

**Michigan Statewide Public Advisory Council (SPAC)
September 30, 2021
Business Meeting Minutes
Meeting via Microsoft Teams**

Attendees:

Horst Schmidt, Torch Lake Area of Concern (AOC) (Chair of SPAC)
Patty Troy, St. Clair River AOC (Vice Chair of SPAC)
Eric Diesing, Clinton River AOC
Mary Bohling, Detroit River AOC
Bob Burns, Detroit River AOC
Christine Kosmowski, Kalamazoo River AOC
Cheryl Vosburg, Kalamazoo River AOC
Corey Barr, Manistique River AOC
Kathy Evans, Muskegon Lake AOC
Brian Egen, River Raisin AOC
Dick Micka, River Raisin AOC
Bill Craig, Rouge River AOC
John O'Meara, Rouge River AOC
Marie McCormick, Rouge River AOC
Laura Ogar, Saginaw River/Bay AOC
Bill Wright, Saginaw River/Bay AOC
Paulette Duhaime, St. Clair River AOC
Mike Ripley, St. Marys AOC
Erma Leaphart, Sierra Club
Rebecca Nixon, Purdue University
Leah Medley, United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Carolyn Koch, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
Mike Alexander, Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE)
Rick Hobrla, EGLE
Melanie Foose, EGLE, SPAC Liaison
Kimberly Passick, EGLE
John Riley, EGLE
Stephanie Swart, EGLE
Jennifer Tewkesbury, EGLE

Welcome – Patty Troy

Patty welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Introductions and Roll Call – Rick Hobrla

Rick asked that the SPAC representative introduce themselves first by AOC as he called them off, and then welcomed any others associated with that AOC to introduce themselves and their roles. He followed with agency staff and concluded with two special guests. Erma Leaphart – is a guest joining with interest in PACs and how they engage with the community. She works for Sierra Club and is familiar with work that Healing Our Waters

has done in this area. She is also a member of the Detroit River PAC and plans to be involved in the SPAC EJ/DEI subcommittee.

Rebecca Nixon – is working with Illinois/Indiana SeaGrant in the Department of Forestry and Natural Resources at Purdue University. She is looking at connections in AOCs and how restoration fosters revitalization in those communities.

Review of Agenda – Horst Schmidt

Horst went over the day's agenda. There were no changes proposed.

Review/Approve Minutes – Horst Schmidt

Bill Craig made a motion to accept the minutes. Mary Bohling seconded. Unanimously passed.

Review of Action Items – Melanie Foose

Melanie reviewed the action items from the previous meeting and all action items were completed. One item was for Rick and Melanie to see if additional funding would help to improve result times for lab results and analysis. After looking into the matter, Rick reported that issues for the lab were complex and simply increasing funding would likely not increase those results.

EGLE Update – Rick Hobrla

- Working Remotely (until at least November 1) – when the SPAC met in June, the COVID peak was subsiding and it was expected that EGLE staff would be returning to the office in July, unfortunately there was a new surge with the Delta variant and while not as dramatic as before it is still significant. This has resulted in EGLE staff continuing to work from home until at least November 1. Some staff are going into the office periodically and are required to wear masks regardless of vaccination status. Vaccinations are not mandatory for staff but are highly encouraged.
- BUI Removal – the Restrictions on Dredging BUI for the Manistique River has been approved. The recommendation for the removal of the Degradation of Aesthetics in Muskegon Lake has been submitted to EPA.
- Funding/Budget – the State budget for FY22 has been signed by the governor. It includes increases for laboratory staff which may improve the amount of time it takes to receive data. Funding is included for addressing water infrastructure, removing lead pipes and improving drinking water quality. A continuation for watershed council grants was also included in the amount of \$600,000.
The current federal grant expires in March 2022. As of now, it is likely that a new grant will begin in April 2022 and extend for three years. It is possible that this amount of funding may be reduced but no details are available at this time.

