



- News
- Classifieds
- Community
- Directory
- Marketplace
- My Zwire!

Home -> News -> Content

Thursday 22 February, 2001

NEWS SEARCH



[Advanced search](#)

Top Stories

### Lake levels

By: Tom Watts, Macomb Daily Staff Writer

February 18, 2001

#### Water levels play game of cat and mouse.



Macomb Daily staff photo by Michael Samojeden Forecasters predict Lake St. Clair water levels will rise through June, much like the water at the Spillway in Harrison Township.

- News
  - Top Stories
  - Local News
  - Sports
  - Business
  - Entertainment
  - Editorial Page
  - Obituaries
  - Health
  - Home & Life
  - Taste
  - CommunityCalendar
  - Weather
  - Wire Services
  - National News
- ▶ Newspaper in Education
- ▶ Classifieds
- ▶ Business Directory
- ▶ Our Newspaper
- ▶ Sports Wire!
- ▶ Fun and Games
- ▶ Personal Finance
- ▶ Consumer Guide

Lake St. Clair water levels are ahead of last year's average and are projected to rise this summer despite low water levels in Lake Superior, Lake Michigan and Lake Huron.

SECTION LINKS

- [Lake Levels - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](#)

"They better rise," said Frank Forner, a Harrison Township canal homeowner. "I had problems last year getting my boat on the hoist. Unless the water comes up I'll have to dig a trench. Everyone else will have to do the same."

Forner, owner of FJF Door Sales of Clinton Township, said he wants to use his 34-foot Sea Ray this year, but he's also realistic.

"The proof will be after all the snow and ice melts in March," Forner said. "I'm hoping for a 6-inch increase, but I don't know."

Ironically, scientists said water levels should rise up to 8 percent over the average through June and July on Lake St. Clair. However, August and September is a different story.

"Lake St. Clair was 8 inches below the long term average before the last major rainfall we had," said Adam Fox of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Detroit. "Now levels are about at or above the long term average after the storm. That shows you how fast rainfall fills Lake St. Clair and determines water levels."

Fox said based on its shallow waters, a "hard rain" on any given day in Macomb County or southeast Michigan will cause the lake to "fill quickly."

"We saw it last week (Feb. 9-10) when Lake St. Clair went up 11 inches in two days," said Fox, a physical scientist. "The ground was still frozen, so like a parking lot the water has nowhere to go but to the nearest drain or the Clinton River."

The phenomenon is "a cause and effect runoff," Fox said.

"The more you have of that this winter the more water will make it to the lake and raise water levels," he said.

This week, the Clinton River was at the 16-foot flood stage and Lake St. Clair experienced a rise due to snowmelt and rainfall.

"We need a wet spring and continued snow melts to help the dry situations experienced over the last three summers," Fox said. "The lakes are benefiting right now from the frozen ground and rainstorm runoffs."

The current water levels in Lake St. Clair is not indicative of the entire Great Lakes Basin. Lake Superior is 13 inches below the average for February, while Lake Huron and Lake Michigan are 23 inches below the average for the month, Fox said.

"We're projecting the upper lakes will not be as robust as the average projections," he said. "There is a 10-14 inch annual rise in the upper Great Lakes, but we're expecting only a 7-10 inch rise this year before they fall back down again in late summer."

The average on Lake St. Clair, meanwhile, is 578.6 feet above sea level.

"When thinking in terms of water running down like steps, Superior to Michigan to Huron to Lake St. Clair to Lake Erie, there's a 4-foot drop (in water levels) by the time it gets here," Fox said, "and goes to Lake Erie."

Continued snow and rain this month will add to Lake St. Clair's overall average.

"Lake St. Clair is close to average right now," he said, "and will probably be well above average soon."

Overall, the Great Lakes basin remains below the average compared to this time last year, Fox said, considering Lake St. Clair has experienced its lowest water levels since 1966. In the 1960s, water levels dropped to 573.43 feet above sea level

.....

Drought-conditions are the worst the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has seen in 35 years, Fox said, when the average water level for Lake St. Clair was 574.2 feet above sea level.

Levels in 1998 were 573.8 feet.

For the record, in 1936, levels reached an all-time low of 570.5 feet above sea level, Fox said.

Long range weather forecasters predict near normal temperatures and above normal precipitation for February and March.

The more water - the more business, said Harrison Township bait shop owner Jimmy Lewandowski.

"I can get my boat out of the canal when there's water," said Lewandowski, owner of Jimmy's Boat Livery. "Last year I couldn't even get my boat out of the canal."

Still, warmer lakes have little impact on Michigan's fish populations, said Mike Thomas, a fisheries biologist for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Thomas said changes in water levels have no immediate impact on the Lake St. Clair fishery.

"We need to have a couple years of low water to see a change and you have to collect biological information as well, something we have not done," Thomas said. "It's harder to see in a lake than in a forest. Low water complicates the whole process and to see what kind of trends are occurring is not possible.

"Overall there are no big changes. Fishing reports are no different than I heard. There's still good muskie, good bass, good walleye, good perch fishing here."

Professional walleye angler Andy Kuffer of Fair Haven said the negative impact on the fishery will come years down the line.

"It hasn't been a problem lately because the mild winters allow better food sources for the fish," Kuffer, 48, said. "The water is low, but I think the fish are just harder to find and catch."

Kuffer said if water levels remain low, it'll be a good year.

"But if water rises," he said, "the fish spread out a little bit more and they'll be harder to find.

"It looks like a normal winter to me. But I haven't seen the water this low since I was a little boy."