

Meeting Highlights
Michigan Water Quality Monitoring Advisory Board
February 13, 2002

Focus Topic: Reporting Water Quality Information

Members Present: Dean Premo, Debbie Hayes, Elwin Coll, Mick DeGraeve, and Richard Rediske.

Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Surface Water Quality Division (SWQD) Staff Present: David A. Hamilton, James Grant, Gerald Saalfeld, Christine Aiello, Gary Kohlhepp, Shannon Briggs, Robert Day, and Jason Smith.

DEQ, Land and Water Management Division (LWMD) Staff Present: Ralph Bednarz and Richard Sorrell.

Public Present: Jim Nicholas and Steve Blumer, United States Geological Survey (USGS).

The second meeting of the Michigan Water Quality Monitoring Advisory Board (Board) was held on February 13, 2002, from 9:30 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. at the Hannah Building in Lansing. Dean Premo of White Water Associates, Inc., chaired the meeting (agenda attached).

HIGHLIGHTS FROM OPENING COMMENTS

Responding to Board interest, Mr. Hamilton informed the Board that House Bill 4926 would put a \$15 million cap on the amount of Clean Water Fund (CWF) bond money the DEQ could spend on monitoring. Many in the Legislature are philosophically opposed to the use of bond money for monitoring, though not against monitoring itself. The DEQ recognizes that secure, long-term funding must be available for ambient water quality monitoring. The Board responded to this by passing a motion unanimously opposing attempts to restrict the use of money in the CWF for monitoring. Mr. Hamilton indicated that he would keep them informed about the status of the House Bill.

The report entitled, "Great Lakes Conservation Task Force, 2002 Final Report: The Citizens Agenda...An Action Plan to Protect the Great Lakes," had been distributed to the Board in advance of the meeting. There was a brief discussion about the monitoring issues raised in the report.

PRESENTATIONS

- Mr. Kohlhepp gave an overview of current efforts by the DEQ at reporting water quality information, including existing MS Access and Storage and Retrieval System (STORET) databases, reports such as the Section 305(b) report already available on the DEQ website, and other reports - many of which will be made Web accessible. In fact, work is well underway to provide Internet-based delivery of water quality information (see highlights of presentation by Smith). Report due dates are primarily driven by the lag time in getting complete, quality-assured electronic datasets from laboratories. With the exception of the annual DEQ/Michigan Department of Natural Resources State of the Environment report, which is written for a nontechnical audience, the DEQ targets a technical audience (e.g., USGS, United State Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), United States Fish

and Wildlife Service, management/decision makers, and staff of other DEQ divisions) with its reports.

- Mr. Smith gave a presentation focusing on data availability and Internet utilization, indicating that the DEQ Web page (currently under development and targeted for completion by June 2002), will be one of the DEQ's principle means of delivering water quality information to the public. Water and sediment chemistry data are already available to the public through STORET, which is fully Web-accessible and (now) user-friendly. These data get into STORET usually well before the written reports have been completed. The DEQ intends to link its website to those of other agencies/groups.

- Comments:
- 1) Draw distinction between volunteer stream and volunteer inland lake monitoring projects.
 - 2) Avoid the use of acronyms in material made available on the Web site (e.g., 305(b), Procedure 51, etc.).
 - 3) Anyone who obtains an organization code from the USEPA can report data on STORET; no quality assurance standards are imposed by the USEPA. Reply: The DEQ can make its organization code known to the public, and make it clear that we can only stand behind our own data.
 - 4) What is being done to create an interface that will serve the nonscientific public, including kids? Reply: Clickable maps and a graphical user interface are being developed by the USGS in cooperation with the DEQ.

- Mr. Day gave an overview of the redesign of the fish contaminant database currently underway and targeted for completion in time for the June 2002 rollout of the DEQ website.
- Ms. Briggs gave an overview of the beach monitoring database focusing on its primary design consideration, that being user-friendly Internet access by the public and health department officials. Presentation included a tour of the website from the point of view of a member of the public and of a health department official.

