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Minutes from Conference Call Meeting of  
A Water Resources Decision Support System for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence  
Inventory of Information on Ecological Impacts Technical Subcommittee

Tuesday, June 19, 2001  
3:00-4:00 (EDT)

**Summary Minutes**

*1) Welcome and introductions*

Mike Donahue welcomed conference call participants and asked them to introduce themselves. Attendees included Mike Donahue, Great Lakes Commission; Tom Rayburn, GLC; Dan Blake, GLC; Wendy Leger, Environment Canada; Keith Harrison, Michigan DEQ; Brian Potter, Ontario MNR; and Jennifer Jacobsen, Ontario MNR. Donahue noted that the purpose of this meeting was to prepare for the Project Management Team meeting next week. He reviewed the purpose of the project and the subcommittee. Then he outlined three agenda items: the status of the literature review, the status of work on computer models and preparation for the Expert's Workshop.

*2) Review status of ecological impacts literature search*

Prior to the conference call, Donahue emailed copies of the draft literature review by Michel Slivitsky, a compilation of comments on the draft, and a list of possible additions to the review that had been prepared by GLC staff. Donahue summarized the comments on the draft as follows: 1) presentation would be enhanced through the addition of elements such as an introduction and an executive summary, 2) some additional references should be added, including gray literature and references that could be found using other search terms, 3) other ways for categorizing literature should be considered, and 4) an emphasis on the lower St. Lawrence could be particularly helpful.

Donahue asked for input on what next steps might be appropriate for the literature review. Brian Potter asked about extending Slivitsky's contract and Donahue said that would be a viable option. Wendy Leger said it would be particularly valuable to have Slivitsky look at gray literature more. She said EC would not be able to contribute funds for extending the contract. Donahue said GLC's project funds should be able to cover the additional expense. Potter said there is also some potentially valuable material in the possible additions list, if there is a good way to synthesize it. Donahue clarified the purpose of the literature review as being a resource for applicants and reviewers of withdrawal proposals. They also need information categorized in a way that will help them. Leger said that since Slivitsky essentially admits that he is "out of his league" on certain aspects on the literature review because of his engineering background and focus, it may be good to get another person involved. Donahue said it might work to get someone involved with an aquatic ecology or limnology background. The GLC has looked into the option and has had preliminary discussions with Christine Lynch, who is completing her PhD work at Michigan State and may be available to begin part-time work in September. He said Slivitsky can finish up with what he has worked on, including updates and amendments as received during the review process, and then another person such as Lynch can fill the gaps. The subcommittee agreed that this course of action makes sense. When asked about the possible additions, Dan Blake noted that the text of all the references is not online, but is available for a number of the sources. Donahue asked about creating categories for the possible additions, and Blake said he was not sure what categories would be best. The categories may be decided on later, once there is a better idea of what would be useful.

ACTION ITEM: Donahue said he will get with Slivitsky and work on fine tuning the literature review and adding some articles for him to review – particularly some gray literature and international work. Then he will try to get Lynch (or someone else) to edit and reformat the review and add some material that may be missing.

3) *Review status of descriptive inventory of computer models that relate to assessment of ecological impacts*

Donahue spoke about an inventory of computer models that is being done by Rao Manam of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. So far, there are 24-30 models that have been looked at. Donahue suggests that a one-page write-up be done for each of these with model title, a brief description, the author/developer, where it is housed, software/hardware/data needed to operate, primary focus of model, past/current applications, strengths in assessing ecological impacts, weaknesses, and a summary assessment of the utility. Leger asked if other information should also be included and Donahue said a write-up could be done for one of the models, allowing a critique to be done of the format. He will also get a list of the models that are being considered. Leger noted the focus of the models on hydrology and the need for more emphasis on ecological processes. She has staff who has been looking into this. Donahue had an idea for a contract with Joe DePinto, who is now working as a consultant in Ann Arbor. Keith Harrison said it would be useful to have an outside review that provides an overview of model weaknesses – essentially a sensitivity analysis. Brian Potter said it would be helpful to know the relative precision of the model and the level of confidence associated with it. Donahue asked if there is anyone else who could help with modeling. Harrison said he could talk with some of his associates who would have a better idea of contacts. Donahue will also look at getting other modelers involved.

ACTION ITEMS: Donahue will have Manam prepare a draft model write-up and put together a list of models being considered. Donahue will talk with Joe DePinto and other modelers. Harrison will also check into getting other modelers involved and Potter will speak with OMNR modelers.

4) *Discuss format, content and timeline of the fall Expert's Workshop*

Donahue spoke briefly about the purpose of the Expert's Workshop, which is scheduled to be held in Quarter 5 of the project. It will serve to determine ecological impacts associated with water use, match up models appropriately, determine gaps where models are not available, and determine practical ways to make the process work. He recommends a strategic approach to the workshop that looks at the types of questions a withdrawal applicant would need to answer instead of an "information dump" where experts just provide information. Leger asked if the questions should be developed beforehand and Donahue said the subcommittee could get started, but it also may be good to get outside assistance. Potter said it might work to get Christine Lynch involved if she does work on the literature review because she would be in a good position to know what is needed. Others agreed with this suggestion. Harrison said questions should be sent to participants beforehand so they will be prepared and Donahue said the subcommittee could get the questions together. Donahue asked how the process could be insulated from the political process so the approach can remain useful. Harrison said the process will be insulated to some extent, but problems will arise when there is a scientific gap, so questions should be based on what needs to be known. Leger said she wants the workshop to take another step and determine the needs for answering informational gaps. Donahue said that as the literature review is finalized, the subcommittee could get started on determining what the questions may be. Then the workshop can take the questions and determine what information can be answered. Everyone seemed to be in agreement with this approach.

