

NYSG Assists Access to New Web-Based Tool: A Boaters' Forecast for the St. Lawrence River

New York Sea Grant (NYSG) helped make a new real-time, web-based tool available to recreational boaters on the St. Lawrence River.

Conditions on the River can change dramatically due to weather events, drawdowns in the system, pooling, and ponding. Water level regulation on the upper St. Lawrence River has noticeable effects on the river, particularly due to releases from the control dam on the River at Cornwall, Ontario-Massena, NY. Other human-driven decisions, and natural factors (i.e., wind), also impact the river conditions for boaters.

The Great Lakes Observing System (GLOS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Great Lakes Environmental Research Lab (GLERL), with assistance from NYSG, developed a new web-based forecasting resource for the River, integrating data from several sources including Environment Canada.

The St. Lawrence River Boaters Forecast is a real-time application of the Great Lakes Observing System for recreational boaters. Boaters, marina operators, and anyone with a computer or smart phone can access the easy-to-use Web site at www.glos.us.

This new tool provides real-time and forecasted water current and water depth data for points all along the River. Users can simply click on their desired locations to see depth and current readings now and 12 hours into the future.

Users can pre-set their own safety datapoints, e.g., a specific water depth or water current speed, and the Boaters Forecast will send an email or text alert when that point is reached.

At right, a GLOS data buoy that provides information on water conditions on the Great Lakes. The new Boaters' Forecast tool for St. Lawrence River provides boaters with current and 12-hours-ahead data on water depth and current. Photo: GLOS



Knowing this information helps boaters realize when they should head back to homeport or seek a safe haven.

Working with GLOS and GLERL, NYSG provided the education/outreach component for the "St. Lawrence River Boater Forecast" development and access project. Four public meetings were held along the river in Alexandria Bay and Ogdensburg, NY, to provide developers with actual boater input that was used to enhance the hydrodynamic modeling initiated by researchers.

John Cannon, a St. Lawrence boater who tested the site noted, "I enjoyed using the website. It was very straightforward. I will be using the information when boating in the 1000 Islands. This tool will be very helpful to anticipate changes in river conditions."

GLOS Program Coordinator Kelli Paige reports that between July 2012 and mid-January 2013 this new boaters' resource had been accessed by more than 3,000 unique viewers who spent an average 4:15 minutes on the site. This pilot project is now the basis for the development of a Great Lakes-wide "Boater's Forecast" tool.

This project meets the performance goals of Sea Grant's Sustainable New York Coastal Development Focus Area.

New York Sea Grant is a joint program of Cornell University, the State University of New York, and NOAA. New York Sea Grant Extension administration is located at 112 Rice Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853.

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