

CHAPTER 9 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

9.1 Summary

This chapter discusses the Public Involvement and Communication component of the Lake Ontario LaMP. It highlights the goals for public involvement and describes ways in which the LaMP implements these goals. The chapter focuses on the activities that have been conducted over the past ten years and lists contacts for further information.

9.2 Public Involvement Goals

The goals of the public involvement program, as set out in the Lake Ontario LaMP Stage 1 Report, are to: (1) increase public understanding and awareness of LaMP planning and activities; (2) provide opportunities for meaningful public consultation; (3) promote environmental stewardship actions; and (4) build partnerships with others who are working to preserve and protect Lake Ontario.

9.3 Meeting Public Involvement Goals

The Lake Ontario LaMP provides a variety of opportunities for people to keep informed about the LaMP projects and progress, and to provide their input and ideas. Public information and participation are encouraged. The LaMP provides information to the general public through the media, publications, the LaMP websites, and public meetings. Individuals can add their names to the LaMP mailing list for more regular contact.

The LaMP continues to reach out to many organizations each year, using displays and brochures to showcase its basin-wide activities. Public Involvement and Outreach activities constantly evolve based on the LaMP implementation activities going on around the lake. We hope that the outreach improvements presented here, enhance our efforts to reach out and we look forward to future changes and improvements.

The LaMP uses a variety of methods for communicating with and engaging the public. Some actions and initiatives are joint efforts; others are conducted by individual members.

9.3.1 Public Meetings

Beginning in 1996, the Lake Ontario LaMP held annual public meetings in conjunction with the Niagara River Toxics Management Plan to provide an update on activities throughout the year. These meetings alternated from Ontario to New York.

In 2004 the LaMP adopted a new two-phase approach for conducting public meetings. This new approach calls for a LaMP Overview meeting every three years, held in conjunction with the Niagara River Toxics Management Plan, to present a comprehensive overview of LaMP activities and status of the lake ecosystem's health. These meetings will continue to be held alternately in Ontario and New York.

The second phase includes theme-specific public meetings held in locations around the Lake Ontario basin. These meetings are held in an effort to reach a broader audience and involve more people in the protection and restoration of Lake Ontario. Each meeting not only provides an opportunity to report on specific activities focused on a particular theme, but allows the LaMP to engage the public in a dialogue about specific topics of interest (e.g., watershed stewardship, non-point source pollution control, and coastal wetland protection).

9.3.2 Publications

The Lake Ontario LaMP keeps partner agencies and the public informed through two key publications: (1) the biennial Status, and (2) the annual Update. A number of historical publications are also available for reference.

Stage 1 Report: The Stage 1 Report was released in May 1998 to meet the requirement under Annex 2 of the binational Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA) to report to the International Joint Commission (IJC) in stages. The first stage was described as the “Problem Definition” phase. A draft report was released in 1997 for public comment. The consultation period included Open Houses in both Canada and the United States, where agency staff made presentations and were available to answer questions. After adjustments were made to the report, based on input from the public, the report was transmitted to the IJC.

Biennial Report: The biennial report, also required under Annex 2 of the GLWQA, provides detailed information on the LaMP including: background, beneficial use impairments, sources, and loadings of critical pollutants, and ecosystem goals, objectives and indicators. In addition, it reviews habitat restoration, human health considerations, and emerging issues. The full five-year LaMP workplan is included in this document.

The LaMP reporting schedule is mandated by the Great Lakes Binational Executive Committee (BEC), which is the group of senior government representatives to the GLWQA. In June 1999, the BEC implemented a new biennial reporting process and cycle for the LaMPs. The intent was to accelerate time frames, to emphasize action over planning and to streamline the review and approval process for the LaMPs. The date for the biennial release of the LaMP reports was set by the BEC and linked to Earth Week. The first progress report for the Lake Ontario LaMP was released April 2002.

Beginning in 2004, the BEC requested that all LaMPs use a “virtual binder” format for reporting all technical and workplan information. The Lake Ontario LaMP adopted the new format and changed the title of the report to LaMP Status {year}.

The LaMP Status 2004 amalgamated existing information from previous LaMP reports, and provides some updates to longer-term, on-going activities. The new format used the Stage 1 report of 1998 as its base, along with other reports which were prepared up to 2003.

The new binder is considered a living document for partner-agency use, and will be updated regularly and submitted to the International Joint Commission every two years. Copies of the LaMP Status 2004 were distributed to agency partners and the IJC on Earth Day, April 22, 2004.