- PAC Support Grants – Most of these grants will end in February 2022. This means there will be a short break in funding until the next grant is put in place. It is expected that PACs will be able to apply for multi-year grants in accordance with the terms of the grant that EGLE gets. Details on applying for the new cycle of PAC support grants will be distributed in early 2022.
- SPAC Representation Update – Dennis Zimmerman has resigned from the Saginaw PAC and as their SPAC representative. Mary Bohling offered to coordinate a collection to get a gift recognizing Dennis' long service to the state.
- Other – the International Associations of Great Lakes Research is planning a special edition of their journal which will be titled *Assigning Agency; How Communities, Individuals, and Organizations Engage in Environmental Cleanup and Revitalization*. This is co-sponsored by Dr. Katie Williams of EPA and Dr. Paul Seelbach from the University of Michigan (UM). It will draw on much of the work that UM students have done over the last several years. The timing is not known but it is underway. The State of the Strait conference scheduled for December 2, 2022 at UM, Dearborn may be postponed until Spring 2022.

EPA Update – Leah Medley

Leah shared a presentation updating the SPAC on the BUIs removed basin wide in FY21, those anticipated in Michigan for FY22, and the federal process for removing a BUI from start to final approval. A copy of this presentation is included at the end of these minutes. A question was asked if there was a listing of the projects involved to get a BUI removed and the response was that those are listed within the removal document which is posted on the EPA website for the involved AOC.

AOC Conference Update – Rick Hobrla

This meeting was originally planned to occur at the conclusion of the AOC conference; however, the conference was postponed until May 2022. It is hoped that the agenda that has been planned can still be used with minor adjustments. Kathy Evans wanted to commend EGLE for their apt handling of the planning and rescheduling of the conference. She shared that she will be retired at the time of the conference, however she will attend and help to conduct the pre-conference tours that have been planned. She also intends to continue as an active member of the planning committee and as a PAC member with the watershed council. Her current position at the WMSRDC will be filled by Fallon Chabala, a graduate of Grand Valley State University in aquatic sciences. She started two weeks ago, and Kathy will be working to help her fully transition into the position until the end of the year.

FY22 AOC Projects Prioritization List – Rick Hobrla

Rick shared that Melanie sent a handout for this presentation prior to the meeting (it is included at the end of these minutes). Amy Pelka had previously shared that funding would be insufficient to get all work goals set in the GLRI III completed. EPA worked with the states to accept recommendations for prioritizations of projects. The prioritization list only includes projects that will need to be funded with FY22 funding. EPA has asked that the States provide similar lists that will include AOC projects requiring funding beyond FY22. Funding decisions from EPA for FY22 are expected to be made by January 2022.

EJ/DEI SPAC Subcommittee Update – Cheryl Vosburg

Cheryl shared that the subcommittee met in April, June, and September of 2021. The September meeting was to specifically discuss setting up Implicit Bias training for PAC leadership. This training would be provided by the Michigan Department of Civil Rights. It would be offered to PAC chairs, vice-chairs, SPAC representatives, and others as space allowed. This would be a 4-hour training held virtually and funding for this obtained through the EGLE grant with an amendment submitted to EPA. The training can accommodate up to 50 people. Once the amendment is approved the training can be scheduled and next steps can be discussed once that is complete.

The subcommittee is also looking at creating a PAC recruitment package in the interim.

Mike Ripley from St. Marys and Marie McCormick from the Rouge offered to represent their AOCs in the subcommittee. Laura Ogar also expressed interest in participating in the subcommittee meeting on behalf of Saginaw.

Prior to breaking for the morning, Rick extended an invitation to Dr. Nixon to ask the PACs about their thoughts and input on what kind of information would be helpful for them as they work toward community engagement. There was some discussion about what was meant by community impact and clarification on her research.

The group broke for lunch at 11:45 AM.

PM Session began at 1 PM

Horst welcomed everyone back to the afternoon session and proceeded to the PAC updates for each AOC.

PAC member updates

Horst had a suggestion for future meetings that a map of the AOC and any photos of highlights be shown during the report outs. Melanie asked that AOCs wishing to share pictures send them to her prior to the meeting so they can be ready for the report outs.

