

December 8, 2013



## **Reservoir Lake Water Levels Higher than Normal this Fall**

If you have not been back to the cottage since Thanksgiving, you may be surprised to learn that lakes levels throughout Haliburton and northern Peterborough Counties rose to unusually high levels for late October and early November. In some cases, levels were at record highs for the time of year. The principal reason: unusually high rainfall in October. This means that those of us who thought we had pulled docks far-enough out of the lake and up on to the shore may find that our docks were re-floated and moved around by wind and current. Lake levels have been falling steadily since the ground started to freeze in late November, but draining the entire system back to normal levels is a slow process, especially for the upper Gull River watershed. It is expected that most lake levels should be back close to the long term average by the end of December as long as we do not have a prolonged thaw or more exceptional rainfall events before then.

There have been suggestions in the local media that the high water levels were the result of poor water management decisions by the Trent-Severn Waterway (TSW). But this does not appear to be the case. The real story is that the Gull River system in particular has severe flow-constraints that make it hard to drain excess water from the system in a timely manner – as was seen following the April 2013 flood events.

The CEWF Executive Committee met with TSW staff on two occasions in the past few weeks and received a full briefing on the fall water levels. It is important to note that the TSW completed all normal fall log adjustment operations before the end of September and our reservoir dams were all at their “winter set” levels. The lakes were draining and most of the reservoirs were close to typical fall levels, which is a goal prior to the trout-spawning period in mid-October. The one general exception was that the reservoir lakes upstream of Minden were typically some 20mm (8 inches) above average in early October.

Starting on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October, we began to receive very heavy rain over most of the Haliburton Sector of the Trent River basin. The total precipitation for October at the Haliburton station was reported by Environment Canada as 207mm, which is more than twice the 30-year average of 97mm for the month. The precipitation events were concentrated on a few days, which further increased the rate of direct runoff to the lakes. We received 62mm (2.5 inches) on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of October, another 36mm (1.5 inches) between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of October, another 25mm (1 inch) on the 21<sup>st</sup>, and finally 41mm on the 31<sup>st</sup> of the month. This exceptional amount of rainfall saturated the ground and caused all reservoirs to rise well above their normal fall levels. This in spite of the fact that logs were out of the dams and water was passing freely downstream. Similar record levels were experienced on the flow-through lakes and on the connecting rivers. The Gull River in Minden has been flowing at just below flood level since mid-October. All logs have been removed from the Gull Lake dam so there is nothing more that can be done to evacuate water from the Gull system.

Further downstream in the Trent System the canal lakes have been drawn down early to make room for the flows coming from the reservoirs and the Otonabee River at Peterborough continues to flow at very high levels.

If you are interested in the water level charts for individual lakes go to the Parks Canada website where you will find a new format graph that includes a red line for the average level to compare with the actual levels. The new format for the water level graphs is discussed below on this CEWF website.