



WOMEN IN
WATER DIPLOMACY
NETWORK & PARTNERS

Women in Water Diplomacy Network The International Joint Commission Semi-Annual Meeting Session After Action Report¹

April 11, 2024 | Washington D.C., United States

Summary

On April 11, 2024 the Women in Water Diplomacy Network convened an information and consultation session as part of the International Joint Commission (IJC) Semi-Annual Meeting in Washington D.C., United States. The session was attended by approximately 50 participants from both U.S. and Canadian Sections of the IJC



alongside representatives from IJC partners including the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Geological Survey, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Global Affairs Canada, Organization for American States, Heidelberg University, Michigan State University, the University of Michigan, Oregon State University, Indigenous water experts and representatives as well as civil society organization representatives and other interested stakeholders.

The Women in Water Diplomacy Network Session was opened by **IJC Commissioner Robert Sisson**, and **Commissioner Merrell Ann Phare**. Commissioner Sisson emphasized the global significance of water not only for daily health but for global peace. He detailed the achievements of the IJC's International Watershed Initiative (IWI) in fostering diversity within the IJC and shifting focus away from the perceived boundary between the U.S. and Canada to prioritize local waters and communities. Commissioner Phare underscored the unique contributions women bring to peace negotiations, citing Former President Mary Robinson's experience in Ireland, emphasizing that involving women in peace processes can lead to quicker and more sustainable peace agreements. Commissioner Phare stressed the importance of inclusivity and the principle of "*nothing about us without us*."

The welcome remarks were followed by an introduction to the Women in Water Diplomacy Network from **Elizabeth A. Koch**, Senior Manager, Environmental Law Institute and Process Support Team Lead for the Women in Water Diplomacy Network. Elizabeth outlined the growth of the Network from its inception in the Nile Basin in 2017, to the engagement of IJC officials when the Network launched its global strategy, to the recent launch of the North American branch of the Network in December 2023. She highlighted barriers to women's participation in decision-making and stressed the importance of inclusive decision-



¹ This Women in Water Diplomacy Network After Action Report was authored by Jesse Ferraioli, Research Associate at the Environmental Law Institute (ELI) and Elizabeth A. Koch, Senior Manager for International Programs at ELI and the Process Support Team Lead for the Women in Water Diplomacy Network. Photos provided by Maya Sokolov, Communications Associate, ELI.



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making for sustainable agreements between communities, also emphasizing the need for gender-disaggregated data collection. Additionally, she explained how excluding women from decision-making diminishes decision-making potential, contrasting this with the benefits of inclusive approaches in achieving more sustainable, long-term agreements.

Following the introductory remarks, Elizabeth introduced a panel discussion on “*Supporting women water diplomats at local, regional, and national levels*” with expert panelists **Dr. Anna Warwick Sears**, Executive Director, Okanagan Basin Water Board, **Zoe Rosenblum**, Doctoral Candidate, Oregon State University, North American Youth Parliament for Water member and Women in Water Diplomacy Network member, **Swathi Veeravalli**, Director of Climate Security and Adaptation, National Security Council, The White House, and **Dr. Annalise Blum**, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, U.S. Department of Interior.

Dr. Warwick Sears discussed her work with the Okanagan Nation on restoring salmon populations and emphasized the traditional role of women in water management within indigenous communities, advocating for inclusive water governance initiatives and the importance of recognizing indigenous knowledge in decision-making processes. She also stressed the critical need for data harmonization and institutional knowledge to ensure continuity in decision-making processes, especially concerning water availability across various spatial scales and jurisdictions, as well as for pre-empting and bridging water crises. Zoe highlighted the diverse roles women play in wetlands governance globally, citing examples from West Africa and the Yucatan Peninsula. Despite these contributions, she noted a lack of recognition for women in major wetlands-related roles, emphasizing the importance of including wetlands in discussions on gender and climate change. Zoe Rosenblum also emphasized the importance of meaningful engagement and mentorship for young professionals, highlighting the role of networks like the North American Youth Parliament for Water and the Women in Water Diplomacy Network in empowering young water professionals. Swathi Veeravalli highlighted the critical role of water security in economic growth and its potential impact on food and energy systems, stressing the interconnectedness of water and climate change due to its integral role in both inputs and outputs. She emphasized the value and agency water brings to discussions and underscored the urgency of water diplomacy, emphasizing that water scarcity is not only a concern for countries in the global south but a global issue that must be addressed in tandem with commitments to a clean energy future. Lastly, Dr. Blum emphasized the importance of investing in women scientists and removing barriers to their participation in leadership roles in water management decision-making processes. She described how science informs diplomacy, emphasizing the necessity of women’s representation and the inclusion of indigenous knowledge to ensure equitable policies, especially in mitigating the effects of climate change on water resources.



