the Ojibway Prairie Reptile Recovery Program (OPRREC) is to recover the Massasaugas of the Ojibway Prairie, while providing direct benefits other Species at Risk reptiles and plants, such as Butler's Gartersnakes and Dense Blazing Star, at the Ojibway Prairie Complex and Greater Park Ecosystem. We had a few different project sites in 2023, but I'll provide a brief update on our major accomplishments specifically at the Provincial Nature Reserve:

- We participated for a 2nd year in Ontario Nature's province-wide snake monitoring project. This resulted in over 640 snake observations, including over 75 Species at Risk (SAR) snake observations. SAR snakes included Eastern Foxsnakes and Butler's Gartersnakes. No Massasaugas were seen here or during surveys at other locations.
- We continued to control invasive Phragmites across a 10 ha project area, and confirmed our treatment areas were being used for reproduction by 5 local snake species. Enhancements were completed within 400m of proposed Massasauga reintroduction sites.
- We continued to maintain over 500m of snake barrier fencing to protect reptiles from road mortality and human-snake conflict, and continued planning toward additional installations in preparation for Massasauga reintroduction. We're in the process of completing an effectiveness evaluation of our barrier fencing.
- We provided comments/feedback/complaints on 5 projects negatively impacting SAR snakes and their habitat in the general area.
- We continued public outreach initiatives and reached over 650 people via conference presentations, outreach events, and outreach with park users.
- In winter 2022/23 we validated our proposed Massasauga reintroduction sites for a second year in a row by hibernating live Massasaugas in artificial hibernacula. We confirmed 100% overwinter survival in 12 juvenile Eastern Massasaugas that were loaned from the Toronto Zoo. We published a scientific paper on the work leading up to this in the journal *Global Ecology and Conservation*.
- In summer 2023 We conducted an experimental translocation with 4 Eastern Gartersnakes using radiotelemetry, as a trail prior to conducting translocations with Massasaugas. All gartersnakes survived the active season and selected natural hibernation sites.
- We secured permission under the Endangered Species Act to begin reintroduction trials with Massasaugas in summer 2024, which we are actively gearing up for!

Wrap up and next meeting

Tom thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and mentioned that the next meeting will take place at the call of the chair.

Appendix I. Land Acknowledgement

The Essex region is the traditional territory of the Caldwell First Nation, members of the Three Fires Confederacy, comprised of the Ojibway, the Odawa, and the Potawatomi Peoples. We value the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all the Original Peoples of Turtle Island - North America who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial.

Appendix II. Meeting attendance

Jackie Serran	Detroit River Canadian Cleanup
Laura Neufeld	Detroit River Canadian Cleanup
Tom Henderson	Detroit River Canadian Cleanup Public Advisory Council (Chair)
Mark Shafer	Little River Enhancement Group
Elaine Price	Member of the public
Patricia McGorman (virtual)	Canada South Land Trust
Pearl Bradd	Detroit River Canadian Cleanup Public Advisory Council (Vice Chair)
Derek Coronado	Citizens Environment Alliance
Dave Munro	Little River Enhancement Group
Mike Fisher	President, Friends of Ojibway Prairie
Frank Butler	Citizens Environment Alliance
Giovanni Abati	Citizens Environment Alliance
Mike Walsh (virtual)	Member of the public
Chris Hodare	UNIFOR Local 200