



GREAT LAKES
COALITION

*Michigan/Lake Michigan Chapter
For Shoreline Preservation*

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Newsletter – Fall/Winter 2020

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING – AUGUST 8, 2020

PRESIDENT RON WILSON'S MESSAGE

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I welcome everyone to the Great Lakes Coalition 2020 Annual Meeting. I am Ron Wilson, President of the GLC.

Since the last time we met, we had 17 days of fall storms that had gale force winds and waves that got taller and stronger with each passing storm. Many of us lost beaches, decks, seawalls, and cottages. During the stormy fall the Great Lakes Coalition lobbied for the Governor's Executive Order and legislation sponsored by Senator Victory that would expedite the permit process. The Governor responded and gave us an expedited permit process that still would take a week. The Great Lakes Coalition testified for Senator Victory's legislation that would allow licensed contractors to jump in to do the work needed and then file for a permit later, explaining what they did. Members also talked about high lake levels and their situations with Sen. Kim LaSata, Rob Sisson, Debbie Stabenow's staff, and many others.

We began to build coalitions with local government associations, especially the Michigan Municipal League. Their coastal cities were getting hit as hard as private property owners were. They lost beaches, marinas, boardwalks, parks, and roads. Their drinking water treatment plants and their storm water and sewage treatment plants were in harm's way as well. Why did we do this? The media and many legislators only saw cottage owners as people who built mega mansions along the coastlines. The majority of cottage owners are not millionaires, but normal working class families. Many cottages, like my family's, have been handed down for generations. By getting coastal cities as well as the state with its damages to state parks and highways, legislators and media are receiving a clearer impact of lake levels and the need for action.

Last fall, we reached out to Rob Sisson, the new International Joint Commissioner who replaced Lana Pollack. In December we invited him to attend a tour put together by Representative Joe Tate of Grosse Pointe. We toured Wayne County's storm water treatment facility, a home in Detroit along the canals, and the roads, marinas, and parks nearby. It was certainly eye opening for all of us. After the tour Rob Sisson, an IJC staffer from Windsor, Rep. Tate, Herasanna Richards from the MML, and I discussed the issues further.

We also contacted other states. Three groups involved in Lake Ontario levels responded. Together, we hosted 3 webinars. The first focused on the impact high water has on cottage beaches and on local communities. We were shocked when Brian Dissette told us that tiny South Haven would need: \$20 million for new sewage and drinking water treatment plants, revetment for roads, and a new bridge if the water levels continued to get higher. Sen. Stabenow heard of this and contacted the US Army Corps of Engineers who helped South Haven install Hesco Barriers to prevent water from flooding key points in the city.

The second webinar focused on the causes of high water levels. UM Professor Drew Gronewald told us that the amount of evaporation had decreased dramatically after 2013. Howard Learner told us of hundreds of toxic or sewage treatment plants that were along Lake Michigan that could leach into Lake Michigan should the water level continue to increase. The third webinar focused on current water levels and what cities and cottage owners could do to protect their properties. John Allis from the Army Corps of Engineers told us the water in Lake Michigan-Huron was 33 inches above their average high water mark, while Lake Superior was only 8 inches above its average. We also had speakers tell us the proper way for protection and/or remediation. They also talked about the permitting process. All of these webinars can be found on our website.

The GLC didn't stop there. We were in contact with ABSCA, a national group that focuses on beach restoration and other similar projects. They provided us with their national standards for beach restoration and protection. The standards helped Sen. LaSata with her legislation. We also contacted Jon Altenberg of the Great Lakes St. Lawrence River Initiative. It represents Mayors and similar officers from Canada from each state and province along the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway. Its staff was very excited to work with the GLC and the Lake Ontario groups, especially on federal legislation.

Finally, we have contacted the Northeast-Midwest Congressional Initiative. We will be providing them with data and anecdotal stories members provide us. Send us your photos and anecdotal stories, especially ones with historical perspective. When I testified before a House Committee in January, I showed the State Representatives photos of when my cottage was built in 1933 by my great grandfather, my son's wedding on the beach in 2013, and then the results of the storms. They were stunned. Pictures tell a story that many can't otherwise grasp.

