



IMMEDIATE ACTION NEEDED ON GREAT LAKES WATER LEVELS

IJC Commissioners urged to overrule “do nothing” study on St. Clair River

Georgian Bay Forever, a Canadian environmental charity which has been the leading voice in raising concerns about the impact of low water levels on the unique ecology of Georgian Bay, is urging the International Joint Commission to begin acting to stop the loss of water from the middle Great Lakes.

IJC Commissioners will hold a series of public meetings on March 22, 24, and 25 to hear comments on a report on the St. Clair River issued last December by a special study board created by the IJC.

Georgian Bay Forever will ask the IJC Commissioners to overrule the study board’s “do nothing” recommendations before any further environmental damage is done to Georgian Bay and the Great Lakes. It is also encouraging citizens within the Great Lakes region to attend the meetings, either in person or by dialing into one of the IJC’s teleconferences the following week.

The December report by International Upper Great Lakes Study Board (IUGLSB) acknowledged that the outflow of Lake Huron into the St. Clair River has unexpectedly increased by almost six per cent compared to 1962 and has already lowered the level of Lakes Michigan, Huron and Georgian Bay by about five inches. The IUGLSB called the loss of water too insignificant to justify any action to prevent further loss but provided no justification for this opinion.

Allowing this much water to leave the middle Great Lakes will have serious consequences for precious wetlands, aquatic habitat and water quality. People and businesses will bear the potential costs of lower lake levels to our economy from reduced shipping and more dredging of channels and marinas. Early readings of water levels on Michigan-Huron-Georgian Bay this year suggest levels are dropping again.

“We hope the IJC Commissioners will consider the cost of doing nothing,” says Lloyd Posno, Chair of Georgian Bay Forever. “The extra water that’s flowing out of Lake Huron, Michigan and Georgian Bay through an expanded St. Clair River is a precious resource, much of which comes from glacial deposit water that can never be renewed.”

The IJC Commissioners have the authority to overrule the “do nothing” IUGLSB recommendations. Georgian Bay Forever believes the Commissioners should take immediate action, including:

- Establish a binational Control Board to monitor and regulate the flow out of the single body of water that is made up of Lakes Huron, Michigan and Georgian Bay. A coordinated Control Board for all the Great Lakes would establish reliable data needed to devise sensible solutions to water level issues and put to rest questions that have been raised about the science put forward by the IUGLSB.
- Consider the installation of flexible control measures at the outflow of Lake Huron that also take into consideration downstream management requirements on Lake Erie. These types of structures could slow down the outflow during periods of low water when appropriate, but could be adjusted when water levels are within normal or high cycles. We believe the IJC has the authority to do this under the Boundary Waters Treaty.

Georgian Bay Forever is also supporting a call by a number of environmental groups – including the U.S. National Wildlife Federation and Great Lakes United – to ask the IJC to call a special meeting in which scientists who contributed to the IUGLSB report present their findings. This would allow stakeholders to ask questions and exchange ideas in a respectful manner and, by doing so, put to rest some concerns that have been raised about the final IUGLSB report.

Earlier this month, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel called the IUGLSB report a “study in controversy” and raised questions about the transparency of the Study Board’s process. You can read the whole Journal Sentinel article here:

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/wisconsin/86733647.html>

Here are the dates and locations of the upcoming IJC public meetings, which will be held simultaneously in U.S. and Canadian communities and linked by a video feed:

Monday, March 22

(7 p.m. EDT / 6 p.m. CDT)

Midland, Ont.

North Simcoe Sports and
Recreation Centre
Community Hall A
527 Len Self Blvd.

Sturgeon Bay, Wis.

Crossroads at Big Creek
Nature Center
Lecture Hall
2041 Michigan Street

Wednesday, March 24

(7 p.m. EDT)

Toronto

Seneca College
Newnham Campus
Conference Centre, Rooms 4-6
1750 Finch Ave. East

Muskegon, Mich.

Annis Water Res. Institute
Grand Valley State U, 2nd floor
Lake Michigan Center
740 West Shoreline Drive

Thursday, March 25

(7 p.m. EDT)

Sarnia, Ont.

Sarnia City Hall
Council Chambers
255 North Christina Street

Toledo, Ohio

Lake Erie Center
University of Toledo
6200 Bayshore Rd.
Oregon, Ohio

Teleconferences will be held on March 30 and March 31. For further details on how to participate in these and more information on the above meetings, visit the IJC website at

http://www.ijc.org/rel/news/2010/100308_e.htm

About Georgian Bay Forever: The registered Canadian charity was created in 1995 to protect, enhance and restore the natural ecosystem and aquatic environment of the Georgian Bay area. It has funded work by McMaster University to do the first comprehensive inventory of wetlands on Georgian Bay and has also worked with water-based communities on Georgian Bay to conduct water-quality testing.

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(Mr. Schatz can provide French-language comments)