

Summary Report

What is a Healthy Lake Ontario for You?



Wednesday, October 5, 2016
Toronto City Hall

Introduction

As part of the International Joint Commission's efforts to obtain public input on Agreement progress at the Great Lakes Public Forum, a public roundtable was held to connect with local citizens who are committed to restoring and protecting their part of the Great Lakes. The evening roundtable at Toronto's City Hall focused on local and regional success stories to transform the conversation from Lake Ontario's damage to its promise, and developing a shared vision for a healthy Lake Ontario.

Five presentations summarized issues and initiatives in the areas of waterfront regeneration, the Toronto Remedial Action Plan, wastewater treatment, toxic substances, and fish habitat. Participants divided into small group discussions for each topic, as well as a sixth group to discuss topics not covered by other presentations. Summaries of these discussions follow.

The IJC will incorporate these findings into their assessment report on Agreement progress, and hopes that these conclusions and recommendations provide direction to Toronto residents for cooperative strategies to deal with unique issues facing their part of the watershed.

Waterfront Restoration

Presenter: the Honorable David Crombie, Waterfront Regeneration Trust

Facilitator: Marlaine Koehler, Executive Director, Waterfront Regeneration Trust

Rapporteur: Cindy Warwick, Policy Advisor, IJC Canadian Section

Key Messages

Public access to the waterfront needs to be enshrined as a long-term goal in planning documents, including cost-benefit models and incentives for trail development and expansion around the Great Lakes. The group expressed strong support for the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail that is broader than a physical pathway. The recreational opportunities it provides are a gateway to teaching/learning about and experiencing ecological functions, and an avenue through which people can experience a psychological relationship with water and the watershed. The Great Lakes Waterfront Trail has a significant role to play in engaging the public in ecological and community restoration at the waterfront. People use the trail to see firsthand the impact of decisions, policies and actions respecting the Great Lakes. Both imperatives and progress become visible.



Recommendations

- Access to the waterfront should be enshrined in plans.
- Connect the waterfront trail to a larger common vision of healthy ecology, transportation, community, psychology and economy of waterfront region.
- Recognize the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail as backbone to a watershed network of trails.
- Identify local advocates in multiple sectors for local trails and their connection to water quality.

Toronto Area of Concern (AOC) and Remedial Action Plan (RAP)

Presenter and small group facilitator: Nancy Gaffney, Head of Watershed Programs, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority

Rapporteur: Matthew Child, Physical Scientist, IJC Great Lakes Regional Office

Key Messages

The Toronto RAP has seen significant investments to prepare plans and design drawings to address wet weather flow (storm water and combined sewer overflows), which is the primary source of contaminants to Toronto Harbour. Billions of dollars will be incurred over the 25-year implementation phase. Thus, significant progress is contingent on large infrastructure projects. Resources are also required to invest in the science capacity to characterize and understand impairments, and to monitor recovery following remedial actions. Funding to increase public and stakeholder awareness of RAP issues is also required, since many remedial actions, such as urban habitat projects, require broad participation.

The science associated with AOCs and the Great Lakes in general have progressed considerably since AOCs were created in 1987. Monitoring and surveillance activities in AOCs have resulted in improved understanding of local conditions, and various ecosystem models have been developed for many AOCs to understand the transport and fate of contaminants. Tracking down microbial sources of pollution and improved management of nearshore processes are continued priorities. The impairments and remedial actions associated with many AOCs are complex, and include a diversity of monitoring and surveillance activities. These require the participation of many organizations and individuals.

Recommendations

- The Parties should invest the resources necessary to complete the identified remedial actions, science activities and community/stakeholder engagement.
- Consider AOCs in their broader geographical context, so that stressors can be identified and remediated at an appropriate geographic scale, using ensemble modeling approaches.
- All levels of government and affected stakeholders and community members must coordinate and collaborate to the maximum extent possible to address AOC impairments.

Wastewater Treatment

Presenter and small group facilitator: Krystyn Tully, Founder and Vice President, Lake Ontario Waterkeeper

Rapporteur: Antonette Arvai, Physical Scientist, IJC Great Lakes Regional Office

Key Messages

Raw and partially treated sewage, via bypasses and sewer overflows, is frequently discharged from Toronto into Lake Ontario, impacting the swimmability, drinkability and fishability of the waters. These discharges must be stopped. There is a gap in the public's understanding of the connection between clean source water for these uses and the challenges in infrastructure to accomplish this.

Recommendations

- Through the use of education programs and trained volunteers, the public needs to be better educated on what pollution from sewage discharges looks like and the method by which they can report it to the proper authorities. The reporting method needs to be well advertised to the public (e.g. billboards, signs).
- Create a coalition of interested groups to advance progress toward eliminating and preventing sewage bypasses and overflows.
- Continue to promote the implementation of green infrastructure as part of new urban development planning and during retrofit/upgrade of gray infrastructure. This will help to

capture storm water, reducing the amount of water entering drains, helping to alleviate the stress on the capacity of storm and sanitary sewer systems and treatment facilities.