- Comments:
- 1) The flaw in the beach monitoring system is the delay between the sampling event and beach closure decision-making. Reply: The USEPA and DEQ are pursuing development of rapid Escherichia coli testing methods that will significantly reduce existing delays.
 - 2) Can links be placed on this website to other relevant sites, such as those managed by watershed groups? Reply: Yes.

- Mr. Bednarz gave an overview of the volunteer Cooperative Lakes Monitoring Program. Information from this program is accessible on the Internet. The site, which is targeted for revision and updates by March 2002, includes links to the Michigan Lakes and Streams Association (MLSA) website. A CWF-funded contract with the MLSA helps advertise this program.

Comments: 1) How are the data obtained from this program used? Reply: To provide feedback to volunteers, and to help determine the trophic status of lakes for the DEQ's Section 305(b) report.

- Mr. Sorrell gave an overview of reporting on flow and water quantity measurement data. A searchable flood flow discharge database is currently available on the website. The miscellaneous discharge measurements data file is also available online, but it is not searchable in its present format. Approximately 80 percent of the flood/low flow discharge requests received by the LWMD come through the website.
- Mr. Nicholas gave an overview of the USGS website currently under development in cooperation with the DEQ. The website uses a tiered approach (simple to complex) to communicate data. Website design was driven by the five-year basin cycle followed by the DEQ, though it can be easily tailored for different audiences by the addition of appropriate links. In addition to supporting user-defined queries, statistical methodologies for trend analysis could be added that would perform calculations on data selected by the user. It is envisioned that the site will make full use of available spatial data, including regional land use data. Data would be updated two to four times per year via downloads from existing databases.

Comments: 1) How will the DEQ utilize the USGS's website? Reply: The DEQ envisions tying its data into the USGS website with its user-friendly graphical interface.

FOLLOW-UP COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

1. The DEQ should consider targeting a broader segment of the population, and a less technical segment of the population, with its water quality information.
2. Information distribution modes other than the Internet should be considered to reach those who don't have Internet access. Alternatives include public radio and television, as well as involvement in public forums such as Outdoorama, boat shows, fairs, etc.
3. The DEQ should consider advertizing the availability of the website/data to schools that have Internet access, colleges, and universities. This may be accomplished through notices in the Michigan Education Association newsletter and by tying into boater/swimmer safety classes that are already welcomed into schools.
4. It's important that the DEQ educate lawmakers. Reply: The DEQ is preparing a presentation to help educate and inform legislators.
5. Interested consumers may also be reached through notices placed in lake association and watershed group magazines and newsletters and through local health departments.
6. The DEQ should consider developing a marketing and communications plan and a spokesperson to get this information to consumers at all levels. First and foremost, the plan should identify who the target audiences are and what questions they have.
7. Successful communication may necessitate rethinking and rewriting reports and summaries so the information can be understood and interpreted by the nontechnical public. Suggest that the DEQ enlist the help of Project Water Education for Teachers by asking them to look

at the DEQ reports and advise how to translate the information into a language understandable by the nontechnical public.

8. The DEQ should look for opportunities to present the monitoring program at conservation organization annual meetings and conferences. Ms. Hayes invited the DEQ to present the strategy at the Great Lakes United annual meeting.
9. Reaching younger audiences is the key to the future success of the DEQ's monitoring program.

ACTION ITEMS

1. The DEQ staff will forward electronic copies of all PowerPoint presentations made during the meeting to the Board.
2. The DEQ staff will forward copies (ideally electronic) of all available major monitoring-related staff reports to the Board, including a copy of a typical biosurvey report, as well as a copy of the 2001 State of Michigan's Environment Report.
3. Ms. Aiello will take the lead in developing a draft of the meeting highlights.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE BOARD FROM THE CHAIR

Respond to meeting highlights with specific ideas/recommendations for action.

NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING DATE

The next meeting will be held on June 12, 2002.