



Understanding Water Levels – Summer 2015

As the summer season gets into full swing here on the River, there has been a lot of discussion particularly in the Thousand Islands area about the water levels on the St Lawrence. Here are some answers to the questions that you and your neighbors may have about conditions on the River this year.

Is the water level in the Thousand Islands area of the River low this year?

In the big picture, the water levels in the Thousand Islands stretch of the River are not actually low right now. While they are lower than last year, the current water levels are about three inches above the long-term average for the end of June.

Why are water levels lower than last year?

The water in the St Lawrence is lower than last year because the supply of water flowing into the river has been lower. You have to appreciate that the St Lawrence is part of a complex system. When looking at the water it contains, you need to look at where it comes from, whether it is the outflow from Lakes Ontario and Erie, this winter's snowfall, or the recent rainfall and runoff.

While we did have a very cold winter, we didn't actually get a lot of snow. Add to this our very dry spring and the result is lower water levels. The water levels were 4-6 inches below average in May, as there was less rain than usual across much of the Great Lakes basin. Precipitation in June has been higher and levels are now coming up faster than normal.

It's also important to understand that while we on the River tend to like our water levels to be on the higher side, the health of the St. Lawrence depends on having a variety of levels including some infrequent low levels. Occasional low levels are essential to the health of the fish, the wildlife and the wetlands of the St. Lawrence River. There's just no way around it. If we want a healthy river, we have to learn to live with a range of levels.

Was water let out for ships and commercial navigation? Is that why the water's low?

While extra water was discharged to raise water levels for downstream shipping interests earlier in the year, it's important to know that it is not affecting our current water level. Giving 3 inches of water to the Port of Montreal only brings down the water levels in the Thousand Islands and Lake Ontario by less than a third of an inch. Also, while there were a few of these short-term discharges for shippers early in the year, that water was restored within days of being released.

In other words, any and all discharges for commercial navigation were restored shortly after they occurred, and none of them caused a drop of more than a third of an inch in our water levels here on the River. Currently, these discharges are having no impact on our water levels.



What is *Plan 2014* and has it been implemented?

Plan 2014 is the more natural plan for setting water levels that our communities have been pushing for to replace the outdated plan that is now more than 50 years old. Save The River strongly supports *Plan 2014* as it will improve the overall health of the River and restore critical wetland habitat, provide greater economic opportunities for our tourism-based economy. *Plan 2014* has been recommended for approval to the federal governments in the U.S. and Canada, however it has not yet been implemented.

Would *Plan 2014* mean a longer boating season?

Most of the time yes, but not always. Overall, it's clear that *Plan 2014* would extend the boating season. Over the last hundred years, the boating season under *Plan 2014* would have been 23 weeks or longer in 51 out of every 100 years. However, in a very few years, likely 6 or fewer years per century, *Plan 2014* would allow the levels to drop when nature wants them to. These very occasional low summer levels are very important for the health of the River. During these years, marinas and docks constructed during periods of high water levels may experience difficulties. A comprehensive survey of recreational boating conducted by Cornell University says only a very small proportion of the marinas and docks would be affected.

Would the water be higher if we had *Plan 2014*?

Most years, yes. This year? No. This year, if *Plan 2014* were in place, the level would be almost exactly the same as our current level. But remember, because of the way it allows for more natural water levels, *Plan 2014* would restore more than 60,000 acres of wetlands, and there would be additional Northern Pike, terns and other species for our children and grandchildren to catch, watch and enjoy. In short, water levels will always fluctuate but until we get approval of *Plan 2014*, they will not do so in a way that benefits the River.

For more information on *Plan 2014* call our office 315-686-2010 or go to <http://www.savetheriver.org/index.cfm?page=app.programsLevels>

For more information on current water levels go to the Facebook page of the International St. Lawrence River Board of Control: <https://www.facebook.com/ISLRBC?fref=ts>

How Can You Help Support Plan 2014?

PLEASE CALL or write to Governor Cuomo today and tell him you support Plan 2014 to restore fishing and the tourism economy along the St. Lawrence River.

Call: **1-518-474-8390**

Send a letter to:
The Honorable Andrew Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS Capitol building

Suggested Script:

"I am calling to urge Governor Cuomo to endorse Plan 2014 for better water levels management on the St. Lawrence River. I support the Governor's environmental record and this will be a key addition. Plan 2014 will restore our fisheries, restore our wetlands and restore our River dependent economy. He must take this opportunity to leave our children the River they deserve, and restore the River region's tourism economy."