



THE WATER LINE

Volume 43 / Winter 2008

A Voice For Recreational Boaters In Ontario

WATER LEVELS

A Hot Topic on the Great Lakes

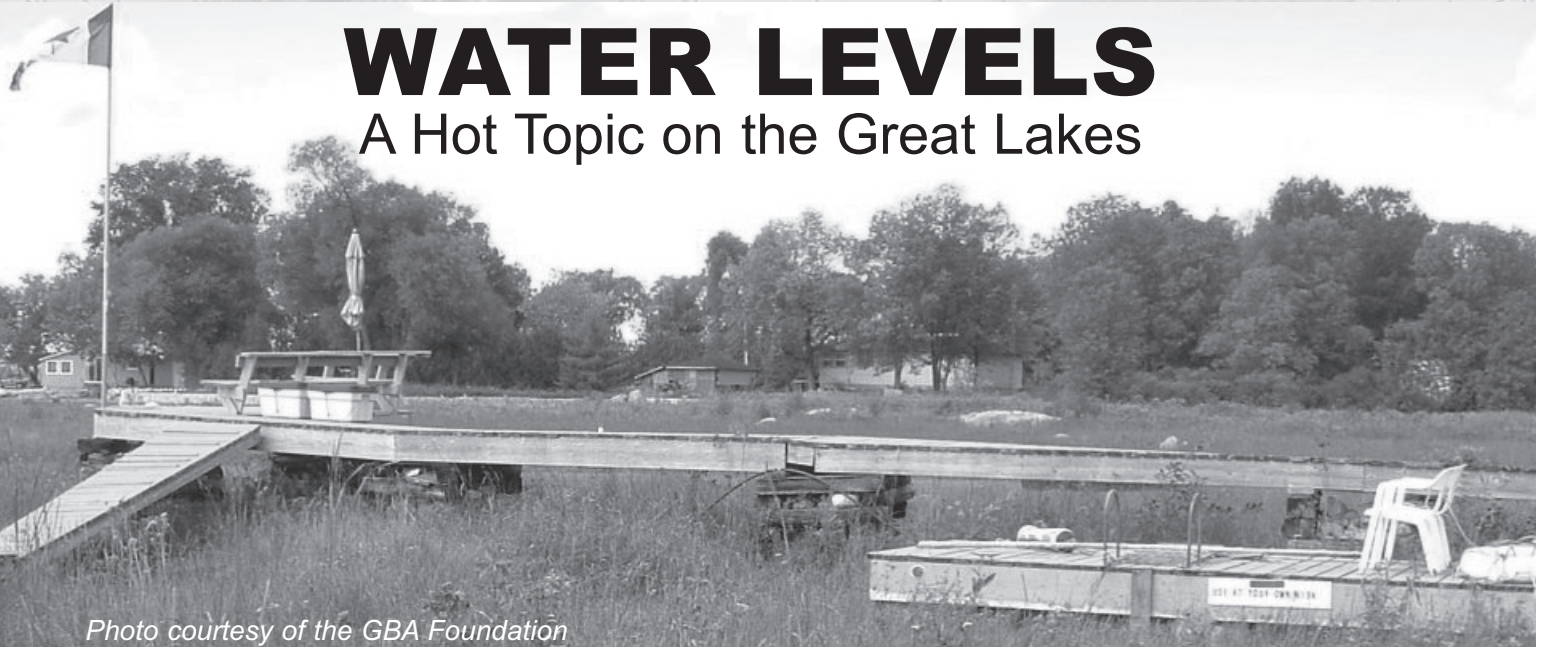


Photo courtesy of the GBA Foundation

This past summer, water levels were low on all of the Great Lakes. Lake Superior levels suddenly declined about two feet last fall, but have started to come back up this fall. Nevertheless, it sure has folks asking a lot of questions about the factors that influence water levels. Since the Great Lakes are only a one per cent renewable resource, there is sound reasoning in wanting to understand what influences water levels – in particular, what activities we humans are doing that can draw down water levels.

Most concerning is what has happened to levels in lakes Michigan and Huron. Beginning in 1999, they began dropping and have remained close to record low for seven years now. And predictions now are that they may exceed record lows in the next year. That has not happened on any of the other Great Lakes. And during October, thankfully, Lake Superior levels began to rise – likely in response to increased precipitation. To quote from the US Army

Corps October water levels report, “Precipitation in October was above average over the Lake Superior and Lake Michigan-Huron basins, while precipitation over the Lake Erie basin was below average.”

