

Please personalize this letter by adding your own story / perspective/ concerns.  
Then email **and/or** mail a hard copy to local, provincial and federal politicians.

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Dear ,

We are writing to express our concern regarding the impact of the low water levels on Georgian Bay and Lake Huron. The situation has now reached an emergency crisis level; the past twenty years has seen the area affected by the chronic low water levels. This has resulted in severe economic and environmental devastation that requires a short term crisis response to reduce the economic impact to business owners, cottagers and local communities. At the same time, we need to consider remedial action to solve the long term chronic low water levels.

*“Record low water levels are a slow moving disaster” – Gordon McKay, Mayor of Midland ON*

### **The Current Situation**

The Georgian Bay Leaders Initiative have recognized and shared their concerns of their citizens about the declining water levels in Georgian Bay. Leaders from 27 communities have come forward and identified the current crisis and its devastating financial, cultural, and environmental impacts:

- Marina slips with insufficient water depth
- Docks that are no longer accessibly by boat
- Municipal water intakes that need to be relocated
- Lakers and ferries with insufficient water to operate

The low water situation affects the whole of Georgian Bay. Accommodative repairs to residential cottage properties are estimated at \$500 million. Losses to the Georgian Bay tourism and general economy are estimated to surpass \$100-200 million per year. The potential exists to severely depress recreational use of Georgian Bay and the tourism industry across Ontario now and in the future. Remedial action is required this year.

### **Action Needed Now**

Federal and provincial leaders need to provide immediate financial support to the local communities in order to respond to the devastating impact of the low water levels. A program to support cottagers fixing personal docks, water intake lines and pipes is essential to ensure the continued enjoyment of Georgian Bay. Dredging and blasting permit streamlining is required to allow marinas and tourist attractions to continue to operate.

## **The Long Term Impact of Low Water Levels**

The chronic low water levels on Georgian Bay and Lake Huron need to be declared an economic and environmental disaster. The following have been identified as long term financial, cultural, and environmental impacts:

- Declining water levels are being seen in all the great lakes but it is worse in Lake Huron and Michigan and worst of all in Georgian Bay
- The natural shore line is suffering serious erosion and growth of invasive species
- Fish and wildlife habitat are suffering from serious devastation - Who is putting a dollar value on the dead fish, birds and disappearing wetland habitats?
- More and more exposed shore lines will be taken over by invasive dense, 10-foot tall *Phragmites australis*, which excludes all wildlife, including fish
- Over 50% of Georgian Bay's wet lands will be forever lost
- The water access to the 3000 Islands on the eastern and northern shores will be rendered unnavigable. Boating will be severely limited on the entire middle lakes.

*Doing nothing will only further exacerbate the situation and will cost more in the long term.*

## **Long Term Action Plan**

Water controls need to be developed to help mitigate the progressively declining water levels that will completely devastate the economic, cultural and environmental future of the Great Lakes. Gradual restoration on the already lowered water levels of Lakes Michigan, Huron and Georgian Bay, through water controls at the St. Claire River, is needed to provide restoration capability. The other Great Lakes have IJC Control Boards that meet monthly and set discharge rates. The vast middle lakes have no such oversight. It is imperative that controls be developed to manage the long term water levels of the middle lakes.

## **Our Personal Story**

Our family has owned a cottage on Present Island since 1984. Over that period of time the water levels on Georgian Bay have dropped by more than three feet and we have experienced continued periods of chronically low water levels. Our dock, which was 40 feet long in 1984, is now over 500 feet long and at the end of the dock there is less than 18 inches of water. This has severely impacted access to our family cottage. We are on the verge of having no water access and risk not being able to provide water to our cottage due to the extreme conditions. All of our neighbors on the island (approximately forty family cottages) are experiencing similar circumstances.

Cottagers on the island have suffered declining real estate values as a direct result of the low water levels. Many cottagers are not able to sell their properties due to the lack of water access. Many of our neighbors have purchased and enjoyed these cottages with the intent of selling their properties to finance their retirement and are now suffering drastic financial loss. This has a broader impact beyond the loss of recreational use and enjoyment. Families who intend to pass their cottages on to their children and grandchildren are devastated by the physical hardship and financial burden the low water levels have caused. Future generations risk not being able access or physically maintain their cottages. The financial burden the low water levels have created is going to have a severe long term impact on Georgian Bay cottagers and their families.

Action is urgently needed to restore Georgian Bay water levels so that local communities, cottagers and tourists can continue to enjoy one of Canada's greatest natural assets.

We look forward to receiving your support in addressing our concerns.

Yours sincerely,

Rick and Sue Pressé