



EMBARGOED FOR 10:30 a.m., TUESDAY, DEC. 15, 2009

ACTION NEEDED TO STOP LOSS OF WATER FROM MIDDLE GREAT LAKES

IJC STUDY BOARD MISSES OPPORTUNITY TO PROTECT LAKES MICHIGAN, HURON AND GEORGIAN BAY

A special study board of the International Joint Commission has missed a historic opportunity to recommend environmentally sound solutions to the serious water levels situation facing the middle Great Lakes.

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, now calls on IJC Commissioners to reconsider and overrule the “do nothing” recommendations of today’s St. Clair River Report of the IJC’s International Upper Great Lakes Study Board (IUGLSB).

The main recommendation of the IUGLSB final report – that no remedial measures are needed to slow down the outflow of the middle Great Lakes – ignores the consequence of the continuing and irretrievable loss of water from the Lakes Huron/Michigan and Georgian Bay.

“After over 100 years of changes to the St. Clair River that have lowered lake levels with no compensation and now evidence of recent increased outflow, it is time to do the right thing,” said Mary Muter, the Georgian Baykeeper and a member of *Georgian Bay Forever’s* board of directors. “The future health of the aquatic ecosystems of these important bodies of water is at stake.”

The IUGLSB has previously conceded up to six billion more gallons (almost 23 billion litres) of water per day are flowing out of the Middle Lakes compared to 1971, but have decided the amount is too insignificant to justify any action.

Georgian Bay Forever believes losing this much water from the middle Great Lakes must not continue. With climate change imminent and likelihood of adequate future water supplies dwindling, action is required immediately.

To this end:

- ***The IJC should establish a binational Control Board to monitor and regulate the flow of water out of the single body of water that is made up of Lakes Huron, Michigan and Georgian Bay.*** The three other Great Lakes have binational Control Boards and some form of control structures to regulate outflows. The IUGLSB’s report admits no reliable flow data on the St. Clair River have existed since 1986. A Control Board would be able to establish reliable data needed to devise sensible solutions. *Georgian Bay Forever* believes independent scientific reviews show the conveyance increase of the St. Clair River – the amount of extra water flowing through the river – is double what the IUGLSB has acknowledged in its report.

- ***The IJC should consider recommending the installation of flexible control measures in the St. Clair River.*** These types of structures could slow down the outflow during periods of low water on the middle lakes, but be adjusted when water levels are within normal or high cycles. Right now, with levels above the long-term average on Lakes Erie and Ontario – but still below the long-term average on Lakes Michigan, Huron and Georgian Bay Bay in spite of unusually high precipitation levels there – it would be possible to return some of the lost water to the middle lakes with no significant impact on the lower lakes.

The IJC Commissioners have announced they will hold hearings in the spring once the public and scientific experts have had sufficient time to study the IUGLSB’s final report. After the hearings, the IJC will make its final recommendations to the Canadian and U.S. governments regarding remedial measures in the St. Clair River. ***Georgian Bay Forever*** will be encouraging IJC Commissioners to take the needed action that the IUGLSB has failed to recommend.

When the IUGLSB held public hearings around Georgian Bay in 2008-09, many Georgian Bay residents expressed serious concerns about the impact of low water for most of the last decade. Wetlands biologists from McMaster University in Hamilton, Ont., have determined the sustained low water levels that existed from 1999 to 2008 have significantly impacted east and north coast Georgian Bay wetlands. Loss of wetland habitat and fish species diversity is especially crucial in Georgian Bay because McMaster has also determined the east and north coast wetlands are the most extensive, diverse high quality wetlands found anywhere in the Great Lakes.

Low water levels also affect water quality in many of Georgian Bay’s enclosed, shallow bays by reducing the flow of water. This has resulted in toxic blue green algal blooms. Commercial marinas do more blasting and dredging during periods of low water, meaning toxins from sediment are mixed into the environment.

Georgian Bay Forever (formerly known as the GBA Foundation) commissioned a study in 2004 by W.F. Baird & Associates that suggested changes to the area where Lake Huron drains into the St. Clair River have resulted in an increased outflow from the middle Great Lakes. It was the original Baird Report that prompted the IJC to include in the IUGLSB’s mandate a provision to “examine physical processes and possible ongoing St. Clair River changes and its impacts on levels of Lake Michigan and Huron.”

A more detailed response to the IUGLSB final report is posted on www.georgianbayforever.org.

About Georgian Bay: Often called the Sixth Great Lake, Georgian Bay is the impressive, eastern arm of Lake Huron. Its west coast is famed for limestone cliffs and turquoise water that plunges to great depths. UNESCO designated the Bay’s east coast and its Thirty Thousand Islands the Georgian Bay Littoral Biosphere Reserve in 2004. It is home to the highest number of reptile and amphibian Species at Risk found anywhere in the Great Lakes – including the Massasauga rattlesnake, Eastern Fox snake, Hognose snake, Musk turtle and Spotted turtle.

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 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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