

ST. CLAIR-DETROIT RIVER SYSTEM INITIATIVE

Partnership Agreement

2014-2023

BACKGROUND

The international waters of the St. Clair-Detroit River System (SCDRS) include portions of southern Lake Huron, the St. Clair River, Lake St. Clair, the Detroit River, and western Lake Erie. The System is located within Michigan and Ohio, USA, and Ontario, Canada (Figure 1; *Map of St. Clair-Detroit River System*).

The System is recognized historically for its cultural, ecological, and economic contributions to people in the Great Lakes basin. Unfortunately, the long-term use of the system for waste disposal, water withdrawals, shoreline development, shipping, urbanization, recreation, and fishing has impacted this ecosystem and its environmental services to the region. Deterioration of water quality, habitats, and biodiversity, as well as a proliferation of introduced invasive species, reflect an ecosystem in need of improvement to restore lost benefits to people.

In 2004, the Huron-Erie Corridor Initiative (HECI) was proposed by the U.S. Geological Survey Great Lakes Science Center (USGS-GLSC) to address high-priority research questions affecting aquatic resources and habitats in the System. Over time, this voluntary consortium of researchers and managers successfully cultivated effective working relationships among various academic, federal, provincial, state, First Nations and private sector groups, and stimulated interest in having a formal partnership to further advance restoration of the System. In 2013, the HECI membership adopted the use of the “SCDRS Initiative” to more aptly reflect the geographic focus of the strait itself rather than the adjacent lakes.

The St. Clair-Detroit River System is a thriving ecosystem managed with science-based principles and broad social support, providing desired environmental services for the region and the Great Lakes basin. The purpose of the Partnership is to coordinate research and management efforts that collectively will achieve measurable progress toward the shared vision, as implemented through a strategic process to link science with integrated management priorities, that is to say, a common agenda.

This Partnership Agreement is intended to formally recognize how signatories will interact to fulfill joint Partnership Objectives of the Initiative for the next decade (i.e., 2014-2023).

PARTNERSHIP OBJECTIVES

1. Provide an inter-disciplinary forum for communication and coordination of the interests and efforts among all SCDRS Initiative participants to fulfill the common vision;
2. Identify the core values and operational structure of a formal partnership that will facilitate the development of working relationships necessary to sustain signatory commitments to the Initiative;
3. Establish a foundation of collaboration upon which a strategic vision can be developed and implemented to fulfill the partnership purpose and achieve shared strategic actions; and,
4. Serve as a nexus for plans and actions to proactively address emerging issues and opportunities in the System.

CORE VALUES

- **Knowledge sharing:** a group of experts in their respective fields allowed to share the results of their work and allowed to express their opinion in an open forum;
- **Respect:** an understanding that each agency operates within its jurisdictional authority and recognition of internal / cross-boundary policies and process;
- **Trust and Accountability:** recognition that each member of the partnership has a role to play and actively seeks to contribute to actions that lead to the collective outcome;
- **Adaptive Management:** a planning process based on science and experimental design that improves the management actions through monitoring and reporting of successes and failures; and,
- **Engagement and Collaboration:** to engage partners in their fields of expertise and to collaborate in various disciplines required for success (e.g., science, policy, funding, management, planning, and communication).

STRUCTURE

The St. Clair-Detroit River System Initiative is a bi-national, collaborative partnership currently with more than 30 organizations, including U.S. and Canadian natural resource-related agencies, Tribes/First Nations, units of local government, industry and university partners, non-profit organizations, and interested citizens. Resource managers, scientists, and other stakeholders use a consensus-driven, multi-disciplinary approach to identify management and research priorities, develop funding strategies, and increase public involvement in the Initiative. Signatories may contribute knowledge, funding, equipment, implementation skills or other support to the Initiative and, in turn, receive benefits from progress toward the common agenda. We acknowledge that this voluntary agreement expresses intent to cooperate and to contribute, but that no contract or financial obligation is accepted or inferred by the signatories.

Formal Structure:

- **Steering Committee:** A Steering Committee will include a representative from each of the following management and science agencies:
 - Fisheries and Oceans Canada
 - Environment Canada
 - Essex Region Conservation Authority
 - Great Lakes Fishery Commission
 - Michigan Department of Environmental Quality
 - Michigan Department of Natural Resources
 - Michigan Sea Grant
 - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
 - Ohio Department of Natural Resources
 - Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources
 - Ontario Ministry of the Environment
 - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
 - U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
 - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 - U.S. Geological Survey
 - Walpole Island First Nation
- **Chair and Vice-chair:** A chair and vice-chair of the Steering Committee will be selected from the pool of current committee members by consensus decision of the committee. Each will serve a term of two years, with the vice-chair assuming the role of chair at the end of the term for an additional two years. The Steering Committee will nominate and confirm a new vice-chair every other year to maintain congruent leadership.
- **Members-at-Large:** All signatory groups to the Partnership Agreement are entitled to appoint formal representatives (one per group) to serve as members-at-large.
- **Official Observer:** Entities may participate as a non-voting member of the Partnership.
- **Subcommittees:** Subcommittees will be established by the Steering Committee to address important roles relative to priority issues. Subcommittee membership may consist of Steering Committee members, members-at large, and external participants having expertise in the area of interest, with Steering Committee approval. A chair and vice chair shall be selected for each subcommittee by the Steering Committee with two-year terms and rotating positions, and as necessary.
- **Ad Hoc Teams:** The Steering Committee may establish, as needed, ad hoc teams to address important short-term issues. Ad hoc team membership may consist of Steering Committee members, members-at-large, and external participants having expertise in the area of interest, with Steering Committee approval. The Steering Committee may select a chair and/or vice chair for each ad hoc team, as deemed necessary.
- **Partnership Facilitator:** Given the number and diversity of groups involved in the Initiative, it may be useful to have an administrative facilitator. The Partnership Facilitator will be external to the Steering Committee.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- **Chair:** organize and conduct an Annual Meeting of the Members, organize and conduct other Steering Committee meetings as necessary, and represent Steering Committee interests through various forms of communication deemed necessary to implement the Initiative.
- **Vice-chair:** assist the Chair with all duties and assume lead in the Chair's absence.
- **Steering Committee:** foster cooperative efforts among Partnership Agreement signatories to implement the Strategic Vision and Science Strategy; establish an annual work plan following the Annual Meeting that highlights activities and expected outcomes for that year; conduct monthly or quarterly meetings as needed to implement work plan, and retain official hard copies of Partnership Agreements.
- **Members-at-Large:** attend the Annual Meeting and other meetings to communicate work results or interests of relevance to inform Steering Committee decisions on annual work plans. Members-at-large may also serve on subcommittees and ad hoc teams of the Steering Committee, and/or conduct projects of importance to the Initiative.
- **Subcommittees:** complete all tasks assigned by the Steering Committee related to focus areas of management and research interest, including development, implementation, evaluation, and communication of science-based strategies, metrics, and progress, so as to recommend future actions in the Initiative to the Steering Committee and signatory groups.
- **Ad Hoc Teams:** complete all tasks assigned by the Steering Committee and report on activities at the annual coordination meeting.
- **Partnership Facilitator:** guide the Steering Committee and general partnership meetings, produce and manage the meeting agenda, and produce a written summary of meetings. The Partnership Facilitator will also maintain a roster listing the names and contact information of all partners and oversee content of the Initiative website.

