

I. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND

The Remedial Action Plan process was the result of the International Joint Commission's (IJC) efforts to halt the degradation of water quality in the Great Lakes. The 1972 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement between the United States and Canada initially focused on controlling phosphorus inputs to the lakes. The 1978 Agreement expanded the issues of concern to include the effects of toxic substances on the Great Lakes water quality (Table I.1). The agreement adopted an ecosystem approach to water quality problems by encouraging consideration of the interrelationship among water, air, land, and all living things.

After the signing of the 1978 Agreement, IJC identified and designated 43 areas in the Great Lakes Basin as having impaired beneficial uses of the water resource due to pollution. Remedial Action Plans (RAPs) are to be developed for each of the 43 Areas of Concern (AOC). The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, as amended on November 18, 1987, defines AOC as "...a geographic area that fails to meet the general or specific objectives of the Agreement, or where such failure has caused or is likely to cause impairment of beneficial use or of the area's ability to support aquatic life." AOCs typically include major urban and industrial centers near rivers, harbors and connecting channels where pollution from a variety of sources, development of shoreline areas and other ecosystem impacts have impaired beneficial uses. Contamination from toxic substances is typically a major concern. The goal of RAPs is to define problems and their causes, and then recommend actions and timetables to restore all beneficial uses of the AOCs. Restoring uses is to be achieved through implementation of programs and measures to control pollution sources and remediate environmental problems.

That portion of the St. Louis River watershed initially designated as the Area of Concern included the section of the St. Louis River below Fond du Lac Dam, including St. Louis Bay and Superior Bay. This definition was later expanded to include the river reach from the City of Cloquet to Lake Superior (Figure I.1). This is the area of the river, that by virtue of population density and industrial concentration, will be the main focus of the RAP. In addition, the Nemadji River will be included in the plan and any factor within the St. Louis River watershed contributing to problems of the water resource will be considered in the plan. The St. Louis River AOC is shared by Wisconsin and Minnesota and both are actively cooperating and involved in development of the Remedial Action Plan.

The St. Louis River was originally designated an AOC due to the large loads of suspended solids, nutrients, and biochemical oxygen demand directly discharged into the river by various industries and communities. This pollution had significant adverse impacts on the beneficial uses of the area and placed severe stresses on the fish populations inhabiting the area. In the early 1970's, the adverse impacts of the pollution and objectionable tasting fish resulted in little or no sportfishing interest. Other recreational uses of the area such as boating and aesthetic viewing were similarly impaired.