



GREAT LAKES
COALITION

**Michigan/Lake Michigan Chapter
For Shoreline Preservation**

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**GREAT LAKES COALITION FOR SHORELINE PRESERVATION
POSITION ON INSTALLATION OF STRUCTURES IN THE ST. CLAIR RIVER
TO INCREASE LAKE MICHIGAN-HURON LEVELS**

The Great Lakes Coalition is an alliance of several thousand shoreline property owners in Michigan and Wisconsin. Many of them remember the extremely high water levels, and the shoreline erosion that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. Beaches were destroyed, wetlands were flooded, and homes fell over the bluff into the lake. Coalition members believe that high levels will return. Every period of low water that has ever occurred has eventually been followed by a cycle of high water.

Coalition members fear that, if levels are intentionally raised by 10", then during the next natural high water cycle, levels will be an additional 10" higher. The destruction and devastation along the shore will resemble a war zone.

Our position is consistent with the IJC's position in their *International Joint Commission's Advice to Governments on the Recommendations of the International Upper Great Lakes Study*, issued April 15, 2013. Section 3 entitled "Restoration of Lake Michigan-Huron Water Levels" states, "The Commission encourages the Governments to focus on an option that would not result in a permanent restoration change that could exacerbate future high water levels...".

Although we are sensitive to the difficulties created during a period of extremely low water levels, we cannot support a proposal to increase Lake Michigan-Huron levels by the installation of flow restriction structures in the St. Clair River unless it is absolutely certain that the resulting levels increase can be, and will be, completely negated in the future to avoid higher high levels than would have existed without the flow restriction.

We would like to make the observation that according to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers levels data, the normal 11-inch seasonal increase in Lake Michigan-Huron levels was surpassed by 10 inches in just 7 months this year as levels rose 21 inches from January to July. In terms relative to LTA (Long Term Average), Michigan-Huron levels started this year 29 inches below the January LTA and by November levels reached a point 14 inches below the November LTA. This 15-inch, or 50% reduction in the gap between actual levels and LTA in only 10 months' time is evidence that levels can increase more significantly and in much less time due to Mother Nature than placing restriction structures in the St. Clair River.

High water levels also present a threat to the environmental, ecological and economic stability of our Great Lakes. Endangered shore birds such as the piping plover need mature beaches on which to build their nests. No beaches or very little beach will affect one of our greatest industries -- tourism. No beautiful beaches--no Michigan tourists. And intentionally raised high water levels may compromise the safety of the nuclear power plants located along Great Lakes shorelines.

For a recent event, just recall the March 2011 storm that inundated Chicago's Lakeshore Drive, flooding buildings and stranding motorists and vehicles. And this happened when levels were low, not high, and an extensive (and expensive) shoreline protection system had just been installed.

Many government officials and most of the general public have forgotten a few important historical water level facts. Lakes Michigan-Huron set RECORD HIGH LEVELS in 1973, 1986, and almost again in 1997 during a 30+ year stretch of levels above the long term average from 1968-1998. This increasing trend of higher record levels all occurred AFTER the dredging of the St. Clair River.

Imagine the despair and mental anguish of watching your property being gulped up by the lake. We are talking about people's homes – not their pleasure boats. For many people, their homes are the greatest part of their net worth. The IJC has a guiding principal of no-disproportionate-losses. Well, it is certainly disproportionate to a person who loses the value he/she has worked so hard to build up in their home. And the loss is permanent. When low levels come up again, pleasure boats will still be there, shippers can carry full loads again, and power generation returns to normal. But one's house that went over the bluff does not spring back into place, as if by magic.

Suppose levels were intentionally raised 10" and then the levels start to rise: the next cycle of high water is on the way! Some say that they can just let the extra 10" out again. We believe it could not be done! Lake Michigan-Huron has 4.6 times the surface area of Lake Erie, which is downstream where the water would go. If you let 10" out of Lake Michigan-Huron, it would raise Lake Erie an incredible 46", nearly 4 feet! Do you think that is really feasible? At a time when levels are high? What do you think the people on Lake Erie would say?

What about letting it out gradually? Suppose it is done over 5 years. That is still 9" of extra water dumped on Lake Erie every year for 5 Years! That is not very feasible either.

Wouldn't the extra water run out of Lake Erie over Niagara Falls? No, not enough of it. That was the main problem in the 1980s. The flow in the Niagara River has been restricted by infilling and by the closed Black Rock Lock.

If your home is threatened, a cure 5 years off doesn't help much.

We believe that nature should be allowed to take its course. Nothing was done to alleviate the high water situation in the 1980s and probably won't be done during the next high cycle. So please don't make the next high even worse.

In fact, we wonder if the dredging didn't just remove many years of sediment accumulation and the dredging was, in itself restoration to an earlier time.

Finally consider this: if lake levels cause damage and suffering never seen before during the next cycle of high water because of an extra 10" of water, there may be a movement by drought stricken western states and provinces to "help us out" by diverting some of the water out of the lakes to themselves. That would set a bad precedent because, once started, it would be hard to stop. But, Restoration might make this scenario more likely to happen. Who would want to be responsible for that?

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