

NYSG is helping decisionmakers respond to climate change impacts that are creating water level extremes in Lake Ontario, threatening the sustainability of waterfront communities.

NYSG Connects Local Stakeholders and Regulators to Strengthen Lake Ontario Water Level Decision Making

Lake Ontario outflows are regulated in accordance to Plan 2014, by the International Joint Commission’s (IJC) International Lake Ontario–St. Lawrence River Board (ILO-SLRB), primarily through the Moses-Saunders dam. The ILO-SLRB may deviate from the rules of Plan 2014 under specific conditions, such as the high-water extremes during 2017 and 2019. Water levels continue to be a contentious topic among coastal stakeholders. Localized data is needed to allow better informed decisions related to water management.

Given New York Sea Grant’s (NYSG) credibility and long-standing relationships with waterfront communities, NYSG coordinated and co-facilitated a meeting with the IJC Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Adaptive Management Committee (GLAM), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and decisionmakers from priority communities to review the data used to define “Impact Zones” for use in the ILO-SLRB Decision Support Tool.

As a result of this work, aspects of the support tool are improved. Specifically, the NY impact zones were verified and, in some cases, improved; e.g., expanding Sodus Point to include the barrier bar and additional portions of the Sodus Bay shoreline. A potential new impact zone based on local input related to North (Sandy) Pond was identified.

The creation of the ILO-SLRB Decision Support Tool, with verified local data, supports the ability to make better-informed decisions related to water outflow deviations. Enhanced communication as a result of the process used by NYSG to engage the IJC GLAM and local stakeholders is expected to positively impact future interactions.

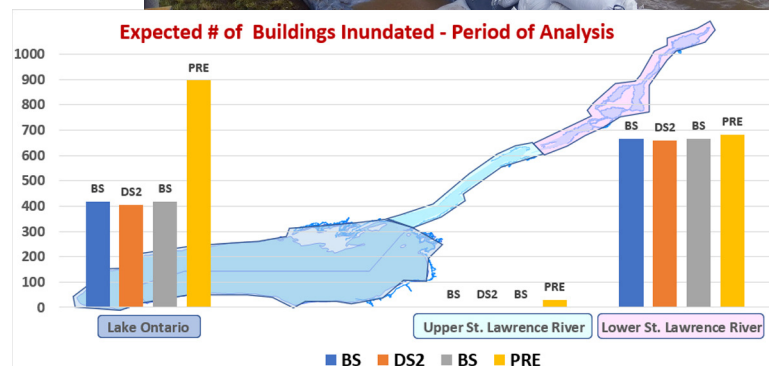
Project Partners:

- International Joint Commission Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Adaptive Management Committee
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

NYSG Focus Area for this project: Resilient New York Communities and Economies.

New York Sea Grant is a joint program of Cornell University, the State University of New York, and NOAA.
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Top: A Lake Ontario property inundated in 2017; above: data chart projecting inundation along the Lake and the St. Lawrence River. Photo: Mary Austerman/NYSG

“NYSG was instrumental in connecting the IJC GLAM committee with leaders in impacted communities along the Lake Ontario shoreline. These communities are among the most sensitive areas when water levels are high and their input to the Decision Support Tool will improve the available information when the International Lake Ontario-St Lawrence River Board considers deviations during periods of extremely high-water levels.”

*— Christopher Warren, P.E., Hydraulic Engineer,
 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*