

Shore Property Owners Call on Great Lakes Governors and Premier to Declare a High-Water Level Emergency

Membership of several shore property owner associations are calling for the governors of Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio and the Premier of Ontario to issue states or provincial disaster declarations over high water-level impacts on all of the Great Lakes. This outcry follows the lead of the State of New York, which sued the International Joint Commission (IJC), a U.S.-Canadian treaty organization, over Lake Ontario water level management.

New York filed its lawsuit in November 2019, alleging that the IJC failed to follow its own protocol for releasing water from Lake Ontario into the St. Lawrence River in 2017 and 2019, causing shoreline damages along New York shorelines.

Shoreline residents along Lakes Superior, Michigan, Huron and Erie have been encouraging their federal, state and provincial governments to react to unprecedented high-water levels on each of these lakes, all to no avail. Each of these lakes has set new historic high records over the last six months. Most alarmingly, Lakes Michigan and Huron and Georgian Bay, which are at the same level, being connected through the Straits of Mackinac, are now 14" higher than last year at this time. New record highs occurred on Lakes Michigan-Huron in January and February 2020 and are forecasted to set new record highs each month through August 2020 and perhaps beyond.

The IJC has ignored outcries from several sectors over the last 14 months to push for cutting back inflows from the Long Lac and Ogoki Diversions north of Lake Superior while the Great Lakes have received record-setting precipitation and snowfall. In addition, the IJC approved deviating from its Lake Superior Regulation Plan 2012 (as amended) by dumping more water from Lake Superior into Lakes Michigan-Huron than the plan called for.

Roger Gauthier, the American Chair of Restore Our Water International, an umbrella organization of U.S. and Canadian shore property and small business owners, stated: *"We sent three letters to the IJC and its International Lake Superior Board of Control starting in November 2018 requesting a cut back of inflows into Lake Superior from the Long Lac and Ogoki Diversions. We have pleaded with them that allowing inflows into the Great Lakes during this crisis is unconscionable. They have ignored our legitimate complaints. Is our only recourse to sue them to do their jobs?"*

Prior IJC studies have concluded that the Long Lac and Ogoki Diversions have permanently raised Lake Superior by 2.5", Michigan-Huron by 4", and Lakes Erie and Ontario by 3". These studies have shown that every inch of water on the lakes increases flooding and erosion damages exponentially. The Ontario Provincial government cut back inflows from these diversions in 1952, 1973 and 1985 in reaction to public outcries in previous high-water periods.

"We are looking down the barrel of a gun," said Don Olendorf, Board Member of the Lake Michigan Shore Association. *"We have requested that the Governor of Michigan sign a disaster declaration as municipalities along the Lake Michigan shoreline are losing beaches, parks, roads and homes due to unprecedented high levels on the lakes. We expect substantial damages along our shorelines this spring and summer, including my own home."*

Mary Muter, the Canadian Chair of the Georgian Bay Great Lakes Foundation and Vice-Chair of ROWI, added to this outcry: *"Record high water levels have devastated the coastal ecosystem around Georgian Bay destroying critical wetlands needed to nurture the fishery across the upper Great Lakes. I am also concerned that, as septic systems close to the shore become flooded, increased nutrient loading into Georgian Bay could cause massive algal blooms this summer."*

The IJC two weeks ago announced that they would be spending \$3 million from the U.S. and Canadian federal governments to improve control of water levels on Lake Ontario. However, there appears to be no similar emphasis on their part to address record-setting levels on the upper Great Lakes.

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