International St. Lawrence River Board of Control

NEWS RELEASE

May 13, 2011

Control Board confronts wet spring

The International St. Lawrence River Board of Control (Board) recently reviewed conditions in the Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River system. The Board has decided for the next several weeks to release outflows up to the capacity of the hydropower facilities (which may be less than plan flow), provided this does not cause levels downstream to reach flood alert levels. If basin conditions continue to stay wet, the Board may direct an increase in flows that will require water to be spilled (bypassing the hydropower generating stations).

The supply of water received by Lake Ontario in April and early May was well above average. Record high water supplies were received during a portion of this time. Lake Ontario has risen about 78 cm (31 in) since its winter lows. The average seasonal rise is about 49 cm (19 in). The level is now at 75.16 m (246.59 ft), which is about 16 cm (6 in) above average for this time of year. Any further large amounts of precipitation will cause seasonal rises in lake level as the ground is wet and unable, right now, to absorb the rains. With the recent rise in water level, there is a small but growing risk of Lake Ontario reaching its upper level limit in 2011. Water levels on Lake St. Lawrence have generally been above average the past three months, and are currently near average for this time of year. Some gates of the Iroquois Dam, just upstream of the Moses-Saunders dam, were dipped into the water for a few days to reduce the levels of Lake St. Lawrence.

Snowmelt and heavy rains have caused levels of the St. Lawrence River near Montreal to rise well above average since mid-April. . The Board reduced Lake Ontario outflows in late April and early May in order to keep levels below the flood alert level near Montreal. Flows have since been increased as downstream tributary flows have decreased. As of May 11, about 2.6 cm (1 in) of water has been accumulated on Lake Ontario relative to Plan 1958-D as a result of these actions. The Board may store more water on Lake Ontario to avoid downstream flooding and to also not exceed the outflow capacity of the hydropower facilities. The level at the Port of Montreal on May 10 was about 2.5 m (8.2 ft) above chart datum, and 0.81 m (2.66 ft) above average.

The Board, in conjunction with its staff, is monitoring the situation carefully and is prepared to take action if required. The Board will confer again if there is a significant risk of Lake Ontario reaching the upper limit, or if the amount of water stored on the lake approaches 4.5 cm (1.8 in).

Water levels on both Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River can vary considerably from year to year. The Board urges everyone to be prepared to live within the range of levels specified in the Orders of Approval. For Lake Ontario, the upper limit for monthly mean levels is 75.37 m (247.3 ft), the lower limit (from April to December) is 74.15 m (243.3 ft), a range of 1.22 m (4 ft). Levels on the river tend to vary more widely.

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The International St. Lawrence River Board of Control was established by the International Joint Commission in its 1952 order of approval. The Board's main duty is to ensure that outflows from Lake Ontario meet the requirements of the IJC order; it also develops regulation plans and conducts special studies requested by the IJC. For more information, visit http://ijc.org/conseil_board/islrbc/en/main_accueil.htm. To receive a weekly e-mail about water levels and flows in the Lake Ontario–St. Lawrence River system, please send a blank e-mail message to stlaw-L-subscribe@cciw.ca, with the word 'subscribe' in the title and body of your message.