Lastly, please renew your memberships or make a healthy contribution. Convince your neighbors to do so as well. You can renew or make generous donations with your credit card on our website: www.greatlakescoalition.org/membership.

President Wilson then began our presentations by introducing Michigan Senator Debbie Stabenow:

Sen. Stabenow gave a brief history of what has been happening in and around the Great Lakes. Water levels, in lakes and rivers, partly due to higher than normal precipitation in the past three years. The lakes are warming faster than the oceans. Sen. Stabenow is co-chair of the bi-partisan Great Lakes Task Force. Her mission is how to unlock the funding. Declaring a disaster area is not really effective. What do we need to change to get the funding? And to get short term mitigation. FEMA insurance is limited to one-time disasters, not erosion. Sen. Gary Peters (Michigan) has introduced the Storm Act, which would provide (FEMA) grants to reduce disasters like erosion. Also introduced is the Farm Bill to stop or reduce fertilizer runoff into streams and rivers and manage the land differently. What is needed is a Great Lakes Resiliency Study to have a long-term clear vision to plan for the future. This was not put into the U.S. Army Corps budget. She reported that our voices have been heard and Michigan EGLE (Dept. of Energy, Great Lakes and Environment) has been approving permits more rapidly. And more information should be gathered about the diversions – we need to investigate “whatever works.”

Following Sen. Stabenow was IJC Commissioner Rob Sisson:

Commissioner Sisson outlined the background and formation of the International Joint Commission as part of the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 between the U.S. and Canada. There are three U.S. commissioners and three Canadian commissioners. He gave a history of water level cycles, also stating that above average precipitation in the past three years has been a cause of the higher water levels, and also that climate change will cause higher highs and lower lows. He described the net basin supply: $\text{inflow} + \text{runoff} + \text{precipitation} - \text{outflow} - \text{evaporation} = \text{Net Basin Supply}$. He also described the adaptive management process and steps that can and are being taken such as: more community-based shore protection projects; acquisition of flood plain land; relocation of structures; setback requirements; real estate disclosure; and flood insurance.

Our final speaker was State Senator Kim LaSata, 21st District of Michigan. Sen. LaSata was invited by the New Buffalo Shoreline Alliance to view the erosion damages caused by the New Buffalo harbor installation. After viewing damages in person, she supported bills in process and then introduced more legislation to get some help. She stated that the regulatory burden should be eased without injuring our natural resources. She described several bills being discussed now: HB5309 & HB5310 states that if an emergency is declared, residents can protect their property without first obtaining a permit and no taxes would be raised as this is a repair, not an improvement.

HB5556 by Rep. Brad Slauch would allow for a minor permit to include sandbags and would enable bottom lake sand to fill the bags. SB1020 would allow that a permit would not be needed for projects above the Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM) and Sen. Roger Victory's bill SB714 expedites the applications for permits. And her own bill, SB974 which would enable and expedite beach nourishment projects using dredged sand. Her bill is currently being reviewed by the Michigan Natural Resources Committee and Sen. LaSata asked for members' support of her bill in the form of a communication to Sen. Ed McBroom, chair of the Natural Resources Committee.

[VIEW MEETING](#)

COALITION ACTION POINTS

Here are steps the Great Lakes Coalition believes should be taken. Many of these actions come from International Joint Commission study reports:

1. Restore the Long Lac and Ogoki Rivers in Canada to their original flow channels to Hudson Bay instead of the present diversion into Lake Superior.
2. Operate the Lake Superior Regulation Plan 2012 in a more balanced manner to decrease flows into Lakes Michigan-Huron when their levels are approaching record highs.
3. Remove the in-fills that restrict flow through the Niagara River, open Black Rock Lock in Buffalo, and utilize Welland Canal to increase Niagara River flow.
4. Consider increasing the Chicago Diversion when the Mississippi River is not at flood levels.
5. Install an ice boom at the head of the St. Clair River to reduce the risk of ice jams.
6. Examine ways to accomplish increasing outflow from Lake Ontario.
7. Investigate other outflow sources such as the Erie Canal or Oswego Canal into the Hudson River.
8. Include citizen representatives at the policy decision segment of water level management.
9. Each Great Lake should have some water level control and the water level variance between highs and lows should be smaller.
10. Mitigate water level effects when repairs are made to gates on the St. Marys River.
11. Continued concern about spent uranium storage at nuclear facilities on Lake Michigan (i.e., Cook plant)
12. Encourage offshore dredging.

