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Shared Vision Planning for Transboundary Water Resources Management

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Dr. Eugene Z. Stakhiv has served as chief of the Planning and Policy Studies Division, IWR, since 1990, and is co-director of a five-year comprehensive study of the Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence water management criteria for the International Joint Commission. In that capacity, he oversees a program of 20-25 policy studies annually, dealing with a broad range of topics from acid mine drainage to zebra mussels. Dr. Stakhiv also manages a robust program of applied field studies, assisting Corps district offices in solving ongoing regional and river basin planning studies, reservoir operations studies, ecosystem restoration studies, and special area management studies. He has spent his entire professional career of 32 years with the Corps, and has served as study manager for several large comprehensive river basin studies and metropolitan water supply studies, including Washington, DC and New York City. He has a Doctorate in Water Resources Systems Engineering from Johns Hopkins University.

ABSTRACT

“Shared Vision Planning” (SVP) is an approach devised to complement true public decision making for water resources management problems. It is being successfully applied in a large and complex study, conducted by the US-Canada International Joint Commission, to update the operating criteria and decision rules for improved management of the Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River system to account for emerging uses (recreational boating) and objectives (enhance ecological sustainability, reduce flooding vulnerability) that were not part of the original Treaty mandates. Yet, SVP is based on organizing and incorporating many old and proven water resources planning and evaluation principles that have their origins in the Harvard Water program, which culminated in Mass’ “Design of Water Systems” (1962) and the US Water Resources Council’s landmark “Principles, Standards and Procedures for Planning Water and Related Land Resources” (1973).

What is new is that advances in computer technology have enabled planners to quickly simulate the complexity of the existing system operation and its economic, ecological and social consequences, based on existing information. This facilitates and accelerates the all important public participation component – the critical element of “public decision making” – by enhancing the transparency of the process and exposing the various public interest groups to the intricacies of current water management issues, as well as the subtleties of how

other variants and options fulfill a variety of public preferences, expressed as planning goals and objectives, as well as the standard engineering objectives of reliability, efficiency and cost-effectiveness. It is literally an iterative plan formulation, evaluation and impact assessment process being conducted simultaneously through numerous public venues.

An overview of the five-year study will be presented; its interactions with the Public Interest Advisory Group will be highlighted; and the analytical tools, reflecting the SVP process, will be demonstrated.