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Hot, dry weather keeps lake levels low

By: Amanda Lee, Macomb Daily Staff Writer

August 03, 2001

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The hot, dry weather is making some boaters sweat over water levels on Lake St. Clair.

"I'm really careful when I'm out," said Donnie Castle of New Baltimore. "I've really cut down on speed when I'm closer to shore in case I run into a sand bar or something."

The good news is that Lake St. Clair has an extra 14 inches of depth than at its all-time low, which was set in 1934. The bad news is, it's 13 inches below where it should be.

"Obviously, the lake is lower than everyone would like," said Adam Fox, a hydrologist with the Army Corps of Engineers in Detroit. "Things aren't as bad as they could be, though."

Lake St. Clair isn't the only lake with lower water levels, but the moisture loss affects the smaller lake more, Fox said.

"Lake St. Clair is a little bit more vulnerable than the others," he said. "Basically, you're dealing with a lake that, in most parts, is about 10 feet deep. When you lose 13 inches, that makes a big dent in total volume compared to other lakes, which are a lot deeper."

"When you lose a few inches of water in Lake St. Clair, it could mean the difference of running aground," he said.

Van Snider, of the Michigan Boating Industries Association, said the lower levels don't have as big an effect on boaters as they used to because boaters have become more aware of the water.

"When this first came about three years ago there was a lot more coverage in the media and everyone was really worried about it," he said. "Now, people are used to it and they're naturally more conscious of where they are."

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"People are paying attention to their charts and understanding where they are," he added. "They know if they don't do this they could run into trouble."



The situation isn't likely to improve anytime soon. Water levels don't look like they'll show much improvement the rest of the season.

"When it's very warm and very dry, it's bad news for a puddle on the street, let alone a lake," Fox said. "If it stays warm like this it will keep the water temperatures high, which will lead to increased evaporation this fall."



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