While these proposed mitigation strategies will not control the rain, snowfall, and evaporation rates, there is enough human control through the International Joint Commission to reduce the severity of the damage currently ravaging the coastal communities. Residents throughout the Great Lakes, be they Canadian or U.S., are suffering, as are the communities in which they live. Loss of property values, diminished levels of tourism, as well as mounting restoration and repair costs are creating a significant economic and environmental crisis for coastal communities, Canadian and U.S. alike. It is time for the Commission to utilize the extent of its power to begin to bring relief. Interested citizens can contact the International Joint Commission by visiting their website at <https://ijc.org/en/contact> for an online message form, or write to them at the following address:

International Joint Commission
1717 H Street, N.W., Suite 835
Washington, DC 20006

LAKE ONTARIO COALITION GROUPS

The Coalition has been approached to collaborate with a Lake Ontario coalition of shoreline groups to work on common issues. The three groups, one in Canada and two from New York State, have been challenging Lake Ontario Plan 2014 which was put into effect to provide more natural flow of water in and out of Lake Ontario. After implementation of the plan, severe flooding has occurred causing considerable damages to properties and municipalities. And recent high water levels in all the Great Lakes has exacerbated the situation. Their coalition is interested in producing one-hour webinars regarding Great Lakes issues. The effort would provide technical information along with personal stories and examples. These webinars would be the initial steps to create a nucleus by which Great Lakes states' organizations could work together on diversion and federal support for mitigation.

The GLC has responded by jointly sponsoring a webinar on Friday, April 10, 2020 on the subject "Flood Protection and COVID-19 – Protect your property without sacrificing your safety." Participants included: Natalia Moudrak, Director of Climate Resilience, INTACT CENTER; Brian Dissette, City Manager of South Haven, Michigan; Roderick Scott, Flood Mitigation Industry Association; and George Bastedo, Director of Disaster Preparedness, Wayne County, New York. Members of both Coalition groups were invited to attend.

Here is a link to the presentation:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGmy7xfzWkc&feature=youtu.be

NEW BUFFALO SHORELINE ALLIANCE

NBSA Challenges: The New Buffalo Shoreline alliance continues to work with local, state, and federal authorities on a solution to our severe erosion problem south of the New Buffalo harbor. We have applied for several grants, we have hired state and federal consultants, have the support of local, state, and federal officials and continue to work with officials in Washington D.C. and with the Detroit office of ACOE. We were successful in 2018 obtaining funds for dredging New Buffalo harbor as well as two other recreational harbors (Saugatuck and South Haven). We do anticipate getting future funds for nourishment and breakwaters.

However, funding for the recent nourishment programs requested by the ACOE, and separately by Congressman Fred Upton for New Buffalo, was never appropriated. Without supplemental nourishment our shoreline will continue to erode due to sand starvation caused by the harbor. The ACOE is in the process of developing a Federal Interest Determination (FID) study under Section 111 Authority to determine the impact of the harbor on erosion.

Our primary challenges have been getting funding approved that was submitted by the appropriate federal authorities and being able to get state and federal grant funding. The NBSA team is examining alternative plans to reach our goal of nourishment and constructing breakwaters.

