



International Upper Great Lakes Study



Response letter to Editors of the various newspaper articles – (August 24, 2007)

A five year International Upper Great Lakes Study (IUGLS) was officially launched by the International Joint Commission (IJC) in March 2007. The IJC has appointed leading U.S. and Canadian experts from inside and outside of government to conduct an independent, peer-reviewed investigation of factors affecting water levels and flows on lakes Superior, Huron, Michigan and Erie. The main objectives of this study are to review the regulation of Lake Superior outflows and to examine the physical processes and possible ongoing St Clair River changes and their impacts on the water levels of Lake Michigan and Huron. The IJC directed the Study Board to complete the St Clair River portion of the Study by early 2010.

A recent estimate by the Georgian Bay Association (GBA) indicated that the volume of the river outflow may have increased by as much as 2.5 billion gallons per day, or about 2% of the flow of the St Clair River, as a result of dredging. These impacts are greater than those previously reported by the IJC. The GBA is requesting that action be taken immediately to address this issue. IUGLS will be assessing all the potential contributing factors to the changes in water level in order to ensure that informed decisions can be made. Studies have been initiated, hydrographic surveys are being conducted, hydrometric stations are currently being installed in order to provide us with the information needed to address this issue.

Climate change and variability, hydrology, glacial isostatic adjustment, and streambed erosion are a number of key factors affecting the water levels that need to be assessed in a comprehensive manner to determine their relative importance to the lowering of the lake levels. The IUGLS will examine the changes that have occurred both naturally and through man-made factors over the last few decades in the St Clair River. A report addressing changes in the flow regime of the St. Clair River and the factors affecting water levels will be provided to the IJC by early 2010. Depending on the nature and extent of physical changes in the St. Clair River, and their potential impacts on water levels and flows, the study would explore potential remediation options. In the interim, the Study Board will report every six months on its work and any preliminary findings.

The Study Board recognizes that the levels of the Upper Great Lakes are declining to a significant extent, however remedial action cannot be considered without a full scientific assessment of all the factors involved in the hydrological cycle and their relative impacts both upstream and downstream of the St. Clair connecting channel. Hydrological shifts are well documented on the Great Lakes and this must also to be taken into account in determining the need for remedial action. Finally, any structural changes in the St. Clair River will require agreement by both the U.S. and Canadian governments.

Ted R. Yuzyk
Co-Director
Canadian Section

Eugene Z. Stakhiv
Co-Director
United States Section

Ted R. Yuzyk, Canadian Co-Director
234 Avenue West, 22nd Floor, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6K6
Telephone: (613) 992-5727 Fax: (613) 993-5583 Email: yuzykt@ottawa.ijc.org

Eugene Z. Stakhiv, Ph.D., P.E., U.S. Co-Director
7701 Telegraph Road, Alexandria, Virginia 22315
Telephone: (703) 428-8077 Fax: (703) 428-6686 Email: Eugene.z.stakhiv@iwr01.usace.army.mil