Lake Ontario – St. Lawrence River Communications Assessment of 2017 High Water Event

Communication Recommendations & Media Analysis

September 2018

WITH MINOR AMENDMENT POST PRESENTATION IN OTTAWA, OCTOBER 24

Prepared for:

International Joint Commission • Commission mixte internationale

ECO STRATEGY
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Overview

Background

ECO Strategy was contracted by the International Lake Ontario – St. Lawrence River Board (ILOSRB or “the Board”) in May, 2018 to undertake a review of the media coverage of the 2017 flooding event of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River in, and to conduct a review of all communication products, including media releases, Facebook postings and correspondence with stakeholders.

From a review of the media coverage and an assessment of the effectiveness in communicating key Board messages surrounding the flooding event, this report summarizes key findings and recommendations and provides a detailed analysis of media activity during the 2017 flood event.

In addition to this report, Don Huff, President of ECO Strategy presented to the International Lake Ontario – St. Lawrence River Board on October 24th in Ottawa. The presentation content (see Appendix 1) reflected the findings cited in this report, and addressed questions from the Communications Committee (Appendix 2) memo of October 1st.

Key Findings: Traditional and Online Media

The media attention focused on the International Joint Commission (IJC) and the ILOSRB and the coverage generated by the 2017 flood was unprecedented for the organization.

There were several nodes of activity, and not surprisingly, the clear majority of the coverage occurred in May. The significant attention paid to the specific events in very large cities like Toronto and Montreal resulted in large amounts of sustained coverage.

Over 42,000 individual media “hits” were recorded and identified through the data supplied to us by the Board and the additional data secured by ECO Strategy. This report breaks down this coverage based on the media type (online, print or broadcast), by country, tone, language and whether it mentioned the Board or IJC as part of their coverage of the floods. Significantly, media monitoring collection practices do not differentiate between television and radio in the “broadcast category.” Table 1 summarizes the data.

When considered as a total engagement, the duration of the episode and the induced fatigue on staff, the Board’s media relations performance was strong, with some notable incidents that merit discussion and attention.

ECO Strategy contends that the Board emerged from the 2017 flooding episode with a much-enhanced profile, with the media scan indicating that it was perceived as a non-partisan and credible source of reliable information. This is especially commendable, considering the negative comments made by high profile US elected

| Table 1: Summary of Media Clips |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Total Flood Clips             | 42,494           |
| US                            | 24,981           |
| Canada                        | 17,513           |
| Can - English                 | 12,389           |
| Can - French                  | 5,124            |
| Online                        | 9,081            |
| Print                         | 8,534            |
| Broadcast                     | 24,879           |
| Did Not Mention Board/IJC     | 36,709           |
| Did Mention Board/IJC         | 5,652            |
| Tone of Board/IJC Mentions    |                  |
| Positive                      | 124              |
| Negative                      | 255              |
| Neutral                       | 3,893            |
officials about Plan 2014. In this vein, special note should be made of the online commentary that praised the Board for consistently and rapidly providing fact based and “unbiased” comments and info.

Our assessment of the “tone” is based on quite conservative criteria. In both the assessment of the Canada and US media clips, we categorized the clear majority of the coverage to be neutral (indicating a significant balance and lack of skew), though the format related limitations of how the broadcast data was provided, did not allow us to undertake as thorough an analysis of TV and radio clips.

When considering what we deemed to be positive and negative coverage, the following observations can be made (related discussion and charts appear in the Discussion section):

In print media (USA and Canada), media clips were deemed to be positive in tone, at a rate of greater than two positive clips for every one negative story.

For online media in Canada there was an almost even split (with a small sample size) and in the US, there was roughly three times the number of negative postings than positive ones. This is not an unexpected outcome for this media type, however neutral clips still significantly outweighed any of the positive or negative coverage.

It is noteworthy that the consistent and credible deployment of fact-based information saw many instances where the US media relied on the Board positioning related to Plan 2014 as providing important data and “truths” as responses to US elected officials criticism of the Plan.

An interesting pattern was observed, with the Board being cited more frequently in US broadcast media than in its Canadian counterparts, while the reverse was true for print media. The volume of coverage (print and broadcast) follow similar curves in both nations from the early stages until August. Then the frequency of media coverage declined in Canada, while coverage remained high in the USA during the Fall of 2017. We attribute this to the flood threat lessening and the rise in political focused commentary in the USA.

While difficult to determine the significance, a greater total number of print media clips were generated in the USA, while the number of clips with a IJC or Board mentions being higher in Canada.

The French language content followed similar trends to the rest of the findings, with the media type being primarily from broadcast sources. The Board nor IJC were used heavily as a source in these French clips, although all coverage was deemed to be neutral. Similar to the rest of the Canadian coverage, local authorities were more predominantly used as a source of information than the IJC or Board. Building relationships with French media contacts will help with future events in establishing themselves as an authority.

**Earned media value** (EMV) is the metric that represents the value of the exposure (generated by media outreach) approximating the paid advertising value. While external to the scope of this project, because we had the spreadsheets of media coverage we were able to undertake a simple evaluation which suggests the minimum EMV value was $3M+.
Key Findings: Social Media

Social media’s role as a tool for securing information from credible sources is demonstrated by the growth in Facebook follower recruitment with a 230+% month over month growth from April to May and 380+ % growth over the flood period. It is noteworthy that retention of the Board followers has been high. This is an indicator of the importance of Facebook to the growth of the Board’s communication reach. In the report, we make some observations about demographics of the followers of the Facebook page and posting activity during the floods and how these aligned with media outreach. These findings show the strength of the Board’s Facebook page as a key communication tool.

There are significant opportunities to be considered in the social media sector, as there was sustained growth despite inconsistent coordination between the traditional media outreach and the social media channels. For instance, media releases were either not posted or delayed in the early and mid-stages of the flooding, and would benefit from greater coordination.

We have made a series of recommendations to take advantage of available social media platforms on an ongoing basis. These include the need to continue the Facebook page which has established and engaged online community, and the suggestion to expand to Twitter.

Recommendations: General

The Board has an opportunity to build on the success of its media work in 2017 to build a solid infrastructure and processes to deal with major events in the future and to help achieve the goals laid out in its Communication Plan:

1. **Planning:** Decide what level of public profile is desired by the Board, and determine appropriate budget and resources required to achieve the Board’s communication goals.
2. **Information:** Increase general public awareness of the IJC and the Board -- who we are and what we do.
3. **Information:** Communicate accurately and in a timely fashion about the actions of the ISLRBC and the reason for those actions.
4. **Education:** Explain how natural factors and regulation affect water levels and flows.
5. **Education:** Increase understanding of the need to expect and prepare for fluctuations in levels and flows.
6. **Consultation:** Consistently seek out, consider and respond to the views and concerns of all stakeholders.

Working to develop long-term relationships with key journalists, publications and outlets, by providing regular information and updates will serve to help inform and educate the public as well as confirm the Board’s position as the authority of record on issues related to water levels. It is worth noting that online publications either employ journalists or republish contents from traditional publications or video content from news sources. Much of the information shared on social media is generated by journalists, either in story, video, or summary form.

Additionally, regular contact will allow the Board to gain insight into the kind of information the media, and their audiences are seeking. The media will also cover town hall meetings and other stakeholder consultations to allow the Board to demonstrate its efforts in support of its goal of consultation.
As the majority of the negative media coverage resulted from criticism of Plan 2014 by politicians, there would be great value in expanding regular communications with politicians and their staffs, with the goal of promoting open communication and goodwill for the Board’s efforts.

On an ongoing basis, the Board should ensure that local members of the legislature, and state and federal Congress, as well as municipal representatives, are informed and invited to local consultations and events.

For politicians, photo opportunities are an important way to showcase their work on behalf of the community, and their presence at events benefits the organization by affording an opportunity to educate politicians about their activities, build personal relationships, and attract media, if desired. Politicians and their staffs should be made aware of the Board’s website, tools and information that is available to them and their constituents with the goal of establishing the Board as a source of record.

Politicians have large audiences for their own communications and access to the media. In crisis situations this can be an asset to the Board in helping to get accurate information to the public in a timely manner. Providing regular briefings to politicians and particularly, their constituency staff, at the beginning of every season, and making sure that they receive timely updates in the event of flooding or other adverse events will help them in fielding questions from constituents. It can also prevent misinformation or misunderstandings, and early identification of issues that can be resolved before becoming public relations problems.

The messages and content of the press releases were very strong, and easy to understand. The addition of simple infographics and photos to the materials would help achieve wider public dissemination by online and social media. Clear and precise instructions on “what to do” would also be an asset for media, and web and social media content.

Recommendations

A) Communication Plans and Protocols

1. Review and update the Strategic Communication Plan and Rapid Responses Plan with what was learned from the 2017 floods.
   i. This would include developing a core media contact list, portioned by categories such as USA/Canada, science writers, political commentators, news reporters (weekly & daily papers), radio, TV, on-line, columnists, opinion page editors, etc.

