

# Planning for Prosperity in River Hydro Communities

## Lower Au Sable River Group: Cooke, Foote, Loud, and Five Channels

# Meeting Three

September 17, 2024 | 10:00 a.m.

Alpena Community College–Oscoda Campus  
5800 Skeel Ave #206  
Oscoda, MI 48750

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## Attendees

- Bissonette Landing HOA
  - Charter Township of Au Sable
  - Consumers Energy
  - Develop Iosco, Inc.
  - Great Lakes Fishery Commission
  - Huron Pines HOA
  - Iosco Conservation District/County Parks and Recreation
  - Iosco County
  - Michigan Department of Natural Resources Parks and Recreation Division–Tawas Point
  - Michigan Hydro Relicensing Coalition
  - Michigan Office of Rural Prosperity
  - Office of Senator Michele Hoyenga
  - Old Orchard Park
  - Oscoda Area Schools
  - Oscoda Township Parks and Recreation Department
  - Pine Acres
  - Plainfield Township
  - Public Sector Consultants
  - Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe
  - Save the Dams
  - Seven Mile Hill HOA
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## Welcome

- Jamie Carruthers-Soboleski, Iosco County Controller/Finance Director, had everyone reintroduce themselves. The meeting’s purpose was to review assets and opportunities that Iosco County can build upon if the dams were decommissioned, sold, or relicensed; how Iosco County can achieve these aspirations, and what support is needed.

## Consumers Energy Updates

- Angela Thompkins, Consumers Energy Chief Diversity Officer and Vice President of Community Affairs, introduced herself and announced Josh Burgett is no longer with Consumers Energy. Thompkins will be the Consumers Energy lead for community engagement associated with the river hydros moving forward. She described the RFP

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process that Consumers Energy started back in February to assess whether it is viable to have a new entity own and maintain some or all of the Consumers dams. Consumers Energy is holding conversations with viable buyers and expects to make a decision in early 2025.

- The Department of Energy (DOE) has awarded Consumers Energy \$23 million to maintain ten of the dams. Consumers Energy is currently in negotiations with DOE. If Consumers Energy sells the dams, they want to make sure that the grant will go to the buyer(s).
- Consumers Energy was invited to apply for a \$750 million loan from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This process takes at least a year and Consumers Energy is evaluating what a loan would look like.

## Q&A

- Are there any international buyers interested in purchasing the dams?
  - All interested bidders are from North America and are open to all possible buying options, including purchasing all the dams or by river system.
- What would current leases of land or future leases look like if Consumers Energy sells or decommissions the dams?
  - Any land discussion will take place after the decision is made on what is happening with the dams. If the dams are sold, Consumers Energy will transfer their license to the new buyer(s). After the license transfers, the potential buyer(s) would decide on the licenses and leases. The buyer(s) would have to work with the landowners. If the dams are decommissioned, Consumers Energy will have to decide how the land that was previously under water can be utilized.
- Who owns any land that was previously under water if the dams are decommissioned?
  - Homeowners on river front property are concerned about this. Consumers Energy will make this determination after the decision has been made.
- What would be the impact on the ground water? More specifically what would happen to wells in the area?
  - This has not been determined yet and will be looked at further if the decision is to decommission the dams.
- How long is the decommissioning process if that is what is decided?
  - Decommissioning the dams would be at least a 10-year process. Each dam would be decommissioned separately.

## Guest Speaker Presentation: Sarah Lucas and Lisa Miller, Michigan Office of Rural Prosperity

- The Office of Rural Prosperity is an intergovernmental and cross-sector liaison for rural communities.
- Rural Michigan is facing changes in population, housing shortages, shrinking workforce, and aging populations. New funding resources are necessary for key priorities and improvements in rural communities. Rural Michigan is regaining population due to COVID impacts and the drive for outdoor recreational habits.
- Outdoor recreation and natural resources enhance regionally driven and place-based economic development. Rural areas should build up year-round attractions to build up and retain population.
- Rural Readiness Grant Program
  - This grant is currently open, and letters of intent are due October 7, 2024. Local governments and tax-exempt organizations are eligible for the \$50,000 grant with a 20 percent match. This grant can help with grant writing support and education, housing strategies and community engagement, etc. Develop Iosco, Inc. was awarded this grant in the past for grant writing.
- Rural Readiness Network and Supports
  - This program connects rural communities with resources to advance their priorities. There are peer connections, targeted training and technical assistance, community coaching, grant navigation, and microgrants.

