

Level plan a mistake, lakes commission told

Critics say Hamilton Harbour cleanup at risk

ERIC MCGUINNESS

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The International Joint Commission (IJC) was told last night that its proposed new plan for regulating the level of Lake Ontario jeopardizes the cleanup of Hamilton Harbour and efforts to remove it from the list of Great Lakes pollution hot spots by 2015.

John Hall, co-ordinator of the harbour Remedial Action Plan, Jim Hudson, executive director of the Bay Area Restoration Council, and Tys Theysmeyer, aquatic ecologist for the Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG), presented a united front against the IJC's favoured Plan 2007, which they said would result in high water at the wrong time for plants and animals.

"Timing is everything in plant and animal life," Theysmeyer said.

They were joined by Laurel Thompson, who presented a petition signed by 350 people opposed to the plan.

Backing also came from Doug Cuthbert of Burlington, Canadian co-chair of the five-year, \$20-million IJC study that proposed three alternatives that the commissioners set aside in favour of Plan 2007 that was devised later at their request by commission staff.

All the Hamilton-Burlington speakers called on the six commissioners to adopt Plan B+, one said to be best for the environment but more costly to landowners because the lake would be higher during spring storms that erode shore properties, especially along the Niagara Peninsula and in New York State.

Hall said restoration of the Cootes Paradise marsh and Grindstone Creek estuary, both on RBG lands, is a criterion for delisting the harbour as an IJC area of concern, and delisting "may not be possible if Plan 2007 is approved."

He reminded Canadian co-chair Herb Gray, a former deputy prime minister, and the other commissioners that York University researchers estimate a billion-dollar payback from delisting the harbour, and said: "Do not approve Plan 2007 as this will be very difficult to move away from.

"It will set a clear path, entrenching errors of the past that allowed for properties to be built in areas susceptible to flooding and erosion. Plan 2007 will set a path that clearly compromises the environmental benefits of the Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River system."

Cuthbert said the IJC study had been very public and transparent, but Plan 2007 was devised behind closed doors, "raising suspicions as to how and why."

Last night's public hearing was the first of 10 the commission will hold before making a decision.

Written comments will be accepted until July 11.

For more information, go to ijc.org.

emcguinness@thespec.com

905-526-4650

