

A Seat at the Table: Successes and Challenges in Great Lakes Legacy Act Partnerships

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Background/Objectives. The Great Lakes have a complex history of sediment contamination. Many sites persist after multiple decades of environmental degradation from municipalities and industries, making it difficult to assign a responsible party. The Great Lakes Legacy Act is the United States' mechanism for accelerating sediment cleanup in the region. The program uses a novel, collaborative approach to transform these sites from contamination to cleanup. EPA shares the cost of the remediation with a non-federal sponsor, typically a state, industry, municipality, or combination of partners. With 15 years as an established program, EPA has partnered with more than 50 unique partners to clean up sediment in the Great Lakes. Partnership recruitment has been successful with the help of industry leaders advocating for the program. However, those advocates cannot always be in the room when a potential partner is considering its options.

Approach/Activities. Video provides an opportunity for sharing the perspectives of multiple entities when they cannot physically or even digitally be present in real time. Eleven former cost-share partners were interviewed in 2017 and 2018 about their experience with the Great Lakes Legacy Act. Interviews were filmed, primarily in Areas of Concern with completed sediment projects. Stakeholders interviewed include representatives from industry (Tyco, Honeywell), state (Ohio EPA, Michigan DEQ), municipality (City of Sheboygan, Milwaukee County), and the non-profit sector (Buffalo-Niagara Waterkeeper) among others. Interviewees were asked about the benefits of a Legacy Act partnership with EPA and challenges encountered and overcome. Essentially, interviewees described what it means to be a cost-share partner and explained whether or not they would recommend other entities of their kind to explore a partnership opportunity. Interviews were woven together with voiceover and b-roll to create a narrative on the successes and challenges of the Great Lakes Legacy Act program from the cost-share partner's point of view.

Results/Lessons Learned. A short video is being finalized that will document the experience of the Great Lakes Legacy Act partnership in the words of former non-federal sponsors. Commonalities across former cost-share partners interviewed regarding the partnership paradigm included its flexibility, the remediation skills EPA brought to the table as partners, the focus on science, not litigation, and the power granted to signatories to guide the direction and extent of the project. Challenges varied by the partner, from the waiting period in using EPA's contracting system to the difficulty of multiple entities coming to agreement on project plans. It is anticipated that the video will be a critical tool for partnership recruitment in spreading program awareness broadly and in acting as a catalyst for interested potential partners. Partnership recruitment statistics will be available along with lessons learned in how to apply the video successfully as a tool to help potential partners make informed decisions.