

Willow Island Property Owners Association
Submission to Manitoba Clean Environment Commission
February 28, 2015

RECOMMENDATION: REDUCE UPPER LIMIT OF MANITOBA HYDRO LICENCE LEVEL OF LAKE TO 714' ABOVE SEA LEVEL

Background:

Willow Island is part of the Gimli Municipality and is situated on the west shore of Lake Winnipeg, just south of Gimli. Although still referred to as Willow Island, this stretch of land is technically no longer an island, as a causeway now links it to the mainland forming a continuous 3 mile long isthmus. We are surrounded by water and therefore vulnerable to the elements from 3 directions. There are 85 residents on the "island" who are impacted by these high lake levels.

Lake Levels and Manitoba Hydro

Before regulation the lake naturally had high water years and low water years. During the high water years there was often shoreline erosion and property damage, but this was always countered by periods of low water when the shoreline would be replenished. As an example, from 1974-2014 before regulation, the lake fell below 712' in twelve different years, almost 40% of the time, giving the shores and the marshes the ability to replenish. Since regulation Lake Winnipeg has fallen below 712 only four times. When a storm event takes place during periods of low water, the sand is washed in from the bottom and the beaches are rebuilt. But because the water has been consistently high these past years, the sand and the beaches are being eroded and not being replenished. All of the shorelines on Willow Island have been severely reduced or have disappeared since regulation of the lake.

At the upper control level of 715 feet Manitoba Hydro has shown an inability to control the lake level as evidenced by the many occurrences of sustained levels above 716 feet and even 717 feet, including the summer of 2014. Even though the upper gates were wide open, Hydro could not reduce the level of water in the lake fast enough to prevent shoreline damage. When the dam was built, Hydro claimed that they could increase the outflow from the lake by 50% and therefore counter any high levels in the lake by letting 50% more water out. But they've been consistently wrong. Under extreme wind conditions they can't let the water out fast enough if the level is 715 or higher.

Property Damage and Costs Incurred

1. Land Erosion

Property owners with cottages and homes on Willow Island have had considerable land erosion due to high winds (from the north) which have caused loss of property and valuable trees. Most property owners on Willow Island have taken measures in an attempt to mitigate the risk of more land erosion. Some measures have been

more effective than others depending on what has been done. In a quick poll of property owners it seems that costs incurred to shore up property range from \$7500 to \$25,000 per residence. As taxpaying Manitobans, we have paid to have the dams built to create hydro electricity and now we are also paying because of the damage these dams have caused. And because there is no control or guidance regarding protective measures, some of these attempts to save property have had adverse effect on neighboring properties.

2. Overland and Cottage Flooding

When the water is high and the winds blow, the lake comes at us from all sides. We suffer erosion on the north side from wave action and actual flooding from the south side because of high water. Garages, basements, and crawlspaces have been flooded resulting in content damage and in some cases, major structural repairs. Despite paying federal, provincial, and municipal taxes, our seasonal property owners have received no compensation for any damages.

3. Selling Property and Loss of Value

In the last few years, a number of cottage owners have sold their property due to the stress of the high lake levels and threat of further damage. Others have identified that the value of their property has decreased significantly.

Observations and Concerns

If the government maintains that there is no problem with high water and erosion, why has the government taken action to protect all government land on the lakeshore at a cost of millions of dollars?

Manitoba Hydro seems to have made revenue from hydro it's only priority in decisions it makes regarding the lake. The high lake level makes a profit for Manitoba but this is at the expense of our beaches, our marshes, tourism, the fishing industry, our homes and our property. Hydro has turned Lake Winnipeg into a reservoir. Our lake has not functioned as a lake since the dam was built.

If the government has decided (and they will never admit it) that the revenue generated by hydro is more important than the shoreline and the people who live on it, then they need to be willing to compensate those property owners (permanent and seasonal). Furthermore, the government needs to provide guidance and expertise on how to protect the collective shoreline. Presently people are attempting to protect their own land but often this has a negative impact on their neighbors.

Solution

We believe the solution to help reduce the negative effects of regulation is to re-set the upper limit of the license to no more than 714 feet above sea level. The maximum level hydro has been allowed to hold the lake at was an experiment. It may have been successful for the production of hydro, but it has been a failure for many other reasons, especially for the shoreline of the lake. We believe it's essential for the health and use of the lake that the allowable maximum be reduced to 714'. Even if the lake was reduced on occasion to a 711' level, would this compromise the ability to produce maximum electricity for Hydro's customers? Does anyone know?

Submitted on behalf of Willow Island Property Owners Association

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