The session was concluded by **IJC Commissioner Susan Chiblow** who provided closing remarks encouraging everyone to reflect on their own responsibilities towards water. Opening the Women in Water Diplomacy Network’s Global Strategy, she quoted the 1992 Dublin principle, she emphasized the pivotal role of women in water provision and management, stressing the importance of ongoing dialogue, amplifying women’s voices, and embracing collective responsibility. Susan emphasized that, “*we have the momentum of the water and must keep it going,*” and concluded by highlighting that the responsibility of caring for water extends to all, not solely indigenous communities, encouraging the audience to reflect on their individual “*water story.*”



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Program

9:00 **Welcome Remarks**

Commissioner Merrell Ann Phare, Canada and **Commissioner Robert Sisson**, United States; International Joint Commission

9:15 **Introduction to the Women in Water Diplomacy Network**

Elizabeth A. Koch, Senior Manager, Environmental Law Institute & Process Support Team Lead, Women in Water Diplomacy Network

9:35 **Panel Discussion: Supporting women water diplomats at local, regional, and national levels**

Facilitated by Elizabeth A. Koch, Environmental Law Institute

- **Dr. Anna Warwick Sears**, Executive Director, Okanagan Basin Water Board, IJC
- **Zoe Rosenblum**, Doctoral Candidate, Oregon State University, North American Youth Parliament for Water member and Women in Water Diplomacy Network member
- **Swathi Veeravalli**, Director of Climate Security and Adaptation, National Security Council, The White House
- **Dr. Annalise Blum**, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, U.S. Department of Interior

Invited questions and inputs from session participants

10:10 **Closing reflection**

Commissioner Susan Chiblow, International Joint Commission, Canada

For further information:

1. International Joint Commission highlights video from the 2024 Spring Semi-Annual Meeting, board appearances and reception in Washington, D.C.: <https://vimeo.com/935007292?share=copy>
2. International Joint Commission – International Watersheds Initiative: <https://ijc.org/en/iwi-iibh>
3. [The Women in Water Diplomacy Network's Global Strategy 'A Path Forward for Women, Water, Peace and Security'](#)
4. Women in Water Diplomacy LinkedIn page here: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/women-in-water-diplomacy-network>
5. North American Women in Water Diplomacy Network resources: <https://www.eli.org/women-water-diplomacy-network>.
6. [After Action Report from the 2023 UN Water Conference](#) including highlights of the participation of IJC and IBWC among others.
7. [After Action Report from the North American Women in Water Diplomacy Network launch event](#)



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Speaker Short Biographies: *in program order*

Commissioner Merrell-Ann Phare is a lawyer, writer, strategist, negotiator, and relationship-builder who worked extensively in and with Indigenous organizations on environmental, land, water, rights and governance issues. She, along with 10 First Nation Chiefs, was the founding Executive Director of the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources, a national First Nation charitable environmental organization. As Chief Negotiator for the Government of the Northwest Territories, Ms. Phare led the negotiation of transboundary water agreements in the Mackenzie River Basin and the creation of Thaidene Nene, a national and territorial park in the east arm of Great Slave Lake. She is the author of the book “Denying the Source: The Crisis of First Nations Water Rights” and co-author of “Ethical Water”. She is a member of the Forum for Leadership on Water, Smart Prosperity's Leadership Council, and is a recipient of Canada's Clean 50 Award. She served as legal counsel and advisor to a number of First Nation and Métis governments and organizations. Ms. Phare was appointed by Canada to the International Joint Commission in 2019.



Commissioner Robert Sisson the Acting United States Co-Chair of the International Joint Commission has been involved with the environmental organization ConservAmerica since 2006, where he has served as president since 2011, and more recently was appointed by Michigan Governor Rick Snyder to the state's Environmental Justice Working Group in 2017. Mr. Sisson has also been involved in the government of the Michigan city of Sturgis, where he has served as mayor from 2005-2007 and as a city commissioner from 2003-2008 and again from 2011-2016. Concurrently, he was a member of the boards of directors for both the Sturgis Economic Development Corporation and the St. Joseph County Economic Development Corporation.



