

Water Levels Q&A May 28, 2010

Ontario Power Generation operates its dams in accordance with water management plans developed and approved under the direction of the Ministry of Natural Resources. For more information on these plans please contact your local MNR office. [www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/ContactUs/index.html]

In addition, for rivers where there are water management plans, standing advisory committees are kept informed of water conditions and have input into plans and actions. Other rivers are controlled through regulatory or control boards, for example the International St. Lawrence River Board of Control.

Levels for many rivers that OPG has facilities on are posted and updated regularly on OPG's website at www.opg.com/safety/water/river/.

This spring many cottagers and campers have noticed their lakes and rivers are lower than normal. Below we answer many of the questions we've received.

Q: Why is the water so low on my lake?

A: The simple answer is that most areas didn't get typical snow falls this past winter. Moreover, we're in the middle of what Environment Canada noted was the driest spring in 100 years and have dubbed it "the invisible drought". The combination means that flows on many of the rivers and levels on many of the lakes in Ontario are significantly lower than normal for this time of the year. In some cases lake levels and flows are comparable to conditions experienced in the late summer.

Q: Is OPG responsible for these low levels?

A: No. The low levels are because there has been little or no rain in Ontario this spring, and we had little or no snow in most areas this past winter. OPG manages and uses water in compliance with MNR approved water management plans that consider the requirements of all users of the lakes and rivers – electricity production is given the lowest priority. Currently, many of OPG's hydroelectric stations are passing little more than the minimum flows required to meet the needs of fish spawning and the environmental requirements of the river systems.

Q: I have heard that OPG was late closing dams?

A: No, that's not the case. In fact in some cases we closed dams earlier than normal. We monitor weather, snow pack (in early spring), rainfall and adjust our operations according to comply with MNR water management plans. The Ministry of Natural Resources oversees the management of rivers and lakes in Ontario. Water levels are managed to balance the needs of fish spawning, navigation, drinking water supplies, recreation and hydroelectric power. This spring OPG hydroelectric generation was well below normal during the freshet period when normally we experience our highest production.

People should also remember that these lakes and rivers are part of a larger system that could stretch for hundreds of miles and include many lakes and rivers. The plans we follow are designed to balance the needs of everyone on the system. Closing a dam to make water rise on one lake, may mean someone downstream doesn't have drinking water.

Q: How do the flows we are experiencing compare to previous years?

A: To give an example of the conditions experienced, the peak flow on the Ottawa River during this spring was 50-60 per cent of the long-term average and was the lowest on record at some sites. Flows on the Madawaska River are 30 per cent of normal for this time of year and are more comparable to what occurs typically in July.

Q: The lake that's not controlled by MNR and OPG looks fine – how come your lakes are so low?

A: Many OPG and MNR lakes are man-made reservoirs. They are drawn down through the winter so that they can accommodate expected normal high flows in the spring to prevent flooding. They rely on being filled by snow melt, and spring rains – both of which were much less than normal. We're in the middle of what Environment Canada has called "the invisible drought."

Q: Are you going to work to modify your plans so this won't happen again?

A: The plans are not the problem, lack of rain is the problem.

Q: People say you're not answering their questions – will you be informing lake users?

A: Local public affairs officers can be contacted for information. Look under the Community Activities section of [opg.com](http://www.opg.com) for the contact in your area.

www.opg.com/community/activities/