

**Remarks from Michelle Selzer**  
**Michigan Department of Environmental Quality**  
**At the Lake Erie Areas of Concern Summit**

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This was a discussion about Michigan's AOC Program and a few of the challenges that RAP liaisons and our PACs face, in the hopes of learning what others are doing to tackle these same issues.

- Since the RAP/LaMP program began around 1987, staff capacity has expanded and shrank over the last 20 years. We have gone from having about fourteen people working directly in the program in 1995, that was one person per AOC, to having only one full-time person for all 14 AOCs in 2003.
- During the years when the AOC program had limited capacity, many of our PACs, forged ahead anyway and kept the program moving forward. Several of our PACs went as far as developing their own restoration targets and continued to report and track the progress that was being made in their AOCs.
- In the last couple of years, thanks to lobbying efforts by the Michigan Statewide Public Advisory Council and local PACs, and with increased financial support from the EPA, our program has recently expanded to 4 full time RAP liaisons.
- Splitting the 14 AOCs among 4 liaisons has allowed each of us to re-engage the PACs, and together, we have begun to focus our efforts on demonstrating the progress that has been made over the last 20 years. Mainly we are working with our PACs to determine delisting targets for each AOC, and are using these criteria to assess the status of each BUI to see if any have been restored and are ripe for removal. This wasn't possible a few years ago because one of the things that had been missing from the program was state approved restoration criteria.
- That all changed in January of this year when we finalized the DEQ's Guidance for Delisting Michigan's AOCs. The Guidance document outlines restoration criteria for all of the 14 BUIs except for the Fish and Wildlife Habitat and Population BUIs, which will need to be developed at the local level to address specific local restoration needs. The RAP liaisons will be actively working with our PACs over the next year to develop those targets.
- The timing of Guidance couldn't have been better. Like many of the other GL states, Michigan devoted a lot of time and energy to the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration and one of the recommendations of the effort was the development of delisting targets for all AOCs by the end of 2008. With the Guidance, we are well on our way to meeting this deadline.
- In addition to our RAP responsibilities the liaisons are active members of the LaMP Workgroups, which has been helpful to us in making connections where we can between the RAP and LaMP programs.
- Because we have the more time to focus on individual AOCs needs, we are able to better communicate AOC specific needs to staff within our own Department and with other agencies who are routinely working in our AOCs within their own programs.
- Also, as a consequence of sharing 3 binational AOCs, management and staff are also active members of the 4-Party Management Team and the 4-Party Work Group. These 4-Party groups are made up of staff from the Environmental Protection Agency, Ontario Ministry of the Environment, and Environment Canada. So, we are beginning to reinforce those binational connections and are learning more about what other agencies are doing in our AOCs and in the Great Lakes basins.
- There are a lot of great things happening right now in our program, we seem to be gaining momentum and the PACs especially like having our full attention again. But our program is still faced with many challenges both at the agency and local levels.

Some of the most significant challenges facing our program include information flow; addressing differences in public perspectives and maintaining stakeholder participation, particularly when we have to address the questions of how-clean-is-clean and when should an AOC be considered restored; and, there are immediate concerns, especially with regard to CSOs and contaminated sediments issues facing all of our AOCs in the Lake Erie basin.

- One of the key information needs is to have a better understanding of the current status of projects and research taking place in the Great Lakes basins that either directly affect, or are relevant to our AOCs. Since the AOCs are often major contributing sources of pollutants to the Great Lakes, it's important to track all of the remedial actions that are taking place within the AOCs that may lead to delisting a BUI, and that also address a LaMP issue. But, without a strong institutional memory, and because we depend on the work of others, it's sometime difficult to identify what recent remedial actions have occurred and be able to report out on them to the PACs in a timely fashion.
- There is an extreme range of values from the public's perspective on restoring AOCs. For example, some folks in highly urbanized areas like the Detroit and Rouge AOCs, may see these rivers as mere sewersheds, serving the necessary purpose of eliminating municipal and industrial waste; while others want the AOC to be restored to pristine conditions before being considered for delisting. The challenge lies in getting all the stakeholders together that have a vested interest to come up with a balanced compromise that most everyone can live with. A great example of how this is happening right now is the newly formed partnership between the Alliance of the Rouge Communities and the Rouge PAC, which you will hear more about during the Summit.
- We also need to recruit and maintain public interest in the AOC program. We need to engage folks that live and work in the AOCs, those who should have a vested interest in restoring their surroundings. But, the work of one or two groups within AOC isn't always enough to engage a broader audience.
- CSOs and contaminated sediments continue to actively impair several beneficial uses and the water quality in our AOCs. We need to have a better understanding of what can and should be done in the near-term to address these two long-term issues. Addressing CSOs is not just a decades long problem, but a generational problem, both terms of continued upgrading of infrastructures to meet growing demand and doing so under the ever present funding constraints.
- Contaminated sediments in our AOCs continue to pose not only long-term environmental impacts, but also pose technical challenges as well. This is particularly true in the River Raisin and Detroit AOCs, where CDFs are limited, and those that are available are filling up. Yet, sediment redeposition and inputs from non-point sources within the watershed remain constant.
- We are actively working with our PACs and other local stakeholders to demonstrate progress and to tackle these important challenges, and I think this Summit is a great opportunity to share some of our success and issues with other AOCs in hopes of learning more about what other agencies and PACs are doing to address these common issues.

(This presentation was based on communications with various staff and PAC members; was based on my own experience in the AOC Program, as a RAP liaison; and may not reflect the beliefs of the Department of Environmental Quality.)