

St. Lawrence County Environmental Management Council
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MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday May 17, 2023 at 6:00 PM

**2nd-Floor Conference Room, Public Safety Complex (and via Zoom)
49½ Court Street, Canton, NY**

1. **Call to Order.** Chair Catherine Bennett opened the meeting at 6:09 pm. Cat asked Vice Chair Sue Rau to run the meeting.

2. **Land Acknowledgement.**

Sue Rau read a Land Acknowledgement, provided by Tony David, Director of the SRMT Environment Division, and used with his permission:

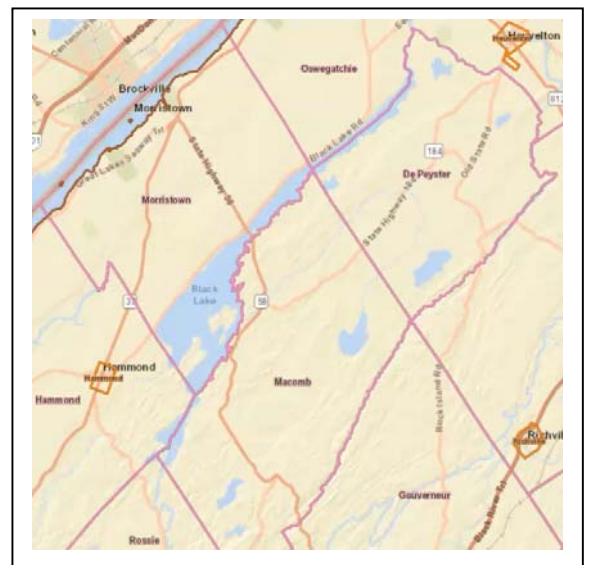
“As we meet today, let us first give thanks and acknowledge that the land upon which we are gathered is part of traditional indigenous territories, including the Rotinoshionni (Low-dee-no-SHOO-nee), the People of the Longhouse, also known as the Iroquois Confederacy; and the Kanienkehaka (Ga-nyun-geh-HA-gah), the People of the Land of Flint, also known as the Mohawk Nation.”

3. **Comments from the Public / Speaker.** There was no public comment.

The speaker was William (“Bill”) Dashnaw, president of the Black Lake Chamber of Commerce. He discussed the progress being made, to improve water quality of Black Lake, and to guide future development in the region.

Bill reported that he began public service as mayor of Heuvelton, in 1976. He has served as Town Supervisor of Oswegatchie, and worked as SLC Highway Superintendent. Bill does fiscal work for a number of towns, including several in the Black Lake region. He also served on the EMC from 2012 – 2017.

Bill described his involvement with Black Lake: he had owned a campground at Black Lake for a number of years. Currently, in addition to serving as president of the Black Lake Chamber, Bill is a member of the Black Lake Association (BLA), and the Black Lake Fish & Game Association (BLF&GA).



EMC: Everybody Must Care!

Bill distributed the current “Black Lake Guide”; he also recommended that interested persons check out the Black Lake web site (www.blacklakeny.com). He reported that Black Lake is the largest lake in DEC Region 6; DEC had reported over \$16 million in economic impact per year from businesses on/near Black Lake (2017 data).

He described several of the most significant invasive species afflicting Black Lake: water chestnuts (https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/lands_forests_pdf/aiswatercfs.pdf); and Eurasian Water Milfoil (https://nyis.info/invasive_species/eurasian-watermilfoil/).

Bill reported that it is probably too late to eradicate milfoil. Milfoil will need to be managed; this will likely include cutting to create channels in the Lake. There was some discussion about the use of herbicides; Dashnaw indicated that there is no consensus among stakeholders in the Black Lake area about using herbicides, so they have not been used in the Lake.

Bill stated that it might still be possible to prevent the spread of water chestnuts into Black Lake from the Oswegatchie River. He noted that, after a heavy rain, water from the Oswegatchie River will flow into Black Lake; this would provide a route for water chestnut to become established in the Lake.

Dashnaw reported that DEC is conducting a TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) study on Black Lake; their report is anticipated in late summer or fall of 2023. TMDL studies identify the types and concentrations of pollutants in a waterbody; the TMDL study will also include recommendations to reduce the amount of pollution.