## Group Activity

- The group divided into three groups to complete a review of the assets that were defined at the June 25, 2024, meeting and further refined those assets into priority actions and investments and key activities under the three scenarios listed below.

# Planning for Prosperity in River Hydro Communities

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### Scenario One: Hydro Facility Continues Operation by Consumers Energy

Priority	Ways to Support Achieving the Priority
1. Expand and protect current recreation opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand access and handicap access—especially at Foote site</li> <li>• Expand parking at the boat launches</li> <li>• Inventory properties and assets</li> <li>• Develop a recreation management plan for the four dams</li> </ul>
2. Ensure dam safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency continued</li> <li>• Long-term process for safety</li> </ul>
3. Access to the waterway and land around it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More and bigger launches/kayak launches</li> <li>• General improvement of current sites</li> <li>• ADA compliant</li> </ul>
4. Increase promotion of Iosco County for tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketing plans</li> <li>• Social media, statewide promotion</li> <li>• Partnerships</li> <li>• Promotion of four-season destinations</li> <li>• Sponsorship of events</li> </ul>
5. Strengthen/protect the fisheries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure there is continued control of invasive species</li> <li>• Address water flows for fisheries habitat</li> <li>• Develop more access for fishing opportunities</li> <li>• Build more boat wash stations</li> <li>• Address water temperature concerns</li> <li>• Construct a fish ladder if just Foote site remains and all others are removed</li> </ul>

# Planning for Prosperity in River Hydro Communities

## Lower Au Sable River Group: Cooke, Foote, Loud, and Five Channels

### Scenario Two: Hydro Facility Is Sold

Priority	Ways to Support Achieving the Priority
1. Protect current recreational opportunities and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand access and handicap access—especially at Foote site</li> <li>• Boat launches, expand parking</li> <li>• Inventory properties and assets</li> <li>• Management plan</li> <li>• Maintain water level</li> </ul>
2. Ensure safe operations of the dam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency continued</li> <li>• Long-term process for safety</li> <li>• Assurances for financial capabilities to maintain the dams</li> <li>• License requirements would transfer</li> <li>• Communication at least with the local units of government</li> <li>• Community involvement maintained</li> </ul>
3. Ensure Old Orchard Campground is allowed to continue use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Old Orchard lease agreement would be maintained</li> <li>• Develop a plan to maintain or expand the campsite and access</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
4. Ensure current lease holders keep access as it currently exists	
5. Ensure the financial viability of the new owner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create and share publicly a standard for safety that the new owners have to meet</li> <li>• Develop a clear understanding of what happens if the owners default or can no longer operate the facilities</li> </ul>
6. Continue to partner with the community on developing a robust tourism plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketing plans</li> <li>• Social media, statewide promotion</li> <li>• Partnerships</li> <li>• Promotion of four-season destinations</li> <li>• Sponsorship of events</li> <li>• Promotion plans</li> </ul>

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### Scenario Three: Hydro Facility Is Decommissioned

Priority	Ways to Support Achieving the Priority
1. Protect landowners adjacent to the dam and local governments from financial impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand the impact and protect wells in the adjacent the impoundments</li> <li>Create a business remediation or support fund</li> <li>Develop a land management plan including land previously under water (e.g., recreation, remediation, restoration plans)</li> <li>Conduct studies performed around decommissioning</li> </ul>
2. Preserve area around the dams for public use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a recreation plan for the properties including river access</li> <li>Conduct an evaluation of recreational sites and the best use of the land</li> </ul>
3. Enhance river access	
4. Develop and market the region as a recreational destination, with more trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a marketing and prosperity plan that includes clientele and markets</li> </ul>
5. Ensure there is a barrier/way to keep out invasive species	
6. Explore new usage of the asset/facilities buildings associated with the dams	
7. Determine the feasibility of maintaining any of the impoundment(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct a feasibility study to determine if local community could maintain an impoundment at any or all sites</li> <li>Barrier dam at Foote site to restrict invasive species and allow fish passage, understanding this could not be owned by Consumers</li> </ul>

### What's Next

- The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for October 24, 2024, regarding setting priorities for how Iosco County can achieve the goals listed above and a longer question and answer session.
  - Additional meeting dates: early 2025—public meeting