
INTERNATIONAL RAINY LAKE BOARD OF CONTROL (IRLBC) INTERNATIONAL RAINY RIVER WATER POLLUTION BOARD (IRRWPB) NEWSLETTER 3rd Quarter 2009

This newsletter provides a summary of the activities of the International Rainy Lake Board of Control (IRLBC) and the International Rainy River Water Pollution Board (IRRWPB) during the 3rd Quarter (July-September) of 2009.

Basin Conditions and Regulation

The third quarter of 2009 provided yet another good example of the highly variable weather that the basin has experienced in recent years. Rainfall over the 30-day period from July 23rd, although not consistent through the period, was the third wettest for this time period in 104 years of record. Then, in contrast, the next 30-day period experienced persistent well below normal rainfall, such that this period (starting August 23rd) was the sixth driest for this time of year in 104 years of record.

Water levels, inflows and outflows for both Namakan and Rainy lakes are shown on the attached graphs. Namakan Lake started the quarter at 34 percent of its operating band and with outflow being reduced to counter the declining inflow. In response to the wet period starting in late July as noted above, the outflow was increased in mid-August such that the lake level was just contained below the Upper Rule Curve (URC), although the level on Crane Lake did marginally exceed this level briefly. During the subsequent dry period noted above, outflow was reduced from the August high of 258 m³/s down to a low of 56 m³/s; even so, the lake level reached only 7 percent of its operating band before recovering to 44 percent of band at the end of September. Rainy Lake started the quarter at 60 percent of its band and with its outflow also being reduced to counter the declining inflow. As a result of the wet period, Rainy Lake exceeded its URC for eight days in August, in spite of the outflow being increased from below 240 m³/s to just over 840 m³/s. The maximum deviation above the URC was 3 cm (1.2 in). During the subsequent dry period, Rainy outflow was reduced to less than 120 m³/s. Rainy Lake's level fell to 28 percent of its operating band before recovering to 48 percent of band at the end of September.

Annual Basin Meetings and Tour – August 25-27, 2009

The Boards held their annual joint meetings in International Falls on August 25 and 27 to address water issues in the Rainy-Namakan and Rainy River basins. On August 26 the Boards toured the lower Rainy River, including Four Mile Bay on Lake of the Woods. IJC Commissioners Olson and Trépanier, and several IJC staff, attended the meetings and tour.

The Boards met with Boise and ACH/AbitibiBowater, the Rainy and Namakan lake dam operators, on the afternoon of August 25. Dam operations and maintenance, dam sluice leakage, data collection procedures, sunken pulp logs in the upper river, the automation of the Fort Frances powerhouse, the transfer of Canadian regulation operations to ACH's control centre in Oshawa and public information efforts were discussed. Discussion of public information addressed the updated Boise web site, access to the ACH recorded message service, and the number and nature of calls received from the public by both Companies and the IRLBC regarding high Rainy Lake levels in 2009. The Boards thanked the Companies for their cooperation in extending the "no peaking" window this spring to accommodate the delayed spawning period on the Rainy River. The possibility of relocating Abitibi's mill fire system

pump intake was again raised; this resulted in a letter from AbitibiBowater (dated September 1, 2009) stating that installation of a backup intake would be pursued early in the second quarter of 2010, with the result that forebay drawdown would no longer constrain dam gate operations.

The Boards' annual joint public meeting, held on the evening of August 25, was attended by about 40 members of the public plus representatives of the media, the area resource agencies and the Companies. The presentation summarized the IJC's involvement in the basin, a number of basin issues under review, the installation of temperature gauges in the Rainy River to help predict the timing of the spring spawn and the high water levels experienced yet again in 2009. During the subsequent question period, a number of attendees expressed frustration with the high water and suggested that the lake levels at the end of winter should be lower; however, several attendees also expressed satisfaction with regulation operations. As at last year's meeting, concerns were again expressed regarding the proposed Namakan River hydropower development. Board members also agreed to follow up on several specific concerns that were raised, including a discharge pipe entering the Rainy River below the dam and a number of environmental concerns raised by Chief Klyne of the Seine River First Nation.

On August 26, the Boards spent the day touring the lower Rainy River area. Four Mile Bay on Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River from its mouth to east of Rainy River / Baudette were toured by boat, while Long Sault and Manitou Rapids and several tributary areas further up the river were visited by car. The tour was guided by several resource agency experts and a local historian.

On August 27, the Boards met with representatives of local resource agencies and other governmental organizations responsible for water resource information and management within the basin. Board Members were briefed on:

- the Ontario Ministry of the Environment's Action Plan for Lake of the Woods water quality
- the creation of a Multi Agency Working Group, consisting of both Canadian and US agencies and groups, to focus on Lake of the Woods water quality
- on-going studies by Voyageurs National Park, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources with the objective of providing the information needed for review of the Year 2000 Rainy and Namakan rule curves in 2015. The studies address fish, benthic macro-invertebrates, wetland vegetation, furbearers, shorebirds, nutrient cycling, etc.
- an overview of the MPCA's approach to watershed investigations
- lake sturgeon in northwest Ontario being identified as "threatened"
- the environmental assessment process for the proposed Namakan River hydropower project.

