



Save The River

Protecting the St. Lawrence River through Advocacy, Education and Research

**Remarks by Jennifer Caddick, Executive Director Save The River & Upper St. Lawrence Riverkeeper, to the International Joint Commission
June 25, 2008**

Alexandria Bay, NY

PRESIDENT
Elizabeth Raisbeck
VICE-PRESIDENT
Bud Andress
SECRETARY
Bill Grater
TREASURER
Fred Morey
PAST PRESIDENT
John Peach
MEMBER-AT-LARGE
Teddy McNally

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Joan Baldwin
Jan Brabant
Dan Churchill
John Cooper
John Farrell
Rick Gregware
Bruce Harrison
Ted Mascott
Tammy Quinn
Clif Schneider
Randy Sargent
Tricia Tague
Ann Ward

DIRECTORS EMERITI
Bud Ames
William Danforth
Ken Deedy
J. Richard Munro

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Jennifer Caddick

Thank you Chairwoman Brooks and Commissioners for the opportunity to speak tonight.

Thirty years ago this year Save The River was formed by citizens to give voice to the fact that the St. Lawrence River is a magnificent place that deserves our protection.

Today Save The River represents thousands of people who live, work and raise families along the River, and we are here – once again – reiterating our firm support for Plan B+, the only water level plan that will restore the River ecosystem.

Tonight's hearing is feeling a bit like déjà vu...we were here eight years ago when you asked Save The River to participate as a member of the study's public interest advisory group. We were here in 2006 commenting on the three draft plans presented by that study, and we were a month ago at the information sessions explaining your proposal.

We are here because you tell us that you want our input and that it is "instrumental" along with sound science in reaching your final decision on this issue. Our request, as well as the request of numerous citizens, conservation groups, government agencies, and elected officials has been constant - a water levels management plan that reverses 50 years of significant damage to the River ecosystem.

Yet, we are incredibly disillusioned by your announcement of Plan 2007, and feel that you have not been listening to public input or the scientific and legal facts of this issue.

It is a fact that sound science shows that the current water levels management plan has significantly degraded the environment of the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario. And, it is a fact that Plan B+ is the only management plan option put forth that will restore – in one fell swoop – tens of thousands of acres of wetlands on the River and Lake.

It is a fact that you have the legal authority to implement Plan B+ now. During the information sessions, we heard that the Commission cannot implement Plan B+ because of legal constraints in the Boundary Waters Treaty. Upon hearing that, we reached out to experts in this field of law and dissected this important question and it is clear that you do have the authority to implement B+ without indemnifying riparian interests.

It is a fact that you have the overwhelming support for B+ from the majority of the public, government agencies and elected officials.

Politicians on both sides of the border support Plan B+ – from Congressman John McHugh and Congresswoman Louise Slaughter who have introduced a resolution in Congress on this issue, to MPP Bob Runciman, to the Governor of the State of New York, to numerous regional and local elected officials, several of whom you heard from this evening.

Numerous government agencies on both sides of the border have expressed support for B+, ranging from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to the Ontario Ministry of the Environment.

You've heard many many times from residents and visitors to the St. Lawrence River that they support Plan B+ and you're hearing even more tonight.

Numerous environmental and conservation organizations, representing thousands of members throughout the Great Lakes region on both sides of the border have spoken out in support of Plan B+. The list is long and includes a variety of conservation and environmental interests such as Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, Isaak Walton League, Citizens Campaign for the Environment, Environmental Advocates of New York, Great Lakes United, Sierra Club, the National Wildlife Federation and others. In fact this issue is so critical that the national river advocacy group, American Rivers, has weighed in by selecting the St. Lawrence River as one of the Ten Most Endangered Rivers in the U.S.

You have even heard from residents of Lake-shore communities who have spoken out on behalf of the Lake environment. Everyone in this room may be shocked to hear that Citizens Campaign for the Environment, a state-wide environmental group, has collected more than 4,000 signatures from citizens in the Greece, a community on the Lake-shore, in support of Plan B+.

What else do you need to show public support for Plan B+?

You tell us that you want to hear the views of the interested public, that comments from the public will be given full consideration, yet we're a bit skeptical. Over the past eight years, you've heard loud and clear that the public wants an environmental plan yet you delivered Plan 2007.

Of course, there are opponents to Plan B+. However these opponents – whether they are property owners on the South Shore of Lake Ontario or the shipping industry who you heard from last night – have already received 50 years of substantial financial benefits from the current regulation plan. Plan B+ will not remove those benefits. Instead, it will slightly reduce the benefits to property owners and shippers and replace them with significant improvements to the River and Lake environment, which has been the loser for 50 years under the current regulation plan. It seems that the trade-off is more than fair and fits with your objective of finding a more balanced approach to regulating water levels on the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario.

So to conclude, my understanding is that your charge as commissioners is to use scientific and legal facts, along with a healthy dose of public comment to make a decision. Let's look at the checklist: Sound science? Check. Legal authority? Check. Support of the public, elected officials and government agencies? Check. It is high time that you – the independent commissioners of the International Joint Commission – make the decision to protect the environment of the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario and implement Plan B+. You have the tools right in front of you to do so.