

LATE BREAKING NEWS

Regarding Georgian Bay's Extreme IJC-defined "Crisis" High Water Levels

by MARY MUTER, Chair of the Georgian Bay Great Lakes Foundation (GBGLF)



Outflow of Lakes Huron/Michigan/Georgian Bay into the St. Clair River. The black arrow on the right indicates the main flow south; on the left is back flow on the Canadian side.

Back in 2002, a GBGLF team, including hydraulic engineer Bill Bialkowski, figured out that the St. Clair River was eroding, thereby increasing the outflow from Lakes Michigan/Huron/Georgian Bay and contributing to the low water levels of 1999 to 2013. As a result of this work, the International Joint Commission (IJC) included the St. Clair River in its \$17 million International Upper Great Lakes Study. What happened? They came out with a "do nothing" report. Remember that rally in Midland when FoTTSA managed to get over 600 people out to tell the IJC Commissioners that "doing nothing" was not acceptable?

Fast forward to today, and our team has once again carried out an analysis using government agency data. We have determined that the data, when properly analysed, again point a very clear finger at the St. Clair River. Our government agencies state that the only reason our water levels are so high is four years of "above average net basin supply" — precipitation and runoff. Problem: they base their analysis on a

fixed St. Clair River conveyance. Our engineers calculated net basin supply without using the St. Clair River flows and found that in three out of the past four years we had below average net basin supply in Michigan/Huron/Georgian Bay. We now have serious concerns about just what the IJC and Environment and Climate Change Canada are trying to blame our extreme high water levels on.

It gets worse. For many months the government agencies have been telling us that the St. Clair River flows have increased from 5,000 cuM/sec to over 7,000 cuM/sec. Our hydraulic engineer took a look at the flow data and found that the flow rates are being exaggerated by 43%.

How could this happen? Easy. The US Geological Survey installed an acoustic doppler flow measuring device just north of the Bluewater Bridge, but that equipment can only read at best about halfway across the river. So they estimate the rest of the flows to the Canadian side. But guess what? On the Canadian side a back flow moves the water north in

the exact opposite direction of the flow on the US side. So no, you cannot use the flows on the US side to estimate the flows on the Canadian side.

To accurately measure water flow, Canada needs to install a similar flow meter on our side of the river and all parties need to know the river depth. Without it you cannot calculate the flow. GBGLF identified a need for these measurements back in 2004 and even the IJC's 2012 Upper Lakes Study recommended regular assessment of the St. Clair River flows and depths to determine conveyance capacity. And here we are in 2020 with no idea what is happening.

There is another reason why we question official flow estimates. Recent satellite imagery of the upper St. Clair River shows increasing sand sedimentation flowing into the river, reducing the size of the outflow capacity. The increasing sedimentation was likely caused by high water levels that have eroded beaches at the south end of Lake Huron.

This all leads us to demand that our government agencies, including the IJC, correct the St. Clair River outflow data and immediately reduce the outflow from Lake Superior. Why? To compensate for the extra 360cm/s the IJC directed to be discharged from Lake Superior over the previous four months — December 2019 to March 2020. Finally, agencies must develop a three-dimensional model for the St. Clair River so that all government agencies can accurately determine what is changing and what action needs to take place to stabilize the outflow. This may mean stabilizing the riverbed with rock rubble, and putting training walls out into Lake Huron to control sand sediments and prevent ice from moving into the river.

Connecting channels in all the other Great Lakes have flows recorded and reported on an hourly basis and control boards that meet monthly and set discharge amounts. There are no valid data being reported for this large, unstable river that impacts our water levels bigtime. Swift actions taken by the IJC now could reduce shoreline damage for which they, not the weather, must bear some responsibility.

Based on historic trends our water levels should be declining now, but that will not happen until the St. Clair River is accurately assessed and stabilized. Not much to ask for given the multi billions of dollars in shoreline damage and ecological harm.

For more information or to help, visit www.georgianbaygreatlakesfoundation.com

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LEO DUBEAU
SALES REPRESENTATIVE
705-737-7629



Office
363 Balm Beach Rd W
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Email - Leo@HouseGuy.ca
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