But while Lake Superior levels went up, levels in lakes Michigan and Huron actually declined in October under the same increased precipitation conditions. In fact, lakes Michigan and Huron are predicted to be 15 inches lower by January 2008 compared to January 2007. That means by next summer we will likely see record low levels – up to a foot lower than last summer.

This raises serious questions in the minds of many people, who wonder if there is something else that is a factor that needs serious review – the impact of ongoing erosion changing the St. Clair riverbed increasing the outflow and contributing to the low water level conditions.

The ecological implication for seven years of sustained low water levels for wetlands in areas where species cannot

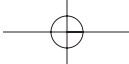
migrate out is very significant. Not only are wetlands the kidneys of our water, they also provide essential spawning and nursery habitat for fish, reptiles and birds. Most of these wetlands species return to their same spawning areas each year. If they can't find it, they simply do not spawn. So this becomes a further threat to the already threatened fishery.

Continued on page 2

IN THIS ISSUE

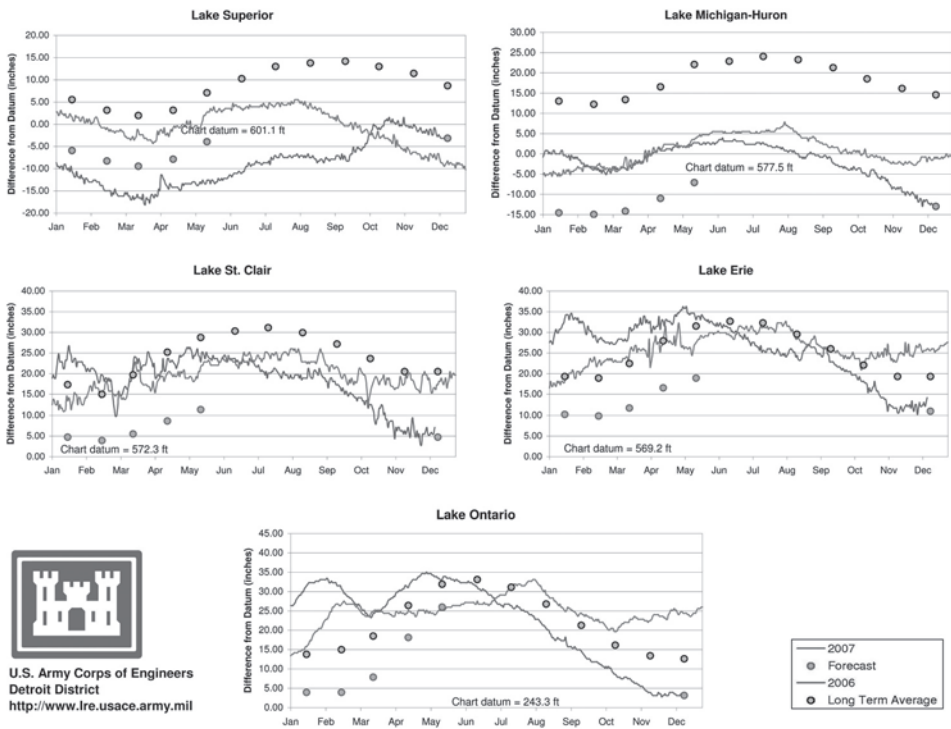
- Water Levels 2
- Waterfront Access 3
- Rideau Canal-
New World Heritage Site . . 4
- Poker Run 4
- News Briefs 4





WATER LEVELS

Continued from page 1



12/13/2007

For boaters, seven years below chart datum means treacherous navigation on Georgian Bay's small craft channel. The Coast Guard has placed warning markers in some channels indicating less than the minimum six-foot depth. In some places, this means large sailboats cannot get through and propellers get damaged.

