

Summary Report

Public Meeting on the Great Lakes

Your Voice: Sault Ste. Marie



Thursday, March 2, 2017
Delta Hotel
Sault Ste. Marie, ON

Introduction

The International Joint Commission visited Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario as part of public meetings in six communities in the spring of 2017 to gather public comment on the Canadian and US governments' Progress Report of the Parties (PROP) and the IJC's draft Triennial Assessment of Progress (TAP) report. An afternoon listening session brought together chiefs and other members of First Nations and Tribes in the region to share their thoughts and concerns about Great Lakes water quality with Commissioners.

During the evening public meeting, three presenters summarized progress to improve wastewater infrastructure in the Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario region, a fisheries habitat project for the St. Marys River as part of that Area of Concern's RAP, and the Lake Superior waterfront trail. More than 85 area residents from both sides of the border attended the meeting and 15 participants provided Commissioners with their comments about Great Lakes water quality concerns. These comments are summarized below.

The IJC's final TAP report will take these comments into account. Both the Sault Ste. Marie-specific and broader regional conclusions and recommendations may also provide direction to the Sault Ste. Marie region's residents for collaborating on solutions for unique priorities in their particular watershed.

Afternoon Listening Session with First Nations and Tribes

Participants:

Kimberle Gravelle, Tribal Councilwoman, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians
Jennifer McLeod, Tribal Councilwoman, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians
Caroline Moellering, Great Lakes Policy Specialist, Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians
Mike Ripley, Environmental Coordinator, Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority
Aubrey Maccoux-LeDuc and Brian Wilkins, Environmental Specialists, Bay Mills Tribe
Anita Stephens, Chief, Joshua and Manon Memegos, Lands and Resources Managers, Chapleau Ojibwe First Nation
Tammy Trembleau, Environmental Officer, Sagamok Anishnawbek First Nation

IJC representation at meeting:

Lana Pollack, US Chair
Richard Morgan, Canadian Commissioner
Rich Moy, US Commissioner
Trish Morris, Director, IJC Great Lakes Regional Office (GLRO)
Matthew Child, Physical Scientist, IJC GLRO
Sally Cole-Misch, Public Affairs Officer, IJC GLRO
Sarah Lobrichon, Acting Public Affairs Advisor, IJC Canadian Section
Allison Voglesong, IJC Michigan Sea Grant Fellow
Cindy Warwick, Policy Advisor, IJC Canadian Section

Key Messages

Participants provided comments on several topics and responded to questions from Commissioners and IJC staff. Key messages from the afternoon conversation included:

- All participants expressed concern for the damage to all of the Great Lakes from a potential oil spill from the Enbridge Line 5 pipeline that runs under the Straits of Mackinac. Tribes continue to meet with Enbridge, and state and federal officials to express their concerns, with no resulting action. A large spill would severely impact all areas of tribal commercial fishing according to the 1836 fishing rights treaty, and they believe small leaks are already occurring based on Enbridge staff reports and oil floating on the water's surface above the pipeline.
- The St. Marys River and adjacent waters of Lake Superior and Lake Huron have improved considerably as a result of the RAP and its implementation. Improvements in the local steel mill, closing pulp and paper mills, and other actions have lessened toxic contamination entering the waters. However, the waters are still sick from legacy contaminants as well as mining discharges and herbicides from forestry operations into Lake Superior and its tributaries, which continue to contaminate drinking water, fish and humans who live in the region. Inputs of pharmaceuticals and microplastics also are of concern, as well as the recent approval by Michigan for open pit sulfite mining by the Menominee River in the Upper Peninsula, where millions of dollars has already been spent as part of the RAP program to clean up previous mining contamination.
- Climate change is impacting all parts of the ecosystem. Birch trees are disappearing, other plants are weaker, invasives such as the emerald ash borer and *Phragmites* are killing native plants. Animals such as moose are more stressed in the warmer winters and thus less healthy. Fish are considerably smaller, due to warmer winters as well as long-standing toxic contamination.
- Asian carp must not be allowed to enter the Great Lakes, and all efforts must be made to keep zebra and quagga mussels out of Lake Superior. The latter have decimated the whitefish population over the past 25 years because of the changes in the lake's food chain. Ballast water controls are essential to protect the lakes.
- The Lake Superior LAMP had excellent participation from all sectors of society until the citizen forums were eliminated. Without them, it is difficult to get involvement.
- First Nations and Tribes regard water as sacred, a living entity rather than a resource to be used as an asset. Subsistence and commercial fishing are essential for their people, and thus the effects of toxic pollution, invasive species and climate change have impacted their lives, health and livelihood. They are the guardians for the lakes and yet they pay the largest price for others' actions and perspectives.

