

The Four Parties are committed to an active public involvement program. Public involvement has been sought throughout the development and implementation of the Lake Ontario Toxics Management Plan (LOTMP) and through the transition to the Lake Ontario Lakewide Management Plan (LaMP). In the late 1980s, a Public Involvement Committee, composed of agency public involvement and communications staff, was created to plan, conduct, and evaluate public involvement activities.

2.1 Introduction

Public Involvement Goals:

- *Increase public understanding and awareness of Lake Ontario planning efforts.*
- *Provide various opportunities for meaningful public consultation in developing and implementing Lake Ontario management plans.*
- *Promote individual and corporate, governmental and non-governmental environmental stewardship actions.*
- *Build partnerships across the various programs and initiatives that are working to preserve and protect Lake Ontario.*

During the transition from the LOTMP to the LaMP, public involvement activities focused on keeping Lake Ontario stakeholders informed through informational updates, meetings, and other outreach efforts. The public involvement activities for the Lake Ontario LaMP aim to fully support efforts to create and strengthen partnerships and provide various opportunities for people to become informed about and involved in the LaMP process. It will take all of us working together to restore and protect this Great Lake.

2.2 A Look Back ... 1988-1995

Historically, the public involvement process for the LOTMP, including the shift to the LaMP, has included the following elements:

- # Holding open Coordination Committee meetings
- # Conducting public workshops
- # Improving connections with the Remedial Action Plans
- # Collecting information and conducting evaluations
- # Developing information and education materials

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Each of these elements supports the overall Lake Ontario public involvement goals. By implementing a variety of activities, the agencies have provided opportunities for the many people concerned with the Lake Ontario basin to learn about and be involved in the planning process. For example:

Open Coordination Committee meetings have provided forums for updating people about key issues and progress and providing opportunities to meet agency decision makers. The agencies evaluated the effectiveness and usefulness of these meetings. After considering public comments, the agencies adjusted the meeting format to better meet both agency and stakeholder expectations.



Lake Ontario Modeling Workshop, Buffalo, NY
(New York Sea Grant Program at SUNY Buffalo)

Public workshops have provided an opportunity to discuss and receive comments and suggestions from stakeholders using facilitated small group discussions.

Communications with the Remedial Action Plan (RAP) committees have strengthened the relationships between the LaMP and Lake Ontario RAPs. These meetings and conversations have provided the opportunity for LaMP and RAP staff and stakeholders to become familiar with each other's programs.

Collecting information about the needs and expectations of people involved in Lake Ontario efforts is an ongoing and necessary process. For example, a 1993 Questionnaire resulted in the development of a Lakewide Advisory Network; feedback from a 1996 Questionnaire was used to develop the framework for obtaining public input on the draft of this document.

Informational materials, such as fact sheets and pamphlets, have been produced in an effort to inform and encourage people to learn about the Lake Ontario ecosystem, take action to conserve and protect Lake Ontario, and participate in Lake Ontario public involvement opportunities.

As the Lake Ontario process evolved, the agencies asked Lake Ontario stakeholders for guidance on enhancing the public involvement program, to be more effective in increasing awareness of the LaMP; provide various opportunities for public consultation; promote environmental stewardship actions; and build partnerships in the Lake Ontario basin.

As a result of public consultation, the agencies adopted a strategy for establishing a three-tiered Lakewide Advisory Network. The three levels of the network were specifically designed to ensure that anyone interested in or concerned about Lake Ontario has the opportunity to become informed about and involved in the Lake Ontario LaMP process and actions to improve and protect the Lake Ontario basin. A closer look at the three-tiered network follows:

Lake Ontario Partnerships

There are many groups, agencies, committees, organizations, associations, and businesses planning or implementing water quality and habitat improvement initiatives, programs, and projects within the Lake Ontario basin. Considering this, it seemed inefficient to create a committee specifically for the Lake Ontario LaMP. The Four Parties, as advised by various stakeholder groups, realized it would be more valuable to focus on building connections between local and regional initiatives within the basin. Coordinated approaches to solving water quality and habitat issues within the basin will maximize the benefit to local areas as well as result in an improved Lake Ontario ecosystem. Some examples are:

- # The important connections between the Lake Ontario RAPs and the Lake Ontario LaMP. Each RAP's individual strategy for local remediation/restoration provides key information about the Area of Concern (AOC) that is fundamental to a comprehensive Lake Ontario LaMP. For example, by identifying sources of critical pollutants in each AOC, the RAPs provide information that will be useful in developing the contaminant reduction strategy under the LaMP. RAPs and LaMPs must work in concert with each other since the LaMP cannot be fully developed or implemented without considering details about specific areas in the basin and the remediation/restoration of AOCs relies upon how the LaMP will address lakewide environmental problems.
- # Regional groups or alliances in the Lake Ontario basin (e.g., the Finger Lakes-Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance and the Lake Ontario Conservation Authorities Alliance) have great potential for coordinating and implementing actions to solve local watershed concerns. An important connection that cannot be ignored is that by taking action to solve local watershed concerns, these groups/alliances provide an essential link to water quality improvements in Lake Ontario.