2. Consider the feasibility of creating tailored plans or products for jurisdictions that would take into account differing impacts of flooding, as well as language, political and media differences.

3. Greater coordination between the traditional media outreach function (media release distribution) and the social media efforts, especially focus on reducing lag time.
4. Revisit and refresh the government agency briefing process, with the aim to be even more proactive.

5. Revisit and refresh the stakeholder outreach process, with the aim to be both inclusive and proactive, ensure contact info is current before a significant need for it.

6. Outreach to politicians and constituency staff on both sides of the border (particularly US), with updates before, during, and after future events.
   i. Ongoing basis, with updates throughout future events.
   ii. Consider creating a notification protocol in case of future events, for elected representatives and their staff.

**B) Media Relations**

1. Ongoing media outreach, keeping contacts up to date on a reliable and planned basis (particularly during a crisis).

2. Ensure that the media release distribution platform the Board is using, is capable of delivering in a crisis communications situation.

3. If the primary spokesperson not be available for media inquiries, creating clear backup roles will ensure an equally fast and accurate media response.

4. Refresh media training for designated spokespeople and backups.

5. The Board’s approval process for all outgoing communications should be examined to ensure maximum accuracy and speed, especially when it comes to crisis communications.
   i. Current Board documents do not currently describe this process, but having a developed protocol in place for review and approval will ensure all communications are sent out in a timely manner.

6. Expand the very useful interview tracking document to cover more information:
   i. In addition to the media contact information, establish whether they are the journalist to talk to for future Board/IJC information. This will help establish media relationships and contacts for future communications.
   
   ii. Keeping track of which member of the Board or IJC responded to each contact will also help.
   
   iii. Expand what is recorded, including questions asked and key answers given, will assist in media monitoring and future communication analysis, as well as clearing up any misunderstandings.
iv. Media list databases like Meltwater are great for getting contact information for media contacts, however those services are not always up-to-date with when journalists and editors leave their publications. Key media contacts and publications should have their contact details checked to ensure media releases are distributed to the correct contact.

7. Revisit media monitoring (what is being monitored, key words, etc.) as there was significant difference in the number of media clips supplied by the ILOSRB for review and the number ECO Strategy was able to secure.

   i. This is important during a crisis to stay up to date with reporting and public understanding.

   ii. As a research tool for future communication assessments and planning.

8. Consider the use of both 1) macro or drainage basin wide focused releases, and 2) more localized media releases focused on “hot spots” experiencing greater impacts or exhibiting more appetite for information.

   i. Localized media releases could focus on the conditions and issues specifically concerning certain areas. This includes more intensive media outreach to busier areas, allowing for a prioritized focused where it is needed most. There could be consistent messaging but targeted audiences, to allow for a quick process while still focusing on specific audiences.

C) Content & Style

1. Continue the same writing style and content that provides necessary information that is easily understood, and that impressively simplifies complex information. A higher level of technical complexity would make the communications less accessible to the general public.

2. By continuing to stress the message that Plan 2014 was not to blame for the flooding, numerous news article (largely letters to the editor) were published that supported the Board and challenged the politicians for politicizing their opposition to it. While the message the Board communicated seemed repetitive at times, a similar strategy is effective and necessary when responding to such a high level of public misinformation.

3. Provide a list of resources and links to support the Board’s advice to be prepared and cautious.

4. The Board’s Facebook page created a highly-engaged forum for the public. Continuing to post frequent information and maintaining their high level of feedback with the community will ensure the Facebook continues to be the success it is now.
5. The Board should ensure their media outreach tools include infographics and pictures (many of which can be found in the organization's archives) as when they were used there was greater coverage.

   i. These were used sparingly, but when included journalists are more interested and have a greater chance of reporting.

   ii. Infographics and pictures should be used more on social media, with findings showing success in doing so.

*Note: samples of infographics can be found in Appendix 1 top and bottom of page 9 and top of page 10*

6. To provide more concise information with a focus on key issues in media releases, the Board might benefit from following some of the similar guidelines set out in their Rapid Communications Protocol.

   i. The messaging of these protocols call for a focus on ‘top line’ messages and talking points.

7. A short update section in future media releases can allow for key information to be understood in a clear manner, while the more lengthy explanation of updates and protocols can be followed in the rest of the release as it currently is now.

*Best Practices:

   i. Media releases that have been planned well ahead of time should be timed to be in line with media cycles. Media usually have stories assigned before noon, and often push anything later than that to the next day (unless it is breaking news). Distributing media releases to media in the morning will ensure it is on their radar at the start of the news cycle, when stories are chosen.

   ii. Media releases with a long approval process should be timed for the optimal time to best reach media, not necessarily when the media releases gets its final approval. Example: A media release that gets final Board approval on a Friday (and is not breaking), would benefit from waiting until the following Monday to distribute.

   iii. During a crisis like the flooding event, the need for a quick approval and translation process for media releases is paramount. The current process makes it a challenge for a timely response to be made, giving opportunity for media and public figures to speculate on the situation.

   iv. Distributing a media release during a crisis should still be done with the media cycle in mind, however should still get critical and time sensitive information out to the public and media as soon as possible.
**D) Social Media**

1. *Facebook*

   i. The greatest strength of the Board's Facebook page is the rate of engagement they have received from their followers, largely due to the rate and speed that comments are responded to. For residents, it has become a great source of information and feedback. Because of this success, this strategy of successful engagement needs to be continued and, if possible, increased to further build the page's following.

   ii. Regular updates such as water and outflow levels should be posted at the same time, each day or week, to establish consistent times that followers can expect new information.

   iii. Pre-written scheduled posts promoting pre-existing evergreen material or regularly updated website features can be used to maintain the appearance of regular social media activity with a lesser degree of staff effort.

   iv. Having public and scheduled online question and answer sessions could be an opportunity to utilize the high engagement of the page and is an organized way to share resident-specific information to the page's followers.

   v. Communications during times of crisis should usually be communicated as soon as possible, however media are more likely to cover stories that are distributed in the morning (before stories are assigned for the day).

   vi. The data trends related to when the Board posted media releases to their Facebook don't point towards any specific optimal time for posting future content. It is recommended that the Board continue to post at varied times and continue to examine if there are any noticeable trends in their level of engagement at different times.

   vii. Best practices indicate that optimal times for posting content to a Facebook page: Weekdays the best time to post is between 1-4 p.m., when click rates have shown to be their highest. On weekends between 12-2 p.m. is prime time. Weekends before 8 a.m. and after 8 p.m. are the slowest times and should tried to be avoided.

   viii. Facebook posts and comments should always be made from the page's profile, rather than any individual Board members using their personal profile to respond to issues. This will ensure no Board member gets personally targeted for responding to comments.

   ix. Responding to comments on the page has been a large reason for the page's growth and level of engagement, and should be continued. As the page grows this will become more of a challenge to sustain. The Board should make an effort to prioritize when they respond, based on whether it is a new question (that has not been previously or recently asked), or if it is of large interest to the rest of the followers ('likes' and comments).
2. **Twitter**
   
i. Twitter is an important tool for journalists, both for information gathering and dissemination. Very early morning release of updates and new data through Board Twitter posts would permit reporters and media outlets to easily access new and current information from a reliable and known source to update their coverage.

   ii. A Twitter account would not require the same level of attention needed as the Facebook page does, and would require little effort to update.

   iii. The account could be geared toward media focused tweets – for instance - in very early morning updates for the convenience of media who are in the situation of maintaining coverage on the topic and “breaking news”.

   iv. Regular tweets can be prepared in advance and automatically scheduled for release, allowing for base-level communication to be developed and planned ahead of time.

   v. A constant source of information on Twitter will also have a greater chance to be seen by officials and politicians, all of which also use Twitter more than other platforms and often in a news gathering manner.

   vi. The use of Twitter for communicating with journalists would be “start of day” and for “breaking news”.

**E) Crisis Communications**

1. Ensure significant stakeholders (including media and politicians) are informed early of pending events/situations such as the 2017 flooding.

2. The Rapid Communications Protocol would benefit from more specifics regarding roles and expertise, to ensure timeliness and accuracy are maximized.

3. Board members who have a role in the protocol, and who have overlapping areas of expertise with other members, would benefit from more clearly defined roles with how they handle media inquiries.

4. Creating more areas of expertise and dividing them among the Board’s spokespeople will allow for quicker communication with media for inquiries that are outside the scope of the current list of expertise.

5. Consider offering media training to Board members
Recommendations: Summary

1. Review and refresh their Strategic Communication Plan and Rapid Response Plan considering what was learned in 2017 and after.

2. Provide ongoing, relevant content to the Board social media channels to keep them fresh and updated.

3. Expand social media interaction to include Twitter, which will enable more timely reach to journalists and politicians than other channels.

4. Continue and (if possible) increase the Facebook page engagement, which has shown itself to be a valuable information channel for residents. Facebook is a proven tool for reaching members of shoreline communities, both for hearing news and asking questions. Facebook should be continued to be used as a communication tool.

5. Having a quick response plan during a time of crisis will ensure the Board has the ability to get its own messages out first and frequently.

