

Implementing Detroit River Organizational Priorities

Our team is the fourth Master's research project from the University of Michigan, School for Environment and Sustainability (together with the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) and individual Michigan Public Advisory Councils (PACs)) working to maximize the effectiveness and impact of Michigan's Areas of Concern (AOC) Program. Each of the previous project groups laid the groundwork by producing a set of recommendations for the state agency and the PACs, addressing:

- what attributes of PACs make them most effective;
- how PACs should prepare for long-term stewardship after AOC delisting;
- and how the state can support PACs that are a long way from delisting.

While valuable, these recommendations are challenging to turn into action because implementation is an abstract process. Each PAC is unique, with a specific geography, history, organizational structure, and capacity; these attributes create a range of hurdles for taking action on recommendations. To simplify, we compiled and reduced the 24 recommendations made by previous project groups into a shortlist of eight.

Interviews with PAC members and their respective state field coordinators helped us determine which recommendations each PAC is interested in addressing. Accordingly, this implementation plan for the Detroit River PAC focuses on their selected recommendations: **Community Stewardship, Community Education, Life After Delisting, and Funding for Life After Delisting** (Appendix). Here we combine the former two into **Broadening Meaningful Community Engagement** and the latter two into **Solidify Delisting Structure for Ongoing Stewardship**. It is important to note that these recommendations are not mutually exclusive. Think of each recommendation as an integrated and holistic aspect of an active and durable organization.

With the organizational objectives for the Detroit River PAC identified, we met again with members and the state field coordinator to collectively identify possible implementation strategies. In this document, we: (1) summarize what we learned about Detroit River PAC priority objectives; and (2) outline concrete implementation strategies to accomplish these objectives.

Broadening Meaningful Community Engagement

The AOC program has been restoring beneficial uses in the Detroit River AOC for approximately 30 years, and immense progress has been made. However, local communities with little to no interaction with the Detroit River PAC are not aware of the restoration projects or the AOC program at large. To remedy this disconnect, the PAC is interested in broadening its current outreach efforts and establishing new methods for reaching and involving the broader Detroit River AOC community in education and stewardship efforts. The Detroit River PAC has conducted many successful engagement efforts such as

drone footage, storybook mapping, and film screening. This plan supplements this work with new ideas suggested by PAC members to reach a more diverse audience.

One to Two Year Organizational Structures and Action Items

Organizational Structures to Institute

Community Stewardship

- Discover and document the existing shared identity among the Detroit River AOC communities through community-based engagement efforts (e.g., visioning sessions, town hall events, community service activities).
 - Discussion topics might include:
 - What makes our communities similar?
 - How do our communities differ?
 - How can our similarities and differences be leveraged to create a diverse and united team of watershed stewards that tackle important issues in our community?
 - Use this realized identity to create a mission statement to establish a common goal toward River restoration and stewardship.
 - What is the compelling niche / role of the Detroit PAC?
- Establish a committee to explore further stewardship opportunities, such as...
 - Set benchmark goals for the next three to five-3-5 years to assess the reach and effectiveness of new stewardship actions.

Community Education

- Establish a committee that focuses on educational opportunities.
 - Develop a plan to reach out to individuals and communities outside of the environmental sphere to educate and connect with a broader audience.
 - Continue reaching out to those within the environmental sphere to partner in this endeavor.
 - Ask partnering environmental organizations how they are tackling diversity and equity within their environmental work. Use this gained knowledge from partners to improve the educational outreach plan.

Action Items to Achieve

Community Stewardship

Communicate Directly with Detroit AOC Communities

- Designate a PAC member to be a community ambassador/liason and reach people living adjacent to the AOC directly where they are.
 - This point-person should utilize the outreach plan developed above for reaching individuals and communities outside of the environmental sphere (e.g., organizations focused on youth education, affordable housing, racial equity, public health, economic development).

Community Education

Partner with the Detroit Education System

- Expand on current educational opportunities by collaborating with partners in the education sector (e.g., Detroit Public Schools, Wyandotte Public Schools) to build AOC protection and stewardship into school programs.
 - Start with K-12 students to build stewardship ideals from a young age.
 - This might include taking students on short field trips to the AOC, or having them do in-class labs that discuss water quality
 - Reach out to non-profit organizations, such as The Youth Connection, to collaborate on educational opportunities.
 - Partner with college and university student-led groups, clubs, and environmental studies related departments (e.g., within Wayne State, Oakland, Wayne County Community College).

Partner with Extracurricular Organizations

- Partner with community service-based organizations such as the National Honor Society, Boy Scouts / Girl Scouts of America, and Key Club International.
 - Several extracurricular activities could involve the Detroit River to educate young adults on the AOC and encourage river stewardship to recruit young professionals into the field.