There is a solution to low water levels on lakes Michigan and Huron and we hope that work underway by our governments will understand the need to place mitigation measures in the St. Clair River. They have been designed on at least three previous occasions when Michigan and Huron were lowered 16 to 18 inches due to navigation dredging. They can be placed in the very deep parts of the river, where it is now over 60 feet deep and will not interfere with navigation. Locks or full control gates are not needed. And, after a period of adjustment during the placement

of submerged control measures, there would be no impact on lake levels downstream. It now seems appropriate this could be done as a "do no harm" measure to protect the ecological integrity of lakes Michigan and Huron.

The International Joint Commission has the Upper Lakes Study underway looking at the St. Clair River first. However, they already looked at this in their 1993 Levels Reference Study and established extreme "crisis condition responses" for all the Great Lakes. Lakes Michigan and Huron, including Georgian Bay, have been at or below the defined "crisis" levels (176.1 m) for the past seven years.

GBA Foundation undertook extensive research in 2005 to determine what was happening that could be contributing to low water levels in the St. Clair River. Their Baird Report is what led to the IJC investigating the St. Clair River as part of the

TSW Water Levels

by Randy Whaley

Boaters who are preparing to transit the Trent-Severn Waterway in 2008 should be very cautious when travelling through the system based on my experience in 2007.

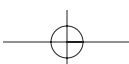
Prior to starting my trip from Trenton to Georgian Bay, I called the TSW offices in Peterborough to ask about the minimum depth of the canal system since my vessel draws 4 feet, 9 inches. The attendant told me that there was "a minimum of six feet throughout the system."

Considering we would transit the canal on the May 24th weekend, when water levels should be at their maximum level, and that we would be idling as we made our way due to the size of the boat, we started our journey believing water levels would be satisfactory to safely make our way to our final destination. Unfortunately, that was not the case. We struck bottom in three different locations – each case in mid-channel.

Based on my experience, it is my opinion that the TSW is not only in need dire need of capital for repairs to the locks and dams, but also to dredge the system as well. In its current state, this historical canal is now suitable for craft with a draft of no greater than 3 to 3.5 feet.

Let's hope Canada's new government sees the value of this important historical canal.

Upper Lakes Study. That report is posted online at www.georgianbay.ca. Anyone who wants to contribute to this can do so online or to the address: GBA Foundation, 48 Lesmill Road, Don Mills Ontario, M3B 2T5.



WATERFRONT ACCESS

A serious problem is looming in Canada

As recreational boaters, we have always taken for granted that there will always be a marina with ample seasonal dockage, transient slips and a launch ramp with parking for our cars and trailers. For those boater's who store their boats at home and trailer to different lakes and expect there will always be a public launch ramp with parking, you better pay attention to this article.

With rapidly rising land values (especially prime waterfront), private marinas are tempted to sell out to large developers of waterfront condominiums, hotels and time shares. This is understandable – after all, the marina owner works while everyone else is out enjoying the season. When, all of a sudden, a generous offer comes in, the owner thinks about having instant retirement and financial security.

There is no issue if the new ownership plans to continue running the business as a marina. But what happens down the road? If the plan is to add

condominiums that include a boat slip, will the operator continue to maintain seasonal and transient slips? If condominiums and time shares are more profitable, the ramification to the marina side of the business is obvious.

In the case of municipalities that control waterfront land, given the choice between a public launch ramp with parking versus a development that brings in much needed year-round tax revenue, you know which way their council will vote. This problem impacts boaters of all stripes, whether trailer boaters, cottage owners with water access only or cruisers.

There has been little, if any, appetite on the part of federal or provincial governments to support boating infrastructure. Within the last decade, the federal government divested itself of many ports and even small docks. This is vastly different from the United States, where fuel tax is directed into boating infrastructure – hence the widespread presence of municipal and state marinas and boat ramps. This approach

has led to a robust trailer boating sector in the United States.

In Canada, the lack of municipal ramps explains the lack of trailer boating to the same extent. These public facilities are less subject to residential conversion. The Canadian way has been to take all user fees/taxes into general revenue and, thus, escaping the smell test for accountability.

This potential problem is not unique to Ontario and has become a serious problem throughout the coastal and inland waters of the United States. The symptoms are:

- Rapidly escalating slip fees (double, triple inflation)
- Lack of ability to rent slips
- Minimum stays of three or more nights at transient marinas
- No parking available for trailers and trucks at ramps

The problem has become so serious in the US – even with the directions of fuel tax revenue – that there is a bill (HR3223) before congress called the "Keep our Waterfront Working Act." This bill would allow funding for municipalities to buy threatened marinas, public wharfs and launching ramps to guarantee public access for the future.

