

## President's Message – March 2013

All reports through this past winter point to the lowest spring water levels on record for the Middle Lakes.

Municipalities have been actively reviewing the potential impacts for their local businesses as direct result of inaccessibility to marinas and shoreline properties. This will relate to general revenue losses which will come from a reduction in marina slips, reduced sales of fuel and goods and services, reduced employee wages, to name a few.

On the other side, marina operators and property owners will see direct increased costs for dock relocation / reconstruction and blasting and dredging. Some may not be able to access their property at all. I visited the Honey Harbour area last week and saw first hand dredging activities that are well under way for the benefit of half a dozen marinas and businesses that would otherwise be unable to commence operations. More are slated prior to spring breakup, which is just around the corner.

While we anxiously await the IJC's recommendations to our two governments (re the Study Board Report), the reality of the situation is that whatever they recommend will do little if anything for 2013 at the very least. With the cottage season almost upon us, we are in a reactive mode, doing what is necessary to make the best of a bad situation.

Municipalities have pledged to reduce red tape for various construction and reparative works and GBA has been instrumental in clearing as many roadblocks as possible with various provincial and federal ministries. Our dealings with all levels of government are a testament to the close working relationships that we have managed to develop over a number of years.

We mustn't resign ourselves however, to think there is no hope for the future. There is just too much at risk, financially and ecologically, for governments to ignore the warning bells. Our collective voices are indeed being heard, not just from GBA, but also from other interested groups who are equally concerned.

Our Water Levels Committee is working at creating a "Joint Action Plan" statement that incorporates the respective positions of GBA, GBF, and the newly formed Restore our Water International Inc. (ROWI). ROWI is an alliance of Canadian and American organizations who are equally concerned about the economic and ecological impacts of continued low waters in the Great Lakes; it is chaired by Roger Gauthier, a retired US Corps of Engineers hydrologist. As leaders on the water levels issue, we at GBA feel it is important to dialogue and work with other entities in identifying areas of expertise without duplication on the water levels issue.

About a month ago I informed you of our decision not to proceed with an outside communications initiative spearheaded by Colin Dobell, who was at the time a GBA board member. Since then, Colin has left our board to pursue this initiative with specific emphasis on his Stop the Drop campaign. We have received questions as to the ultimate

goal of this campaign and it has caused some confusion as to why there is yet another voice on the water levels issue. I leave it to you and your local association if you wish to participate but want to make it perfectly clear that GBA remains committed to our strategy as declared in our Water Levels Action Plan that was distributed in January – see attached. Like others, we want to see political action and as of a few days ago we made another direct enquiry to the IJC as to why their recommendations to governments have been delayed and when we may expect to receive them. We will share their response as soon as it is received.

A year ago we recognized the signs of a general decline in membership and, as directed by you, we struck a new Membership Committee. Part of the committee's mandate was to create a questionnaire that was put to all the member associations. This has been completed and we are now developing a clearer understanding of (a) our organization as a whole and (b) your local association, and (c) what types of best practices that can be shared for mutual benefit. You will receive a preliminary report from the Membership Committee at the AGM; we hope you will find useful information to identify areas where you can make greater inroads to increasing membership in your community.

GBA plays an important role by identifying and tackling the larger issues that affect all communities around the Bay, something you already know. We continue to focus on water quality, the health of our lands, forests and wildlife, issues relating to aquaculture, boating and safety, and liaise with all levels of government through an effective volunteer board of directors and volunteers. Without their dedication we could not possibly achieve the levels of respect we receive from so many corners.

This is my last message to you as president of GBA. I have enjoyed working with all of you, as well as those who have served your association in the past. Most of all, I have learned a great deal about the communities and the people of Georgian Bay who are similarly passionate about our special place on Earth.

I look forward to seeing you at the Annual and Spring Meetings next month.

Sincerely,  
Craig