Highlights Brochure: In 2002, the LaMP produced a brochure as a companion to the biennial report. The format was discontinued when the format of the biennial report changed.

Brochure: The LaMP brochure is a full colour tri-fold publication, produced in 1999 as a way of providing a general description of the Plan and to encourage public participation.

Updates: The Lake Ontario LaMP Update is a newsletter-style publication that provides highlights on each year’s activities to the public. The first Update was released in 1999, providing information on projects and progress. Update was mailed to contacts on the mailing list, distributed at the annual Lake Ontario LaMP/ NRTMP public meeting, and posted on the website. Updates were produced semi-annually in years when the biennial report was not produced (2001, and 2003). The LaMP decided to issue Updates annually, beginning in 2003, when the format of the biennial report changed, and the Highlights brochure was discontinued,

9.3.3 Websites

In 1998, the Four Parties created a binational Lake Ontario LaMP website, accessible from either the US Environmental Protection Agency’s website or from Environment Canada’s site. Since then, the site has been moved to a binational site - a collaborative website which includes information on programs that are binational in nature. The LaMP site includes information on Lake Ontario and the LaMP, and provides access to LaMP publications. An on-line “postcard” has been added for those who want to join the mailing list. The site can be accessed at www.binational.net.

LaMP reports continue to be available through the US Environmental Protection Agency's Great Lakes Information Network at www.epa.gov/glnpo/lakeont. Both of these websites can also be accessed from the LaMP page on the Ontario Ministry of the Environment's website: www.ene.gov.on.ca.

9.3.4 Media events

There were no media events in 2004/ 2005. EPA prepared and disseminated a media advisory to the Western New York news media inviting them to attend and cover the joint Niagara River/Lake Ontario LaMP public meeting at Grand Island, NY on Wednesday October 24, 2007. Mike Desmond WNEB - AM (NPR) Radio-Buffalo, NY; Aaron Besecker - Buffalo News and Daniel Miner with the Niagara Gazette attended and covered the meeting for their respective media outlets.

9.3.5 Special projects

a. Stewardship Poster

From time to time individual LaMP partners identify their own particular communications needs and work alone or with other partner agencies to develop communications products and initiatives.

In 2003, the LaMP enhanced its focus on stewardship, encouraging people to be responsible for actions that might have an effect on the health of the lake. To support that goal, on the Canadian side of the basin, the governments of Canada and Ontario produced a Lake Ontario poster targeted toward Grade 7 and 8 students and teachers.

The front of the poster boasts an attractive graphic of the Canadian side of the Lake Ontario basin. The back of the poster features nine panels with tips on how students (and their families) can take action to help protect the lake: in the home, in the yard, at the cottage, on the farm, on the street, and in the community. The poster provides a list of websites for more information on environmental protection.

The posters were distributed to all 1,500 schools and 400 libraries on the Canadian side of the basin with the intention that teachers could use these resources in their lesson plans. The poster can be found on Environment Canada's website www.on.ec.gc.ca/pollution/fpd/fsheets/intro-e.html (English); www.on.ec.gc.ca/pollution/fpd/fsheets/intro-f.html (French).

b. Ecogallery

Building on the theme of stewardship, the Ontario Ministry of the Environment led an initiative to develop a temporary exhibit on the Lake Ontario ecosystem at the Marine Museum of the Great Lakes in Kingston, Ontario. The exhibit was created through an innovative partnership between the Ministry of the Environment, the Marine Museum, and the Community Foundation of Greater Kingston, and with the cooperation of Environment Canada. The two-year exhibit, opened Earth Day, April 22, 2004.

The displays review the environmental history of Lake Ontario, outline the Lake Ontario LaMP, and promote individual actions in protecting the environment. While the exhibit appeals to a broad audience, the primary focus is on young people, and includes a strong interactive component. This exhibit represents a unique, creative partnership between the LaMP and local community groups that are committed to environmental education and stewardship.

In 2007 Ministry of the Environment reconnected with the Marine Museum to explore the possibility of future partnership in reinstalling the Lake Ontario "Ecogallery". The museum is going to research options and will contact the ministry at a later date.

c. Enlightening Educators on LaMPs

In 2002-2003, the New York Sea Grant developed a series of training kits for educators in coastal communities bordering both Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. Referred to as “Enlightening Educators on LaMPs,” the project provides information about the problems facing the Great Lakes. The goal is to help increase educator awareness of what students can do to help restore the ecological health of the ecosystem, and support the priorities of the LaMP. The project involved multiple educational outreach activities including the development of a Lake Erie and Lake Ontario LaMP educational compendium; a CD-ROM presentation on LaMPs for teachers; and a series of training workshops for teachers, non-formal educators, and stakeholders. The package incorporated Lake Ontario LaMP public information materials.