Three to Five Year Organizational Structures and Action Items

Organization Structures to Institute

Community Stewardship

- Reflect on the shared identity and mission statement of the Detroit River PAC by answering the following questions:
 - Does this identity and mission statement still feel relevant?
 - How has the identity of the Detroit River AOC changed over the past three years?
 - How can you adjust the framing of restoration work to meet the needs of the community?
 - How is environmental quality and degradation directly affecting the Detroit River communities?
 - How can this be built into the framing of restoration work?
- Evaluate community efforts toward the common goal of Detroit River AOC restoration.
 - After three years, does the PAC have an established communication chain to organizations within and outside of the environmental sphere?
 - Has the PAC continued work on effective engagement efforts (e.g., drone footage, storybook mapping, film screening) to reach the broader AOC community?

Community Education

- Identify outside funding to achieve stated goals of community education utilizing the educational outreach committee's benchmark goals.
 - Utilize PAC support grants to build and broaden educational capacity in the interim.
 - How will these funding sources be sustained and further developed after delisting?

Action Items to Achieve

Community Stewardship:

- Evaluate the community stewardship committee and the appointed community liaison to assess progress towards reaching the outlined goals after three years (midpoint check-in) and five years (final evaluation).
 - Has the community liaison reached a more broad range of AOC community members?
 - Document lessons learned from the past three to five years of community outreach.
 - What has worked well? What has not?
 - What additional ideas have surfaced?
 - Has the PAC reached its goals established in the one to two- year committee plan?
 - Document lessons learned from the past three to five years of community outreach, through the committee.
 - What has worked well? What has not?
 - What additional ideas have surfaced?

Community Education

- Evaluate progress made toward expanding educational opportunities after three years (midpoint check-in) and five years (final evaluation).
 - Has the PAC collaborated with partners in the education sector to build AOC protection and stewardship into school programs?
 - Has the PAC reached out to non-profit organizations, such as The Youth Connection, to collaborate on educational opportunities?
 - Has the PAC partnered with college and university student-led groups, clubs, and environmental studies related departments?
 - Document lessons learned from the past three to five years of working in schools and with community service organizations:
 - What has worked well? What has not?
 - What activities do students appreciate and feel connected with?
 - What additional ideas have surfaced?
 - Are there other partners in these areas to gain?
- Assess partnerships with community service-based organizations such as the National Honor Society, Boy Scouts / Girl Scouts of America, and Key Club International.
 - Has the PAC expanded its reach to more partners? What have been the successes and roadblocks?
 - Have the previously established partnerships further developed?

Solidify Delisting Structure for Ongoing Stewardship

The AOC program is designed to restore beneficial uses of the aquatic ecosystem. Once this is accomplished, AOCs delist from the program, and the PAC structure ceases to exist formally. PAC members must decide if and how to conduct ongoing stewardship. Unfortunately, there are few successful models for continued stewardship by PACs. Yet, substantial restoration and stewardship work will still be needed in the River Raisin, and PAC members want to continue contributing to this work after delisting.

The Detroit River PAC has existing partnerships, designated roles and responsibilities, and PAC champions improving the Detroit River AOC and its communities. The partnership network includes binational partnership, Friends of the Detroit River (FDR), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the International Joint Commission (IJC). These aspects of the Detroit River PAC will aid in their success after delisting.

The compiled lists of organization structures and action items below outlines PAC members interests and ideas for working towards developing a structure and funding source for ongoing stewardship after delisting.

One to Two Year Organizational Structures and Action Items

Organizational Structures to Institute

- Determine PAC goals that lead toward delisting from the AOC Program such as a timeline for BUI removals, gaining funding sources beyond PAC grants (e.g., dues, donations, membership, endowment, gifts), or determining PAC's structure for after delisting.
 - How will the PAC develop its scope of work beyond the AOC program?
 - Which restoration, education, or outreach projects might the PAC want to add once the AOC is delisted?
 - How can the PAC improve projects already completed?
 - For example, How can the Detroit River PAC continue stewardship through the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy (DRFC) Legacy Act Projects?)
 - What personal passions and interests do PAC members have, and how can they be incorporated into ongoing stewardship work?
- Institute a grant writing sub-committee to pursue funding for current stewardship efforts and to develop a set of long-term funding sources for stewardship after delisting.
 - Appoint a grant-writing champion, who is responsible for facilitating the grant writing processes, sending in grants, and is the main point of contact for the grant.
 - Develop a database with documented funding resources that can be shared and expanded upon.
- Create a recurring PAC agenda item that focuses on solidifying the post-delisting structure within the organization and the community.
 - Create a recurring PAC agenda item to develop future funding sources after delisting.

