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NewsFlash

UP-TO-THE-MINUTE AP NEWS REPORTS

Lake Erie hits lowest level since 1966

The Associated Press
11/19/01 4:08 AM

ERIE, Pa. (AP) -- Little rain and lingering warm weather has shrunk Lake Erie to its lowest level in three decades.

Lake Erie's current level is 570.2 feet above sea level -- just 2.5 inches above its November 1966 low, according to figures from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Signs of the shrinking lake can be seen in docks resting on the exposed lake bed rather than floating. In addition, Presque Isle is surrounded by more beachland than usual.

The dropping lake level has been ironic for some boaters: They had to use wind to get their boats to shore rather than to sea.

"There were some days when the wind was blowing in the opposite direction (when) we weren't able to pull anything out. We just didn't have the water," said Bill Vogel, dock master of the Erie Yacht Club in Pennsylvania. "This is the first time I remember having to depend on the wind (to remove boats)."

Typically, the Great Lakes dip to their lowest points during the winter, but an unusually dry summer has pushed Lake Erie's water levels well below normal. The lake is 5 inches lower than it was this time last year and 8 inches below average.

Lake Erie could drop as much as 3 inches more before it reaches its lowest point this winter, the Corps of Engineers forecasted.

Lake Erie typically fluctuates less than the other upper Great Lakes -- Huron, Michigan and Superior. It gets most of its water -- 85 percent -- from nearby watersheds, said Roger Gauthier, an Army Corps of Engineers hydrologist in Detroit.

Heavy rains this fall, coupled with a lot of snow and spring rain, would quickly restore lake levels, Gauthier said.

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Although the lake is shallower than normal, it's a long way from its historical lowest point. In 1934, the lake levels lingered between 568 and 569 feet. In February 1936, Lake Erie hit its lowest level since 1918, at 568.2 feet.

On the Net:

Great Lakes Water Levels:

<http://huron.lre.usace.army.mil/levels/hmpglv.html>

Great Lakes Information Network: <http://www.great-lakes.net/index.html>

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