Board Meetings and Activities

During the quarter the Boards met while in International Falls in August and also dealt with a number of items via email. The following items were completed or advanced:

- receipt and review of the final report "Wetland Vegetation Monitoring at Voyageurs National Park" by Meeker and Harris (part of VNP's Rainy Lake / Namakan reservoir lake level study).
- review of the work and status of the Peaking Work Group
- receipt and review of the final "Plan of Study" by the Year 2000 Rule Curve Assessment Working Group for the environmental assessment of the Rainy-Namakan rule curves.
- continued discussion with IJC staff and others concerning future amalgamation of the IRLBC and IRRWPB, and consideration of expanded mandate.
- plans for the August meetings and tour, including preparation of the public meeting notices and presentation.

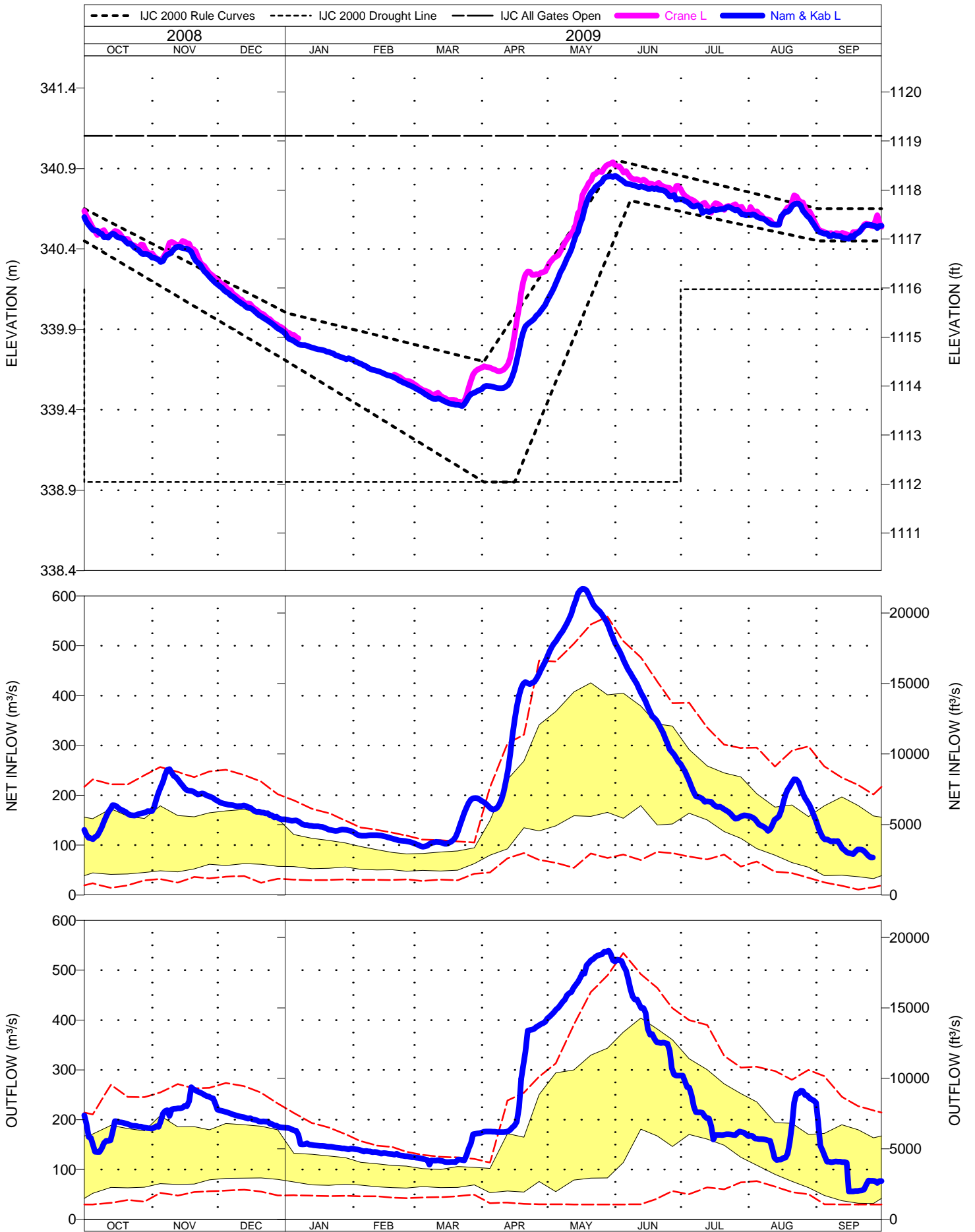
- work related to the IJC's International Watersheds Initiative (IWI), including a project proposal submission for a submerged aquatic vegetation study on the lakes (July 2) and a revised proposal for Rainy River temperature monitoring (July 30). These were both approved for funding (with conditions) by the IJC in mid-August. Input was also provided to IJC staff regarding a proposal for the development of a hydraulic model of the upper Rainy River, and a final report prepared for the IJC's Health Professionals Task Force was received on "Water and Health in the Lake of the Woods and Rainy River Basins".
- responses to individuals and the media regarding high water concerns
- initial consideration of the Boards' Workplan
- review of information from Environment Canada and others regarding the proposed Namakan River hydropower project
- commencement of work on the Boards' fall report to the IJC

Board Members and Staff

Dr. Bill Darby, one of the Canadian members on the IRRWPB since October 21, 2001, resigned from the Board effective July 31, 2009 as a result of his retirement from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. The term of the other Canadian member, IRRWPB Co-Chair Melanie Neilson, was extended by the IJC for another three years to October 18, 2012.

At the Boards' meeting in August, Tana McDaniel, a physical sciences specialist in the Water Quality and Surveillance section of Environment Canada in Burlington, was appointed by the members as the joint Board secretary.

NAMAKAN LAKE



RAINY LAKE