Initial Membership Process (February-July, 2014):

Organizations interested in formally participating in the Initiative must submit a signed Partnership Agreement to the Chair for consideration by the Steering Committee. Each of the signatory agencies listed above is responsible for identifying a representative to serve on the Steering Committee. Every signatory group may also select a formal representative to serve as a Member-at-Large. In the event that a signatory individual cannot attend a meeting, an alternate may attend. Alternates are encouraged to attend coordination meetings with the group representative, but each Initiative member group has only one vote.

Ongoing New Membership Process (August 2014 and later)

- **Individuals:** Individuals may participate in the Initiative through a signatory group representing their stakeholder type. They may also register with the Partnership Facilitator to directly receive all minutes and correspondence of the Initiative.
- **Organizations:**
 - Any organization that seeks formal membership into the Initiative may petition the Steering Committee for admittance and must attend a Steering Committee meeting to explain their expected contributions to the Initiative. Petition may be made by submitting a formal letter to the Steering Committee Chair, requesting to be placed on the upcoming meeting agenda.
 - The applicant may be requested to provide additional information regarding their expected contributions to the Initiative at the discretion of the Steering Committee.
 - The Steering Committee shall notify the Initiative's active membership of the intent of an organization to join and accept comment as to the entity's inclusion.
 - The Steering Committee will make a determination by unanimous consent and the Chair notify the applicant of their request for admittance. Successful applicants will be required to sign the Partnership Agreement as part of the admission process.
 - The Chair or designee will then secure the signed Partnership Agreement from the applicant.

Dismissal or Opting-out Process:

Dismissal of any partner from the Initiative or designated committees, owing to irresolvable conflicts with other members or with the overall vision of the Initiative, will require consensus of the Steering Committee, excluding the partner in question. Once the decision is made, the party will be dismissed. A Partnership Agreement member may also opt-out of the Partnership Agreement at any time by providing the Chair with a written notice that their organization will no longer be a member.

Decision Process:

All decisions involving deliberations among participants under the Partnership Agreement shall be made by consensus. Agreement will be reached by consensus if all members are willing to abide by a decision in support of the partnership. In order to hold a Steering Committee meeting, a quorum consisting of a majority of members, including both Canadian and U.S. members, shall be met. A participant may choose to recuse oneself. Decisions will be made using the best available science and information, in the context of social, economic, and ecological needs.

MEETING SCHEDULE

The Annual Meeting for all members and invited guests is typically in February or March and is generally a one-day session where partners gather and subcommittees and ad hoc teams report on progress on all tasks assigned by the Steering Committee related to focus areas of management and research interest and also provide updates about their respective management needs. The Steering Committee, subcommittees, and ad hoc teams may meet more regularly throughout the year as is deemed necessary.

TERM OF THE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

While the St. Clair-Detroit River System Initiative may extend beyond the next decade, this Partnership Agreement will be in effect from 2014 through 2023. Interim revision of this Agreement may occur at any time deemed necessary by unanimous consent of the Steering Committee, who will then coordinate a revision process. Approval of the revisions to the Partnership Agreement will require consent of all signatory partners. At the conclusion of the 10-year duration of the Agreement, the Steering Committee will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the Initiative and its accomplishments to determine the next suite of goals and priorities to include in the Strategic Vision for the next 10-year phase.

**ST. CLAIR-DETROIT RIVER SYSTEM INITIATIVE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT
PLEDGE**

We, the undersigned, pledge to pursue the Strategic Vision of the St. Clair-Detroit River System Initiative, by contributing technical support, financial assistance and/or in-kind services as available and on a voluntary basis to support the Initiative. We acknowledge that this voluntary agreement expresses intent to cooperate and to contribute, but that no contract or financial obligation is accepted or inferred by the signatories. We further pledge to fully disclose our SCDRS-related activities and to be openly accountable for our actions to all other partners.

Paper copies

| Name | Agency | Date |
|------|--------|------|
|------|--------|------|

Website:

| Organization | Date Joined |
|--------------|-------------|
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FIGURE 1 – Map of the St. Clair-Detroit River System Initiative Project Area.

