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Ottawa, March 22, 2016

Federal Budget 2016 Announces funding support for Upper Great Lakes water levels

Canadians shoreline property owners and cities and towns along the Great Lakes and interconnected waterways have been deeply concerned about extremes in water levels. Finance Minister Bill Morneau's first budget provides some hope and acknowledges long standing concerns about water levels in the Upper Great Lakes.

"It's gratifying that, the Canadian Government is moving forward following the IJC's advice to help protect and restore the mainly finite waters of the Great Lakes. Our team has been working on this since 2002. Delaying determining best mitigation options leaves the Great Lakes very vulnerable facing climate change impacts and could be very costly to the environment and the economy so it's important to act now." Says Mary Muter, (Chair, Great Lakes Project, Sierra Club Canada Foundation)

Our new federal government is clearly behind the IJC, and the IJC already recommended in 2013 the following: **"The Commission recommends that the Governments undertake further investigation of structural options to restore water levels in Lake Michigan-Huron by 13 to 25 cm (about 5 to 10 in)."**

After over a decade of extreme low water levels that harmed wetlands and the fish communities dependent on them, our new government in Ottawa recognizes the problem caused by over 100 years of navigation dredging, shoreline hardening and the removal of sand supply from the St. Clair River. Finally the International Joint Commission will receive the funding needed to properly assess the river and determine the best option to restore and compensate for the loss of water via flexible St. Clair River structures that would be deployed gradually (to minimize any temporary impact downstream.) and deployed only when needed.

Budget Highlights released today include:

"MANAGING TRANSBOUNDARY WATER ISSUES Canada and the United States share 20 per cent of the world's freshwater in the Great Lakes alone, and jointly manage countless other lakes and rivers. The International Joint Commission is the binational body that manages these Canada-U.S. transboundary waters. These waters are of great economic, environmental and symbolic value to Canadians, and how we manage them is of utmost importance. In recent years, flooding, **variable water levels and water quality** have affected four important water basins that straddle the Canada-U.S. border—the **Upper Great Lakes**, Lake Champlain and the Richelieu River, Lake of the Woods and the Souris River. Budget 2016 proposes to provide up to **\$19.5 million over five years, starting in 2016–17, to the International Joint Commission** to



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enable Canada to match U.S. funding to study these issues in order to protect the local environment and communities. "Federal Budget March 22. 2016 Chapter 4, page 164

The Great Lakes Project of SCCF has been supporting the IJC's advice for several years, at times against great odds. Now that everyone can see that we, the IJC, and our Federal government are together on measures to save the Middle Great Lakes from future extreme levels, let's all pull together to make effective progress

"We consider the Federal Budget 2016 commitment an important step forward to protect the Great Lakes. We need to develop the ability to retain water in all the Great Lakes not just Lakes Ontario and Superior. "added Muter.,

The Great Lakes Project of Sierra Club Canada Foundation is the team of volunteers that first identified ongoing erosion of the upper St. Clair River following over 100 years of dredging, shoreline alterations and removal of sand supply. The erosion was a significant contributing factor during low supplies to the recent unprecedented 14 years of extreme low water levels on Lakes Michigan Huron and Georgian Bay. The Great Lakes Project has worked with and provided funding and inkind support for McMaster University's Dr. Pat Chow-Fraser's research to assess the ecological impact of low water levels and classify for the first time Georgian Bay wetlands - the most extensive, diverse, sensitive, high quality wetlands found anywhere in the Great Lakes.

Spokespersons available for Comment:

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