6. Better coordination between media outreach and the social media channels to ensure new information is provided to all stakeholders in a timely manner.

7. Regular ongoing contact with stakeholders to provide updates and maintain relationships.

If the Board could accomplish only three things in 2019 - What would they be?

- Ensure that the Stakeholder Outreach Strategic Plan is current and operational (Recommendations 4, 5 & 6) with priority audiences and the most effective outreach avenues identified
- Prepare a Crisis Communication Plan (built to mesh and complement the existing Board Communication Plan ensuring efficient use of resources)
- Tune up the media outreach mechanics - this would include streamlining the media release (communication materials) process and ensuring the media distribution process is current

From slide 12 of presentation (page 66 of this report) in Ottawa, October 24 (Appendix 1)
Media Analysis Findings

Media Impact

The International Lake Ontario – St. Lawrence River Board supplied ECO Strategy on May 29, 2017 with their media monitoring data of 2201 media clippings. Next, ECO Strategy undertook to verify this data and eventually secured a total of 42,494 clippings by generating a list of key words to identify all media clippings from the flooding from the US and Canada in English and French that mentioned the Board or the IJC and coverage that did not. This process is described in more detail in the section “Assembling the data”.

The total number of media clips, which included print, broadcast (radio and television) and online exceeded 42,000 media clips – with 17,513 generated in Canada and 24,981 generated in the USA. A summary of these clips appears in the Overview section of this report, in Table 1.

An important caveat is that the broadcast media is “inflated” by mentions of pending news coverage (as in at 11:35 the announcer mentions there will be coverage on the Noon news – while the “heads-up” contains little if any detail, but was still captured as a media mention). This challenge and reason for this is further explained in the section ‘Limitations of the Data Set’.

Figure 1, illustrates total print and online media coverage between the US and Canada overlain with the dates when the Board media releases were issued. This depicts the pattern of media coverage and suggests how the media responded to media releases that the Board distributed. At times the Board media releases were used as a source of information (direct quotes) by journalists, however it was the comments and responses to media inquiries to the Board that more frequently appeared in their reporting.

The Board distributed 14 flood episode media releases between April 25, 2017 and October 2, 2017. The initial media release (first in the 2017 flood series) described in depth the events that lead to the flooding event.

This release presented background and explanatory information, indicating that the unexpected wet conditions and extreme weather events were the cause of the record high water levels in Lake Ontario. The release also explained the Board’s role in regulating water levels to ensure that there is a balance between the impacts on upstream and downstream communities.

Table 2 on the next page shows the release date and title of the 14 releases. The media traffic on those days related to the flooding can be seen in Figure 1, with the red circles corresponding to the date of release.

This report analyzes the media coverage that resulted and makes related recommendations.
Figure 1: Timeline of print and online media clippings that mentioned the flood each week in 2017 for Canada and the US from March to September. Red dots correspond to the dates of media releases.

Table 2: Date and Title of Board Media Releases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title of Media Release</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 25, 2017</td>
<td>High Water Levels in the Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2, 2017</td>
<td>Board actively managing outflows in response to extreme wet weather, high water levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 18, 2017</td>
<td>Expect higher Lake Ontario outflows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 26, 2017</td>
<td>Lake Ontario water levels stable last week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2, 2017</td>
<td>High outflows keep water levels stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 8, 2017</td>
<td>High water levels everywhere - continuing high outflows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 14, 2017</td>
<td>Board to Increase Outflows June 14 - Lake Ontario Begins Slow Decline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 21, 2017</td>
<td>Challenges of maintaining record outflow for Lake Ontario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 7, 2017</td>
<td>Board Continues to Maximize Outflows from Lake Ontario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 21, 2017</td>
<td>Board Continues to Maximize Outflows as Wet Weather Persists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 4, 2017</td>
<td>Board Continues to Maximize Outflows as Lake Ontario Falls Quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 18, 2017</td>
<td>Outflows Maximized to Further Reduce Lake Ontario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 7, 2017</td>
<td>Drier conditions, record-high outflows starting to bring relief to Lake Ontario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2, 2018</td>
<td>Board Will Assist with Boat Haul-Outs from Lake St. Lawrence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assembling the Data Set

ECO Strategy provides media monitoring to a range of clients. Because, we have a pre-existing relationship with media monitoring suppliers, we were able to prevail on the suppliers to ensure we were able to assemble a bigger data pool. We have ongoing access to Canadian print and broadcast content and all online content; US coverage for print and broadcast (television and radio) content was secured by ECO Strategy by special request through a related service.

Two distinct media searches were completed for this report.

The first media search focused on finding when the International Joint Commissioner (IJC) or the Board was mentioned. Using the keywords ‘IJC’, ‘International Joint Commission’, ‘International Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Board’, and ‘International St. Lawrence River Board of Control’, ECO Strategy identified all media clippings that the keywords were mentioned in.

For context, this initial search was conducted for all of calendar year 2017 to better understand the media profile before the flooding event, during the event, and after. These lists were then examined to determine the content, tone, and level to which they used the Board as a source of information.

A second search focused on media coverage of the flooding event that did not “specifically” mention the IJC or the Board. This search focused on the keywords, ‘flood’, ‘flooding’, and ‘floods’, and clips were also collected anytime they mentioned the keywords, ‘Lake Ontario’, ‘St. Lawrence, St. Lawrence River’, ‘Toronto’, ‘New York’, ‘Cuomo’, ‘Montreal’, ‘Quebec’, or ‘Ontario’. This search excluded any articles that mentioned the keywords from the first search, this minimized the chances of “double-counting”.

The second search used a time horizon from March 1, 2017 until the end of September 2017. These dates were selected in order to secure media coverage leading up to the flooding and for the months following the event for analysis and context.

The criteria selected for the second search yielded a large amount of data, as the flooding event got considerable coverage. The data was useful in understanding who the media used as a source when the IJC or the Board was not cited.

This same search criteria were used for finding French language content.

The complete list has a total of 42,494 media clippings. This large number is attributable to almost 25,000 broadcast clips. Many of which should be discounted as “news” because while mentioning the issue, they were often best described as a “heads-up” in advance of the hourly news.
This is a systemic problem for monitoring services, as it is difficult for them to optimize this process and only include clippings if the keywords are the content of the show and not any mentioned advertising. Because of this, it is important to examine the full media coverage of the flooding event, but focus on print and online coverage.

**Limitations of the Data Set**

As mentioned previously, the large amount of broadcast clips can be attributed to how media monitoring services find broadcast clips.

Through these services, broadcast clippings will register as the same as if it was the actual coverage during a news program, but are often just an announcement (or “heads-up”) of what is to come. This explains why in the Excel document of media clippings, a clipping would have been registered during a recognizable television program and not during a news segment. As an example, both Just for Laughs and The Late Show with Stephen Colbert got media clips included in the report. It is unlikely the floodings were mentioned during programming of those shows, and it is likely that a “heads-up” was given of the news segment to come after the show.

Copyright related matters mean monitoring services usually only have access to broadcast clip “content” for up to a month after the release date (this allows for us to track when the predetermined keywords are mentioned), however does not allow for access to the footage that was broadcast at the time. While this illustrates the amount of coverage received, it does not enable us to provide reliable information for assessing the “tone” of what is reported.

**Print, Online, and Broadcast Media Coverage**

The total number of clippings that mentioned the St. Lawrence River-Lake Ontario flood was 42,494. Figure 2 shows the data specific to the total number of print, online, and broadcast media coverage the flood episode received in Canada and the United States in 2017.

In the US, broadcast media coverage accounted for most of the mentions in 2017, with significantly fewer print and online mentions. In Canada, there was less deviation between the amount of mentions through print, online, and broadcast media. However, broadcast media still provided the greatest amount of coverage. Again, this can be attributed to the nature of how broadcast clips are monitored.
Figures 3 and 4 show a breakdown of the types of media coverage in the US and Canada. From March 1, 2017 to September 30, 2017 in the US, broadcast media was the main media outlet, with 72.3% of the clippings collected from broadcast media. 16.6% of the clippings were online clippings, and 11.1% print mentions of the flood. In Canada, the coverage was more evenly distributed between the media outlets. Broadcast coverage accounted for 39.2% of the mentions; print coverage accounted for 33.1% of the mentions; and online coverage 27.6% of the mentions. It is useful to remember that the flooding was adjacent to some of the biggest media markets in Canada (Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal), which is likely a contributing factor to the extensive coverage that the flooding received.
Figure 5: The number of print and online media clippings that mentioned the flood each month in 2017 for Canada and the US from March to September.

Figure 5 shows the print and online media coverage from March 1, 2017 to September 30, 2017. This chart focuses on the months that the flooding was most covered in the media from March to September.

In Canada, the print and online coverage was greater than in the US from March to July. In August, the Canadian coverage declined as the US coverage increased. By this time, the water levels had started to decline, and the Board was still controlling the outflows. The Board decided that they would gradually reduce outflows to continue providing relief while balancing the safety risks associated with the high outflows. While the outflows were reduced, they were still the highest outflows recorded for that time. The slowness in changing outflow rates was criticized by many American communities, who were still experiencing impacts from the flood.