Key Messages from the Evening Public Session

Enbridge Line 5 Pipeline

Like the afternoon listening session, many attendees at the evening public meeting discussed the Enbridge oil pipeline that lies on the bottom of the Straits of Mackinac. Concerns were raised for the increased potential for leaks as a result of the strong and shifting currents in the straits, as well as the long-term, irrevocable damage that a spill would cause to all of the lakes.

First Nation and Tribal Beliefs and Perspectives

First Nations and Tribes have lived around Lake Superior, Lake Michigan, the St. Marys River or Lake Huron for generations, eat the fish and wildlife, and believe that the lake is a part of each person. Their beliefs teach them that humans have a responsibility to the earth and lakes, and thus we must stop taking from them and destroying their health. When the lakes are sick, we are sick as well. They believe in the power of their Native ceremonies, and that the earth will heal if we stop destroying her and ourselves.

Toxic Contamination, nuclear waste storage, Asian carp and climate change

Long-standing toxic contamination of the waters and land from mining in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, industrial and air pollution, and agricultural runoff was discussed in relation to most speakers' Native heritage. Mining effluents have forced First Nations along the north shores of Lakes Superior to boil their water for years. Lake Superior is the only pristine lake left of the five Great Lakes, and yet the governments are not taking actions to protect it as they should. Lake Huron is threatened by the proposed nuclear waste repository, which like the Enbridge Line 5 pipeline would damage all of the lakes if a leak occurred. Tourism provides more to the region's economy than mining, shipping and agriculture combined, and thus the health of the lakes is essential. Their health also could be threatened by Asian carp and cuts to US funding for Great Lakes restoration. The question was asked, what if all of our concerns happen and the effects of climate change, leaks from the Enbridge Line 5 pipeline and the nuclear waste repository, and mine tailings and other pollution make the lakes so polluted in another 50 years that they can't sustain life? Water means life, and without it everything dies.

First Nations and Tribes Listening Session Comments

Mike Ripley, Environmental Coordinator, Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority (CORA): Key issues:

- 1) Great participation from all sectors of society, including Tribes and First Nations, in Lake Superior LAMP when had citizen forums. Without these there's a huge gap because grassroots organizations no longer participate.
- 2) Enbridge Line 5 pipeline would severely impact all areas of Tribes' commercial fishing range from 1836 treaty, chiefs travel to DC regularly to fight for closure and to stop Nestle permit to withdraw Great Lakes water.
- 3) Aquafarming is already happening in Lake Huron on Canadian side, no research to identify impacts in local areas and lake as a whole. CORA is against, will lead to increased algae growth and changes in food chain balance.
- 4) Climate change is impacting all parts of the ecosystem. Birch trees are disappearing; other plants are weaker; emerald ash borer and other invasives are killing native plants. Animals are more stressed with warmer winters, particularly moose. We need to come to reality about climate change, get of our dependence on oil (and thus close Line 5 pipeline), stop others from making profit off of the destruction of our water and land.
- 5) Zebra mussels have devastated the whitefish population over the past 25 years by decimating bottom of Lake Michigan food chain.
- 6) St. Marys River: Steel and paper mills had largest impact on river, plus destruction of 90 percent of water flow that used to go over rapids now go through hydroelectric plants. Millions of dollars spent to clean up Menominee River, now Michigan is going to allow open pit sulfite mine, unprecedented in Great Lakes region. Will be billion dollar cleanup from such mining, and has to be stopped.