A committee including the Chamber, the BLA and the BLF&GA has developed a work plan for the near-term. The plan includes cutting water chestnuts and milfoil; working with SLELO PRISM to hand-pull water chestnuts in constricted areas where cutters cannot access. The group intends to continue cutting milfoil and chestnut.

The committee expects that the TMDL study, when completed, will include recommendations for how to deal with issues. They will build water-testing platforms at spots where water enters the Lake, to determine what kinds/levels of pollutants are entering Black Lake from elsewhere. Citizen-science-based water testing will continue. A preliminary lake management plan was released in 2022; links to the study, figures and appendices can be found at <https://stlawco.org/Departments/Planning/CommunityProjects>

Vice-Chair Rau thanked Mr. Dashnaw for his presentation. She then declared a 5-minute recess. The meeting resumed at 7:30 pm.

4. **Roll Call, Determination of Quorum.**

Members present: Catherine Bennett, *Secretary*; Herb Bullock; Lucas Hanss; Shannon Hurlbut; Adam Pearson; Sue Rau, *Chair*; Lance Rudiger; Nicole Terminelli, *BOL Liaison*; Brian Washburn, *Vice-Chair*. **A QUORUM WAS OBTAINED.**

Members absent: Sean Cunningham; Rick Marshall; Tiernan Smith; William Stephens III; Neil Woodworth.

Staff: John Tenbusch, Planner II.

Guests: William Dashnaw, President, Black Lake Chamber of Commerce.

5. **Acceptance of Order of Business, Items for New Business, Items for Unfinished Business.** John Tenbusch reported one item for New Business. The Order of Business was accepted (Pearson / Hanss).

6. **Approval of the Minutes of the April 2023 EMC Meeting.** Minutes from the April 2023 EMC meeting were approved (Rudiger / Hanss).

7. **Report by Nicole Terminelli, Representative of the Board of Legislators.** Nicole reported:

- There was a speaker at the last BOL meeting, who commented on the trails project in Colton.
- The BOL approved a resolution calling on NYS to reverse their position against biomass as a renewable energy source.
- Lucas Hanss and Brian Washburn were approved by the BOL for another two-year term on the EMC.
- At the Operations Committee, 9 parcels were added to agricultural districts; these parcels comprise approx. 386 acres.

Lance Rudiger asked that the BOL approve planting new trees in areas around the County “campus” where trees have been taken down. Nicole will bring it up to the BOL.

8. **Report of the Committees.**

- The Executive Committee met on May 5th and discussed:
 - Potential speaker(s) for the May EMC meeting.
 - There will be a Public Advisory Group (PAG) for the Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Adaptive Management (GLAM) Committee to do an expedited review of Plan 2014 (Plan 2014) to manage water levels on Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. Shannon Hurlbut has volunteered to serve on this PAG; no other EMC members have expressed an interest.
 - Household Hazardous Waste collection event (May 20th). It has been a decision by the Planning Office to no longer support the HHW events. John will put together a summary of HHW events that have been staffed by EMC and Planning volunteers since 2006. **See attached.**

9. **Report of the Staff.**

- It had previously reported that the Five Ponds Wilderness Unit Management Plan would soon be revised. John called the DEC-Potsdam office, and was informed that this was not accurate. The DEC is preparing a draft recreation management plan for the Conifer-Emporium Tract Conservation Easement, in the towns of Clifton, Colton, and Piercefield. Public comments will be accepted until July 14, 2023. There are no plans at present for a public presentation regarding the recreation plan.
- John Tenbusch reported that the Planning Office has agreed to hire two persons to fill open positions: Sam Joseph, Planner II and Preston Santimaw, Planner I. They are projected to begin work after Memorial Day.

10. **Unfinished Business.**

- a. **EMC Visioning process.** John asked for volunteers to work on developing a Vision Statement. Sue Rau and Cat Bennet volunteered to work on this.
- b. **EMC Bylaws process.** John asked for volunteers to work on revising the EMC Bylaws. Brian Washburn and Adam Pearson volunteered.
- c. **FEMRF Fisheries Advisory Committee Report.** Brian reported on the recent meeting held in March at the Nicandri Nature Center. **See attached.**

Other items for Unfinished Business were not addressed.

