

Tay Waterway: A 2021 Review

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Over the past 12 months, water levels along the Tay waterway experienced substantial, and often unseasonal, fluctuations, which some long-term residents have described as unprecedented.

For the first eight months of January to August 2021, water levels from Bobs Lake to Port Elmsley were extremely low. Most prominently, Christie Lake was consistently near, and often below, its minimum historic low level, and Perth experienced periods when the flow was as low as 50% under normal. The initial cause was the low snowpack of the 2020/2021 winter, followed by below normal precipitation in the spring. During this period, the flow from Bobs Lake Dam was not increased, and the lake level was maintained at close to its historic average.

In early August, the flow from Bobs Lake Dam was suddenly doubled, which caught the attention of downstream residents when some docks ended up under water. This happened at a time

when the level in the Rideau Canal was dropping, and presumably additional water was needed to maintain the canal's 5-foot target draft.

A quick turnaround in the fall, beginning in October, brought extremely high water levels, which were maintained through December in most parts of the waterway. In November, Christie Lake was close to its Historic High. In Perth, high rainfall in December raised the flow to 100% over average.

Since entering the New Year with the winter freeze, levels have dropped substantially - in some areas, to below average. The foregoing level fluctuations would not be significant if more were known about where climate change is taking us.

To summarise, for most of 2021, Parks Canada maintained the Bobs Lake level at close to its Historic Average. Because there have been major dry and wet spells affecting Christie Lake and the rest of the waterway, this can only happen if a priority is being given to maintaining levels at Bobs Lake, to feed the Rideau Canal system, rather than to care for the 45 km waterway as a whole. Of note, this was also the case in late 2020, when the waterway was high, while Bobs Lake was maintained at a normal level. This situation was certainly exacerbated by Parks Canada withdrawing daily public access to Bobs Lake flow data.

Information and updates on the Tay Net Program may be seen on the website at

<https://www.taywatershed.ca/documents/streamflow.php>

Sources: This review of water levels along the Tay waterway is based in part on information gathered by this association's nine 'Tay Watcher' volunteers, who take measurements as required at selected sites along the 40 km waterway between Bobs Lake and Port Elmsley. Their findings add to the valuable online data on water levels and flow from five electronic gauges, managed by Rideau Valley Conservation Authority and the Federal MNRF Department. A sixth gauge is being installed by MNRF on the Tay River near Bolingbroke Road. Data from a flow gauge operated by Parks Canada at Bobs Lake Dam is no longer made available to the public by that agency.