We consider this to be a reason to explain the increase in media coverage in August and September in the US, which is somewhat more obvious when comparing Figure 6 and 7.
Figures 6 and 7 illustrate the daily print and online media coverage from March to September 2017 (it should be noted that the chart scales from Figure 6 and 7 are different, as the Canadian coverage had days with higher peaks). The US media had more consistent level of coverage day-to-day, while the Canadian media had days of spiking coverage. Figures 8 and 9 on the next page show just the broadcast coverage and show similar spikes in coverage around the same dates.
Figure 8: US broadcast coverage from March to September 2017.

Figure 9: Canadian broadcast coverage from March to September 2017.
Figure 10: Monthly broadcast clippings that mentioned the flood each month from March to September 2017

Figure 10 shows the monthly number of broadcast clippings between Canada and the US. In each month between March and September of 2017, the broadcast media coverage was much greater in the US than Canada. Broadcast media coverage accounted for more than half of the media clippings collected, with 24,154 clippings collected through our media monitoring services.

The greatest volume of broadcast coverage was during the month of May when the flooding event occurred. In the US, the flood was mentioned 5,525 times, and in Canada, it was mentioned 4,147 times.

Figure 11: The number of Board and/or IJC mentions in print and online media each month in 2017.
Figure 11 illustrates monthly media coverage that mentioned the Board or IJC. May 2017 had the most flood coverage and the most mentions of the Board and/or IJC. Throughout the flood episode coverage, Canadian media mentioned the Board and/or the IJC more frequently and in total than the American coverage. After July, the number of Board mentions in the Canadian coverage declined, and in the US increased. This is indicative that as the flood coverage became more prevalent in the media, the Board and IJC were consistently used as a source and established themselves successfully as a key authority on the issue. More importantly from an issue management perspective, the US coverage evolved into a platform for elected politicians with opinions on Plan 2014.

**French Coverage**

We did not identify any French language coverage in US publications.

Figure 12 shows, the split between English and French coverage in the Canadian clips, with 71% coming from English language sources and 29% from French.

Of the 5,124 French language clips, roughly 1% (55 clips) mentioned the Board or IJC. This is significantly less than the frequency of mentions in English coverage, whether from the US or Canada.

It suggests, that the Board and IJC was less effective in their French language media outreach.

All this French coverage was identified as neutral clippings, and did not use the Board as a focus of their reporting.

The breakdown of the French language by media type coverage was not dissimilar to the entire data set. With the majority of clips from broadcast sources, with 28% coming from online media and 7% from print, as shown in Figure 13.

The French media coverage had similarities to the rest of the coverage that was seen in Canada, with local authorities and agencies being used as a source of information more frequently than they used the Board or IJC.

Building relationships with French media before future events, will better prepare the Board for any contact they have with them. Establishing the Board as a source of information with these contacts might help them be used as a source of information in the future, as frequently as they use local resources in their reporting.
Tone of the Print and Online Media Coverage

ECO Strategy examined the print and online clippings to determine the tone of the coverage. This section provides examples of specific coverage that was categorized as either positive, negative or neutral.

Negative tone coverage category included media clippings that mentioned the IJC or Board and blamed them for the flooding, often without any quote or responsive information/content from the Board incorporated in the media clip.

Neutral tone coverage includes media clippings that presented a balanced representation of the IJC/Board in the context of the flooding. While such clippings could contain negative views of the Board and IJC by the public and politicians, it would have been deemed to have been balanced, by being coverage utilizing information from the Board, (i.e. discussing how Plan 2014 was not the cause of the flooding).

Clippings that did not mention the IJC or the Board were categorized as neutral.

Positive tone clippings focused heavily on 1) the positive actions that the Board and IJC were taking and 2) language that commended the Board and IJC for specific actions and leadership.

An Excel file of the archive of clippings considered in this analysis was sent to the Board along with this report, and because of the size, is too large to attach is a direct appendix. For the sake of convenience column K (labeled – of interest) contains clippings that mentioned the Board or IJC, and we deem these to be noteworthy media stories. These
“highlights” are a cross-section of the articles, editorials, and letters-to-the-editor generated by journalists, citizens, politicians and government officials.

The approach to categorizing tone is further explained, by way of examples. Here by way of example are three articles categorized by ECO Strategy as having a positive tone are considered. In these three instances, media coverage demonstrates there is awareness of unprecedented rain and melting snow as the cause for the flooding.

It is worth noting, that these articles like others, respond negatively to US politicians who “scapegoat” the IJC and Plan 2014 as the cause of flooding.

The Watertown Daily Times’ (article) from June 1, 2017, ‘Panderer in chief: Cuomo sails along through falsehoods with hype over Plan 2014,’ was marked as having a positive tone. The article accurately describes the history and process of establishing Plan 2014, and discusses the problem of Gov. Andrew Cuomo politicizing the flooding. It mentions how he only became interested in 2014 once the flooding was in the public eye, “This is political opportunism at its worst. Mr. Cuomo has no evidence to back up his claims. He is using a natural disaster to raise his poll numbers in anticipation of a re-election bid — and, many believe, a potential run at the White House.” While this did not aggressively highlight the current work that was being done by the IJC and Board, but effectively explains the true cause of the floods, cites data/facts and the problem of politicians inaccurately commenting on it.

The Democrat and Chronicle’ (editorial) from June 24, 2017, ‘Stop blaming the International Joint Commission,’ is not dissimilar issues to the Watertown Daily Times story (above). It discusses how the politicians and shorelines residents have engaged in a campaign against the IJC and Plan 2014, and how their environmental watchdog journalists had gone through decades of lake level data, historical records and weather forecasts, to support the IJC and Board’s claim that the same flooding would have resulted before Plan 2014 was in place. The article states, “They crunched lots of numbers, and put them into context. A great example: Cuomo and others have asserted the Commission failed to release enough water from the lake during an optimal time in March. It is true, Orr and McDermott found, that the Commission let out less water than it did last year during the same period. But, the impact on the lake level was equal to the thickness of a nickel. That is not finger-wagging worthy.”

A letter to the editor (published in the Watertown Daily Times on July 1, 2017) is an example of media coverage categorized as having a positive tone. It demonstrates, how a resident interpreted the mix of inputs from the different authorities and public figures.
It should be noted that while many letters to publications were deemed positive like this one, other residents were outspoken in their opposition to Plan 2014 and the IJC. The letter, ‘Governor needs both sides of water levels issue,’ criticizes Governor Cuomo for failing to understand the true cause of the flooding, and shows a clear understanding of the purpose and role that Plan 2014 has.

Simply said, the St. Lawrence River all the way to the Bay of St. Lawrence is flooded; this leaves no room for anymore water. The system is full.

Along with many others along the southern shore of Lake Ontario, Mr. Cuomo is making a convenient scapegoat of Plan 2014. “There’s no doubt the IJC blew it.” Mr. Cuomo was quoted as saying in a story published Wednesday by the Watertown Daily Times. “I mean, they blew it! I don’t even see how you could debate that.”

The governor’s newfound interest in Plan 2014 and its effects is curious. While scientists and policymakers spent nearly two decades researching, drafting, adopting and implementing the new set of regulations, Mr. Cuomo avoided it like the plague. During the time when his concerns could have affected Plan 2014’s direction, he remained silent.

But now that there are headlines to be made, Mr. Cuomo has found his voice. He chooses this moment — safely after the policy has already been put into place — to speak out against Plan 2014 while pandering to like-minded individuals. And in the process, he discusses tens of millions of dollars being made available to homeowners and small businesses impacted by the flooding.

This is political opportunism at its worst. Mr. Cuomo has no evidence to back up his claims. He is using a natural disaster to raise his poll numbers in anticipation of a re-election bid — and, many believe, a potential run at the White House.

The governor’s action in this case is a textbook example of “Lake News.” He is wallowing in falsehoods while speaking about a complex problem in overly simplistic terms.

In the process, Mr. Cuomo foments dissent about this issue while ditching himself up as the hero of those adversely impacted by the flooding. He also uses an “us against them” argument when referring to Canadians.

So the governor positions himself as a champion by spreading bogus information and making a flimsy claim that his followers have been victims of a powerful institution headed in the wrong direction — all for political gain. Hmmm...that tactic has a familiar ring to it.

The discussion of setting aside money for mitigation efforts is certainly worthwhile, and those who have been impacted deserve this assistance. But Mr. Cuomo should have become engaged in this issue long before now. He could have worked with the state Legislature to create a fund to reduce problems. He also could have advised people living along the southern shore of Lake Ontario to prepare for any unintended consequences of implementing this policy.

But the governor has chosen to take advantage of a crisis by distorting the facts. He failed to provide any leadership when Plan 2014 was being developed and put into effect, and now he believes he can score points.