6) Vessel Incidence Act introduced by Marco Rubio in Congress takes regulation for ballast water from US EPA to Coast Guard, takes rights away from states. This is an attempt by industry to eliminate ballast regulations, even though the International Maritime Organization requires ballast exchange internationally.

Caroline Moellering, Great Lakes Policy Specialist, Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians: Band is very concerned about Enbridge Line 5 pipeline, which represents too large of a risk from an oil spill. For invasive species, decisions should be based on science to get them out of ecosystem. We feel it's essential that Asian carp not enter Lake Michigan through Chicago Ship Canal.

Tammy Trembleau, Environmental Officer, Sagamok Anishnawbek First Nation: We live on the north shores of Lake Superior and have never been asked to be part of Lake Superior LAMP. Toxic contamination is still getting into fish from mining and herbicides used in forestry operations. Invasive species, higher lake levels, smelt and pike populations declining are other issues our First Nation is concerned with. We want to keep zebra and quagga mussels out of Lake Superior any way we can.

Aubrey Stanton, Environmental Specialist for Bay Miles Tribe: Pharmaceuticals and microplastics are two big concerns. Tribe just completed report on ice cover over past 50 years, 79 percent reduction overall impacts dredging, recreation, levels, fisheries habitat and egg production. The St. Marys River RAP and Lake Superior LAMP are very beneficial, but latter is hampered with no citizen forums – starting at square one again to get involvement. Small leaks and spills are already occurring from Enbridge Line 5 pipeline, just need to go out there to see oil on the water's surface. We obtained Enbridge staff reports that document this as well, but they are not allowed to be published. All Tribes have met with staff and industry several times, held protests at St. Ignace, but no action.

Jennifer McLeod, Tribal Councilwoman, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians: We regard water as sacred, a living entity rather than a resource to be used as an asset. Fishing isn't like it was a century ago anywhere in the lakes, which reflects sickness in water. We've restored a lot locally with changes to the steel mill, closing pulp and paper mills, but we have a great fear with US budget cuts and the new administration that sees everything as profit and not according to Native perspective. For Enbridge Line 5 pipeline, since we have ice over the lake most of the year, how can we tell if there are spills occurring? Easier to clean soil from oil spills than water, need to cap pipe before it reaches Lake Michigan and transport on land instead. Substinence fishing is essential for our people, we've changed which parts we feed our children to protect from contaminants, and we're trying to get the message out to more of our community about which fish are safe to eat. The size of fish have declined dramatically, which is a huge economic impact for the Native fishing industry.

Evening Public Comments (Click hyperlink of participant name to view video comments)

[Chief Joe Buckell, Michipicoten First Nation:](#) We live twenty miles downstream from Michigan's Upper Peninsula mines and receive all of their effluent, so have been on boiling water restrictions for years. Bouncing balls between federal and provincial governments as to who is responsible for getting mining operations to clean effluent, but nothing has happened for years. We are guardians for the lakes and yet we pay the price for others' actions, including poor management of the lands. Lake Superior is the only pristine lake, we need to keep it that way because affects all other lakes, but governments aren't doing anything.

[Patrick Egan, Oil and Water Don't Mix:](#) Our organization is a consortium of citizens and groups

concerned about Great Lakes water quality and the effect of Enbridge Line 5 pipeline that lies under the Mackinac Bridge. Pipeline was built in 1953, all technical reviews of safety done from Calgary. Water currents are ten times greater in Straits of Mackinac than those over Niagara Falls, and can switch 180 degrees in 24 hours. Pipeline is unsupported in several areas to protect from these currents and shifts. We have the potential to be the largest oil transporter on the continent with no reward and the potential to ruin the lakes we depend on for everything. The Enbridge Line 5 pipeline must be moved to land.

