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## Lake region from Toledo to Buffalo near drought

Thursday, August 02, 2001

By The Associated Press

ERIE -- The region skirting the Great Lakes from Toledo, Ohio, to the eastern shores of Lake Ontario is experiencing "abnormally dry" weather conditions, according to the National Weather Service.

Erie has recorded its driest July since 1916, just three months after suffering its snowiest winter ever recorded.

It is the second-driest July ever recorded in Erie, according to the National Weather Service office in Cleveland.

The Weather Service measured July's rainfall at 0.52 inches of rain at the Erie International Airport as of Tuesday, said Martin Thompson, a meteorological technician with the National Weather Service.

Part of western New York already is experiencing drought conditions, he said.

"The whole region can be considered an abnormally dry region -- running from Toledo all the way up the lake shore to Buffalo and beyond," said Kirk Lombardy of the National Weather Service.

In Western Pennsylvania, the National Weather Service in Pittsburgh measured 3.15 inches of rain in July, 1.6 inches less than normal.

Since Jan. 1, rainfall at Pittsburgh International Airport has measured 18.15 inches, 4.5 inches below normal.

"We aren't even in a mild drought category yet. It's probably to the point that people are just now starting to notice it, but we're moving into a period where we'll have a little rain for the next few days, so we're not anticipating a problem," said Mike Sowko, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Moon.

Conditions around Erie are raising fears the region may be susceptible to fires caused by lightning or accidentally set by people.

Erie Assistant Fire Chief Tom Lawson said dry conditions had already contributed to six fires in the area this summer.

"Everything becomes dry and [is] a big tinder box," he said.

Lawson said the city had banned all outdoor fires.

Charlie Heffner, a spokesman for nearby Millcreek volunteer fire departments, said crews expected to see more fires.

There is little sign of relief in weather forecasts.

A front forming over Nebraska that meteorologists thought might bring some rain to the region has been dissipating.

"I wouldn't even count on it -- it's a very weak cold front," Lombardy said. "It looks like it will fall apart as it arrives here."

Lombardy said the front might deliver some scattered showers, but probably wouldn't provide substantial moisture.

A March 26 snowstorm brought to 144.9 inches the total snowfall logged in Erie, making it the snowiest winter ever recorded.

Weather records for Erie date back to 1847, Lombardy said.

*Post-Gazette staff writer Johnna A. Pro contributed to this report.*

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