This shows he is much better politician than a public servant, and we’re all the sorrier for it.
Editorial: Stop blaming the International Joint Commission

Rather than continuing this futile exercise, leaders should be joining lakeshore residents in exploring ways to better protect coastal property in the years to come, while still respecting the rights of others who are affected by the rise and fall of this Great Lake.

Watchdog journalists Steve Orr and Meaghan McDermott have spent weeks meticulously examining the issues raised by U.S. Rep. Christopher Collins; officials from Monroe County, the town of Greece, and the village of Sodus; New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo; the Lake Ontario Riparian Alliance; and many individual citizens.

Like most journalists, Orr and McDermott are remarkably above average when it comes to being skeptical. As members of the fourth estate, it is their job to expose wrongdoing, whether intentional or not, by government and quasi-governmental entities. For Orr and McDermott, uncovering a conspiracy – particularly one with international flair, is akin to winning a record Powerball Jackpot.

That is why they have pored over decades of lake level data, historical records and weather forecasts. Rounding over backwards, they dug up Farmer’s Almanac when more scientifically sound measures failed to support the claims made against the International Joint Commission.

They crunched lots of numbers, and put them into context. A great example: Cuomo and others have asserted the Commission failed to release enough water from the lake during an optimal time in March. It is true. Orr and McDermott found, that the Commission let out less water than it did last year during the same period. But, the impact on the lake level was equal to the thickness of a nickel.

That is not finger-wagging worthy.

They followed a dozen trails, and none of them led to mismanagement or conspiracy by the Commission. None of them showed that Plan 2014 unleashed mayhem on the south shore of Lake Ontario.

Yet, there are threats of lawsuits, which would undoubtedly come with exorbitant costs for taxpayers. Relations with our neighbor to the north are frayed, as Canadian officials accuse our officials of fear-mongering and spreading falsehoods. There are efforts to take this unfounded argument all the way to the White House.

Stop.

There may be reasons to tweak or even overhaul Plan 2014. There might be steps that can be taken to boost natural barriers, or put manmade obstructions in the way of raging waters. Improvements in our emergency response to extreme weather are likely warranted. Homeowners and businesses might need to make some changes.

But trying to place blame for this year’s flooding is pointless. It is time to move on.

More: Andreatta: Blame God for the Lake Ontario flooding

More: Nearly 1 million sandbags placed to combat Lake Ontario flooding

More: Flooding hits hundreds of properties along Lake Ontario
Governor needs both sides of water levels issue

PUBLISHED: SATURDAY, JULY 1, 2017 AT 4:45 AM

I am extremely disappointed that Governor Cuomo has not taken the time to get the other side of the high water issue on Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. I have been involved in many issues regarding the St. Lawrence River and the control of water levels on both the lake and the river. For your information I was born and raised in the Rochester area, married a north country man and this part of the country has been my home for way longer than 50 years.

May I share a story, please? Growing up in the Rochester area, I very clearly recall going down to the lake, especially when the water was really high (this is before any control). There were many basic fishing camps on the shore. Some water was going under these structures, some of it was going through them. Then along came a number of wealthy individuals who bought up those fishing camps and replaced them with quite elaborate homes, building them exactly where high water would come off and on.

I often over the years felt that the local politicians closed their eyes, turned their backs and let people build exactly where they wanted to because those large facilities brought in large amounts of money in taxes.

In addition, Robert Moses came along and promised the people on the south shore of the lake that they never would have high water again. He was selling the Seaway. Incidentally, he promised us on our part of the river that we would have cheap electricity, economic growth, etc. That never happened either, and I can show you my electric bill to prove the point. So, we still have water up and down and when it rains as it did this spring.

You have only Mother Nature to scold.

The new plan is not the culprit. In fact, I hope that the new plan will correct the many years of damage done to the environment by what the south shore builders have done and to a degree are still doing. Thank you for listening and how about coming by our area some time? The St. Lawrence River is one magnificent body of water. Governor, the south shore people are not the only stakeholders.

Bea Schermerhorn

Hammond
Media clips that were marked as being negative in tone, contained coverage that either blamed the IJC or Plan 2014 as the cause of the extreme flooding, or reported on negative comments from the US politicians without mentioning statements from the Board explaining their side and the true cause.

The example on the next page, (an opinion piece (Op ed) from the Watertown Daily Times, June 14, 2017) ‘New Yorkers hurt on IJC actions on flooding,’ was written by the Commissioner of the New York Department of Environmental Conservation, states that they (NYDEC) agree that Plan 2014 was not the cause of the flooding, but does criticize the IJC for prioritizing commercial shipping interests over shoreline residents and, “not working with U.S. and Canadian governments to secure financial assistance necessary to implement the new water level management plan.” Coverage that only covered the statements of officials who blamed the IJC was the majority of negative identified coverage, like the examples below from Insurance Business Canada and WWNY-TV (online).
The last category of tone was neutral coverage, which represented the vast majority of media clips that mentioned the IJC or Board.

These clips had coverage typified by a balanced story, providing information from the perspective of different stakeholders. These clips covered the same statements from Collins and Cuomo that were provided as examples for negative clips, but also offered response or rebuttal statements from the IJC and Board.

The examples provided; an article from The Ogdensburg Journal, (June 23, 2017) ‘Cuomo and IJC continue written feud about Lake Ontario flooding, outflows,’ a story from
May 10th appearing on The Weather Network, ‘Floods along Canadian waterway to rise if U.S. politics wins,’ website illustrates the type of story we would categorize as balanced coverage, hence neutral tone.

The letter-based feud between Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and the International Joint Commission heated up as the governor called the binational group’s recent increase in outflows ‘woefully inadequate.’

“No New York families who live and work along the shoreline must be priority number one,” Gov. Cuomo said, in a letter on June 13.

The IJC countered on June 20 with a letter stating that doing so would hurt downstream residents and businesses and make boating and commercial navigation unsafe, which would hurt New York businesses affected by shipping stoppages.

The IJC’s letter, signed by Gordon W. Walker and Lana Pollock, the IJC’s Canadian and American section chairs, also noted the outflows were at a record level of 360,200 cubic feet per second when the group increased it 2 percent to 367,300 cubic feet per second.

“These record-high outflows, ‘Inadequate’ as you may believe them to be, are equivalent to more than three times the flow over Niagara Falls,” the IJC letter said. “These record-high outflows only became possible as Ottawa River flows declined, providing room to increase Lake Ontario releases without re-flooding residents in Quebec.”

The new letter continues a war of words in recent weeks by the two parties about responsibility for the floods.

Gov. Cuomo has blamed the group for the flooding, stating it “blew it” with its response and for not acting sooner.

The IJC countered that the heavy rainfall in the region in April and May, a record for any two consecutive months, is the primary reason for the flooding. The group noted that it had no way of predicting such rainfall and no mechanism for removing excess water last winter if it had known.

The governor’s June 13 letter — his latest — said the flooding has caused damage in multiple counties, affecting roadways and wastewater treatment systems, and eroding natural buffers like parks and beaches.

He also called on the IJC to increase outflows further, “even if it means shipping must be halted temporarily.”

“The safety and security of New Yorkers requires no less,” Gov. Cuomo said.

The IJC’s response also noted that its responsibilities were to a wide range of interests along the lake and St. Lawrence River system.

It also said that increasing outflows to the maximum possible theoretical level, 406,100 cubic feet per second, would only remove 0.2 inches of water per day from Lake Ontario, while increasing Lake St. Louis levels 14 inches for the duration of the increased flows.

The outflow level, which has never been tested at that level, is limited by the flow through the hydropower plants downstream at Beauharnois and Céades in Quebec, according to Frank L. Bovacqua, public information officer for the IJC.

“We note your position that the well-being of New York shoreline residents is paramount, even if it means other downstream residents and businesses will receive greater damage and that businesses in the state of New York and in neighboring regions will bear the substantial cost of a temporary halt in Stewey shipping,” the IJC letter said. “We assure you that your views will be shared with the Board.”

As of Thursday, water levels were at 248.56 feet, about 4.3 inches below the peak set at the end of May. The level was about two feet above long-term averages for this time of year.
Floods along Canadian waterway to rise if U.S. politics wins

Scott Sutherland
Meteorologist/Science Writer

Wednesday, May 10, 2014, 1:19 PM - As communities along Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River remain on alert due to flooding, it’s not the potential for rain in the forecast, but a possible cross-border dispute between Canada and the U.S., that has been causing renewed concerns.

With all the rain that’s fallen across Ontario and Quebec so far this spring, it may not be surprising to see higher than normal water levels on Lake Ontario, and is hear about the significant flooding along the St. Lawrence, but as it turns out, this isn’t just about the recent weather.

According to NOAA’s Great Lakes Environmental Laboratory, as of the month of April, Lake Ontario water levels have been around 63 centimeters above average for this time of year. That is the highest they’ve reached in since 1999, and they are expected to rise even higher through May and June before falling off again afterward.

Current water levels in the lake are a result of the several factors. The rain that has fallen so far this spring, including the latest bouts, have certainly contributed. Runoff from the spring melt also plays a large role. For full disclosure as to why there is so much water currently in the lake, however, one has to take into account the conditions further downstream, and what may be the local point of a breaching cross-border political battle involving New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, local New York politicians, the Canada-U.S. International Joint Commission (IJC) and possibly even U.S. President Donald Trump.

