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Possible Consideration for the Clean Environment Commission Hearings on Lake Winnipeg Regulation

The Lake Ontario/St. Lawrence River Study

In December 2010, Manitoba Hydro applied to the Manitoba government for a Final License for Lake Winnipeg Regulation under the provisions of the Water Power Act. The initial interim license had been granted in 1970.

Following Manitoba Hydro's request, the Manitoba government tasked the Clean Environment Commission with holding a review of this application for a final license to "provide a public forum to consult stakeholders regarding Manitoba Hydro's performance under its Interim License" (Sept. 01, 2011 letter from Bill Blaikie, Minister of Conservation to Terry Sargent, CEC). Due to other priorities, the CEC's hearings have been delayed but are now being considered for the fall of 2014.

In preparing for these hearings we have become aware of a somewhat comparable situation in the Lake Ontario/St. Lawrence River Hydro operations. Information on this can be found on this website. <http://www.ijc.org/loslr/en/index.php> In the 1990's there was growing dissatisfaction with some of the impacts of the regulation in that area and so a study was conducted to look at all the impacts of the water level regulation and to recommend various options for modifications to the way the regulation was working in that area. One of the major issues in the Lake Ontario/ St. Lawrence River water regulation, was the deteriorating health of the coastal wetlands which is certainly a significant concern here in Manitoba as well. The following is an excerpt from the IJC website that describes what and why they undertook the study about the regulation in the Lake Ontario/St. Lawrence River scenario. It's a modern, balanced approach to flow and water regulation, taking into account ecological, social and economic factors.

"We know we must prepare for conditions that are wetter and drier than those the current approach was based on. Plan Bv7, the IJC's proposed regulation plan, is designed to perform under more realistic water supplies, including those experienced since the 1950s and statistically-generated water supply scenarios that are more extreme, but still considered to be likely under the current climate regime. The proposed plan also incorporates practical experience gained from 50 years of operation under many different water supply and ice conditions.

The International Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Study generated a wealth of new knowledge on how water level regulation affects basin interests, including environmental, coastal property and recreational boating. After evaluating over 400 environmental performance indicators, the study analyzed 32 that were sensitive to water levels and representative of ecosystem health. Effects to property were estimated from a parcel database of buildings and shore protection structures, building elevations, 40 years of hourly wave height and direction data, and historical erosion rates. Effects to recreational boating were estimated from an inventory of all marinas, yacht clubs and launch ramps, as well as surveys of boaters and charter and tour boat operators. Substantial work after the study to complete the parcel database in Canada and on Lake St. Lawrence, and refine the models of environmental performance and flow management during ice formation has strengthened our understanding of how water levels regulation affects basin interests.”

We are proposing that the upcoming CEC hearings on Lake Winnipeg Regulation undertake a similar study to fully ascertain the impacts of the current regulation regime and then to forecast the implications of altering the parameters of the regulation requirements. It is an opportunity to put into place a balanced and modern approach taking into consideration the 40 years of experience Manitoba Hydro has now accumulated. Although the recommendations from the Lake Ontario/St. Lawrence River study have not yet been implemented, it does offer a constructive example of what we could be doing here around Lake Winnipeg regulation.

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