

LAKE CHAMPLAIN-RICHELIEU RIVER FLOOD STUDY, 2017-2021

A century of actions and impacts of flooding in the basin

The Lake Champlain Richelieu River flood study will make recommendations to the International Joint Commission (IJC) in 2021 on implementing improvements to binational real-time flood forecasting efforts, as well as measures to reduce the impacts of flooding on communities and property-owners. The study is part of a long-standing history of IJC involvement in the basin.

The history of flooding in the basin

Over the past century, multiple flooding events have occurred in the basin: the most devastating one in 2011. In response, the governments of Canada and United States have made a series of requests to the IJC to study and provide recommendations to mitigate flooding. For example:

THE 1930S

A request by governments led the IJC to recommend construction of a dam to address flooding. Work proceeded on what is known today as the Fryers Island dam just downstream of St. Jean sur Richelieu, Quebec. With the outbreak of WWII, work was halted and the remedial works required to make the dam operational were never completed.

Did You Know?

The International Joint Commission does not make decisions—that's up to governments. It provides unbiased, factual advice based on the best science available, and the perspectives of the public, interest groups as well as federal, provincial and state agencies.

THE 1970S

Study results prompted the IJC to propose that a gated structure be built in the section of the river at St. Jean sur Richelieu to regulate flows, but left it up to the governments to determine the political desirability for this structural solution. This proposed structure was not supported by the states of Vermont and New York. Though federal governments did not come to an agreement on implementing a structural solution for the flooding problem, each was supportive of the IJC recommendation to implement a binational flood forecasting and warning system along with other non-structural actions to address flooding.

A timeline of recent events

2012

Following catastrophic flooding along the shorelines of Lake Champlain and the Richelieu River in Quebec during the spring and summer of 2011, the governments of Canada and the United States asked the IJC to review the causes and potential solutions to flooding and to recommend actions to minimize impacts of future flooding in communities across the basin.

2013

The IJC created the International Lake Champlain-Richelieu River Plan of Study Workgroup, which developed a Plan of Study to explore the causes, impacts, risks and potential solutions to flooding in the basin.

2015

To address the Plan of Study, the IJC created the International Lake Champlain-Richelieu River Technical Working Group. Its final report identified that data are needed to develop both a flood forecasting system and static maps that show where flooding would occur at different lake levels.

2017

In response to a further request from Canadian and US governments to continue its study of flooding in the basin, the IJC created the International Lake Champlain Richelieu River Study Board to conduct a five-year study of ways to mitigate flooding in the basin.

What we can expect from the 2017-2021 flood study

A unique aspect of this study is its emphasis on recommending implementable solutions that can offer real, long-term benefits for managing and mitigating the impacts of floods on Lake Champlain and the Richelieu River. To do this, the study is committed to learning from the past experiences and current perspectives of citizens, speaking with community leaders and organizations about economic and environmental concerns, as well as consulting decision makers in federal, state and provincial governments.

These important social, political and economic considerations will be backed by modern scientific models and analyses that improve binational real-time flood forecasting as well as a collaborative tool to support effective decision-making on reducing impacts of flooding. As a result, the study's final recommendations are intended to reflect the concerns of basin communities on both sides of the border and support approaches to reduce the impacts of flooding.

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