11. **New Business.** John Tenbusch reported on the Great Lakes- St. Lawrence River Adaptive Management (GLAM) Committee, a part of the International Joint Commission (IJC). GLAM is beginning an Expedited Review of Plan 2014, which regulates water levels on Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. GLAM will use a Public Advisory Group (PAG) to “continue robust engagement with the public over the course of the review.”

On a motion (Bullock / Rudiger), the EMC agreed to nominate Shannon Hurlbut to serve on the PAG of the GLAM for the IJC.

12. **Announcements.**

- Shannon Hurlbut suggested that the EMC hear about two new power projects being constructed by NYPA.

13. **Adjournment.** The meeting was adjourned at 8:18 pm (Rudiger / Hanss).

Minutes prepared by John Tenbusch.

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St. Lawrence County Household Hazardous Waste Summary

| Year | # Cars | Collection site | |
|-----------------------|---------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| 2006 | 268 | Ogdensburg | |
| 2007 | 257 | Massena | |
| 2008 | 199 | Canton | |
| 2008 | 303 | Potsdam | |
| 2009 | 198 | Gouverneur | |
| 2009 | 252 | Massena | |
| 2010 | 236 | Canton | |
| 2010 | 204 | Ogdensburg | |
| 2011 | 67 | Gouverneur | |
| 2011 | 141 | Massena | |
| 2012 | 337 | Canton | |
| 2012 | 181 | Ogdensburg | |
| 2013 | 347 | Canton | |
| 2013 | 267 | Massena | |
| 2014 | 357 | Canton | Plus 250 LB Pharm. |
| 2014 | 184 | Ogdensburg | |
| 2015 | 150 | Canton | |
| 2015 | 176 | Massena | |
| 2016 | 145 | Canton | |
| 2016 | 100 | Ogdensburg | |
| 2017 | 171 | Canton | |
| 2017 | | Louisville | |
| 2018 | 240 | Canton | |
| 2018 | | Ogdensburg | |
| 2019 | 241 | Canton | |
| 2019 | 240 | Canton | |
| 2020 | 316 | Canton | Plus 8 bags of Pharm |
| 2021 | 249 | Canton | Plus 3 bags of Pharm |
| # Events | 28 | | |
| Total # Cars | 5,826 | | |
| Average # Cars | 224 | | |

Fisheries Advisory Committee (FAC)

Fisheries Enhancement Mitigation Research Fund (FEMRF)

Report

Annual FAC FEMRF Meeting

March 8-9,2023

Nicandri Nature Center

Massena, NY

Report prepared by:

Brain Washburn

SLC-EMC Representative

2022 Funding Reports

Thousand Island Land Trust (TILT)

- Mullet Creek Conservation Implementation Plan (MCCIP) (\$398,000)
 - Proposed land easements/acquisitions are proceeding and have either closed or are about to close. TILT proposed acquiring additional significant land between the forks of Mullet Creek upstream from current easements/acquisitions. There is no 2023 request for FEMRF funds. FEMRF funds were used for the logistic costs of securing the easements/acquisitions including appraisals, surveys, and legal costs. TILT is aggressively proceeding in easement/acquisition activity based on the speculation of increased real estate demand due to the potential influx of high-end positions at the proposed Micron facility in Syracuse. Utility grade solar concerns were also expressed.
- FEMRF Water Control Infrastructure Maintenance Program (\$34,485)
 - FAC updated on the maintenance of control structures maintenance.
- Blind Bay and Garlock parcels (part of MCCIP)
 - Blind Bay property has been purchased preventing US Customs and Border Services from building a headquarters and docking in Blind Bay. Extensive habitat restoration has been done on the bay by the Thousand Island Biological Station (TIBS).
 - Garlock Property is located on Route 12 and is bound on both the upstream and downstream sides by seasonal RV parks. Ducks Unlimited has done significant habitat restoration on the river shoreline of the property. TILT has entered into a purchase agreement which is expected to close in April for \$1,100,000. Parcel has been appraised for \$1,650,000. As in MCCIP FEMRF funds were used for logistic costs. TILT through its partners raised the purchase price.