Why is the possible political battle over Lake Ontario water levels, something that would seem to be governed by nature, rather than politics? Because the amount of water that discharges out of the lake has been under human control since 1900, at the direction of the IJC’s International Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Board, and through Connaught’s Moses-Saunders Power Dam.

The International Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Board has been following a carefully considered set of rules for water discharge for decades now, which has governed how water is discharged from the Dam ever since it was built, and these rules have been updated by the Lake Ontario St. Lawrence River Plan 2014 (aka Plan 2014), which came into effect in January of 2017.

These rules have been in place to keep the waters of Lake Ontario and along the St. Lawrence River at levels that are consistent with historical records, to ensure that shipping lanes remain open and accessible, that wetland ecology is preserved, that the waterways remain available for recreational use, and that lakesides communities are protected - as well as possible - from the impacts of flooding due to severe weather.

The problem, as it stands now, is that communities along the shores of Lake Ontario have been under flood watches and warnings for some time now, as the elevated water levels inundate beaches, properties and roadways. Resulting to this, politicians in New York State, some of whom have opposed Plan 2014 for years, are saying that the plan is to blame for the flooding in their communities.

“Plan 2014 has been an utter disaster for Lake Ontario taxpayers and communities since it was approved in the final minutes of the Obama Administration,” New York Congressman Chris Collins said in a statement on April 25. “Both the property damage and overflow of debris into Lake Ontario that I inspected today would have been avoided. I came here today to assure local officials and Lake Ontario homeowners that I am working with the Trump Administration to reform the IJC and repeal Plan 2014 as soon as possible.”

“Within the implementation of Plan 2014, we will continue to see magnified, drastic changes in water levels and property owners in shoreline communities across Wayne County will be left with no guaranteed compensation,” said NY Congressman John Katko, in a joint statement with Congressman Collins. “Together with Rep. Collins, I’ve fought against Plan 2014 from the start and this week we’ve urged the administration to permanently withdraw from Plan 2014 to avoid further damage.”

On May 2, Congressman Collins announced on his website that New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, after visiting affected areas along the shores of Lake Ontario, had joined his fight against Plan 2014.

According to the Toronto Star, however, Frank Bevacqua, a spokeslaman for the International Joint Commission, said that water levels on the lake would have been nearly identical under Plan 1988, the set of rules that was in place before Plan 2014 took effect. The reason for the elevated waters now isn’t which water control plan is in effect, but rather the conditions on the St. Lawrence and in Lac Saint-Louis, downstream of Lake Ontario.

Over the past week, the Ottawa River has reached a historic peak, as excellent tributaries along its length caused the river to rise, with water levels in Lac Saint-Louis have exceeded the previous maximum for this time of year, and all of that water has joined together as these watersheds drained into the St. Lawrence River, it has caused record flooding in the city of Montreal.

While the recent rainfall did play a role in all of this, waterways throughout eastern Ontario and southern Quebec had already been running at elevated levels, due to a combination of the rainfall totals so far this season, along with runoff, as the significant winter snowfall trails across these regions succumbed to the warmer spring weather.

At the moment, the discharge from the Moses-Saunders Dam is reportedly below average, but any increase to that discharge rate, right now, would be a disaster for communities downstream, including metropolitan Montreal.

As of last Friday, the State of New York submitted a request to the IJC to increase the flow of water from Lake Ontario, but by Monday, according to the Montreal Gazette, the board had rejected the request after weighing the impacts to the lake shore communities against the potential impacts downstream.

“We are going to be starting to ramp up as soon as the Ottawa River starts to go down,” Gail Pavan, Canadian secretary for the International Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Board, told the Gazette.
Figures 14 and 15 show the frequency of clippings categorized by tone type that mentioned the Board or IJC.

As cited above, the tone of the print and online coverage in both Canada and the US was mainly neutral. The dominance of a neutral tone of the coverage, shows that most of the media coverage provided a balanced representation of the Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Board regarding what was responsible for the flood.
This reflects well on the Board’s efforts to successfully provide timely and substantive information which explained their mandate and role in determining outflows, while balancing the impacts to both upstream and downstream communities.

There was more negative coverage in the US than in Canada. In the US, 17.2% of the coverage perceived the Board as negative, while in Canada only 3% of coverage positioned the Board in a negative manner.

Many small communities in New York were impacted by the flood, and the citizens blamed the Board for the damage to their homes and communities. While the discussion of impacts on the Canadian side often engaged commentary from the local Conservation Authority, which have a well-known responsibility with water quantity and flooding issues.

Media clippings that categorized as negative in tone, often featured Governor Andrew Cuomo, who openly criticized the Board and Plan 2014. Typically, these stories were one-sided, not properly explaining the Board’s role, or that due to the wet conditions flooding would have also occurred under the previous plan.

Very few clippings in the Canadian media mentioned Plan 2014. Rather, they explained the Board’s role in determining outflows, and accepted that the flooding was due to the extreme weather events.

Figure 16 below shows a further breakdown of the frequency of tone by category, by media type and country.

![Figure 16: The tone of the print and online coverage in US & Canada](image-url)
Social Media

ECO Strategy’s social media analysis considers how effective the Board was in using these platforms as tools to better communicate with the public.

Elements reviewed include a breakdown of the growth of their page, the demographics of their followers, and the reception of the Facebook posts that were made throughout the flooding event. The Board did not have a Twitter page.

**Facebook Page Growth**

Figure 17 represents the number of followers and pattern of change that the Board’s Facebook presence experienced in a two-year period beginning July 2016.

The Board page had maintained a consistent following of around 750 followers between July 2016 until May 2017, the steep increase in recruitment and growth was coincident with the flooding event and arguably higher visibility of the Board. It is important to note that the Board’s Facebook page has a very high retention rate, experiencing only 10 unfollows in all of 2017. It notable that the attrition rate is low which suggests there is little cause for concern, regarding followers migrating from the site.

![Figure 17: Total Page Followers from July 2016 to July 2018](image)

It reasonable to surmise that as the flooding crisis developed, people were searching for information and turned to social media as a source of news and information related to the floods. The Board was able to supply that. The number of followers started to steadily increase at the end of April, which then hit over 1,100 by the beginning of May.
Significant growth continued in May 2017 with an average gain of about 350 new followers per week. By the end of the month, the page had over 2,300 followers, increasing its total following by 236% from the previous month.

Follower recruitment was maintained at a similar rate in June 2017, hitting 2,800 followers by month end. This high rate of growth slowed post June, but new followers continued to be secured. By the end of the summer, the Facebook page had over 3,000 followers, representing a 389% increase in followers for the five months beginning in April to the end of August.

**Net Growth**

Figure 18 shows the pattern of recruitment to the Board’s Facebook page between July 2016 and June 2017. Obviously, the high profile of the issue and frequency of Board mentions in the media created the conditions for people to learn about the Board and their Facebook account.

The volume of net followers is an effective measurement to show the retention rate of the page’s followers. (The number of net followers is the number of new followers minus the number of unfollows that the page received.) Rates of loss “unfollows” is a recognized indicator that advises whether a Facebook page needs to make any content changes.

As observed, previously the Board has a very high retention rate, with only 10 unfollows in all of 2017. (red triangles along the horizontal axis indicate when someone has migrated away) The low attrition rate is notable and suggests there is currently little cause for concern regarding losing followers. Though efforts to secure more followers would not be wasted.

![Figure 18: Total New Page Followers from July 2016 to July 2018](image)
**New Followers**

Figure 19 focuses on the number of new followers that the Board’s Facebook page received from the beginning of April 2017 until the end of July. The red dots correspond to the days that media releases were distributed.

While there are days when new follower enrollment peaking coincident with a Board a media release being posted, it is not consistent enough to suggest that the media releases were the reason for the increase in followers.

![Daily New Facebook Followers](image)

**Figure 19:** New Daily Page Followers from beginning of April 2017 to end of July 2017

**Media Release Facebook Posts**

Figure 20 shows the Facebook reach that was gained for each of the media releases that the Board posted to their Facebook page, along with a legend corresponding the column number to the date of the media release.
Figure 20: Facebook reach of the media releases posted

The reach of the posts was inconsistent with a broad range of success between the 13 releases that were posted to Facebook (the May 18th media release was never posted to Facebook).

The reach ranged from as low as 1709 people reached on the June 14 post, to 9595 people being reached from the May 26 post.

It is notable that media release #3 posted on Facebook on May 26, 2017 was unique, as it contained a picture, while the other postings were limited with only a link to the release. This image containing post had the best performance (greatest reach) of any Board Facebook post (in the study period), although it is a small sample size the outcome is suggestive of the value of the inclusion of high quality images.

**Follower Demographics**

Understanding the demographics of an organizations Facebook following can be useful, helping better understand where the interest comes from, and potential how to better connect with their existing and potential audience.