2.3 A Public Involvement Strategy for the Lake Ontario LaMP

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- Public Involvement Strategy:**
- # **Establish partnerships to promote an understanding of the connections between local watershed activities and their impacts on Lake Ontario, to encourage action to conserve and protect the lake, and to provide input to the LaMP process.**
 - # **Maintain a mailing network to keep people informed and solicit interest in the LaMP.**
 - # **Provide opportunities for binational discussions between representatives from the partnerships and other stakeholders on LaMP development and implementation.**

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The agencies are moving forward with efforts to identify, establish, and strengthen partnerships with those taking action in the basin. Although the goal is the same, it is important to realize that the U.S. and Canada will follow slightly different approaches: New York will be encouraging local and regional involvement in Basin Partnership Teams and Canada will focus efforts on developing several key partnerships with existing entities.

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), with support from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), is working to establish Basin Teams in a portion of the New York State Lake Ontario basin. Essentially, NYSDEC is aiming to create a network of partners at the regional and local levels. These Basin Teams would foster cooperation and facilitate discussions among existing groups such as Remedial Action Committees, County Water Quality Coordinating Committees, Regional Planning Councils, the Finger Lakes-Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance, citizen-based watershed groups, municipalities, businesses, and tribal governments to conserve, improve, and protect the Lake Ontario basin. There are a variety of ways Basin Teams could establish this cooperative approach for water quality and habitat improvements. For example, local and regional partners can enter into written agreements that define how planning and implementation could be integrated. Other opportunities for collaboration include: planning joint conferences/workshops/events, convening meetings/discussions, and disseminating information updates. Through these efforts the Basin Teams could: provide useful information about sub-watersheds; promote connections between local actions and Lake Ontario (“Act Locally...Think Lake Ontario”); and increase involvement in and support of the Lake Ontario LaMP and other programs that manage and conserve New York’s water resources.

Environment Canada (EC) and the Ontario Ministry of the Environment (MOE) will work with existing organizations involved in managing and protecting Lake Ontario. Lake Ontario partners include the Waterfront Regeneration Trust (responsible for the Lake Ontario waterfront from Burlington to Trenton); Remedial Action Plans in Hamilton, Toronto, Port Hope, and Bay of Quinte; Conservation Authorities (responsible for managing watersheds that drain into Lake Ontario); municipalities; First Nations; and other interest groups.

Lake Ontario Information Connection

Information about the Lake Ontario LaMP and public involvement opportunities will be made available in a variety of ways. For example, the Lake Ontario LaMP mailing list includes approximately 1,000 names of U.S. and Canadian citizens and organizations who are interested in the LaMP. To ensure efficient distribution, the mailing list is continually updated. In addition to mailing information, the agencies will maintain a

home page on the Worldwide Web, accessible from either the Great Lakes Information Network (www.epa.gov/glnpo/lakeont) or the Canadian Great Lakes Information Management Resource (www.cciw.ca/glimr/lakes/ontario).

Lake Ontario Forums

At significant stages in the development of the LaMP, the Management Committee will convene a binational meeting of Basin Team representatives and other stakeholders to provide input on major decisions. Rather than a formal committee, this “Forum” will provide an opportunity for binational discussions and sharing of information as required by each stage in the LaMP process.

Efforts are now underway to build the Lakewide Advisory Network. The agencies are working to establish and strengthen partnerships within the Lake Ontario basin and build awareness of the connections between the LaMP and local initiatives within the basin. Activities that the agencies plan to undertake to further develop the Lakewide Advisory Network are included in the Binational Workplan for the LaMP (see Chapter 5). For example:

2.4 Next Steps

- # Identifying and recognizing Lake Ontario partners and basin teams
- # Developing and distributing information materials
- # Conducting meetings and/or workshops
- # Improving connections to other Lake Ontario initiatives
- # Making information accessible on the Internet