

**INTERNATIONAL RAINY LAKE BOARD OF CONTROL  
INTERNATIONAL RAINY RIVER WATER POLLUTION BOARD**

**NEWSLETTER**

**ACTIVITIES AND ACTIONS SUMMARY - 2003**

Number 1

Feb., 2004

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This is the first issue of a planned series of public newsletters to be published jointly by the International Rainy Lake Board of Control (IRLBC) and the International Rainy River Water Pollution Board (IRRWPB). The newsletters are aimed at providing the public with a periodic summary of the boards' activities and actions. This first issue provides a summary covering calendar year 2003. Future issues will be released on a quarterly basis, shortly after the end of each quarter. The newsletters will be posted on the International Joint Commission's web site at [www.ijc.org](http://www.ijc.org) and can be viewed by following the appropriate links for each board. Further information on accessing IRLBC and IRRWPB web postings is given later in this newsletter.

***Basin Conditions***

On the heels of the high water conditions in the Rainy-Namakan basin in 2002, conditions turned very dry and remained so through most of 2003. Precipitation over the Rainy-Namakan basin from November 1, 2002 through March 31, 2003 was the lowest since Board records start in 1901. The spring refill for Rainy and Namakan lakes was very poor. As a result, the level of [Rainy Lake](#) was below its lower IJC rule curve from May through early November and below its IJC "drought line" from June through mid-October. Although not as severely impacted, the level of [Namakan Lake](#) was below its lower IJC rule curve from early May through mid-July. Once back within their respective IJC rule curves, both lakes remained there through the end of the year.

***Regulation***

In an effort to alleviate the impacts of low lake levels, the IRLBC took several actions under the terms of the IJC's 2001 "[Consolidated Order](#) for regulation of the level of Rainy Lake and of other Boundary Waters in the Rainy Lake Watershed". These actions were taken in consultation with resource agencies, affected municipalities, and others.

The IRLBC issued a public advisory concerning the very dry conditions in the Rainy-Namakan basin on [May 30<sup>th</sup>](#). On [June 19<sup>th</sup>](#), to slow Rainy Lake's rate of decline, the Board authorized a reduction in the outflow of Rainy Lake from 100 cubic meters per second (m<sup>3</sup>/s) or 3,530 cubic feet per second (ft<sup>3</sup>/s) down to 75 m<sup>3</sup>/s (2,650 ft<sup>3</sup>/s). Further action was taken on [July 10<sup>th</sup>](#) as the Board directed that Namakan Lake levels be maintained within the lower 10 percent of the IJC operating band, once the lake level rose above its lower IJC rule curve. This allowed more water to be passed downstream to help improve the low water situation on Rainy Lake.

The action taken by the Board on June 19<sup>th</sup> to reduce Rainy Lake outflow to 75 m<sup>3</sup>/s (2,650 ft<sup>3</sup>/s) was terminated in mid-October as the level of Rainy Lake rose above its IJC drought line. The normal IJC minimum outflow of 100 m<sup>3</sup>/s (3,530 ft<sup>3</sup>/s), as prescribed by the Consolidated Order, was reinstated.

On [November 5<sup>th</sup>](#), the Board issued revised guidance on Namakan Lake levels due to a modest improvement in basin conditions and the expectation that Rainy Lake would rise into its IJC band. Under the revised guidance, the Board directed that Namakan Lake levels be maintained in accordance with the general provisions of the IJC's January 2001 Consolidated Order, subject to the level of Rainy Lake returning to its IJC operating band. This action terminated the Board's July 10<sup>th</sup> directive.

For 2003, the level of Rainy Lake reached its lowest point on June 23<sup>rd</sup> at 336.58 m (1104.3 ft), 87 cm (34 in) below its lower rule curve and 12 cm (5 in) below its drought line. This was the lowest summertime level since the rule curves were implemented in 1949. However, the lowest level recorded in recent years was 336.48 m (1103.9 ft) on October 14, 1998, which was 10 cm (4 in) below the minimum in 2003.

### ***Local Public Involvement***

The IJC has a long-standing interest in having more local involvement in the water management activities of its various boards. Interest groups and residents in the Rainy-Namakan basin echoed these sentiments and requested stronger local input following the high water years of 2001 and 2002.

