

Meeting Record

DRCC Public Advisory Council & EPI Work Group

October 16, 2024 – 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm

Budimir Public Library, 1310 Grand Marais Road West, Windsor, ON N9E 1E4

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 of introductions. Meeting attendance is included as Appendix II. The meeting agenda was approved as presented. Derek mentioned GLWQA is under review currently and it was suggested that this be discussed in the round table updates.

Review of February 28, 2024 Meeting Record and Action Items

The February 28, 2024, meeting record was approved by consensus with no changes. There were no action items from that meeting.

PAC Update since February 28, 2024

Ambassador Bridge hazardous materials

Tom reminded everyone that last fall the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) received a request from the Detroit International Bridge Company (DIBC) to allow hazardous materials to move across the bridge. The PAC chair sent a letter to Federal Transport Minister Anita Anand supporting the City's opposition to the Michigan Department of Transportation's approval of the permit.

Illegal dumping at Dragonfly Park

This issue took about a year to settle within the City of Windsor's Parks and Recreation Department. A contractor was found responsible, and the site was cleaned up in July, a site visit followed by Mark Shafer and Patricia McGorman. The City of Windsor's legal team is also addressing the illegal dumping. Councillor Kieran McKenzie said that this situation highlighted some internal challenges the city has through their by-law enforcement and the pace at which they move through the system towards resolution.

Opposition to the Enbridge Line 5 Pipeline Under the Straits of Mackinac

The Line 5 Enbridge pipeline 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 is continuing to follow this issue and will update the PAC as it progresses.

Rediscover our Parks

Phil shared a presentation with the group highlighting a series of natural heritage properties and their connection to the City of Windsor's Parks Master Plan. The focus of that plan was connectivity, and with Ojibway Shores property, the Herb Grey Parkway and the National Urban Park, more land is included into

the connectivity concept coined a biodiversity gateway in the Parks Master Plan. Phil's presentation is Appendix III of this meeting record.

Focus was made on the forested land on the City of Windsor's airport property. At one point, the airport woodlots were assessed as Provincially Significant Wetlands and incorporated into ERCA's natural heritage inventory across the region. Several years ago, the DRCC also contributed funding and expertise with partners to re-naturalize sections in between the fragmented forests to reconnect them and offer nature-based solutions for stormwater management. These plantings were removed. Recently, the City of Windsor initiated amendments to the Official Plan and zoning bylaws to allow employment uses on the lands within the airport property, changing the land use to industrial and business park. A proposed synthetic graphite plant concept was considered, however was denied by Transport Canada.

Phil concluded his presentation by saying there are some organizations in the region who are not committed to their priorities outlined in various master plans, climate change commitments, and original natural heritage designations, particularly for this property. The airport woodlots are ecologically significant, as they are located in the headwaters of Little River and it is one of the only interior forests remaining on Windsor's east end.

Discussion

Mark is invested in seeing this through to save the lands and reminded everyone about the restoration efforts on the property that were removed a few years ago. Phil said that a hazard assessment took place regarding waterfowl and other birds who access the site. Canada Geese and Ring Billed Gulls are the more hazardous species to aircraft as they are slower, heavy moving and bunch together. Security fencing was installed for wildlife exclusion also. As the forest continues to become more interior, the less hazardous it becomes as more songbirds/passerines move in. Frank added that increased severe flooding caused by climate change is inevitable. These forests are critical for climate change adaptation, especially given the development plans in that area. Phil agreed and said that green infrastructure accounting should be included in any development in the area.

Pearl wondered what the City of Windsor's position is on the forest. Kieran answered that it depends as each department, commissioner, and political scenario have different viewpoints. Proposals for development are continuing to be put forward in this area as the city is facing limits on available, serviced industrial lands.

The discussion ended by considering what the DRCC PAC could do to advocate for the protection of these woodlots. Phil said that there are many groups that come to the table at these meetings, but until something is set in motion and is an official proposal, it would be difficult to pinpoint the campaign needs. Reminding the City of Windsor and other stakeholders about their natural heritage commitments needs to be included in anything that is developed in the future regarding this issue.

DRCC Updates

Jackie provided an overview of the BUIs and their status on the Canadian side of the Detroit River Area of Concern. Her slides are included as Appendix III. She confirmed that four BUIs remain impaired, and they will be the focus over the next few years to complete the AOC project.

1. **BUI # 1 - Restrictions on Fish Consumption:** Jackie mentioned that an assessment has been completed by Dr. Ken Drouillard at the University of Windsor for this BUI. Ken is currently in the process of incorporating 2024 data into the assessment, but the initial assessment results indicate that there are

no local actions that can be completed to improve advisories for indicator species in the Detroit River and therefore, this BUI is recommended to have a status change to not impaired. Over the next year or so, the DRCC will begin public engagement on this beneficial use.

