

June 8, 2011

Control Board responds to high waters

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 equivalent to the maximum outflow limit of the regulation plan, provided this does not cause levels downstream to reach flood alert levels. If basin conditions continue to stay wet, the Board may direct further increases in flows.

The supply of water received by Lake Ontario in May continued to be well above average. Lake Ontario has risen to a daily mean level of 75.37 m (247.3 ft) which is 32 cm (12 in) above its long-term average for this time of year and 63 cm (25 in) above its level last year. Fortunately the forecast is for dry weather, allowing the Ottawa and other tributary rivers to recede and the Board to increase discharges from Lake Ontario, more than those specified by the Plan. Water levels on Lake St. Lawrence have also been above average during the last month, and are currently 20 cm (8 in) above average for this time of year.

Heavy rains and wet spring conditions 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. The outflows from the lake have now been increased because downstream tributary flows have decreased. The level at the Port of Montreal on May 30 was 7.57 m (24.8 ft), which is 0.66 m (2.2 ft) above average.

As of June 1, about 3.7 cm (1.5 in) of additional water was stored on Lake Ontario relative to Plan 1958-D as a result of these actions. The Board has decided to discharge 8780 m³/s (310,000 cfs) until the level of Lake Ontario falls to 75.32 m (247.1 ft), so long as levels downstream are below the flood alert level. At that point the Board may lower discharges but intends to keep them above Plan flow to continue to eliminate the water accumulated relative to Plan 1958-D.

The Board, in conjunction with its staff, is monitoring the situation carefully and is prepared to take further action if required. The Board will confer again if Lake Ontario rises to 75.42 m (247.4 ft).

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) and 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.