On May 12, 2003, IJC Canadian Chairman Herb Gray and IJC United States Commissioner Allen Olson held public meetings with representatives of affected interest groups in Fort Frances and Baudette to seek their views on improving local involvement. Two potential approaches were proposed for discussion

Decision-making - To expand membership on the IRLBC from two to four, by adding two members who live within the watershed of Rainy Lake, Namakan Lake and Rainy River, one from the United States and one from Canada.

Advice to the IRLBC - To establish an Advisory Committee that would advise the IRLBC on matters of local concern regarding the Board's mandate, and to improve communication between the Board and the public within the watershed. The Advisory Committee would be comprised of members of the public who reside within the watersheds of Rainy Lake, Namakan Lake and Rainy River.

After assessing the public input, the IJC viewed expansion of the IRLBC as the best means for incorporating local involvement into the IRLBC decision-making process. On December 9, 2003 the IJC appointed Mr. Leland Grim and Mr. Steven Richardson to the Board.

Mr. Grim, of International Falls, Minnesota, taught science at Rainy River Community College for 33 years and has worked as a seasonal employee in Voyageurs National Park for 31

summers. He was appointed by the Governor to serve on the Minnesota Environmental Education Board for four years.

Mr. Richardson, of Devlin, Ontario, has served as a firefighter for 21 years, including 10 years in management positions. In 2000, the Ontario Government appointed him Fire Coordinator for the District of Rainy River.

Mr. Grim and Mr. Richardson will join current members, Dr. Syed Moin of Burlington, Ontario and Colonel Robert Ball of St. Paul, Minnesota. Members of the IRLBC are expected to monitor Rainy Lake and Namakan Lake levels and outflows to ensure that regulation of these lakes is in compliance with the Commission's Orders.

With this goal achieved, the Commission has directed the IRLBC to continue with the investigation of the establishment of a local advisory committee.

### ***Annual Public Meetings***

The IRLBC and IRRWPB held joint annual public meetings in International Falls on July 24<sup>th</sup> and in the Town of Rainy River on July 25<sup>th</sup>. Members of the IJC and staff were in attendance. In addition to a brief background on both boards, the presentations focused on a review of basin conditions from January 2002 to the present. Emphasis was placed on the sharp contrast between the high water event of 2002 and the very dry conditions of 2003 in the Rainy-Namakan basin due to the high variability and unpredictability of inflow produced by nature. The boards stressed the need for floodplain management and public awareness in light of such natural variability and limited ability of humans to control its consequences.

### ***Website Developments***

The IJC launched its new website in December 2003. Information on IRLBC and IRRWPB membership, board mandate, board publications (reports, news releases, etc.), useful links to other websites, and board activities, can now be found on the new website at the following web links:

#### **IJC**

<http://www.ijc.org>

#### **IRLBC**

[http://www.ijc.org/conseil\\_board/rainy\\_lake/en/rl\\_home\\_accueil.htm](http://www.ijc.org/conseil_board/rainy_lake/en/rl_home_accueil.htm)

#### **IRRWPB**

[http://www.ijc.org/conseil\\_board/rainy\\_river/en/rainy\\_home\\_accueil.htm](http://www.ijc.org/conseil_board/rainy_river/en/rainy_home_accueil.htm)

### ***Other Activities***

Hazardland Awareness

In light of the 2001 and 2002 high water events in the Rainy-Namakan basin, the Boards continue to explore means to raise public awareness about water levels that can occur, to educate the public about the shoreline hazard land or floodplain and to encourage local governments to adopt and enforce restrictions on the use and development of these lands.

Rainy River Gauge

On June 30<sup>th</sup> a new real-time water level gauge at the Town of Rainy River, Ontario became operational. The gauge, installed by the Water Survey of Canada, was jointly funded through a partnership of the IJC, the Fort Frances District Office of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) and the Lake of the Woods Control Board (LWCB). The Town of Rainy River supported the project by providing construction crews to install the necessary sensing line from the gauge site to the Rainy River. The Town has also provided space and power for the gauging equipment in their water treatment plant. The new gauge provides improved monitoring on the lower Rainy River.

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*The Boards will be using the Newsletter as a mechanism to keep the public informed. If you have comments or questions, please contact the Boards' Secretary:*

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