

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – November 26th, 2024

Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority Board Approves Cessation of Winter Operations at Durham Upper Dam to Prevent Structural Failure and Ensure Public Safety

ALL SAUGEEN WATERSHED MUNICIPALITIES – Municipality of Arran-Elderslie, Municipality of Brockton, Township of Chatsworth, Municipality of Grey Highlands, Town of Hanover, Township of Howick, Municipality of Morris-Turnberry, Municipality of South Bruce, Township of Huron-Kinloss, Municipality of Kincardine, Town of Minto, Township of Wellington-North, Town of Saugeen Shores, Township of Southgate, Municipality of West Grey.

The Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority (SVCA) Board of Directors has approved the end of winter ice operations at the Durham Upper Dam, following repeated engineering assessments highlighting resulting risks to the structure. This decision will be re-evaluated annually.

Since 1977, the Durham Upper Dam has been operated seasonally, with stoplogs and flashboards removed each fall and reinstalled after spring melt. In 2006, West Grey Council voted to adopt management of ice through leaving stoplogs and flashboards in during winter operations at the Durham Upper Dam. Over time, these winter operations contributed to structural deterioration. Engineering assessments in 2021, 2022, and 2024 identified severe concrete damage, stress on the metal walkway, and erosion, confirming that continuing winter operations poses a risk of structural failure.

Operating the Durham Upper Dam in winter for ice management has always been outside the original design and intent of the structure. Years of this practice have caused extensive damage, placing the dam at risk of failure. The decision to stop winter ice operations is not one the Board made lightly. However, it is a necessary step to protect public safety and prevent the dam from failing.

“The decision to cease winter ice operations at the Durham Upper Dam is grounded in the need to prevent its failure; the risks of continuing winter operations far outweigh any perceived benefits.”

- Erik Downing, General Manager/Secretary-Treasurer, SVCA

The SVCA Board has directed staff to prioritize the safety of operators, residents, and the community by adhering to engineering recommendations and ensuring compliance with the historical operating plan.

Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority remains committed to working closely with the Municipality of West Grey and the community to ensure transparent communication and address public concerns throughout this process.



Photo credit: Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority.

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