

# Manitoba Association of Cottage Owners



## Environment and Conservation Issues: Lake Winnipeg Water Levels



Prepared: November 2009

### **Background to the Issue:**

- Lake Winnipeg levels were uncontrolled until 1979 when Jenpeg Hydroelectric dam was finished
- Manitobans were assured that lake levels would be managed to prevent damage
- Many people were sceptical of MB Hydro's ability to adequately control Lake Winnipeg water levels
- Manitoba Hydro completely controls level with Jenpeg Hydroelectric dam
- Lake levels controls have caused millions of dollars of damage private and public
- Lake level controls have changed ecology of all areas around Lake Winnipeg and now threaten many species of plants and aquatic life

### **Cautionary Notes:**

- Failing to modify lake level management strategy can will continue to cause damage to environment
- Failing to modify lake level strategy will continue to destroy land and infrastructure
- Manitoba Hydro will have to modify dam to maintain power production efficiently
- Manitoba Hydro will have to modify dam to allow adequate control of water flows
- Mandate is responsibility of Manitoba Provincial Government who have agreement with no regulations
- Hydro has no interest in making change, leaving responsibility unattended by anyone
- Restoration of damage to wetlands and lakefronts cannot be done without lake level changes
- Grass roots will have to take action in cooperation with private organizations, Municipal government and environmental experts to effect change on government
- Normal drainage of lands around Lake Winnipeg difficult with high water levels causing further instability

### **Budget Implications:**

- Budget implications lie with Manitoba Hydro and are massive but must be undertaken
- Corrections by parties other than Hydro are not affordable or sustainable
- No amount of money will buy back destroyed wetlands and extinct species
- Municipal tax income permanently reduced by lost farm lands and cottage properties
- Municipal Infrastructure requiring more expensive repairs as erosion advances
- Private stakeholders cannot afford to protect properties and will have to abandon

***Policy or Program Implications: What is current Policy or Program for this issue?***

- Manitoba Association of Cottage Owners Inc. supports changes to Lake Winnipeg water levels that will help rebuild wetlands and reduce the impact of lake action on all property around the lake
- The Shoreline Erosion and Technical Committee (SETC) supports changes to water levels
  - The SETC includes Municipal and professional representation from engineers and the Federal Department of fisheries and Oceans and Provincial Conservation
  - SETC have found few erosion control systems are able to withstand lake damage
  - SETC have found previously approved erosion control systems are being overwhelmed and failing due to sustained lake levels
- Municipal governments have passed resolutions to change the lake levels
- Private groups are raising money to help restore wetlands and protect species at risk
- Ducks Unlimited are interested in supporting the issue
- Many cottage associations are asking for change and need to get together with MACO

***Action Taken by MACO:***

- Responding to lake level complaints and encouraging writers to actively assist MACO with this huge issue by getting more local supporters
- Contacting SETC to begin discussions and strategy to effect change to the current lake level management by Hydro
- Contacting Municipalities to consolidate support and get in touch with other associations not presently members of MACO
- Writing this Position and Policy statement to clarify our position on our website
- Having speakers at AGMs to educate the Directors and members on issues and solutions related to Lake Winnipeg
- Contacting other private groups and professionals to provide information and support for change

***MACO's Recommendations for the Future:***

- Contact MACO to indicate your support for change to Lake Winnipeg levels.
- Join MACO as an individual or association to help fund our efforts to promote regulations and changes to current Lake Winnipeg management strategy by lobbying
- Get involved as a local representative to help MACO get information out and to get support for change
- Write Provincial MLAs and Federal MPs to indicate your concern on the issue to pressure the Manitoba Government to change its regulations and strategies
- Contact MACO and other resources to understand the full implications of existing lake levels and their long-term impact
- Encourage the Province of Manitoba to write effective regulations with penalties for Hydro mismanagement of lake levels and to lower operational levels to help rebuild wetlands and to protect other stakeholder from continued damage
- Encourage the Province of Manitoba to immediately lower the lake level maximum by at least one foot until proper regulations can be assembled and adhered to

- Encourage the Province of Manitoba to ensure immediate action by Hydro and not allow protracted times to remediate Hydro infrastructure for the operation that was promised decades ago and failed to do so

### ***Position of MACO***

- That change is required to the current Lake Winnipeg water level management plan by lowering maximum level
- That a plan is required with all stakeholders that represents a strategy to rebuild wetlands needed to absorb pollution and support native plant life and other species
- That work is required with all stakeholders to determine the variations needed for natural erosion control and avoid erosion damage
- That MACO will lobby government as necessary using all resources available to effect change on Lake Winnipeg water levels
- That MACO will provide information on our website to inform others on the Lake Winnipeg water level issue
- That MACO will encourage our constituent local associations and individual members to help finance a lobby effort to effect change to the water levels on Lake Winnipeg