

## Cootes Paradise wins as lake regulation plan dumped

**ERIC MCGUINNESS**

The Hamilton Spectator

(Oct 2, 2008)

Cootes Paradise appears to be safe from a threatened change in Lake Ontario levels that would have left the marsh too dry in spring when fish are spawning and waterbirds nesting.

Jim Hudson, executive director of the Bay Area Restoration Council, applauds the International Joint Commission (IJC) decision to abandon lake regulation Plan 2007, which came under heavy fire from local environmental organizations and hundreds of boaters as well as the governments of Ontario and New York State.

They want a return to more natural conditions that generally produce a higher water level after spring melt and a lower level at the end of summer, arguing that's best for wildlife and for efforts to restore marsh vegetation in the Cootes wetland nature sanctuary, which acts as a fish nursery for western Lake Ontario.

Hudson, who appeared before the commission to oppose Plan 2007 in Jordan last June, said the decision "illustrates that people can be heard."

"Contrast that with the Hamilton Health Sciences decision (to close the McMaster emergency room to adults) this week. In the environmental sector, a big, international, multi-governmental organization was willing to step back and say we are willing to take another look based on the upwelling of sentiment from Joe Public.

"It's good news for the decision and the process, and I want to offer tremendous thanks to all the parties that came forward, the environmental groups and the boating community that rallied to the cause."

The IJC conducted a five-year, \$20-million study that proposed three alternatives for better controlling the level of the lake. The commissioners rejected all three in favour of one labelled Plan 2007, devised at their request by commission staff.

It would have lowered the level in spring, when storms often accelerate erosion along the New York shore, where there is a strong landowner lobby.

After weighing submissions made at a series of hearings, the commissioners wrote last month to the governments of Canada and the U.S. to say "there was little support for regulation Plan 2007." They said they now want to move to more natural flows.

If the two federal governments consent, the IJC aims to come up with something new by next June. Until then, it says it will stick to the present regulation plan, in effect since 1958.

[emcguinness@thespec.com](mailto:emcguinness@thespec.com)

905-526-4650