

**THE YEAR AHEAD – CHAIRMAN BILL WRIGHT’S REPORT
TO THE PARTNERSHIP FOR THE SAGINAW BAY WATERSHED
AT ITS ANNUAL MEETING – MARCH 29, 2016**

“THE ONLY TRUE WISDOM IS IN KNOWING YOU KNOW NOTHING.” - SOCRATES

As the Public Advisory Council (PAC) for the Saginaw River and Bay Area of Concern, I submit that we do our most effective work when we’re asking questions.

For one example, I offer *Measures of Success*, published in 2000. The questions, stated as recommendations in the Preface, were, “What (should) the river/bay restoration targets... be to have the Saginaw River/Bay removed from the list of Great Lakes Areas of Concern,” “ How (should) success... be measured,” and “What steps are required to address remaining pollution sources and/or document restoration?” I don’t think it’s an exaggeration to say that these questions changed the way things are done in Great Lakes AOC restoration work.

For a second example, I offer *Enhancing Fish Passage over Low-head Barrier Dams in the Saginaw River Watershed*, published in 2005. The questions, stated as reasons for the study in the Overview, were, “(How can we) ... restore habitat required to enhance and sustain valuable fish populations of Saginaw Bay,” a question attributed to *Measures of Success*, and “(How can we) ... allow fish passage around impoundments to access historical spawning grounds,” a question asked by the 1999 *Fisheries Scoping Study* by the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network. As noted in today’s Year in Review report, the *Fish Passage* study has changed the way people in this watershed view dams, and it spawned (please pardon the pun) millions of dollars in construction that is changing the way our tributary rivers work.

“I THINK IF YOU KNOW WHAT YOU BELIEVE, IT MAKES IT A LOT EASIER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS. I CAN’T ANSWER YOUR QUESTION.” – GEORGE W. BUSH

Last year’s question may have been, “How is the Partnership going to survive?” We’re still here, so I suggest we stop asking that. We have more important things to think about.

There are many questions to be answered before we finish our task of cleaning up Saginaw Bay. I don’t have a crystal ball to know which is the most important at this moment. I do have some questions, though. A looming deadline is my chief editor today, but that may preclude finding the questions of greatest significance. As new questions appear, they may instantly eclipse these.

REGARDING FISH PASSAGE (IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER)

The *Fish Passage* study identified the Chesaning, Frankenmuth and Dow Dams as the highest priorities. Chesaning and Frankenmuth have been addressed. Is anything being considered for fish passage at the Dow Dam?

Fish Passage also noted that “... a fish passage project should include a public education component such as kiosks or literature highlighting fish life stages and the importance of Great Lakes tributaries.”

Chesaning and Frankenmuth are both towns that attract a lot of visitors, making them good sites for public education efforts. What has been done at the rock ramp sites? If not much, can we help?

Are there any findings, yet, from the studies of fish passage at Chesaning or Frankenmuth? If so, what are they showing us?

Fish Passage identified 17 more dams as candidates for removal or fish passage work. Some of these are noted in the Year in Review as subjects of studies or construction proposals. Should we look at this list to identify the next tier of priority sites?

REGARDING BIRD AND ANIMAL DEFORMITIES

Some “impacts on wildlife” studies in the Great Lakes, particularly a multi-year Canadian project, have sampled birds (and fish?) at the Confined Disposal Facility (CDF), an island near the mouth of the Saginaw River. The findings from these samples are not very good, compared to other sites around Saginaw Bay or elsewhere in Lake Huron. Could it be that gathering all the PCBs and dioxins from dredge spoils in this one spot creates an extreme situation, worse than the contamination level of the rest of Saginaw Bay? If so, is there anything that could be done to mitigate that? Remember that Bay County is contractually obligated to assume ownership and management of the CDF island when the Corps of Engineers is done with it.

REGARDING PROJECTS AND PROGRESS TOWARD REMOVING BENEFICIAL USE IMPAIRMENTS (BUIs)

Part of the Remedial Action Plan process is a matrix of recommendations for further work on each Beneficial Use Impairment in this Area of Concern. This was presented in the 2012 Update of the Saginaw Bay RAP, and is maintained by Office of the Great Lakes AOC staff. Our AOC Coordinator, John Riley, has invited us to recommend additional items to be considered for the matrix, and Jo Ellen Strieter, our admin contractor, has worked on a format for gathering suggestions. She and others of us have been combing through 30 years of Saginaw Bay work to find recommendations that may be relevant for inclusion in the BUI Matrix. As we do this work, should we consider gathering some data points that may offer an opportunity for screening and prioritizing these recommendations relative to each other? Would such categorization be helpful for allocating scarce resources to those efforts that offer what looks like the greatest chance of success?

I have run out of time, before I ran out of questions. Life is often like that.