Elizabeth A. Koch serves as the Senior Manager for International Programs at the Environmental Law Institute (ELI) and leads the Women in Water Diplomacy Network's Process Support Team, supporting the Network's development since inception. Elizabeth has over 15 years of experience supporting water diplomacy engagements in conflict sensitive basins on behalf of ELI, SIWI's Shared Waters Partnership programme, the UNESCO Category II International Centre for Water Cooperation, and EcoPeace Middle East. Elizabeth holds a MA in Government, Diplomacy and Strategy and BA in International Relations.



Dr. Anna Warwick Sears, Executive Director, Okanagan Basin Water Board, a collaborative local government water agency. Raised in British Columbia, she received a PhD in population biology at the University of California – Davis. Before returning to Canada in 2006, Dr. Sears was Research Director of a watershed NGO in California. Dr. Sears is passionate about using science to solve real-world problems and building bridges with community stakeholders. She is a Governor on the Board of the Real Estate Foundation of BC – a philanthropic organization focused on sustainable land use, and in 2015 the International Joint Commission appointed her as a member of the International Osoyoos Lake Board of Control.



Zoe Rosenblum is a doctoral candidate in geography at Oregon State University (OSU) and a member of both the North American Youth Parliament for Water and the Women in Water Diplomacy Network. Her research explores the intersection of international water governance and transboundary wetlands, investigating the role of law and institutions in shared wetland areas. She employs geospatial and qualitative analyses to understand the global distribution of transboundary wetlands and how transboundary wetland governance is implemented on the ground. Zoe is a graduate of the Water Cooperation and Diplomacy





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joint master’s program of OSU, IHE-Delft and the United Nations-Mandated University for Peace. She is advised by Professors Aaron Wolf (OSU) and Susanne Schmeier (IHE-Delft), with whom she supports transboundary water cooperation workshops and capacity building in basins across the globe.

Dr. Annalise Blum is a hydrologist with expertise in climate, water, and national security policy. She serves as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science at the U.S. Department of the Interior working closely with the U.S. Geological Survey and the Bureau of Reclamation. Previously, she served at the U.S. Department of Defense as Senior Advisor for Climate Policy and an American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Science & Technology Policy Fellow, for which she was awarded the Office of the Secretary of Defense Medal for Exceptional Public Service. Blum has over a decade of experience leading multi-disciplinary research focused on water security, extreme events, and the impacts of climate change. She has served as a lecturer in Environmental Sciences and Policy and as the Pim Postdoctoral Fellow in Global Change at Johns Hopkins University. Blum has also worked at the National Academy of Sciences, the American Meteorological Society, the U.S. Geological Survey, and the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. She holds a Ph.D. in environmental and water resources engineering from Tufts University, M.S. from UNC-Chapel Hill, and B.S. from Stanford University.



Swathi Veeravalli currently serves as the Director for Climate Security and Adaptation in the National Security Council’s Climate & Energy directorate. In this role, she serves as the Executive Office of the President’s principal climate security and global adaptation expert to formulate and implement U.S. government policy to minimize global food, water, and energy risk and tradeoffs. She previously served at United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM) and helped shape, synchronizes and assesses USAFRICOM’s security cooperation priorities in Africa. Prior to joining USAFRICOM, Ms. Veeravalli led the Strategic Integration Office’s development of national security objectives on contingency operations to ensure force protection and readiness for the Combat Engineer Regiment, while at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). She holds a Master of Science in Water Science, Policy & Management from the University of Oxford. Ms. Veeravalli also holds a Bachelor of Arts in International Affairs concentrating in African Politics and Development from the George Washington University. She has served as an adjunct faculty member at Georgetown University’s Walsh School of Foreign Service. Swathi is a dedicated civil servant who is committed to addressing domestic and global challenges and core systemic risks to security in the Anthropocene.



Commissioner Susan (Sue) Bell Chiblow is Anishinaabe kwe, born and raised in Garden River First Nation, Ontario. She has worked extensively with First Nation communities for the last 30 years in environmental related fields. Sue has a B.Sc. in Biology, M.Sc. in Environment and Management, and has her PhD in Environmental Science with a focus on N’bi Kendaaswin (Water Knowledge). She has worked with the Chiefs of Ontario as the Environmental Coordinator of the Environment Unit. Through her company, Ogamauh annag, Sue continues to work with First Nation communities and Elders as an Anishinaabe Advisor on environmental projects and policy analysis (i.e., watershed planning, source water protection, Anishinabek law development, policy development, facilitation, strategic planning, report writing, environmental assessments, documenting Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and environmental management planning). Dr. Chiblow is also a Vanier Scholar and Assistant Professor at the School of Environmental Sciences at the University of Guelph.