2. **BUI # 3 (fish component Under Review) – Degraded Fish & Wildlife Populations:** Jackie reminded the group that wildlife populations are still impaired but the public review of the fish populations report is complete and that the DRCC is waiting for the wildlife component to be completed before sending to government agencies for a not impaired status. Jackie informed the group that remaining actions for the wildlife component of this beneficial use include implementing the two planned habitat projects in the river – one at Fighting Island and one at the Canard marshes – to re-establish cattails and improve marsh bird populations.
3. **BUI # 5 (Under Review) - Bird or Animal Deformities or Reproduction Problems:** This beneficial use report is expected to be presented to the Four Agency Managers Committee (FAMC) this Fall. This begins the process of engaging our U.S. colleagues on the recommendation that the status of this beneficial use be changed from impaired to not impaired. Beneficial use re-designation reports are reviewed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Michigan Department of Energy, Great Lakes and the Environment (EGLE). Experts from these two agencies provide input on the report. These comments will be incorporated and concerns addressed. The report will then be sent to the Federal and Provincial governments for official status change from impaired to not impaired.
4. **BUI # 14 – Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat:** Jackie provided an overview of the two anticipated habitat projects on the Detroit River. She announced that \$5.3 million has been secured for the implementation from the federal government through the Great Lakes Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative (GLFEI). Jackie provided an overview of the Fighting Island project. Six sheltering islands will be constructed on the south end of Fighting Island 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. She also provided 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. The plan is to implement the Canard River Dyke project in 2025, with the implementation of the Fighting Island project in 2026.

Discussion

Tom asked for an update on funding for the governance portion of the DRCC program. Jackie mentioned that there are current agreements in place to fund governance for the DRCC until March 2026. This will provide funding for Jackie and Gina's positions as well as meetings, outreach, and other DRCC activities.

Chris asked a clarifying question regarding the funds secured from the federal government for the two habitat projects. He asked whether the \$5.3 million in funding was for one project or both. Jackie clarified that it was for both projects.

Phil mentioned that there is an opportunity to protect the shore at Ojibway Shores, which was historically a wetland as well. Jackie mentioned that this has been discussed as a potential project.

EPI Project Update since February 2024

Gina shared a list of outreach and engagement projects that took place in the Detroit River watershed since the last group meeting. The recap includes the City of Windsor Malden Park Earth Day, Earth Day community tree planting (2050 trees/shrubs planted), Little River cleanup (75 volunteers, 425lbs

removed), Devonwood Conservation Area cleanup with Caesars Windsor for HERO Day of Action (10 volunteers, 60lbs removed), WDBA Community Benefits Malden Park planting (50 trees planted), Detroit River Evening, Learn to Fish (80 people in attendance), canoe cleanup in the River Canard (15 volunteers, 145lbs removed) and the DRCC habitat site boat tour in September.

She mentioned that this weekend through the Gordie Howe Community Benefits Program, ERCA will be planting 50 large native hardwood trees along the Ojibway Parkway walking trail. She also reminded the group that ERCA would be putting out a call for nominations to the Conservation Awards in December and that the DRCC is starting to plan the 2025 film screening, planning to be hosted in January 2025.

Roundtable updates from partners, questions, and discussion

Jackie provided an update sent to her by Jonathan Choquette from Wildlife Preservation Canada. Jonathan said that his team has successfully conducted an experimental translocation with 21 Massasaugas at the Ojibway Prairie in late August, and they've been out daily radiotracking those snakes. They've trialed a novel translocation technique and are hoping this results in high overwinter survival.

Derek mentioned that the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement was last amended in 2012 and will be up for minor review again soon. The Citizens Environment Alliance has submitted comments asking for a more thorough review and submitted comments and suggestions. Derek mentioned there will be a public meeting held in December 2025.

Kieran shared that the Environment and Climate Change Advisory Committee (formerly the Windsor-Essex County Environment Committee) is hosting a movie screening of All Too Clear, next week as part of the Windsor International Film Festival.

Chris shared that he is working with Ford plant officials to build pollinator habitat on a piece of land that is currently not being used. He is hopeful that he can get both Ford plants an official pollinator designation.

Wrap up and next meeting

Tom closed the meeting shortly after 6:30pm. He said that the next meeting will be held at the call of the chair. He thanked everyone for attending and encouraged new attendees to return.

Appendix I. Land Acknowledgement and Action Items from February 28, 2024 Meeting:

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.

There were no action items recorded from the DRCC EPI/PAC February 28, 2024 meeting.

Appendix II. Meeting Attendance

Nancy Abati	Member of the public
Carlo Abati	Member of the public
Pearl Bradd	Detroit River Canadian Cleanup Public Advisory Council (Vice Chair)
Frank Butler	Citizens Environment Alliance
Derek Coronado	Citizens Environment Alliance
Jim Drummond	Little River Enhancement Group
Ryan Graham (virtual)	Member of the public
Tom Henderson	Detroit River Canadian Cleanup Public Advisory Council (Chair)
Councillor Kieran McKenzie	Ward 9, City of Windsor
Gina Pannunzio (virtual)	Detroit River Canadian Cleanup
Dave Munro	Little River Enhancement Group
Jacqueline Richardson	Essex Region Conservation Authority
Phil Roberts	Public Advisory Council
Jacqueline Serran	Detroit River Canadian Cleanup
Mark Shafer	Little River Enhancement Group
Michael Walsh (virtual)	Public Advisory Council