Detroit River – Mary Bohling reported that there were many projects underway, however no BUIs have been removed recently. There are 14 habitat projects identified and 10 of those have now been completed, the most recent being Lake Okonoka on Belle Isle. This project connects over 75 acres with previously impounded aquatic fish spawning and nursery areas. There is now a flow through from the river into the Blue Heron lagoon, to Lake Okonoka, and back out to the river. Fish are now able to migrate through the system. There are projects currently underway at Sugar Island, South Hennepin Marsh on Grosse Isle, Belle Island Flatwoods, and the Upper Detroit River Waterfront Parks. Once these projects are complete the fish and wildlife populations and fish and wildlife habitat BUIs will be eligible for removal. On the Canadian side, Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation, and Parks recently removed the Degradation of Phytoplankton and Zooplankton Populations from their list of BUIs. Last month a complete package of management actions and funding needs to remove all remaining BUIs was submitted to EPA and is under review.

River Raisin – Brian Egen shared that they are in a monitoring phase for the last BUI removals. They have been active over the past summer with an annual cleanup event that covered shoreline and adjoining creeks due to high water conditions. The event drew over 125 people and local businesses supplied snacks and lunch for participants. They are currently working on a documentary that they hope will show on PBS. They have migrated their website to a new location for improved maintenance, created outreach items such as window clings, and will be installing new interpretive signs along the river.

Rouge River – Bill Craig said the PAC's most recent meeting was September 10. Erma Leaphart attended that meeting and asked to join which caught them off guard. The PAC recommendation subcommittee is drafting new membership and voting guidelines to address an input of new faces and talents. Marie McCormick expressed an interest in serving as PAC chair. She has also agreed to represent the PAC in the SPAC EJ/DEI subcommittee. For projects, work is underway in several channels and sediment sampling began earlier in the month. They are working on a story map that will assist with education and outreach efforts. There are numerous habitat projects in progress from design stage to near completion. There is an inter-county drain project and a daylighting project also underway. There will soon be action on the adoption of new county stormwater standards

for Rouge River watershed communities. More information can be found online at their [website](#), and on their [Facebook page](#).

Clinton River – Eric Diesing shared that all eleven habitat projects have been completed. They are now looking at some additional projects. Much of their current focus is on outreach and education with a video being made to highlight projects, they are developing signage for each project location, and a restoration booklet that explains the science behind the project designs and the impact they have had. In cooperation with Oakland University, they are currently analyzing the monitoring data from all 11 projects from 2014 to 2021. It is hoped this will be published in a scientific journal within the next two years or so. They recently completed a restoration project in Rochester Hills by Yates Cider Mill. They had a bypass channel open up around the terminal barrier for sea lamprey and they are working with the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission, and the Fish and Wildlife Service to address that issue. They also received a grant to remove a dam in the Paint Creek subwatershed, one of the last remaining projects to be done in that subwatershed. Jen Tewkesbury reported that once the data analysis is complete, the fish and wildlife BUIs will be eligible for removal and she hopes to begin work on that this winter. For sediment work, there are a couple of hot spots that are being sampled. There are approximately 32 acres of sediments contaminated with PCBs to be remediated at an estimated cost of \$6 million. Once complete, work to remove the restrictions on dredging and benthos BUIs can begin.

St. Clair River – Paulette Duhaime reported that they are following up on the drinking water survey they conducted this past spring and are creating a drinking water public education webinar which is scheduled for October 19. The goal is to educate the public on work that has been done to clean up and prevent spills and keep drinking water clean. Canada is in the last stages of design to deal with sediment contamination on their side. They have determined that these sites will be capped. During PAC meetings they are focusing on how to recruit for the PAC and on life after delisting to ensure good stewardship and continued monitoring of the river. Canada is producing a symposium on the fish and wildlife populations BUI for October 20, which will be open to the public. The Lake St. Clair Conference is also taking place on November 9th. This is a virtual meeting and more information can be found at www.scrca.on.ca/conference.

