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Corps Announces Community Relations Update on Former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works

Buffalo, N.Y. – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Buffalo District (the Corps) announces that it is updating its ongoing community relations program for its projects at the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works (LOOW).

Since being given overall authority to address environmental issues related to past federal activities at the former LOOW in 1997, the Buffalo District has engaged in a variety of outreach activities including public information sessions, technical presentations, fact sheets, and website development. From 1997 to 2003, the Corps sponsored a LOOW Restoration Advisory Board (RAB) to provide an organized forum for public participation in accordance with federal program guidance. In 2003, the Corps-sponsored RAB was dissolved and transformed into a community group sharing the same name. This transformation expanded the organization and satisfied the membership's desire for independence from a government co-chaired organization. Since 2003, the Corps has dealt exclusively with the community LOOW RAB as the venue to communicate with the local community.

“Over the past six months the community LOOW RAB has suffered several resignations of key leaders and is working to fill those vacancies,” said William Kowalewski, the Corps’ project manager for the LOOW site. The Corps has stressed that the RAB leadership must achieve some level of consensus to prioritize their many diverse concerns regarding the federal projects at the former LOOW. “The most recent resignation of the Chair of the Chemical Committee caused us to step back and reassess whether we can continue to rely exclusively on the community LOOW RAB for conducting an effective community outreach program. There are great people serving their community on the RAB and doing some very good work. However, too often we feel that individual achievements by the RAB and the Corps are lost among changing priorities and an inability to get the messages out from the monthly meetings to the greater community.”

“We have been concerned for some time,” stated Joan Morrissey, the Corps’ Outreach Coordinator, “that we may not be reaching the entire Lewiston- Porter community with information and updates about our progress at the sites. Our team is charged with implementing Federal guidance that requires open, consistent, and effective public participation. Our District leadership and our entire technical and management team have been meeting to determine if we are satisfying those requirements. It is clear to us now that we must do more than just work with the community LOOW RAB, we must develop and execute our own outreach program priorities over and above our current efforts.” According to Morrissey, the Corps is planning to update its project websites, establish a regular project newsletter and conduct more effective project update meetings within the community.

The remaining RAB leaders have advised the Corps that they will be electing new leaders soon. “We are pleased to hear an election will take place and hope the new leadership will address our concerns and resolve these issues.” said Mr. Kowalewski. “The Corps considers the election of a new LOOW RAB Steering Committee Chairman as the single most pressing issue the LOOW RAB faces.” According to Mr. Kowalewski, the Corps will suspend its participation in monthly coordination meetings of the working committees and the steering committee. “During this hiatus,” Mr. Kowalewski explained, “the Corps project team will refocus and expand its outreach strategy to be more effective.”

Mr. Kowalewski and the Corps’ project team are hopeful that the Corps’ broadened public outreach activities and the new RAB leadership can partner on areas of common interest to enable both to better serve the Lewiston-Porter community. He remained open to future coordination with the community LOOW RAB and stated that “if the new leadership can establish stability, demonstrate an ability to resolve internal debates, and achieve consensus on their priorities and expectations for the Corps, I think we can achieve our common goals”.

Once the new LOOW RAB leadership is in place and has time to get familiar with the Corps’ projects and address internal RAB issues, the Corps team plans to meet with the new LOOW RAB Steering Committee Chair to discuss potential future coordination efforts and areas of common interest for public education and outreach on federal actions at the former LOOW site.