

Meeting Highlights
Michigan Water Quality Monitoring Advisory Board
Wednesday, September 4, 2002

Focus Topic: Review of the Draft Annual Report

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: Dave Hamilton, Jim Grant, Gary Kohlhepp, Christine Aiello.

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

Public Present: Steve Blumer (U.S. Geological Survey).

The fourth meeting of the Michigan Water Quality Monitoring Advisory Board (Board) was held on September 4, 2002, from 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Constitution Hall in Lansing. Dr. Premo of White Water Associates, Inc., chaired the meeting (agenda attached).

HIGHLIGHTS FROM OPENING COMMENTS

Mr. Hamilton informed the Board of the following:

All new CMI grants for bathing beach, local monitoring, and volunteer monitoring projects, as well as non-point source (NPS) grants, were halted by the administration as a consequence of the state's current economic difficulties.

MDEQ reorganization is scheduled to take effect September 15, 2002. One of the impacts of this reorganization will be to create a Water Division that will include, in part, the former Great Lakes and Environmental Assessment Section (minus the Hazard Assessment Unit) and NPS from the former SWQD, and the Inland Lakes and Soil Erosion and Sedimentation programs from the former LWMD. It's unclear at this time whether or how these changes will affect the Board and its activities, but the Board should proceed as planned unless instructed otherwise.

REVIEW OF DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT

The remainder of the meeting focused on comments and discussion relevant to the draft annual report. The following is a summary of these comments:

1. Given the state's current economic difficulties, it's important that the report explicitly highlight the Board's strong support for water quality monitoring, including its support for continued funding for monitoring projects.
2. Staff requested that board recommendations outlined in the report be prioritized. The MDEQ cannot address all recommendations at once, and having a prioritized list is, therefore, essential.

3. The report should emphasize that the Strategy must be flexible to incorporate past monitoring results and respond to new problems and issues. This “adaptive management” approach means that MDEQ should be able to shift money among monitoring elements as necessary.
4. For those recommendations with a research component, consolidate recommendations into a single bullet point.
5. Elaborate on bulleted items listed under the “Next Steps” section of the draft report.
6. Typically open-ended requests for grant proposals could be viewed as a vehicle to promote research by universities into emerging issues, resulting in research done for (rather than by) the MDEQ. Such requests for grant proposals could also serve as a substitute for screening activities. When viewed this way, typically open-ended requests for proposals could become a powerful tool in helping the MDEQ to get more work accomplished despite its staffing limitations. This could be coordinated, in whole or in part, through the Great Lakes Protection Fund, and the Board could make a recommendation to this effect.
7. Monitoring efforts need to be directed toward consideration of the long term effects of the aquatic herbicide, 2,4-D. This chemical breaks down into chlorinated phenols, which don’t break down readily and which may create taste and odor problems over time, among other possible effects.
8. Michigan has an obvious problem with mercury (Hg) accumulation in fish tissue, yet no information is available on how readily different waterbodies methylate Hg. In order to better understand the likelihood of conversion to methyl Hg, dual samples (i.e., one for total Hg and one for methyl Hg) should be collected from selected locations statewide.

Follow-up: The Wisconsin State Lab of Hygiene (WSLH) currently does not analyze for methyl Hg, and while the University of Wisconsin’s Environmental Chemistry and Technology Lab (ECTL) does, its capacity is severely limited due to demand from existing project commitments. However, staff from both facilities are planning talks this month to discuss the feasibility of either adding capacity for methyl Hg analyses to the ECTL, or equipping the WSLH and training staff to perform methyl Hg analyses there, and it’s likely that one or the other of these options will be chosen.

9. Regarding the draft recommendation that the MDEQ consider creating an expert panel that advises specifically on emerging issues, most Board members agreed it was the Board’s role to help the MDEQ focus its attention on important emerging issues, and to pull together experts as needed. Continued discussion emphasized the benefits of MDEQ keeping informed of relevant research, and attendance (either by an MDEQ staffer or by a Board member) at the annual meetings of the Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry (SETAC) was viewed as the ideal way to accomplish this.
10. The draft report recommends that the Strategy be amended in future by the addition of a key principle prioritizing water quality monitoring within watersheds that provide a drinking water source, major swimming beaches, and high use recreational areas. One observation made in response to this was that the vast majority of Michigan residents derive their drinking water from either the Great Lakes or groundwater as opposed to surface water. It was also suggested that the existing Source Water Protection Program may already

address the issues of concern, and the monitoring activities should be coordinated with this program.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Board members will have comments on and proposed revisions to the draft annual report delivered to the chairperson by September 11, 2002.
2. The chairperson will prepare a revised draft annual report, which will be distributed to all parties by September 16, 2002.
3. Final comments on the revised draft will be delivered to the chairperson by September 18, 2002.
4. The chairperson will prepare the final draft annual report and transmit it to the MDEQ by September 20, 2002.
5. MDEQ will finalize the report and transmit it to the Governor by October 1, 2002.
6. Elwin Coll's term on the Board expires on December 15, 2002. In early November, MDEQ staff will raise this issue to the department's front office. Board members can be reappointed, and Mr. Coll expressed interest in continuing to participate on the Board.

NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING DATE

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, February 12, 2003.