Saginaw Bay/River – Laura Ogar shared that the region is very active and is in the process of transitioning from an industrial base to a more recreational base. There are water trails along the shoreline and in the rivers. There was a reef restoration in the bay that is showing good spawning use. There have been some lake sturgeon releases and those fish are now being caught recreationally. They are significantly larger than when released. For the PAC itself, they are facing some challenges in coming up with criteria for beach closings and creating a management actions plan. Bill Wright said that one of the issues was COVID complicating progress as virtual meetings were not as effective for them. Continued use of virtual platforms is helping with communications with the larger community as they get practice with the technology. The AOC continues to face challenges and the PAC is open to assistance in identifying projects to work toward removing their BUIs.

Kalamazoo River – Cheryl Vosburg reported that there was a lot of activity in an eight-mile stretch of PCB contaminated stream. EPA is preparing for the removal of the Trowbridge Dam. They are in the design phase, expect to have it complete by the end of this year, will put the project out for bid over the winter, and begin the project in the summer of 2022. It is expected to take two to three years to complete. The settlement with NCR Corporation has resulted in the selection of 14 projects at the cost of \$12.4 million for planning and implementation. This is the first phase of the settlement. John Riley added that the Army Corps of Engineers has agreed to begin a study upstream of the AOC in Battle Creek of a concrete channel that runs through the downtown area. They will be doing some modeling and a feasibility study to see if removing that channel and naturalizing that stretch of the river is possible. This will take a couple of years and if viable it will take many years and a good amount of funding to complete.

Muskegon – Kathy Evans began with the BUI work that is being accomplished. The aesthetics BUI has been submitted to EPA and is undergoing review. They have recently completed some tributary monitoring that will help inform the benthos BUI and begin the removal process. For the eutrophication BUI, they are in the process of collecting information to support its removal. A lot of work has been done to reduce phosphorus in the Bear Lake portion of the watershed as it effects the overall AOC. They hope to remove that BUI in the coming year. They are close to completing three large habitat restoration projects that will help support the removal of the loss of habitat and degraded populations BUIs. Her employer, WMSRDC, manages those projects which are located at the lower Muskegon River, the Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve, and the Amoco Tank Farm near the mouth of Ruddiman Creek. They are continuing the monitoring of previous projects and are fostering stewardship of those restored sites. The PAC also funded a survey regarding public access that was done through Grand Valley State University and they will be getting the results of that survey next week. A website that has details of all of their restoration projects and lots of other information is being used as an outreach tool and means to foster community stewardship. The site is muskegonlake.org/.

St. Marys River – Mike Ripley reported that Environment Canada has a final draft of a contaminated sediment management plan as there is still a great deal of contaminated sediment on the Canadian side. That will be presented to the BPAC at their next meeting. A community fish consumption survey is currently being conducted through Algoma University on the Canadian side. The link can be found at bpac.algomau.ca and it may be of interest to other PACs as it shows the types of fish that are being caught and consumed in the AOC. This survey may be used to help craft an advisory if needed.

Algoma Steel, the second largest steel plant in Canada, has recently announced that they will be receiving \$420 million (Canadian) in federal funding to convert to an electric arc furnace, eliminating the need to burn coal. This would improve air quality in the AOC and achieve a 70% reduction in carbon emissions along with a reduction in mercury emissions. An article about the Algoma Steel project can be found at sootoday.com/local-news/.

Manistique River – Corey Barr shared that they have just recently received approval for the removal of the BUI for the restrictions on dredging. The fish consumption BUI will be the final one for them to remove. They are scheduled for another round of fish sampling next year and as the data moves in the direction needed, they will come up with a plan to remove that BUI and then move towards delisting the AOC. John shared that there had been challenges with getting results on fish analysis data back from the lab due to constraints they've had with COVID, personnel, and the increase of PFAS testing.

Torch Lake – Horst Schmidt shared that the test plots are in place and once data is back in 2023 a determination of whether to remove the sediments or cap them can be made. Stephanie added that they are in the monitoring phase for the benthos plots, two wetland and two capping that include bentonite clay and slag. They are trying to determine whether or not the benthos can be improved. It is particularly affected by copper which is heavy in the region and also due to excessive stamps sands at the bottom of the lake. During this process of monitoring they will also be evaluating if the sites can be expanded and if that is feasible in terms of funding and moving the AOC forward. They are also still in conversations with Honeywell for two locations, the Hubble property and the Lake Lindon property. Honeywell and EPA have reached an agreement to remove sediments, barrels, and other items out of Torch Lake in order to meet the goals being set in the design phase.

