

Action sought on record-high water levels

Municipalities ask lake authority to act



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Hastings Drive in Long Point remains precarious due to record high water levels in Lake Erie. This camping trailer wound up in the drink following a violent wind storm last month. On a positive note, Norfolk council heard this week that recent efforts to fortify breakwaters along county property on Hastings have succeeded in preventing the sand-based road bed from washing out. – Contributed photo

LONG POINT — Norfolk County was asked last week to lobby Ottawa and Queen's Park for action on record-high water in Lake Erie.

Port Rowan Coun. Tom Masschaele said other municipalities on the Great Lakes have done so and that Norfolk should follow suit.

"Many people have been suffering on the shores of Lake Erie from this high water and the recent storms have brought that to light," he told Norfolk council.

Earlier in the Nov. 5 meeting, Long Point property owner Mary Weber said she raised the issue at the office of local MP Diane Finley. Weber was told to take it up with the office of local MPP Toby Barrett. Weber was told there to take it up with Norfolk County.

"A plea to the federal government has got to start at the municipal level and work through the ranks," Weber told council.

"I implore this council to take action. Start the process right now to work through the upper levels of government to get help to save our shores. Beg for lake levels to be lowered and for relaxed restrictions on what can be done along the shoreline to curtail erosion and property damage."

Water levels in the Great Lakes are the responsibility of the International Joint Commission, a trans-national panel appointed by the United States and Canada. The IJC says high levels of precipitation in this part of North America are driving water levels in the Great Lakes.

Affected parties such as New York State beg to differ. Last month, the state government sued the IJC for millions of dollars in shoreline damage incurred as a result of IJC policies and practices.

The IJC's Plan 2014 – which was passed in 2016 – approved lake levels favourable to the maintenance of wetlands and Great Lakes shipping. The IJC has deviated from the plan in recent months given the damage high water is causing.

Dams in the St. Lawrence River control how fast water flows into the Atlantic Ocean from Lake Ontario. Unfortunately for shoreline owners above Niagara Falls, speeding water out of Lake Ontario doesn't affect Lake Erie.

This summer, the Long Point Region Conservation Authority said Lake Erie is about 80 centimetres above its historic average.

Ben Hodi, a water resource analyst with the LPRCA, said Lake Erie levels depend on inflows from the upper lakes, the amount of precipitation the lake receives from rivers and tributaries, and the rate of evaporation. There

is no mechanism, Hodi added, for hastening water over Niagara Falls into Lake Ontario.

Weber was at council to thank the municipality for restoring rock and rubble breakwaters along the 48 properties on Hastings Drive that belong to the county.

Private property owners on Hastings have maintained their breakwaters. This has prevented the adjacent sand roadbed from washing out. Because the county allowed its breakwaters to fragment, Hastings Drive in the area of county land has washed out during recent storms. This has forced occasional road closures lasting several days.

Weber told council this no longer happens despite severe weather in October. Hastings Drive was impassable for a few hours Nov. 1 following Halloween's wind storm due to debris in the right-of-way. However, Weber said the road bed held up and was again passable once a grader came through.

"I'm here to say thank you," Weber said. "Thank you for listening to the concerns of property owners along Hastings Drive. Thank you for stepping up and being a good neighbour. By protecting your property you protected ours." – with files from Postmedia

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Comments