Should the Board want to increase its profile, a more in-depth version of this type of analysis would help determine where and how to prospect for new followers.
Figure 21 indicates that 56% of followers are male and 42% are female. This underrepresentation of female followers (which from our experience appears to be unexpected) is worth greater attention if efforts to increase the number of followers is to be undertaken.

Figure 22 shows the ages of the current followers, with individuals in the 45-54 and 55-64 year ranges making up more than half of the total followers.

Figure 23 allows for the easy comparison of these core demographics.

Figure 24 shows the distribution of followers by country. 63% of followers are from the US, and 36% are Canadian.

While more US residents use Facebook as a source for information, we would suggest caution in using this data, with the Canadian population outnumbers US residents in the drainage area.
Content & Style

The fourteen Board media releases produced between April 25, 2017 and November 2, 2017 successfully imparted information to the public (stakeholder and journalists). This included updated water level data, informing the public of planned increases and decreases in outflows, explaining its mandate and role in regulating water levels and determining outflows according to Plan 2014, drawing comparisons to previous years’ water levels to put the flooding into perspective, and clearly and frequently explaining a key message - that similar flooding would have occurred, regardless of what regulatory plan was in place.

The messages that the Board communicated during the flooding event were effective, being focused, consistent, with a level of technical complexity suitable for communicating with a wide range of audiences.

Faced with a complex topic, the Board often had to use complex technical terminology in media releases, interviews and social media posts. However, this type of language was used sparingly, consistently, (seemingly) only when necessary and appeared to allow for complex material to be easily understood by stakeholders and accurately reported by journalists.

The first media release distributed on April 25, 2017 would have benefited from being distributed earlier (and this will be addressed in the next section). That said, the content was on message and began both the introduction of the Board to those unaware of its existence and the establishment of the Board as an authority or expert.

The release immediately and unambiguously states that, “Extreme wet weather,” was the cause of the flooding and continues to clearly layout the water level heights and how they had increased.

The third paragraph supports the position that Plan 2014 was not the cause of the flooding and that similar levels would have persisted under the old plan, while explaining what the plans benefits/merits with respect to minimizing and balancing the flooding impacts in the region.

The next release, distributed on May 2, 2017, continued to explain and reinforced how the extreme weather was the cause of the flooding, citing water levels from previous years, and providing a thorough description of the criteria that Plan 2014 has in place to respond to the levels.

Despite US media coverage beginning to contain commentary from New York Representative Collins and New York Governor Cuomo (blaming the Board and Plan 2014 for the flood), the Board managed the issue well and successfully emerged as an authority, with frequent statements by Board members appearing in the media rebutting the politicians claims.
ECO Strategy would attribute the measured tone and consistency of the message in the Board’s media releases as well as the timely responses to journalists and politicians to significantly blunting politician’s efforts to misdirect blame – from natural causes to Plan 2104.

The Board’s communications efforts were successful at informing stakeholders of the levels of flooding and actions taken to alleviate the high levels, and although not their mandate they did not position themselves as an authority on how people could safely respond to (or mitigate) the flooding.

While likely intentional, as on-ground support is not the Board’s direct responsibility, there was an unrealized opportunity to better serve the public. In the early media releases, it was frequently stated that, “Coastal jurisdictions should prepare for the possibility of major coastal flooding.” While this call for caution is necessary and frequent throughout the Board’s communications, there little if any concrete information on how these jurisdictions (and residents) should prepare or “take caution,” which was also frequently advised. The Board could have been more forthcoming with information and advice.

The online social media community that the Board fostered and grew during the flooding event evolved into a robust Facebook page. While the messages and information appeared to be quite technical, the accompanying information that was provided allowed for the public to be informed and engaged.

The open and non-judgmental tone of the Board’s page allowed for frequent comments from the public, which the Board was fantastic at responding to. Several times commenters noted how impressed they were by the frequency and level of response that they were receiving from the Board to their questions and comments.
Timing

During the flood episode, the Board was usually very timely in communicating with stakeholders. This improved through the duration of the flood cycle and as stated previously a quicker response in the early stages of the flooding, would have enhanced the stakeholders (and journalist) understanding of the reasons for the flooding.

By mid-April 2017 flooding had started and was getting significant media attention. Despite responding to earlier media interview requests, but it was not until April 25, that the Board distributed their first media release.

A more rigorous campaign to explain the real cause (unprecedented rainfall and high water levels was the cause of the floods, and that Plan 2014 was not) of the flooding would have provided an inoculant from attacks.

By April 21, 2017, news articles appeared with comments from New York Rep. Chris Collins, blaming Plan 2014 for the flooding, and then Governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo repeating similar claims to the public and media.

We contend an initial media release when the flooding first started might have limited or suppressed these opinions, and minimized a distraction during a time of crisis.

It is worth noting that the time of day when the Board posted their media releases to their Facebook page varied and data did not indicate any clear direction on when a post would be most successful. Some early morning posts performed well while others less so. Afternoon postings also performed arbitrarily.

Media Release & Interview Effectiveness

Board media releases were often quite lengthy. While this provided an opportunity to deliver a complete message, the volume of content often overshadowed the key messages.

This became more obvious and challenging as the flooding episode continued and the media releases leaned towards reiterating a lot of information, it became more difficult to pick out what the “news” and the key messages of the specific release was.

The titles of the eight media releases distributed between June 2 to August 18 continued either ‘increasing outflows,’ or, ‘maximized outflows, making it for the average reader it would be difficult to discern if the release was new or identify the new information

Additionally, the use of repetitive titles (perceived that nothing is new) increases the risk of being ignored by journalists.

While understood that the increase in outflows needed to be communicated, greater variability in how it was stated will ensure the release is considered.
The Board staff dealing with the media, becomes more comfortable and has increased dexterity when dealing with the media as the flooding continued. This observation flows from the Board’s presence in the media, Board attributed copy appears more frequently as statements and responses to media inquiries, rather than reporters “cutting and pasting” media release copy.

There is no reason to expect that responses to the media from the Board were not quick, obviously the frequency of the Board comments being reported is an indicator. The Board’s Rapid Communications Protocol provided clear guidelines on how the media is dealt with and responded to, with a clear division of responsibilities and expertise.

The areas of expertise under the current protocol cover the main areas of interest for the flooding event, including IJC Policy, Plan 2014, benefits & impacts, and operations. This list leaves room for developing more areas of expertise, including specific environmental concerns or Government affairs (responding to politicians like Cuomo or Collins).

Creating and developing more areas of expertise will further help the Board in speed and accuracy when responding to any unique media request that might arise. While roles are clear on which Board member responds (by area of expertise), the protocol does not currently have guidelines for backup roles, should the primary Board member be unavailable (or double booked) for comment or interview.

The approval process for media releases and other communications from the Board is not abundantly clear in the Strategic Communication Plan or the Rapid Communication Protocol documents. The Strategic Communication Plan does state, ‘All Board members should have the opportunity to review media releases before they are issued unless the timing is critical, in which case, releases may be approved by the Board co-chairs.’ Clarification of this approval process, particularly when responding to “crisis” communications scenarios, would better ensure an accurate and timely response to the public and media.

The Board appears organized in how they track and respond to interview requests. Efforts to streamline approvals and turnaround time would be to the organization’s advantage. This was evident in the high number of Board media quotes that appeared which were different than the media release copy.

The ‘LOSLR Interview requests,’ document provided by the Board is an account of the media contacts that requested comments and interviews, the publication they were from, whether it was completed, some contact information, and the date.

While a useful record, it could benefit from having prompts to collect more information. It will never be easier to get a journalist’s full contact information than when they are making an inquiry.
Alternative Communications

The current communication tools that the Board uses have been successful at building an engaged community on Facebook, and through traditional media. The comments that appeared (often as subtext) indicate the Board and IJC have established themselves as a reliable and trusted information source.

While Facebook is a useful social media tool for reaching residents in the US and Canada, the platform is fairly narrow is the demographic it attracts. While residents spend a lot of time on Facebook, it is Twitter where journalists and politicians make their online presence felt. Not using this social media tool is a missed opportunity to tell the media of what is happening and to educate politicians of different issues (like the cause of the flooding in 2017).

The communication plans and protocols in place would benefit from being updated with the experiences learned from after the 2017 floods, and shape their communication planning accordingly. A review of these materials and changes based on them will allow for quicker responses in the future.
October 24 De-Brief and Discussion related to ECO Strategy report and responses to matter raised in the October 1, 2018 Communication Committee Comments
Overview

- ECO Strategy contends that the Board emerged from the 2017 flooding episode with a much-enhanced profile, with the media scan indicating that it was perceived as a non-partisan and credible source of reliable information.

- This is especially commendable, considering the negative comments made by high profile US elected officials about Plan 2014.