There needs to be a more sustainable model for infrastructure development and improvements, with resource needs shared between federal, provincial and municipal agencies. While the ultimate goal is to eliminate sewage bypasses and overflows, the timeline to achieve this can be quite long. Until that goal is met, the public needs to be notified when bypasses occur, so that they can avoid contact with the contaminated water to minimize the risk to their health.

- The public should be notified as soon as possible of sewage bypass and sewer overflow events.

Toxic Substances

Presenter and small group facilitator: Jacqueline Wilson, Staff Attorney, Canadian Environmental Law Association

Rapporteur: Victor Serveiss, Environmental Advisor, IJC U.S. Section

Key Messages

There are significant challenges ahead. Data is not adequately reported on toxic substances in the Great Lakes. The slow pace of work to address toxic contamination in Lake Ontario does not reflect the urgency of the issue. For nonpoint source contaminants, the focus must be on prevention and the promotion of safer alternatives. Public engagement needs to be improved during this crucial time in implementation of Annex 3. The Parties need to increase their commitment and funding to implement Annex 3. The role of the IJC should be enhanced to support the public engagement function.

Recommendations

- List radionuclides as a chemical of mutual concern (CMC) and take same actions on radionuclides that governments are taking on other CMCs.
- Take action to reduce the risk of an underwater pipeline spill, especially from the existing pipeline at the Straits of Mackinac and other pipelines currently undergoing review.
- Increase funding and support for education and citizen science to increase awareness about the value of the Great Lakes.
- If one country has standards for a toxic chemical, it should automatically become a CMC for both countries.
- Increase funding and support to reduce contaminants in wastewater.
- Increase funding and support to identify emerging contaminants and address their risks.

Fish Habitat

Presenter and small group facilitator: David Clark, Executive Director and Founder, Toronto Urban Fishing Ambassadors

Rapporteur: Nick Heisler, Senior Advisor, IJC Canadian Section

Key Messages

The group discussed two issues that affect fish habitat in the Toronto area. First, 60 percent of road salt use (and its derivatives) in parking lots is unregulated, by private operators who overuse to avoid the risk of lawsuits and sometimes misuse chemicals to melt snow that should be plowed instead. This results in significant runoff of salt into waterways, affecting fish habitat. Frenchman's Bay in Pickering, for example, had ten times the natural level of chloride and the solution was to dig a deeper channel to flush it into the lake rather than eliminate the source of the problem.

The second issue discussed was combined sewer overflows (CSOs). Although Toronto has ambitious plans to eliminate all CSOs, this will take 25 years. In the meantime, too much sewage is dumped too close to the shoreline. For the relatively short time frame before this can be accomplished, CSO pipes should be lengthened to deposit the waste away from nearshore spawning grounds. This would also benefit swimmers and other nearshore recreation activities.

Recommendations

- Regulate the private use of road salt in parking lots.
- Since large CSO projects in Toronto will take 25 years to be completed, a short-term immediate solution – within three years – is to extend the “pipe” outlets further into the lake to protect nearshore spawning. The Ashbridge Bay pipe that outlets at Thompson Park should be a first priority.

Other Issues

Facilitator: Frank Bevacqua, Public Information Officer, IJC US Section

Rapporteur: Dave Dempsey, Policy Advisor, IJC US Section

Key Messages

The Great Lakes Public Forum did not engage individuals from a number of sectors or communities in the basin. The IJC should provide a holistic model and location for meeting, or demonstrate to those individuals or communities why they should care about Great Lakes water issues. Processes like the Canada-Ontario Agreement address the same issues as those of 20 years ago rather than existing community concerns such as food and drinking water security, water as a resource held in common, and economic equity. Education needs to expand beyond

traditional water cycle lessons that do not connect to students' lives. Other issues mentioned by participants but not explored in great depth included long-term planning for climate change, water security, biosolids application, water levels control and water privatization.

Recommendations

- To engage urban populations, indigenous peoples, youth and others not traditionally engaged in Great Lakes issues and the Forum in particular, reach out to and visit these communities, establish trust and credibility, and have members of the communities assist in promoting the relevance of the issues to their lives.
- To engage these groups, remove barriers of cost and location.
- To understand how to engage these groups, consult social science resources such as the Journal of Environmental Education and establish a database containing case studies of holistic engagement based on economic, environmental and social justice considerations.
- To engage youth, focus on curriculum development and get young people to the water.
- Equip sectoral groups, such as recreational boaters, with tools to conduct citizen science.
- Consider how report cards (for example, on drinking water) affect groups differently.