Donahue asked who should be involved in the workshop and the subcommittee agreed that only the scientists should participate, but that other parties could also be invited as observers. Harrison noted that

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many of those who are potential participants are being identified in the literature search. Everyone seemed to agree that mid-November would be good timing for the workshop because it will allow Lynch to get up to speed on the literature review, but will still be within the fifth quarter of the project. Donahue said there might be resources to hold a follow-up workshop, which could address three topical areas. Tom Rayburn said these are definitions of consumptive use, resource improvement and conservation. Donahue asked about the benefit standard in the Charter Annex and Harrison said it can be an improvement anywhere in the system. Donahue said the information will be reported out next week and items can be put on the table for input from the Project Management Team.

Donahue asked for further input on the Expert's Workshop. Leger said her agency would hold another workshop on methodologies used for looking at ecological impacts. She is not sure whether it will be before or after the Expert's Workshop. Potter clarified that the size of the workshop is important and that 40-60 participants would be too many – the workshop should be as large as necessary, but no bigger. Donahue said that by selectively inviting participants, a good cross section of expertise would likely result. Leger said about 20 participants would be manageable and others agreed.

### *5) Other items*

Donahue asked if there was other business to discuss. Leger said that later in the summer, information from the EC's previous workshop will be sent out and be available for this project as well. Donahue also solicited help in finding additional subcommittee members. Leger said it would be particularly helpful to get some downstream interests involved.

### *6) Adjournment*

With no further items of business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:00.

Minutes Submitted by:  
Dan Blake  
Edna Bailey Sussman Fellow  
Great Lakes Commission

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members,  
Technical Subcommittee - Ecological Impacts

FROM: Mike Donahue  
Great Lakes Commission

DATE: June 18, 2001

RE: Agenda and Background Material for Conference Call - Tuesday,  
June 19, 3:00 p.m. (EDT). Please dial: **1-703-871-3712 followed by  
5332028#**

In follow up to my earlier email, I am writing to confirm a conference call of the Ecological Impacts Technical Subcommittee of the "Water Resources Decision Support" project.

Access the call by dialing: **1-703-871-3712 followed by 5332028#** at **3:00 p.m. (EDT) (2:00 p.m. Central)** tomorrow, Tuesday, June 19. The call will last 60-90 minutes.

The objective of the call is to prepare for the June 27 meeting of the Project Management Team at Detroit Metro Airport. Agenda items are as follows:

- 1) Renew status of ecological impacts literature search. Comments from project participants and staff will be reviewed, and a decision made on finalizing the literature search effort (attached is the consultant's draft report, a summary of comments received, and a staff-prepared listing of "gray literature" that may warrant review.
- 2) Review status of descriptive inventory of computer models that relate to assessment of ecological impacts. Rao Manam, USACE-in Chicago, has been working on the inventory and, to bring the effort to closure, additional guidance on the format and substance of the narrative for each model is needed. To maximize utility of this effort to decision-making processes, I suggest that the following elements be included in the write-up for each model (1-2 pages): model title; brief description; author/developer; where housed; software/hardware/data needed to operate; primary focus of model; past/current applications; strengths in assessing ecological impacts; weaknesses; summary assessment of utility.

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- 3) Plan for “experts workshop” in late 2001. Our project work plan commits us to designing and conducting an “experts workshop” later this year. Objectives are to:
- A) Identify the key questions that need to be answered to ascertain the ecological impacts of a given water withdrawal proposal;
  - B) Identify existing information sources, research and data sets that can contribute to the response to such questions;
  - C) Identify gaps and unmet needs and how to address them; and
  - D) examine options for incorporating ecological impact analysis into the water resources decision-making process.

During the conference call, I will seek your input on how to approach the experts workshop . My current thinking is that our technical subcommittee might be well positioned to initially articulate the key questions that need to be asked (perhaps with the help of a consultant). These draft questions would provide the basis for a day and a half workshop of 40-60 individuals that would include the Project Management Team, our technical subcommittee, interested members of the stakeholders advisor committee, and 8-12 invited experts. Through plenary sessions and breakout groups, attendees will refine the questions and for each, identify what we know, what we don't know, and what we need to know. Workshop results will then be “packaged” to maximize their use in developing the decision support system.

In preparation for the conference call, I invite you to give some thought to the types of questions that might form the basis for the expert workshop. I will also share my ideas on workshop time frame, format and logistics.

- 4) Other business. We should conclude by discussing the process and timeline for decisions/products, set a date for an in-person meeting, and address other matters.

Thanks for your consideration; please call me at 734-665-9135 should you have questions/comments prior to the call.

/peg

Attachments