

International Osoyoos Lake Board of Control – July Drought Meeting

July 8, 2024

Attendees: Dave Hutchinson, Katie Slimmon, Rob Caldwell, Kris Kauffman, Brian Symonds, Sue McKortoff, Kate Alexander, Scott Vanderkooi, Sarah Dunn, Col. Kathryn Sanborn, Connie Chapman, Sonja Michelsen, Anna Warwick Sears

Meeting Notes:

Introduction

- Mr. Hutchinson opened the meeting at 2 pm PDT and reviewed the agenda.

Hydrologic Conditions Update

- Ms. Slimmon provided an update on the current hydrologic conditions.
- The basin snowpack has melted.
- The Condition 8a drought criterion is projected to be met, the Similkameen River's projected April-July flow is 736 kac-ft.
- Condition 8bii will not be met. Okanagan Lake surpassed the 1122.6 ft threshold on June 5.
- Condition 8bi is of interest. Currently Okanagan Lake net inflow is above the 195,000 ac-ft threshold, meaning that drought conditions currently are not met, however negative net inflows in July are common in dry years.
- Outflows of both Okanagan and Osoyoos Lakes have been kept below normal.
- Osoyoos Lake water levels have been held within the Condition 8 operating range.

Hydrologic Conditions Discussion

- Dr. Warwick Sears reminded the group the 8bii target was met was because Mr. Shaun Reimer, the Okanagan Lake Operator, held back as much water in Okanagan Lake as possible.
- Dr. Warwick Sears added there was potential for a higher-than-normal irrigation demand.
- Mr. Hutchinson acknowledged the net inflow is still too close to the threshold to rescind the drought declaration.
- The consensus was to continue under Condition 8 until at least July 31.
- Mr. Symonds and Ms. McKortoff reported that locals have not had issues with the lake level. The risk of flooding from sudden inflows is now low, which is the main concern when water levels in the lake are high.

Okanagan Lake Fish Pulse

- Mr. Reimer has indicated there will be a fish flow pulse released from Okanagan Lake sometime in August.

- The Board may want to consider holding Osoyoos Lake at Condition 8 levels into August to supplement the pulse. If the drought declaration is rescinded and lake levels drawn down to within the Condition 7 bounds, that water might be wasted when it could otherwise augment the fish pulse.
- The pulse from Okanagan Lake isn't expected to push Osoyoos Lake levels above the rule curve.
- Mr. Symonds cautioned the potential of a temperature oxygen squeeze. A pulse of water through Okanagan Lake and past Zosel Dam could reduce the risk of fish dying. He added that Osoyoos Lake temperature stays high at the north end, even where water is deeper.
- Dr. Warwick Sears explained that they won't know when to release the pulse flows until fish arrive. The fish are being tracked but their travel through the basin depends on environmental factors.
- Mr. Symonds added that generally the warmer the water the slower the fish will move, and this looks to be a warm year.
- Mr. Symonds described the flow of water from Okanagan Lake to Osoyoos Lake, noting that there is a lag as water travels through the system, and that there are different basins within Osoyoos Lake. Managers need to focus on where the temperature of the water is most impacted and how the fish travel through Osoyoos Lake. He noted that it is important that we show some flexibility. There is no risk of flooding, so the Board should be able to be more strategic with the releases.
- Mr. Arterburn, the Colville Tribe and the ONA may be good to consult with about the timing of the fish.

Board's Discretion

- Dr. Warwick Sears thought the Board had discretion over when it is appropriate to remove the declaration. She emphasized that the IJC didn't appoint Board members to ignore their local and hydrological knowledge and that the board needs flexibility to respond to changing conditions.
- Ms. Michelsen put the following excerpt from the 2013 [Consolidated Orders](#) in the chat for reference:

“Drought year operations shall be terminated when in the opinion of the Board of Control the conditions no longer meet the criteria defining a drought year. The elevation of Osoyoos Lake shall then be returned to and maintained in accordance with Condition 7 in the shortest practicable time while respecting ramping rates that may be specified by the Board of Control from time to time”
- Mr. Hutchinson suggested writing a letter to the Commission recommending continued operation under drought conditions given the closeness to the drought thresholds and active management within the system. He voiced his understanding for what Dr. Warwick Sears had said about Mr. Reimer regulating the Lake.
- Mr. Hutchinson asked Mr. Caldwell about the IJC's interpretation of the Order. Would the Board be able to look less to the numerical and more to the whole watershed when determining if drought conditions persist.

- Mr. Caldwell responded that the Commission looks to the board to act on their expertise. Should the board want to deviate, they should simply write to the IJC Commissioners and ask for permission. The Commission needs to know what the board is doing. He suggested waiting until August to get the definitive number and that Condition 10 is also an option.
- The Commission will want the board to have sought endorsement from the operator.
- Mr. Hutchinson reported that he has been in communication with Ecology about seeking a Condition 10 variance, and that Mr. Reimer has been in communication with Ecology about lake level operations too.

Next Steps

- Be prepared to write a letter to the Commission in August should the inflow stay above the threshold.
- Communicate with Ecology.
 - Their staff are new after all and may not fully understand the order.
 - Educate on their options to manage lake levels.
- Those in attendance concurred with this plan.

NHC

- Mr. Hutchinson brought up the need to reschedule the July 24 NHC update meeting. NHC requires more time. Ms. Slimmon will be sending out a new doodle poll for the week of August 12-16.
- Mr. Caldwell mentioned that the meeting is tied to an early July deliverable. NHC won't be able to bill for the extra month of work. Mr. Hutchinson mentioned that this was not raised as a concern in previous conversation with Ms. Genevieve Brown, NHC project lead.
- Ms. Brown is asking about dykes in the area. Col. Sanborn responded that they are looking up the locations on the USACE map database.

Other

- Mr. Symonds was hiking in the Similkameen, there really isn't much snow left. Less water compared to normal. May be value in augmenting this flow later in the summer with the Okanogan River