IMPACT OF HARBORS ON EROSION AND THE NEED FOR OFFSHORE DREDGING IN MICHIGAN

Large areas of the shoreline of Michigan have been greatly impacted by the severe erosion which has been exacerbated by the impact of harbors and jetties that were designed and installed by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (ACOE). Serious erosion has occurred even before we experienced high water and erosion has been a continuing problem since the harbors were built. Harbors located in New Buffalo, St. Joseph, South Haven, Saugatuck (and many others) have interrupted the natural littoral drift of nearshore sand resulting in severe erosion and sand starvation on the least dominant harbor side. In some cases, such as New Buffalo, the ACOE was to supplement the "interrupted" sand flow by a sand nourishment plan. According to the ACOE, a properly designed harbor would initially interrupt sand flow for a certain period of time thus requiring sand nourishment until the area reached an "equilibrium" by filling the fillet on either side of the harbor after which sand would flow to beaches on both sides "naturally". In many cases, a periodic nourishment program is required.

Unfortunately, in some cases (well documented in the New Buffalo Harbor Case) the ACOE did not fulfill their nourishment obligation leaving the area south of the harbor void of sand resulting in zero beaches and severe erosion. When sand leaves the beaches accelerated erosion occurs resulting in a steepening of the lakebed. A steeper lakebed allows larger waves to reach shore causing huge shoreline damage and a continual steepening of the lakebed. This is a vicious (compounding) cycle and occurs even when the lake levels are normal. Of course, it is accelerated with high lake levels. Lake areas that have a healthy beach are more resilient to damage from large waves.

The beaches on the downstream side of a harbor will be impacted for several miles depending on harbor length (into the lake) and the predominant sand drift in the area.

The ACOE and EGLE are very much aware of jetty and harbor impact on littoral drift, sand starvation, and erosion. Although we are not aware of any new plans for larger harbor construction being made in Michigan, we assume given what is known today, any new construction would either require better harbor design approaches (that must allow sand to by-pass) or they must make hard legal (monetary) commitments for continued sand nourishment. The severe erosion caused by the New Buffalo harbor has put the City's water intake in peril and a home near the water intake was severely compromised by a storm in 2015, partially fell in the lake, and was later removed (demolition) by the City of New Buffalo. This was well before the water levels increased to historic levels. You may have read about the severe damage done recently to beaches and shoreline near Ogden Dunes, IN. There are large harbors in the area (including the Michigan City Harbor) that impact sand flow on their shoreline.

The sand flow mechanics vary with harbor design (size) but in most cases the results are:

- Sand is blocked by the harbor building large beaches on the predominant flow side.
- Sand can be re-directed out into the lake beyond the "depth of closure" and may not ever be able to reach the beaches by natural mechanisms (wave action).
- Sand can by-pass the harbor and create offshore sand bars often within the depth of closure.
- Sand is not appreciably deposited anywhere near the shoreline on the downstream side.

In most cases the natural sand that would be present (pre harbor construction) on the shoreline downstream side of the harbor is nonexistent for several miles downstream!

What can be done to fix the problem? Short of tearing out existing harbors and constructing improved harbor designs that minimize littoral drift impact we should be locating the sand that is impacted by the harbor and place it back on the downstream shoreline. Offshore dredging (not just channel dredging) is required to collect the impacted sand and returning it to the natural location it would be if no harbor construction interfered.

If the State of Michigan doesn't do something to protect sand in the littoral drift, eventually we will lose great volumes of sand to the deeper parts of the lake. Offshore dredging is done in many areas in the country to replenish beaches and is a normal "maintenance" activity on some of the nation's most popular beaches (refer to item under New Buffalo Shoreline Alliance concerning offshore dredging). Offshore dredging can be done anywhere suitable sand deposits are located that could be placed on a depleted beach (does not have to happen near a harbor). We believe that the State of Michigan should take a more active role with the ACOE to establish sand replenishment programs.

The State of Michigan has a Great Lakes Plan that provides 823,000 jobs for the State, 12.8 billion dollars to the travel industry, 21 million dollars to the charter boat industry and 2 billion dollars to harbors and marinas from the recreational boating industry. Local communities rely on tourism as our economic driver. Without sand on our beaches this economic activity is put in jeopardy. Sand protects the shoreline from erosion!