[Cassie Baxter](#): My family has lived around Lake Superior and Lake Huron for generations, we eat the fish and wildlife, the lake is part of us so when it's sick we feel sick. The Enbridge Line 5 pipeline is a threat to all we hold dear, as is the proposed nuclear storage facility close to the shores of Lake Huron. With a change in the US administration, corporations will be given more support to profit off the lakes, such as Nestle, rather than as the sacred resource that it is. We are depending on the IJC to make a difference for the lakes. [Click here to view additional video comments.](#)

[Abdul Malhardeen, Algoma University](#): The United Nations emphasizes respect and conservation of water ecosystems above and below the surface, Great Lakes region needs to do the same.

[Bob Dunn, Lake Cheneaux Islands dock builder](#): Stop the manmade outflow of water from Lakes Michigan-Huron, stop dredging in the St. Clair River and return to natural flows as part of your adaptive management plan. Michigan has ignored the public trust doctrine and ignored the health of lake bottomlands by allowing massive boathouses and docks to be built, as well as Enbridge Line 5 pipeline. Tribal people will pay the ultimate price. [Click here to view additional video comments.](#)

[Klaas Oswald, St. Marys BPAC](#): Remediation has moved forward on many levels, dredging of contaminants will be costly and take many years. Heavy metals, chromium and lithium are still coming into the river from Lake Superior mines, plus agricultural contaminants and microplastics. We need a comprehensive plan to deal with all of these throughout the lakes. I am concerned about the US budget cuts for the Great Lakes and resulting increase in pollution from municipal and industrial sources.

[Wanda Trudeau, teacher](#): Students are very aware of microbeads, toxic algae and toxic pollution issues in the lakes, and expect our generation to protect them and the lakes. Spirits are in water and land, water will heal us if we protect it.

[Candace Neveau](#): As Anishinaabe, we know that we keep taking from the earth, and we need to give back to it and stop others from destroying our land and water – such as Enbridge Line 5 pipeline and the Lake Huron nuclear depository. Why do we have to wait until it's an emergency, why can't we be proactive about protecting earth and ourselves?

[David MacLachlan](#): Tourism is three percent in Ontario's economy, four times of international tourism. It provides more to the economy in the province than mining, shipping and agriculture combined. Having clean lakes and lands is essential to sustain this tourism.

[Tanna Elliott, Kensington Conservancy](#): Best practices are known for agriculture but there is no accountability and repercussions for farmers not following these practices and rules. Otherwise the Agreement and laws are just words on paper.

[Adrienne Beatle, Michipicoten First Nation](#): My family's health has and continues to be threatened by pollution in our waters and land. We held a First Nation grandmother protest on lake, and when we put a ball on the lake lightning struck – there is power in ceremonies. We believe the Enbridge Line 5 pipeline must be stopped.

[Unidentified First Nation member](#): Cockroach can take all of the pollutants that we give to Mother

Earth and still survive. We won't, we will destroy ourselves, but cockroach and Mother Earth will still be here.

Taylor Wright, Lake Superior State University Invasive Species Centre: Asian carp should be the #1 concern. All invasive species have far reaching economic, recreational, cultural and physical impacts. There's been significant progress in stopping new introductions, but we must stop the spread of existing aquatic invasive species and prevent Asian carp from entering and destroying the lakes' food chains.

Betty Lou Parr, lifelong resident on shores of St. Marys River: We need to appreciate the priceless resource we have in this region. More extreme weather is causing faster changes to the lakes, more boating accidents, and more danger from the Enbridge Line 5 pipeline.

Cleis Neveau: As an Anishinaabe, we understand the value of ceremonies and the responsibility to earth and lakes. Imagine if the Enbridge Line 5 pipeline, tailings from mines, other pollution and climate change make the lakes unusable in another 50 years – they're so polluted that they can't sustain life? We must identify problems and solutions and take action now so the lakes aren't ruined forever. Water means life, without it everything dies.