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NEWS with THE BAY CITY TIMES

Rain keeps lake levels just above record lows

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By Dorothy Bourdet
TIMES WRITER

Bay-area residents may feel a bit waterlogged from above-average drizzle this spring.

May's average rainfall for Bay City was 2.96 inches, up from a 30-year average of 2.67 inches, said David Hiatt, meteorologist with AccuWeather Inc., The Times' Pennsylvania-based weather service.

But the extra moisture may keep water levels in the Great Lakes above record lows, and that's good news for area shippers.

John Glynn, vice president of Wirt Stone Dock, said lower water levels mean increased costs, since freighters must make more trips with smaller loads.

"With the water levels where they are right now, we're bringing in about 2,000 tons less per cargo (shipment)," Glynn said.

Roger Gauthier, a supervisory hydrologist with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Detroit, said a wet April in the Lake Superior basin and record rainfall in May in lower Michigan has helped keep lake levels from bottoming out.

Some had feared Lake Michigan's water levels would be the lowest in 37 years. But the Corps of Engineers' records show the lake is only 2 inches below last June and about 10 inches above the all-time low set in 1964.

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Corps of Engineers' data shows Lake Superior is 5 inches higher than it was last year at this time. The rise in Lake Superior helps lakes Michigan and Huron because more water flows into the lower lakes.

Hiatt said Bay City precipitation in May was 11 percent greater than normal.

"The weather got locked into a pattern where certain parts of the country experience the same weather for a long period of time," Hiatt said.

But clouds may be breaking soon, he said. "It's looking like the warmer weather is going to shift eastward."

The weekend forecast for Bay City is getting brighter. Friday will be partly to mostly sunny with an expected high of 70. Saturday will be mostly sunny, with a high of 74, and Sunday will be variably cloudy, with chance of showers and a high of 74.

Hiatt said May temperatures in Bay City were 3.1 degrees higher than the average, but attributed the increase to the abnormally hot days in early May.

"The first three days of May were in the 80s," Hiatt said.

Since May 1, the Detroit area has had two days of sunshine, according to meteorologists. Rainfall was up slightly from average - 3.7 inches compared to a normal of 2.92 - but the persistent gray skies made it seem worse.

"People are starting to wonder when it's going to turn summer-like. We had an awfully long winter, at least up here," said Kevin Farina, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Gaylord.

- The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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