

Experts keep weather-eye on flood threat

By **RUTHANNE URQUHART**
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March came in like a lion but it may go out by boat.

There is a threat of serious flooding for municipalities along the Mississippi, Clyde, Indian, Carp and Rideau rivers. It all hinges on the amount of melting and rainfall the area gets in the next week.

Area-lake water levels are at or near normal now, said Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority wa-

ter management supervisor Gord Mountenay, but snow-cover water content is about 175 ml, the highest level in 20 years.

Low risk of fast thaw

Rideau Valley Conservation Authority water resource technician Patrick Larson said temperatures hovering around freezing change the quality of the snow pack without really melting it.

"We have measured relatively high amounts of snow-cover water

content," he said.

And, because there is more snow on the ground, Larson said a quick thaw will result in worse flooding problems than last spring.

But with predictions of cloud cover for today and tomorrow, and a forecast of flurries for Sunday and Monday with an average temperature of -2C, there is no imminent danger of a rapid thaw.

Last March, the average area temperature for the month was 3.5C and rainfall totalled 84.5 ml.

Both Environment Canada statistics are more than twice the average.

Little rain

In the wake of January's ice storm, flooding caused extensive damage across Eastern Ontario in 1998, and led to the evacuation of some low-lying rural areas.

March 1999 has brought lower-than-normal temperatures and little rain, but more than twice the normal amount of snow, about 70.4

cm. Many lakes and channels are registering ice thickness levels above normal, and area conservation authorities agree ice jams may be a problem as well.

"For now, we just have to be aware of the potential problems," Mountenay said, adding municipalities should clear all culverts and roadside blockages, and have emergency supplies on hand.

Parents are urged to remind their children about the dangers of playing on or near waterways.