

Concern growing over Great Lakes water levels

Costs of lower levels include harbour dredging and waterline interference from silting for snow-making pumps

BY DON CROSBY
OSPREY NEWS

Concern continues to grow over the local effects of declining water levels in the Great Lakes.

In his inaugural address, Bruce County Warden Milt McIver promised to make water levels a priority during his term of office. He wants the county to be involved in discussions on Great Lakes water levels, which are beginning to affect several Bruce County municipalities.

"It's having a huge impact for all of us but especially those of us on the lakefront. We see lake levels decreasing and there is certainly a lot of discussion as to why this is happening and I think we need to be involved and be a part of the process," said McIver, who is also mayor of Northern Bruce Peninsula.

Blue Mountains Mayor Ellen Anderson is calling for changes in the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement — a treaty negotiated in 1987 that formed the basis of efforts by Canada and the U.S. to protect the lakes from pollution.

Speaking at the recent annual meeting of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative in Wisconsin, Anderson noted the original agreement — which took aim at reducing the chemical loading of the lakes — has been eclipsed with more com-

and regional drought and a growing number of invasive species that threaten the food chain in the lakes.

"The Great Lakes have changed in the last 20 years and the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement needs to change with it," said Anderson, who is calling for the governments of Canada and the U.S. to renegotiate the agreement, with an increased emphasis on protection of watershed-based sources of drinking water.

Anderson is a member of the board of directors for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative — an organization of mayors and locally elected officials advocating for protection and restoration of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River.

Founded in 2003 by Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, with Mayor David Miller of Toronto as the lead from Canada, U.S. and Canadian cities across the basin are working together to improve water quality, water conservation and waterfront vitality.

Anderson said in an interview last month, after returning from this year's meeting, that the mayors passed a motion alerting the International Joint Commission of the urgency of the situation and asking that it speed up the study of the upper Great Lakes and St. Clair River that would form the basis of action to solve the problem of declining water levels.

In February 2007, the IJC appointed the International Upper Great Lakes Study Board to examine whether the regulation of Lake Superior outflows can be improved to address the evolving needs of the upper Great Lakes.

Anderson is calling for cities and towns around the Great Lakes to have a seat at the table during the renegotiation and implementation of the Great Lakes Water

Quality Agreement. She also wants the governments of Ontario and Quebec to adopt aggressive water conservation measures.

She noted that 50 members of the initiative have taken the lead by adopting a 15-per-cent water conservation target by 2015.

Anderson referred to effects of declining water levels in the past five years on Nottawasaga Bay, noting that in 2007 the water levels in Thornbury harbour were two feet lower than normal levels as indicated on shipping charts.

She said the harbour may have to be dredged, but that could cost as much as \$40,000 a year and take more than one year to complete.

The Craigleith Ski Club has had to lengthen its water intake line at Northwinds Beach due to inadequate water levels, which was causing sediments to interfere with the club's snowmaking pumps.

Anderson's biggest concern is for the water intake that supplies Thornbury's Peel Street water plant, which sits in 22-to-24 feet of water in Nottawasaga Bay. That's down from the 28 feet of water when the pipe was installed in the 1970s. Levels of 30 feet or more are optimal for reducing turbidity levels, which are caused by wave action.

"If the water levels dropped another two feet, the intake would have to be extended . . . at an approximate cost of \$5 million," Anderson said.

She said governments appear reluctant to take action when faced with the cost of dealing with the issues and call instead for more studies, but, "It isn't going to be anywhere near as expensive if we do something (now) than what it's going to cost if we don't correct the problems now."