



## *Restore Our Water International*

Press Release: Monday, April 29, 2013

**Restore Our Water International (ROWI) applauds the International Joint Commission (IJC's) Advice to Governments to investigate installation of flow reduction structures in the St. Clair River to respond to the ongoing low water crisis across the middle and upper Great Lakes.**

On April 15<sup>th</sup>, the IJC advised the U.S. and Canadian governments that they should investigate structural options to provide up to 25 centimeters (or 10") of relief to Lakes Michigan and Huron water levels, in a manner which would not exacerbate flooding and erosion problems if water supplies changed substantially. ROWI believes that this is a good first step, but encourages the governments to broaden this investigation two-fold (up to at least 50 centimeters or 20"), since the U.S. Congress has already authorized the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to do this in 1957.

When Canada and the U.S. agreed to complete deepening of the St. Clair and Detroit Rivers in 1962, "compensation measures" were supposed to have been placed in both rivers to counter increased river flows and anticipated water level lowering on the upstream lakes. Compensation measures were deployed in the Detroit River at that time, but unfortunately no compensation measures were deployed in the St. Clair. Subsequent studies by the IJC have concluded that Lakes Michigan and Huron and Georgian Bay are at least 50 centimeters or 20" permanently lower today than they would be if compensating structures had been placed in the St. Clair River. ROWI supports the IJC's new call for governments to conduct a thorough cost-benefit analysis and a comprehensive environmental impact study for the full range of compensation structures options. Compensation structures proposed in the past include a series of underwater sills (or "speed bumps") on the bottom of the St. Clair River and gated structures in non-navigable areas adjacent to islands in the river.

"We hope our governments in Canada and the United States will act quickly to approve the funding to allow this critical restoration process to begin now – a restoration that should have happened 50 years ago," said Mary Muter, Chair, Great Lakes Section, Sierra Club Ontario and Vice Chair of ROWI. "Restoring Michigan Huron water levels responsibly will benefit wetlands, fish spawning and recruitment and help to reduce economic losses across the middle Great Lakes," added Muter. ROWI believes that compensation structures can be placed in the St. Clair River in an environmentally responsible manner which would improve spawning habitat for the threatened Lake Sturgeon fishery.

Installation of temporary flow reduction measures in the Niagara River, called for in the IJC's Levels Reference Study, Crisis Response Report in 1993, would eliminate any downstream lowering of Lakes Erie and St. Clair, while these lakes reach a new permanent equilibrium between reduced inflows and outflows. "This type of integrated crisis response was studied in the 1993 IJC study but was not re-assessed under the current crisis low water conditions on all of the middle Great Lakes," said Roger Gauthier, Chair of ROWI and a retired senior hydrologist with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. "Implementation of St. Clair compensation structures could take 3-5 years at the earliest. In the meantime, other crisis response measures need to be considered by the IJC, including using its discretionary authority to immediately allow more water to flow out of Lake Superior into Lakes Michigan and Huron," Gauthier added.

ROWI is pleased that the IJC again rejected calls for full regulation of Lakes Michigan-Huron outflows. This strategy, referred to as multi-lake regulation, would require more extensive investments in locks, dams and further dredging in the St. Clair River. This strategy has been consistently rejected in the past by the U.S. and Canadian governments, since it involves massive costs for construction, would cause economic losses to commercial navigation and would create huge environmental damage in the river and upstream on Lakes Michigan and Huron.

ROWI supports the IJC call for improving climate monitoring and prediction, more comprehensive economic impact models, and three-dimensional modeling and re-charting of the St. Clair River to evaluate whether erosion of the bottom is continuing. ROWI also supports implementation of the IJC's proposed system-wide Adaptive Management Plan, in consort with St. Clair River compensation. Simultaneous implementation of these compatible responses would help coastal communities to prepare for and respond to climate change.

**About ROWI, [www.restoreourwater.com](http://www.restoreourwater.com)**

ROWI is an alliance of Canadian and American organizations concerned about the dire economic and ecological impacts of the low water crisis on Lakes Michigan and Huron and Georgian Bay. ROWI represents at least 15,000 shoreline owners and commercial interests across these water bodies.

**Contacts;**

Roger Gauthier, Chair, Restore Our Water International, 248 219 4284 [rogergauthier@charter.net](mailto:rogergauthier@charter.net)

Mary Muter, Chair, Great Lakes Section, Sierra Club Ontario 905 833 2020 [marym@sierraclub.ca](mailto:marym@sierraclub.ca)