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Binational Expert Panel: No Ongoing Erosion in St. Clair River Draft Report Identifies Several Causes for Changes in Water Levels

[Washington and Ottawa] – In a draft report released today nearly one year ahead of its original schedule, the International Upper Great Lakes Study (IUGLS) determined that erosion of the St. Clair River is not ongoing and recommended that “remedial measures not be undertaken at this time.” The report – *Impacts on Upper Great Lakes Water Levels: St. Clair River* – is the product of intense effort by a 10 member binational Study Board of experts and public members, who commissioned 42 research projects that engaged over 100 scientists. Fourteen public meetings have been scheduled throughout the region where residents can learn about the findings and provide comments (see page two or www.iugls.org for the full report and other details regarding the public consultation process).

The Study Board was appointed by the International Joint Commission to determine whether the conveyance capacity of the St. Clair River has changed, to assess if there is ongoing erosion in the river bed and to identify other factors that may be affecting water levels. Specifically, the independent panel examined the change in head drop (or difference in water levels) between Lake Huron and Lake Erie, estimating the decline to be 23 centimetres (cm) or 9 inches (in) between 1962 and 2006. After an exhaustive effort to collect and verify historical data, conduct new research and analyze results, three key factors were identified as contributing to the decline:

- **A change in the conveyance** of the St. Clair River (deepening of the river bed) accounts for about 10 to 12 cm (3.9 to 4.7 in); a relatively dramatic and rapid change in conveyance appears to have occurred in the mid-1980s, possibly resulting from a single event, such as a major ice jam. This change in conveyance resulted in a temporary increase in flows, which returned to pre-change conditions by the end of the decade.
- **Changes in climatic patterns** (less water being supplied to Lake Michigan-Huron and Lake Superior) account for about 9 to 27 cm (3.5 to 10.6 in); this factor has become even more important in recent years, accounting for an estimated 75 percent of the decline between 1996 and 2005.
- **Glacial isostatic adjustment** (the rebounding of the earth’s crust after the retreat of the glaciers) accounts for about 4 cm (about 1.6 in), but varies greatly throughout the basin. For example, this effect is much larger (11 cm or 4.3 in) in Parry Sound on Georgian Bay with respect to the outlet at Lakeport, Michigan, where it is negligible.

“Climate is the main driver of the lake level relationships between lakes and over time,” the report emphasized. “There has been a persistent decline in net total supply of water to Lake Superior and Lake Michigan-Huron over the past two decades that has resulted in declining lake levels and a change in the relationship to Lake Erie.”

(more)

The Study Board also recommended that: “The need for mitigative measures in the St. Clair River continues to be examined as part of the continuing Study that will include a comprehensive assessment of the future effects of climate change on water supplies in the upper Great Lakes basin on Lake Superior regulation.”

To assure the scientific credibility of the results, the IJC engaged the Environmental & Water Resources Institute of the American Society of Civil Engineers and the Canadian Water Resources Association to select highly credentialed engineers and scientists who are leaders in their fields to review the Study methodology, key scientific reports and other major products of the Study. While initial reviews have been positive, other reviews with respect to the draft St. Clair River report are ongoing and will be completed later this spring. After incorporating public comments, the results of additional research and responses to both internal and independent reviews, the Study Board will finalize the report for presentation to the International Joint Commission in the fall of 2009.

Funded equally by the U.S. and Canadian governments, this draft report is the first output of the Study. The Study will continue to examine whether the current regulation plan for outflows from Lake Superior through the compensating works and power dams on the St. Marys River at Sault Ste. Marie needs to be modified to reflect broader interests and the potential impacts of a changing climate. The St. Marys River regulation plan report is scheduled to be completed early in 2012.

Besides the St. Clair River scientific report, there is a concise summary report available at www.iugls.org.

The Study Board will be providing in-depth briefings and receiving comments at fourteen public meetings throughout the upper Great Lakes basin in May and June. Comments can also be provided via the Study website. The schedule for these public meeting is below:

<u>May 19, 2009</u>	<u>May 20, 2009</u>	<u>June 9, 2009</u>	<u>June 11, 2009</u>
Sarnia City Hall Council Chambers 255 North Christina Street Sarnia, ON N7T 7N2 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.	Great Lakes Science Center, Auditorium 601 Erieside Ave. Cleveland, Ohio 44114 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.	Annis Water Resources Institute 740 W. Shoreline Drive Muskegon, MI 49441 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.	North Simcoe Sports and Recreation Centre, Community Hall A 527 Len Self Boulevard Midland, ON L4R 5N6 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.
Grosse Pointe War Memorial, Library 32 Lake Shore Drive Grosse Pointe Farms, MI 48236 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.	Northeastern Manitoulin and the Islands Recreation Centre 9001 Hwy-6 S Little Current, ON POP1K0 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.	Charles W. Stockey Center, Theatre Two Bay St. Parry Sound, ON P2A 1S3 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.	Northwestern Michigan College Oleson Center 112 1701 East Front St. Traverse City, MI 49686 7:00 – 9:00 pm
Bayshore Community Centre Bay Room B 1900 3rd Ave E. Owen Sound, ON N4K 3M6 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.	Hotel Orrington Heritage Room 1710 Orrington Avenue Evanston, Illinois, 60201 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.	Algoma University, Great West Life Amphitheatre 1520 Queen St East Sault Ste. Marie, ON P6A 2G4 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.	Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College Superior Conference Center 600 North 21st Street Superior, WI 54880 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
	Lakehead University Theatre AT 1001 955 Oliver Road Thunder Bay, ON P7B 5E1 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.		Delta College Planetarium and Learning Center Space Explorer Hall 100 Center Ave. Bay City, MI 48708 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.