

Dry spring means low water levels

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Despite unusually low water levels in Haliburton County's lakes and rivers, the area's fish populations should be just fine, according to one local expert.

Due to an usually dry spring, water levels in the Gull River, the string of lakes that are feeder reservoirs for the Trent-Severn Waterway and other waterways throughout the county are way down, in some places by a metre or more.

However, fish populations will be just fine, says Keith Hodgson, president of the Haliburton Highlands Outdoors Association and a member of the Trent-Severn Water Management Advisory Council.

"It's better than [the water level] being high and then going low," Hodgson said, explaining that in years where there is a lot of fluctuation in water levels, some spawning grounds end up going dry and killing eggs.

Hodgson said volunteers with the association have to move some pickerel spawning beds they created near West Guilford as they were left high and dry, but said moving them is no problem.

"They'll find other sites," he said.

Hodgson said pickerel are the first species of fish to breed each spring.

He said the lower water levels mean the area should be safe from flooding this year, which has been a challenge to deal with in the past.

The low levels mean that docks along the Gull River and other bodies of water are high and dry for the time being.

Dave Ness is the water control engineer for the Trent-Severn Waterway, of which the Gull River is a part.

Ness said the below-average rainfall this spring means that water levels in the system's feeder lakes are low.

"Normally, we would have a lot more water on the dams," Ness said last week.

So far, very few of the dams throughout Haliburton County and the City of Kawartha Lakes are spilling water and Ness said this could remain the case for sometime to come.

"We're not going to move anything until those reservoirs are full," he said. "We need some rain."

Ness said that water would be brought down through the system if levels on the canal proper got low, but pointed out that it is still almost a month and a half before boating season begins.

To emphasize just how dry the spring has been, Ness pointed out that the Burnt River, which is an untouched waterway, had its lowest peak in 50 years this spring.