

Thames River Clear Water Revival – Thames River Water Management Plan  
**First Nations Engagement Committee Meeting #7 - Minutes**

Friday, February 20, 2015, 12:30 – 3:30 pm

Walpole Island First Nation

Naaknigewgamig Governance Building, 117 Tahgahoning Road

**Attendance:**

Aimee Johnson (Walpole Island First Nation)  
Bonnie Plain (Aamjiwnaang First Nation)  
Chief Louise Hillier (Caldwell First Nation)  
Christine Rogers (Aamjiwnaang First Nation)  
Courtney Jackson (Aamjiwnaang First Nation)  
Dave Depuydt (Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry)  
Dean Jacobs (Walpole Island First Nation)  
Eleanor Heagy (Upper Thames River Conservation Authority)  
George Henry (Chippewas of the Thames First Nation)  
Larry French (Councillor - Chippewas of the Thames First Nation)  
Murray Blackie (Upper Thames River Conservation Authority Director)  
Rob Wallis (Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry First Nation Liaison)  
Sharilyn Johnston (Aamjiwnaang First Nation)  
Tara Tchir (Upper Thames River Conservation Authority) – Project Manager

**Regrets:**

Pat Donnelly (City of London)  
Isabel Lewis (Caldwell First Nation)  
Darryl van Oirschot (Caldwell First Nation)

**Unconfirmed:**

Levi Antone (Oneida Nation of the Thames)  
Tina Jacobs (Delaware Nation – Moravian of the Thames)  
James Jenkins (Walpole Island First Nation)  
Justin Logan (Delaware Nation - Moravian of the Thames)

**Purpose of Meeting:**

- Develop Request for Proposal for First Nation projects about water quality and quantity
- Develop proposal for First Nation engagement

**1. Welcome**

Chief Dan Miskokomon came in to greet everyone and welcome the committee to WIFN. He commented that there are many species at risk (SAR), including First Nations people. Law enforcement is needed to protect SAR. He stated that everyone faces cash flow problems but we need to look past that and all work together.

Everyone introduced themselves. Tara thanked Aimee for hosting the meeting. Tara mentioned that she brought copies of the Thames River Heritage Guide and TRCWR thumb drives, if anyone wished to have some.

## 2. Updates & Sharing

Aimee – Aimee is going to New Zealand on March 17 as part of a project started by James Jenkins and Dalhousie College, involving WIFN, the Grand Traverse tribe, and a group of tribes in NZ. Aimee, James, a WIFN councilor and a women's water group member are all going.

Sharilyn – Aamjiwnaang FN received a Conservation Award from the St Clair Region Conservation Authority for the Talfourd Creek Restoration Project (see story at <http://www.scrca.on.ca/scrca-annual-meeting-held/>).

Aamjiwnaang FN also received funding from SCRCA and COA to undertake waterfront restoration and shoreline softening in the St. Clair Area of Concern. The goal is to improve access to the river and fisheries. The work will begin this summer. The staff created models of the shoreline so the community could get hands on to help envision what is desirable in the shoreline.

Rob – MNRF staff will be attending a meeting with COTTFN, focusing on connecting younger staff with people there and starting up dialogue about stewardship.

George – Carmeuse and Walker are proposing a dump near Beachville in a former aggregate pit. The site is next to the Thames River. Many people have been fighting the proposal, including the First Nations. Many environmental groups want to support the FN efforts. George spoke at a coalition of churches that also wants to help.

COTTFN are working with Heather Gingrich at University of Guelph. There may be two water quality testing machines available after the PanAm games, and they want the FN to host them. This may be a good opportunity for water quality testing, as these are transportable machines that can test a broad range of parameters. We can ask Heather to address our committee.

### *DISCUSSION RE: DUMP PROPOSAL*

Dean – Indigenous stewardship laws may be the way to go. We should do a scan of FN codes and values, and then come up with a FN statement regarding the Thames River.

Sharilyn – Look at the Buffalo Conference between the Blood and the Cree – the Buffalo Treaty is a guide for how to interact with the environment and government. She wants to bring governance documentation into Aamjiwnaang FN, which means “where the Spirit of the Water lies”, to help develop some kind of governance treaty for interactions with the water.

George – Article 35 of the Canadian Constitution, which addresses inherent rights, may be the right tool to protect water, air and land as inherent rights are also about nature

Murray – This information may be useful to push the MOECC into requiring a full Environmental Assessment. It's a private proposal so a full EA isn't required.

Dean – If we get resources for capacity we can also compile comments on the Great Lakes Protection Act.

Rob/Tara – COA funding may be available.

Murray – We need to be careful using government funding to oppose a private proposal. There is an opportunity now to get funding because of the Thames River's identified impact on Lake Erie water quality.

Dean – The WIFN Water Working Group has stories of spiritual connection to water and places. It is important to gather stories to show the importance of connections with the environment.