The State of Michigan has the largest freshwater coastline of any state, yet Michigan does not protect their greatest asset with a budgeted beach nourishment program. Michigan with over 3,000 miles of coastline spends zero to protect their greatest asset. New Jersey with only 94 miles of coastline spends 20 million dollars a year to protect their coastline and Florida spends 100 million dollars a year. Hawaii recognized that beaches are a state asset regardless if they are public or private and spends state money to protect them.

Why doesn't Michigan protect this precious asset and budget money to protect it?

IJC GREAT LAKES ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE 2020 QUESTIONNAIRE

The International Joint Commission's Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Adaptive Management (GLAM) Committee has an on-line questionnaire that allows impacted shoreline property owners to report directly on their experiences in **2020**. A similar questionnaire appeared in 2019 and many of you participated.

Wet conditions throughout the upper Great Lakes basin continued again in 2020 and resulted in record and near-record high water levels on Lake Superior and Lake Michigan-Huron. These water levels have impacted many of you that live and work along the upper Great Lakes shoreline.

Your input will be invaluable to the GLAM committee in evaluating and improving the scientific and engineering models that have been developed to estimate potential damages under a range of Great Lakes water level conditions. Such evaluation is a critical requirement for the GLAM Committee as it assesses the performance of the regulation plans that are used to manage outflows from Lake Superior and Lake Ontario. The information will also be made available to the ILOSLRB and the ILSBC to support their ongoing operational activities. Data provided through the questionnaire will only be reported in a summarized format to ensure the privacy of respondents.

[CLICK HERE FOR 2020 QUESTIONNAIRE](#)

You will also have an opportunity to complete the 2019 Questionnaire if you experienced damages last year. Thank you for participating!

[READ "GREAT LAKES CONNECTION", an IJC publication](#)

GREAT LAKES COALITION IN THE NEWS

Great Lakes Coalition president Ron Wilson participated in several interviews in the past few months. You can read the full interviews using the links below, or visiting our website at www.greatlakescoalition.org/news

An article in the October 2020 issue of *Physics Today*:

[The Great Lakes are filled to their brims, with no signs of receding](#)

An interview on *RochesterFirst.com* on October 20, 2020:

[How upper Great Lakes impact Ontario as Lake Michigan water levels are 2.5 feet above average](#)

USEFUL CONTACT INFORMATION

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Detroit District
477 Michigan Avenue
Detroit, MI 48226
Phone: 313-226-5013
Website: www.lre.usace.army.mil

International Lake Superior Board of Control
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
550 Main St.
Cincinnati, OH 45202
Phone: 513-684-2010
Website: www.ijc.org/en/labc

Michigan Dept. of Natural Resources
Shore Protection Division
120 Chapin St.
Cadillac, MI 49201
Phone: 231-876-4442 (Barry Peterman)
E-mail: Peterman@michigan.gov

Honorable Gretchen Whitmer
Governor, State of Michigan
P. O. Box 30013
Lansing, MI 48909

Contact State of Michigan:

Dept. of Energy, Great Lakes & Environment (EGLE)
www.michigan.gov/highwater

Contact Your State Legislators:

<http://house.michigan.gov/mhrpublic/frmFindaRep.aspx>

<https://senate.michigan.gov/fysbyaddress.html>

If you have not already done so, time to renew your membership for 2020, or join us if not already a member:

Michigan/Lake Michigan Chapter-Great Lakes Coalition
P. O. Box 429
Saugatuck, MI 49453
(269) 857-8945

We are a 501(c) (3) tax-exempt organization
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NAME _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

LAKE PROPERTY ADDRESS IF DIFFERENT

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SUGGESTED MEMBERSHIP CONTRIBUTION: _____ \$35 _____ \$50 _____ \$100 _____ Other

12/20

OR, visit our website at www.greatlakescoalition.org and open the Membership tab to renew online.



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

MISSION STATEMENT

The Great Lakes Coalition (GLC) concentrates on water levels; natural sand supply to beaches, dunes, and bluffs; and coastal management. The objective is to promote environmentally sound management of the coastal zone. Natural conditions have been changed by sometimes flawed government intervention and judgment. The GLC is a respected advocate for shoreline property owners that challenges inappropriate regulations and encourages beneficial government decisions.