

Local Government Engagement in Great Lakes Areas of Concern

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Introduction

Under 1987 revisions to the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement between Canada and the United States, forty three Areas of Concern (AOC) were designated around the Great Lakes basin. In each AOC, a local citizen advisory committee worked with government agencies to identify Beneficial Use Impairments (BUIs), environmental problems in need of remediation. A Remedial Action Plan (RAP) was written for each AOC to direct policy implementation by the stakeholders.



Photo Source: NASA Visible Earth, Provided by the SeaWiFS Project, NASA/Goddard Space Flight Center, and ORBIMAGE

Great Lakes governance must be understood in the context of federalism and collaborative governance. Public policy scholars have explored civic engagement in AOCs (Grover & Krantzberg 2012). Active citizen advisory committees contribute to the achievement of AOC goals (Kratzberg & Houghton 1996; Sproule-Jones 2002). *Yet, we still know little about how local governments are involved in AOC governance and Great Lakes water protection efforts.* Therefore, we ask: **How are local governments engaged in Great Lakes restoration efforts within AOCs?**

With support from the student engagement fund at Northern Illinois University, students identified local governments that were highly involved in AOCs. This process began with a survey of AOCs coordinators to identify high levels of local government involvement. Students then selected AOCs with high levels of local government involvement for the development of case studies. Through the case studies, we explored how local governments are engaged in Great Lakes restoration efforts. We then compared across cases in order to offer propositions, or hypotheses, regarding why some local governments are highly engaged in AOCs.

1) St. Louis River AOC

The St. Louis River AOC is located on the western arm of Lake Superior and includes the cities of Duluth, MN and Superior, WI. The AOC has 9 out of the possible 14 BUIs. Remedial actions in this area are mainly focused on the beach closings, body contact, and degraded fish and wildlife populations BUIs. According to progress reports created in 2013, multiple remediation projects have been either implemented or completed in the AOC.

Duluth, MN has been the most active local government and has been involved with many remedial projects including park and trail restoration along the river, sturgeon-spawning habitat creation, and general river restoration. They have high records of community involvement including both individual volunteers and public environmental groups that actively notify and educate the community about local problems. Although they are listed as stakeholders and participants in remedial actions taken in the AOC, Superior, WI appears to be much less involved in restoration.

2) Detroit River AOC

The Detroit River Area of Concern is a 32 mile international channel linking Lake St. Clair and the upper Great Lakes to Lake Erie. It is located between Detroit, Michigan and Windsor, Ontario and is North America's only International Wildlife Refuge. The known BUIs include urban and industrial development, combined sewer overflows, and municipal and industrial discharges from both sides of the river. As of January 2014, four projects have been completed and another fourteen are in the planning process.

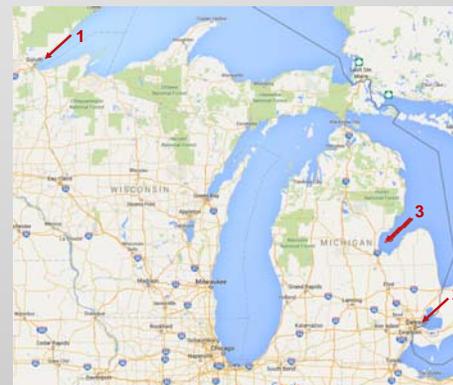
The local governments within the Detroit River AOC have had a heavy involvement protecting shoreline restoration, and fish and wildlife habitat restoration. A good example of this would be a large donation from a local company received by the towns of Amherstburg and Essex, Ontario. This donation was used towards the Essex-Amherstburg Greenway project, including a shoreline restoration with a trail running along the Detroit River.

3) Saginaw Bay/River AOC

The Saginaw Bay/River in Michigan was designated by US EPA in the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement of 1987. This area encompasses a stretch of coast that is about 22 miles long, open to Lake Huron. The Area consists of 12 beneficial use impairments (BUI's), 3 of which have already been remediated. The AOC has been mainly focused on restoring coastal areas so fish and wildlife can flourish and maintaining the Saginaw Bay Watershed.

The local government in this AOC banned phosphorus fertilizer use for both agricultural and household use in 2009. This addresses some of habitat issues addressed in the BUI's. Bay County has also implemented the use of Michigan Green Schools. This program provides public and private schools with an education program for kids to learn and contribute to the remediation process. Both local government and community involvement have played a huge role in the Saginaw Bay/River clean up.

The Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network is funded by the local foundations and run by volunteers in the community. This program identifies projects being done to help clean up the Saginaw Watershed and supplies them with anything they may need in order to finish it. The interaction between local government and the community groups ultimately help along the remediation process.



Propositions Regarding Local Government Engagement

Based upon our review of the three case study sites, we offer a set of propositions regarding the involvement of local governments in Great Lakes Areas of Concern. These working hypotheses can help local AOC coordinators and local governments think about management practices that encourage local government involvement. This is a practical goal for case study research (Barzelay, 2007).

- Higher levels of civic engagement and the involvement of civic groups spurs more local government involvement.
- Some BUI's appear to engage more local government attention. These include loss of habitat and beach closings.
- Financial support from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and other intergovernmental aid draws more local government involvement.
- Local governments also become involved through public education efforts, and educational programs in public schools.

References

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For more information...

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