

## **Presentation Notes**

### **The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement: First Nations and data collaboration in an inter-governmental context**

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**October 26, 2023**

#### **Opening Remarks/Introduction**

- Good afternoon everyone. I am an Environment Program Manager with the Chiefs of Ontario, and from a settler family living in Peterborough in the territory of the Mississauga (Michi Saagiig) Anishnaabeg
- My role with the Chiefs of Ontario focuses on the Great Lakes, primarily engaging with governments on policy and programs to support First Nations priorities on Great Lakes issues.
- Environment has major data and research needs in order to make informed decisions and take action for both short and long-term goals.

#### **The GLWQA**

- First signed in 1972, last revised in 2012, is a commitment between the United States and Canada to restore and protect the waters of the Great Lakes.
- Overseen by the International Joint Commission (Henry Lickers, Haudenosaunee citizen of the Seneca Nation is one of the Commissioners)
- Work on the Agreement occurs through 10 Annexes
- The Canada Ontario Agreement sets out how the federal and provincial government will cooperate in implementing the GLWQA. It also contains a series of Annexes that largely mirror the GLWQA
- However, the COA also has Annex 13, which was advocated by First Nations and Chiefs of Ontario as directed by Resolution.
- Annex 13 directly addresses First Nations' roles in Great Lakes work, including roles in decision-making, Traditional Knowledge, and in crafting Fish advisories.
- 66 First Nations communities in the Great Lakes Basin
- Inherent and Treaty rights, supported by the implementation of UNDRIP and the TRC recommendations, and the widely recognized value of Indigenous

Knowledge to environmental decision making, all require strong roles for First Nations in the GLWQA.

- First Nations Water Declaration 2010 asserts the rights and responsibilities of First Nations, and the role of women as keepers of the ceremonies.
- Success of the 2022 Great Lakes Public Forum; representatives from First Nations and Tribes in the US participated in the majority of sessions.
- Drew attention to colonization as the problem that impacts the health of the Great Lakes and why the GLWQA was needed – restoring the health of the Great Lakes must include First Nations and Tribes.

### **Research and Data Collection: Some Examples**

- Areas of Concern
  - o Walpole Island First Nation examining fish tumors in Brown Bullheads. That study, following community protocols, provided necessary research to lift the beneficial use impairment (BUI) for fish tumors in the St. Clair River Area of Concern
- Chemicals of Mutual concern
  - o National Pollution Release Inventory/US Toxic Substances – incomplete data, compatibility issues, key information not collected or shared.
  - o Fish advisories – Akwesasne and the IJC efforts to unpack and address the impacts on fish consumption – difficulties for Akwesasne to get the data they need, risks in sharing community Knowledge and data.
- Traditional Knowledge
  - o Need to balance the work of monitoring and data gathering with practicing First Nation’s culture. There is an integral need for First Nation’s practices, knowledge and relationships to addressing the health of the Great Lakes region
  - o Traditional Knowledge Guidance produced in US with Tribes, IJC conducting a study but currently no guidance on the Canadian side.
- While data is at its most basic element is about the *thing* being measured, the involvement of Indigenous Peoples and First Nations in particular often provoke much more discussion and context on the *why* for certain courses of action.

## **Challenges for First Nations**

- Data Sovereignty and OCAP Principles
- Capacity
- Collaboration
- Receiving data
- Collecting data
- Sharing data
- COA Executive commitments to pursue co-developing tools that support better reporting on commitments to First Nations that stem from the COA. Incorporating progress on recommendations put forth by First Nations –in particular recommendations from 2022 First Nation’s Priority Setting meeting hosted by COO –will also be a component of improved reporting.
- State of the Great Lakes Report: working on adding a First Nations drinking water indicator – issues include different US/Canada reporting; currently only examines water drawn directly from the Lakes (not ground water wells); might give a skewed picture of the state of drinking water in First Nations.

## **Future ways to support both First Nations Sovereignty and Capabilities**

- Upcoming Workshop hosted by the COO Environment Team
- Expectation of increased funding and a multiyear cycle to support First Nations involvement in the GLWQA
- Working with the PTOs and Independents, along with ECCC, the workshop will come up with a model funding and develop a work plan for First Nation’s Great Lakes priorities.
- Data and research will be key elements up for discussion: access/sharing/First Nations research and monitoring capacities

Thank you.