MICHIGAN'S GREAT LAKES AREAS OF CONCERN PROGRAM PUBLIC ADVISORY COUNCIL

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is an Area of Concern?

An Area of Concern (AOC) is a geographic area in the Great Lakes Basin that has been degraded by high levels of pollution and needs to be cleaned up to be comparable with environmental conditions outside of the AOC. Of the original 43 AOCs throughout the United States and Canada, 14 were in Michigan. Pollution in three of the 14 Michigan AOCs has been cleaned up to be consistent with non-AOC environmental conditions, and they were removed from the list of AOCs, a process known as delisting. Ten AOCs remain including: Torch Lake, Manistique River, St. Marys River, Saginaw River and Bay, Kalamazoo River, St. Clair River, Detroit River, River Raisin, Clinton River, and Rouge River.

What is a Public Advisory Council?

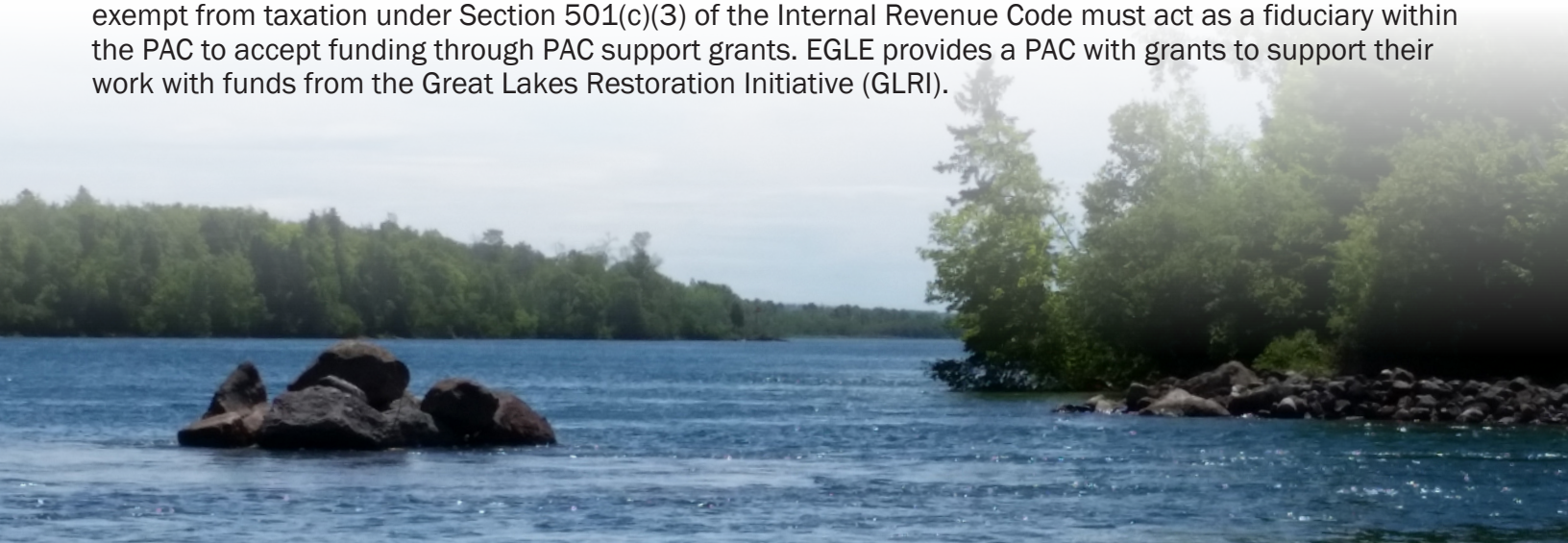
Each AOC has a Public Advisory Council (PAC), which is a group of community members and non-profit organizations that work in close partnership with federal, state, local, and tribal governments, including the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). The overall goal of the PAC is to advise and collaborate with EGLE and USEPA on ways to restore the AOC by addressing environmental issues caused by pollution; these issues are known as Beneficial Use Impairments (BUI).

Who can join a PAC?

Anyone and everyone! All people and organizations have diverse perspectives, interests, knowledge, experiences, and goals. PACs should include many people with different skillsets, backgrounds, and priorities, so the environmental issues that are important to the local community can be identified and addressed. Community involvement is essential for cleaning up Michigan's AOCs because local expertise and perspectives are necessary for addressing environmental impacts specific to the region.

How is a PAC structured?

A PAC is a partnership between various local citizens, community organizations, and governmental entities. The PAC will collaborate to develop bylaws to define the PAC's purpose, responsibilities, membership, terms of office, meeting frequency, and other internal operating rules. Units of government (state agencies, counties, cities, townships, and villages), regional planning agencies, conservation districts, public and private colleges and universities, and incorporated nonprofit organizations who are exempt from taxation under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code must act as a fiduciary within the PAC to accept funding through PAC support grants. EGLE provides a PAC with grants to support their work with funds from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI).



How often does a PAC meet?

A PAC must meet regularly, with the frequency defined in the bylaws developed by the PAC. Typically, a PAC meets monthly or quarterly.

What are the roles of a PAC in an AOC?

A PAC primarily functions as an advisor to EGLE and USEPA, coordinating and communicating with the AOC Coordinator to identify community interests that relate to cleaning up pollution and removing BUIs. The PAC facilitates meetings, develops projects related to BUIs, engages with community members, and creates a work plan used to request PAC support funding from EGLE. PACs participate in the Statewide Public Advisory Council (SPAC), which consists of members representing each of Michigan's eleven remaining AOCs to share information and ideas with other AOC communities. Public education efforts are coordinated by a PAC, with priority on implementing local efforts to diversify the PAC, providing inclusivity for underrepresented communities.

What are the roles of an individual in a PAC?

People in a PAC participate in PAC meetings and have discussions to provide community perspectives on environmental issues. They can invite other interested people to join PAC meetings to bring new ideas and priorities to the discussions. Individuals can contribute towards focused discussions that align with community interests. Members of the group can vote on PAC leadership (if applicable as defined in PAC bylaws). When BUIs are removed or the AOC is delisted, people can celebrate those achievements that contribute to a cleaner environment for everyone.

For More Information:

Michigan EGLE: Michigan.gov/AOCProgram

Michigan EGLE AOC Staff: Michigan. gov/EGLE/About/Organization/Water-Resources/AOC/Get-Involved-In-AOC-Restoration

USEPA: epa.gov/great-lakes-aocs

GLRI: glri.us

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, GREAT LAKES, AND ENERGY

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