USGS Lake Sturgeon Project

The project was supported by FEMRF as part of the relicensing agreement of the NYPA facilities. Four artificial spawning beds were created with two upstream from Robert Moses and two downstream.

There is limited evidence of sturgeon spawning activity on the upstream areas. Many potential variables as to why the beds are not being used have been postulated. The final report is due in 2024. There is no evidence the downstream beds which have not encountered the same issues as the upstream beds have ever been used by sturgeon.

USFWS Acoustic Sounders and American Eel Projects

USFWS has a network of 91 acoustic sounder receivers annually placed from the Cape Vincent to Robert Moses. Receivers are placed shortly after ice out and retrieve late October/November. Receivers store information from fish tagged with acoustic tags. USFWS also utilizes PIT tags and the purchase of both acoustic and PIT tags are typically part of FEMRF funding requests.

Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT): PIT's are small and easily attached to fish. There is no power supply for a PIT. The PIT receiver sends a radio frequency and magnetic charge field to activate the PIT which sends the 10-15 member alpha-numeric code unique for the individually tagged fish. There are different PIT technologies. A pit tag costs approximately \$2 and receivers cost in excess of \$2400.

Acoustic Sounders: Acoustic tags are surgically implanted into the fish and transmit a high frequency "ping" that can be recorded by a receiver up to 0.5 km. Tags cost \$865/tag and receiver cost \$2370/device.

A review of the American eel light array experiment above Iroquois dam was presented. Most of the eels are moving through the dam along the US shoreline where the current has been determined to be 1.0 m/sec compared to the Ontario shoreline where the current is 0.5 m/sec. The overall American eel project continues with the objective to mitigate the estimated 40% mortality rate of downstream migrating eels caused by the turbines at the Robert Moses and Beauharnais (HydroQuebec) facilities.

SUNY Potsdam Mooneye Project (Doug Carlson) The objective of the project is to determine spawning sites of the threatened Mooneye.(\$8,229 with \$12,822 matching)

- The 2022 sampling and capture results were presented with several potential spawning sites eliminated from further evaluation. Possible reasons for non-capture were discussed.
- Mortality of gill netting vs electrofishing were discussed. USFWS donated an electrofishing boat for the project with the mortality from electrofishing dramatically less than gill netting. It was recommended by USFWS that electrofishing is to be the preferred method for spawning site evaluation. Two sites are of interest for the 2023 evaluation. The confluence of Indian Creek draining the Upper and Lower Lakes and the Oswegatchie and the Indian River downstream from Rossie at the High Rocks area.
- Data presented the introduction of significant angler anecdotal information of Mooneye capture including images of the several Mooneye captures. After the discussion of angler evidence of capture Lana Langtry, NYSDEC Regional Fisheries Manager, announced that there will be an on-the-water NYSDEC angler survey throughout the summer on Black Lake.
- There is no additional request for funding as the remaining grant surplus will be used for travel. USFWS will provide the electrofishing boat.
- It was mentioned that some physical data such as current, DO, and temperature would be valuable. USFWS announced it had four data loggers that could be used. This surprised Jana Langtry as well as Brian Washburn as this is a significant issue in the development of a lake management plan for Black Lake.

Clarkson University Mooneye Population/Ecology Conservation Plan. (\$116,797 requested with \$65,892 matching)

This proposal was essentially the funding of a master degree research project. This was a second proposal which was initially funded in 2021 which failed since a graduate student was not enrolled. Considerable discussion involved the use of FEMRF funds to support a graduate student research project with no evidence other external funding sources were obtained. Of significance was that the proposal specifically identified the baccalaureate student was to be from Clarkson which does not have any fishery program nor fishery courses. The funding was approved with the stipulation the graduate student abilities to conduct the research be evaluated by USFWS and the individual complete all required training on electrofishing as well as netting procedures. The presentation was by the graduate student. The student was approved by USFWS. Several issues arose:

- The student must complete all required USFWS training requirements
- The student presented the objectives of his research proposal. The discussion presented concerns of the complexity of the research and the ability of the research to be completed in the typical time for the completion of a master's degree. It was suggested that the objectives be reviewed and those objectives that did not directly relate to the population ecology of Mooneye such as some hydrologic variables be considered for elimination.
- Since the electrofishing boat would be furnished by USFWS the question was asked who would be the two additional crew members needed to operate the electrofishing boat. The question was not fully answered. Additionally, Clarkson was questioned as to the availability of a towing vehicle and how the vessel would be stored and secured.
- A significant outcome of the discussion was the need for public awareness of the Mooneye including the development of a PSA to reduce Mooneye mortality and to report capture including photos. A suggestion was the distribution either a pamphlet or a sticker with an image of a Mooneye and the method of reporting a capture. Jana Langtry reported NYSDEC has significantly reduced its annual fishing guidelines from a large form which could include the PSA to the historic folded form.
- The graduate student is required to provide a report at the 2024 FAC.

SUNY-ESF Musky Propagation Project (\$27,631). Results of 2022 efforts to create a muskellunge hatchery at TIBS were presented. Additional research at TIBS was presented.

2023 Funding Proposals

SUNY-ESF Musky Conservation Telemetry and Genetics Proposal (\$143,425)

The proposal was for telemetry equipment (acoustic tags and receivers, hydrophone, and PIT tags). The acoustic tagging equipment was requested for use in spawning areas not covered by the USFWS array. Additionally, TIBS is proposing the addition of Walleye Pike to its conservation plan. TIBS is in the development of a collaborative research project with a SUNY-Oswego professor/researcher to evaluate several aspects of the genome of muskellunge. The proposal was approved and has the advantage that there are no labor costs incurred (graduate student indentured servitude) and USFWS can procure the needed equipment and supplies.

FEMRF purchase of a new USFWS boat (~\$150,000)

USFWS proposed the purchase of a 24 or 26 foot aluminum research vessel. The vessel is to have a cabin as well as a landing craft type bow to facilitate the loading/retrieval of the acoustic tag receivers which weigh in excess of 80 pounds each. The discussion was similar to buying a new vehicle considering all the available options. The consensus of FAC was to equip the boat with many options not in the original USFWS proposal with many proposed by Brian Langtry of USFWS Lake Ontario Region. FAC approved the purchase of the craft with enthusiastic support from NYSDEC.

Non-Agenda Items

Project Reports

Project reports have a deadline of 30 days before the FAC. That is not being followed. The only reports the FAC received prior to the meeting were for the SUNY Potsdam and Clarkson projects with both distributed two days before the meeting. The reports often contain a multitude of data and graphics. For the USGS Lake Sturgeon and the SUNY-ESF TIBS report the data and graphics were overwhelming and were presented via PowerPoint on a screen difficult to see. Furthermore, The SUNY-ESF TIBS report lasted over two hours. It was suggested that Scott Schleuter look into a different way for the reports to be presented such as having the presenters post their presentation before the meeting allowing FAC members to evaluate the report and formulate specific questions. Improving the report presentation format may reduce FAC from a day and half to one day.

Atlantic Salmon

Tony David was asked by Jana Langtry about the evaluation of the Atlantic salmon stocking effort on the St. Regis. The preliminary results of salmon return do not look promising. Jana Langtry noted that NYSDEC evaluation of trout spawning beds upstream of the reservation have found salmon. This was a surprise to Tony David. Jana Langtry, Brian Langtry, and Scott Schleuter stated that both NYSDEC and USFWS have no interest in any reintroduction of Atlantic salmon to the tributaries of the St. Lawrence.

Windsong Bay

An approximately 100-acre parcel of St. Lawrence River shoreline has been provided to the Town of Waddington by NYPA. The Town of Waddington has proposed that the parcel be open to development. The shoreline reaches upstream from Iroquois dam to the downstream shore of Windsong Bay. The upstream shore of Windsong Bay is in the proximity of the NYSDEC Shallows Bluff WMA. USFWS has evaluated Windsong Bay and have found numerous fish species including some identified as threatened. Scott Schleuter attended a Town of Waddington Planning Committee and Town Board meeting presenting USFWS concerns about Windsong Bay. The issue is that NYSDEC (Jana Langtry) and USFWS (Scott Schleuter) were apparently not informed of the potential land transfer prior to the offer thus not allowing a thorough evaluation of Windsong Bay. Scott Schleuter floated the idea that FEMRF through funding a land trust purchase at least a portion of the parcel to protect Windsong Bay.