SPAC Opinion Poll Results – Melanie Foose

Melanie shared a slide presentation of the poll results and this generated some discussion on the creation of possible subcommittees in the future, possible topics for trainings, and collaboration. It was suggested that temporary subcommittees could be formed for specific tasks. It was decided that the PACs should determine if they felt there was a need for any subcommittees and if so, which ones. Then polling could be done to prioritize the topics and assess interest. For trainings, it was suggested that sessions or webinars be recorded, or copies of presentations be made available for those that cannot attend. A copy of the presentation is included at the end of these minutes.

All PAC Members Meeting – Rick Hobrla

The opinion poll asked about supporting an all-PAC meeting, open to all members of every PAC and there was a lot of support for this idea. Based on the responses it is being recommended that this occur once a year and it was proposed that the first meeting take place in late February of 2022. They will be looking for input from the SPAC members on what topics would be of value for this meeting. A proposed agenda would be drafted and sent to SPAC members for review. This meeting would likely be scheduled for two to four hours in total. If the first meeting is well-received, this could become an annual event. Some post-meeting feedback would be gathered to assess its success.

Topics proposed during discussion were;

- an introduction to AOCs or the GLRI,
- how BUIs are removed,
- recently removed or soon to be removed BUIs,
- photo tours of an AOC,
- funding priorities,
- how an AOC is delisted,
- how PACs can engage their communities,
- future funding opportunities,
- success stories and lessons learned.

If anyone is aware of a good speaker, please pass their information on to Melanie. Another element would be a need to gather updated email lists from each PAC to send the meeting notices out. There was an idea about setting up a registration for this meeting so Melanie and Rick will consult with EGLE's Environmental Support Division to see what options are available. The all PAC meeting would be targeted at US members; however, all members would be welcome to attend.

Future Meetings and Call for Agenda Items – Rick Hobrla

The winter meeting is scheduled for January 20, 2022. It was proposed that the spring meeting be held in conjunction with the AOC conference. The options for meeting times would be the morning of Tuesday, May 24 or the afternoon of Thursday, May 26. A Tuesday meeting may require some to arrive on Monday and stay that night and the conference block does give the discounted rate for that evening. A Thursday meeting may require some to stay that night and the hotel is not offering the discounted price. A higher cost could be incurred or a stay at a difference hotel may be necessary.

It was suggested that as everyone would be together at the conference anyway, a virtual SPAC meeting after the conference would be acceptable as well.

An informal poll was done to assess preferences but it was not definitive so Rick and Melanie will work with Kimberly to put a poll together to decide on the timing and location of the Spring meeting.

For the Fall meeting, Rick felt it would be preferable to have an in person meeting perhaps at one of the AOCs and asked if any would be willing to host or if the members preferred a virtual meeting. Melanie suggested going to Monroe for the River Raisin AOC or an Upper Peninsula AOC.

There was an inquiry about having a legislative briefing in Fall 2022, however that is an election year so it would likely be more productive to hold one in 2023. Ideally, spring 2023 would be the best time for that briefing.

It was decided that the timing of the next meetings would be determined later.

Some topics for the winter meeting that were suggested were

- an update on project prioritization,
- PAC support grants,
- update on EJ/DEI training,
- the agenda for an all-PAC meeting,
- review of bucket list schedules,
- presentation on EGLE's BUI removal process

Bill Craig made a motion to adjourn, Paulette Duhaime seconded and there were no objections.

Meeting Adjourned at 3:32 PM.

Action Items:

- PACs should discuss if they have any interest in establishing an SPAC subcommittee for a specific topic.
- Rick, Melanie and Kimberly will develop a poll to prioritize topics and assess interest in participation if the PACs report an interest in pursuing any subcommittees.
- Rick and Melanie will consult with EGLE's Environmental Support Division regarding registration or other means to send meeting notices to a large pool of attendees.
- Rick, Melanie and Kimberly will create a poll to clarify the timing and location of the spring meeting.
- Melanie will ask if Monroe would be willing to host a fall SPAC meeting.