

PEI Agri Watershed Partnership Committee

Mid Term Report

Oct 24, 2019

Background

Members of the Federation of Agriculture and the PEI Watershed Alliance met in late fall 2018 to discuss their mutual interest in eliminating on-farm environmental issues (i.e. fish kills). Both groups had been in separate discussions with both Ministers of Agriculture and Environment related to these issues and both felt there was a need to work in partnership to achieve this shared goal

In March of 2019 the Minister of Environment invited representatives from both organizations along with representatives from both the Agriculture and Environment departments to discuss establishing a project to support these common goals. All agreed this project was beneficial and agreed to establish a committee to oversee the completion of the project.

The committee was established in April and a sum of \$300,000 was provided by the Province to fund the project, with a further \$200,000 made available in the 2019/20 budget. Its broad mandate was to build on existing work to identify and address on-farm environmental issues, create beneficial management practices (BMPs) that could support farmers' due diligence should an environmental issue occur, and consider whether an alternative measures model could be developed to address regulatory issues. The project's end date was set for December 2020.

Mandate

The committee's mandate is formalized in its Terms of Reference:

The Mandate of the Watershed and Agriculture Steering Committee ... is to ensure efficient and effective implementation of the Watershed and Agriculture Project ... The Project aims to increase capacity of watershed groups and the agricultural sector to identify and address farm-related environmental issues.

The Committee is guided by three goals:

- Reduction (ideally, elimination) of land-use-related fish kills;
- Keeping soil on the land, and out of waterways; and
- Developing an industry standard of code of practice for agricultural cropping.

Committee Membership

The committee is made up of the following individuals:

- Mike Durant (Chair) – PEI Watershed Alliance
- Dale Cameron - PEI Watershed Alliance

- Greg Donald – PEI Federation of Agriculture
- Robert Godfrey– PEI Federation of Agriculture
- Kate MacQuarrie - Director, Forests, Fish and Wildlife, Environment, Water and Climate Change
- Erin Taylor - Manager, Climate Change, Environment, Water and Climate Change
- Carla Miller - Manager, Agriculture and Land, Sustainable Agriculture

Activities

The committee's broad mandate was broken down into the following major activities:

1. Develop beneficial management practices for agricultural production that will be signed off by the Committee.
2. Identify barriers to implementation of these practices and, where possible, recommend options for overcoming those barriers.
3. Develop criteria for identifying on-farm high-risk environmental areas, particularly in light of extreme weather events and a changing climate.
4. Develop educational and/or communications materials highlighting key environmental risks, benefits of implementing beneficial management practices, and the complex operational and financial realities faced by farmers.
5. Provide technical and financial assistance to farmers willing to prepare and implement on-farm management plans that comply with the beneficial management practices.
6. Recommend to Government whether an alternative measures model should be developed and implemented to address regulatory issues related to agriculture and the environment.
7. Such further activities as directed by the Department of Communities, Land and Environment and/or the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Current Status

- The committee was formally established in April 2019 and has met monthly (roughly) since that time; formal agendas and records of decisions have been documented. Significant progress has been made on the first 3 key activities.
- A technical working group was established and tasked with four key tasks related to the first 2 goals/activities of the Committee, specifically:
 - To review existing literature on BMPs and select the top 20 that the committee feels would have high or moderate impact on reducing (ideally preventing) fish kills and keeping soil out of waterways on PEI;
 - Classify each BMP selected as short, medium or long term and high or moderate impact;
 - Identify barriers to implementation of those BMPs; and
 - Suggest metrics for measuring the effectiveness of those BMPs as they are implemented
- The technical group completed its initial review of these BMPs in July and presented its preliminary recommendations to the committee. The committee and TWG discussed existing programs that are in support of the various BMPs as well as the need to develop additional criteria to identify high risk sites

- The committee discussed risk factors and tools available to identify high-risk sites including a review of currently available GIS data which incorporates the following criteria:
 - the % of watershed with crops,
 - documented fish kill events since 1998,
 - % of crop land within 50 meter buffer of stream or wetland
- The committee discussed the need to identify other risk factors not currently being tracked or available in GIS data to help further refine high risk areas, with a potential goal add these risk data to the upcoming 2020 land use survey, if needed.
- The committee has contracted with a highly qualified and experienced Agrologist (Gwen Vessey, P.Ag, CCA) to assist the committee and technical working group further refine its goals.
- Budget – The committee thus far has not incurred any expenses or disbursed any funds.

Plans (next 6 months)

The committee's main goal for the next 3-6 months is to develop the overall plan for execution for the project, breaking down the key activities into deliverables and metrics to measure project success. Significant consultation will be required with all stakeholders, including industry and government, to align project deliverables with current program goals.