- Your efforts were effective during the crisis, as there are always opportunities to learn and tweak

- Our advice and recommendations were geared towards minimizing need for additional resources.
Summary of Media Clips

| Table 1: Summary of Media Clips |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Total Flood Clips             | 42,494           |
| US                            | 24,981           |
| Canada                        | 17,513           |
| Can - English                 | 12,389           |
| Can - French                  | 5,124            |
| Online                        | 9,081            |
| Print                         | 8,534            |
| Broadcast                     | 24,879           |
| Did Not Mention Board/IJC     | 36,709           |
| Did Mention Board/IJC         | 5,652            |
| Tone of Board/IJC Mentions    |                  |
| Positive                      | 124              |
| Negative                      | 255              |
| Neutral                       | 3,893            |
Timeline of print and online media clippings that mentioned the flood each week in 2017 for Canada and the US from March to September. Red dots correspond to the dates of media releases.
Figure 2: Print, online, and broadcast media coverage in Canada and the US in 2017.

Figure 3: Print, online, and broadcast media coverage in the US from March 1, 2017 to September 30, 2017.

Figure 4: Print, online, and broadcast media coverage in Canada from March 1, 2017 to September 30, 2017.
Figure 6: The print and online American coverage from March to September 2017.

Figure 7: The print and online Canadian coverage from March to September 2017.
Total Facebook Page Followers from July 2016 to July 2018 (below)
Any discussion needs to be considered in the context of the Communication Plan elements

- **Planning:** Decide what level of public profile is desired by the Board, and determine appropriate budget and resources required to achieve the Board’s communication goals.

- **Information:** Increase general public awareness of the IJC and the Board - who we are and what we do.

- **Information:** Communicate accurately and in a timely fashion about the actions of the Board and the reason for those actions.

- **Education:** Explain how natural factors and regulation affect water levels and flows.

- **Education:** Increase understanding of the need to expect and prepare for fluctuations in levels and flows.

- **Consultation:** Consistently seek out, consider and respond to the views and concerns of all stakeholders.
Recommendations

There were **48 recommendations** made

- Communications Plans & Protocols
- Media Relations
- Content & Style
- Social Media
  - Facebook
  - Twitter
- Crisis Communications

- The communications committee reviewed the report and the recommendations in detail, and asked us several questions which we will address later
Key Recommendations

1. Review and refresh their Strategic Communication Plan and Rapid Response Plan considering what was learned in 2017 and after.

2. Provide ongoing, relevant content to the Board social media channels to keep them fresh and updated.

3. Expand social media interaction to include Twitter, which will enable more timely reach to journalists and politicians than other channels.

4. Continue and (if possible) increase the Facebook page engagement, which has shown itself to be a valuable information channel for residents. Facebook is a proven tool for reaching members of shoreline communities, both for hearing news and asking questions. Facebook should be continued to be used as a communication tool.

5. Having a quick response plan during a time of crisis will ensure the Board has the ability to get its own messages out first and frequently.

6. Better coordination between media outreach and the social media channels to ensure new information is provided to all stakeholders in a timely manner.

7. Regular ongoing contact with stakeholders to provide updates and maintain relationships.
Response to the Communications Committee’s October 1 review
A) Communication Plans and Protocols (Recommendations 4,5,6)

From the Oct 1 Communication Committees Comments - ECO Strategy concurs with the observation in the note

1) The strategic approach to the content and messaging is something that should be in place prior to the next crisis.

2) Once the Board is comfortable with the strategic approach, it should delegate implementation to a small group of Board members and staff who would have a freer hand to organize briefings and provide responses in a timely fashion.
A) Communication Plans and Protocols (Recommendations 4, 5, 6)

- We view the outreach work as being key way to both educate your stakeholder audiences and strengthen/foster relations.
- Can inoculate the Board - proper proactive outreach can shape positive politicians’ perspectives while enhancing your experience - since you are doing it on your schedule.
- The specifics of the timing would be part of a strategic communication plan.
- Do not attempt to “over-brief” or be seen wasting politicians’ time - but use ‘briefings’ to reinforce a reputation for competence, timeliness and usefulness.
- Build on existing resources.
A) Communication Plans and Protocols (Recommendations 4,5,6)

Practical Considerations

- What resources do you have and are they being effectively deployed?
- Who can you share resources/assets with?
- How much effort do you want to exert - consider who needs to be “Briefed” is it the politician or the staffer
- What is your track record of inviting politicians to events, a relatively simple tool for building good working relations
- Are you getting all the value from your existing efforts and channels
B) Media Relations (Recommendation #5)

- ECO Strategy concurs with the idea of efficiency improvements and streamlining the approvals and production schedule for turning around media releases.
- The point about **brevity** speeding translation turnaround is noteworthy.
- Ensuring the quality and suitability of the distribution list for media releases is critical.
- There are choices to be made for some information that can be circulated in a manner requiring less effort (Social Media post, or Media Release).
C) Content & Style (Recommendation #5)

- Securing a relevant photo library is commendable.

- *ECO Strategy could assist by providing examples of effective visual materials, even if they are not directly related to the Board’s subject matter.*

- See provided samples of representational images (next several slides).
HOW ICE JAMS FORM

The conditions for an ice jam are created when fragments of broken ice and slush are swept against a section of solid ice cover.

Broken ice

Solid ice layer

River flow

Riverbed

The broken ice builds up a thick layer, primarily on the bottom surface of the solid ice, which constrains and slows water flow.

Water rises and can cause flooding at the point of the jam or a sudden release of fast-flowing ice and water if the jam gives way.
How Much Rain Has Fallen in Texas?

According to the National Weather Service in Fort Worth, Texas, over 35 trillion gallons of rain have fallen in the month of May. Here’s some perspective on that number:

35,000,000,000,000 GALLONS

- Enough to cover the entire state of Texas in 8 inches of water.
- Enough to fill up California’s 200 largest surface reservoirs 3X to capacity.
- Enough to supply the entire world’s population with 10,000 days of water if everyone drank eight 8-ounce glasses a day.

Sources: National Weather Service Fort Worth, California Department of Water Resources.
Credit: Nelson Marra / NBC
2018 Ohio River Facts
(at Cincinnati)

Days above flood stage: 15*
*(2 floods, Feb and April)

Only in 1937 (21 total) and 2011 (15 total) was the Ohio above flood stage for as many/more days.

Ups and Downs: Since 1950, this winter/spring has been the most active (defined as max to min stage difference each month):
- Above flood stage in 3 separate months
- Above Action Stage in 4 separate months

More Ohio River facts at:
weather.gov/in/ohioriverhistory

Did You Know? River gages are typically operated by the U.S. Geological Survey, with additional funding by state/local agencies.
D) Social Media (Recommendation #1)

Facebook

- We see the Q&A material as being responsive to non-crisis situations and indeed an internal resource saving response.
- It was not suggested as a replacement for the regular updates.
- A added or higher level of “human touch” would be recommended during more crisis-like situation or times. If for no other reason than to reassure stakeholder that the IJC was not on “cruise control” and capable people are paying attention and are engaged.
D) Social Media (Recommendation #2)

- Twitter may not have the same globe-spanning reach as Facebook, but one group of professional users has adopted it en masse: journalists.

- Columbia Journalism Review
  https://www.cjr.org/the_media_today/journalists-on-twitter-study.php

- Our recommendation was based on the relationship between Twitter and Journalists
Response to two specific ?’s

- If the Board could accomplish only three things in 2019 - What would they be?
- ECO Strategy could assist by providing more geographic breakdown in its media analysis
If the Board could accomplish only three things in 2019 - What would they be?

- Ensure that the Stakeholder Outreach Strategic Plan is current and operational (Recommendations 4, 5 & 6) with priority audiences and the most effective outreach avenues identified
- Prepare a Crisis Communication Plan (built to mesh and complement the existing Board Communication Plan ensuring efficient use of resources)
- Tune up the media outreach mechanics - this would include streamlining the media release (communication materials) process and ensuring the media distribution process is current
ECO Strategy could assist by providing more geographic breakdown in its media analysis:

- Did coverage differ significantly in different locations (beyond US/Canada, English/French differences)?
  - The significant attention paid to the specific events in very large media markets (cities) like Toronto and Montreal resulted in large amounts of coverage from more media outlets.
  - We attempted (unsuccessfully) to analyze the information on a per capita basis (Challenged by question related to the boundaries of the study area, population #'s and # of media outlets)
  - As well there was national coverage in Canada (less so in the USA) via services like Canadian press wire stories appearing in many far afield media outlets (i.e. Vancouver and Calgary)

- Did analysis differentiate between coverage of flooding across Quebec and coverage of flooding in areas affected by Board actions?
  - The data doesn’t really allow us to answer this question, since we didn’t collect comprehensive data from areas beyond the Board related area. That said, similar to the rest of the Canadian coverage, local authorities were more predominantly used as a source of information than the IJC or Board.
Celebrate your Success

- In this vein, special note should be made of the online commentary that praised the Board for consistently and rapidly providing fact-based and “unbiased” comments and info.

- It is noteworthy that the consistent and credible deployment of fact-based information saw many instances where the US media relied on the Board positioning related to Plan 2014 as providing important data and “truths” as responses to US elected officials criticism of the Plan.

- Earned media value of the IJC/Board mentions is at a minimum of $3 million