

## **Water Levels Q&A      July 9, 2010**

Ontario Power Generation operates its dams in accordance with planning guidelines or water management plans developed and approved under the direction of the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). For more information on MNR water management plans please contact your local MNR office.

<http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/ContactUs/index.html>

In addition, for rivers where there are MNR approved 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/](http://www.opg.com/safety/water/river/)

This spring and summer 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 lack of rain. This past spring was one of the driest in 100 years and has been dubbed it "the invisible drought". The dry weather 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.

### **Q: Is OPG responsible for these low levels?**

A: No. The levels are low because of extremely dry weather. For rivers where there are approved MNR water management plans, OPG manages and uses water in compliance with these plans that consider the requirements of all users of the lakes and rivers. These plans consider elements such as fish spawning, the environment, navigation, drinking water supplies, recreation and electricity generation.

This spring and summer 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 this spring in recognition of the potential for reduced spring

runoff. We monitor weather, snow pack (in early spring), rainfall and adjust our operations in order to comply with MNR water management plans. The Ministry of Natural Resources oversees the management of rivers and lakes in Ontario.

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, but can impact users of the water downstream.

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

A: Many of OPG's "lakes" are in fact reservoirs that are drawn down through the winter and refilled in spring. This allows the stored water to be used for generation over the high demand winter period, and takes advantage of the normally high flows in spring to refill these lakes. This sequence also helps minimize spring flooding. The spring refill relies on snow melt, and spring rains – both of which were much less than normal this year. Because of dry weather, this spring was dubbed by Environment Canada as "the invisible drought."

**Q: Are you going to work to modify your plans so these low levels 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: OPG conducts Public Stakeholder meetings in various communities throughout the year to update and inform the public on water levels and flows. Local public affairs officers can also be contacted for information. Look under the Community Activities section of [opg.com](http://opg.com) for the contact in your area.