Must consider socio, economic and spiritual impacts

Sharilyn – Ask for assessment of the spiritual values associated with the impacts of the proposal. Companies have to a spiritual values assessment as well as an EA.

Murray – There are good opportunities now to push the spiritual values and connections.

George – In the Ojibwa language, the name for the Thames meant “a Place to Drink.” He would like to develop a 30 minute historical narrative / documentary on the importance of water and spiritualism, connection with kindred. There are three laws: creation law, nature law and people law. Most western civilizations leave out nature law.

Rob – Gathering and telling stories, engaging FN and non-FN communities – can our committee support this effort? We can find funding to help pull together knowledge and stories that will support the fight.

Dean – Up to \$50,000 is available for special enhancement projects. A coalition of FN is preferred for funding. Arts councils, industries and companies have funding available too.

### **3. First Nation Water Quality or Quantity Projects**

Dave showed a presentation about the MNRF Youth Stewardship Ranger Program, which has been in operation for over 60 years and could be used as a model for the FN youth engagement project (COA funding available). Other examples include the Mill Creek stewardship program, a program run through the COTTFN, and WIFN Ecokeepers program. The objectives of the program are youth employment; stewardship project support; and training, certification and natural resources management. They will also get physical activity and management skills. A champion would be needed in the FN to take this forward. Private sector funding can be found to replace government funding when that dwindles, if this is a long term project. The challenge is always sustainable funding. The program can be residential or participants can work from home. It can unite youth across the watershed with work carried out in the traditional territories. MNRF’s program has a crew of four for eight weeks, plus a crew leader for 11 weeks.

#### *DISCUSSION RE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM*

George – New Credit FN is developing a nature camp, focusing on natural skills. Other ideas include fall and winter hunting camps, rifle maintenance and shooting training. Desire to get youth back to nature

Aimee – WIFN had a program called Bkejwanong EcoKeepers that was similar to the rangers program, but with a few key differences. The program was developed by the students rather than just western based science projects and natural resources management; it included traditional knowledge and survival skills. The community developed the program guidelines. Funding is needed to develop the program guidelines and then to run it. Desire is to get government funding to start the program, and then sustain it with industry funds

Tara – Dave and Rob can help get this project off the ground. We would need to find sustainable long term funding.

*George – There have been changes in the walleye fishery. What is the state of the fishery?*

*Tara – The fisheries management plan is a large gap in the Thames River strategy.*

Aimee – Major costs for the program are wages and travel. They applied for summer student funding (Canada Summer Jobs). There is no shortage of stewardship projects that can be done.

Dave – Another model is the Norfolk Environmental Stewardship Team, which is university/college age and runs for four months. Found that university students are more mature, keen and have a longer time to work

Rob – Estimates cost for eight weeks for crew of four is \$35,000.

Sharilyn – We can make a work plan by pulling pieces from various models. The biggest challenge is transportation.

George – The COTTFN social department mandate is to get youth involved. The health department will also support it. Youth want a long term, consistent program.

Aimee – There is a Bkejwanong Youth Facility and there are hunt clubs that may want to house students for a few days.

Larry – Start the crew at the Forks of the Thames and go downstream, doing projects and activities along the way. Learn the ecosystem from the Forks to the mouth and have First Nations communities host the meals

Chief Hillier – The students who participated in a similar program at Point Pelee were responsible for their own transportation, and they had to go 15-20 km. It taught them to be resourceful but also that they can ask for help, that they could work things out together. They weren't permitted to have any cell phones or electronic devices with them. They needed to be responsible and self reliant. Program taught them life skills, leadership qualities, etc. Many students returned to the program. The first year they had to do as many jobs as possible, the second year they were put into the area that they were most interested in.

Sharilyn – The program could go from the Forks to the mouth, plus CFN, Aamjiwnaang, WIFN. Look at knowledge gaps – invasive species, erosion sites, fish, turtle habitat, human activities (e.g. dumping garbage) – this could be one or two weeks. Then go with experts to do special projects. Their crew also used to go to Magnetawan and participate in drumming and story telling.

Louise – There are 14 municipalities in the watershed, we can ask them for support.

George – Bring in the scientific community. Develop a template that can be transferred elsewhere.

**ACTION:** Aimee will draft an outline of the projects (youth team and water values) with input from other committee members. COA has \$8000 to go towards developing the work plan. Any community meetings needed to develop the work plan will also be funded from this money.

#### **4. First Nation Engagement Strategy**

Rob talked briefly about the draft First Nation Engagement Strategy, which was written in 2011/2012. We need to refocus it. Rob has developed a shorter version that has a page with goals and purpose, a page with a brief background, a page outlining two models of First Nation engagement and legal duty. He has moved everything else that was in the draft strategy into appendices, including a rough list of projects that needs to be sorted out. James had a lot of input into the draft, so Rob will pass the revised draft by James and Aimee.

**NEXT MEETING: March 9, 2015, Aamjiwnaang First Nation, Sarnia.**