9.3.6 Speaking Engagements

The LaMP reaches out to individuals and groups that are already involved and working to conserve and restore Lake Ontario, either by attending their meetings, or inviting them to speak at LaMP meetings, or by mailing information to these groups or their members.

9.3.7 LaMP Display

The LaMP has two displays, a 10-foot “pop-up” and a smaller table-top display unit. The display is used at symposiums, fairs, forums and other events throughout the Lake Ontario basin as a means of informing the public about the LaMP.

USEPA has the current LO displays: a 10’ pop-up display as well as a table top version which are housed at its Western New York Public Information Office in Buffalo, NY.

The displays were used at the following activities during the past two-years:

- Lake Ontario Ordnance Works Restoration Advisory Board Open House at the
- Lewiston, NY Senior Center on October 18, 2006. 400 Stakeholders inspected the tabletop display.
- US Fish and Wildlife Service Fishing Derby/Environmental Field Day, Niagara Falls, NY - Hyde Park Saturday, June 2, 2007. Two thousand stakeholders inspected the tabletop display
- Niagara River/Lake Ontario LaMP Public Meeting - Grand Island Holiday Inn resort and Conference Center October 24, 2007. Eighty stakeholders inspected the 10’ popup display

9.3.8 Information Distribution

The LaMP maintains a mailing network and responds to requests for input and comments on Lake Ontario LaMP documents.

Environment Canada maintains a mailing list of over 500 Canadian stakeholders who have a personal or professional interest in the Lake Ontario LaMP. A similar list of 1100 American stakeholders is maintained by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. These lists are updated regularly, and new members are added either through the Contact Us page on Binational.Net or by the contact people.

Since the release of the LaMP Stage 1 Report, the LaMP has been updating the mailing list and looking at additional ways to reach the public.

9.4 Information Connections

If you would like to receive information regarding the Lake Ontario LaMP, please contact one of the names below.

In Canada:

Mrs. Pamela Finlayson
Environment Canada
4905 Dufferin St.
Toronto ON M3H 5T4
Phone: (416) 739-5996
Fax: (416) 739-4804
Email: pamela.finlayson@ec.gc.ca

In the United States:

Mr. Mike Basile
US Environmental Protection Agency
Western New York Public Information Office
186 Exchange St.
Buffalo NY 14204
Phone: (716) 551-4410
Fax: (716) 551-4416
E-mail: Basile.Michael@epa.gov

9.5 Actions and Progress

On October 24, 2007 the LaMP hosted a joint public meeting with the Niagara River Toxics Management Plan. The meeting was held in Grand Island, New York. The focus of the meeting was progress on the NRTMP, with a brief overview of the work of the LaMP. About 30 members of the general public attended. There were three media outlets present, including the Buffalo News, National Public Radio, and the Niagara Falls Review.

In June 2005 the LaMP hosted a public information session at the Marine Museum of the Great Lakes in Kingston, Ontario. The meeting was timed to coincide with the International Joint Commission's (IJC) Biennial Meeting. The theme topic of the meeting was stewardship. A presentation on the LaMP was followed by presentations from the {Canadian} Centre for Sustainable Watersheds and the {New York} Finger Lakes - Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance to share their approaches to stewardship. An opportunity for public discussion followed the presentations. The LaMP will plan future public meetings for other areas around the basin.

The LaMP continues to pursue the goal of participating at other agencies' meetings and conferences. In 2004, the LaMP had material available at the SOLEC Conference in Toronto. The LaMP continues to pursue the goal of participating at other agencies' meetings and conferences. In 2006, the LaMP had material available at the SOLEC Conference in Milwaukee and the plan is to participate in a like fashion at SOLEC 2008 to be held in Niagara Falls, Ontario in October.

The LaMP also regularly participates at the International Joint Commission Biennial Meeting. In June 2005, materials were made available in the display area at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. The LaMP will continue to explore opportunities to participate in relevant meetings and events around the Lake Ontario basin, including IJC Biennial Meetings, SOLEC, etc.

The LaMP will continue to seek opportunities to partner with other organizations around the Lake Ontario basin in order to share information and expand its outreach activities.

9.6 References

No references were identified for inclusion in this section.

