**AYC Ecology North**

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**Great Lakes Losing 2.5 Billion Gallons Per Day Due to Manmade Drain Hole Near Detroit**

**New Research Finds St. Clair River Draining Water from Lakes Huron, Michigan at Triple Rate Originally Thought**

PRNewswire, prnewswire.com

Two years after specialists first linked declining water levels in Lakes Michigan and Huron to U.S. and Canadian navigation dredging, riverbed mining and shoreline alteration projects near Port Huron and Sarnia, research released Tuesday finds that the river "drain hole" is sucking away triple the amount of water previously estimated--causing widespread ecological harm throughout the middle Great Lakes.

The updated findings released by the Georgian Bay Association (GBA) show that the drain hole in the St. Clair River is causing the Michigan-Huron system to hemorrhage 2.5 billion gallons of water a day--more than triple the 845 million gallons documented two years ago by a consulting firm studying the impact of the U.S. Army Corps's dredging in the river.

Those billions of gallons of lake water lost down the drain each day--more water than what's used by all Chicagoland households in a day--translate to rapidly declining water levels, which negatively affect water quality, boating, fishing, and commercial shipping.

 "This new report reveals that the problem is far more serious than first thought and underscores the need to fix the problem immediately," said Mary Muter, local Georgian Baykeeper for the national Waterkeeper Alliance and Chair of GBA's Environment Committee. "The longer we wait for mitigation measures to be put in place, the worse it will get. It's time to stand up for the millions of boaters, shippers, anglers, property owners, and beach-goers who rely on these lakes and stop the water loss now. We can't afford to wait."

"The historic changes and dredging of the St. Clair River over the years has resulted in changes to the riverbed that has increased the amount of water going down the river, carrying more and more water out of Michigan and Huron, through the lower Lakes, and out to the ocean. This water is irreplaceable," explains Roger Gauthier, Lead Hydrologist for the Great Lakes Commission. "It has reached a point where the damage is profound. It is now threatening the hydrological integrity of the entire upper Lakes."

Since 1970, the drainage hole, which continues to grow larger, has resulted in an overall water level decline of nearly two feet, or 60 centimeters, in Lakes Michigan and Huron and Georgian Bay. If put together in one place, that two foot loss would be the size of a block of water one mile high and four miles long by four miles wide.

"We're seeing drastic sustained decline in the Michigan-Huron system at the same time that Lake Erie is rising," said Bill Bialkowski, the Engineer who conducted the new GBA research. "This is indicative of water loss independent of naturally occurring fluctuations or those due to global warming. Research is showing us that this is a persistent, unprecedented water loss."

These alarming findings come as the International Joint Commission (IJC) prepares to begin its Upper Great Lakes Study, which will examine the St. Clair drain hole and other possible causes to the water level crisis. The study has met with some criticism and controversy among advocates, as it is being led by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Environment Canada, which are failing to acknowledge the danger of the situation.

 IJC studies of this nature often take more than six years, which advocates and scientists insist is too long to wait. According to engineers, Lakes Huron and Michigan will lose another 12 centimeters, or about four inches, if the water loss is allowed to continue for more than five years.

 "Water level deficits over the past two seasons have had major negative

 effects in the shipping industry," said William Hryb, general manager,

 Lakehead Shipping Company Limited. "Additional trips by vessels because of

 lighter payloads lead to higher production costs. This is an enormous

 economic burden few ship owners and operators can afford."

 The new GBA research uses water level data from the National Oceanic

 and Atmospheric Association's Great Lakes Environmental Research Lab that

 extends through February 2007--data that was not available when the

 original Baird Report was released. According to the original 2005 Baird

 Report, the rapid water loss is due to a number of factors, with bottom

 erosion of the St. Clair River being the major factor. Much of this erosion

 is a consequence of navigation dredging conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of

 Engineers that took place in the river during the 1960s. The Corps designed

 structures to remediate anticipated adverse impacts of this dredging at

 that time, but the project was never completed.

 Environmental warning signs including dried up wetlands, less fish

 spawning, and unusually shallow waterways have begun to surface in Lakes

 Huron and Michigan as well, leading many to fear for the overall health of

 the region. There are several factors that have converged to cause low

 water levels in the Middle Great Lakes, but the erosion in the St. Clair

 River stands out among these problems as a man-made issue that can be

 corrected fairly easily and within a relatively short timetable.

 "Great Lakes water is far too precious to squander away through an

 increasing hole in the channel," said Joel Brammeier, associate director of

 the Alliance for the Great Lakes. "With lake levels nearing record lows,

 all hands on deck should be focused on plugging a gap we've known about for

 years."