Action Items to Achieve

- Within the first year, create a strategy planning for the next five years toward delisting.
 - Draft a goal-driven working document that can be assessed as the organization moves toward delisting using the information cultivated from the bullet above.
 - Communicate with FDR to develop a concrete structure to document within the plan for continued mutual support and work.
 - Answer questions such as:
 - How will the structure of the PAC shift with regard to current partners?
 - How will the structure change in relation to FDR?
 - What does this look like with regard to the Candian side of the PAC?
 - What aspects of the PAC (e.g., restoration, education, and outreach) are important to maintain as the organization shifts? How does this look within the new organization?
- Communicate biannually with partners (e.g., EPA, NOAA, FWS, the City of Detroit, MDNR) with regard to delisting and maintaining joint stewardship efforts after exiting the program.

- Determine which partners are currently attending meetings and send invitations to those that are not to expand PAC resources and viewpoints.
- Keep partners up to date and provide them with materials (e.g., progress reports, newsletters) to support the PAC's education and outreach efforts.

Three to Five Year Organizational Structures and Action Items

Organizational Structures to Institute

- Determine how PAC goals have changed over the past three years.
 - Has the PAC completed any of the goals in the five-year strategy within its first three years?
 - What goals can be added to the last two years of the five-year strategy based on what the PAC has already achieved?
- Evaluate status of the five-year strategy to assess if the PAC is on target for its progress toward delisting.
 - Has the structure been solidified?
 - Have key action items been achieved?
 - What should change to ensure the plan is embodying the mission of the PAC?
 - Update the strategy as needed.
- Develop materials for partners that showcase the previous successes and continued impacts of their partnership on the path to delisting.

Action Items to Achieve

- Reach out to new technical partners who can inform the PAC on ongoing and long-term problems such as coastal wetland issues, climate change, and increasingly hazardous weather conditions.
- Continue engaging with the community to inform them on the work being done to meet these challenges.
- Host town halls to engage with a broad audience about these longer term issues.
 - Include time for questions and discussion during town halls
- Connect with existing and new partners for ongoing stewardship on a biannual basis.
 - Continue reviewing and updating the Report Card that articulates what has been done, where the Detroit River AOC is now, and future restoration goals.

Additional Insights and Suggestions

Here we provide our team's recommendations and insights for action beyond what was identified by Detroit River PAC members. Our recommendations supplement the outlined actions above. We also highlight how EGLE can further support these efforts.

Broadening Meaningful Community Outreach

- Supplement restoration projects with outreach events and education materials.
 - Utilize educational materials at restoration work-days to contextualize the impact of the work being done.
 - Include scheduled time at the beginning of events to teach attendees about the history, ecology, and current restoration projects of Detroit River.

- Produce an annual factsheet and other printed and online materials highlighting community outreach and involvement successes and further needs.
 - Send these documents to EGLE, EPA, and GLNPO offices to illustrate the necessity of funding outreach and education activities.
 - Send these documents to local businesses and municipalities to encourage further engagement and to recruit funding interest.
- Address equity issues related to outreach toward the broader Detroit and downriver communities.
 - Education – educational material should meet the community where they are at.
 - This could mean holding focus groups to understand the educational interests and needs of each community.
 - Outreach – members of all communities should feel engaged and understood with regard to activities and programming.

Solidifying Delisting Structures for Ongoing Stewardship

- Address equity issues related to outreach toward the broader Detroit and downriver communities.
 - PAC Membership – broaden the diversity of membership to underserved communities and working professionals.
 - Partners – work to broaden the diversity of partners within and outside the environmental community to diversify reach, impact, and resources.

Prioritize State Support for PAC Process

- Use PAC support grants to build up the Detroit River PAC's backbone capacity so they can better invest in community outreach and stewardship after delisting.
- Approach each Detroit River community with their individual challenges in mind; there is no one size fits all method to conducting outreach.

Appendix

Final Set of Proposed Recommendations

1. **Community Stewardship:** Incorporate community sense of place to change negative public perceptions of the water bodies and encourage community stewardship.
 - a. Host community engagement and recreation events to involve local community members (i.e., beach cleanup, kayaking, citizen science).
 2. **Community Education:** Develop strategies for meaningful community outreach, develop educational and informational materials, create relationships, and engage with storytelling and local knowledge.
 - a. Organize outreach and educational events in tandem with schools, universities, municipalities, and nonprofits to cultivate higher community values of ecological health.
 - b. Cultivate a community understanding of the broader economic and social impacts of restoration.
 3. **Life After Delisting:** Strategize, prepare, and develop a vision of future organizational structure by planning for life-after delisting when exiting the AOC program.
 4. **Funding for Life After Delisting:** Build fundraising capacity from external funding sources for continued organizational capacity after delisting.
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Figure 1: The four objectives that the Detroit River PAC members collectively stated they wanted to focus on, in Phase I and Phase II interviews, and have an implementation plan created for.