More information about this is available at www.BoatUS.com/news/releases.asp. This is well worth reading especially since the CBA will be making this a key issue in 2008 We will be entering into discussions with the GBA and Ontario Marine Operators Association, along with federal, provincial and local politicians.

We are not trying to scare the boating public or discourage recreational boating, but this is a reality. We strongly suggest before purchasing a large recreational vessel that you have made docking arrangements prior to closing your deal.



NEWS BRIEFS

Panel on the Future of the TSW

As of the week of December 17, the panel has wrapped up and their recommendations will be submitted to Environment Minister John Baird by the end of February 2008. They will also be made public at this time and we will post the key points on the CBA website (www.cbaontario.com).

As reported in the last Water Line, the panel spent last summer and fall holding public meetings in various towns along the TSW, seeking input from concerned citizens and major user groups. The CBA submitted a detailed 10-page proposal to the committee at the meeting in Barrie last September and it was well received. Visit the CBA website to view our proposal.

A special thanks to Simcoe North MP Bruce Stanton for making the TSW a major issue in his riding. His bill received the support of all political parties in Ontario.

Georgian Bay Islands National Park

The CBA will continue monitoring the steps of the new management plan, which will be moving to the next phase in the Spring 2008. We are very concerned and want to make sure the plan will provide for additional overnight docks, as well as increasing the length of current docks that are no longer accessible due to low water levels. Upgrading the facilities at Cedar Springs is another priority.

Visit the CBA at the Toronto International Boat Show!

The Toronto Boat Show runs January 12 to 20, 2008 to the Direct Energy Centre, Exhibition Place. Once again, we will have a 20-foot booth (#1860) located on the south wall directly across from Bombardier (Johnson/Evinrude). Drop by and check out the latest benefits of being a member. You can renew your membership and bring your boating friends along to sign up as well, or purchase the

newest Discover Cruising DVD on Lake Ontario, which is available to members at a special discount.

We are always looking for volunteers to help out at our booth and your time would be well appreciated. If interested please call Bill Ross at (905) 822-2686, your show admission is covered.

Pleasure Craft Operator Card

Remember the September 15, 2009 deadline is fast approaching for you or any of your crew to have the Pleasure Craft Operator Card in order to legally operate your vessel or motorized inflatable. For more information call Transport Canada's Safe Boating line at 1-800-267-6687 or visit www.tc.gc.ca/BoatingSafety.

Poker Run, Poker Run!

We are at it again. The second annual CBA Dinghy Poker Run will be held June 21, 2008.

This year, you will find us in the Honey Harbour Georgian Bay Islands National Parks area. We'll bring cash prizes, great gifts from generous sponsors and the program. You bring your dinghies, friends, enthusiasm and competitive spirit. The CBA Dinghy Poker Run promises to be better than ever. We want you to win the \$500 first prize.

Put the Poker Run in your calendar now! See you there.

THANK YOU AGAIN TO OUR BIG HEARTED SPONSORS!

South Bay Cove Marina, Bay Port Marina, Kill Bear Marina, Moose Deer Point Marina, Doral Marine Resort, Queens Cove Marina, Moon River Marina and Henry's Restaurant

THE RIDEAU CANAL: NEW WORLD HERITAGE SITE!

On June 27, 2007, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee inscribed the Rideau Canal World Heritage Site to the World Heritage List.

This living legacy of the 19th Century, which we preserve and present for the benefit of all Canadians, now joins a very select group of exceptional cultural and natural icons formally designated as being of outstanding value for humanity as a whole. The Rideau Canal World Her-

itage Site encompasses the Rideau Canal, Fort Henry and the Kingston Fortifications.

The fourteenth Canadian site to obtain such recognition, Rideau Canal's designation is of particular importance due to the fact that it is the first World Heritage Site in Ontario. This designation could never have made it into reality without the exceptional quality of the work done by many key stakeholders.

The CBA is operated primarily by volunteers, so to ensure that your questions or concerns will be addressed please EMAIL the CBA as emails are our primary method of communication.

info@canadianboatersalliance.ca

Be sure to check out our new website at www.cbaontario.com

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