

231st Meeting of the Great Lakes Water Quality Board

Summary Notes

January 22, 2026

Virtual

US Member Participants

Molly Flanagan, Co-Chair
Jim Bredin
Aimee Clinkhammer
George Elmaraghy
Brandon Hofmeister
Tara Houska
Sara Hudson
Monica Lewis-Patrick
Shaili Pfeiffer
Teresa Siedel
Terry White
Bill Wolf

Canadian Member Participants

Chris McLaughlin, Co-Chair
Meredith Brown
Charles Cauchon
Fe de Leon
Melissa Dick
Carolyn Dubois
Jamie Lavigne
Jennifer McKay
Carolyn O'Neill
Mark Reusser
Jillian Smith

US Member Regrets

Liz Kirkwood
Kelsey Leonard

Canadian Member Regrets

Niharika Bandaru
Bonnie Fox
Carolyn Johns

Observers

Ash Kumar – Environment and Climate Change Canada
Carla Torchia – Environment and Climate Change Canada

Invited Guests

Dawn Schilling, Potomac-Hudson Engineering
Rod Whitlow, University of Guelph

International Joint Commission

Commissioner Susan Chiblow
Sommer Adbel-Fattah – IJC Great Lakes Regional Office
Anna Boegehold – IJC Great Lakes Regional Office
Raj Bejankiwar - IJC Great Lakes Regional Office
Oliver Dumville - IJC Canadian Section Office
Breanna Green – IJC US Section Office
Ian Stone - Great Lakes Fellow
Allison Voglesong Zejnati – IJC Great Lakes Regional Office
Rachel Wyatt – IJC Great Lakes Regional Office

Secretariat

Antonette Arvai – IJC Great Lakes Regional Office

Action Items

1. Revised work plans will be circulated to members January 22, with a deadline for approval decision by January 30th.
2. Board Secretary will circulate the proposed strategic communications review process to members for review and input.
3. Board secretary will send a calendar meeting invite for the spring in-person WQB meeting on May 12-13, 2026.

Welcome & Indigenous Acknowledgement *(Chris M & Molly F.)*

The Co-Chairs welcomed everyone to the 231st meeting of the board. Co-chair Chris McLaughlin acknowledged the diversity of traditional Indigenous territories in which participants reside. The acknowledgement emphasized the 2015 final report of the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#), the first three paragraphs of the section titled "[Reconciliation at the Crossroads](#)" on page 6 of the summary version (click on "look inside" of [Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Volume One: Summary](#)), and the new book by Indigenous author David A. Robertson - [52 Ways to Reconcile: How to Walk with Indigenous Peoples on the Path to Healing](#).

Recent Great Lakes Regional Office hires, Sommer Abdel-Fattah and Anna Boegehold introduced themselves. They will be supporting projects of the Water Quality Board (WQB) and Science Advisory Board (SAB).

Co-Chair Updates *(Molly F.)*

Members were updated on the following items:

- During the December 2025 advisory board appearances, Commissioners requested a strategic planning session with the Great Lakes advisory boards to identify priority topics for the development of coordinated and aligned work plans. Staff are working with Commissioners to advance this session.
- WQB Co-Chairs meet monthly with the Lead Commissioners. Members are invited to share any suggested discussion items with the Co-Chairs.
- The WQB completed a review of draft work plans in early January. Revisions were made based on member feedback, and the updated work plans will be circulated after the meeting for approval by January 30.

Action Item: Revised work plans will be circulated to members January 22, with a deadline for approval decision by January 30th.

Great Lakes Regional Office (GLRO) Update *(Breanna G.)*

Breanna Green, IJC US Section Office, is serving as the Acting GLRO Director, beginning January 1, 2026. It was noted that the strategic planning session (identified under "Co-Chair Updates") will be discussed by Commissioners during their Executive Meeting January 29. The [Great Lakes Day](#) event being held in Washington D.C. on March 5 was also highlighted.

Presentation: Learning from the Lands: A Synopsis of First Nations' Views on Great Lakes Water Quality & Ecosystem Health Protection

The board received a presentation from Rod Whitlow (University of Guelph) and member of the Six Nations of the Grand River. Mr. Whitlow is undertaking a New Frontiers Research-funded project with Dr. Susan Chiblow on Indigenous community approaches to pollution risk in the Great Lakes. As the project is in its early stages, he shared some perspectives on aspects of chemicals management from an Indigenous lens. Mr. Whitlow shared his experiences with First Nations' engagement in Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA) and Canada-Ontario Agreement on Great Lakes Water Quality and Ecosystem Health (COA) processes, particularly around

Areas of Concern, Lakewide Action and Management Plans, Chemicals of Mutual Concern and nearshore/drinking water issues.

The board expressed interest in receiving future updates as the research progresses.

2026 Triennial Assessment of Progress (TAP) Update *(Allison V-Z)*

Commissioners were briefed on the TAP progress during the December IJC meeting. In preparation for writing the TAP report, staff are preparing “homework” tasks for interested board members to support report development. Staff are organizing these tasks and timelines, which will be conveyed to members when ready.

Public engagement activities will begin in February, with the first IJC listening session at the Great Lakes Public Forum in Chicago, followed by additional virtual sessions in February and March. Engagement with Indigenous partners continues, including the Indigenous Great Lakes Network and upcoming sessions with First Nations, Tribes, and Métis partners. All details on public engagements are available at GLperspectives.ijc.org. Board members are encouraged to promote this opportunity with their networks.

All inputs—board homework, public engagement, Indigenous engagement—will feed into a draft report for later board review.

WQB Strategic Communications Review *(Allison V-Z)*

Board communications planning is currently done on a project-by-project basis with no overarching strategy. The types of communications products and activities vary by project and can be used to disseminate and raise awareness of project products, receive targeted feedback, support implementation of recommendations and provide opportunities for public engagement. IJC staff introduced a proposed framework for a strategic review of the WQB’s current communications objectives and activities, to identify successes and to explore opportunities for new/additional objectives and approaches. The proposed review framework presented will be circulated to members for input. The review process will be refined, as needed, based on input received.

Action Item: Board Secretary will circulate the proposed strategic communications review process to members for review and input.

Presentation: WQB’s Great Lakes Restoration & Revitalization Project

The board received a presentation from Dawn Schilling, contractor from Potomac-Hudson Engineering, on the WQB’s Great Lakes Restoration & Revitalization project. The project began in spring 2024 and is near completion with the finalization of a contractor report. The project goal is to understand the human related benefits of ecological restoration and identify approaches for communities to integrate social and ecological considerations into decision making for restoration projects across the Great Lakes region. The project included a literature review on ecological interventions and community social dimensions, followed by two workshops in 2024 and 2025. During the progress of the project, an opportunity emerged to collaborate with United Nations Regional Center of Expertise (RCE) Detroit–Windsor. Key takeaways from the project centered around themes such as, Indigenous leadership, relationship-building, and restoration inclusive of environmental, social and cultural. Possible future actions will also be identified for consideration by the WQB in carrying out potential next steps of the project. The final report will be circulated to the WQB for review, once completed.

2026 WQB Meeting Schedule *(Molly F.)*

The WQB meeting schedule for 2026 was reviewed:

- 232nd Meeting: May 12-13, 2026 (in-person) – Ohio
- 233rd Meeting: July 22, 2026 (virtual)
- 234th Meeting: October 2026 (date TBD) – Ottawa, ON in conjunction with IJC Semi-Annual Meeting

Action Item – Board secretary will send a calendar meeting invite for the spring in-person WQB meeting on May 12-13, 2026.